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Aether—a substance formerly thought to permeate all space

Oxford English Dictionary

Media, the organized means of disseminating information, permeates space and power/knowledge. Media intervenes and arbitrates the semiological chain of signifieds and signifiers, infusing signs with meaning, ideology and hegemony. It is simultaneously naturalized as it intervenes, producing simulacra that allow ideology to appear as fact and myth to appear as truth. One can, of course, view media as a text, and the use of the textual metaphor runs deep in geographical theory. Johnston et al. (2000) and Smith (1999) discuss the concerns of qualitative methodology as to how the world is viewed, experienced and constructed by social actors while also stressing the importance of systems of meanings to any qualitative textual analysis. This methodology provides the access to the motives, aspirations and power relationships that account for how places, people and events are made and represented. The interpretation of texts that can include landscapes, archival materials, maps, literature, or visual images—all forms of media—is one of many qualitative methods. Said (1993) points out the importance of ‘fictional’ texts to the production of geographical knowledge, particularly how the interpretation of texts can provide insight into the ordering of society and space. Texts are culturally coded through the use of signifiers and contain clues to the political, social and economic circumstances of the society that produces them. This in turn results in what Harris and Harrower (2006) see as a larger and a more critical engagement
between cartography and social theory that can only bring about a better understanding of how media can be best utilized within the discipline of geography.

However, media is not a mirror of absolute signifieds; it does not re-present some ontologically stable reality. While often positioned as a representational praxis, it cannot wholly be constituted as a text. Rather it exceeds textuality and communication permeating identity formation, cultural (re)production, economics, and geopolitical practice. Media and space are dialectical and mutually constituted so much so that it is often impossible to separate them. Binaries like real-representation, primary and second experiences, present and re-present, bind the ontology and epistemology of media geography to outmoded discursive vessels. These vessels rely on an imaging of space as an abstract Cartesian plane waiting to be filled. In contrast, it is now widely accepted that space is a social construction, a mediated interaction between individuals and their environment. Therefore, in order to critically engage media landscapes it is important to understand that their places and spaces are not neutral. Massey (1992, 81) states that because “space is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations.” Just how spatial social power structures are involved in the transformation of these geographies reflects the response to a contested space.

*Aether* fills a much-needed void by offering a refereed scholarly journal focusing on the spatialities of media. The goal is to position geography and media as mutually constituted; they are representational and non-representational, lived and virtual, practiced and performed, real and imagined. To do so requires an international and interdisciplinary critical dialogue about all aspects of the media. Clarity about what media is requires an acknowledgement of the affective and the kinetic aspects of media—by ‘placing’ the cultural context of mediaspace within the domain of geography we get some specificity of time and space and this clarity furthers our understanding of the nature of media and protects insights from simple generalization. *Aether* argues for a critical analysis of how media productions are often presented as universal and use critical analysis to make visible alternative narratives that allow us to see more than we already know. To best engage the representational spaces of media and its role in the construction of spaces and identities, *Aether* seeks critical methodologies that incorporate new geographic thought from within geography in addition to spatial theories arising from the larger geographic turn in social and cultural studies. *Aether* strives to create a geography of media that uses critical methodology to uncover patterns and relationships within the spaces of media in all its forms. By doing so, by utilizing a critical engagement with media to analyze the geography contained therein, we can better understand the geographical information located within these unique datasets.

*Aether* is committed to modes of dialogue that go beyond the written word. While the journal will be dedicated to open submissions and organized thematic editions, it will also move beyond text and into other mediated formats including
films, multimedia exhibits, and other types of spatial visualizations. Further, rather
than being a static journal that simply waits for the next edition to be published, we
envision *Aether* to be an interactive and ever changing resource for media geography.

For nearly a decade the editors of *Aether* have organized media-related sessions
at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers. These “Media
Geography” sessions are now a part of *Aether* in that all session abstracts and, when
possible, full conference presentations will be posted to the journal in a section wholly
separate from the peer-reviewed journal articles.

In this introductory volume we have asked members of the editorial board
to speculate on the scope of media geography. By no means do we consider this a
comprehensive assessment of this subfield, but rather hope it sketches a foundation
from which future dialogue will follow. Subsequent issues already in the works include
themed editions on gaming, media and the Middle East, journalism and, hopefully, on
the works of sci-fi author William Gibson. Plus a special issue of online documentary
films, produced by professors and students will begin *Aether*’s foray into non-traditional
forms of discourse.

We welcome and look forward to your contributions and commentary on this
endeavor.

The Editors,

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Harris, L. and Harrower, M. 2006. Critical Interventions and Lingering Concerns:
    Critical Cartography/GISci, Social Theory, and Alternative Possible Futures.
The Chilling Tale of a Haunted Child  
(or How I Learned to Start Worrying and Love the Media)

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The inaugural issue of Aether is a welcome opportunity to share a few reminiscences about my early encounters with media. My aim is to say something about the roles of media in the places, spaces, and times we learn during childhood. How do we construct and inhabit what we think of as “out there” but that only exists because we and others have internalized it?

I am running up two flights of stairs from the “family room” in the basement where a bright orange couch faces the still-warm Zenith television to my bedroom on the second floor. It is around 1970 and my brother and I have stayed up past 10:00 to watch a program called Night Gallery because our parents are out for the evening. The horror show was cut short by a rather different sort of communication—the subsonic vibration of the family car arriving in the driveway. We must turn off the tv, dash upstairs, and dive into bed before the front door opens and the folks come in. In retrospect it seems like this was a regular occurrence although in fact it probably only happened once or twice.

There was something terribly fascinating about television programs that aired after my bedtime. When I watched them I felt I was gaining access to a secret place marked “adults only.” Night Gallery fed my desire for entry into a forbidden world not only because of its time of airing but also because of its format, which played on notions of virtual place. Rod Serling (of Twilight Zone fame) hosted the program with great solemnity, standing before gloomy paintings as he introduced stories of fantasy and horror.

A most hearty welcome to those of you whose tastes in art lean toward the bizarre. Our first painting submitted for your approval is an item of real estate—but you won’t find it advertised in the classifieds. Oh, it’s light and comfortable and altogether well-heated—but there’s a chill to the place. So
bundle up when you look at this one. Our painting is called The House, and this is the Night Gallery.

Night Gallery, 2007

Just as the 'night gallery' was an apparently real place—a gallery of macabre paintings that framed other-worldly stories—the family room of our suburban house provided a portal onto many less tamed and purified worlds, through the enframing device of the bulging, round-cornered television screen. This was the same screen that brought scenes of space exploration, civil rights conflict, and the Vietnam War to living-rooms and family-rooms all over the country. Then there were the books I devoured. Short stories and novels of science fiction and fantasy, from many unknowns and a few greats like Tolkien, Asimov, Bradbury, Orwell, Huxley, and Vonnegut, added a different sort of horror—less acute but more tenacious, like a cold mist rising in suburbia rather than the flickering light of the television illuminating the inside of drawn curtains.

The “I” who entered the mediated places of a real and imagined adult world was the same “I” who rode his bike around the neighborhood and floundered through swimming lessons at the Harlan Park swimming pool. If mediated experiences struck a deep chord in my childhood sense of place, it was in part because I had not yet learned to partition off experiences; onscreen experience was as immediate and visceral as swimming or riding my bike. All such situations elicited fear from time to time, as well as pleasures and desires. This meant growing up familiar with being both in place and out of place, both here and there, both embodied and disembodied, bounded and unbounded (Adams 2005). This situation is perhaps more pronounced today, but if televisual experience stood out among the mix then, and perhaps even now, it was in part because of enframing by the screen, which stood it in opposition to more tangible forms of unmediated experience and less dynamic forms of mediated experience. Networks of ideas, objects, threats, promises, rules, and roles crossed from screen to suburb and back, and I moved through these networks following vast and haunting ideas related to time, space, money, identity and death.

Around the age of seven, television triggered a train of thought in my mind, a realization that spiraled downwards to feelings that could not yet be put into words and that changed my life in indefinable ways. The insight began as I watched a television drama about a young girl who befriends an old man, paying him regular visits at his shack on the beach, until she discovers that he is an amputee; she sees that he is missing one of his hands, at which point she runs away and never comes back. Not only was it possible to lose something important—a hand, a friend, a life—but such a great loss could necessitate other, perhaps even greater, losses. As a young male, I was between the categories “old male” and “young female” and therefore sensed the leaving and the being-left-behind, the revulsion and the loneliness, at the same time. Life was not always fair and somehow we made it so with our actions. Televisual experience was better able to
convey the abstract concepts of impermanence, finality, solitude, and human weakness more than anything I had experienced up to that point, perhaps because I had already learned to expect that media offers an endless supply of happy endings and this program did not.

The screen did not simply enframe stories, it opened a portal into my own interior affective space. I descended rapidly into an apprehensive state of mind. Rather than Kierkegaard’s (1967 [1944]) “concept of dread” or Sartre’s “nausea” (1965), this was a sense of profound, almost infinite vulnerability, like McLuhan’s (1964, 64) image that we must live with utmost caution, like someone turned inside-out: “Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its shell and its nerves outside its hide.” I felt a horrible presence of absence and my parents’ attempts to console me failed to remove the chill. I sensed that because I had encountered this acute sense of vulnerability through the media then somehow the antidote must lie in the media, as well. I turned to writing, music, and drawing to work through my emotions and externalize myself into something durable, but at the same time these emotions produced a strange kind of affect: I was a nervous kid.

My effort to respond to the deeply disturbing thoughts led along the way to a creative impulse, which evolved into certain academic skills. At some level, ever since then, I have been working through my contradictory senses of the media as a place of refuge from fears and a place of profound and disturbing encounters. If I have connected with people through my research it is perhaps, more often than I would like to admit, because they too have had their affect altered by looking through the small screen into an abyss that has looked back into them. Troubling subjects in media texts make audience members into troubled subjects. If media-supported networks reflect the existential condition of being prosthetically extended, as Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Allucquére Rosanne (Sandy) Stone (1994) argue, then they also expose us dangerously to cross-currents of a world in which we are impossibly small, dangers are inconceivably large, and we can never turn back and rewrite the script.

In other words, rather than virtual place being secondary to place in childhood, simply or mainly an escape, it exists alongside place and infuses places with meaning. Children reenact mediated experiences in physical places, naming corners of the yard after rooms in Hogwart’s castle (vicariously becoming Hermione or Harry Potter) or after pirate ships (taking on the persona of Jack Sparrow or Elizabeth Swann). Just as a child running in and out the back door deposits bits of the yard in the house (leaves, rocks, mud, insects) and bits of the house in the yard (toys, containers, books, food), likewise a child crossing the permeable boundary between virtuality and materiality carries “bits” of each world across the boundary. Those mobilized bits are the quasi objects (Serres 1980; Latour 1991) of childhood - big topics from the adult world like time, money and death, as well as little topics like riddles and clapping games.
primarily of concern to children. Bodies, texts, and technologies get jumbled together in a heterogeneous and fragile network that mutates as part of “growing up” and is as much about internalizing mediated experiences as the lessons of parents and teachers, all of which permit greater and greater extensibility of the maturing self (Adams 2005, 39-44). Maturation involves a mutual haunting and being haunted as one learns that all practices create “ghostly correlates of unactualised possibles, so space-times are always accompanied by their phantoms…” (Thrift 2000, 221-222). Like the “aether” of alchemy and philosophy, media provide the continuous unifying and penetrating substance that permits fragmentary daily experiences to be worked into the networks of actual and potential action and experience, here and there, past, present and future.

In short, my childhood self living in the suburbs moved through, and wove, a networked space between books, television, and other media, as well as physical environments like the street, the yard, the house and the swimming pool. I always had my “nose in a book,” and the television was a place of adventure and discovery that inflected other spaces of adventure and discovery. Physical places were inextricable from the media that occupied them and that innocently opened portals onto other, virtual and physical places, all of them haunted. Media was the aether I inhabited, the fifth element of my world—or rather the first element, coming before all other elements as my source of solidity, fluidity, energy and rejuvenation. But by forming as a subject in this environment I took on the traits of an extensible self that would continue to live both inside and outside of its skin: neither bounded nor unbounded, neither solid nor ethereal.

References
Often when we sit in a semi-darkened theatre waiting for a movie to begin—
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  trying to ignore the annoying pre-film advertisements—conversation turns to interesting
  subjects: movie genres, favorite directors and actors, what we like and don’t like. Today
  my seventeen-year-old son, Ross, and I await *The Bourne Ultimatum* and chat about
  franchises and re-makes. I heard that the third time was a charm on this particular
  franchise and that Matt Damon was the new James Bond (move aside Daniel Craig,
  if you cannot produce a sequel within a year you lose your place). Ross and I wanted
  to see a movie today and this seemed the best of a bad bunch. And sometimes the pre-
  and post-movie chat make it all worthwhile. We were talking about movie genres and I
  asked him what he thought would be the next big thing now that scifi/fantasy/graphic/
  action extravagancies were running out of steam. In the adjoining theatre, *Stardust*
  was bombing in front of a handful of people who had not read the reviews. Ross thinks
  that video-game narratives are about to cash in on the demise of the aforementioned
  extravagancies but, he notes, this is all about niche marketing to cohorts of young people
  itching to see feature length versions of their favorite midnight multi-player indulgencies.
  As I wonder what will be left for those of us who do not play video-games, a preview
  of Russell Crowe’s upcoming epic flashes across the screen. The acclaimed action/adventurer with the beautiful mind is stepping into Glenn Ford’s shoes with a re-make of *3:10 to Yuma.* “That looks good,” says Ross providing the litmus test for success. He
  is part of the cohort that makes or breaks these kinds of features/franchises/genres.
  Perhaps Russell Crowe will do what the two Kevins (Kline and Costner) failed to do in
  the mid-1980s with *Silverado*: bring back the epic Western.

  Back in June I gave a keynote address at the *Flickering Landscapes* conference in
  Moab, Utah. The conference was all about Westerns: I talked about landscapes in film,
  patriarchy, emotional geographies and the War in Iraq. I knew that John Wayne had
made a few movies in this part of the world but I did not realize how much this was "The Duke's" country until I was there and talking with the Mayor of Moab and a number of local dignitaries. They warmed to my talk to the degree that politeness dictated but I had an uneasy feeling that for most locals The Duke in a Green Beret was exactly the person to solve the kind of representational problems that I was suggesting were part of the War in Iraq. I am not a great fan of Westerns, but I appreciate a number of the classics. The other keynote speaker in Moab gave a spellbinding presentation on *The Searchers*. There is so much to say about that movie and its times, and this is why I like auteurism and tracking the careers of Hollywood stars: it is not about the individuals it is about why their films are revered. Stardom and popular films carry with them another litmus test that speaks to the culture and the times that create them. Ross the gamer is intimately tied to the possibility of a new genre, and vice versa—at some brutally crass level it is a symbiosis that is all about making money.

My wife likes Westerns because of their spectacular portrayal of landscapes in the American West. As a geographer, you'd think that would be a key attraction for me but to be brutally honest, I like the anti-heroes and the violence more than the landscapes. Clint Eastwood's "man-with-no-name" personifies a particular kind of anti-hero for me (I hated Sergio Leone's arid Italian landscapes—it was all about making money). As a successful director, Eastwood's more recent sensibilities to men and their violence as part of a family- and community-context is appealing geographically. He creates precisely the violent geographic context that Quentin Tarantino fragments and turns in on itself so beautifully. I am sympathetic to his anti-heroes also. That Tarantino aspires to create the most violent movie ever made is hugely interesting to me. What does it say about our times and its fragmented spaces? I do not think it says anything too important about some teleological move towards more violence in society. Nor does it suggest some hidden and enduring evil in the hearts of men (and Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu). I do not think that young people are becoming more violent because of violence in movies and video games (the statistics confirm this even although spectacular events such as the Virginia Tech shootings suggest otherwise). Rather, I think representations of violence done well (and some done badly) perpetrate thoughtful and insightful political discussion. If you need convincing on this, re-read the first five pages of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and then reflect on how much that book has changed the way academics think about power and institutions. And I am guessing that if you are reading this inaugural ejournal, the work of Foucault has had both direct and indirect impacts on the way you come to know your world.

Helen Keller noted famously that "… things seen are temporal, things unseen are eternal." For Keller, I think this was a simple affirmation of the beauty of a world sensed but not seen. For me, this quote suggests that there are emotional, non-representational connections—visceral reactions—that move me to action. They are unseen and unrepresentable and they affect me hugely. Okay, so I am moving precipitously to a
Deleuzian appreciation of film here so let me back-pedal a little before I drown in a post-structural quagmire. For me, feelings/emotions are always good; it is what we do with them (suppression/acting out) that leads to problems. Okay, so I am now moving precipitously to a Freudian/Lacanian appreciation of film here so let me back-pedal a little before I drown in suppressed desire. If I am moved to action—to trying to change the world for the better—what kinds of media get me there? There will always be great socially responsible filmmakers like Michael Moore and in-your-face bands like The Clash and Green Day that use their popularity to foment social justice. There will always be politicians like Emiliano Zapata and Al Gore who use media and technology to forward important messages. I am inspired by these kinds of calls to action, but there is also something subtle and unknowable in certain representations that tugs at my gut and calls me to action.

So here, for me, is the other side of Keller’s insight. If things are seen, if I am shown things and they foment a visceral reaction then I am moved to action. Eastwood and Tarantino show me things about violence that move me to think in more complicated ways about the hearts of men but theirs is not a call to action. Unfortunately, the work of Eastwood and Tarantino is part of a problematic genre that is couched in a sanitized (read commercialized, marketed and made profitable) American rating system. What would a critical geography of the ratings system (a process which is, oddly enough, strictly voluntary) bring to light? If you don’t know, there are some clues in the balance of *Discipline and Punish* if you care to read further.

If the major media corporations are making a lot of money through selling representations of violence then why not sex? Why can we see heads cleaved and bodies sliced asunder but not an erect and impassioned penis? Well, hold on a minute. It turns out that the major media corporations are heavily into sex—it is just hidden a little. It is perhaps no surprise to many of you (and particularly those of you who know Foucault’s work) that the pornography industry is alive and well in Hollywood and that it is mainstream corporations who are profiting most. I find pornography desperately boring, but it feeds on something quite profitable: addiction? desire? The French director Catherine Breillat opens me up to desire (was I talking about violence?) in a different way. She represents sexuality and gender conflict in ways no American or British director has yet dared. In a New York screening of one of her films, Breillat famously retorts to a critic who asked her if her work was pornography by suggesting that raising the question in and of itself moves her work beyond pornography. As with the 1960s work of celebrated photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, controversy is important and should not be censored. Like Mapplethorpe’s photographs, Breillat’s films and novels challenge emotionally my middle-class, white, male comforts. The classes and categories of the FCC are not about emotional challenges or protecting children, they are about making money. And it turns out that sex or, rather, pornography, is more profitable than violence. But I like violence so let me return to it in closing.
On a recent visit to Scotland, Ross and I toured some of the battle sites that were represented in Mel Gibson's wonderfully violent *Braveheart* (1995). It has been many years since I've been to these sites and I was curious to see a significant change in the way that the violence was represented in situ. Life imitates art, thanks Mel! The 13th century turns out to be way more violent than Gibson's movie and the narrative at the battle sites relish as much this violence as the political fight for Scottish independence.

Did Mel have an eye on ratings when he chose not to portray William Wallace and his men skinning an English knight at the battle of Stirling Bridge? Or was Mel more concerned that the brutality of this historical insurgent/terrorist might not appeal to the heroic narrative he was creating. And, of course, Wallace was a hero along with Robert the Bruce, the first King of an independent Scotland. Ask any Scot. The Bruce is noted for lamenting the loss of his best battle axe when it broke while cleaving in two the head of a young English nobleman prior to the Battle of Bannockburn (there is a scene in *Braveheart* that borrows aspects of this scenario).

Heroes are sometimes forced to violence but flaying seems a little over the top (if you haven't done so already, go and re-read that beginning piece by Foucault). I remember people walking out of the movie theatre during the very tense scene prior to the public flaying of a man in Zhang Yimou's award winning *Red Sorghum* (1987). I remember a woman shouting “Stop this film immediately, how can you people watch this,” before she noisily left the theatre. *Red Sorghum* is a film couched in magic realism that takes place in China's eastern province of Shandong in the 1930s and represents, at least in part, the brutality of the Japanese occupation. The flaying scene left an impression on me that identifies with war atrocities, resistance and martyrdom. It produced in me the same visceral reaction I get when I watch the murder perpetrated by Ed Norton's character in Tony Kaye's *American History X* (1998). With that movie, the move is towards racism and the myth of redemption. This kind of representation of violence
moves me physically more fully in a direction that Tarantino’s and Eastwood’s portrayals
only point to. It is the same general direction that Breillat’s work moves me sexually.

What is this movement? Sergei Eisenstein would have called the affects of
the image-events created by Kaye, Yimou and Breillat an extraordinary “shock,” but I
am more interested in after-shocks. Those describe, for me, a move to a safer world
where subjects of emotional worth are less hidden; a world where we delight in all our
emotions and our corporeal feelings; a world where we understand better how to explore
feelings in a healthy, unchallenged way. It is also a movement towards social change;
a recognition of the values embodied by the ratings board and other governmental
agencies that purportedly are here to protect us. What are we being protected from?
Who are the perpetrators? The ratings board is specifically about the regulation of
media in the United States. Other aspects of our lives are regulated by other various
governmental acts and agencies that have sprung up since 9/11 and the current War on
Iraq/Terrorism. Who will be the hero, the “braveheart,” of this war?
Tetsuo!
Kaneda!

Tetsuo!...Kaneda!...As these sounds reverberate through my head, (or is it my gut?), they bring to me a calm air of familiarity entangled with violent forces of difference. Through movements of creation and fantasy these sounds become the creation of fantasy; through my body, as affect, in me. Less a wave than a presence, more familiar than strange—Tetsuo! Kaneda!—Their sound is an image. Their image is an affect. Their affect is the real. In the assemblage of these sounds I lose myself in geography as a coordinated location to become part of geography as creation. Tetsuo! Kaneda! Me? Yes, me! My body is undone by these images, only to be (re)created; a (re)creating of something unique, something original, something new. Together we are assembling the real of the registers of thought and extension, discovering the striving of the will and appetite, living the relation of the one and All.

Tetsuo! Kaneda! Ostensibly, they are sounds as signifiers—as two names of two characters from Otomo’s 1988 film Akira. But they signify nothing in or to me. Instead, they give rise to a rapid calmness which envelopes me and allows me to partake in the ever creative assemblage of film and body. They are sounds of imagination and animation, of graphic images one through the other, moving through that condensed viewpoint that I perceive as me; pushing it, changing it, transforming it: into a challenger. A challenger of what? For what? For the new as the new; through the real that is—for a real that becomes. Not an aether of waves, but an aether of pure affect.

All forms of media offer this avenue of exploration and examination to the world; to geography. But animation takes these forces of media—word, image, sound, color,
light, vibration, etc.—and creates a different intensity all its own. Animation is a world
greeting the Universe with a firm handshake, asking it, teasing it, provoking it, to take
notice of what lies beyond (or before) its current space-time. This is what animation
does so well: it challenges through the lines of its creating. It is the political and the
wondrous, the practical and the fantastic, the ethical and the outrageous. It shouts to
the Universe that the practical must be fantastic—the ethical must be outrageous—or
else it alienates and tortures the multitude that fall outside its territory. This speaks to
geography. Not by shouting, but by whispering in the machinery of its ear: geography
must be fantastic if it is to Become instead of be, Count instead of count, Do instead of
doze.

My earliest recalled encounter with these forces of media belongs to Disney's
Fantasia (1940). As a young child, or so my mother once related to me, I stood atop
a theater chair for a large duration of its showing, repeatedly clapping my hands and
bouncing up and down, "oooooohhing" and "oooooohhing" over and over. My body was
captured and enraptured by its movement of images; images of light demanded my
attention, images of sound tickled my wonder, images of color seized my control. A
different body emerged from the theater that day. One delighted that the Universe that
is can be—is always—challenged by worlds that become.

Whether this story has crept through the battle-scarred crevices of my memory by
its own force and volition is unclear. It well may be my mother's story that planted or
fueled these memories in me. Yes, I fully recognize that this event may well have never
actually, externally, exactly played out this way. But, for my purposes here, it does not
matter. It is still real; still materially relevant. It is a memory and a particular affect that
is present with(in) me as I map out this essay, affecting the trajectory of my expression.
And this speaks to my main point: animation, like this memory, is always immanently
real. Animation is not just representation, metaphor or signification of spaces and times
deemed "real," or, if one prefers, concrete. Like memory, that is only its weakest and most
innocuous force. Yet, unlike memory, animation lacks nothing. It is not a subtraction
from the Universe, but an addition to it. This takes me back to those vibrations of sound,
color and light: Tetsuo and Kaneda. Tetsuo! Kaneda!

If Fantasia is my earliest memory of animation and its affective creation of the new,
Akira is the fondest and the most enduring. And they are not alone: there is Otomo's
Cannon Fodder (1995); Oshii's Ghost in the Shell (1995) and Innocence: Ghost in the Shell
2 (2004); Yamaga's Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise (1987); Miyazaki's
Princess Mononoke (1997); and Shinkai's Voices of a Distant Star (2002) and The Place
Promised in Our Early Days (2004), to name only a very few. Equally, other realms of
media converge and swirl in, through and around me, challenging me to challenge, such
as the pulsating humor of Terry Pratchett's multiverse, the quiet tranquility of Khalil
Gibran's drawing and the intense gyrations of Demetrio Stratos' voice. To say these
pulsations and vibrations of line and light, color and word, movement and sound, are like
friends is to rely too much on simile. They are friends; companions; guides; mentors; at least to the degree that they help me—or is that prod me?—to actively question and challenge habitual notions of the real, conventional conceptions of the norm, prevalent practices of relation, static notions of space and time. This is the greatest union of media and geography: a union which assembles offspring that express and feel space as alive, all beings as social, each be(com)ing as unique yet related. These are offspring that do not seek to separate, deny or negate the body’s affect, but are informed by and through it. These are offspring that have reclaimed the imagination as a compositional force of the real; as a complementary force of what becomes between bodies as intensive openings. These are a few of the offspring that have become the machining ears of a territory called geography. Sound is an image. Image is an affect. Affect is the real. Tetsuo! Kaneda! Where are we going to go? What are we going to assemble? Who are we creating, now?
Kaleidoscope Eyes:
Geography, Gender, and the Media

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We are suggesting...a change in attitudes and perceptions, a substantial shift in the angle of vision, a recognition, in short, of the supreme social, and thus geographic, fact that women, as individuals or as a class, exist under much different conditions and constraints in a world quite different from, however, closely linked with, that inhabited by males. The human geographer must view reality stereoscopically, so to speak, through the eyes of both men and women, since to do otherwise is to remain more than half-blind. (Zelinsky, Monk and Hanson 1982, 353)

Picture yourself in a boat on a river,
With tangerine trees and marmalade skies
Someone calls you, you answer quite slowly,
A girl with kaleidoscope eyes.

The Beatles, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (1967)

When I began my graduate work, Jacqueline Burgess’“The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media: A Research Agenda for the 1990s” (1990) and Wilbur Zelinsky, Janice Monk, and Susan Hanson’s “Women and Geography: A review and prospectus” (1982) inspired and supported me as I took my first steps into media work. I was interested in landscape photography and gender, wondering about gendered experiences of place as well as gendered gazing at landscapes and peoples. Or as Burgess (1990, 157) phrased it:

...how landscapes, places and nature are encoded in the press, television, radio, the cinema and advertising and what do they signify for different groups of consumers? How do class, gender, ethnicity and locality affect the ways in which media texts are produced and consumed?

(Burgess 1990, 157)
I wrestled through a master’s degree and then a Ph.D. in geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. There were times when it was challenging to be a woman interested in gender, geography, and media. After Gillian Rose’s *Geography & Feminism* (1993) was published, interested faculty and graduate students got together in the library to discuss it: I was the only woman in the room. Later in my graduate career, I received a teaching assistantship in Women’s Studies out of pity, I’m convinced: a male advisor’s incredibly sexist letter of recommendation drew their gaze to our department. Time has passed but in many ways questions of gaze continue, for me as an area of research interest and personally as the only woman faculty in an all-male department, and in terms of work being done in geography, gender and the media.

The potential elements for study in the realm of geography, gender, and the media includes a great variety of media from the news (print, magazine, television, internet, advertising) to creative works (films, books, comics, graphic novels, photographs, websites) as well as a variety of geographical themes (landscape, globalization, regions, movement, etc.) and gender issues (masculinity, femininity, feminism, GLBT studies). This is well beyond the “stereoscopic view” that Zelinksy, Monk, and Hanson advocated for geography in 1982 but a virtual “kaleidoscope”—endless potential patterns, a riot of colors and shapes (Zelinksy, Monk, and Hanson 1982). But a kaleidoscope it is not just the patterns, but also the mechanism to create these patterns, and the human eye to gaze through the kaleidoscope to these patterns. On this occasion, Aether’s first issue, I’d like to think about geography, gender, and the media and on how Aether offers an opportunity to draw our gaze to patterns that matter.

**Thoughtful Gazing**

Geography as a discipline has long been tied to viewing and the gaze. Historically, early geography was based on what had been observed, translating these observations into written descriptions (Driver 2003, 227). As Western society has developed its science and technology, we have grown more and more dependent on visual information—photographs, maps, satellite imagery. A range of mediums offer us access to this information: paper, television, computer screens, websites, iPhones, etc. Even the language we use in geography is filled with visual references—“reading the landscape,” “world view,” “visualization” (Sui 2000). However, despite our growing visual culture we seldom question this visual information for its “accuracy,” let alone their implications (and by “we” I mean geographers as well as contemporary Americans) (Goin 2001). It is easier to glance at the images, accept them, and then move on to the next image. Early work on the gaze began with art history and film studies, particularly early feminist scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Linda Nohclin, and Griselda Pollock (Davidov 1998; Mulvey 1989; Parker and Pollock 1981).² These feminist scholars’ groundbreaking work examined what it means to be both the subject of the gaze and a constructor of the gaze. Women have traditionally been the object of the gaze (gaze as masculine) and that there are differences produced when women “guide the gaze,” creating art or directing films.
When Zelinsky, Monk and Hanson called for a “stereoscopic” view, geography was just venturing into geographic perspectives on women and women’s lives, refocusing the discipline’s gaze as it were. Gillian Rose’s work has pointed to the role of masculine gaze in constructing geographic knowledge (Rose 1993, 88). Susan Ford suggests “Feminist geographies can enrich the discipline by subordinating the ‘male gaze’ to being one look amongst many” (Ford 1991, 154). In 2000, Daniel Sui called for a shift in geography’s metaphors from the visual to the “aural,” linking this shift to the increased number of women in geography and use of interviews and other methods by feminist geographers that involve “really listening” (Sui 2000, 333). While Sui’s call was very intriguing, geographers still seem attached to our gazing traditions and contemporary postmodern culture seems, if possible, even more visual and media oriented than ever, which makes it all the more important for geographers to be conscious about the gaze and our gazing. John Wylie’s “Depths and folds: On landscape and the gazing subject” draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty to move landscape beyond mere gaze to a “geopolitics” involving not only visual culture but also performance/embodiment and materialities (Wylie 2006, 533). Today, geography has moved beyond a mere stereoscopic view but in many ways we are still coming to terms with our “gazing.”

A TURN OF THE KALEIDOSCOPE

I would like to play with the concept of gender and the gaze, to turn the kaleidoscope as it were, and play with some potential patterns of geography, gender, and the media, and dream a little of the “tangerine trees and marmalade skies” that Aether promises. One element of gaze that has great potential for geography is the increased involvement of women in constructing the gaze in a variety of mediums. I would like to highlight three potential areas, drawing from graphic novels, film and television journalism.

Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis is a graphic novel/autobiography of girlhood in Iran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution and war with Iraq (2003). With its strong black and white graphics (Figure 1), it captures the changing geography of a girl moving

Figure 1 This image of Marjane captures the different worlds she occupies (Satrapi 2003, 6).

from childhood towards adulthood, as well as the changing geography of Iran as it moves from the more liberal regime of the Shah to the tight control of the Ayatollah Khomeini (Figure 2). Comic books are a medium that have long been associated more with young men than with young women, a landscape traditionally of busty women and heroic, powerful men (Wright 2001, 250). Over the last twenty-five years, women have moved into authoring comics and graphic novels in increasing numbers. Satrapi’s foray into graphic novels represents one way women shift from the object of the gaze to creators of the gaze, creating works that communicate their “view.” According to Satrapi (2003, 11):

We learn about the world through images all the time. In the cinema we do it, but to make a film you need sponsors and money and 10,000 people to work with you. With a graphic novel, all you need is yourself and your editor… Of course, you have to have a very visual approach to the world. You have to perceive life with images—otherwise it doesn’t work. The point is that you have to know what you want to say, and find the best way of saying it.

(Satrapi 2003, 11.)

Satrapi’s works capture an Iranian view of its history and politics for a transnational audience of men and women, but specifically a woman’s perspective of the experience of becoming “veiled.” Through the imposition of and policing of veil and dress, Satrapi’s text and graphics capture how “an oppressive state regime inscribes itself on the body of the individual and nation” (Tarlo 2007, 356). In Persepolis, it is through appearance, the ways in which others gaze upon you, that your political position is established. In a serious yet amusing turn of events, Marjane is stopped by female Guardians of the Revolution and questioned about a Michael Jackson button she is wearing on her denim jacket: she tries to convince them it is Malcolm x. Satrapi captures and communicates her own gaze as she documents her youthful attempts at expressing
herself in her clothing and its ramifications, as well as capturing her evolving landscape and how space comes to define both her dress and behavior.

The films of Mira Nair, such as *Mississippi Marsala* (1991) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), captures Nair’s view of the changing landscape of women globally. *Mississippi Marsala* depicts the struggles of a young woman of Indian ethnicity (from Uganda), caught between American culture and her parents’ Indian traditions and values as she becomes involved with an African-American man. *Monsoon Wedding* uses a wedding in India to pull together a family scattered around the world, with one foot in the traditional and the postmodern worlds. Nair uses the medium of film to explore how women negotiate our globalized, postmodern landscape:

> She has always, the filmmaker says, ‘been drawn to stories of people who live on the margins of society; people who are on the edge or outside, learning the language of being in between; dealing with the question, ‘What, and where is home?’”

*(Simpson 1992, 67)*

Nair is deeply intertwined in her subject matter: being an example of it herself, capturing it on film, and catering to this audience with her work, with *Monsoon Wedding* finding success in the United States, Britain, and India (Sharpe 2005, 61). As she explores themes of home and margins, mobility and transition, Nair uses almost exclusively the visual: “I make images in my work. I don’t pen words” (Nair quoted in Rivera 2007, 82). The gaze is one of Nair’s hallmarks with complicated “gazing” found in many of her works. *Mississippi Masala*, for example, captures a clash of cultures “between Indian Africans who have never seen India and African Americans who have never seen Africa. In the background are anxious white Americans who are equally dislocated as the country changes around them” (Simpson 1992, 67). Rather than a male or an imperial gaze, Nair constructs interracial gazing: “traditionally subjugated characters look back, stereotypes are challenged, and the gaze, with its inherent anxieties and domination, becomes a mutual process of looking” (Klaver et al. 1998, 12).

While new forms of the gaze are possible, old habits are hard to break. Women newscasters are not “new” to the newsroom, but their positions are still being negotiated, particularly when it comes to locations and the gaze. A year ago, Katie Couric became the first woman to anchor a network newscast, the *CBS Evening News*. Couric’s occupation of the seat long held by legendary journalist Dan Rather prompted Rather to comment that CBS executives had tried to increase viewers by “dumbing it down and tarting it up” (Shales 2007). Rather then backpedaled and tried to explain that he was “trying to make a larger point about dangerous trends I see in broadcast news.” However, the comments were widely seen as directed at Couric’s relocation into the anchor position, a location expected to command respect and demonstrate intelligence, as they guide the audience through the news. Couric long anchored NBC’s *Today Show*, a morning news
and entertainment program. “Dumbing down” and “tarting” can be read as gendered, associated more with female newscasters, who are often viewed as being hired more for their looks, to be the subject of the gaze, rather than the focus of the gaze.

In May 2007, The Daily Show correspondent Samantha Bee did a report on “News I’d Like to F@#k.” — “I’m a n.i.l.f. hunter and the 24 hour news networks are my Serengeti.” Bee’s commentary on the attractive newswomen points to the gendered gaze, even when it comes to such serious news as the Iraq war: “Take CNN... Their coverage has proved that war is hell-o ladies! Jennifer Eccleston’s screen says Baghdad but her open neckline says bag these.” According to Bee:

News anchors used to be just pretty enough that you could spend a half hour a night getting informed. But now they’re so hot I just want to stay home, draw a steamy bath and inform the shit out of myself.

Samantha Bee, 2007

Bee highlights the “so hot” newscasters (compared to “pretty enough” newscasters such as Jane Pauley and Linda Ellerbee), categorizing them by location/network (“Fox...is the Hustler of news networks”). While women now occupy forty percent of the all jobs in TV and radio newsrooms, physical attractiveness, in men as well as women, is still a crucial factor in obtaining positions on air (Bauder 2007). Bee challenges convention by addressing the overt sexuality of women newscasters head on in a satirical format, her own gender key to the commentary. Bee’s subject matter, her forthright gaze, and her use of raw language, pushes convention in ways associated more with masculinity than femininity, an irony as the pioneer women journalists often felt, in order to succeed, they needed to be less feminine and more masculine. But Bee’s subject, gaze, and language are more associated with “private” masculinity than the public masculinity displayed by today’s male newscaster. Bee’s language and gaze make the piece funny yet critical: done by a male correspondent on air, it would have come off as disturbing.

These three brief examples provide a glimpse of the ways in which geography, gender, and media interact with the gaze, particularly with the practice and construction of the gaze, but more importantly how binaries can be broken down through this process. The visual work of Nair and Satrapi explores “the interconnections between the local and the global,” offering an opportunity to see “the experiences of women ‘over there’ as interrelated to our lives, actions, and policies ‘over here’” (Hobson 2006/2007, 96 and 104). The case of women newscasters demonstrates that while women are increasingly involved in framing our news (framing as providing meaning to a series of events), they are yet part of the image itself (that is tied to the gaze). But by acknowledging or even bridging these dichotomies, such as in Bee’s commentary, light can be shed on this relationship and its contradictions. Wilbur Zelinsky, in “Geographer as Voyeur,” his essay on fieldwork, laments the demise of fieldwork in the face of “virtual” ways of sensing the world (Zelinsky 2001, 3). Zelinsky (2001, 8) uses “voyeur” to refer to a
return to fieldwork and the pleasures it entails: “an inspired voyeurism will someday 
regain its rightful place as one of the necessary means for knowing the world.” But, in my 
mind, both the fieldwork (practice) and the media (representation) are forms of gazing, 
and which have traditional been constructed as masculine. Gunhild Setten, in explored 
notions of gendering and the male gaze in a Nordic context, suggests a new possible 
way of approaching this intersection of gender and geography that echoes Wylie—that 
“identity formed through practice might...contribute to a re-definition of dichotomies 
and categories by focusing on what we do and not exclusively on what we are” (Setten 
2003, 134).8

Kaleidoscope Eyes

Human geographers must now view our world with kaleidoscope eyes – helping 
humans to make sense of our geography, media, and gender saturated world. Between 
the various medias, genders, sexualities, and cultures globally, there is tremendous 
potential for some spectacular patterns to be brought into focus. I am looking forward 
to seeing the patterns Aether publishes—in terms of the topics it covers but also in the 
forms. Photographer Peter Goin has questioned the use of photography as “illustrative 
and subordinate to the written text” and that “the track record reflects underutilized 
and underrepresented potential for photographic collaboration” (Goin 2001, 34). James 
Ryan has called for “positive engagements between geographers and visual artists, 
such projects produce new understandings of visual art as a form of conceptual and 
practical enquiry and academic geographical research as creative practice” (Ryan 2003, 
236). Aether’s online format means that the envelope can be pushed further in terms of 
incorporating not just images but also media clips...and who knows what else? While 
the name Aether seems to suggest transparency, it also suggests greater connectivity. But 
a kaleidoscope is not just the patterns, it is also the mechanism. Aether can be a means 
to view these patterns but also the mechanism to bring these patterns into play.

Endnotes

1Emphasis added.
2Nochlin’s “Why Have Their Been No Great Women Artists?,” first published in 1971, is widely 
regarded as opening the door to work in feminist visual culture (Nochlin 1988).
3Gillian Rose’s commentary “On the need to ask how, exactly, is geography’ visual?” points also 
to the performance element, specifically the use of slides in teaching and presentations.
4An animated feature based on Persepolis (2003) is scheduled to be release in 2007. The film 
shared the Jury Prize at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival. (with Silent Light).
5A great review of Persepolis appears in the journal Fashion Review (Tarlo 2007).
6This discussion was inspired by Scott Rodgers, “’Reporting live from ?’: Researching spatial 
ontologies of journalism,” Geography and the Media iv: Journalism, 2007 AAG Annual 
Meeting, San Francisco.
7Textually this was how the word appeared on television screens but Bee said the word on the air 
with censor beeping over it, hardly obscuring the profanity.
8Emphasis is Setten’s.
Bibliography


Rose, Gillian. 2003. On the need to ask how, exactly, is geography ‘visual’? Antipode 35 (2): 212-221.


Broadcast television began in Ottawa, Canada, where I grew up, in 1953. In 1954, when I was four years old, my parents purchased the first TV in our neighborhood. They were not wealthy and the TV was not cheap. The choice they made was between buying the television set and making a down payment on a car. My dad, influenced by mid-fifties discourse that positioned television as the universal educator, opted for the TV because, in his words, it would help with “the boy’s” education. For a while, before other families had acquired their own sets, our house was popular with neighborhood kids who would stop by after school to watch the cartoons broadcast shortly after programming on the sole (CBC) channel commenced at 4PM. Before the shows started, a static test pattern filled the screen. Amid the rows of parallel lines was a native man in full headdress drawn in profile. I used to watch the pattern with a mixture of awe and impatience. Impatient for the cartoons to start, I’d also stare at it, intent on understanding its meaning. The screen became my map, a pixilated geography of light.

They say that many geographers aren’t very good at reading a map. I am. At about the same time as TV entered our home I discovered the paper map. As much as I loved TV I loved maps too and pestered my parents to unfold them, talk about the places on the maps, get them to tell me what the different kinds of lines on the map meant—railroad, highway, county road, natural attraction. Maps were one of the ways I learned how to read and count. The first time I saw a map on TV I was puzzled, then enthralled that TV could swallow the map. After the other neighborhood families had their own televisions the collective nature of TV watching at our house gave way to solitary family viewing. Local chums no longer stopped by just to gaze at the screen. They had their own. But I still had my maps and thus began my earliest engagement with what we might now call multiple viewing practices. I’d sit on the floor in front of the screen, but as often as not
there'd also be a map on the floor between me and the screen. I guess you could say I was an early "distracted viewer” but I was also mixing my media.

My fascination with the box, however, didn't last forever. I stopped watching—period—when I was eighteen. I still don't watch, except for concentrated doses when I stay in motels or conference hotels. I'm as mediated as the next fellow but I've never sat down to an episode of *Cagney and Lacey*. I've heard a lot about the banality of *The Love Boat* but I've never seen an episode. The same for *Taxi*, *Laverne & Shirley* and *Everyone Loves Raymond*. In the early 1970s, I was taken aback, however, when a friend, seriously critical in tone in the way New Age-y folks sometimes can be, told me that “listening to you make a joke is like listening to the radio or watching TV, all your references are media.”

If I’d turned my back on TV I still had my maps and my sense of how they connected as representations to the actual world they make claims to diagram. During the 1970s and '80s I worked with a series of community organizations in Ottawa as a volunteer planner, organizer and community activist. I became skilled at guiding citizens adversely affected by planning decisions on how to understand the sugar-coated maps produced by planners and intended to lull or mute community opposition to freeway widenings, zoning changes and the like. One evening in the late 1980s, I had an experience that served as a kind of extended wake-up call. As president of an inner-city community organization, I’d helped organize opposition to a freeway widening by residents living immediately adjacent to the existing road. The proposed widening would have meant demolishing all buildings in each city block running along either side of the freeway across the entire length of the community. On the evening in question, the Ottawa City Planning Committee met to vote on a key detail in the widening program. The community organization had publicized this meeting in the affected neighborhood. It was important to get a strong show of support at City Council chambers and essential that residents living adjacent to the freeway attend. Planning Committee listened to our presentation, duly noted residents' opposition, then passed the motion to proceed with the widening. The vote was reported the next day by local media. Upon hearing the news a woman living directly across from the freeway called me to ask why we, as a community organization, had not been able to block the vote. We had, she said, let her down and badly. I agreed the Committee's decision was bad news but also noted the battle was not yet over. But I also asked her why, considering the potential demolition of her home, I had not seen her at the meeting. She told me she couldn't possibly have attended because she would have missed Norm and the gang on *Cheers*, her favorite TV program. I was speechless. How could not missing a single episode of a TV program be more important than saving one's house—even in the pre-TiVo era?

On a separate occasion right around the same time, an acquaintance complained to me in passing that her landlord was harassing her because she was behind in her rent. He'd come to her door the previous evening, she said, interrupting her favorite program, demanding she pay her arrears or he would begin eviction proceedings. I sympathized
until she added that he’d then asked how she could afford cable TV when she couldn’t pay her rent. Why, he’d asked, didn’t she cancel her cable if she was so broke? To which she’d apparently replied, “Surely you can’t expect me to do without cable.”

In the early 1990s, burnt out on community organization and the discursive politics of conservative politicians to always position opposition to ill-conceived development as a reactionary or knee-jerk opposition to “progress,” I decided, with much encouragement from friends, to pursue a graduate degree in planning. Faculty was very supportive of my interests and offered me great latitude in my studies. “You’ve already figured out a lot about the planning process before coming here—what would you really like to study?” my advisor asked, somewhat rhetorically. With the memory of the above incidents still echoing in my mind, the gist of my reply was, “The relationship between television and planning—why urban architecture and city forms so often look like a screen—how the map seems to have been swallowed by the TV.” “Go for it,” my advisor said. “See if you can pull it off.” And I did.

But I didn’t really want to work as a planner. I wanted the time to think through what my experience in community organization had meant. I’d not only seen how media seemed to trump practical considerations. I also seen up close and personal how often the idealism that young planners bring to the job about making a better world gets turned to the sign of the dollar, how planners usually end up acting as soft cops. As a student studying various “offbeat” planning techniques I developed an interest in the hype surrounding a new technology—virtual reality or VR. All the buzz, both corporate and academic, worked to suggest that you would, in just a few years, be able to relocate yourself, your identity, inside the computer, inside media technology itself. I smelled a rat but was fascinated by the ways that the technology was a form of cosmological mapping—an ironic inversion of the myth of Plato’s Cave and one within which the media hype implied that every spatial strategy, including those defying the laws of physics, would be possible.

With a Masters of Planning in hand and still somewhat footloose, I decided to pursue my interest in VR and work toward a Ph.D. at the same time. In Geography. Looking at VR as a form of virtual space, a kind of 3-D immersive map that swallowed the territory and pulled the viewer into its magical ersatz space. But in 1996 American Geography generally, while finding my research “fascinating,” wasn’t ready to go the distance and legitimatize studying virtual space as “real” Geography. I had, however, minored in Communication/Cultural Studies and while I couldn’t find a job in Geography I did have multiple offers from Communication departments. Perhaps I was in the right place at the right time as Communication and Cultural Studies more generally were very intrigued with issues of space, power and identity at that time. (That had been one of my frustrations with American Geography—for many researchers, Geography’s core concepts of place, space and landscape had slipped beneath their radar, lost in a wholesale rejection of purportedly outmoded 1970s phenomenological enquires into these concepts. The concepts had, however, been enthusiastically picked.
up by Cultural Studies scholars, though too often in ways that ignored or naively inverted generations of Geography research.)

Immersive Virtual Reality never fully lived up to its hype, though important military and medical applications exist. But I don’t think that a full actualization of its promise ever was the overall intention. Instead, “cutting edge” technologies such as VR often serve as the necessary advance brigade in the capitalized economy of hype. Hype propels popular interest in new media applications but, just as importantly, it also prepares people to be more receptive to more commercial, more realizable applications. One such application, coming onto the scene at the same time as immersive VR was making such a media splash, is the World Wide Web. If the “promise” of VR remains largely unfilled by the particular technology itself, much of it has been realized on the Web. Today such “Internet 3.0” sites as Second Life, Active Worlds and There! realize in 2-D formats a considerable degree of what was said to be possible through immersive VR. My current research focuses on these sites and their capacity to organize ritual practices in online settings. Hundreds of thousands of members “populate” Second Life “where” they hang out, build houses, flirt, have sex, make friends, inhabit virtual islands and, increasingly, engage in forms of education and commerce with real-world implications. Navigation is important—the entire site is premised on infinitely extensible Cartesian space, organized around the map’s latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates.

Moving from Geography to the media studies unit of a Communication Studies department has allowed me to pursue my interest in Web practices and techniques and their relationships to social space in several interlocking ways. One example would be the ways that sellers on eBay organize their listings as a set of linked virtual territories within which they establish specific forms of identity claims linked to memorable events. I’ve been fortunate enough to study the ways that sellers do so in order that they might more profitably “auction the authentic.” But I have not been limited by my move only to the study of “new” media. My interest in urban issues, space and subjectivity extends back in time long before taking on the mantle of community organizer in the 1980s, and I have been pleased to find new, interdisciplinary ways to organize my research in urban space through the “lens” of film studies. Specifically I have pursued the relationships between the city itself as a character in the cycle of films popularly known as film noir. Los Angeles is frequently the overarching non-human (though sometimes anthropomorphized) character in many of these films set in that fair megalopolis, and I currently work on a set of related projects asking into the nature of urban subjectivity, paranoia, sexuality and space as depicted in these films which, on the surface, seem realistic but in point of fact are anything but. The spatialized id and the cultural politics attached to it as revealed to spectators through the camera’s dark eye might be a more productive way to think of the classic film noir cycle.

From Geography to Communication Studies via the map relocated to digital media. And back again. It’s been a journey fair for this media geographer, one I don’t think I’ll ever quite finish charting on my own inner map.
On a recent trip to Hawaii I noticed a fellow traveler who had an iPod that could be listened to underwater. Several questions crossed my mind at that moment: how would the music sound underwater? What would they (or I) listen to during a snorkeling or scuba diving expedition? Or perhaps most importantly, why would someone want to do this at a time when they are, in theory, communing with nature? This also got me thinking about how the consumption and spatiality of music has changed over the years since my childhood. The ability to listen to music while snorkeling or scuba diving while surrounded by sea life can be perceived as an amazing achievement or a vile bastardization of nature depending on one’s perspective. Either way, my mind was catapulted back to when I was a kid, how music became an important part of my life, and how and where I listened. Later on, as I embarked on a career as a geographer, I also got to thinking more seriously about spaces of music, which to most outsiders is an alien concept and perceived as a frivolous pursuit without much meaning. People tend not to think much about sounds/music as aural spaces, but this topic has become an increasingly interesting and fertile avenue of inquiry.

All of us beyond a certain age are likely to remember the first album we bought and not only how it sounded, but also how it smelled and how it felt in our hands, not to mention the multiple uses of the fold-out albums. My first introduction to buying music though was with 45s (I’m not old enough to ever have owned 78s) and listening to AM radio-inspired ‘bubblegum pop’ (e.g. the Archies “Sugar, Sugar”) in the sanctity of the bedroom in our suburban Connecticut duplex. But what also resonates today is where these songs were heard and how the sound and place are eternally married in my (and I’m sure most of our) mind(s). This place we created was one of great pleasure, an escape from our parents, siblings, homework, etc. These spaces have now become portable beginning with the Walkman and now morphing into iPods where you can take your entire music collection anywhere. In effect, people can take their musical sanctuary with them thereby reconfiguring how people, music, and space interact.
We all live with the so-called “soundtracks of our lives” which are intimately connected with place. For example, one of my earliest vivid memories is of listening to Stealer’s Wheel “Stuck in the Middle with You” on a family road trip to Cape Cod in our 1967 Pontiac Le Mans. When Tarantino resurrected the song for Reservoir Dogs, I was at once pleased and wounded that part of my past was now being replayed for a new generation. As we grew and progressed from 8-tracks (I can still hear Kiss “Alive” as played on my Ford Pinto’s 8-track player and the patience required to wait while the player switched tracks in the middle of a song) to cassettes (buying a 10 pack of Maxells to copy all of my friend’s Steely Dan albums in our faux wood paneled ‘den’ was such a cool thing). Also quite vivid is the memory of holding down the turntable needle as it rolled over the skip in the record to end up with a clean recording. Despite its flaws, albums persisted for a long time and the one thing that endured my many moves was my collection of 500 or so records. Then came the fateful day when I bought my first compact disc and I knew life would never be the same. It all seemed a bit too easy and there were a few, perhaps overly romanticized, aspects of the record album, that I was not fully ready to part with such as the legible record sleeves. Now in the age of digital music, people no longer listen to full albums but rather get fixated on songs and seldom even know the dozen or so songs that the artist recorded and several of those less popular musical gems remain undiscovered by many. I often took great pleasure, nee pride, in knowing all the words to all the songs on some of my favorite albums (I hope this gap in knowledge does not scar future generations). Through these early changes, where music could be listened to was shifting—portable music was surfacing and this innovation, in turn, transformed much of the enjoyment of music into a very private affair. We now see people walking on campus, riding on a bus or plane, sitting in the back of a car, or even snorkeling listening to their own music insulated from their surroundings. Many criticize this behavior as ‘anti-social’ and perhaps there is a legitimate argument there, but the reality is that how music is consumed has changed. It is not a very long step from the enjoyment of recorded music to the world of live music. One of my most vivid pre-teen moments was at a KISS concert in Springfield, Mass. watching a couple engage in acts beyond my pre-pubescent imagination in front of a pre-concert audience of several thousand, thereby cementing my devotion to rock and roll. The outrageousness of the punk rock movement kept people guessing and kept me coming back for more. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, live shows became increasingly outrageous and as we entered the 1990s it seemed (at the risk of sounding old) that everything had been done and as Jane’s Addiction stated in 1988’s Nothing’s Shocking. As a parent of a 10-year-old girl, it is obvious that kids today are exposed to so much more than I was at the same age. The media landscape has been transformed to the point where they can have everything now and how this has detached things such as music, from the material places of our past into places that are now virtual, but immediate. If you want to see a Killers’ concert you need to go no farther than your
computer and log into YouTube and watch. Gone is the anticipation of what they look like or how that song sounds live, or if they’ll play that one. Here, however, is everything at your fingertips and the ability to listen to any band in the world at any time, no need to hope the radio station will play that band or if the record store will stock that album.

As I continue to reflect back on my own personal music history, I was also reminded of how music was my entre into many thoughts and ‘activities’ that I was unfamiliar with. I have to admit that as an American teen, I did not know much about British politics until listening to the music of The Clash and Billy Bragg, for example. I believe it was Joe Strummer who, a while back, said something like “not many will read a book about an issue, but most will listen to a two or three minute song.” Despite the transformation of the music industry as a whole, music is arguably more central to the lives of people today than it was 30 years ago.

I’m not sure that this ramble has much of a point, other than that music and other forms of media are now more central to our existence than ever before and as social scientists, our ability to understand this becomes increasingly important. My hope is that Aether will cultivate a forum where geographers of many stripes will have a place to disseminate ideas on things media, both music and other forms, that would not fit the confines of more traditional journals and I am happy to be part of this board and look forward to contributing to the expanding horizons of Media Geography.
Spatializing Storytelling:
Contemporary Post-Binary Geographies of News Discourse

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The invitation to contribute to the inaugural issue of Aether delighted me because I believe the dawning of this journal marks an exciting moment in geography—a moment burgeoning with possibilities for an emerging geography of media. As a multidisciplinary scholar with a joint position at University of Toronto in geography and journalism (the first joint position of this kind to the best of my knowledge), I am passionate about exploring the process of storytelling, paying particular attention to stories we tell about place. Although I am happily ensconced in my academic home now, teaching journalism students how to cover stories differently—stories that do not replicate racist and sexist assumptions—I must admit I still feel most comfortable in an edit suite, barricaded in by walls of video cassette tape boxes like bricks, peering intently at the monitor, explaining to the editor which shot needs to be dissolved next. Before I became a full-time academic, I was a national television producer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, where I was out daily covering news stories with a reporter and camera and sound team. I would be assigned a story early in the morning and expected to return that day with a two and a half minute news item. I covered stories ranging from deadly subway crashes to the rise and rise (then) of Alanis Morissette, to the demise of an environmental minister to a yodelling contest. I interviewed politicians, pundits and was on the cusp of the reality show craze in the late 1990s, helping to produce a show entitled “Seventy-Two Hours to Remake Canada” where twenty four Canadians met to rewrite the Canadian Constitution over a weekend. During this time of my life, I rarely slept. I worked on a steady diet of adrenaline and coffee. I loved the job and at the same time found it exasperating because while it gave me the freedom to tell stories that would reach millions of people, I also felt boxed in because I had only a few minutes to tell a story which was always necessarily more complex than what was told.
Working in television profoundly shaped my path in geography. I was granted a leave of absence from my job at the CBC to complete my Ph.D. and I took a year and a half off from my job to write up my research at University College London. There is no doubt that being a producer influenced my approach to my study on women of “mixed race” in Toronto. As I engaged in a snowball sampling approach to find participants, I discovered that the majority of the women I interviewed were journalists. This complicated my research findings because some of the women were only too eager to provide me with interview material journalists could only dream about, coining pithy phrases like “Women of “mixed race” occupy a third space—isn’t that the perfect clip for you?” accompanied by a cheeky grin. This obviously complicated my data collection and needed to be addressed in my analysis (see Mahtani in progress). There is also something about being “mixed race” that allows for the opportunity to see issues from both sides – an approach which has come in handy for me as a journalist. Many of the women I interviewed likened themselves to “flies on the wall” or “ambassadors” (Mahtani 2002) and while this does not mean we are objective, for no journalist is truly impartial, this positioning did allow me to consider different perspectives in storytelling. It has also changed my interviewing skills. As a journalist, I was trained to ask particularly potent questions, including my all-time favourite, “What do you mean by that?” My dual identity shifted from one where I was Indian-Iranian to that of the journalist-academic. I felt comfortable adopting this new identity and it provided me with a chance to map out new ways to understand the senses of belonging for women of “mixed race” in my study.

My new research explores a critical geography of journalism. Geography offers me a particularly fruitful lens through which to consider the worlds of both news media production and consumption. Not surprisingly, my research has been influenced by my own experience in a newsroom. As a woman of “mixed race” I was seen as a member of a minority group, and often asked to cover stories related to “race” and religion. What does it mean to be essentialized like this in a newsroom? What kinds of silencing occur in newsrooms for people who are labelled as members of a minority group? People of color make up less than five percent of employees in most newsrooms, and yet there is a renewed interest in covering marginalized groups in a fair and accurate way, especially after 9-11 (Allan 2002). Inspired by my own experience, I interviewed women journalists of color in a variety of international sites, ranging from Mumbai, Sydney, and Toronto, asking them about their experiences of sexism and racism (Mahtani 2005, Mahtani 2001). The stories I heard (from very articulate and eloquent journalists no less) were remarkably similar from place to place. I heard that women were expected to act in ways that reinforce ideologies of femininity and at the same time perform a masculine identity in order to get the “hard news” story. This paradoxical space (Rose 1993) and how it was negotiated for many of these women was of great interest to me, because the experience of newsgathering is indeed gendered. Even the language of news
is loaded—one gets a news “hit”, you acquire a “spear” for your story, there is the old adage, “if it bleeds, it leads”; etc and as geographers the onus is upon us to explore how various forms of masculinity are enacted, negotiated and challenged in various international newsrooms, asking about the impact of this dynamic on international newsmedia production.

While fascinated with the sites of international newsmedia production, I have become interested in the other side of this equation: the experience of news consumption, especially among members of the so-called “ethnic audience.” Even in cultural studies, our research on marginalized audiences remains limited. I am curious to discover how our memories of particular places are influenced by media representations. Can memory be contaminated by media portrayals? I have been conducting focus groups with members of the Iranian diaspora and asking them how they remember their “home” based on media representations in Canadian news reports. I argue that yearning for the homeland is altered, shaped and sculpted through particularly pervasive patterns of racist programming in Canadian newsmedia. In particular, I suggest that the imagined space of the homeland is continually being reconstructed in juxtaposition against the dominant culture’s mis-representation of the Other. It’s my hope that this kind of audience analysis will open up a new space for work in the sub-discipline of geography of media—a geography that is politically inspired, critical in perspective, and takes into account the racialized and colonial subject position of the diasporic media consumer.

The birth of Aether offers us an opportunity to develop a novel approach to analyzing the relationship between geography and media, where we move beyond our reliance on discourse analysis as a methodological tool towards a critical, progressive geography that may lead to different kinds of storytelling about place and identity—storytelling that challenges the heteronormative and ethnocentric assumptions so often rampant in conventional newsmedia. I look forward to reading these new stories in future issues of Aether.

References
An aphorism by Walter Benjamin encapsulates my interest in exploring the place-image-media nexus. In perusing Benjamin’s voluminous compendium, *The Arcades Project*, I came upon his deceptively simple statement: “Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it; each ‘now’ is the now of a particular recognizability” (Benjamin 1999, 462-463). Long before the crisis of representation scrambled mimetic circuits, Benjamin captured the creative-destructive power of image. Once attuned, I encountered, seemingly at every turn, culturally mediated images relating to aging, place, and mobility, a long-standing research interest. Popular magazines such as *Travel 50 & Beyond, Where to Retire* and *Arizona Living* parading the elixir of anti-aging and agelessness rooted in mobility and place jumped off bookstore shelves (McHugh 2003), and I found myself tormented in viewing films depicting older folks feeling in place/out of place, such Doug Hawes-Davis’s documentary *This is Nowhere*, Alexander Payne’s *About Schmidt*, and David Lynch’s *The Straight Story* (McHugh 2005, 2007a, 2007b).

In reflecting on this, I realize that I did not pursue media geographies as a matter of calculated choice; rather, I felt compelled to respond to moving images that speak to disparate meanings of aging, place and mobility in our society and culture. Others surely have had analogous experiences. One might invert the question and ask: in our media-saturated culture how can a geographer avoid being drawn, in some fashion, to mediated geographies? Playing off the Greek origin of *Aether*, title of this newfound e-journal, can we say that the media writ large constitute the celestial fire of our age?

Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn’s (1994) essay, Re-Presenting the Place Pastiche, was an innervating introduction to film geography and an opening salvo in moving beyond mimetic, representational thinking. I recall reading their essay and experiencing a moment of delightful realization, writing in the margin: “we inhabit cinematic spaces!” Chris Lukinbeal (forthcoming) notes Aitken and Zonn’s pioneering essay and expresses the point thusly: “Films are not merely images, but rather actively reconstruct our
lives.” A poignant illustration of the intertwining of film and life is Tina Kennedy’s (2007) paper “Living with Film: An Autobiographical Approach.” Tina presented her narrative in a colloquium at Arizona State, a heartfelt story that moved me greatly, a touching evocation of film, emotion, place, and identity.

Living with film is a slice of a daunting challenge in cinematic and media geographies: coming to grips with, and tracing out innumerable implications of, the implosion of the “real-reel” binary (Cresswell and Dixon 2002). Much of the time, of course, we are not cognizant of the deep conflation of real and mediated spaces and places in our daily lives and practices. Conspicuous examples bring it to the forefront. From the comfort of her motor home in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Missoula, Montana, a woman in the documentary film, This is Nowhere, speaks to the camera: “When somebody asks me, ‘Have you been to this city?’ I say I don’t know. I always ask him [indicating her husband]: ‘Were we there or did we see it on television?’” Film and media-related tourism is a striking example of the interplay of real and virtual worlds, as people engage and perform place in a panoply of productive and consumptive practices (Beeson 2005; Crouch, Jackson and Thompson 2005). A PhD student in geography at Arizona State, Ann Fletchall, is pursuing place making and reality TV via a case study of Orange County, California, setting for the popular shows The o.c. and Laguna Beach. Geopolitics is a field rife with thorny questions about the pervasive influence of mediated spaces and places, a point driven home in Carter and McCormack’s (2005) treatment of the film, Black Hawk Down, in relation to U.S. involvement in Somalia.

It is interesting to observe lingering attachment to the separation of the real and mediated in relation to place. An example can be found in remarks about thinned-out places made by the philosopher Ed Casey (2001, 684-685) in the course of elaborating his phenomenological schema of the ‘geographical self’:

It would follow that thinned-out places are those in which the densely enmeshed infrastructures of the kind Heidegger discusses are missing. Not only do such places not contain strictly, as on Aristotle’s model, they do not even hold, lacking the rigor and substance of thickly lived places. … Think of the way in which programs on television or items on the Web melt away into each other as we switch channels or surf at leisure. In such circumstances, there is a notable lability of place that corresponds to a fickle self who seeks to be entertained: the “aesthetic self” as Kierkegaard might call it. The collapse of the kind of surface that is capable of keeping something within … correlates with a self of infinite distractibility whose own surface is continually complicated by new pleasures: in short, a self that has become (in Deleuze and Guattari’s term) a “desiring machine” (emphasis in original).

This passage seemingly rests upon an all-too-tidy separation of real and mediated or virtual place, diminishing the latter vis-à-vis the former. Casey goes on to offer hope that all is not lost in the postmodern desert: “The more places are leveled down,
the more—not the less—may selves be led to seek out thick places in which their own personal enrichment can flourish” (p. 685). The self, says Casey, “is now able to move between virtual space and actual places—i.e. a space that does not require full engagement versus places that do…” (p. 685-686). Casey concludes this section of the essay equivocally, tacking a tad more favorably toward the virtual: “Despite an affinity for thick places, the contemporary self can flourish even in spaces that are disembodied, virtualized, and notably thin” (p. 686).

I quote Casey at some length to illustrate ambiguities and devilish difficulties in approaching place in binary fashion: real-virtual, thick-thin. How would a person weaned and fully immersed in the digital world and the Internet, for example, respond to Casey’s argument that she is navigating thinned-out spaces lacking in rigor and substance, that these navigations do not entail full engagement in the world, that her travels and experiences in virtual environments should be a springboard for more meaningful incorporation in real, thickly lived places? Would such questions register as intelligible?

A recent issue of the journal *Erdkunde* champions and celebrates the arrival of film geography as a bona fide subfield (Lukinbeal and Zimmermann 2006; Aitken and Dixon 2006). The celestial fire burns bright in film. This chimes with rising concerns regarding affect and emotion in human geography (e.g. Anderson and Smith 2001; Thrift 2004; Davidson, Biondi and Smith 2005; Woodward, forthcoming). This is the direction in film geography that I find most innervating. Film engenders powerful affective currents and fields that are amplified and channeled in particular directions, constituting emotions when registered within bodies (Massumi 2002b; Carter and McCormack, 2005). Nowhere is this demonstrated with greater intensity than in Stuart Aitken’s (2007) deft treatment of Christopher Nolan’s disturbing film *Memento*.

Reading Brian Massumi’s (2002) book, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, was a mind expanding experience that launched me on a journey of Bergsonian-Deleuzian delight (Deleuze 2006, 1986; Massumi 2002a; Connolly 2002; Bogue 2003). Can an exploration of this ilk prove inevitable for anyone intrigued by society, culture and film? A morsel of this intrigue is provided by Deleuze in his final essay before his suicide, “Immanence: A Life” (Deleuze 2005, 31), part of his effort to flesh out the concept of the virtual:

> A life contains only virtuals. It is made up of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane that gives it its particular reality. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen.

I close with a Bergson-inspired observation: our passage through time and space is
not a succession of states; our experience is that of duration, a dynamic continuation of movement and sensation. Is it any wonder, then, that geographers turn to film in practicing and performing their art?

References


As a child, I remember fighting exceedingly hard to create and maintain an emotional ‘locatedness’ as I encountered the multitude of moving images (animated and fiction) rushing through me. I grew up a part of the fabled television and blockbuster film generation during the late 1970s and 1980s, where the television stayed on from the wee hours of the day and into late parts of the night—ultimately becoming the altar (and alter) of our shared living space—as important a social contributor and mediator of major familial disputes and resolutions as any of us were. Most meals, birthdays, family and social gatherings, etc. were performed with the TV on. Homework always seemed to be done with one eye on whatever program was on. My brothers and I sometimes fought with one hand on the remote control and the other with a fist clinched or grasping some part of the other’s body. Remote controls did not last long in my home. Typically they were thrown at the other person or against a wall when things got really bad. I lost count after remote control number four. Other times, watching television for my brothers and I was more important than the fight at hand. The remote control was then used for defensive purposes, transforming it into a shield (as nobody wanted to hit the person holding the remote and access to the television). In all, the remote control helped materialize the perpetual power struggle my brothers and I were engaged in.

When things got really intense within my family we would just ‘tune into’ the television and ‘tune out’ each other and whatever personal, familial, or social problem going on that particular day. Sometimes it was as easy as a commercial break ensuing or a program ending that would move and lessen the intensity just enough to give family and social life another go. Sometimes, however, a Tide or Life cereal commercial or the ending of Matlock or The Jeffersons didn’t have enough mustard to hold our bodies and our emotions captive to move us through into a new space with the relational issues at hand. On those nights, it was not uncommon to wake up in the middle of the night and
see my entire family all passed out in the living room with the television still on. We were all kind of stubborn in that way. Other times, when a program like *All in the Family* was dealing with a similar issue that we were, the fight we thought we moved on from would be reborn anew, gaining in size and power, and boil over into the viewing space itself. Eventually, when we started to fight over what to watch we were all given our own televisions for our bedrooms. Our televisions grew in size and number.

The media field that the television produced was a part of the fabric of my home life and was integral in (re) shaping it. We had other activities and things going on as well (cooking, cleaning, board and video games, Nerf hoop, animals, etc.) However, by ‘turning on’ the TV, it was like we were ‘turning into’ our own social field and family issues. We connected ourselves to this affective media field and inside, as we dwelled in and moved through that intense space, we made new connections with each other and were able to move ourselves and whatever family issues that plagued us from one emotional space to another, from one family body to another. In this way, the social production and media production were not two separate and distinct spatial or affective production bodies. Both fields connected to the pulse intensity of the other and were affected as the other one moved.

We can look geographically at the same situation and suggest that both fields (media and social) fold into and affect the perception, substance, and power of the other. Local cable companies, at least as they apply to my family, have been a major force in the creation of both therapeutic and perilous spaces for American families. Such a conceptual movement suggests that the television (if not all media) function as a therapeutic, perilous, contentious, but always productive and intensive force/space.

My parents, divorced when I was five, would set off to work as I awoke. Instead of a babysitter (which could not be afforded), my brother and I were pushed out from the bed and situated in front of the TV, given a kiss goodbye and told to ‘plug’ ourselves into the set until it was time to either catch the bus to school or wait for them to return from work. Maybe this had to do with the notion that in these early years I grew up in some unsafe neighborhoods, living around some seedy dudes, had issues of tardiness and truancy at school, experimented with cigarettes and chewing tobacco, loved sugar and video arcades, and took a liking to shoplifting at the local supermarkets and music stores. My mom was also not particularly fond of some of my choices in friends and felt that the safest place for me was inside the home and in front of a TV.

Various PBS programs such as *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*, and *The Electric Company*, numerous cartoons (*Looney Tunes*, *Transformers*, G.I. Joe etc) and rerun television programs from the 1950s (*I Love Lucy*), 1960s (*Star Trek*), and 1970s (*Happy Days*) paralleled and connected to the production of child/parent spaces I had going on at the time. For a long time, I felt that I was being a ‘good boy’ in the eyes of my mom the longer I stayed ‘tuned in’ and connected to this particular media field. Besides the sports section of the newspaper the only other book I read with any conviction was
the *tv Guide*. *tv Guide* became the prime social and parental directive for me, as it not only affected what I did (to go outside and play or not), but whom I hung out with (to become friends with people who watched the same programs as me), for how long (was hanging out with friends talking about the programs actually better than watching them?), and when I would go to bed because *Love Boat*, *Fantasy Island*, and *Dukes of Hazzard* were usually on at 9 or 10 pm). I am not ashamed to say that I may have had some issues of addiction to television by the age of five.

Out of this emerged interesting geographies that actualized a positive evolution between me and the television and the television to my world. For me, watching television was more than escapism from the perilous spaces that surrounded me growing up. It became a space of/for becoming: a productive affective media field that my world grew from with every encounter I had with different people and places my parents could not offer or afford. Such a flowing and folding (actual to virtual and virtual to actual) affective media field pushed me into new spaces. My body became a part of the sensual fabric of the moving imagery (ideas, people, places, and the human imagination) as the television became part of my body as an extension of the social spaces off screen. The notion of an affective media field is a nomadic space where moving imagery and moving viewer flow or fold into these spaces in a multitude of ways and conditions. Both bodies (viewing and image) pass through and take a line of flight through the material/affecting body of the other and are changed.

Connecting my body to this affective and affecting, intensive, or sensual surface (media body/pace/field) was something I experimented with during my childhood. I used to see how close I could put my face to the television screen and still be able to see and perceive the moving images and when I would go to the movies as a kid I would sit in the first row. Most of the time, I had to turn down the volume and be mindful about static electricity. At best, I could watch a half hour program this way before my eyes were burning and my neck hurt. While not my intent, what I was actually doing was experimenting with various mediated geographies of perception and affect. What I did not realize was that this was more of a Cartesian exercise than a Deleuzian one. This scared the crap out of my dad. If I could have entered the television as a virtual body and left my ‘real’ life behind I surely would have given it a go. In many ways the Internet (chat rooms, online gaming, search engines, pornography, and MySpace) and digital media sources (DVDS) now allow us to dwell: we can belong to virtual social networks. We can navigate our bodies in virtual spaces.

My father was a force with my evolving life as television body. He quickly became worried not so much by the amount of time I spent watching television but with regards to how ‘close’ I sat to the television. The old adage of protecting young boys from the electromagnetic energy being emitted by the television was something I guess my dad had heard or read somewhere. This old adage later morphed into a much more profound message my dad was imparting to me as a young boy: not to allow
the connections (emotions, body, and mind) I made with the various stories, places, and characters embedded in the sensual spaces of television and movies to have lasting affects on me in my life. It was as if he believed I could connect to the intensive flow of moving images and not be moved by them. I used to ask him if he was human.

For example, my father would always say, “we watch television and go to the movies to be entertained, escape from our worries, and relax, not to come out of that engagement all worked up, in tears, distraught, and overjoyed.” His position was that if I couldn’t watch television or movies without expressing extreme emotion (cf. Thrift 2004 and his notion of universal emotions) then I was not allowed to watch television or go to the movies, at least not with him. Thinking back, maybe this is why he always took me to see comedy films like *Caddyshack* (1980) or feel-good dramas like *Rocky* (1976) instead of feature films such as *Platoon* (1986) or *Blue Velvet* (1985) that took on socially and politically charged issues dealing with gender, war, addiction, sexuality, disability/mental health, and racism.

And so I learned at a very young age that being moved and expressing emotions from a film or a television program were the sorts of things young boys just don’t do. For years, my dad had me believe that it was I, the viewer and consumer of media, who held the power over images in terms of dissecting their meaning (structural semiotics), directing how they moved through me, connected to my world and the spaces from which I dwell (home, work, school to name a few), and ultimately registered with me emotionally. I guess he did not realize, as I did later, that there is an intensive geography that is created when viewing movies and television for its productive tendencies, as both art and force. The sensual surface of the screen is something that we as viewers become one with, shape, and are shaped by. Emotions connect us to this space: as we move with the images, we are affected in such a way that our bodies and the spaces they are partially connected to change and produce.

In this way, media expressions, in the same way as maps, art, or cinema, are always coming to be when they connect with users/consumers. We take the images, messages, and feelings we get and ingest those images, message, and feelings into our bodies and lives in such a way that they travel and morph way beyond the initial intentions of their makers. It is true that media produces things and invents new space-time social-cultural worlds. The media geography I imagine is forever flowing, sometimes redirected, but always doing something. One direction I take in my own research is conceptualizing and creating new geographies: mapping the productive tendencies of media, the interrelations that connect image and society, and the affective processes that bind media and social production together.

Interestingly, there are some parallels between the evolution of geographic thought and that production of different forms of media itself when they are seen for their productive tendencies. For example, we have continuous innovations in cinematic production technologies and techniques (camera work, special effects,
improved audio systems, editing, and a movement from analog to digital to name a few). In geography, new theories, geographers, concepts, visualizations, social and spatial problems, technologies, and domains of study likewise have given rise to new ways of imagining, doing, and creating geography. Aether is in many ways is a reflection of this very process. What started out as film geography in the mid 1990s has evolved into geographies of journalism, marketing, newspapers, photography, video, internet, gaming, geovisualization, music, and television. And as we have seen in the journals in which this work is published and the various conference at which this work has been presented, these innovations in media production and media geography affect the production of society and space.

It is my hope that in keeping with a continuous ‘processual production’ in the creation of a media geography that takes on the notion of an affective and affecting media/social fields, we will be able to look to the affects of media and to what society is actually doing with its connections to the various media fields. How do media move us in our lives? What kinds of things do media produce? Compassion or empathy, political action, controversy, social change? What do we produce with the emotional spaces from which we emerge in this media(ted) relationship? How do media actualize a particular form of society and space that are different from other forces operating? In this way, media geography has the potential to explore the multiplicities of media as desiring machines, not only as a creative art, but also as a social force that affects the formation and becomings of society and space.

So what might this work look like? Currently there has been a rush of interesting work going on in geography exploring the affective and emotional geographies of media (cf. Aitken 2007a, 2007b, Aitken and Dixon 2006, Doel and Clarke 2007. Craine 2006). Other work I find of interest is the conceptualization of what Mark Hansen (2006) and other new media theorists call the transcendental conditions of media experience, the work of Katherine Hayles (2004) and her post-human discussions of bio-mediated bodies, and other projects exploring various social geographies of media production and consumption. I am also intrigued with the creation of a geography of media where geographers produce media fields through video, the internet, photography, music and Aether will certainly provide a venue for this type of research. I am hopeful that Aether will bring about new and exciting forms in the expression and legitimacy of this burgeoning field of media to geography and geography to media. Massumi (2002,13) says, “Media producers use techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add to reality.” Similarly, the creation and evolution of media geography has the potential to add something to the reality of the body geographic. And so I am excited about this burgeoning field in geography—for its productivity.
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A professor in one of my film courses once asked if we get lost in the movies. By ‘lost’ she meant being immersed in the intentionalities and problematics of the film’s narrative structure that sutures you to its story and makes one forget about the political economy involved behind the creation of that particular film. In thinking through my own experiences, I thought Sofia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation* (2003) speaks volumes about loneliness in a foreign land—a position I was in during the first semester I entered graduate school. The protagonist’s labyrinthine journey in the maze of Tokyo’s business district found a correlative expression in my own mournful solitude in the sea of whiteness in my new university. The real and the reel followed different paths but somehow collided and created a city of sadness leading me to wonder what particularities of Coppola’s artistic and personal politics enabled her to capture the exact shade of sadness in the film that a Filipino like myself also felt.

Pauline Kael (1965) has taught me that a film can be a cultural text that need not follow a formula to be dissected and discussed. This position clearly challenges everything that creates monolithic blocks of theory that taxonomically classifies films for whatever purpose and for whom it will be useful—from the auteur theorization Andrew Sarris helped to develop in 1962 to Siegfried Kracauer’s seminal *Theory of Film* (1960). It emboldens me to evaluate Filipino filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik’s *Mababangong Bangungot* (*Perfumed Nightmare*, 1976) not only through Bakhtins’s notion of the carnivalesque but also through other approaches. These approaches are not necessarily glimpsed via the lenses of say, a displaced Filipino national or of a diasporic subject experiencing transnational melancholia. *Mababangong Bangungot* opens up a space where Marcosian jokes that are phenomenologically embedded in the consciousness of anyone growing up during the Martial Law years are trans-textually employed in the playful use of the local language that simultaneously captures and eludes the texts’
'official' subtitles. After Fredric Jameson (1992) presented the film and Kidlat Tahimik as art-naif in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), various other voices came to offer different readings. For sure, the film’s palimpsest narration and guerilla aesthetics of ‘found footage’ accommodate a range of textual investigations and cultural mediations from various geopolitical spaces. Kidlat himself confessed to me in 2006 in Manila that he does not understand the polemical works being written about *Mababangong Bangungot*. Or in his words: “*Nagkaroon ng sariling buhay ang pelikulang ‘yan*” (That film has taken a life of its own outside of me). As my own personal sojourns and explorations in film unfolded, I became enraptured with the various forms of ‘national’ cinemas. However unique they may be perceived in terms of thematics as lensed through their own brand of cinematics, I realized much later on that ascribing a specific national style for the films a particular country produces can be problematic: it perpetuates the notion that some kind of meta-narrative is responsible that mediates in the national cinematic articulation (Bhabha 1990). Someone asked me if I thought Alejandro Gonzalez Iñarritu’s *Amores Perros* (2000) is idiomatically Mexican. Can it also be Canadian? By extending this question, is the concept of national cinema still useful? Can there ever be a national cinema? It depends who is speaking. When you employ Marc Auge’s theory of non-places, things show some ruptures and slippages. Non-places dislocate the embeddedness of ‘national’ signifiers because of the former’s homogenized and anodyne qualities (Auge 1992). Looking at scenes showing terminals and supermarkets in *Amores Perros*, the space ceases to be associated with a country as these non-places of uniform culture manage to disorient the viewers away from the country the film hails from. Non-places also operate outside the realm of cinema: in the foyers of five-star hotels, the central business districts, theme parks and even in the iconographies used in the internet that offers service, information or mediated forms of gratification. Non-places never truly erase the referents but imbues these ‘national’ signifiers a gradual disappearance. (Auge 1992) Once when I was standing in line for a Danish film, a moviegoer remarked to me that to him all films at their base are alike. His statement was similar to what a news journalist said at the conclusion of Danis Tanovic’s *No Man’s Land* (2001). When asked by a cameraman if he will film the trench where a bloody confrontation took place minutes ago to give legitimization to the place, the news journalist replied: “No, a trench is a trench. They’re all the same.” *No Man’s Land’s* titular place located between the borders of Serbia and Bosnia was actually shot in Slovenia. Does this ‘crime against geography’ matter to most moviegoers? Chris Lukinbeal (2005) has argued that geographic realism remains valid only among viewers if the narrative assists in the construction (and perpetuation) of the ontologically authentic. On the other hand, Kracauer observed that a particular kind of soul permeates a cinematic image with the use of the actual and real landscape. But this also begs a further question: real to whom? The world of media has offered
countless examples how new spaces opened up to create newer ones by utilizing the same codes and indexical likeness to replicate the original ones. Indeed, No Man’s Land’s geographic no-man’s land serves as a postmodern and hyperrealist region that stands for everything and nothing at the same time. Like being home and abroad at the same time; simultaneously foreign and native.

The various constructs accorded to a continually shifting definition of ‘foreign’ (like in the case of foreign films) beg to ask what constitutes ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ (Harbord 2007). The word ‘foreign’ implicates an exclusion, closed boundaries and of being outside of the national boundaries of a given country (although one can argue that the diasporic and exilic films remain in the middle despite various degrees of assimilation) (Naficy 2001). While contexts play a crucial role in the definition, what does it say about the complexity of foreign interventions and co-productions when members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences reject Switzerland’s submission of Krzysztof Kieslowski’s Rouge (1994) as that country’s entry to the Foreign Language category? The director was a Polish national while the film’s language is in French. Filming location was in Geneva. Which country has the ‘rightful’ jurisdiction to claim this film as theirs? The Academy members stated that issues of ‘artistic control’ were not met hence the film’s disqualification as Switzerland’s entry. It seems that Rouge has entered a no-man’s land from the perspective of the mostly North American members of the Academy. Janet Harbord (2007,11) says: “[M]any films contain an acknowledgment of their alterity within the text itself, an acknowledged ‘foreignness’ that prefigures and confronts its perceived ‘foreignness’ to be met in its journeys of circulation.”

Rob Marshall’s screen adaptation of Arthur Golden’s Memoirs of a Geisha (2005) offers an interesting parallel. A mostly Chinese cast (and Hollywood mainstays) instead of Japanese actors played the lead roles. Moviegoers I talk to do not care much about verisimilitude that may evade cinematic capture as long as the image makes a lasting impression. Does that signal the triumph of affect over realist registers? When a movie provides a good story with engaging performances, audience members I talk to are less concerned about what goes on behind production and creation. The finished product is consumed and there is less interest for its subsequent worldwide circulation. Or enough about Third Cinema’s manifesto extolling the virtue of the film’s radical becoming via community efforts rather than as a commodity that ensures capitalism’s stranglehold of the world and its culture. After all, No Man’s Land won the Best Foreign Language Oscar in 2001 while the issue hounding Memoirs of a Geisha and its controversial casting decision were smoothed over by favorable box-office receipts on its opening weekend.

I am still wary about films when I read of their claims to greatness. Much as I champion unheralded films with their own grassroots financing, or those coming from other countries with fledgling movie industries, I am also aware of my fetishization for these types of films. Some of these subtitled films are hegemonic in their own countries of origin, quashing independent efforts that may not have the machinery to
move beyond the national border for circulation and distribution. The rise of digital films along with the rise of micro-fabric-based media forms has transformed everyday landscapes and altered the way we view films. Or as Janet Harbord (2007, 39) says: “one of the most critical tasks that a film performs is a question of how we thread together the differences that we come in contact with, or conversely how social, cultural and ethnic differences are to be comprehended as beyond our repertoire of experience.”

I am excited that Aether is creating a space to critically engage with the future directions and trajectories of media geography and providing a site to re-visit and re-engage with older debates. My interest in film as a form of media and the global path it has taken has allowed me to investigate slippages and ruptures on issues of identity, border crossing, hybridity and transculturation. I always remember that defining final scene in Walter Salles’ Diarios de Motocicleta (2004) when the pre-revolutionary Che Guevarra swam the Amazon in an effort to shatter, break and transgress the borders to be with the lepers whose voices are muted or not heard. It is therefore exciting to see how the film’s texts and contexts create an alternative map that allows affect, landscape, metaphor, and subjectivity to freely chart its own path and draw its own cartographic line.

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Blame Sergio Leone. It was his film *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) that lured me down the rabbit hole. The journey began innocently enough (as most do) with a simple question. The naïveté of wondering “Why would an Italian make a Western?” quickly evolved, however, into the much more engaging inquiry “What was happening in Italy during the 1960s that propelled a score of predominantly southern Italian directors to make over four hundred ‘Spaghetti Westerns’?” This original desire to locate the cultural, economic, and historical motivations behind the utilization (and deconstruction) of the myths of the American West has grown into an obsessive quest to illuminate the substantial role that films have played in the creation and manipulation of place-based identities. Towards this end, I have focused on exposing the inextricable relationship between the development and popularity of Italian film genres and the distinct socio-economic and political periods of Italian post-war development from which they emerge and, most importantly, transform.

In the broadest sense I consider myself a historical geographer. More specifically, my research employs a historiographic framework informed by underlying concerns for the political, cultural, and economic processes of representation of imagining and concretizing identity at various geographic scales. These are processes in that their existence as hegemonic constructs of inside/outside continually requires regeneration given the practical and symbolic contestation with which they are faced. To clarify further, it is the recent past, the history of living memories so to speak, that interests me most. Identified in this way, it is easy to correlate how the processes of representation that anchor my research—of imagining and sustaining the ideology of the national, regional, and local—are directly related to the associative process of globalization, including that phenomenon’s effect on cultural and political identities and the re-imagining of place in the late twentieth century.
Throughout my research on post-World War II Italian regionalism, cinema has proven to be an invaluable and undeniable analytic and descriptive tool. There are two primary reasons for this: First, like so many iconic representations of place ranging from propagandist pamphlets and posters to travel brochures (replete with picturesque photographs) to monuments and maps, cinema is a visual medium. This is obvious. However, the semiotics of cinema extends beyond the purely visual, incorporating the linguistic (auditory) and behavioral (gestural) as well. Combined with the movement of the individual frames, the medium imbues an air of authenticity—a depiction of the real rivaled only by the subsequent development and diffusion of television. Without going as far as Pier Paolo Pasolini, who proclaimed that “cinema represents reality with reality itself,” films exist, in a purely descriptive sense, as documents of acutely specific historical times and places. Of course, this documentation is manifested in varying degrees of discernment and empirical usefulness, from a rather low level visible in the most escapist fictional films to a potentially high level rendered by films classified as “documentaries.” But what is this evidence that films ‘document’? In the most basic geographical sense, any film shot on-location captures a spatio-temporal picture of the physical landscape (the setting), allowing one to ‘locate’ via comparison the degree of natural and/or human-induced stability or change of a place. Socially and culturally, films contain evidence of time- and place-specific social relations because regardless of plot or narrative, they offer socio-cultural identifiers in both objects (the clothes, cars, appliances, for instance) and the behavior of people (the dialect they speak, their occupations, their actions and the objects they use which the viewer is able to associate with a particular class, ethnic group, etc.). Naturally, as with any other media source, the utilization of films as primary historiographic texts requires a researcher capable of locating representative works, usually those with the greatest visibility and commercial success or an identifiable cultural-political impact by the film or its author.

In truth, the unearthing of appropriate film sources for historical geographic research can be simplified and made less subjective. This brings me to my second point. Over the past twenty-odd years, a handful of geographers have critically examined the geography of, and in, films. By doing so, they have created a tapestried analytical blueprint that informs our utilization of the cinematic medium in geographic forays varying from an emphasis on the aesthetic, humanistic, and political to the iconic and purely spatial. Thirteen years later, the collection of essays compiled by Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn (1994) still remains a seminal text within the discipline. Although the continued engagement with film by geographers is both encouraging and enlightening, I feel that a deep void still exists in scope. The vast majority of geographic research to date has focused on either individual films or directors. As a guilty party myself, I am certainly not slighting this approach. Yet, in a sense, this limits us to a particularism that denies the power that films, as cultural and often ideological products of mass consumption possess, through their ability to reiterate and transform our relationships
to other human beings and to the physical world. By extending our attention to film genres, we are able to encompass both greater time frames for understanding the social construction of place and more holistic considerations of recurrent viewpoints relative to changing socio-economic and political situations. This is because genres, in their persistence and unity of technique and/or content often elucidate the deepest and most tenacious cultural issues of a given time. Although geographers have made this call before, the formation of "Aether: Journal of Media Geography" entices me to make it again with the hope that these pages will be filled with a multitude of responses.

On the topic of calls, there is another void within the modes of geographic scholarship that Aether has the potential to fill and this is in the making of films and videos themselves. There is no doubt that today the channels of exchange within the communicative realm (at least in the developed world) are predominantly visual, owing to the combination of television and cinema and most recently the global diffusion of the Internet. Although the academic credibility of a multitude of television broadcasts and certain cyber alleyways is dubious at best, it is undeniable that both platforms contribute greatly to the construction of beliefs we hold about peoples and places. If we acknowledge this basic affectability then it remains a curiosity that we have done relatively little as a discipline to provide more empirically sound and complex geographic concepts for mass consumption. A connection to geographic principles is too often deferred to the reasoning and will of the spectator in that the viewer is ultimately asked to derive associations on their own between the visual geographic elements contained in non-geographical and non-critical representations and the (f)actual relevance of such depictions or themes. What is being offered in great doses as “geographical” amounts to little more than eco-porn, a natural-world voyeurism heavy on slow-motion panning shots and seductive (yet vapid) voice-over narration.

This void in film and video production by geographers surely can no longer be ascribed to a fear of subjectivity, an inherent characteristic of film and video media. If all the post-‘isms’ have collectively shown us anything, it is that the presentation/representation/historicization of reality is always subjective. Documentaries ‘document’ only one specific view of reality considering that it would take an infinite number of cameras and angles to objectively represent a single time- and place-specific action. The editing process itself requires choices of inclusion/exclusion and narrative structuring that are made according to the ideological goals of an individual or group, as every material work is meant to convey something.

If at one time the means of making films (particularly of the celluloid kind) was economically unfeasible, it is no longer the case. The advent of digital video has rendered possible a lens for tens of millions of people in the last decade. If we hesitate due to a perceived lack of technical know-how it is a shame. One needs to look no further than the hundreds of untrained Nigerians (of all ages) who contribute to the expansive growth of Nollywood or the daily uploaded video dairies put together by children...
living in the favelas of São Paolo. The individuals participating in these endeavors have the desire to make known the characteristics that define their experiences with the social and physical settings in which they live and they have done this via visual media outlets that provide a high level of engagement and exposure. Why shouldn’t we?
Swinging at the State:
Media, Surveillance and Subversion

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In a mediated world, the opposite of real isn’t phony or illusional or fictional—it’s optional.

Thomas de Zengotita, Mediated

Not long ago, I sat down with a security consultant for a public housing provider, inside a crumbling late modernist high rise located in one of the postwar suburbs of what is now formally known as the City of Toronto. The consultant wanted to show me the Closed Circuit Television (cctv) system the housing provider had recently installed in this catchment area. After several minutes spent scanning live images from each of the 29 cameras, I inquired as to whether these images were recorded. They certainly were, and our gaze promptly switched to some archived footage. Within seconds, we were observing two youth in a concerted quest to destroy one of the cameras. The youth began their mission with a quick survey of the architecture of the device. Next, they scanned the ground, selecting large stones within the immediate area which they then hurled at the casing surrounding the actual recording apparatus. With this casing dislodged, the youth alternated hoisting each other onto a door ledge to provide the necessary leverage they needed to swing a baseball bat—which had been resting idly against the wall—directly onto the camera itself. Finally, after several swings, the screen in front of us abruptly blackened. The movements of the youth were methodical and unhurried. They made no effort to conceal their identities—if I were to see them later on the street or in the park I would have easily been able to congratulate (or condemn) them on their undertaking.

CCTV systems, as we know, are a means of surveillance. But they are also agents of mediation. Rather than a neutral recording device designed to enhance ‘community safety’, they have the capacity to reify human relations so that they appear...
as relationships between things. In doing so they produce representations of ‘events’ to be viewed, interpreted, and acted upon. The remarkable things about the footage I describe above was its ability to render visible the transformation of such relations by inverting them. Watching it, I became acutely aware that as the viewer, I, in fact, was what was ‘represented’ and they—the youth—the ‘reality’. No longer was the cctv device simply a means to record reality, but an object that actively constituted that reality. By destroying the instrument that marked my presence as a viewer, the youth effectively made me present, exposing the mediating agent as a determining factor of the event itself. Such exposés are unsustainable however, precisely because formally recognizing them as such would reveal that perceptions of events matter far more than the actuality of their production. cctv, not unlike other forms of media, could never endure such an epistemological blow.

We can imagine this relation, for instance, when we ask what role the mediating agent—the cctv system—might play when these youth are brought to court to face their pending charges. Will it figure centrally in the production of this footage, particularly as it is both the subject and object of the event in the first place? Or will the visual media itself—the footage from the cctv system—be the focus? If it is the latter case what will most likely be distilled from this footage? An act of ‘masculine’ violence and aggression against private property? Or will the youth be deemed ‘at risk’, their actions pathologized through their socio-economic class, citizenship status, ‘race’, or literally ‘place’ as residents of a decaying public housing high-rise amidst an isolating suburban landscape? If however, the mediating agent does work its way centrally into the analysis—will the judge then cry out: ‘What in the world was this camera doing there in the first place when the only thing it’s managed to capture in its miserable existence is its own annihilation?’

My point is that visual media encourages the viewer to separate what is represented from the actuality of its production—the systemic interlocking of class, race, and gender; the historical and contemporary geographies of uneven development in the city and beyond. Paradoxically, while the youths’ act of aggression is embedded in the contemporary social ordering of Toronto’s inner suburbs, deriving such a representation from the footage gleaned off the cctv would be remarkable precisely because cctv was never intended to offer that. Rather, the system was designed primarily as a preemptive security mechanism, much like the one, for example, that recorded the London Bombers in the early morning of July 7th, 2006 (the footage of which was projected relentlessly around the globe). Indeed, rather than preventing crime and promoting safety these devices have become yet another instrument crafting our aestheticized global imaginary—producing ‘authentic’ visual media to bloat the ideological bowels of state security.

There are, however, emergent signs of subversion. While smashing the 700 plus cameras installed in Toronto’s public housing properties may seem like a daunting
task, even with such stellar swings, Austrian filmmaker Manu Luksch’s science fiction film *Faceless* is rooted in a similar desire to undermine the rise of visual media in the service of social order. Produced under the guidelines of the ‘Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers’, the film was entirely composed of CCTV images obtained through the UK’s Data Protection Act. Under this Act, any individual has the right to access surveillance camera footage of his/herself (a right that those who produce such images were none too willing to oblige). While one of the film’s reviewers suggests the beauty of *Faceless* lies in its ability to transform a visual medium into something for which it was not intended, I would argue that the film does precisely the opposite—it reveals just how CCTV is not simply an agent of law and order but also *an increasingly powerful aesthetic device*. Commenting for example, on how the film dwells on ‘the everyday’ rather than the sensational, this same reviewer goes on to note: ‘We were half expecting some bland, grey scene of a truck passing or a person entering a tube station to suddenly erupt in the staggered crimson frames of a terrorist explosion...’ (Frost 2006, emphasis added). Such expectations demonstrate how the production and circulation of visual media from CCTV sets structural limits to our urban public imaginary. *Faceless* on the other hand, gleans its CCTV footage from banal experiences and mundane spaces of the city, and in doing so, counters the tendency of this media to reify social relations. The film prompts us to ask why we now expect the sensational and in whose interests such expectations serve.

To be sure, when I asked the security consultant who’d shown me the video of the youth if what we’d seen was representative of the kind of footage held in the archive, the response was: ‘No way, the most common violation we record is illegal dumping. But you don’t want to see that do you?’

**ENDNOTES**

1The Manifesto “declares a set of rules, establishes effective procedures, and identifies further issues for filmmakers using pre-existing CCTV (surveillance) systems as a medium in the UK. The manifesto is constructed with reference to the Data Protection Act 1998 and related privacy legislation that gives the subjects of data records (including CCTV footage) access to copies of the data. The filmmaker’s standard equipment is thus redundant; indeed, its use is prohibited. The manifesto can easily be adapted for different jurisdictions”
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**FILMOGRAPHY**

A few weeks ago, I was flying to visit some friends, and on the plane with me were two teenagers excitedly and loudly anticipating their first flight. With a clear sky and mild weather, it was a perfect day for flying: good news for these teens, I thought. As the plane took off, I heard one of the novice travelers remark to the other, Woah! It looks just like Google Earth! (It helps if you imagine Keanu Reeves saying this.) As the full implications of this utterance hit me, I felt a lot like the character in that clip; waking up into a whole new understanding. Woah! I thought. This is what Baudrillard was writing about in 1994; and what a great opening gambit for my *Aether* essay!

This perspective—where terra Google precedes terra firma—exemplifies some of my interests in media geography. For me, Google Earth is a map, with all of the (in)accuracies and (re)presentational qualities that maps communicate. Despite my interest in critical cartographies, I still have a special place in my heart for the romantic positivist notion that maps are first and foremost representative of reality. Put another way, Google Earth is a simulation to me: it is analogous to reality. "It looks just like Google Earth!" signals a complete, Baudrillardian inversion of my guilty pleasure. Google Earth becomes simulacra: the earth—the signified—subordinated to the signifier. The earth itself becomes the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1994).

I’m interested in these intersections between the physical and the digital; the intangible and the material. Lev Manovich (2002) once remarked that although the 1990s were the decade of the virtual, this would be the decade of the real (2002). It’s also been suggested that the next evolution of the Internet will be primarily semantic and geospatial (a.k.a. “Web 3.0”). The questions implicit in future new media are many: What happens to our socio-spatial interactions when our pendular, and increasingly communicative and social mobilities, are informed, guided, and mediated through code?; how will we continue to negotiate public and private—any kind of differential—spaces?; what new social practices will we develop around this technology?; how can we educate learners to think and compose for, through, and with new media?
It’s obvious that cartography and spatial philosophy have much to contribute to explorations of these questions, especially because when we speak of the digital, it’s very much like speaking of the “informational,” and in speaking of the relationship between the digital and the physical, there is a clear parallel to our understanding of how our space is informed and how we are informed about our space.

A striking example of the intertwining between the digital and the physical is observed in a new type of media termed hybrid reality games (de Souza e Silva & Delacruz, 2006). Hybrid reality games (HRGs) are played on location-aware mobile devices with Internet connections (e.g., most new cell phones). A digital gamespace is overlaid on top of the urban cityscape. As the player moves through the city/game space in an HRG, game play can be hindered (or helped) by physical circumstances, such as road construction, traffic jams, or back-alley shortcuts. Meanwhile, the game objectives themselves can encourage new types of mobilities through the urban landscape (the Situationists are often alluded to in the literature on HRGs and other mobile, location-based games). Players may travel to an unfrequented, out-of-the-way part of the city to complete a goal. Through these games, physical reality and digital representation are not opposed; they are merged. There are also some HRGs that are simultaneously played by stationary players on a home Internet connection and mobile players on mobile Internet connections. In one game, the stationary players are information-rich and the mobile players are information-poor; so the two must work together to complete the game objectives. In such a game, there is a multiplicity of no fewer than four spaces, each with different points of convergence and divergence; each requiring navigation and negotiation between the players. Hence, these HRGs illustrate not only how space can be produced (multiplied, divided, emulsified); but also how spaces are simultaneously communicative and social.

HRGs can help us interrogate how the information we have, changes our experience of space and our social dynamics. While HRG players can interact with physically distant people, they can also be socially distant to people who are physically close, precisely because of the different ways each person’s space is informed. There are many other possibilities of how our space will become informed in the future: from GPS navigational data, to consumer data that is merged with GPS (e.g., mobile Google Maps), to technology such as digital graffiti, which is like short message service (SMS), except it connects to a location, rather than a phone number. As our spaces are increasingly informed, it will be interesting to see how spaces become communicative and social in different ways. I think they will be more social in some ways and less so in others: likewise our mercurial notions of public/private. Maybe we’ll one day have the freedom of anonymity afforded by Internet avatars brought to our mobiles, and we’ll be inspired to more readily communicate with “strangers” that are nearby, with our avatar acting as a bridge between the physically close but socially distant (c.f. Simmel, 1950). Indeed, rather than bridging physical or temporal distance, our communication technologies
seem to be increasingly used to bridge social distance (Watts, 2003), if the popularity of social networks and online Massively Multiplayer Roleplaying Games (mmorpgs) is any indication. However, Danah Boyd (2007) has recently questioned whether social networks bridge economic digital divides, and the technology I’ll mention in closing adds a “picture-perfect” materiality to the question of digital divides. In this case, I’m not referring to economic digital divides, but to the informational-spatial divides I mentioned earlier, between multiple and multiply-informed spaces and the experiences of these spaces.

Just this morning, I came across kameraflage, a company designing reality augmentations that are mediated through digital cameras. With camera phones quickly becoming pervasive technology, this sort of digital invisible-ink has huge potential for widespread adoption. Indeed, the future ubiquity of camera phones is one of the selling points this company stresses. On this page, I find the order of “applications” compelling and provoking. The progression from cinema to public space to fashion reveals—literally—how technologies (the commercial, the informational, the digital) become inscribed on our media, on our spaces, and on our selves. Each differently augmented reality creates a different relationship to that space and to experiences of that space. Although you and I can be in the same “place,” new icts make me question whether we will ever be in the same “space” again, and I wonder about the communicative and social effects of these multiplicities of space. A multidisciplinary and multimodal journal like Aether is an ideal forum in which to approach these issues, and I’m looking forward to seeing revelatory scholarly and artistic contributions that will address media geography in creative and challenging ways. I don’t think it’d be inappropriate for me to wish, in closing, for a Woah! from every issue.

References
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 Raztel 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.

**References**


I am the archetypal suburban Los Angeles postwar baby boomer. Born in the summer of 1946 to one parent who could trace her heritage to both the Declaration of Independence and relatives who may have wandered the hills of Wales and a father born in Basra to a Russian father and Polish mother fleeing the Revolution, I am one of four children born within a short time to a homemaker and a father returning from the commitments of war. She was 17 and he 21 when they married the day of the invasion of Guadalcanal. We lived in a variety of Southern California suburbs, with the pilgrimage ending in Simi Valley, the prototypical suburb emerging from an exurb of walnut and orange groves. I graduated from the newly constructed High School in 1964.

We loved to go to the movies when I was a child, which we did intermittently. For years, the whole family would pack into the little pointed-nose red Studebaker, and later the stylishly-finned black and red Desoto, and go to the drive-in. Among these visits I can recollect a seemingly unremarkable and representative evening that for some reason is deeply embedded in my memory. Maybe it was the movie. My recent IMDB search tells me I was six.

We went to see *Singing in the Rain*. Of course, there were cartoons and likely another film, and maybe even a newsreel, but I mostly remember that particular film, eve, and place. It all began when the grounds were not yet dark and the air was still hot. Some popular but inane tunes and mnemonics for concessions played from the little speakers that attached to the slightly rolled up window while car headlights played on the screen. We were in our pajamas, but were allowed, nonetheless, to explore the playground equipment that was in front of the screen and to create new and fleeting friendships. As darkness settled in, lights flickered or horns tooted—I can’t remember which—and we knew it was time to return to the little red car, which was always parked in front of the concession and projection building, and was, we realized decades later,
packed ever so-tightly with our family of five; number six was born the next year. Of course, we systematically devoured the hotdogs, Coke, popcorn, and jujubees that came with the ritual. I’m sure I fell asleep before it was all over.

Despite falling for Debbie Reynolds and as much as I’ve always enjoyed Gene Kelly’s song and dance performance, surreally enhanced twenty years later by Stanley Kubrick, the memory was as much about the experience of the place as it was the film. The sights, sounds, smells, interactions and sheer excitement of being at the drive-in that one eve (as with others) was something we wanted to repeat again and again. But of course the family and times were changing. We finally got our TV, we became too big to tolerate being cramped into one space with siblings, and, well, we just outgrew it; there were so many other things to do. The experience we thought would never end did just that, and at the time we didn’t notice. A little over ten years later, I started going again, now as a teenager, but despite the new excitement and far different rituals of mid-1960s high school, the experience was different and for some reason was far less memorable. It was about something far more significant than the differences between *A Hard Day’s Night* and Gene Kelly.

Most of us have the tendency to take everyday places for granted, especially when the ritual of visiting the same kind of setting occurs regularly and in an environment that is seemingly generic in design. Watching a film at the local multiplex, in front of your own 42” flat screen TV, on a DVD player at 35,000 feet, or through the windshield of your car are place-based experiences that can become subtle yet integral and even defining features of our daily lived practices. The nature and source of these actions are deeply ingrained in the social and technological fabric of the country and beyond, and so shifts in the character of these practices are inevitable. Any seeming constancy of form and function should not be misconstrued as the status quo. Just as my high school visits to the drive-in had different contexts than a decade before, the recent and modest revival of the drive-in movie theater here in Texas, as in the case of *The Showboat Drive-in Theatre*, hardly (and fortunately) means that we are returning to the ’50s and ’60s. And so these three seemingly identical drive-ins are, of course, quite different from one another, unless a frozen vision of a landscape is the only issue of concern.

Clearly, watching movies is about place and experience, and the myriad of possibilities and stories that surround them fascinate me. As geographers, we are so often interested in the character of place-experience tales, and indeed they can often serve as a spark of interest, provide insight, and serve as a case in point, but without a broader focus of concern, they simply become anecdotes. My interest here, then, is with the ways in which filmic sites and their experiences are socially constructed through the intersections of historical, social, cultural and technological processes, even if an experience of a fleeting moment of one movie is the point of discussion.

Of course, the primary concern of film studies, including the geographic contribution, has been with the textual analysis of film, and there is no doubt that such
a view will and even should remain the preeminent concern. But, as Morely has stated, “...it is necessary to consider the context of viewing as much as the object of viewing” (Jancovich, et al, 2003, p. 11). I suggest that it is time for geographers to consider place-based ‘filmic sites’ as a means of acknowledging this context. In essence, then, the primary question here becomes: How are filmic sites and their respective experiences constructed and what do these place- and space-based processes tell us about the nature of cinema and its praxis as they are set within contemporary social, cultural and technological settings?

Frames and Sites

The range of theoretical frames that can be utilized for the study of filmic sites are almost as varied as the subjects of emphasis, and so, to begin, the experiential should not be privileged over the social theoretical, while a rigid division between the two should not be presumed. Study the site as you see fit, and be creative. That said, there is a literature of immediate and more empirical value that can be used in studies of filmic sites, including as introductory examples, the site as landscape (e.g., Jones 2003), the history of technology, film, and the audience (e.g., Allen 1979, 1980; Gomery 1992), and the film as consumption and experience (e.g., Corbett 1998-1999, 2001; Hiley 1999; Jancovich, et al 2003; and Waller 2001).

Given the complexities that face the research of filmic sites, allow me to suggest a broad organizing frame. I would like to begin with the essay by Dixon and Zonn (2004) in which we assume a broad-based cinematic network comprised of elements that are loosely connected by the flows of people, ideas, and things. The elements that comprise the heart of the network—technology, sites of exhibition, audience, the film, society/culture, and the industry—should be seen as primary, but not sole, points of reference. The resulting linkages and thus flows between them allow for a relational approach in which influences are considered without deterministic effects. We consider the writings of Latour (1997) only in the broadest sense of his constructs, and so we are interested in:

“... how people and things are placed in relation to one another, such that issues of inclusion and exclusion, hegemony and dependence, remain at the forefront of analysis. All phenomena in such a network...whether they be human or nonhuman, can be considered powerful in the sense that they operate as part of a collective to allow for a particular event to occur or entity to perform; in this sense, all such phenomena are of explanatory significance.”

(Dixon and Zonn 2004, 246)

And so I am interested in the study of the network and of the many intersections of culture, society, technology, environments, and audience as they physically and socially construct places and spaces of the cinematic experience. The film is not considered to
be a singular or discrete entity within this view, but instead becomes thoroughly and inseparably integrated into the multi-faceted process of filmic site construction. Each filmic site occupies a distinctive position within the network, then, and so each site is accompanied by a respective and idiosyncratic experience that in turn can be related to broader constructs.

So, where are these filmic sites? Contemporary venues might include your living room, your neighbor’s home theater, the classroom, the walk-in multiplex, the ‘revitalized downtown theater’, the mobile cinema found from Scotland to India, the DVD player being watched by four-year child on a transnational flight, the charge-at-the-door Nollywood film in someone’s home in Lagos, the sheet between trees at the city park for a summer eve, and on my iPod, wherever I choose. Historical venues might include the penny arcade, horse-drawn traveling picture shows of the early 20th century, and the drive-in of the 1930s, 1950s, 1960s, and 2000s America. Each may be studied as a unique entity or it may be part of a larger systematically framed work.

And now imagine filmic sites in cinema, whereupon the site becomes a text within a text. Here the lessons learned on the construction of place can be reintegrated into the film itself. Mainstream examples abound, starting with Cinema Paradiso, The Last Picture Show, and the Purple Rose of Cairo. For a yet richer and more complex scenario, consider Austin’s Alamo Drafthouse’s Rolling Roadshow, in which The Last Picture Show was shown on an inflatable screen adjacent to the theater used in the film, and so the immediate filmic site was set next to the filmic site that was used in the film!

As another example that requires a careful reading are films in which mobile cinema is part of the film. Arun Kumar’s The Truck of Dreams (2006), is the story of a mobile cinema truck that goes from one village to the next in India and, of course, involves Bollywood love while reflecting a broad set of issues concerning a changing Indian society, technology, and globalization, just for a start. Now imagine this film being shown across rural India and the resultant filmic sites. Another example, from a list of films studied by me and my old friend in Adelaide, Craig Faulkner, is John Power’s The Picture Show Man (1977), starring the Australian Rod Taylor. It is the story of a man who wants to open his own cinema to show films of the new silent film era, but instead travels around rural Australia in a horse-drawn wagon and shows films to small appreciative gatherings. The film was produced within the frame of a re-emergent nationalism of the 1970s when the film industry relied upon the tried and true model of a constructed rural and male identity as being the heart of Australian identity, and so the tale is one of technology, gender, rural spaces, and national identity, with a string of filmic sites sitting at the heart of the issue.

The filmic site as geographic endeavor, then, holds promise for the exploration of a rich array of issues associated with cinema as praxis, technology, landscape, place, space, and text as they reflect, influence, and integrate with broader social, cultural, technological and cinematic twists, turns, and trends. The exploration could open new
avenues for understanding the many ways in which people ‘see’ movies, which would provide a unique complement to so many of the existing directions. As for me, and thinking back about my first VCR, it has opened a stroll down a long memory lane.

**References**


