Susan P. Mains · Julie Cupples
Chris Lukinbeal *Editors*

Mediated Geographies and Geographies of Media

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Dedicated to Fredy Humberto Patiño Durango

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Introducing Mediated Geographies and Geographies of Media

Introducing Mediated Geographies and Geographies of Media

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Julie Cupples, Chris Lukinbeal, and Susan P. Mains

While "media geography" has coalesced in recent years as an identifiable subdiscipline of human geography, media geography did not emerge from a linear history, nor does it have a clearly defined or singular focus. Compiling this edition, participating in media geography networks at conferences and elsewhere, and teaching media at our respective institutions have all abundantly revealed that media geography is a subdiscipline with many different routes and trajectories. People come to identify as media geographers as a result of an interest in a particular medium such as film, television or radio, through the literature on the Internet and geographies of cyberspace, through critical and popular geopolitics, through questions of development and the digital divide, through media and cultural studies, through communication studies, through scholarship on the city and urban studies, and through GIS, the geoweb and geospatial technologies. Media geography intersects with social and cultural geography, development geography, political geography, feminist geography, economic geography and GIS. One of the major contributions of media productions, spaces and analyses are the opportunities they offer for providing an entryway into understanding places and communities that we may otherwise rarely, if ever encounter—but this can be problematic when the identity and places that are being marked as yours, no longer appear recognisable,

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representative and/or desirable. The contributions in this collection pay close attention to such opportunities and challenges posed by a range of media formats, contexts and methods. These diverse entry points make for a rich emerging field in which a number of voices and perspectives are present. The field is further complicated and enriched by scholars in media studies who have turned to human geography and human geographic concepts, in order to take space, place and scale seriously in their analyses of media texts, industries and audiences. Given the diversity of the field, we thought it valuable as editors to write three position pieces that situate our work, and us personally, within the broader project represented by the scholars in this volume.

Susan P. Mains, University of Dundee

Although media permeates our lives, the ways in which mediated spaces become embedded in our personal narratives are not always apparent until much later or when a specific place, conversation or television programme acts as a prompt, reminding us of something that reappears and coalesces with other times and places. When I was a child, one of my favourite activities involved spending an evening watching a collection of homemade Super 8 mm cine films—an emotive occasion that brought our immediate family together and various friends who popped by. These film shows transported us to summer holidays in blustery wind-breaker-dotted North Yorkshire beaches, silly walks on our driveway (including those performed by younger versions of my parents when they had first moved into their house—and before the distraction of me and my sister!), and our annual living room birthday party balloon fights. Prior to each "screening," living room chairs would be rearranged, then snacks and drinks dispensed. We all waited with anticipation as my Dad set up the projector on the dining table and hoped that the bulb wouldn't blow or that the film didn't jam and turn into a molten monster projected onto the wall in front of us. There was usually a quick call of "OK, here goes . . . !" and one of us would run to turn off the lights and jostle back into a prime viewing location. The films that unfurled made us giggle: speeding up our movements ever so slightly, while also mercifully editing out the never-ending car journey and Christmas dinner meltdowns, and highlighting instead a series of funny faces, parents in deckchairs pretending to relax while their children fought over buckets, and slightly blurry close-ups of hands waving maniacally in front of the camera.

Our childhood birthday parties provide the most vivid memories of watching these home movies. Screenings became an annual ritual when my sister and I, along with our school friends, would all find a spot on the living room carpet and my parents would show the film from the previous year's party. We couldn't believe how silly our younger selves were—a whole year ago!—and after watching the film through once, we would then watch it in reverse to even greater hilarity (which was also a great opportunity to enjoy gravity defying balloons, backwards dance moves and undone food spillages). As we sat shouting out comments, we would point out each other's outfits, spot people trying to hide in the corner while smuggling extra

sausages (or cocktail sticks for puncturing balloons), and make every effort to plan something even more dramatic for the current year's film. My Dad would then be required to show the film several more times, until, in the face of much boisterous resistance, he would have to turn off the projector before it really did combust.

Although it seems obvious now, it was only years later that I realised these humorous gatherings acted as a key catalyst for my curiosity with the creation, viewing and retelling of media geographies (also demonstrated recently through a highly popular screening series of Scottish-based cine film and edited archival footage (Aitken 2014)). These moving image stories produced socio-spatial cartographies that are interwoven through memories and material landscapes, and have become part of a collective experience of wonder, a sense of occasion, and, at times, even frustration. While the films themselves were quirky and fleetingly short—and probably not very exciting unless you were actually in them—it was the shared and heightened sense of expectation, fun and camaraderie of a public viewing that propelled them into the stuff of legend. I relished my friends' enjoyment and the chance to relive past festivities, and was secretly proud of my parents for being savvy enough to capture a nugget of our smaller selves and magically bring it back to life before our very eyes.

As I grew older, I paid more attention to how the places and people with whom I felt most familiar were depicted through a range of media formats and became increasingly aware of media representations with which I felt a connection. I also found myself pondering the many media portrayals that overgeneralised or undermined popular stereotypes (for example, in the Scottish context: the "idyllic" Highland retreat, the "violent" and reactionary Glasgwegian, the "chatty" female tenement resident who lived in a poor, but warm community), and became more interested in how different media forms used their own kind of place shorthand (for example, through dialogue, scenery, clothing, framing, colour, etc). This interest became more formalised through further exploration: as an undergraduate student at the University of Glasgow, I studied Geography and Theatre Studies, and although not initially realising the connections between the two, their affinities soon became apparent, as well as the opportunities they offered for examining identity and place.

As a first year student I had the unusual opportunity to work as a research assistant in the Glasgow University Media Unit (GUMU (now also known as Glasgow Media Group)), headed by Greg Philo in Sociology. This innovative research centre had been investigating a range of controversial issues: mainstream television news coverage of the 1984–1985 miners' strike, the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, and more widespread bias in television and print media. Although only working for a few hours each month, as a new student I had a fascinating introduction to the possibilities, questions and (pain-staking) methods that could be utilised to interrogate our assumptions about the reliability and neutrality of news media in particular. The GUMU's work also illustrated the political context in which academic research functions and its subversive possibilities: for example, ongoing discussions between the unit's researchers and national media organisations in relation to state intervention and control of mainstream media were highlighted

through the BBC's censorship of a broadcast addressing the GUMU's publication, *War and Peace News* (1985) investigating the Falklands conflict (Quinn 2014).

While studying at Glasgow, the work of urban and feminist geographers inspired an interest in the ways in which power, representation, gender and space are interrelated (Women and Geography Study Group 1984). The city was going through a process of "re-imagineering:" hosting the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival and being promoted as the 1990 European City of Culture. Our discussions (including within the student run Geography journal, *Drumlin* (Philo 1998)), interrogated what such civic boosterism meant in the face of high unemployment, displaced tenement residents, and the highly contentious Poll Tax being introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (Paddison 1989, 1993). How did advertisements promoting a beautified urban space intersect with concepts of regeneration, inequality and problematic social relations? These questions also informed my Theatre Studies classes where I was investigating the role of community theatre groups as a form of grassroots agency at a city level, as well as the role of drama in challenging exclusionary concepts of identity and nationhood, for example, through the work of the 7:84 theatre group in Scotland, Ntozake Shange's poetic monologues, playwriting and site-specific performances (see, for example, McGrath 1974 (in Davidson 2014), Shange 1980; Bryden and Bailey 1990). My geographic horizons were simultaneously brought into focus and broadened by the poetic writings of playwrights from the US and South Africa, combined with geographic studies challenging neo-colonial development strategies in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. This led to my dissertation examining the work of South African writer, Athol Fugard, whose play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (Fugard et al. 1976)—written and produced in collaboration with John Kani and Winston Ntshona—strikingly illustrates the urgency to understand the ways in which identities and spaces are policed and resisted within racist systems of governance. The central characters in *Sizwe* negotiate the nefarious pitfalls of the pass laws circumscribing the mobility of residents, enacted through an amalgam of insidious racial criteria. This depiction of mapping and placing as being bound up in stories of terror, violence and courage, and the broader implications of international political activities, including those of the UK government and NGO protest movements, led me to an ongoing concern that continues to run through my research: borders, and how they are lived, enforced, mobilised and contested.

While my academic interests emerged from a range of theatre, cultural studies and feminist literature, it was during my postgraduate studies that I attempted to make more explicit connections between these bodies of work with that of geographers. Geography had encouraged me to think critically about urban spaces, economies and political participation (Rogerson et al. 1989). Theatre and cultural studies had provided me with an insight into theoretical concepts about language, movement and identity, specifically the ways in which deixis, semiotics and the implied relationships and hierarchies with which they are associated order, reflect and frame spatial and temporal relationships (Elam 1980). It was while studying for a master's degree in Geography at San Diego State University and then a PhD at the University of Kentucky that a growing discussion about media geographies peaked