

THE ASHGATE
RESEARCH COMPANION *to*
MEDIA GEOGRAPHY



Edited by

**PAUL C. ADAMS, JIM CRAINE
AND JASON DITTMER**

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MEDIA GEOGRAPHY

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The Ashgate Research Companion to Media Geography

Edited by

PAUL C. ADAMS

University of Texas at Austin, USA

JIM CRAINE

California State University, Northridge, USA

JASON DITTMER

University College London, UK

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Notes on Contributors

Paul C. Adams is Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Texas at Austin. His research addresses place images in the media, the historical geography of communication technologies, mediated experience and virtuality, and the incorporation of communication technologies into particular places. His previous books include *Geographies of Media and Communication* (2009), *Atlantic Reverberations* (2007), *The Boundless Self* (2005), and *Textures of Place* (with Steven Hoelscher and Karen E. Till, 2001). He is the founder of the Communication Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers.

Stuart C. Aitken is Professor of Geography at San Diego State University and the Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Young People and Space (ISYS). He has also worked for the United Nations on issues of children's rights, migration, and dislocation. His research interests include film and media, critical social theory, qualitative methods, children, families, and communities. He has written five books including *The Awkward Spaces of Fathering* (2009) and *Geographies of Young People* (2001) and has collaborated on five others including *The Fight to Stay Put* (2013), *Young People, Border Spaces and Revolutionary Imaginations* (2011), *Qualitative Geography* (2010), *Global Childhoods* (2008), and *Place, Space, Situation and Spectacle: A Geography of Film* (1994). He has published more than 200 articles in academic journals.

James Ash is a lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Newcastle University. He received his PhD in Human Geography at the University of Bristol in 2009. His thesis investigated practices of videogame design and use. His current research is concerned with developing post-phenomenological accounts of body–technology relations. He has published work on videogames and technology in a variety of journals including *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Theory Culture and Society*, *Body & Society*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* and *Environment and Planning A*. More information about his research is available at his Web site: www.jamesash.co.uk/.

Michael Bull is Professor of Sound Studies at the University of Sussex. He has published widely in the field of Sound Studies. His books include *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (2000) and *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (2007). He coedited *The Auditory Culture Reader* with Les Back (2003) and recently published a four-volume edited work on sound studies for Routledge (2013). He is a founding member of the European Sound Studies Association, a core member of the European Think Tank "Future Trends Forum," and the editor and cofounder of the Journal *Senses and Society* (Bloomsbury).

Brett Christophers is Associate Professor of Geography in the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at Uppsala University in Sweden. His research ranges broadly across economic and urban geography, with particular interests in the media and cultural industries, money and finance, and urban political economy. He is the author of three books: *Positioning the Missionary* (1998), *Envisioning Media Power* (2009), and *Banking Across Boundaries* (2013).

Jim Craine is Associate Professor of Geography at California State University, Northridge. He specializes in the geography of media and also works applying geovisualization theory to digital and analog cartography. He is a coeditor of *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography* (www.aetherjournal.org).

Julie Cupples lectures in Human Geography at the University of Edinburgh. Her work is positioned at the intersection of cultural geography, development studies, and media studies and has appeared in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Antipode*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Television and New Media*. She is currently investigating the geographic dimensions of media convergence and the relationship between convergent media production and consumption and cultural citizenship through a focus on geopolitically inflected entertainment television and indigenous media.

Giorgio Hadi Curti is Adjunct Professor and Research Associate in the San Diego State University Department of Geography. Working at the intersections of society, culture, and media through post-structuralist sensibilities, he brings a spatialized and micropolitical perspective to discussions of urban transformation and change, the politics of place, and affect, emotion, and memory. His recent publications include an edited collection with Jim Craine and Stuart C. Aitken titled *The Fight to Stay Put: Social Lessons through Media Imaginings of Urban Transformation and Change* (2013). He currently holds the position of Ethnography Project Director and works as an ethnographer and cultural geography at HDR, Inc., where he is putting to practical use his research and interests in emotional and affectual geographies and memory, identity, and the politics of place.

Christina E. Dando is Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Her work explores the intersections of landscape, media, and gender and has appeared in *Acme: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography*, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, and *Cartographica*, *Gender, Place, and Culture*. Her current project examines Progressive Era women's use of geography, cartography, and media to improve their communities on local and national levels. She is an editorial board member for *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography*.

Ronald A. Davidson is Associate Professor of Geography at California State University, Northridge. His research focuses on humanistic geography, public space, and urban landscapes in the United States and Japan.

Jason Dittmer is Reader in Human Geography at University College London. His recent books include *Comic Book Geographies* (2014), *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics* (2013), and *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* (2010). His current research considers the role of materiality and affect in geopolitical assemblages.

Deborah Dixon is Professor of Geography at the University of Glasgow. Her research addresses monstrous geographies, as manifest in feminist theory, art/science, critical geopolitics, topologies of touch, and the viralities of cinema. Her recent work has been published in *Science*, *Nature*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Progress in Physical Geography*, *Dialogues in Human Geography*, *Geoforum*, *Cultural Geographies*, and so on. She is Editor of *Environment and Planning A*.

John C. Finn is a lecturer in Geography in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology at Christopher Newport University. His research focuses on racialized urban landscapes, music, and space, and food and food culture in Cuba. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Brazil and Cuba.

Colin Gardner is Professor of Critical Theory and Integrative Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he teaches in the departments of Art, Film and Media Studies, Comparative Literature, and the History of Art and Architecture. Working specifically on the intersection of art, film-philosophy, and Deleuze studies, his research focuses on issues of time, space, and memory. He is the author of *Joseph Losey* (2004), *Karel Reisz* (2006), and a new critical study of Samuel Beckett's film and television work entitled *Beckett, Deleuze and the Televisual Event: Peephole Art* (2012). He is currently on the editorial board of *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography*.

Steven Hoelscher is Professor of American Studies and Geography and is former Chair of the Department of American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He regularly teaches graduate seminars on the history and geography of photography at the Harry Ransom Center, where he is Academic Curator of Photography. His books include *Reading Magnum* (2013), *Picturing Indians* (2008), *Textures of Place* (with Paul Adams and Karen Till, 2001), and *Heritage on Stage* (1998), and he has published more than 50 book chapters and articles in such journals as *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *American Quarterly*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Ecumene*, *Geographical Review*, *GeoJournal*, *History of Photography*, *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Public Historian*, and *Social and Cultural Geography*. In 2005, he received the President's Associates Teaching Excellence Award from the University of Texas.

Tamara M. Johnson is Research Associate for Academic Planning in the Office of Academic Affairs and an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Global, International and Area Studies at University of North Carolina (UNC) at Charlotte. She earned her doctorate in geography from the UNC Chapel Hill, completing a Fulbright-funded dissertation project that explored the emotional politics of marginalization, embodied memory, and inclusivity in Cape Town, South Africa. As an urban geographer, her research examines the ways in which continued conflicts and contestations over changes in the material, legislative, and symbolic infrastructure of the city play out in urban social spaces. Her pedagogical and policy research focuses on global service-learning, community engaged scholarship, and student success.

David Lulka is an independent researcher who has taught at several colleges in California. His research primarily focuses upon the ontological and ethical aspects of human relations with nonhuman animals. In addition to highlighting pervasive hierarchies among species, his work accentuates nonhuman agency so as to redefine the parameters for equitable relations in a posthuman world. His writings have been published in numerous books and geographic journals, including *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Urban Geography*, and *Geoforum*.

Derek P. McCormack teaches in the School of Geography and Environment at the University of Oxford, where he is an Associate Professor. He is the author of *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (2013) and has written widely on nonrepresentational theory and spaces of affect. He is currently working on a book about atmospheric things.

Alasdair Pinkerton is a lecturer in the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway University of London. His research interests include geopolitics and political geography, with a particular interest in media and communications. His PhD and postdoctoral research have explored the political geographies of international radio broadcasting during and after the Cold War. More recently, his research has explored the both the geographies of rumor and social media technologies. His first book, *Radio*, will be published by Reaktion in 2014.

Ate Poorthuis is a PhD student in the Department of Geography at the University of Kentucky. His current research is looking at (im)possibilities of studying the everyday use of public spaces through “big data.” His broader interests lie at the intersection of urban and Internet geographies with a predilection for a varied and eclectic use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. He is a member of the FloatingSheep research blog.

Darren Purcell is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sustainability at the University of Oklahoma. His research interests are situated within the fields of political and communications geography, primarily focusing on how the state and other geopolitical actors use information technologies to achieve strategic goals such as articulating the nation, place promotion, branding, and governance. Other work has engaged the role of humor in popular geopolitics, social media and its use by nationalist groups, and film in popular geopolitics.

Pauliina Raento is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Helsinki and an associate editor of *Political Geography*. Her research interests include political and cultural geography, interdisciplinary leisure studies, and visual and field methodologies. Her work has appeared in, e.g. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Geografiska Annaler Series B, Geopolitics*, *The Geographical Review*, *International Gambling Studies*, *National Identities*, and *Political Geography*. Among her recent books is *Gambling, Space, and Time* (coedited with David G. Schwartz).

Paul Simpson is a lecturer in Human Geography in the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at Plymouth University. His research interests relate to the social and cultural geographies of everyday life and the use of urban public spaces. He is currently pursuing these interests through a collaborative L'Agence nationale de la recherche funded research project that considers the significance of ambiances and atmospheres to understandings of the experience of urban mobilities. He has published on these themes in *Area*, *Cultural Geographies*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Geoforum*, *Social and Cultural Geography*, and *Space and Culture*.

Katrinka Somdahl-Sands is Assistant Professor of Geography at Rowan University and Coordinator for the New Jersey Geographic Alliance. Her research interests focus on the spaces of political communication, mediated spaces of performance, and geographic education. Her recent teaching areas include World Regional Geography, Political Geography, and regional courses on Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. She has published articles in various journals including *Cultural Geographies*, *Journal of Geography*, *Space and Polity*, *Geography Compass*, *Acme*, and *Aether*.

Barney Warf is Professor of Geography at the University of Kansas. His research and teaching interests lie within the broad domain of human geography. Much of his research concerns economic geography, emphasizing producer services and telecommunications. His work straddles contemporary political economy and social theory on the one hand and traditional

quantitative, empirical approaches on the other. He has studied a range of topics that fall under the umbrella of globalization, including New York as a global city, fiber optics, the satellite industry, offshore banking, international producer services, and the geographies of the Internet. He has also written on military spending, voting technologies, the US electoral college, and religious diversity.

Matthew Zook is Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Kentucky and researches technological change and the associated spatial structures and practices of society and the economy. His recent work focuses on the geographical web (the geoweb) and the phenomenon of user-generated data (both volunteered and unknowingly contributed) and seeks to understand where, when, and by whom geo-coded content is being created. He is the cofounder of the New Mappings Collaboratory at the University of Kentucky as well as the FloatingSheep research blog.

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Introduction: Geographies of Media

Paul C. Adams, Jim Craine and Jason Dittmer

Planning this project took a great leap of faith. After all, we were doing most of the work during the final year in the thirteenth *b'ak'tun* in the ancient Mayan calendar. By some accounts, the world would end on December 21, 2012 – long before we could finish our project. As early as 2006, hundreds of Web sites in dozens of languages had appeared in anticipation of the calendrical event as well as “compact discs of music, videos, on-line discussion groups, and even commemorative t-shirts” (Sitler 2006: 24, 27). Maya-millennialism also spawned close to 2,000 books and tens of millions of Web sites, as well as television programs on the Discovery Channel and History Channel, and films such as Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypse* and Roland Emmerich’s *2012* (Sitler 2012). Many if not most of these texts profited from the craze while conveying little understanding of the Mayan people, their culture, or even their sense of time. Serious scholars, including scientists at NASA, joined the debate to expose some of the delusions, deceptions, and misunderstandings (Stuart 2011; Hoopes 2011; Restall and Solari 2011), but at least some of their arguments may have been beside the point. The event meant what people in 2012 wanted it to mean, not what the ancient Mayans intended.

The date came and went with neither Armageddon nor a radical heightening of human consciousness, but it *was* an event. It typified what Daniel Boorstin long ago labeled a “pseudo-event” (1961) in that the hype around the event constituted the event itself. The event included a handful of people moving to the Yucatan Peninsula to be close to Ground Zero at the time of transition, people watching movies and television, people taking “spiritual tours” to learn about “crystal skulls, ancestral ties to Atlantis, and a bond with Pleiadians” (Sitler 2012: 68), and people hoping to experience an “exponential acceleration of the wave harmonic of history as it phases into a moment of unprecedented synchronization” (Argüelles 1987: 159). As a media event, its origins reach back to the carving of glyphs into stone some 2,000 years ago, long before anyone could have imagined that they would eventually drive a billion dollar media market.¹ The turn of the *b'ak'tun* thus became a social, cultural, and economic event through media – to be precise, through transhistorical, international networks of cross-cultural communications, involving countless interpretations and reinterpretations.

Media are deeply implicated in historical geographical processes, some of which reside primarily within these media and others of which have their origins outside of mediation. But even events of the latter sort, like the tsunamis that struck Indonesia in 2004 and Japan in 2011, become known to all but a handful of people through media. Regardless of their degree of materiality, and even when they abound in unmet expectations, misrepresentations, and misunderstandings, mediated events are very real. This is true of events mediated by print and broadcast media as well as computer-mediated events. Indeed, the process of technological convergence renders this distinction increasingly problematic.

1 Emmerich’s film alone grossed over \$769 million (IMDB).

Turning from the history of mediated experience to the much shorter history of media geography as a research focus, it is over a quarter of a century since the publication of *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture* (Burgess and Gold 1985) – a foundational text that appeared at a time when the Commodore 64 was the state of the art home computer and DVDs had not yet been invented. How can we thank Burgess and Gold for their prescience? No doubt by looking in more than a cursory fashion at exactly what was going on in that book. The predominant methodological inspirations came from British cultural studies, particularly questions about how thoroughly dominant ideologies are imposed by the media versus the degree to which audiences actively shape the meaning of media products – a debate largely articulated at that time in terms of “encoding” and “decoding.” While catch phrases have shifted, certain fundamental assumptions of this early work remain, not least of which is that it is taken for granted that the meanings and social relevance of all sorts of things, and even what constitutes a “thing,” are constructs embedded in mediated discourses.

The editors of *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture* noted a fundamental dichotomy between European and American research. In a somewhat stereotyped characterization, the American scholars adopted a model of communication based on transmissions between sender(s) and receiver(s), conceiving of both primarily as individuals and focusing on the fidelity of this transfer, as well as its effects on people’s perceptions and actions. In contrast, the Europeans framed communications as a social force, adopting a contestational model of society in which scholarly writing must work to unsettle, expose, and critique the dominant ideologies and paradigms. Interestingly, a quarter century later, this divide has largely disappeared. The European contributors to this volume cite North American theorists such as Marshall McLuhan, Robert Putnam, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway, while the American participants cite Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Walter Benjamin, and Julia Kristeva among others. There are now important figures in the subdiscipline – for example, Manuel Castells – who defy categorization as either American or European. (And one of this book’s editors has forsaken the former colony for the heart of the former empire.)

A third feature of *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture* was its attention to power, whether in the form of the power to produce cheap television programming (Gould and Lyew-Ayee 1985), the power to define notions like risk and danger (Liverman and Sherman 1985; Burgess 1985), the power to articulate a particular structure of space and time (Brooker-Gross 1985), or more generally the power to propagate dominant ideologies. Power remains a central concern in media geography, and the contributors to this volume address the power relations of media production (Dixon), the power of geopolitical iconography (Pinkerton, Raento, and Dittmer), the power of visibility in defining race relations (Finn), and a range of other power relations. Media geography emphasizes that power relations are embedded in spaces and places through communications, no less than through physical means such as violence. Media geographers still contend that the physical acts imposing power – violence, intimidation, and embodied resistance – become socially meaningful through lead-up and follow-up acts of communication. At the same time, media geographers have become a bit more careful to avoid blanket critiques that overlook contingencies of the places and circumstances of communication.

Geography, the Media and Popular Culture is a peculiarity among the geographical works of the 1980s as most of the foundational works in media geography did not appear until somewhat later – works such as Barnes and Duncan’s *Writing Worlds* (1992), Duncan and Ley’s *Place/Culture/Representation* (1993), Aitken and Zonn’s *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle* (1994), and Crang, Crang, and May’s *Virtual Geographies* (1999). Yet all of these later works owe something to earlier explorations focused primarily on literature – works such as Douglas Pocock’s *Humanistic Geography and Literature* (1981), Buttimer and Seamon’s *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (1980), and various writings of Yi-Fu

Tuan (1974; 1977; 1978). Research motivations and sense of purpose changed radically between the 1970s and the 1990s, with a wholesale reorientation from interpretation and understanding toward critique and intervention. Today there is a partial return indicated by the ebbing of the quixotic sense that attacking dominant ideologies is our *raison d'être*, yet there is a lingering concern with power's operation through discourse.

The early corpus in media geography includes some, like James Duncan (1993), who entirely rejected literal meaning and the principle of mimesis, finding in representation *nothing but* ideological distortions and operations of authorial power. Other early contributors extolled the place perceptions and existential insights in what they saw as artful expressions of transpersonal aspects of experience, although if one reads closely they also recognized representations as constructs (Tuan 1978). We would venture to suggest that here again the dividing line between opposing poles has blurred with time, in large part because an interest in the body and embodiment has brought attention not only to biological differences (e.g. sex and age) but also to aspects of embodied sameness in the human encounter with the world (e.g., eating, moving, seeing, hearing, touching). This is in many ways a return to concerns that animated the works of humanist geographers, such as age (Rowles 1978), mobility (Tuan 1977; Seamon 1980), and the senses (Tuan 1974).

This phenomenon illustrates that as media geography has grown forwards it has also grown outwards, encompassing a widening range of issues, which in turn lead back to the root stock of geography, linking to other specialties in the discipline. This process now includes political geography, economic geography, and critical landscape studies. Specifically, these rerouted roots of media geography include insights about bordering as an ongoing process of social construction and attention to humor as a form of critical engagement with mainstream geopolitics (Paasi 1996; Dodds 1996; Purcell, Brown, and Gokmen 2010). Key texts now include landmarks of economic geography such as David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990) and J.K. Gibson-Graham's *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996). We also look back to landscape studies by authors such as Don Meinig (1979), Denis Cosgrove (1984), J.B. Jackson (1970), Richard Schein (1997), and Ken Foote (2003). Thus, media geography as a specialty has become less specialized (though hopefully no less special) over its two-and-a-half-decade lifespan.

Despite this luxuriant growth forwards, outwards, and backwards, our specialty is still new and there remain many gaps. More work needs to be done on nonvisual media such as radio, telephone, and portable music technologies. There has been relatively little research on the geographies of media production compared to the numerous geographies of media images, representations, and discourses. We are still quite vague about the meanings, spatial practices, routines, and audiences of humble, everyday media like postage stamps and advertisements. It is in some of these areas in particular that we have tried to fill in a few of the gaps with this collection, as well as engaging with the cutting edges of epistemology and methodology. Finally, the personal interests of the three editors bring certain emphases to this collection: virtuality, visualization, geopolitical discourse, nonlinear narrative, embodiment, language, and performance. The time has come, then, to consider more closely the state of the art in media geography.

State of the Art

In their contribution to this volume, Curti and Johnson argue that "media geography and its syncretic encounters offer an emerging promise for those who do not fit so comfortably into the confines of the pre-scripted, the conventional, the acceptable, or the 'appropriate.'"

We agree wholeheartedly with this argument, although we do not necessarily share their dismissal of the rest of geographical research. The value of media geography resides to a major extent in its propensity to test the boundaries of conventional worldviews. We are happy to adopt a kaleidoscopic vision of the world by looking at the world through whatever lenses have been provided by culture, with both a small *c* and a large *C*. An unsettling and creative tendency emerges from the combination of media studies with geography, because of ontological cross-currents when we see the world as something we (humans) always know through mediation (by language and all the rest), even as we insist that media themselves are not placeless but have particular place-based implications, depending on where they are used and how they facilitate interactions through space and at a distance. Rather than attempting to justify the neglect of one of these viewpoints, we submit that they coexist in a productive tension.

Media in Spaces/Places

On the one hand, the question Where am I? points us toward an “I” situated in geographical space/place. What we mean by this is that *communications form a connective tissue through space and between places*. From this standpoint, communication is both a product and a producer of myriad differences between here and there, but it also permits interdependency and interaction between here and there. Research indicates the marked spatial variability of media access and the digital (and predigital) divides between the information haves and the have-nots. This perspective also leads to a focus on the centers and peripheries as world cities accumulate access and control over global information flows while much of the world is left with sparse access to information and little ability to shape these flows. On this account, asking Where am I? takes us to a position in urban, regional, national, and global spaces where differences instrumentally assert and contest manifest structures of power.

This perspective leads to multiple foci. For example, one may interrogate the impact of having the state act as a media producer versus private enterprise. Questions arise concerning power relations and organizational arrangements at the place of production – for example, between actors and the production management team. Geographies of media distribution can be examined, from retail outlets to the mail system, to electromagnetic waves, to the Internet, each with peculiar characteristics structuring the flow of communications through space and time. Speed, directionality, funding, scripting, and many other attributes of communication relate in important ways to the uneven geographical patterns of communication flow and infrastructure. These geographies are all about power in its various forms – for example, the global south has limited broadcasting access owing to topography, political oppression, and poverty. But when noting this we must avoid determinism: “limiting a group’s access to media does not necessarily render it powerless” (see Raento this volume).

The media in spaces/places-approach locates media infrastructure in map space, but also locates communications devices in interior spaces and places. Whether we examine how a home is transformed by the introduction of a radio or television, how a billboard gazing down on a street transforms that street, or how an onboard DVD transforms the inside of a moving vehicle, we repeatedly encounter the power of media to transform the places in which they are used. This power is not a mere conceit of human audiences; animals and even plants respond to the presence of media in their environments (see Lulka, this volume). Media transform a place from within, whether the place in question is the nation-state, the neighborhood, or the home.

Spaces/Places in Media

Returning to the question Where am I?, we may alternatively point toward topological relationships embodied within a network of communication flows. This view encounters space and place as contents rather than the contexts of communication. On this account, *media actively constitute spaces and places through techniques of representation, expression, and performance*. Many if not most human actions and sensations take place in and through media and the meanings of any given experience are always already embedded in texts and discourses (Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988). People inhabit the assumptions of particular discourses since what is taken for granted or unsayable includes the vast majority of geographies – known and fantastic, actual and ideal, past, present, and future. Thus, Where am I? leads not to a physical place but to the intersection of various publics as they engage with various media and a dizzying array of texts (Warner 2002).

Drawing on Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, and others, the observers of this new environment employ tactile terms such as “smooth,” “striated,” or “folded,” to capture how the things we encounter are felt to be inside or outside. This challenging new vocabulary charts a shift from a focus on objects to a focus on processes, doings, and verbs. We are no longer comfortable enumerating the objects that comprise “the media” – the screens, cameras, producers, and audiences – but alternatively want to consider an event, an identity, a place of refuge, a conflict, or a form of intergroup contact. A medium is a network of particular dynamics constantly slipping through various hybrid configurations. A major shift in interest has carried media geography in this direction over the past five to 10 years. From an interest in auditory and haptic spaces to the idea of video games as social architecture, to the idea of interior as exterior and vice versa, to the notion of social space as folded or “scrumpled” – non-Euclidean geographies have proliferated like mutants in a nuclear holocaust.

The earlier understanding that communication consists of codes and languages remains viable, if rather submerged with the waning of interest in naturalistic, positivistic, semiotic, hermeneutic, and deconstructive methodologies. The notion of decoding still helps us to recognize that to read the televisual/cinematic language requires that one learn to make sense of certain conventions regarding the meanings of these perspectival movements such as jump cuts, panning, tilting, and tracking. It is still instructive to recall that there is nothing natural about the way a particular medium produces a sense of setting, or a particular spatiotemporal configuration; each medium carries with it certain ways of communicating that have specific histories. But rather than stop with identification of codes, we must press onwards to ask how it is that one language or code inf(lects) another. Spillover – for example, from film to dance, or from billboard to graffiti, or vice versa – is not merely semiotic but also sociospatial.

After a several decade hiatus, Marshall McLuhan has once again reared his homely head. Communication geographers are noticing that “changing media form, in and of itself, can be informative” (see Lulka, this volume). Armed with this sensibility to meaning as excessive, spilling over each and every symbolic system, familiar academic tropes (for example, the critiques of romanticism and anthropomorphism) collapse under the weight of a general skepticism regarding dichotomous thinking. The medium is now, once again, seen to be the message (or rather one of many messages).

Synthesis

These two approaches, space/place in media and media in space/place, are explored by Adams (2009; 2011), who divides the ontological terrain into four quadrants by associating research approaches with positions on two axes. While we find this approach helpful, we would note the risk in imposing dichotomies. Place versus space is often more of a polarity than a productive tension. The other dialectic, between media-as-content and media-as-context, is more subtle and therefore less likely to be used in reductionist fashion, but it may still be employed in a way that creates impasses in our understanding. As Adams suggests (2011), rather than adopting one of two poles, research can occupy the center of the field, working with both elements rather than picking sides.

There is much to be gained by looking simultaneously, for example, at “the media connection between places of interiority and worldwide forces” (Aitken, this volume) while questioning the dichotomy between the represented spaces and the spaces where representations are produced, which in the case of film-geography reduces to a rejection of the fossilized distinction between “the real” and “the reel.” A nationalist superhero like Captain America can be seen as a representation of the nation through a kind of idealized embodiment, but at the same time, the superhero exceeds representation and transcends borders by inspiring the creation of competing visions of the nationalist superhero in foreign countries (Dittmer 2013: 185). We can think of communication as occurring in a possibility space between the poles of space and place, as well as between the poles: in-media and media-in (more on this possibility space in a moment). Manifestations of this impulse include a nonrepresentational style of inquiry as advocated by Nigel Thrift (2007) and the distributed, hybrid actors that Actor Network Theory urges us to recognize (Latour 2005). It may help to think in terms of assemblages and hybrids – for example, the screen-body that exists through the linked performances on both sides of the screen, a body that is at once technical and pleasurable.

This synthesis of dichotomies motivates a turn toward the body, because whereas earlier writings in geography dismissed mediated place on the basis of its supposed disembodiment, recent contributions to the geographic literature find the body to be situated simultaneously in mediated encounters *and* in material environments. On the one hand, bodies make up much of the content of media:

Bodies are ubiquitous in media. Slim and fit bodies, obese and carnivalesque bodies, young and old bodies, murdered and mutilated bodies, alien and machinic bodies appear constantly on our television and computer screens, producing diverse modes of entertainment, engagement and contestation. (Cupples, this volume)

On the other hand, bodies are required in order to engage the media. Deborah Dixon points to an ontology of touch while Derek McCormack suggests we think of moving bodies as “prosthetic technologies for inhabiting affectively mediated worlds” (McCormack, this volume). If we acknowledge Pinkerton’s suggestion that radio can play to the mind’s eye, then the seemingly frivolous pun employed in “The medium is the massage” (McLuhan and Fiore 1967) articulated a prescient understanding of our deep interdigitation with media – that “we do not simply partake of a message, but rather ... are worked over by it because we are in the midst of the medium itself” (Lulka, this volume). Digital media have made us (once again) sensitive to this interdigitation.

One of the kinds of synthesis involves the way a medium such as radio works to “produce, reinforce or, indeed, to unsettle and undermine different kinds of sociocultural and political formations and at a range of different scales” (Pinkerton, this volume).

Here we are dealing with the constitution of particular publics or imagined communities (Warner 2002; Anderson 1991). Communication binds the public or community not only by *reaching* people, and therefore connecting through physical and social space, but also by *portraying* “the people,” and therefore staking out boundaries in physical and social space. These simultaneous operations are suggested by Curti and Johnson, in this volume: “Approaching the world in this way requires an accounting for both the coming-together – *the syncretic amalgamated* – and breaking-apart – *the emergent migrating* – of the very living processes continually (re)composing the zones of variable intensities and integrities that are place and places.” Yet even in this synthesis the dichotomies indicated above remain, if only as complementary impulses. New technologies of “augmented reality” reveal these complementary impulses as human mobility comes to depend on the ubiquitous hereness of georeferenced information as it is accessed through handheld devices and we make sense of this information by mobilizing our understanding of the intangible environments of games and simulations so that “the interface logics of game environments bleed into extended spaces of the world through such devices” (Ash, this volume). In short, representations of place are rendered as overlays that one accesses by moving through space, thereby infusing the experience of material, tangible spaces and places with preinscribed and reinscribed meanings linked to an abstract, geometrical coordinate system. But augmented reality devices are not the only means of moving through “real” space with a mediated awareness. Simply by internalizing the narratives of National Geographic television specials and programs on the Discovery Channel, we explore what it would be like to inhabit space and place as an animal (Lulka, this volume), and this internalized awareness may in turn motivate animal rights activism, environmentalism, and other systematic alterations of action.

The Chapters

This volume is divided into three parts, each of which highlights a different dimension of media geography, drawing from Adams’s typology (2011). In the first part of the book, the authors turn their attention to specific media, if not arguing for their absolute uniqueness at least considering them as distinct forms. Some of these media have been well covered in the geographic literature while others were selected because of their unique geographical properties. The authors in this section were asked to specifically highlight the geographical dimensions of the medium in question: What is unique to this medium with regard to space and place? How is the medium productive of particular places and spaces? This section starts with media that, while continuing into the present-day, were developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: photography, film, radio, comic books, the postal system, and dance. It concludes with media of more recent provenance: video games and the Internet.

The second and third sections delve into the qualities of mediated places and spaces. In the second section, place is imagined as the momentary crystallization of various flows and discourses within a particular context and also as a context in its own right where various events take place. Authors in this section were asked to speak to two questions: How is place produced through or embedded in various media? What kinds of spatiality enable this mediated place to exist? The chapters chart a flow from nature, the mysterious world-out-there, inward to the body and mind – the mysterious world-in-here, with its intuitions, desires, and emotions. The discussion builds in several ways on the notion of interiority, unfolding place or even turning it inside out to suggest a synthesis of space and place, a context in which proximity does not necessarily imply legibility or familiarity. In the

remaining two chapters of this section, we learn about inscribing oneself onto place through graffiti and about the ways in which products are inscribed onto places and subsequently onto the mind by advertising.

The third and final section of the book shifts attention to media spaces, which is to say the contexts in which people and things interact by way of communication. Spaces push our attention outwards from the subjective to the intersubjective as the particular structured flows of sensation, meaning, action, and value help to constitute the contexts in which things happen. The authors in this section respond to two questions: How do spaces of communication differ with regard to the sensory modalities of the communication? What spatial patterns and topologies are associated with particular kinds of communication? The individual chapters cover a range of communication spaces, from spaces of live performance to social networks, ensuring not only that expected topics are covered but that our expectations of what constitute “communication spaces” are challenged. This section concludes with a chapter addressing capital, which by reducing the flows to their economic basis provides an encompassing view.

The three parts to this volume are intentionally overlapping in some ways. There are, for instance, several chapters relating to the Internet in some way, and dance comes up more than once. However, our intention was to show the various distinct ways in which such topics can be considered, and how they might be laid alongside one another in productive ways. In this, we hope that you agree we have been successful.

Media in Place and Space

The first section of the book is organized so as to introduce media dynamics that have a relatively long history – somewhat more than a century – and then turn to newer technologies and dynamics. Steven Hoelscher opens the section with a discussion of photography, a medium that has provided a mediated sense of “thereness” since the mid-nineteenth century. Photography offers a historical perspective that helps lay a foundation for subsequent chapters. In keeping with this attention to time, Hoelscher’s chapter reminds us of the paradoxical relationship between the photograph as a momentary vision and the photograph as an enduring object, a relationship that has recently changed owing to digital photography. Through a case study of Magnum Photos, his chapter reveals media as a means of propagating a progressive sense of place.

In another analysis of a visual medium, Deborah Dixon excavates the complex and multifaceted geography of cinema. She tracks geographies of film from the early proposal that a film can show students “the field,” to studies of the spatial organization of the entertainment industry and its laborers, analyses of the political and economic settings in which film is produced, and analyses of place representations with their systematic distortions and manipulations. Most recently, there is a rejection of Cartesian space and the primacy of the visual that transcends the artificial dichotomy between the “reel” and the “real” and takes us away from images and sites toward topologies of multisensory engagement. The latter aspects of film are more than representational as affect circulates among partial objects – networks of technologies and organisms that only temporarily appear coherent.

Departing from visuality but deepening our understanding of the early twentieth-century media complex, Alasdair Pinkerton draws our attention to radio – a medium too often forgotten by scholars. His contribution shows radio as inherently spatial. Radio was the first of many media to make use of electromagnetic waves; it once startled with its ability to pass through walls and over great distances. Radio remains an important vehicle

for the promotion of place identities, but simultaneously transcends place – for example, promoting national interests beyond the borders of the state. In addition, radio permits continuous communication during mobility, an ability that still renders it useful (in tandem with newer technologies) so that one’s sense of being “here” remains stable even while traveling between here to there. Radio resonates with other media we find somehow more impressive, but perhaps its most intriguing aspect is its ambiguous relation to the entire sensorium, because as Pinkerton argues, the voice of the radio activates not only to the ear but also the mind’s eye.

The mind’s eye is trained in childhood, and as Jason Dittmer argues, superheroes in comics provide an embodied symbol of the nation, functioning as “rescaling icons.” To fit them (and vicariously fit ourselves) into superhero adventures, we need to learn our way around in the Bergsonian space-time of animated narrative. To the spatialities of national embodiment and visual montage we can add the place-based geographical process by which readings of comics are performed. A final geography that is brought to bear in this constellation is the geographical arrangement of comic book production and distribution, which enables all of the other geographies. As Dittmer notes, we must consider all four of these geographies not as disconnected but as co-constituting each other.

Pauliina Raento takes us on an excursion into the surprisingly complex geography of one of the smallest and least obtrusive media. Much more complex than it seems, the postage stamp affords insight into a range of geographic processes including iconographic representations of place and material flows of meaning and information through space. Much of the potency of the postage stamp derives from its official character as a display of national iconography as well as an indication of the conveyance that is prepaid, both of which in tandem create opportunities for subversion. A stamp stuck on the wrong way can be a challenge to the state political authority embodied both in the stamp’s imagery and in the institution of the postal system. This subversion demonstrates the close connection between communication content and communication networks.

Derek McCormack’s chapter explores the relation between dance and media, searching for a way past the too-obvious dichotomy between the live dancing body and the disembodied media image. He urges us to think of dance as a technicity of relational movement. On this account, sensation is always prosthetic regardless of whether it is technologically mediated. Both media and bodies participate in dance as a distributed flow of dynamic materiality. A key to this shift in thinking are “media ecologies,” a term he employs to suggest dynamic relations in which bodies respond to screened dances by dancing differently. We perceive these ecologies whether we think of dance-centric movies such as *Footloose*, video-arcade games like *Dance, Dance, Revolution*, or the countless remakes of dance videos such as PSY’s *Gangnam Style*. While dance is the oldest medium in this section of the book, this chapter raises issues that connect strongly to the last two chapters in the section.

James Ash considers video games with a flexible perspective, arguing that space in video games can be conceptualized in three main ways: spaces that appear on the screen, spaces of the game-player’s body, and spaces constituted by assemblages of body and screen. Spaces of the screen construct space visually, as they scroll in various ways allowing the player to move beyond the visible field of the screen in different ways, depending on the game. Some games appear to surround the game player in three dimensions while others are two-dimensional. Screen-spaces of these various sorts are supplemented by the various spaces of the body where the player is embodied and his or her senses literally come into play. Integrating these spaces begins to allow us to perceive the game as an assemblage; constructed geometries limit player action even as players “corporeally and skillfully respond to these limitations using their embodied knowledge and sensori-motor skill.”

Darren Purcell rounds out the section with a discussion of the Internet. His chapter cites the boundary-crossing potential of the Internet with the implications of such fluidity, in regard to human mobility and the evolving notion of intellectual property. While computer networking provides the means of overcoming spatial boundaries, its appropriation always reflects the local conditions of “real people, embedded in real places.” The big picture also continues to show unevenness in the concentration of Internet bandwidth, raising skepticism about whether boundary-crossing necessarily leads to the smoothing out of spatial lumpiness. Nonetheless, as Purcell mentions, there are some tantalizing examples of resistant politics benefiting from digital networks and flows.

Place in Media

The second section attacks the concept of place, working on it through a wide-ranging set of theoretical inspirations. David Lulka’s chapter provides a point of departure by questioning how mediated encounters with nature distort the distance between humans and nonhumans. To shrink the earth by picturing it from space, to draw a fantasy vision of a future earth without humans, to analyze nature via science or romanticize it via fiction, thereby engaging it via anthropomorphism or mechanism, is in any case to work on the conceptual distance between the human and the nonhuman. Whether in the anthropomorphic characters of *Bambi* and *Finding Nemo*, or in the “ecoporn” of *Blue Planet*, we are confronted by (re) constructions of this distance. However, as Lulka reminds us, it is not enough simply to critique media constructions for being constructions, because our critique itself is historically and geographically contingent.

Julie Cupples explores what she calls the “body-media interface.” These concerns are not wholly different from those of Lulka, because in many ways it is through our own bodies that we connect with nature, whether through the shared experience of consumption and reproduction, or through the panoply of the senses and desires that are bequeathed to us by our mammalian (and specifically simian) ancestry. This discussion addresses a powerful current of media-critique: the allegations that spending time with media degrades the body to a tuberous state while media images themselves push us to strive for impossibly slender and muscular physiques. The chapter leaves room for progressive potentials in mediated forms of embodiment, acknowledging but also questioning such critiques.

Stuart Aitken takes us on a dizzying trip that starts on terrain similar to the previous chapter – the mediated body – but works toward a more general notion of interiority. On this account, places of interiority include not just the innards of the body but also the mind, as revealed by psychology, psychotherapy, and post-structural critiques, and interiority itself, as considered by Gilles Deleuze, certain “new” feminists, and the philosopher Henri Bergson. The filmic language of David Cronenberg provides a case study in which the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the body, and ultimately the boundaries of the self, are dissolved in a monstrous way.

Giorgio Hadi Curti and Tamara M. Johnson offer a perspective that nicely complements Aitken’s interpretation. Their discussion of syncretic geographies, tied closely to the notion of hybridity, brings together an unlikely pair of media: Japanese anime film and Salsa dance. The assumed difference between these media serves to recall ways in which other things assumed to be different are, to greater or lesser degrees, the same, and more generally the ways in which place itself depends on mixture, combination, and blending. Calling for a relational sensibility, the authors urge us to compose maps of the world that can be unfolded like intricate origami creations so as to better capture the syncretic stew of affect.

The art installations of Canadian artist Stan Douglas form the focus of the chapter by Colin Gardner. These installations are not only places in their own right, but are meant to evoke other places, and in doing so they simultaneously rupture an ordinary sense of time. They linger on a past in which things obviously could have worked out differently, and if they had, here would not be here and there would not be there. Thus ultimately they disrupt the traditional relationships between space, place, and time to offer an alternative reality that is both haunted and haunting.

The chapter by Jim Craine, Ron Davidson and Christina Dando explores yet another ordinary and mundane medium with hidden geographic import. Advertising is so familiar that it is usually treated as “beneath” geographic study. Yet advertisements not only use place representations to promote consumption, which alters places, they also shade into architecture and thereby become places. The orange roof of the Howard Johnson’s, McDonald’s golden arches, or the obese homunculus in front of a Big Boy restaurant, all serve as media built into place for the purpose of increasing consumption. The identical façades and décor exist in tension with ads playing on the concept of the uniqueness of place, a uniqueness one must colonize, either literally or at least with the touristic gaze.

John Finn rounds out this section with a consideration of graffiti as a way in which people are able to write meaning directly onto the landscape. As a tool for reclaiming some degree of power over the spaces that urbanites inhabit, graffiti quite often responds to the other messages deployed in the city – for example, billboard advertisements. In Finn’s analysis this reinscription intervenes in representation of race in the city of Salvador, Brazil, and contests this city’s racialized landscapes.

Space in Media

The third and final section reframes the geographical not as place but as space. Paul Adams invites us to think of words as creating particular verbal spaces: tree-spaces, container-spaces, layer-spaces, particle-spaces, and area-spaces. While these spaces may be encountered through metaphors, like the term *root* when applied to an ancestral word fragment, there is something here that is more than metaphorical. How we interpret words and organize words, on the one hand, and how we use words, on the other, are coordinated in complex ways that imply the existence of spaces that coordinate the interactions between people, words, and things. Our ability to act through words depends on the varied logics of these spaces. If spaces are understood as systems of opportunity and constraint, then we literally inhabit the spaces created by words.

Michael Bull shows how the movement of people through urban space is increasingly overlain with the experience of mediated sound. People move around in what amount to “privatized sonic bubbles” as they employ headphones or earbuds to replace the auditory aspects of the spaces they inhabit. Sonic environments therefore become oddly dislocated even as they are privatized and fused (differently for each person) into a single melody and rhythm, and space is no longer shared in the way it once was.

Barney Warf explores social networking, or to be more precise, telemediated interpersonal interactions. While noting the unevenness of the diffusion of all of the associated technologies, he also shows the revolutionary situation induced by even modest levels of access to new interpersonal networking media such as cell phones. To a degree this change involves hardware but it is no less dependent on software, as Twitter, Facebook, and other applications form “telemediated networks” separate from the cell phones and computers on which they are carried. These networks permit daily life to constitute strange geographies, including wormholes, tunnels, and “origami-like spatialities.”

Ate Poorthuis and Matthew Zook explore the relatively new and increasing interactivity of computer-mediated communication, or what is increasingly called VGI (volunteered geographic information). Drawing on the metaphor of a flaky, many-layered French pastry called a mille-feuille, they consider the countless layers of mediated social interaction that now characterize daily life. Creating and updating online maps, posting updates to one's online profile, broadcasting invitations to events, and responding to crises and disasters, people are increasingly at home in multiple discrete but relatively ephemeral and crumbly layers of space.

Paul Simpson's chapter seeks to avoid equating media with texts and textuality by taking up nonrepresentational themes, particularly the concept of affect. He considers the countless encounters when bodies impinge on other bodies, when emotions cross the bounds of the self, when a certain intensity passes from here to there and we are caught up in communications of a nonrepresentational sort. He attends to communication as a form of change and transformation without recourse to conventional notions of cause and effect that objectify communications as things passing between objects. Instead, he considers cinema, video games, and sound in relation to their various atmospheres.

The chapter by Katrinka Somdahl-Sands and Paul Adams takes us into spaces and places of performance that are undergoing transformation in response to the diffusion of various media. Performance has proven fully capable of evolving alongside contemporary technological and social transformations. Viral videos, for example, are performances. As such, they rework the boundaries between public and private. What would otherwise have remained private, such as a child bursting into tears, can become public on a grand scale. What is new about this publicness is not merely the geographical scale or audience numbers, but the particular ways in which technology reworks the boundaries between presence and absence, self and other, now and then, here and there. This reworked performance space brings together activists, artists, and artist-activists whose projects constitute new types of publics.

Brett Christophers rounds out the section and the book by considering the geography of media-related capital. There is, on the one hand, a concentration of productive power in the hands of giant media conglomerates in a few major cities where the vast majority of media products are created, packaged, marketed, and licensed. At the same time, media investment and production have become increasingly mobile, transnational, and decentralized through a process of deterritorialization. This process of concentration and dispersion profoundly affects all of the media geographies addressed throughout this book.

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PART I

Media

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Photography

Steven Hoelscher

Introduction: An Oakland Bus Stop

Photography, at its most powerful, is a geographic medium unparalleled in shaping perceptions of place (van Gelder and Westgeest 2011). Whether viewed on a computer screen, in a gallery, through the pages of a book, or at a classroom lecture, photographic images of locations, near and far, can seem real and unmediated. They can transport people across vast distances of time and space.

This was made clear to me in early August 2010 at a bus stop in Oakland, California. I had just finished the first of a two-day oral history interview with Richard Misrach for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art (Misrach 2010a). As a way to help prepare for our discussion the following day, Misrach – an environmental photographer whose large-scale prints of bombing sites in the Nevada desert, petrochemical plants in Louisiana, and beaches in Hawaii have earned him international acclaim – lent me an advance copy of a forthcoming book. *Destroy This Memory* is large, measuring 15" x 11," with the horizontal spine across the top, and printed at the highest possible quality in full color (Figure 1.1). Reading the book is like holding a slice of a museum in your hands with the pictures seeming to leap out from the page.

But that's not putting it quite right. It's more like a window through which viewers jump into another place – in this instance, post-Katrina New Orleans during the immediate months after the 2005 hurricane. Waiting for the bus back to Berkeley, I leafed through the photo book, lingering over every page, as the embattled city came into clear focus. New Orleans, through Richard Misrach's lens, was unpeopled – not one person is seen in the 70 images – but the human impact on the devastated environment was immediate and loud. Seeing the landscape meant hearing it, too, as the words of local residents appeared at the center of each uncaptioned picture. Spray-painted messages in bright red, violet-blue, deep carrot orange, and ghost white gave voice to frantic pleas for help, stories of traumatic loss, and angry indictments. Although Misrach (2010b) let the words of residents speak for themselves with no interpretative text, he arranged the graffiti-laced photographs in a distinct narrative, beginning with despair ("help" and "fuck, fuck, fuck") moving on to defiance ("I have a gun" or "to SOB that looted me I will kill you") to gallows humor ("yard of the month" and "yep, Brownie, you did a heck of a job") to a concluding, existential note ("what now?" "broken dreams," "destroy this memory"). The effect on viewers is haunting.

And affective. Emotions of confusion, sympathy, frustration, and anger are ones that I heard expressed at the Oakland bus stop. Within minutes, more than a dozen fellow passengers, also waiting for the F bus, joined me in studying Misrach's photographs. Sitting next to me and looking over my shoulder, they took turns thumbing through the photo book as I held it, stopping at every page, reading aloud its provocative words, and seeing the

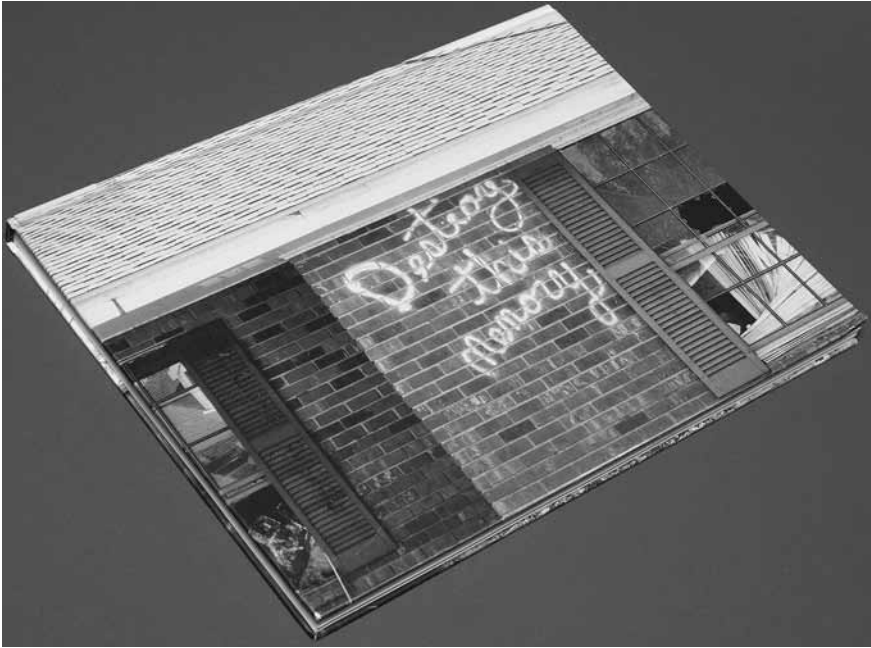


Figure 1.1 Cover to Richard Misrach's *Destroy This Memory*, 2010
 Source: Richard Misrach

wounded landscapes on which they were written. My bus stop companions offered shrewd, at times conflicting interpretations of the photographs' meanings: some knew little about the hurricane and were astonished that such disaster could be wrought by natural forces, while others remembered it well and were chilled by what they saw to be indictments against governmental ineptitude. It was made clear to me that there was no single right way to read these visual images. But also clear is that, for everyone that afternoon at the small corner in Oakland, we were somehow having contact with a place and a time that affected us in profound and surprising ways. We were responding to the *thereness* of photography.

The Thereness of Photography

So was Roland Barthes, when he looked at a nineteenth-century photograph of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. "This old photograph touches me," he wrote, "it is quite simply *there* that I should like to live." The experience that Barthes (1981: 38, 84) describes – the sense that he is looking directly at a slice of geographic reality, "an immediate presence to the world" – is foundational to the medium. And it's not just among astute semiologists like Barthes that photographs exert the power of place. The most democratic of the geographic media, photography speaks an accessible language that's both multivalent and open to anyone who pauses to look at what's there.

"Thereness is a sense of the subject's reality, a heightened sense of its physicality, etched sharply into the image," writes Gerry Badger (2010: 17). "It is a sense that we are looking at

the world directly, without mediation." Badger is describing the often-noted aura of machine objectivity that hangs over photographs, despite the subjective nature of both taking a picture and manipulating its visual qualities. It's often easy to forget, when looking at photographs, that one is looking at a mediated reality instead of reality itself. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001: 17) call this the *myth of photograph truth* and note that "although we know that images can be ambiguous and are easily manipulated or altered ... much of the power of photography still lies in the shared belief that photographs are objective or truthful records."

This constant tension between photography and reality – a slippery relationship at once straightforward and enigmatic – can be found at the extreme ends of the photographic spectrum: from modest snapshots emerging from a Brownie camera or cell phone to the most serious "art" photographs. Walker Evans (1974: 95), himself a master of the art, recognized that even the most modest and banal postcards, produced as they often are "as a routine chore by heaven knows what anonymous photographer," can be a "well-nigh perfect record of place." Such photographs can simultaneously present evidence and evoke a magical quality that evades definition – resulting in a complex set of feelings and associations specifically because of the allegiance with thereness.

What's more, the thereness of photographs means that such visual images "don't only show us things, they *do* things. They engage us optically, neurologically, intellectually, viscerally, physically" (Heiferman 2012: 16). For my bus stop companions, photographs of Katrina-wracked New Orleans demanded our scrutiny and interpretation, as they promoted conversation, stimulated thought, and shaped at least one person's understanding of the unnatural metropolis. Conceiving photographs this way, on the one hand, helps move beyond an unproductive impasse within human geography, where "representation" is counterposed to something called "practice" or "performance." As an agent of change, feeling, and affect, photography's active role in the practices and performances of everyday life makes it an especially important geographic medium (Abel 2012).

On the other hand, recognizing the thereness of photography suggests something about geography. As Felix Driver (2003: 227) argues, the idea that geography is a particularly visual discipline has a long history and "isn't simply the product of heightened anxiety about the politics of vision in recent cultural theory. For centuries, indeed, practitioners of the art of geography have been engaged in developing languages and techniques to capture what the eye could or should see in a landscape." Photography emerged in the nineteenth century as an ideal instrument for geographic research and education, evolving from lantern slides and stereographic views to 35 mm slides and PowerPoint presentations (Figure 1.2). So successful has the camera been to visualize a slice of the world that, as Tuan (1979: 413) astutely observes, "in the classroom, a geography lecture without slides is as anomalous as an anatomy lecture without bones."

Sometimes, as Gillian Rose (2003: 216; cf. Driver 2003; Matless 2003; Ryan 2003) observes, the photograph shown as a lecture slide "becomes the real," the photographs "confirm the truth of our words." This is an important point, and one that must be emphasized. It also should be extended beyond the geography classroom and become an initial point of departure for all photographic/geographic studies – namely, the recognition of the dual existence of photographs as physical objects and compelling imagery. Before a photograph can function as a representation of any kind, it begins its life as a three-dimensional thing, which has "volume, opacity, tactility, and a physical presence in the world" (Batchen 1997: 2). One might push this general observation even further to assert that a photograph's material form (whether a gelatin silver print or the bytes of a digital file), no less than the image it bears, is fundamental to its function as an object that carries social and cultural meaning.

This essential observation is easy to overlook, especially when viewing photographs of visually arresting imagery. As Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (2004: 2) argue, "the



Figure 1.2 *Children in a Geography Class Viewing Stereoscopic Photographs, 1908.*
Photographer unknown

Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Underwood and Underwood Collection, LC-USZ62-90216

prevailing tendency is that photographs are apprehended in one visual act, absorbing image and object together, yet privileging the former.” While image content – what is depicted in a photograph – remains the principle interest of most viewers, much is lost if we leave it at that. It’s worth considering, for example, this 1938 image of an isolated farm in the Texas panhandle by the American photographer Dorothea Lange (Figure 1.3). At one level, it offers evidence of the sort of vernacular structures and agricultural patterns that have long fascinated cultural geographers. Pushing a bit further, a geographer might take notice of the abandonment of the dwelling and the particularly neat rows of contour-plowed land surrounding it. Such descriptions, as important as they are, neglect the fact that Lange’s Texas photograph is a mediated representation that performs cultural work.

An approach to this photograph that is aware of its thereness begins with its status as a material object. It would, furthermore, acknowledge that Lange created this image with a specific agenda in mind, that it served her and other’s interests in competing ways. Finally, it would recognize that, over the years, the material object has circulated widely as different viewerships have seen it in multiple contexts. As a key member of President Franklin Roosevelt’s Farm Security Administration (FSA), Lange was commissioned to



Figure 1.3 Dorothea Lange, *Tractored Out*. Power farming displaces tenants from the land in the western dry cotton area, Childress County, Texas Panhandle, 1938.

Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, US Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information, LC-USF34-T01-018281-C

photographically document the social and economic relationships of American agricultural labor during the Great Depression. She became a severe critic of that system, using her photographs to expose its structural inequalities. This becomes evident only when the photograph's full caption, as Lange intended it, is matched to the image itself: "Tractored Out: Power farming displaces tenants from the land in the western dry cotton area, Childress County, Texas Panhandle. June 1938." Far from a value-neutral picture of a Texas landscape, Lange's photograph simmers with indignation and moral conviction (Spirm 2009).

Image makers like Dorothea Lange seductively deployed the thereness of photography to stake her claims about the troubled and uneven nature of American capitalist development. Other photographers may also strive to present a visual argument, but, like Trevor Paglen, are simultaneously concerned with the slippery relationship between photography and what is depicted. Trained as a geographer and a photographer, Paglen recognizes a contemporary suspicion of representation – "the days of believing that there's something out there in the world that can be transparently represented by a photograph or image are over" – at least in the realm of critical theory and the art world (quoted in Stallabrass 2011: 8). But rather than either retreating to pure abstraction or eschewing the visual altogether, he embraces the performative act of photography. Indeed, for Paglen photography is all about exploring limits – limits of visibility, representation, knowledge, and democratic society.

Each photograph he takes can be regarded as a record of political performance as he insists on his right to bring his camera to public space and document what is otherwise invisible.

And it is the generally invisible – and purposefully so – that intrigues Paglen and compels him to document the hidden spaces of military power. He has taken thousands of photographs of the “black world” – the covert defense projects and infrastructure that has grown exponentially since the Bush administration’s 2001 declared War on Terror. In some cases, he uses high-end optical lenses designed for astronomical photography to document secret military bases in the United States. In others, he makes use of data generated by amateur satellite watchers to track and photograph classified spacecraft in the earth’s orbit. “Nine Reconnaissance Satellites over Sonora Pass” from 2008 (Figure 1.4) is an example of the latter series and presents viewers with an immediate and interesting contradiction. With its striking, multicolored symmetrical lines set against the deep black background, the photograph is a four-hour time-lapse exposure of the northern sky over the Sierra Nevada. It at once belongs to the art world,¹ but its full significance only becomes apparent when considering the social process that went into making it. For the artist, it is an exposé of the “legal ‘nowhere’ that nourishes the worst excesses of power” (Paglen 2010: 276).



Figure 1.4 Trevor Paglen, *Nine Reconnaissance Satellites over Sonora Pass*, 2008
Source: Trevor Paglen; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; Metro Pictures, New York; Galerie Thomas Zander

¹ Paglen is represented by the same Chelsea gallery, Metro Pictures, that represents superstar artists like Cindy Sherman, and his photographs have been exhibited at the world’s most prestigious venues, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Tate Modern, London.