

EDITORIAL

Did You Find the World or Did You Make it Up? Media, Communications and Geography in the Digital Age

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Geography, media, and communications have been closely linked since the 16th Century. Just as the advent of the printing press and new modes of measurement changed the media landscape, so too did it change that of geography and cartography. Now, in the digital age we are presented with ever more instruments of measurement (big data, algorithms, UGC, VGI etc.), ever more far-reaching versions of the printing press (Web 2.0, Social Media etc.), and the waters are muddied further by the development of participatory-GIS systems, and the (re-)birth of Neogeography which purportedly offers up a challenge to the status quo. Thus, it becomes essential that, just as we might question the 16th century map-makers, we must now question data analytics, algorithms and their architects, as well as the tools used to communicate these new spaces. The bringing together of the theories of Geography and of Media and Communications allows for an alternate, nuanced, and a spatially grounded approach to envisioning the myriad ways in which the digital age mediates social, economic and political experiences and, in particular, in the increasingly technologically informed media and communications sector, allowing us to ask, 'did you find the world or did you make it up?'

Keywords: Geography; media; communications; GIS; mapping; social media; digital media

This special issue brings together media and communications scholars alongside geographers and cartographers to explore ideas that transcend the two fields. This combining of communication and geographic theories is not in itself a new idea. While the disciplines are certainly not neighbours in the sense of having a similar subject matter or shared methodological foundations, they are increasingly intertwined and a number of texts have already explored the shared theoretical underpinnings of the disciplines, most notably *Geographies of Communication* by Falkheimer and Jansson (2006) which explores communication theory's *spatial turn*. There are also numerous texts that examine geography's cultural or *communicational turn* (See Adams and Jansson, 2012). The still emerging digital landscape of media and communications though, brings these shared values into sharp focus and also

makes the requirement of a complimentary effort all the more urgent. Geography has had a long and varied connection with theories of communication and social sciences that are now more fully seen as communication theory, and this is just as true in reverse; each attempt to illuminate the processes of everyday life (Dear, 1988). Moreover, Adam's (2011) *Taxonomy of the Geography of Media and Communications* highlights four key areas where the disciplines are interlinked; place-in-media (reporting on events related to their location); media-in-places (changing the meaning of places through using media in them); media-in-spaces (infrastructure of communications) and spaces-in-media (topologies and symbols that move ideas). The papers presented here cover this full range of linkages, as well as being embedded in the historical approaches to linking these theoretical underpinnings, traced back to Hartshorne's (1939) text *The Nature of Geography*. While Hartshorne's work is a crucial starting point, geographic thought at that time was dominated by the infrastructural properties of communications, often favouring patterns over people (Hillis, 1998). It was not until the 1950s and 60s that geographers began to move to more closely consider the interactions between locations, and more importantly the people within those places. Geographic and media and communications theories became increasingly intertwined at this time, with the rise of McLuhan's (1962, 1964) work, which often discussed the geographical implication of communications. Cartographic practice also began drawing on communications theories, with Koláčny's development of the *Cartographic Communications Model* (Kent, 2018, *this issue*). Communication theory, and to a greater extent, geographic theories, were bounded at this time by a haunting of what Warntz (1967) called 'the tyranny of space', seeing communication tools as a vaccine to the seemingly problematic entity called distance and space. McLuhan's (1962) ideas of a global village are born of this notion, as are the later communications theories of writers such as Castells (1996). As new forms of communication were seen as being able to overcome the tyranny of space, seemingly bringing the world together, scholars found themselves faced with the tyranny of communications (Abler *et al.* 1975). This new tyranny led a growth in interest in social geography through the 1970s (Ley, 1979), with an increased focus on communications in terms of discourse and representation, moving away from seeking the abolition of distance, but instead seeking to bring it to the fore (Robins, 1997). The Heideggerian notion that closeness or proximity are not equal to nearness grew in relevance in the studies of both geography and communications (Urry, 2002). Yet, there remained a distinct separation of spatial forms and social processes (Ley, 1979) – that is until the publication of Lefebvre's seminal text, *The Production of Space*, which put forward the premise that 'social space is a social product, and that each society, or each mode of production, produces a space, its own space' (Lefebvre, 1991: 59). The terminology used here reveals the Marxist leanings of his writing (Lefebvre, of course continued to pursue Marxist critique even after his expulsion from the French Communist Party in 1958); but it also signals a shift in geographical thought towards problems of uneven development and social economics. Lefebvre's work is of interest for a number of significant reasons, firstly the ideas he put down in *The Production of Space*, where he used examples of medieval society which produced space around 'strong points [such as manors and cathedrals] anchoring the network of lanes and main roads to a landscape transformed by peasant communities' (Potts, 2015: 40) can be used analogously with digital networks. In the sense that digital networks are built around nodes and links between these nodes, and the medieval analogies of Lefebvre are reflected in Castells' (1996) notion of the network society, an important concept in understanding the way in which knowledge is communicated in the digital age. Lefebvre's work helped to usher in a move towards the 'linguistic turn' in postmodern geography, adding to the perception that language plays a large role in knowledge production (Dear, 1988). As noted by Fuchs (2018) *The Production of Space* makes many references to the role of language

in creating space, further emphasising the importance of communications theories within geography. The second point of interest to take from Lefebvre's work is that of *se mondialise*, the move towards the state becoming worldwide and highlights the true tyranny of communications. As the state increasingly becomes the manager of space, it increasingly acts as the dominant power within these spaces (*ibid.*: 275). While Lefebvre's theories on space cannot be easily summarized, and some have even referred to him as suffering an unhealthy fetishism of space (Soja, 1989), his work does in itself create a space for the intersection of the main ideas of this special issue, which are, to explore the physical, social, cultural and representational relationships between geography and communications within the digital age. And while Lefebvre himself was not a communications scholar, his work allows for the intersection of geography and communications through his deconstruction of humanism and structuralism, the social production of space and his work on information and communication technologies in capitalism (Fuchs, 2018). In each of the papers here the lived gives rise to spaces of representations established from objective, practical, and scientific elements – both creating as well as documenting spaces – and also changing and forming *espace-nature* (Lefebvre, 2009; Fuchs, 2018).

The underpinnings provided by Lefebvre foregrounded the shift towards ideas of the information economy (Lyotard, 1984) in the late 1980s, which whilst suffering from the issue of often lumping together older forms of technology with newer ICTs, also saw the rise of the political economy of communications (Lagopoulos, 1993), and perhaps one of the most famous deconstructions of the social, political and communicative influence of mapping by Brian Harley (1989), in his text 'Deconstructing the Map'. The 1990s then saw huge advances in the power of computers, the internet, GPS and other communications tools, and with this, the move to postmodernism and the need for new theories of communication (Lagopoulos, 1993). The chief characteristics of postmodernist thought of concern here are the preoccupation with discourse and language alongside a new openness to difference and a deliberate attempt to understand and include local knowledges (Sayer, 1993). The postmodern and these new communications systems became quickly embedded into the political visions of people like Al Gore and Newt Gingrich (Robins, 1997), and dreams of a new global peace and political harmony, facilitated through communications tools, echoed around – helped in no small part by the ending of the Cold War and a general sense of global optimism. These new politics and technologies hugely changed our routines and relationships, but at the same time were becoming subsumed into our everyday existence, and as they disappeared from view their cultural influence became occluded (Hillis, 1998), echoing the modest movement in architecture, in which the functional relations of entities dictated the form of built space (Lagopoulos, 1993). This made the study of these new tools, the spaces they occupied, and how they were shaping space and place, all the more urgent. As the world moves deeper into the era of digitization, technological convergence and individualized digital and mediated experiences (Morley, 2006) we run the risk of forgetting about who owns and benefits from the extension of these new communications technologies (Hillis, 1998). Just as maps of old, held power over those they mapped, so too do the communications technologies that are mapped over our existence; postmodern society is not then a new type of social formation, but is rather a new stage of capitalism (Lagopoulos, 1993). The television already colonized public space, mobiles phones have dislocated domesticity, smart phones then too dislocated the workplace. We are once again seeking, if not the elimination, then the transcendence, of distance, seeking to ensure that geography does not matter, for nothing will matter where it is located, bringing about the death of the geographic community, as the world becomes defined socially, not spatially (Procopio and Procopio, 2007). Again, the papers in this issue show that physical locations are still crucial, space has not been transcended, even

in discussions of working remotely (See Randell-Moon, 2018, *this issue*). These contradictions once again bring the tyrannies of communication to the fore.

These new tyrannies of communication are inherently spatial in their make-up, and have born new theories and conceptual ideas such as *non-representational theory* (Thrift, 2008), *actor-network theory* (Latour, 2005), and *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006), seeing efforts being made to think of the digital in relationship to space. This leaves questions for media/communications theorists around the formation of the media and how it is involved in transforming space and citizenship. Geographers, with their access to sophisticated conceptualizations about space, spatiality, place and the construction of material landscapes according to landscape-as-idea, have a stake and a claim in positioning themselves more centrally in contemporary debates about how communication technologies and ITs relate to the production of meaning and identity (Hillis, 1998). Combined with new and emerging communications theories this development can help drive the work of geography and communications forwards towards understanding the new geographies of the digital age (Procopio and Procopio, 2007).

Throughout this issue the scholars here have themselves been moving these theories forwards, conceptualizing ideas and putting forward new empirical analyses that cover the full range of Adam's (2011) taxonomy of communication geography. The first of these is Media (and Communications)-in-Places, in which representations of places are communicated through media, and is an area addressed by Schmitz Weiss (2018, *this issue*) and Levy (2018, *this issue*). Levy explores the way in which those on the Brazilian periphery are attempting to change their 'in-media' status through counter-mapping. Levy notes that counter-mapping is not only about generating new imagery or data and asserts that the practice can create deeper meaning and change affective references to locations. Examining areas of Brazil that are seen as being on the periphery, those outside of the mainstream media discourses, or which are marginalized through stigma and rhetoric, Levy explores a range of counter-mapping practices. These include the use of graffiti in non-periphery areas to highlight the periphery, or the use of hip-hop or rap songs and their accompanying videos that draw on imagery and voices from the periphery. Each of these practices are attempts to redraw the boundaries of representation, breaking down notions that the periphery is not-newsworthy, that those who dwell there are natural police targets, or invaders of the 'public' space (Penglase, 2007). Conversely, they also seek to break down the notions that other spaces are inclusive, noting the way in which those on the periphery are excluded from sites such as shopping malls. Levy's exploration of counter-mapping on the periphery goes beyond cartographic experiences of representation, and instead attempts to redraw the discursive boundaries that create the periphery, in an attempt to encourage fairer media representations, and the 'correct-kind of publicity' (Levy, 2018, *this issue*; See also Specht and Ros-Tonen, 2017). Levy explores how counter-mapping practices can forestall the naturalisation of vocabulary, breaking the repetitive structures of media reporting. In Levy's work, it is the media who create the geography as they report it, but through counter-mapping those forced to the periphery attempt to escape the notion that 'geography is destiny', and alleviate the frustration and limitations to human and social life that are born from geographical determinism (Robins, 1997).

Schmitz Weiss (2018, *this issue*) also explores the duality between the way that media and journalistic practices represent, and create, the world. Schmitz Weiss' work on Spatial Journalism draws on both the concepts of Places-in-Media and Media-in-Places (Adams, 2011). Examining journalistic practices that incorporate space, place or location into their undertakings, Schmitz Weiss notes significant differences in the way in which journalists and their readers understand the concept of local, and that this is continuing to evolve in the digital age. While journalistic practices are still very much reliant on the labelling of stories with geographic or time-based stamps that can be easily categorized into news databases (Øie, 2013), these

categories are often different from those of the readership, particularly in relation to geographical boundaries. This leads to a series of issues for journalists as they attempt to understand these changing geographic spaces, while also being faced with fewer resources and lower levels of staffing. Schmitz Weiss also suggests that this has implications for the traditional 'beat reporter', whose role has already been eroded (Howe, 2009). Following the work of Levy (2018, *this issue*), Schmitz Weiss also contends that the journalist's role in creating positive or negative notions about a place, and the role of place making more generally, needs to be a conscious part of robust journalistic practice. Digital devices have further compounded these issues of space and place, giving users the ability to access location based news in the moment and local, leading to quick assessments of place, and quickly changing, highly localised discourses based on news items. Schmitz Weiss calls for a re-examination of the role of location in journalism, suggesting that it needs to recognise its power in creating places, rather than serving audiences who are less tied to place than before.

While Schmitz Weiss touches upon the issues of Media (and Communications)-in-places – that is the way in which places have become altered through the fashion in which people use media and communications tools within those spaces – these topics are also dealt with at length by a number of other authors in this issue, Halliwell (2018, *this issue*), Brantner (2018, *this issue*), and Duggan (2018, *this issue*). Brantner's paper takes up the complexities and difficulties in navigating a world that is entangled with geomeia. Exploring the way in which new locative media practices, such as digital mapping, are also forms of mediatization of the world, that are not outside our world, but are instead engrained in every moment of social existence (See Hepp and Krotz, 2014) in a way that is even more ubiquitous than Crampton's (2001) notions of hypermedia forms and distributed mapping. By exploring the technological developments of geomeia, from basic geotagging tools found in Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, to complex multidimensional geospatial tools such as *Photosyth*, Brantner charts how these change our relationship to space and knowledge. The role of algorithms and 'networked locality' (Gordon and eSilva, 2011) in bombarding us with huge quantities of images of place, have led us beyond the spatial (Harvey, 2001) and mobility turns, and towards a new (visual) algorithmic turn (Brantner, 2018, *this issue*), suggesting that geomeia is less of a tool, and more of a reflection on our existence. And, one that requires us to adopt a new research programme that combines old and new methods, digital and ethnographic, in order to understand this new visual regime. Uses of geomeia, as well as non-geomeia, are also examined by Halliwell (2018, *this issue*) through an exploration of the new geographies of sexuality that are both permitted and created through digital and social medias. Taking fandom surrounding the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), Halliwell, like Levy (2018, *this issue*), explores what it means to be on the periphery, and how new medias that pertain to remove boundaries and borders can redraw spaces for previously excluded groups. Halliwell explores themes of media convergence (Jenkins, 2014) and the construction of identity, noting that social media platforms can operate as technical mediators that help maintain proximate social connections, allowing the expression of queered identity through textual, audible and visual forms (Halliwell, 2018, *this issue*). These ideas echo those of Anderson's (1991) 'imagined communities', where shared cultural practices provide a basis for the linkages between people. With the elimination of time and distance, beliefs and ideas are more easily shared, and the global fan network is redrawn into a more homogenous culture (Greig, 2002), an idea that would appear to be a self-evidently good thing (Robins, 1997). Certainly, Halliwell's work points to not only a positive digital geography that allows for 'coming out', but one that also shapes an 'imaginative geopolitical logic that progressive LGBT politics is associated within occidental constructs and representations of European modernity'. National performances Halliwell notes, have manipulated sexual and ethnic stereotypes

to articulate European nationhood. In this way, Eurovision and the new digital geographies of sexuality that have emerged from the event, are also shaping relations between Russia and Europe, leaving the former promoting anti-LGBT legislation, and at the same time presenting camp, gay or bi-curious performances at ESC in order to position itself as less Other.

Duggan's (2018, *this issue*) work also explores Media-in-Places, examining the politics of mapping from the perspective of those using the map for navigation around the city of London. This work also begins to explore Media (and Communications)-in-Spaces, that is infra-structural elements, as well as Spaces-in-Media (and communications) – the topologies and images that move ideas through space. He does this by following a number of participants as they engage with both online and offline maps in order to find their way around, examining the way in which their engagements mediate and give shape to the experience of locating oneself within the city, or where they evoke affective, and social, responses. While Duggan (2018, *this issue*) notes that the respondents in his work never questioned the map, nor the politics held within them, Duggan himself deconstructs both these notions throughout his paper. Navigation is, so Duggan asserts, 'laden with a politics that matter'. Furthermore, these politics operate in two directions, firstly in how maps are designed as a communication tool, the efforts that are employed by mapping companies and software developers to ensure that maps are not just user friendly, but also designed to keep us engaged and coming back, even if this is at the expense of cartographic design (*See also* Kent, 2018, *this issue*). While the additional layers of data that are included in such digital maps as those produced by Google are seen as good for the user, Duggan refers to these tools as 'more than representational'. Here Duggan seeks to go beyond the works of Crampton (2001, 2009) or Gerlach (2018) to make explicit the linkages between the representational properties of the map and its performative effects, both in terms of returning to the map, but also in changing navigational practice through a series of feedback loops via which the lived experience is channelled (Thatcher and Dalton, 2017). Duggan also explores the power of what is collected through these mapping practices, noting that the process of using digital maps is not static, but is also used to further create those digital maps, allowing the mapping agencies to wield yet more power (and commercial wealth) from the data they accumulate from users (*See also* Thatcher and Dalton, 2017). Duggan brings us to further understand mapping practices are emergent and processual, rather than fixed and universal.

Each of the interactions between media and communications and geography discussed above are only possible due to the interactions of Media-in-Space, the infrastructures of cables, satellites and other elements. These too require close examination, and Randell-Moon (2018, *this issue*) undertakes this through an exploration of the politics behind the physical digital networks that are reshaping geography in New Zealand, a country that is world leading in broadband access (Heatley and Howell, 2010 *cited in* Randell-Moon, 2018). Taking the *Gigatown Competition*, which sought to give the fastest internet in the southern hemisphere to one New Zealand town, as her focus of analysis, Randell-Moon challenges the notion that communication technologies are a 'space conquering' economic tool, or that they are implicitly neutral (Hillis, 1998). While suggesting there were many positives of the *Gigatown Competition*, such as the wider stimulus to create better and faster communication technologies and the promotion of creative urban planning, a number of problems are also identified that exacerbate an already uneven development of communications technology (Soja, 1989). The first contradiction notes that in order to win the new high-speed connection, towns needed to compete on social media, thus enabling the most connected towns to have an advantage over those that were less well served. Of more concern to Randell-Moon though is the tension between the notions of physical space and digital space. While high-speed connections are sold under the proviso that a de-territorialized economy allows for

anybody to work anywhere, rendering place redundant, the competition also sought to create specific place-based reasons for the instillation of high-speed internet. Furthermore, the project's suggestion that those who left their 'home town' for work could now return and work remotely creates further tensions between de-territorialized communications and territorialized infrastructure. These issues are brought to the fore through the competition's discursive framing of 'frontier' development and under-developed areas, terms that exacerbate uneven geographies and evoke colonial notions, valuing parts of the city as more valuable than others, where, in what Randell-Moon calls a *neoliberal-spatial-twist*, the development risk is devolved onto the consumer. These kinds of projects, that stimulate governmental spatial planning, Randell-Moon calls *Digital Cartography Enterprise*, but they are, she concludes, a gamble, and one where not everyone can win.

As each of the papers in this issue have dealt with various ways in which geographic practice and communications intersect, it is perhaps then salient to finish with Kent's (2018, this issue) paper on cartographic communication. The problems of representation and place making that have been dealt with in the other papers in this issue are often born from a desire to create a uniform model of communication, in which a sense of place is created through an optimized set of information (cartographic or otherwise) that encourages the inclusion of the fewest themes shown in the simplest way, be this in journalism (Schmitz Weiss, Levy), geomedia (Brantner), or more traditional mappings (Duggan). Each of these has faced problems when confronted by a world in which the object of the communicated information is able to respond, either through counter-mapping processes, altering mapping directly, changing their behaviour to disrupt the status-quo (Halliwell, 2018, *this issue*), or through social-media feedback (Kent, 2018, *this issue*). In these increasingly multi-directional communication models Kent suggests that it is necessary to rethink models of cartographic communication in order to better include the user, who likely thinks about and uses a map rather differently to the manner intended. Kent also calls for the inclusion of more consideration on the connotations and denotative aspects of the cartographic enterprise, and asks, whether – as 'likes' become some kind of virtual endorsement of cartographic design – does this further change our relationship with the models of cartographic communication? To address this he sets out to present us with a new model of communication that draws upon the intersection of geography and communication disciplines, recognizing not only that places of knowledge are both material and symbolic, but also that each particular place representation is contingent and unique (Hall, 1980). Kent also takes a journey through digital feedback as part of the map making process, reflecting Duggan's work, but leading towards a new model for understanding communications through mappings. In doing so he reminds us that it is imperative to draw upon Stuart Hall's work in understanding that the meaning of our data, knowledge, and communication is 'dependent on culture, geography, language, heritage, education, and it is through processes of representation that it is inscribed; through the 'words we use [...] the stories we tell [...] the images [...] we produce [and] the emotions we associate' (Hall, 1997: 3). There is little to suggest that the intersection between communications and the creation of space and place cease, rather it is accelerating at a great speed, and governments and citizens alike will need to harness these new modes to ensure they do not become more exclusionary (Kitchin, 2014; Stuart *et al.* 2015).

Anyone who might be interested in the intersections of geography and communications is forced to manage the contradictions between culture and economics (Hillis, 1998). There are numerous ways in which these intersections and contradictions play out, many of them explored in the issue. The authors in this issue found themselves confronted with the traditional cartographic order of the world that has forced many peoples into an imperial logic under the no-win situation often referred to as *Map or Be Mapped* (Paglen, 2008). Both Kent

(2018, *this issue*) and Duggan (2018, *this issue*) grapple with the notion that cartography is not only poor at describing the qualities of the relationships of everyday life, but also forms power traditionally being used as an instrument of both colonialism and the contemporary geopolitical ordering of the world (Specht and Feigenbaum, 2018; Paglen, 2008). These issues are both alleviated and compounded by the growth in the number of privately owned sensors, not only harnessing Global Positioning Systems (GPS), but also sound-level, light and accelerometer sensors. Aggregating data from these diverse and plentiful sensors enables new forms of monitoring societal and development phenomena at an unprecedented scale (Buckingham Shum *et al.* 2012), issues that are also seen in Brantner's (2018, *this issue*) untangling of geomediality. The kind of abstract scientific knowledge collected in this way may seem universal, but in the real world, it is always integrated with supplementary assumptions that render it culture-bound and parochial. In calling for new models of cartographic communication (Kent), and an examination of the aesthetics of maps, that both try to convey information and draw us back to the map (Duggan), each also touch on how the mode of communication itself also conveys a set of tacit cultural and social assumptions or prescriptions (Wynne, 1989). These issues are accentuated through digitization, in which information is converted to bits – malleable, electronically stored bits that can erode cultural objects, information cultures and politics. In this emerging landscape, ever more mediation is required in order to grapple with the large amounts of information presented to us. This creates new peripheries, as well as allowing for the striking down of others. As Levy (2018, *this issue*) notes, the redrawing of spaces through the data presented about them is problematic, with stigma reinforced through reporting and journalism. Yet, both Levy and Halliwell (2018, *this issue*), see these processes of digitization as providing the opportunity to deconstruct the periphery, giving a powerful voice and representation to individuals and groups, be that through digital online platforms (Halliwell) or through various counter-mapping practices (Levy). As we attempt to manage information, information itself mutates into new forms that often require new types of management (Jordan, 2015). Hartley *et al.* (2012) have noted that in our shifting and mutating media landscape, 'representative representation' is under increasing attrition 'especially following the rise of interactive, participatory and digital technologies, where direct public *self-representation* can be undertaken by anyone with access to a computer network' (156). While this sounds like a positive step, not all connections are equal (Randell-Moon), and it leaves news rooms and journalists to reconsider the notion of local news. As the number of channels by which we can access journalism increase, the more it becomes fragmented, and the harder it is to see what the consumer wants in terms of local journalism (Schmitz Weiss, 2018). This makes Brantner's (2018, *this issue*) call for visual communication research that investigates the impacts of algorithmic techniques all the more urgent, and one that perhaps should go beyond visualizations, in order to avoid a regime that equates seeing with knowledge (Rose, 2016). We live immersed in representation, be it mediated, digital or through the cartographic gaze; it is how we understand each other, and in turn how we understand ourselves (Webb, 2009). New modes of communication have led to a globalized notion of *self* and *other*, and this newly established worldwide scale is leading in turn to new conflicts, crises, wars, and tyrannies (Lefebvre, 2009; Abler *et al.* 1975). These issues are compounded by projects that in their attempts to connect the world, actually create a more divided one, the work of Randell-Moon (2018, *this issue*), highlights the ways in which physical infrastructure can change the geography and social structures of a country, rewarding those most connected, and creating additional gaps in provision.

Late twentieth century communication and information technologies have produced such a blurring of what is real and what is representation that the two can no longer be distinguished

(Corner, 1999), leading to persistent questions over how human behaviour is constituted through space and time, and within specific social contexts (Dear, 1988). Our mappings of the world, be they through cartographic representations and data visualizations (Space-in-media), or mediated senses of place (Place-in-Media, and Media-in-Place), are in-between the virtual and the physical. A distinction not to be confused with a distinction between real and fake, 'as we would not claim that our bodies are real while our minds are fake' (Smith, 2017: 30). *Did you find the world or did you make it up?* asked Winnicotts (cited in Corner, 1999), a salient question indeed. The information super-highway agenda of the 1990s was designed to change the very fabric of society (Robins, 1997), to create a homogenized flow of communications transcending geography (Greig, 2001). This post-modern condition of 'space-time compression' (Harvey, 1989) would annihilate space. Yet, space has not disappeared, but has re-established itself in new spheres, created of ever larger data, and increasingly mediated, and must then be understood through the use of semiotic and communication theories, such as the Marxist spatial frameworks of Castells and Lefebvre, or the *Ideologiekritik* of the Frankfurt School (Lagopoulos, 1993). The postmodern creates tensions between all theories in an attempt to best understand the conditions of existence, at its core, perhaps, lies the dialectic between space and society; a *geographical puzzle* in which structures, institutions and human agents operate on different scales to define spatial patterns in any given locale (Dear, 1988). The individual does not disappear in the midst of the social effects caused by the pressures of the masses, but is instead affirmed (Lefebvre, 1991). It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it, as Fuchs (2018) states: 'means of communication are (just like social space) means of production through which humans produce social relations and therefore also social space' (p. 19). The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight (Berger, 1972/2008). While human geography has always been a maze of diverse interests (Dear, 1988), the use of Geographic Information has changed dramatically in the past decade, and continues to do so; increasingly it is used in mediated practices, to shape stories, to transcend boundaries, to develop new ethereal networks, as well as to produce maps. But even in those maps, users themselves are being encouraged to crowdsource data, be that to add to the 'usefulness of the map' or to create counter maps. Data has become the standard way in which the world is ordered (Thatcher and Dalton, 2017), with those that link location and temporal information being seen as *fixes* for capitalism's tendencies towards over-accumulation (Greene and Joseph, 2015). As the scholars in this issue demonstrate, there is much to be gained from the combining of communications theories and those from the geographic disciplines. Bringing the two together allows for an alternate, nuanced, and a spatially grounded approach to envisioning the myriad ways in which the digital age mediates social, economic and political experiences and, in particular, in the increasingly technologically informed media and communications sector.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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