MEDIA

'Media' refer to cultural technologies for the communication and circulation of ideas, information, and meaning. These are usually taken to include various mass **communication** mediums such as books, newspapers, radio, television, film, and now various forms of 'new media'.

In the last two decades, research on media-related topics has flourished in geography, without adding-up to a theoretically or methodologically coherent agenda for media research. Media texts are often taken as a resource for analysing various forms of **representation** (of landscapes, places, identities, cities, etc). There is also a burgeoning literature on the economic geographies of media production, distribution and consumption, given a further boost by the growth of digital media economies and culture industries. Nevertheless, the inherent **spatiality** of media processes has attracted surprisingly little attention from geographers. Some work in geography has focussed on the forms of social interaction which different media help to constitute (Adams 1998). But in the main, insight into the spatialities of media and communications has been better developed by scholars working outside of geography. Thompson (1995) provides the clearest articulation of the study of media with the central concerns of **social theory**, and in the process develops an analysis of the spatial and temporal constitution of social relations and institutions. He argues that different media and communications practices *uncouple time and space*, enabling the transmission of symbolic forms over time and space without physical transportation of objects; and they thereby enable new forms of *simultaneous co-presence* between spatially and temporally distanciatated subjects and contexts. This type of analysis implies thinking of 'media' as a *process of mediation* operating "wherever human beings congregate both in real and in virtual space, where they communicate, where they seek to persuade, inform, entertain, educate, where they seek in a multitude of ways, and with varying degrees of success, to connect one to the other" (Silverstone 1999, 4).

As in other disciplines, media research in geography is prone to overestimate the causal power of media practices, and to make functionalist assumptions about the degree to which social formations are held together by the mass mediated circulation of values over integrated political, economic, and cultural territories. There is a tendency to assume that subjectivity is media-dependent, and to presume that either the content of media texts or the patterns of ownership and control of media production and distribution are highly determinate in shaping patterns of belief, knowledge, and practice. Media research in geography could benefit from taking seriously Garnham's (2000, 5) claim that "the central question underlying all debates about media and how we study them concerns the way in which and the extent to which humans learn and this how through time identities are formed and actions motivated". Combining Garnham's question of *whether* and *how* people learn through their engagements with media practices with Silverstone's idea of media as *processes of mediation* points towards a more coherent agenda for media research: one that investigates how the spatio-temporal organisation of media practices helps to

distribute different possibilities of agency and communicative competency (Couldry 2006).

References

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Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study the Media?* London: Routledge.

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Suggested Reading

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