

JOURNALISM STUDIES: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The Places and Spaces of News Audiences

Edited by
Chris Peters



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The Places and Spaces of News Audiences

Historically, or so we would like to believe, the story of everyday life for many people included regular, definitive moments of news consumption. Journalism, in fact, was distributed around these routines: papers were delivered before breakfast, the evening news on TV buttressed the transition from dinner to prime time programming, and radio updates were centred around commuting patterns. These habits were organized not just around specific times but occurred in specific places, following a predictable pattern.

However, the past few decades have witnessed tremendous changes in the ways we can consume journalism and engage with information – from tablets, to smartphones, online, and so forth – and the different places and moments of news consumption have multiplied as a result, to the point where news is increasingly mobile and instantaneous. It is personalized, localized, and available on-demand. Day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year, technology moves forward, impacting more than just the ways in which we get news. These fundamental shifts change what news 'is'. This book expands our understanding of contemporary news audiences and explores how the different places and spaces of news consumption change both our experiences of journalism and the roles it plays in our everyday lives. This book was originally published as a special issue of *Journalism Studies*.

Chris Peters is Associate Professor of Media and Communication at Aalborg University's Copenhagen campus, Denmark. His research explores the ways people get and experience information in everyday life and the sociocultural impact of transformations in the digital era. His publications include *Rethinking Journalism*, *Rethinking Journalism Again*, and *Retelling Journalism*.

Journalism Studies: Theory and Practice

Edited by
Bob Franklin

Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University, UK

The journal *Journalism Studies* was established at the turn of the new millennium by Bob Franklin. It was launched in the context of a burgeoning interest in the scholarly study of journalism and an expansive global community of journalism scholars and researchers. The ambition was to provide a forum for the critical discussion and study of journalism as a subject of intellectual inquiry but also an arena of professional practice. Previously, the study of journalism in the United Kingdom and much of Europe was a fairly marginal branch of the larger disciplines of media, communication, and cultural studies; only a handful of Universities offered degree programmes in the subject. *Journalism Studies* has flourished and succeeded in providing the intended public space for discussion of research on key issues within the field, to the point where in 2007 a sister journal, *Journalism Practice*, was launched to enable an enhanced focus on practice-based issues, as well as foregrounding studies of journalism education, training, and professional concerns. Both journals are among the leading ranked journals within the field and publish six issues annually, in electronic and print formats. More recently, 2013 witnessed the launch of a further companion journal, *Digital Journalism*, to provide a site for scholarly discussion, analysis, and responses to the wide ranging implications of digital technologies for the practice and study of journalism. From the outset, the publication of themed issues has been a commitment for all journals. Their purpose is first, to focus on highly significant or neglected areas of the field; second, to facilitate discussion and analysis of important and topical policy issues; and third, to offer readers an especially high quality and closely focused set of essays, analyses and discussions.

The *Journalism Studies: Theory and Practice* book series draws on a wide range of these themed issues from all journals and thereby extends the critical and public forum provided by them. The Editor of the journals works closely with guest editors to ensure that the books achieve relevance for readers and the highest standards of research rigour and academic excellence. The series makes a significant contribution to the field of journalism studies by inviting distinguished scholars, academics, and journalism practitioners to discuss and debate the central concerns within the field. It also reaches a wider readership of scholars, students and practitioners across the social sciences, humanities and communication arts, encouraging them to engage critically with, but also to interrogate, the specialist scholarly studies of journalism which this series provides.

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Chapter 3

Locative News: Mobile media, place informatics, and digital news

Gerard Goggin, Fiona Martin, and Tim Dwyer

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Chapter 4

News Media Old and New: Fluctuating audiences, news repertoires and locations of consumption

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News Media Consumption in the Transmedia Age: Amalgamations, orientations and geo-social structuration

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News in the Community? Investigating emerging inter-local spaces of news production/ consumption

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Citizens of Nowhere Land: Youth and news consumption in Europe

Shakuntala Banaji and Bart Cammaerts

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Notes on Contributors

Shakuntala Banaji is Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Communication and Director of the Master's Programme in Media, Communication, and Development at the London School of Economics, UK. Her research focuses on the lives of children and young people in different geographical and class contexts, with a critical take on the ways in which rhetorical conceptions of citizenship, development, engagement, and digital media construct and position child and youth subjectivities. She is the editor of the *Global Media and Communication* book series.

Bart Cammaerts is Associate Professor and Director of the PhD programme in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics, UK. His current research looks at activist cultures and how a media and communication saturated environment impacts on activist identities; the nature of protest; community radio regulation; and the consequences of different patterns of consumption of, and value attributed to, music for alternative labels and artists.

Nick Couldry is Professor of Media, Communications and Social Theory at the London School of Economics, UK. He approaches media and communications from the perspective of the symbolic power that has been historically concentrated in media institutions, and how these institutions contribute to various types of order. He is the editor of *Ethics of Media* (with Madianou and Pinchevski, 2013), as well as the author of *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (2012) and *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism* (2010).

Luke Dickens is Departmental Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Oxford, UK. His research interests include the politics of urban experience and spatial practice. In particular, his research seeks to develop critical understandings of the relationships between the performance of difference and identity, and the material conditions and contingencies driving unequal processes of urban change.

Tim Dwyer is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Sydney, Australia. His research focuses on the critical evaluation of media and communications industries, regulation, media ethics, and law and policy in an era of convergent media. His most recent books are *Convergent Media and Privacy* (2016) and *Legal and Ethical Issues in the Media* (2012).

Aristea Fotopoulou is Research Fellow in the Department of Media and Film at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK. She works at the intersections of media and cultural studies with science and technology. She has written about information politics, knowledge production, digital engagement, digital networks, and feminism.

Gerard Goggin is Professor of Media and Communications and ARC Future Fellow at the University of Sydney, Australia. He is the author of *Disability and the Media* (with K. Ellis, 2015) and the editor of *Mobile Technologies* (with R. Ling and L. Hjorth, 2016). His research focuses on social, cultural, and political aspects of digital technologies, especially with regard to the Internet, mobile phones, and the media.

André Jansson is Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden, where he also directs the PhD programme. His research is oriented towards questions of media use, identity, and power from an interdisciplinary perspective. His work links various theoretical strands including social phenomenology, human geography, and the sociology of culture.

Johan Lindell is a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Geography, Media and Communication at Karlstad University, Sweden, where he recently completed his PhD on *Cosmopolitanism in a Mediatized World*. His research is driven by a media sociological vision that insists on understanding media and communication in social contexts, and the power dynamics at work in those contexts.

Fiona Martin is Senior Lecturer in Convergent and Online Media in the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Sydney, Australia. She is the editor of *The Value of Public Service Media: RIPE@2013 Reader* (with G. Lowe, 2014). She researches the uses, politics, and regulation of online media, and the implications of these technologies for change in the media industry.

Zizi Papacharissi is Professor and Head of the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago, USA. Her book, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (2010), discusses how we practice politics in a digital age. Her latest book, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology and Politics* (2014), won the Best Book award for the Human Communication and Technology Division of the National Communication Association in 2015.

Chris Peters is Associate Professor of Media and Communication at Aalborg University's Copenhagen campus, Denmark. His research explores the ways people get and experience information in everyday life and the sociocultural impact of transformations in the digital era. His publications include *Rethinking Journalism* (with Marcel Broersma, 2013), *Rethinking Journalism Again* (with Marcel Broersma, 2016), and *Retelling Journalism* (with Marcel Broersma, 2014).

Kim Christian Schrøder is Professor in the Department of Communication, Business and Information at Roskilde University, Denmark. His most recent books are *Transformations: Late Modernity's Shifting Audience Positions* (with Nico Carpentier and Lawrie Hallett, 2014), and *Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum* (with Kirsten Drotner, 2013).

Mimi Sheller is Professor of Sociology and the Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy, at Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA. She is a co-founder of the journal *Mobilities*, the author of *Citizenship from Below* (2012) and *Aluminium Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity* (2014), and the editor of *Mobile Technologies of the City* (2006) and *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (2013).

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INTRODUCTION

The places and spaces of news audiences

Chris Peters

Having the means to access “news” at any moment without much hassle likely changes the experience of journalism for many people. Beyond this, one might even say that the way we interact with information on a daily basis transforms through this phenomenon. Considering such changes in what is often referred to as “everyday life” provides a useful starting point for research into media use. It guides us towards a number of considerations, from how we structure our day through certain habits and patterns of media consumption; to the development of technology and the formation of new rituals; to shifting dynamics of communicative flows across societies and their impact; and to the processes whereby the emergent becomes the familiar. Obviously such analyses are not bound to the disciplinary confines of media studies and the term “everyday life” enjoys a rich, if vague and complicated, twentieth-century history.¹ Indeed, a quick Google Scholar search of “everyday life” takes us on a whirlwind interdisciplinary tour of academia, from sociology to cultural studies, psychology to political science, anthropology to economics. There is good reason for this, in that thinking through consistency and change—patterns and disruptions—across the passage of time forms the analytic foundation for much scientific research. But while “everyday life” adorns the cover of many a noted book (e.g. Goffman 1959; de Certeau 1984), a comparable term is almost nowhere to be found. “*Everywhere* life” not only draws the Google equivalent of a blank stare, even writing it down or saying it aloud feels a little awkward. This is almost certainly no discursive anomaly but is rather indicative of the subjugation of spatial thinking to temporal analysis within academia (Soja 1989). While space has been “treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical. Time, on the other hand, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Foucault 1980, 70). Journalism studies is not immune from this tendency. Yet if we want to understand much of what *makes media use meaningful for people*, it is important to *accentuate not only its everydayness, but its everywhere-ness as well*.

This special issue on the places and spaces of news audiences presents an initial attempt to do this; to see how the everyday digital geographies of contemporary media, communication, and information flows intersect with the everywhere “lived” geographies of individuals, and how this impacts audience perceptions of news, of storytelling, of journalism. The past few decades have seen a tremendous increase in the number of different devices and platforms through which we can get journalism—from tablets to smartphones, Twitter, online news, and so forth—and the different possible places and moments of news consumption have multiplied in concert. Although it is not certain just how robust traditional practices such as reading newspapers or watching the evening news will be in the future, to whatever extent they may have been stable in the past, what does seem clear is that old audience habits are certainly becoming de-ritualized and it is unclear what will replace them (Broersma and Peters 2012). As consumptive possibilities gradually spread to any conceivable instant and every potential location we desire, it

seems fairly self-evident that conceptualizing the news media diet of audiences as something clearly distinguishable from other mediated forms of communication is problematic. Similarly, as the temporal and spatial architectures of media use are increasingly unshackled from the distributional constraints of unidirectional, programmatic mass media, audiences are slowly catching up to the possibilities. This changing ecology of digital media may appear quite disruptive, its scale and impact being perceived most strongly early on in its introduction (until such emerging practices and ways of living with media become habitual and taken-for-granted). Coming to grips with the impact this has on journalism requires a scholarship attuned to these different spatio-temporal affordances.

This is not to say that efforts to theorize the dynamics of place and space have been entirely absent from the study of journalism, of course. Many of the classic ethnographies which helped establish the field were attuned to how the newsroom functioned as a place that captured and combined information from a variety of geographic locales before redistributing these back out (e.g. Tuchman 1978). Research into the content of news has also looked more closely into how the world is portrayed on the pages of newspapers and what this signals in terms of how different regions and places are represented and understood (e.g. Wanta, Golan, and Lee 2004). And much current research into news and journalism which centres on the breakdown of distance seems to implicitly recognize the importance of “where” when it comes to content, production, distribution, and reception in an increasingly networked, connected, and participatory digital age.

Yet for all the talk of the emerging and dynamic spaces of news, many of the examples that seem to investigate its significance for journalism employ conceptions that are quite two-dimensional, ignoring established theories of space or imbuing the concepts with dictionary-like meaning. A closer look reveals that the way space and place are treated in many analyses that brand themselves around their consideration is often based upon a Euclidian approach that makes these ideas synonymous with a “plottable” location, albeit one increasingly marked out by virtual coordinates (i.e. “going on to Facebook”). This sort of “GPS” perspective of space can easily miss the inherent sociality that produces it (cf. Lefebvre 1991) and often treats spatiality, sociality, and temporality as separate factors for analytic purposes. This risks mistakenly conceptualizing space as something that “pre-exists” human interaction—as a steady location in which “action” occurs or passes through.

This approach becomes especially problematic when it comes to figuring out what the foundational stakeholder of journalism, namely the audience, “does” with its media use, as new technologies allow users to blur familiar boundaries and co-create new communicative spaces. While media has always possessed this affordance to some degree, in the current changing media landscape even those especially sensitive to accusations of technological determinism must certainly acknowledge that something fairly fundamental has changed, and that former habits will have a tendency to transform. The ubiquity and personal proximity of recent digitalization increasingly means experiencing multiple places simultaneously and continuously and it is unclear how this impacts our perception and experience of information and the world in general. Here challenging questions arise, such as: How do familiar places like work and the home change from the lived materiality of new technologies? What about more abstract but supposedly social aggregates like communities or neighbourhoods? Do these change alongside non-relational, “non-places” like airports, commuter transport, motorways, supermarkets, and shopping centres

(Augé 1995)? If we think of places as layered, textured environments created by social interaction, human intervention, and technological extension in the broadest sense, how does news use fit into this broader equation? Do different potential places of consumption and habits within them change what news is and can news use change our meaning of different spaces? As social scientists and humanities scholars, the intriguing questions likely are not really about the absolute spaces and coordinates where such practices occur, but rather about *the integration of media use within everywhere life*.

Terms and concepts familiar to journalism studies scholars, like “public sphere” or “network society”, initially sound like they are closely attuned to such complexities of space and certainly have the possibility to offer such insights. But oftentimes scholarship which relies on these notions de-emphasizes such spatial aspects for other considerations. To briefly elaborate, public sphere is a potentially useful abstraction to shape understanding of how people learn about things and form opinions, which is without doubt of great relevance to journalism scholarship. But when we apply it to news consumption, the spatial significance is often lost or relegated, the focus is placed on the substance of content and orientation to discussion within it, and this becomes detached—or conflated—with experience. In a digital age, increasingly we look to participation via online or social media attached to journalism, say in comment fields, live blogs, and via Twitter, and deem this a virtual public sphere; but surely where, when, and why people are participating is as foundational to their experience and proclivity for engagement as the content they read or produce. The idea of network seems more sensitive to these issues, and is also a potentially useful metaphor to explain the flow of information and the shifting forms and infrastructures of communication. However, the predominance of trying to map how the network operates and discern its structure tends to drown out any useful consideration of the lived materiality of news use, and how this is spatially situated.

In scholarship, it is a necessary evil that we ignore some factors to stabilize our object of study and this selectivity is unavoidable rather than an intellectual shortcoming. The previous observations should accordingly be viewed not as polemic or admonishment but rather as invitation. Just as we in journalism studies frequently pause and take stock of key developments in terms of production, content, values, economics, and technology, we should devote comparable attention to taking a nuanced, processual approach to the spatialized aspects of news and experiment with different ways to operationalize them methodologically. The lack of attention employed to tease these out, when considered in conjunction with a general acknowledgement that an “audience” or “user” turn is necessary in journalism studies (see Madianou 2009; Bird 2011; Costera Meijer 2013), means that we are in danger of ignoring much of what grounds the financial viability and democratic remit of journalism.

The argument put forth in constituting this special issue of *Journalism Studies* is that a concomitant emphasis on both is an analytic necessary if we aim to understand the broader context of news and journalism within society. All economic, social, and cultural phenomena are the result of highly complex spatio-temporal articulations and interrelations. Journalism—not only in terms of its production and content but its often overlooked consumption—is no different. This point is at the heart of the seven contributions which form this special issue of *Journalism Studies*, and in this respect the common claim they make may seem quite uncontroversial on the surface: if we want to appreciate the changing ways audiences are engaging with news and information, (social) space is inseparable from the equation. Nevertheless, for all the apparent obviousness of this claim,

what the contributions in this issue demonstrate is just how complex a task embracing this idea can be; concomitantly, they illustrate the added richness of analysis which occurs when such “spatial thinking” is incorporated.

News Use in *Everywhere Life*

The so-called “spatial turn” in scholarship, which has had an increasing interdisciplinary influence over the past couple of decades (Warf and Arias 2008), incorporates a greater effort to approach analysis by treating space and time as equally crucial analytic considerations. Embracing such thinking means discarding the dominant understanding of space as something simply locational, and instead demands thinking of the sociality of space and meanings of place. This sort of “human geography” is an established but not hegemonic paradigm, indeed, even within geography—a discipline in which it seems reasonable to expect that space would be approached in a fairly nuanced and complex manner—the social aspect is still often overlooked for a more “absolute” mathematical conception of space which views phenomena as existing “pre-place” (Hubbard and Kitchin 2011). This seems a case of substituting positivistic simplicity for the “messiness” that shapes different places. As Urry (2004, 13) notes,

[P]lace can be viewed as the particular nexus between, on the one hand, propinquity characterized by intensely thick co-present interaction, and on the other hand, fast flowing webs and networks stretched corporeally, virtually and imaginatively across distances.

Applying this thinking to contemporary news consumption means not only thinking about the different ways that far-off places have become closer, but the materiality, meaning, and practices of situated moments of “news” use. Cresswell’s (2009, 1) helpful description of the tripartite components of “place” is useful in this regard:

- Place is a meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place. Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to the “where” of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations—the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes.

If we think about the significance and meaningfulness of media consumption for most people, not only in the current digitalized, online era but historically, much of this derives not only from its “time-shifting” qualities but from its parallel “emplaced” nature (Peters 2012). Mediated communication can be conceptualized in terms of its fit within the continuous and sensorial experience of moving through life (Pink and Hjorth 2012), and this awareness alerts us to the dynamics behind the personal integration of established and emerging platforms for news and changes which may occur. Old distinctions, such as personal versus mass communication, are being reconfigured in the digital age as the form and function of new technologies change the (a)symmetry of communication practices, interactional structures, and the lived materiality of their use (Lüders 2008). By considering the everywhere alongside the everyday, we place ourselves in a much better position to understand the purpose and meanings people actually make from their interactions with news and information.

Historically, or so we would like to believe, the story of everyday life for many people included definitive moments of news consumption, in regular, set places. The industrial practices of journalism, in fact, were (and sometimes still are) distributed around these spatio-temporal routines: newspapers were delivered to the home before breakfast or to embarkation points for public transit before the morning and evening commutes. Television news buttressed the transitions from work to home (early evening news) and home to bed (nightly news) and the set was frequently the radial point in the central “living room” in most houses. Radio news updates, in terms of both duration and frequency, centred around commuting patterns and the automobile. To understand these habits and the sociology of news media distribution/consumption demands seeing the synergy between these patterns and their enactment. What stands out about the “Golden Age” of mass communication is that there was a certain stability and predictability to media consumption, and the notion of ritual—habitual, formalized actions which reinforce the “symbolic power” of media institutions—provided a good fit⁵ to explain the significance of these practices.

Today, these scenarios seem increasingly anachronistic, at least with Western societies. The places, spaces, times, and further social aspects of news consumption are all changing, but we know very little about the impact this has on journalism’s various audiences/consumers/users/citizens or on how people process, access, and discuss information. This shortcoming is quite troublesome in an age when, according to many authors, the spaces of everyday life are all becoming mediated (Livingstone 2009; Couldry 2012). News is increasingly mobile, instantaneous, and available “on demand”. It is participatory and personalized; locational and localized. Accordingly, this special issue aims to provoke discussion on these themes through a series of theoretically-engaged contributions that are all grounded in empirical research projects. Mimi Sheller employs insights on the materiality, mobility, and infrastructure of digital social media to show how the mobile production, dissemination, and consumption of news produces new spatio-temporalities. Zizi Papacharissi looks at how the hybrid forms of news co-production produce affective news streams which function as social spaces that support marginalized and liminal viewpoints, what she calls “electronic elsewheres”. Gerard Goggin, Fiona Martin, and Tim Dwyer highlight how the locational capabilities of mobile media devices to determine, sense, incorporate, and conjure with the relative locations of reporting and audiences have emerged as key to news-gathering and dissemination ventures. Kim Christian Schrøder provides insights into the cross-media challenges facing news audiences, as they seek access to, navigate in, and make sense of the multitude of news sources across print, broadcasting, online, and mobile media platforms. André Jansson and Johan Lindell look at how individuals navigate and orient themselves through representational spaces and flows, and how their media practices amalgamate with other activities in everyday life. Luke Dickens, Nick Couldry, and Aristeia Fotopoulou demonstrate how community reporting practices lead to the emergence of new, inter-local spaces of news production and consumption and discuss how such practices, while emerging from the place of local community, also extend across wider communities of interest. Shakuntala Banaji and Bart Cammaerts look at the experiences of news by a diverse group of young European citizens, decentering the technologies of watching or reading news to reposition the relationships between political news-seeking, trust in journalism, meaning-making, and socio-economic status within a framework of local experiences of politics and civic life.