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### Digitising and visualising: old media, new media and the pursuit of emerging urban publics

**Book chapter** (Author's draft)

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## Chapter 4

# Digitizing and visualizing: old media, new media and the pursuit of emerging urban publics

Questions of publics and publicness, as the previous two chapters have shown, open up questions of media and mediation. Habermas' (1989) public sphere inextricably links public communication to the practices and institutions of mass media (cf. Garnham, 1992). By contrast, much contemporary debate, both popular and academic, has paid attention to the proliferation of new media technologies and practices that apparently blur longstanding distinctions between the 'mass' and the 'personal' (Lüders, 2008). Unsurprisingly, these radical changes in media and mediation are seen to also entail radically new configurations of publics and publicness (Holmes, 2002), seen as both positive and negative in political terms. Implicitly buried in such accounts is a narrative about the rise and decline of particular *mediums*; the replacement of old with new. A favoured example in this respect is newspapers, a medium usually cast as 'old media' and seen to relate to particular configurations of mass publicness founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, manifesting in many forms throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and now finally in relative decline (e.g. Alterman, 2008; Franklin, 2009). Yet in these and other accounts of the relationships of old and new media, and their implications for publicness or public communication, what is actually implied by 'medium' often seems rather opaque.

One of the more notable conceptualizations of 'medium' in media theory is that of Marshall McLuhan (1964), made famous by the dictum that the 'medium is the message'. McLuhan was worried that too much media research fixates on the *content* of media, when the truly important message of a medium is not its content but the change it brings about in the pattern, scale, pace and scope of human affairs. This priority placed on the materiality of mediums is why so much controversy surrounds McLuhan, who is typically problematized as a technological determinist (though for some, not technologically determinist enough – see Kittler, 1999) with little to say about politics. At least on the surface, his demotion, even refusal, of so-called content might sit uncomfortably with a sense of publicness based around discoursing (e.g. Warner, 2002). A closer reading of McLuhan, however, reveals that the distinction being drawn between medium and content is merely rhetorical, since:

... the 'content' of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as written word is the content of print, and print in the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, 'What is the content of speech?,' it is necessary to say, 'It is the actual process of thought, which is itself nonverbal.' (McLuhan, 1964: 8)

From such a standpoint, there is no dichotomy between medium and content. It follows that it is difficult to set apart and identify the newspaper, or indeed any medium, as fully determining the fortunes of public content (e.g. discourses, affects). It may well be that the printed newspaper as media *technology* is undergoing radical transformation, and indeed, may even disappear in any recognizable form in the near future. But it is misleading to couple such technological transformations together with the multiple practices, settings and mediums that make up how public communication gets rearticulated through newspapers as *organizations*.

With this in mind, in this chapter I rethink and problematize distinctions often made between old and new mediums of publicness, focusing on the ways in which new media technologies get adopted and adapted through the settings of ostensibly old media organizations. The organization in question is the *Toronto Star*, a major Canadian metropolitan newspaper that was the setting for ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 2005 as part of my PhD research. I focus specifically on the efforts of editors and management to align – in part by using and reacting to new media technologies – the futures of their newspaper organization with those of their imagined public and market. Most *Toronto Star* editors viewed their newspaper as an

institution of public responsibility, public trust and public advocacy in relation to Toronto; a 'great metropolitan newspaper' serving the city and its surrounding region for over a century. But much as it was with city newspapers elsewhere, there was a problem. This urban public was seen to be composed of rapidly changing patterns of work, family, leisure, lifestyle and ethnicity, all engaging the public world through a proliferating, mobile and instantaneous media environment. There were both worries and actualities of declining circulation, lost advertising, stock devaluations, budget rollbacks, and staff layoffs. So even as editing was a site of organizational authority and earnestness about its own public remit, it was also a locus of pervading anxieties about the *Toronto Star* as organization, and imperatives to reorient, reorganize and reequip in the pursuit of emerging urban publics.

In what follows, I introduce two brief accounts of how new media or mediums were adopted and adapted into the configurations of urban public address (cf. Iveson, 2007) in which the *Toronto Star* was entangled. The first was a 'magazine sensibility' – new forms of layout, design and presentation – through which editors hoped to attend to the rising visual acumen of audiences. The second was the presumed inevitability of a digital or online newspaper, and the rupture its particular qualities of spatial display, temporality and interactivity posed in relation to the printed newspaper. I then turn more directly to editing, considering the efforts of editors to integrate these and other technologies into the timing and spacing of the *Toronto Star* as organization through new forms of team organization and so-called flat management.

I focus on editing work in this chapter to highlight it as a particular milieu of public action that is orientated towards, and at the same time subject to, more extensive public spaces of circulation. In so doing, I will describe editing as a *site*, by which I mean a nexus between, firstly, the routines, rules and shared senses of purpose that make up editing as practice, and secondly, the material arrangements of bodies, objects and technologies upon which editing as practice inherently depends (Schatzki, 2002). This is a specific style of researching the question of publicness, and in recognition of that, I begin the concluding section by drawing some connections between my methodological choices and the theoretical account provided. In focusing on the interaction between editing as site and public spaces of circulation, I will underline the importance of understanding public action as performed and situated, and therefore fragile. A side effect of this understanding is that media technologies get considered for their uses and effects in particular

practical settings, rather than in general or abstract terms. This perspective lays the groundwork, in turn, for me to offer a critical take on claims about the radical novelty of new media in relation to old, and their implications for the making of publics.

### **Visual publics**

Early on a Tuesday morning in March 2005, on Yonge Street in downtown Toronto, a man brandishes what looks like a kitchen knife. He's surrounded by around six members of the Toronto Police Service, guns drawn. He's not backing down, he's shouting, he's waving his knife about. Officers in one of the nearby police cruisers decide to use their car in an attempt to corral him. They move the car forward at low speed, there's an impact, and the man is vaulted onto the hood of the moving vehicle. He soon falls off, but quickly steadies his balance; more shouts, knife in hand, foot officers again back away. Then, the police cruiser moves forward once more, the man is struck, pinned between the car and a metal bicycle stand. His knife drops, the car reverses, and shortly thereafter the man gets to his feet and surrenders.

The events making up this standoff were captured by nearby closed circuit cameras, recorded, and replayed soon after on Toronto-based 24-hour television news channel *CP24*. On the overhead monitors in the centre of the *Toronto Star* newsroom at 1 Yonge Street, the footage brings about a lot of interest, a little shock, and certainly a buzzing discussion amongst editors and reporters watching. The interest was not just in the events themselves, of course, but in the fact they had been captured on video. Coincidentally, this all happened on the morning that the weekly features meeting was scheduled, at which section editors pitch ideas for, and discuss the status of, special feature articles:

11.47am. The conversation has turned to the video footage of the early morning police take down, which most of the editors seated around the table seem to have seen. They discuss what seem to be the 'difficulties' of the situation, which was diffused without the use of firearms. Lee Bourrier<sup>1</sup>, the City Editor, jumps in: 'I think we should do a big feature graphic, with images, because we got them, and say here's how the cops follow their protocol, like actually dissect it.' A lively discussion ensues. Talk of the stages that made up the standoff: speculation about whether the use of a cruiser is in fact protocol; the technique involved in using a car for such ends; and who the knife wielding man was. And all along, talk about the materials at hand: on using the video stills; on the necessity of additional graphics; on the likely need for annotations; and that it

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<sup>1</sup> The names used here – both for human actors mentioned in observation passages and attributions of interview quotes – are pseudonyms.

all needs to make sense and look coherent. It comes back to Lee Bourrier: 'Okay, anatomy of a takedown, using these images. If we tried to do that for tomorrow, one, we'd need a full page. Colour. And we'd need the Art Department involved.' Wilson Omstead, the Deputy City Editor, adds: 'We could move some ads off page three to accommodate it.' Other editors around the table nod. Some take notes. The discussion turns for a short while to police ethics more generally, its performance in various tense situations, but the chair soon moves the discussion on to other matters. (Observation Diary, 8 March 2005)

In the following day's newspaper, photo stills from *CP24* were arranged next to a story of about 600 words. But the larger and more elaborate visual graphic that Lee Bourrier and his editorial peers had discussed did not materialize. Ideas discussed in features meetings sometimes remain fantasies that cannot be translated within a day into arrangements on published page. Nevertheless, the scenario that I have recounted above provides a snapshot of a wider and important disposition that I both observed in the practical work of editing, and discussed with editors in interviews. This was their attempts to grapple with what they understood to be an increasingly sophisticated visual acumen amongst their audiences:

You know, the younger readers in particular, I think, are much more, have much more of a, uh, magazine sensibility. Their expectations, in terms of design, are very different than people who grew up with older fashion newspapers, where frankly they were a dog's breakfast in terms of they, things were just thrown kind of in there... expectations have changed, and, you know, technology allows us to present in a much more clean way, and effectively, I think. And I think readers are expecting that. (Irwin Connelly, Editor-in-Chief)

Over a number of years, studies had shown that the reader eyes were drawn to colour and shape more so than to text. And increasingly, major newspapers were seizing on the visual presentation techniques – photography, graphics, and innovative page design – associated with the magazine medium.

At the *Toronto Star*, a rather bold move in this regard was an experimental Sunday edition, introduced in early 2005. Colloquially labelled by editors as a 'magapaper', it combined newspaper format (i.e. page size, paper quality) with a magazine-like use of photos, design, layout, and longer, well-written stories, across 72 full-colour pages. Since its introduction in 1977, the Sunday edition had been a poor sibling to the flagship weekend paper on Saturday. This latter edition had long been the *Toronto Star's* platform for weekend features deemed to be truly important, and with very few events classifiable as 'hard news' taking place on Saturdays, Sunday was a comparatively thin edition, with low advertising take-up. This meant, however, that

the Sunday edition offered a flexible canvas of page space and opportunities for more advance planning, making it a good 'petri dish' for experimentation, which is how the Sunday Editor pitched the proposal to the normally unadventurous Board of Directors at parent company Torstar. The experimental nature of the magapaper was eventually confirmed when, following a major redesign of *Toronto Star* in late May 2007, the *Sunday Star* reverted to a design template closely mirroring the other editions throughout the week.

But working alongside and multiplying from this experiment were many smaller efforts at enhancing the overall visuality of the *Toronto Star*. These included not only new styles and techniques for displaying photographs, but various innovations in the use of illustrations and graphics. Perhaps most interesting was the increased use of 'infographics', which are graphical diagrams, sometimes quite elaborate, designed to organize complex concepts, processes or events; in other words, to visually order such content as "this, this and then that" (Valorie Zeigler, the Head of Graphics). These particular types of graphic design were thus explicitly understood to be ideal for doing the explanatory and factual work of journalism:

3.00pm. I arrive, with transportation reporter Manny Ingleston, at the University of Toronto's IntelliCAN Transportation Systems (ITS) Centre. Sitting in a presentation room, facing a large-screen TV surrounded by 20 monitors showing live traffic via closed circuit cameras, we are about to endure a demonstration of a complex highway simulation model. Manny introduces me to Gil from the Graphics Department, who's attending the demonstration to explore the possibility of making a graphic related to the event, and of course, to Manny's article. Without any prompting, Gil assures me: 'you know, we don't just do these things to fill space; I only come into play if a visual graphic is the best way to explain the information.'  
(Observation Diary, 29 March 2005)

To approach these new presentational techniques and technologies purely through textual or semiotic analyses of newspaper content would fail to apprehend the practical work entailed by such efforts. Editors at the *Toronto Star* were developing new methods to deal with issues of design and graphics as part of their daily discussions and decisions around the overall organization of the newspaper content:

To give you an indication ... this morning's meeting, two of the editors were drawing graphics on their [notepads], and I laughed about it, I thought, this is great, ... it's good because now we've got a shared language ... They're all confident illustrators now which is totally cool ... I laugh about it, (but) at a certain point I won't be necessary anymore, because they'll all be so aware



that they'll be able to communicate directly with the illustrators and the artists. (Valorie Zeigler, Head of Graphics)

But more than simply developing practical competencies vis-à-vis graphic design, editors were making implicit and explicit practical judgments on the reading circumstances of their audiences. For example, they made complex judgments about the possibilities printed imagery provides for readers to absorb and engage detailed information, whereas by comparison television imagery is constrained by viewers' attention within a specific span of time. So, along with the coming together of new visual literacy and new technologies were new repertoires for representing and addressing publics. Increasing attentiveness to photos, graphics, illustrations, layout and colour were taken to be effective and affective registers of feel, style, aesthetics, pattern, attraction and emotion. Yet despite the important shifts implied by such new visual experimentation, simultaneously entering the site of editing was a medium that, to invoke McLuhan, brought forth a rather different 'message' or set of effects and affects: that of Internet technology as the incipient platform for an online newspaper.

### **Digital publics**

In the middle of the 1990s, a modest website made its way into the new forms of publicness then quickly emerging through the World Wide Web. A bare bones, sparse web page, split into two columns, news content to the right, scarcely formatted section hyperlinks and a few small advertisements to the left. *Thestar.com* was the *Toronto Star's* response to what was still seen, even at that recent juncture, as a newly surfacing form of online communication. At its genesis, and for much of the decade that followed, *thestar.com* was a website that more-or-less straightforwardly reproduced the content from the printed newspaper, and was updated only once a day. As with other North American metropolitan newspapers, its initial intention was largely to be a tentative online barrier, erected to preserve the newspaper's monopoly of public discussion and market share in relation to its urban-regional geography of circulation (Barnhurst, 2002).

Yet by 2005, there was a palpable sense that internet-based technologies would become the inevitable medium of circulation for future newspapers. Indeed, over a mere decade, *thestar.com* had evolved – through both major redesigns and many smaller but cumulatively significant changes – into a multilayered, complex website based on a 24-hour news cycle. At the point of my own fieldwork at the newspaper,

editors, designers and other production staff were working towards a quite radical redesign using completely new web architecture. The new thestar.com, eventually launched in 2006, enabled enhanced use of photos, audio, video and podcasts as well as much more cross-linking between related stories. It also included an inset media player, a powerful search tool, compatibility with RSS feeds, and new opportunities for readers to tag content. In working up and working with an online edition, there was hope – if sceptical, qualified, reserved – that somehow the metropolitan newspaper model, or something akin to its specifically urban scale of public and market circulation, might translate to a new digitized medium, with its altered rhythm of circulation:

If twenty years from now there is, you know, newspapers really have died ... and people ... are preferring to read, you know, an electronic news service several times a day rather than a newspaper once a day, maybe the advertisers will have, by that time, have completely migrated over to that ... some kind of electronic news service that's like a newspaper in a lot of the same kind of *intangible* ways ... It's not a bulky paper product that's trucked, by gasoline burning vehicles, across a wide geographic area. Instead, you put all those same resources, at the editorial side, and the advertising side, and the creative side, and design, and puzzles, and community information, and listings and all of that stuff is now just electronic. You know, as long as they, as long as you can make it work on the same scale, that's a good thing. (Erik Yongken, Internet Editor)

Intrinsic to the translation demanded by online media technology were shifts in the ways in which newspaper journalism might communicate and resonate (Ettema, 2005) with its publics. Web *display*, to begin with, was seen as introducing capacities and constraints into the experience and practice of reading news that were different from the printed page. The scale and resolution of most viewing technologies (i.e. computer monitors, but also increasingly portable devices) associated with internet-based presentation meant there was a basic tension with the concurrent experiments with enhanced visuality discussed above. But the implications of Internet technology were rather more fundamental. Newspaper pages provide a finite – yet relatively flexible and customizable – space for the arrangement of content into a printed milieu of adjacencies and connections: “In the paper you get, you know, maybe more of a layout where everything can sort of come together and, and people can look at it really quickly, then focus on one thing” (Erik Yongken, Internet Editor). As Nerone and Barnhurst (2003) observe, newspaper pages characteristically set out a kind of diorama, presenting readers with a series of represented relationships between content, an intimate sort of social map which, beyond transmitting or ritualizing

content (see Carey, 1989), creates a certain kind of ethereal *environment* that affirms the public world to which the newspaper as medium relates. Web display, by contrast, is based on a potentially limitless content space, yet one also organized into relatively fixed design templates and subdivided into pages, requiring news readers to select and make their way through an indexed environment of stories. So arguably, web display “unveils the plumbing system of the newspaper” (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003: 122), disassembling the dioramic presentation so fundamental to the newspaper’s distinctive metabolism of collated, printed pages.

The templated nature of content on a site like thestar.com is directly linked to the new *temporal* rhythms implied by the web-based presentation of news. In the early months of 2005, during my observation period, the site of editing was overwhelmingly based on practical routines and a material setting orientated to the *daily* production of the newspaper, from the timing of work shifts and meetings, to the arrangements of work spaces and newsroom technologies. Through the iterative work of assembling a diorama, editors and journalist seemed to reaffirm, in turn, their daily participation in a public discussion, which had certain implications for the sorts of news and commentary thereby valued. Yet on thestar.com, content was being added, changed, and removed much more frequently, almost continuously, introducing values somewhat more akin to radio and television:

... a local story about a traffic accident, or something like that, might be a much bigger story on the website than it is in the paper ... You see this, the same, similar thing happening on radio and TV. A story that’s a top story all day on the radio, if it’s a traffic (story) for example, ... but by the time it’s over, if, if there wasn’t major implications for, you know, for transportation in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area] beyond a single day, it’s not likely gonna be a big story in a paper. But, it will be a big story on the web because people ... are interested, this is the kind of information that they find useful in the day. (Erik Yongken, Internet Editor)

The newspaper transpiring through an online medium theoretically offers no (or much less) obvious ‘punctuation’ for public address, because unlike the printed newspaper, it is not an artifact requiring the same type of physical transportation and distribution to its audiences across space (Warner, 2002: 97-98). This does not mean an online newspaper cannot connect with a phenomenology of dailiness (cf. Scannell, 1996 on radio and television broadcasting) – and many efforts were dedicated to making thestar.com relevant to the specifically daily routines of readers – but a temporality of daily public address is not an intrinsic feature of circulating news online.

Perhaps above all, however, it is the potential *interactivity* and *flatness* of online circulation that is so often posed as the principle challenge, if not outright threat, to journalistic and editorial authority. New journalistic technologies such as blogging, for example, do not necessarily require infrastructure for or intervention by the various sorts of editing work that exists at a newspaper organization like the *Toronto Star*. Yet despite these (very often hyperbolic) qualities associated with online communication, *Toronto Star* editors and management hoped for and were dedicated to an adaptation of online communication that was at least partly on their own terms:

... at the end of the day, I cannot imagine a society in which quality information, reliable and verified information, and a serious editing role, and informed and trusted commentary, are not things that are all valued. And I would argue in a world of more and more information, ... in which, to some degree, everybody can be a journalist, and therefore it becomes harder and harder to know ... what's true and what isn't, that the true reporting function, and the editing of that, and the editing of this mass of information into some form which is accessible and manageable for people, and informed commentary, ... I believe all of that is gonna have as much value, or more value. (Osborn Chamberlane, Publisher)

Nevertheless, Internet technology, and web browsers in particular, bring about some basic forms of interactivity almost by default. The data trail left through the page views of visitors, for instance, offered editors an unprecedented trace of reader attentiveness to different types of content. Thestar.com was a place where, often, 'quirky' and 'odd' stories would become the most read, and in anticipation of this Internet editors were sometimes placing such stories higher up on the main news page hierarchy. So, in effect, with the click of their mouse, online readers were now collectively expressing their own preferences in terms of content and news importance, rupturing a sphere of decision-making previously reserved for the professional judgment of editors and journalists (cf. Nerone and Barnhurst, 2001).

### **Timing and spacing editorial authority**

So far I have used efforts at visuality and digitizing to elucidate new mediums entering into and disrupting the site of editing. Yet I have said relatively little about the site of editing specifically, and why it is such an important lens for considering the adoption and adaptation of these new media at the *Toronto Star*. I would like to suggest that the site of editing is important because it was a site of authority, not only in relation to the organizational spaces of the *Toronto Star*, but also in relation to its entanglement in a circulatory public. Editing is, of course, more than just an unrelated collection of practices such as proofreading, explaining, emailing, turn-taking in

meetings and so on. These sorts of dispersed practices are bound together by the teleoaffective structuring (Schatzki, 2002: 80) of editing: the emotions and normative ends that are expected, accepted and shared in relation to editing practices. Perhaps the most important teleoaffective dimension of editing at the *Toronto Star* was the notion of a reading public, as an explicit end for their work, as well as something with and for which they had implicit trust, responsibility, belonging and attachment. In sharing these sensibilities of acceptability, propriety, expectation and desire, editing had performative coherence and degrees of ascribed normativity and managerial responsibility vis-à-vis other organizational sites, such as reporting. Moreover, the nature of editing as site meant that it was distinctly positioned at a formative moment in which the *Toronto Star* came together as *both* media artifact and organization. Editing was therefore a site in which the effects of such new technologies as visual and online presentation were particularly noticeable and acute.

For editors, the new timings and spacings of public address brought about by these new media technologies (and others as well) correspondingly necessitated new timings and spacings of organizational work at the *Toronto Star*. During my 2005 fieldwork, a good deal of turbulence had been created in the wake of a study commissioned by senior editors, which analysed the ways content ('copy') moved through the work areas of the organization until eventually reaching the newspaper's suburban press centre. This report seemed, for editors, to have an overall thrust: that work flow was getting more and more complex, certainly in part resulting from the new demands of visual and online presentation, and decisions around the final arrangement and angle of particular stories were being made later and later:

I mean you really have, you've been here at a time, well I think you've seen both ends of it, or at least you've seen the old way it was done, and sort of a glimpse of what we're trying to do. And the old way was, you know, like the news desk, the afternoon operation would come in and they would start making decisions, and really key decisions wouldn't be made until the absolute final moment. Um, and that's a ... sort of journalist approach to the world, which is holding off, holding off, holding off cause something could change, but, uh, well, it doesn't work that way (Lee Bourrier, City Editor).

The last remark may appear to be an empirical claim, but Lee also spoke it with overtones of normativity. It was for senior and departmental editors – the 'morning operation' – to formulate the main presentation and angle of major news stories, not principally news or copy editors, whose proper focus was meant to be on detailed or technical matters such as the length, grammar, structure and factuality of content.

Because of these concerns, the timing, conduct and location of daily news meetings, for one, became a central controversy for editors. But meetings were just part of the equation; important gatherings of important people, yes, but effective only by corresponding with the rhythms of activity elsewhere in the organization (Boden, 1994: 83). Simultaneously underway was an experiment with a new team-based (also called 'pod') system in the City Department, in which new editing posts were created to lead on flexible thematic groupings of content (e.g. 'New Toronto', 'City Features', 'GTA Politics', 'Education', and more). These new editors were to arrive midday, liaise with city reporters working stories in their thematic area, and at the same time, interact with senior city editors, graphics staff, photographers, and others over the day and into the early evening. In the longer-term, team editors were to become the primary intermediaries between reporters and senior editors across the organization, to follow groups of stories as they developed (and also mutated online), and identify various sorts of presentational possibilities for their themed content in the printed newspaper.

It would not be an overstatement to say there were great hopes for these attempts at reorganizing, which imitated the experiments of other newspapers. The insertion of team editors was meant to make for new spaces of time and establish new connections between areas and stages of work; in other words to transcend, or otherwise work across, the traditional spatial divisions of newsroom work, and the Fordist-like stages of newspaper production:

I mean, and that's just part of the Star evolving away from the strict segmentation of, you know, I make the letters from hot lead, and I take this, this guy over here takes those, turns them into words, and this guy sets those up in type, and this guy, you know, they haven't even started reporting yet. So it's all, kind of, coming together (Innes Witcar, Team Editor, City Features)

In tandem with other initiatives (notably in retraining), journalists were to become more empowered, more able to be interdisciplinary, able to work their beats more imaginatively, engage with graphical forms of communication, and write with distinctive voices online and in print. Many journalists saw things differently, of course. There was more than a hint of correspondence between these initiatives and the management discourses of the business world, on the merits of so-called flat management and overlapping work spaces over rigid hierarchical control and segregated work areas. Academic work has read these as managerial techniques to more subtly regulate and activate the practices and subjectivities of workers (Dale,

2005; du Gay, 1996; Thrift, 2005). In a sense, journalists saw things in a similar way; or at least, they could see the managerial imperatives at play in such initiatives:

You know we just introduced this new pod system ... this is the system that's gonna completely alter the way we do business in the city section, and this is gonna save us, and make us ... as if. I think it's these guys, all sitting in a room, figuring this all out, you know, it's like a chess game or something, you know, then we're gonna do this, then we're gonna do that, and of course, in the mean time there's the real world, which, you know, has nothing whatsoever to do with their plans (City Columnist)

Efforts to reorganize the timing and spacing of work were not just attempts to realign the actual physical coordinates and chronological times at which different activities and technologies came together, but to do so in ways that there were normatively *well-placed* and *timely* from the standpoint of editorial authority (cf. Czarniawska, 2004).

In focusing in on the site of editing, I have tried to point out that even as the materiality of particular media technologies are in interplay with the wider complexities making up *mediums of publicness*, they cannot be regarded as two interchangeable configurations. In my own accounts above, the former are material entanglements helping to constitute what the site of editing inherently was or could be. The latter is perhaps better thought of as the circulatory configuration of public communication in which the site of editing and *Toronto Star* as organization were entangled as a very powerful obligatory points of passage (see Couldry, 2000: 5, drawing on Callon and Latour, 1981), which affected in turn how such new media technologies were put to use.

## **Conclusions**

At this point I want to momentarily step back from the substance of this chapter, and reflect on the sort of field research that has led to the discussion so far. After all, attending to the site of editing in the way I have above stems directly from (and required) a certain kind of methodological work: situating myself in the newsroom, observing the performance of different routines, noting down material settings and objects in-use, shadowing bodies in action, listening to talk in meetings and elsewhere, carrying on conversations and asking questions. These relatively short-lived experiences were in countless ways exciting and rewarding. Yet on reflection they also imply a certain style of research that is subject to the limitation of radical partiality often ascribed to ethnography as a methodology. For example, I could see

that the site of editing was insulated, both practically and normatively, from those sites concerned with the business of the newspaper, such as advertising, marketing, circulation, promotions, and syndication. More than a partition wall separated these business and editing work spaces. They were on different floors, part of different divisions of the company. Editorial and business staff crossed paths in places like the cafeteria, or otherwise in meetings arranged for specific purposes, to which I was often not invited, or which, of course, occurred before or after my arrival. Even if my situated observations helped me to piece together some of the ways this insulation was maintained, it would be accurate to say that I barely scratched the surface of cross-fertilization going on. The pursuit of urban publics by editors seemed to also be, with sometimes preciously little distinction, the pursuit of urban markets.

Even if, in response to my own self worry, I were to affirm that my focus was on the *public* work of editing, rather than its quasi-business rationalities, I nevertheless would have to admit my research style was radically partial. Indeed, I seemed to be subconsciously aware of it, given my near-relentless anxieties about ‘being there’. I frequently worried about my timing and placement; I wanted to see, hear, and even feel the various events I considered relevant to the taking place of editing work. Yet on reflection Law (1994: 45) seems exceedingly accurate in (only half-jokingly) observing that very often “where the ethnographer is, the action is not”. And it was more than just being there: I was also worried about attending to there, remembering to take notice of and record those matters in which I was most interested. To be sure, I used additional methods to mitigate my worries and fill in some of the blanks: I tracked daily newspaper content over 6 months, read across several documentary sources, and importantly, conducted 58 in-depth interviews. But there were nevertheless multiple dimensions important to editing as a site of public action, and in turn the *Toronto Star* as a configuration of public address, which I quite simply did not and could not get at.

Why reflect on these matters of method? To begin with, they hopefully provide an insight into one approach that might be taken in researching the practices and settings of public action. The reason for reflecting on these matters at this point, however, is to underline how the research I undertook leads to the sort of conclusions I can make in this chapter. Partly, this is because ethnography has a propensity for producing the unexpected. In setting out to do my field research, I had not necessarily been interested in the relationships between editing practices and new media technologies, nor had I expected them to be so important. But more



importantly, the blind spots I worried about in my research, as well as the ones I have not even recognized (what Law, 2004, calls respectively 'manifest absences' and 'Otherings'), have conversely allowed me to *make present* certain aspects of public action and its related mediums. I will end by focusing on three in particular.

First, this chapter has revisited the notion of mediums of publicness by attending to the performativity and situatedness of public action. This focus has implied, on the one hand, an image of publics as heterogeneous and processual; what Hutta and Gabay both helpfully call 'public becoming' elsewhere in this volume. On the other hand, focusing on the performativity and situatedness of public action also highlights its fragility, and in my context, puts into question simple assertions of dominance and hegemony common to many accounts of media. Mediums of publicness are often haunted by a conception of media as a quasi-machinic order: *the* media, with power over publics and *effective* in relation to subjectivities (Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). In this chapter I have tried to remove some of this mystique, where mainstream media organizations are theorized, yet not very often actually studied, as sites of hegemonic power. Even as the accounts in the chapter showed editing to be a powerful site of public action, with sanctioned authority and degrees of autonomy over what gets to count as matters of public concern, it also showed it to be a site at which such matters can never be unilaterally decided. This is because the site of editing is positioned in relation to, and in some ways subjugated by, the public sphere in which it *participates* (cf. Rodgers, 2010 forthcoming). Editing is no more in control of its publics that are consumers of media fully attentive to the public world to which they are exposed (Couldry and Markham, 2007). Recognizing this is especially important when we conceive of a public sphere as discourses and affects that are reflexively circulated, distributed, strung out over a space of time, and convened through multiple mediums (Barnett, 2007; Warner, 2002). The site of editing enacts its power as a milieu through which much more widely distributed or extensive public spaces of circulation and potential are momentarily crystallized or made coherent (Lee and LiPulma, 2002; Marston *et al.*, 2005: 426).

This leads, secondly, to some specific observations on how new media technologies made a difference to this relationship between editing as a site of momentary crystallization and wider circulatory spaces of public discourse and affects. We might begin by observing how these media technologies seemed to *anchor* the work practices and public orientations of editors (Couldry, 2004). Editing was defined not only by participating in discourses of the public, but also by its taking place in and

through specific material settings and technologies. In other words, the publics of editing were not only convened in a discursive sense, but also materially assembled or shaped (Carpignano, 1999; Latour, 2005; Griffin, this volume). This assembly or shaping made a difference: the more interpersonal nature (Lüders, 2008) of the visual and digital mediums discussed in this chapter compelled editors to engage and enter into (or at least be *seen* to enter into) dialogue with the subjective experiences and perspectives of Toronto's more multiple publics. The increasing appearance of those new media technologies enabled, even demanded, new orientations that de-emphasized addressing the audience as a mass urban public, a well-recognized and longstanding editorial tradition of the *Toronto Star*. All the same, it is important to bear in mind these material effects did not take place in vacuum. Editors acted on an understanding of the *Toronto Star* as an important organization in Toronto's public life over many decades. Editing was also a site of authority in relation to the work of various journalists and production staff, who in turn were associated to various sources of expertise, knowledge and authority in the wider social and political world. For these and other reasons, interplaying with the appearance of new media technologies were practical understandings of editing as, at least to some degree, an adequate and legitimate site of public action. Editors were therefore not only materially positioned to order content and assemble a public representation, but able to do so in such a way and *claim to be representative* (Saward, 2006) of publics.

In making the above observations, this chapter has, finally, offered a critical antidote to hyperbolic pronouncements about the revolutionary novelty of emerging forms of media. Such hyperbole takes us only so far in understanding actually occurring sites of public action because it tends to speak of new media outside of any situated milieu, while allowing others to make sweeping predictions about how new technologies affect politics, whether positively or negatively. In this chapter, by contrast, we have seen that a so-called old media organization, the *Toronto Star*, is neither static nor is it necessarily in competition with an externalized 'new media'. Instead, the vignettes in this chapter underlined that the *Toronto Star*, like all organizations, is constantly in motion and constituted *through* change (Linstead and Thanem, 2007). None of this denies how new media technologies can and do reconfigure patterns of public action or public address. What it does argue against, however, is a strong coupling of specific media technologies with either complex media organizations or the more expansive notion of mediums of publicness. The latter are not always indicated by what seem to be the newest or most unprecedented media technologies; new media technologies must be set into a

longer historical perspective, and seen for the ways in which their uses and effects are interwoven with the uneven geographies and temporalities of communication (Boczkowski, 2004; Morley, 2006; Mahony, this volume; Bhasin, this volume). With these points in mind, we might broaden our imaginations about the scope of possibility for bringing about alternative mediums of publicness.

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