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Media Geographies: Always Part of the Game

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TELEVISION, CINEMA, BOOKS, NEWSPAPERS and the Internet mediate our experiences of place and geography. Geography is a visual discipline that is an embedded means of documentation, orientation and representation in appearance of maps, globes, travel descriptions, landscape sketches and paintings, photographs, and films. Mass media pose an interesting spatial problem to geographers and related fields, not only because media representations are part of individual and societal conceptions of the world but also because of media's power to conceptualize and spread political ideas and reinforce hegemonic orders. Before geography was established as a university subject and a science it was a popular and entertaining part of the everyday life and an amusement for the well educated and rich: a thrill of the unknown and the exotic provided intrigue and promoted interest in foreign countries and far away places.

Burgess and Gold (1985: 1), stated same twenty odd years ago that "the media have been on the periphery of geographical inquiry for too long." Although media geography is often considered a new trend, it has a long and vivid tradition in scientific and everyday geography. Geography's relationship to mass media and media representations has a long history, especially with regards to journalism, which requires geographical knowledge to situate and inform readers about stories from around the world. Rogoff (2000) argues that the visual media are primary ways individuals obtain geographic knowledge about the world. Visual mass media are today's social and cultural cartography of meaning creation and identity formation at multiple scales and because of this we have to find suitable ways of analyzing their impact and begin educating students about visual media literacy (cf. Bruno 1997; Lukinbeal et al. 2007).

In Germany media geography can be traced to the highly influential geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, who worked as a journalist before turning to the teaching of geography as a vocation. As a journalist Ratzel developed keen observational skills that heavily

influenced his geographic research and teaching. While Ratzel did not pursue the linkages between journalism and geography in a formal manner, Ewald Banse saw literature's potential to communicate geographic knowledge. In 1932 Banse argued that popular media, in form of adventure and travel literature, might be more influential than scientific geography in informing and spreading geographic knowledge. Travel and adventure writers use geography to transport ideas, ideologies and foster the belief of shrinking global boundaries and possibilities. Authors of adventure novels like the French writer Jules Verne and the German Karl May used geographical writings to substantiate their own work. The Belgian comic artist Hergé, who used a quasi photo-realistic drawing style in his legendary Tintin comic series, provided many European children their first encounter with distant places and exotic cultures. Based on these examples one can see how media can create, reinforce and promote specific ways of seeing for particular cultures.

VISUAL MEDIA

According to Jameson (1987, 199) literature no longer is the exemplar of culture; rather "culture is a matter of media." The availability of feature films in the last two generations allows us to scan the world, to catch glimpses of other places and cultures, to note processes of movement, identity, capital and change. More than television, which is usually national in its institutional structure and socio-cultural concerns, cinema actively contributes to the renewed awareness of global geographical issues. Film and television emotionalize space, place, movement, and identity thereby affecting the viewer's perception. Visual media have also become active agents in globalization in that they spread Western cultural beliefs and attitudes.

Visual media re-present and re-construct specific ways of seeing which carry with them historic baggage. By doing so, sense of place is continually re-constructed from specific vantage points. I therefore see *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography* as a much-needed forum through which to critically analyze visual media's affect on lived world experience. A crude example of film's affect on tourism can be seen in *Casablanca* and especially Rick's Café. In the film Rick's Café is a metaphor for the reorganizing world during WWII (cf. Zimmermann 2007). However, it never existed in the 'real' city of Casablanca until a former American diplomat built it in 2005. It now serves as one of the most visited tourist locations in Casablanca. Is Rick's Café real or virtual, authentic or inauthentic? And, are such distinctions even useful any in a media saturated world? By conferring media to the category of non-material cultural artefacts we bound media as representational discourse that limits geographic inquiry.

The cognitive process of understanding mediated content and the acquisition of geographical information offers a very intriguing and important arena of future geographical research, an arena that *Aether* will surely fill. Researchers should use the term cognitive mapping not in the catholic manner of cognitive psychology but rather

as applied by Jameson (1988, 1992). However, there is the flexibility to incorporate methods deriving from cognitive psychology, media and film studies plus techniques from journalism and visual design.

PERSPECTIVES

Media geographies seem to be based on the principles of core and periphery dialectics. Not only in the sense that specific regions, places and spaces are more often highlighted in global mass media, but huge parts of the world do not have access to free media and thus are cut off from the media of the developed world. Mass media's geography was traditionally characterized by its universal regionalism (cf. Schulz 1983: 283); in more recent times new technology and forms of media implicate new modes of recipient behavior and recipients' expectancy. Accessibility of independent media institutions due to politics and economics has to be investigated from a geographic perspective (cf. Zimmermann 2002). Visualized news and information follows specific and structured patterns that reinforce patterns of cognitive information processing (Schulz 1983). Schulz (1983, 285) argues that we need to take a closer look at this cognitive information processing and how mediated information is disseminated and consumed: "...one should be aware of the fact that international news coverage is usually not determined by political and media policy relating factors, studies have shown that international news coverage is established through media specific offers and editorial conceptions," (Schulz 1983, 285). Physical places have lost the function of hosting all social activities; mass media accommodates a significant quantity of social actions in today's world. Therefore geography has to take a closer look at how these interactions are presented and assembled. One aim could be the development of a visual geography, a subfield that generates knowledge by analyzing popular media's visuality and imagery. Therefore visual media appear to be the central object of future investigation, for images, pictures, and other sorts of visual media have huge influence on contemporary culture.

Future goals of media geography should include the development of theoretical approaches on how geographies are communicated through visual media; how this communicated knowledge affects audiences' life-worlds; and, the awareness of the close connection between geographers and journalists who share an interest in important societal questions, whilst using altered approaches. In doing so we as scientists should by no means ignore that our research is an academic tool that spreads knowledge. No matter what the form our research takes (books, a research paper, a poster, a film, a sound file or any other suitable form of publication) media geography should be sensitive to individuals' selective spatial understanding and societal visions of a just world.

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