

對話世界頂尖學者

從媒介城市到地理媒介：

澳大利亞前沿學者關於信息社會的跨學科洞見

From Media City to Geomedia: Cross-disciplinary Insights into Information Society from a Pioneering Australian Scholar

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Introduction of Professor Scott McQuire

Scott McQuire is Professor of Media and Communications in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is one of the founders of the Research Unit for Public Cultures which fosters interdisciplinary research at the nexus

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of digital media, visual cultures, urbanism, and social theory. Scott is the author or editor of seven books and over 100 essays in journals, edited books and exhibition catalogues. His books include *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera*, *Empires, Ruins, and Networks: The Transcultural Agenda in Art* (with Nikos Papastergiadis, 2005), *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space* (2008), *Urban Screens Reader* (with Meredith Martin and Sabine Niederer, 2009), and *Geomedia: Networked Cities and the Future of Public Space* (2016). *The Media City* won the 2009 Jane Jacobs Publication Award offered by the Urban Communication Foundation, and has been translated into Chinese (2011, 2014) and Russian (2014). *Geomedia* has recently been translated into Chinese (2018). Scott has been a chief investigator on nine Australian Research Council grants, including a current project on creative precincts; he was elected as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2013.

Abstract

This dialog between Professors McQuire and Pan Ji focuses on changes of media technologies for urban communication in the Internet society. Specifically, the conversation explicates the dynamic relation between media technologies and urban space, the conceptualization of geomedia, the implication of embodied technologies, the emergence of novel forms of networked public space in the Web 2.0 era; the opportunities media technologies bring to localism; and critique of the smart city concept. It aims to provide an alternative perspective to understand the role technologies play for urban communication.

PJ : In mass media studies, media are often regarded as a technological force to overcome the limits of space. We know that this idea has been challenged and modified in recent discussions about globalization and about affordances of new communication technologies. In your works, technology-supported media develop a novel relationship with urban space—media re-integrate geographical elements into globalized communication processes. Considering that urban space is a key factor for human

society, how do these changes introduce new space-time perceptions for people?

SM : I think it's correct to say that an important factor in our understanding of media is the impact on the social relations of time and space. A key and defining function of any new medium is its capacity to break with the existing temporal and spatial limits of communication, by preserving messages differently through time, or by facilitating new forms of exchange over distance. Here, I'm thinking particularly of the work of Marshall McLuhan, which itself drew on the earlier work of another Canadian scholar Harold Innis. Innis introduced the concepts of time-bias and space-bias, as a way of understanding the role of new media in contributing to change in forms of social organization. He argued that the shift from carving in stone or imprinting in clay, which are durable media but difficult to transport across space, to more mobile but fragile forms such as paper, were key underpinnings of the emergence of more spatially-extensive empires, requiring bureaucratic networks of governance and communication. McLuhan focused initially on printing, but later on broadcasting, and specially television.

These capacities to alter the spatio-temporal parameters of communication are still very evident with digital media networks. Arguably, the experience of media 'breaking' with spatial and temporal limits are even more pronounced in a global, digital era, in which all kinds of transactions are routinely archived and very 'local' exchanges can rapidly assume transnational dimensions at near zero cost. The key difference I observe from the broadcast era is the way that digital media are being integrated into urban infrastructure, at the same time as the functioning of digital devices and the curating of information is increasingly organized around location. In the context of mobile devices and ubiquitous networks, digital media have become a key dimension of contemporary urban place-making strategies. What we are witnessing in the present is often the tension between these two trajectories—between the capacity of media for breaking with place, for displacement, and its emergent counter-capacity for place-making, for emplacement.

In terms of conditioning new space-time perceptions, Walter Benjamin long ago observed that human sense perception changes with changes in technology. Of course, this cannot be understood as in terms of a direct and linear causality in which between particular devices or platforms translate into a deterministic set of social experiences.

However, if we follow McLuhan's lead and think of digital media in environmental terms—as constituting an environment—we can recognize the historical magnitude of the digital threshold. In a context of ubiquitous, distributed communication, many 'face-to-face' situations, such as urban social encounters, are now routinely mediated in ways that challenge our traditional understanding of the relation between immediacy and mediation. Our challenge in the present is to stop seeing the 'face-to-face' and 'mediation' as polar opposites, but to think and understand them together, as interlaced dimensions of a new experiential horizon.

PJ : In your speech as well as in your new book, you used the concept of geomedia. Yet, most scholars use 'media geography' to refer to the characteristics you mentioned. What do you think is the most significant distinction between media geography and geomedia? Does it mean only the latter possesses positionality?

SM : I'm familiar with some work in media geography, but I would emphasize that is not a single and homogeneous tradition. For instance, there is an older body of scholarship on the geography of media networks that belongs to a communication economics tradition, as well as the more recent concern with bringing critical geographical understanding into the study of media. Contemporary media studies work that pays close attention to the spatial distribution of media production and consumption also has an affinity with approaches developed in fields such as cultural studies and even anthropology, as much as media geography.

Geomedia is a term I first began using about around 2010. My concern was less about analysing the spatial, cultural, and historical specificity of particular media content than in thinking through what I argued was the emergence of a new condition.

Geomedia as I understand it is defined, on the one hand, by a new spatialization of media in the city, and, on the other, by a new set of possibilities and protocols concerning the mediation of urban social relations. I don't think my approach is antagonistic to media geography, but I think my concerns are narrower in some respects and broader in others.

PJ : Then, are geomedia equivalent to mobile digital media? How do geomedia entangle with specific historical and cultural legacies of a particular society?

SM : Well, geomedia is not just about mobile digital media, although this development is obviously extremely important. But I am also interested in various embedded forms of urban media, such as the large LED screens that have been multiplying in cities around the world. In other words, my concern is less the impact of a specific set of devices such as the mobile phone or the smart phone, so on and so forth, than the different social condition produced by the intersection of contemporary urbanism with all forms of digital media. This, of course, includes the Internet. Capacity to access networked information and services while moving through the city changes the function and value of that information. A key example would be mapping, which is rapidly evolving from digital versions of paper-based maps to complex databases capable of displaying a wide variety of real-time situational information. But this is just one example of how geotagged data and spatially-aware services including search are recalibrating the city as social space.

I argue that domains such as architecture, planning and design, which have traditionally taken formal responsibility for the organization of urban space, now increasingly intersect with and overlap with the domains of media and communication. One could historicize this picture further: large-scale infrastructure, such as railways, electricity supply or freeway systems all had a major impact on modern urban form, although these more often lie in the domain of engineers rather than architects or urban designers. Today, media have become critical urban infrastructures. This means that need to think about all levels of media—from the architecture of broadband

and cellular networks to the design of devices to the functioning of software and commercial digital platforms, while still paying attention to more traditional media and communication questions, such as those relating to access, institutions, content analysis and audiences. This makes understanding the mediation of cities a challenging but very exciting field to study.

The question about specific historical and cultural legacies is also complex. The way media are adapted and adopted in specific contexts is not uniform. There are both micro-variations but also macro-level differences that might amount to different paradigms. This is something that demands further work. One of the ways in which I have elaborated the concept of geomedia is by exploring some of the historically distinct ways in which urban publics can become an ‘audience,’ and how these new ‘audiencing’ potentials might contribute to different forms of public agency. In the book I develop a distinction between the ‘broadcast media event’ and what I call the ‘urban media event.’ The former is derived from the work of media scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, who famously defined the media event in terms of mass, home-based consumption of live events on television. I argue that this cultural logic is shifting in the present, as distributed digital media enable new forms of ‘real-time’ feedback to occur between participants as an integral part of an event’s unfolding. This is by no means an unambiguous trajectory.

In fact, new possibilities for relatively informal modes of citizen-based communication, self-organization and collaborative action go hand in hand with the vast extension of data capture mechanisms, most notably those associated with contemporary ‘smart city’ agendas. I think these trajectories and the tensions they inscribe are evident in many different territories, but the way they play out is likely to vary considerably.

PJ : Your research underscores the impact of communication technologies on human communication. And, embodiment is an important characteristic of new technology. Technologies can be implanted into human bodies nowadays. Controversies abound in such cases. How do you understand this trend and its future developments?

SM : It's salient to recall that, when the Internet was becoming mainstream in the 1980s and 1990s, it was primarily understood as enabling liberation from the 'constraints' of the human body. I think this was always a limited and problematic understanding, but recalling this underlines the extent to which conditions have changed significantly in the present. I argue that a key attribute of the condition of geomedia is that it extends the influence of media technologies into more and more areas of social life, including into intimate social interactions. This means that mediation is now entangled with the domain of embodiment, including what has traditionally been called 'face-to-face' encounters.

I think we need to be extremely careful how we understand this change. While I don't want to appeal to a simplistic and nostalgic understanding of the 'face-to-face' as some kind of unproblematic and authentic social encounter, I do think that we need to recognize that embodiment remains a vital characteristic of human social relations. People like to gather together with others—whether this is going to a cinema even if they could watch the same thing at home, or going to a workplace even if they could telecommute. In the 1980s, many urbanists despaired for the future of public space, believing that broadcast television was displacing the need—and even the desire—for embodied public gathering. Yet, the last two decades have seen a marked resurgence of public space, and we can observe many experiences of embodied publics all around the world gathering together for festivals, rituals, sports events, and protests.

Having said this, it is also clear that an older tradition and way of understanding embodied practices, such as encountering others in urban space, is being significantly—perhaps fundamentally—transformed in the present. Once members of the public can use media to report, to comment, to provide 'feedback' on events even as they occur, the nature of the event and of the embodied humans enacting it, have changed. This doesn't mean that we should simply accept or naturalize the current manifestations of this transformation; for instance, the aggressive data capture that underwrites the business models of so much contemporary digital media. To my

mind, this risks an unwanted extension of mass surveillance and the potential for a growing commodification of social life. But we do need to recognize that capacities for ubiquitous real-time connectivity alter our relations to others.

Developing a more critical understanding of the new possibilities for technological embodiment enabled by mobile devices and wearables including embodied micro-sensors, cannot be a matter of hankering back to the ‘good old days,’ nor yet about rushing forward blindly to the promise of the new. Rather, it demands close attention to the possibilities that geomedial opens up. One way I’ve thought about this is to take up Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the ‘right to the city,’ and repose this question as the right to the networked city. How do urban inhabitants utilize digital infrastructure to better appropriate the time-space of their urban surroundings? If, on the one hand, this demands new models of interaction with others, it is also going to require far greater attention to the questions of ‘digital ethics’—how data is captured, analysed and on-sold.

PJ : In your studies, you demonstrate that big screens activate urban public space, and increase citizen encounters or interactions in cities. Cities may obtain new vitality in the new media environment like this. In your opinion, how do new media create a new form of urban publicness?

SM : I’d begin responding to this question by qualifying your statement. I think large screens situated in public space have the potential to contribute to activate public spaces. However, they do not do this automatically. So, the question becomes one of the appropriate settings for the enabling different modes of social encounter and new forms of publicness in the context of networked public spaces.

In the final section of geomedial, I describe a five-year research project I undertook with colleagues into the operation of a large public screen located in central Melbourne in Federation Square. Key findings from that research emphasized the wide range of factors that contributed to the screen functioning as a successful form of civic communication. These included architectural design, screen management and content acquisition policies, and the digital and cultural literacy of the public. The fact that the

Fed Square screen was planned as an integrated part of the space from an early stage was enormously important. So was the willingness of the sitemanagement to forego income from advertising in order to explore the screen's capacity to support new sorts of public events. We also saw significant changes in what audiences were comfortable with or prepared to engage with over time.

Our research demonstrated the way that digital infrastructure such as a large public screens could become a significant asset for a city. Melbourne is a migrant city—about half the population are either migrants, or one of their parents was a migrant. Federation Square has proved hugely successful in establishing itself as a common space of 'belonging' in the context of such diversity. Experimental use of the large screen has also functioned to extend understanding of the bounds of public space in the present. For instance, in a 21st century public space, people expect to be able to connect to other places. This doesn't—or shouldn't—override the distinctiveness and pleasure of being in that place with its particularly history and material culture. Rather, it highlights the way that public screens can become a new dimension of the 21st century 'public sphere.'

In theoretical terms, I argue that the urban screen stands at the junction of two older conceptions of the public sphere: the classical public sphere predominantly based on urban public space (the agora, the plaza, and the street) and the modern public sphere that Habermas analysed, which was organized around the new mediated space-time of the press and broadcasting. Urban screens draw on key elements of both traditions—assembly and connectivity—but combine them in a way that redefines aspects of both.

PJ : I concur with you that new media may not only undermine locality. On the contrary, new technologies may also become a mighty force to restore locality. With that in mind, how do you comprehend the relationship between the local and the global in the new media era? What opportunities does urban localism have world-wide?

SM : There is a longstanding understanding of globalization as a process that erodes cultural

specificity, manifested by the extension of global ‘models’ from food and fashion to commercial operations and media franchises. And there is a level of truth to this dystopic vision. But there has also been substantive work that explores the many ways by which this homogenizing trajectory is not simply ‘resisted’ but has produced complicated and sometimes contradictory itineraries. Processes of ‘glocalization’ will vary from ‘top-down’ models, where ‘locality’ becomes a marketing strategy to more ‘bottom-up’ processes of adaption and modification of seemingly global models. This dynamic has been understood for a longtime now, but we can see this tension playing out in the complicated relationship of contemporary digital technologies to space and place.

On the one hand, digital media certainly enable new ways of ‘attaching’ information to place. This kind of urban annotation could provide a new mechanism for facilitating collective and relatively informal modes of ‘urban annotation’ that might better reflect the multiple and contested histories of cities and particular places. Yet, at the same time, there is a growing dominance of the digital at the level of the platform by powerful transnational corporations with global empires and commercial orientations—Google, Facebook, Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent. This means that local initiatives, such as mapping informal housing zones, are often re-inscribed into hegemonic globalizing logics, such as that of Google Maps.

This situation asks us to reconsider what we mean by ‘local.’ We need to recognize that locality has never been purely place-bound and static, but has always been constituted, in part, through processes of exchange, and differentiated mobilities across time and space. What has changed in the present is the field of operation of those exchanges as the digital milieu brings different scales and rhythms and into operation. On the one hand, we can see the level of citizen-initiated actions, such as collaborative mapping, blogging, and other forms of urban annotation, creating localized operations that might also extend transnationally. On the other hand, at the level of the platform, we can see massive and growing capacity for the centralization of data capture and

analysis. While this tension is playing out differently in different national territories, I think that, to some extent, we are all forced to respond to the growing ubiquity of digital media platforms in urban space and everyday life.

PJ : If media have the potential to re-configure the time-space of urban communication, how do they re-shape the basis for personal identity, and for collective identity? How do these processes change power relations in modern cities?

SM : I think these are extremely complex issues, and go well beyond the scope of my book, which focuses primarily on networked public space. My argument in *geomedia* is that the commercial development of digital media in the West over the last two decades has been primarily driven by a focus on personalization and customization. While this might produce some desirable outcomes in terms of individual autonomy and choice in relation to content and communication, it has tended to come at the cost of neglecting what the space of the common. Digital devices have become ways of filtering our interactions with others on the basis of ego-centric networks. They become means for creating private islands, both within the public sphere and in public space, where forms of tele-cocooning are prevalent. In this sense, I argue that the ‘unthought’ dimension of *geomedia* is its capacity to contribute to the collective reinvention of public culture and public space in networked cities. Exploring this potential demands foregrounding the way digital media might facilitate collective social encounters with diverse others in public space. It is on this basis that we might begin to develop and redevelop the social skills need for living with others in the complex social environments of contemporary cities characterized by heightened mobility and cultural diversity.

However, shadowing this potential is another, almost equally unthought dimension of digital media, which concerns the rapid expansion of capacities for collecting fine-grained data about citizen behavior—actions, patterns of movement, opinions, networks of connection, and so on. Much of this information is volunteered—for instance, on social media sites—while increasing amounts are automatically collected as a condition of access to services or spaces in the ‘smart city.’ In this context, algorithmic power

becomes an increasing concern. How are autonomous systems and AI agents designed? What biases might be embedded in their architecture, or in their ‘training’—which depends on the diversity of the data sets they access? Such algorithmic power should not be understood in isolation from other dimensions of urban power such as the materiality of urban spaces, forms of governance and the functioning of legal settings and institutional cultures, but needs to be understood as an increasingly integral part of their contemporary operation.

PJ : You mentioned earlier in your speech that smart city is not solving real problems. This is a very interesting remark. You also claimed that smart city programs can tighten control over cities. If this is indeed the case, can we infer that stronger control is the purpose of smart city projects? You mentioned the concept of a ‘networked public space,’ are you trying to rectify the logic of smart city with the networked public space concept?

SM : My concern with the smart city concept is that the way it has been elaborated and adopted so far is based on several problematic assumptions. This is probably a function of its history. As Adam Greenfield points out, the smart city is a vendor-created avendor-driven concept, promoted by companies such as IBM, Cisco and others. Most smart city agendas are still predicated on a managerial vision of the city that privileges ‘efficiency’ over all other attributes of urban social life. Efficiency is perhaps an appropriate goal in certain circumstances, but if it is converted into a ‘master value,’ it proposes an impoverished vision of urban life. So, while the smart city agenda might set out to address certain ‘real’ problems, such as energy use, sustainability or congestion, the fact that it frames these issues in very limited, predominantly technical terms, means that it come up with flawed and problematic solutions.

The core of the smart city agenda is the assumption that we can gather and use large-scale, heterogeneous sets of data to develop innovative solutions to urban problems. For example, a lot of work is going on right now into working out how to gather data from millions of private vehicles in order to better plan the coordination

of traffic flows, using elements such as traffic signals, toll road pricing, parking availability and so on. This information can also feed into the design of mass transit systems, as well as the rapidly emerging development of autonomous vehicles.

In the face of such rapid technical advances, we also need to remind ourselves that ‘data’ is never a solution in itself. All data, even ‘big data,’ is partial and perspectival, depending on the settings built into the various digital tools (sensors, database software, and analytics packages) that enable its collection. So, at the minimum, data always demands critical interpretation. If we imagine that this can be done under the simple goal of ‘efficiency’ we risk misunderstanding the nature of the city. Cities certainly involve complex technical systems but they are inherently social and political environments—which is to say, they are spaces in which values are contested, disputed and negotiated.

History also tells us that unexpected or unanticipated outcomes are a feature of every new technology. In the context of the smart city, where ‘data’ is seen as the key input to solving urban problems, smart city planning tends to extol data capture mechanisms in all aspects of urban infrastructure: street furniture, ticketing systems, building entry, wi-fi provision and so on. Whether or not it is intended, this is an infrastructure that lends itself to mass surveillance and intensive, micro-coordination of control. This is something that demands far greater public debate than it has so far received.

My argument in Geomedia is that the integration of digital infrastructure with urban public space offers a number of possible future scenarios. If one is a default setting of mass surveillance, I argue that a more desirable one is to rethink the ‘smart city’ in terms of a ‘communicative city.’ This would involve thinking about digital infrastructure not simply as a tool for achieving operational efficiency, but in terms of how it might enable better communication in urban contexts. ‘Communication’ here needs to be understood in an expansive sense: first, it is not limited to communication from a city government to citizens, or even to feedback from inhabitants to urban

authorities (although both are important), but has to include communication between inhabitants. Second, communication needs to be understood as a complex, iterative process that helps to constitute the sociality of both ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’ in the process of exchange.

Part of our challenge now is to move beyond criticism of the existing smart city agenda, and to begin imagining and articulating how different scenarios might be implemented in networked public space. This is an urgent issue. While the future is not entirely settled, the infrastructure of the digital city is being set in place all around the world right now. So this issue is very much the responsibility of current generations.

PJ : You advocated in your book *The Media City* that scholars should break the ‘representation model’ of media studies. Media do not only represent the world. Instead, media and cities adapt to and embed into each other. In your new book *Geomedia*, you further stressed the integration of media and geographical elements. In your opinion, how do these changes challenge extant media theories? Can we call it a paradigm shift in new media research?

SM : I think there has been a paradigm shift in relation to our understanding of the digital, but it has been going on for some time and has uneven manifestations. At the risk of generalizing, if you look back to the 1980s and 1990s when digital networks first become an object of critical attention outside the domain of computer science, there was a prevailing understanding that ‘cyberspace’ constituted a kind of parallel zone to the material world of cities and social interactions. For many, this was part of the attraction of online interaction. I think this understanding, which was never total, has been unraveling for more than a decade. Instead of separate worlds, we have increasingly recognized that the digital is entangled with the material—with ‘real’ social life, with cities, with the environment and so on. This is becoming a new paradigm of sorts. It does ask us to reconsider certain aspects of a ‘representational’ model of media, in which media belatedly re-present social actions that have already occurred. Live broadcasting had already opened question marks around this model,

but the real-time connectivity of ubiquitous digital networks vastly intensifies this questioning.

However, I think we can sometimes be too quick in ‘moving on,’ which means we don’t really move on at all. If we fail to properly acknowledge and critique the idealism of the older cyberspace paradigm, we risk replacing it with a new and equally problematic idealism. To give one small example: I am particularly concerned with approaches to the mediated city which suggest that the digital is about ‘adding’ a new informational layer to the material city. This implies that if, somehow, the network could be switched off, we would find the old city still in place. In contrast, I argue that the threshold of geomediality penetrates far deeper: it recalibrates our understanding and experience of the embodied and the material, as much as the digital and the mediated.

PJ : To my knowledge, your studies span a wide range of areas. You cross disciplinary boundaries while remaining focused on the intersection between communication and media technologies. Does the development of new media suggest that media and communication have become more important for human life than ever before? What is your comment on statements such as ‘communication is becoming the corner-stone of society today?’

SM : I’m not sure how we’d judge that communication has become ‘more important’ than ever before. I think communication has always been a ‘cornerstone,’ in the sense that our understanding of communication—like our understanding of technology—is closely bound up with our understanding of what it means to be human. The work of John Durham-Peters is exemplary in demonstrating this in the Western tradition. What is clear today is that the processes and implications of communication have changed, as the new social geographies of connection and disconnection now entail a range of novel consequences. For instance, contemporary forms of iterative, recursive, micro-and hyper-communication are mirrored by the pervasive capture and archiving of data related to situated behaviors such as online search, texting, social media posts, and so on. In this context, communication can become

the site of enormously contradictory investments: it can be recognized as a fetish, a compulsion, and a source of anxiety (for instance, keeping up a social media image), but at the same time can also remain the primary way we can imagine developing a better understanding, or basis for more caring or ethical interactions with others. Here I find the kind Bernard Stiegler's analysis particularly compelling.

PJ : The examples you gave in your books (such as the SMS-based big screen project and the dancing project) mostly involve entertainment. But how could we assess the value of these forms of publicness? Related, how to understand the relationship between new media and the holistic changes of urban public life? How does the publicness you mentioned compare with the public sphere concept of Habermas? In what ways do geomedia expand urban public life?

SM : I'd argue these projects were not just entertainment—at least as I understand the term—but they were socially engaged or relational art. They used aesthetic experience to create specific opportunities for members of the public to influence large-scale public displays through their collective interactions. This approach draws on a different understanding of art and aesthetics as they relate to contemporary social life. It suggests that 'art' is no longer primarily about viewing discrete, finished objects in a defined gallery space, but extends to open, interactive, embodied-mediated experiences that occur with others in public.

To appreciate this, it's important to situate these projects in their specific contexts. For instance, SMS-Origins enabled members of the public to contribute to a collective map showing where they and their parents were born. This project was developed at a time of heightened concern in Australia about migration, particularly relating to asylum seekers arriving by boat. Displaying user-generated visualizations of the diversity of the population in the heart of Melbourne served a particular role at this moment. But this was not simply an informational project. The fact that this data was created in realtime by groups of strangers in public spaces in Melbourne and Seoul created a distinct experience.

The dance project Hello also involved participants in Melbourne and Seoul teaching each other a simple dance via the public screens. This project was certainly lots of fun, but it equally had a deeper dimension. As Richard Sennett has argued, playful public encounters can be a mechanism for reflexive examination and negotiation of social ‘rules.’ Hello was notable insofar as it didn’t involve exchanges between people who already knew each other. Instead it was based on telematics and embodied public interactions between strangers. Social encounters with strangers have historically played a critical role in modern urban life. However, contemporary urban conditions, including the filtering role of digital media, have tended to lessen the opportunities for rich encounters between strangers. So the project was deliberately conceived to enable experimental interactions across networked public spaces, combining the distinctive geographies and affordances of the urban and the digital. It involved micro-publics who were both embodied and mediated experimenting with social protocols of public exchange across borders and between cultures.

As I suggested above, the capacity of the large screen to bridge two concepts of the public sphere is precisely what makes it attractive as a platform for civic communication. However, this embodied-mediated public sphere departs from Habermas’ conception, which emphasized critical-rational discourse. While critical-rational discourse is important, our intervention using large screens as a platform for participatory art was more directed towards producing an affective public sphere. This approach drew on the emphasis that those such as Lefebvre and Sennett give to practical activity as a critical foundation for developing social skills. Sennett argues that learning to live in big cities defined by high levels of diversity and cultural difference is not simply an ethical issue—it is not just about wanting to ‘do the right thing’—but it demands social skill. Such skill is gained through practice, through experience. Events like Hello were designed precisely to facilitate such experience.

In underlining the importance of public space as a critical arena of social encounter, we are not trying to idealize this process. Rather, we recognize that we can only work out

how to live together through developing new modes of experiential learning. These kinds of projects provide experimental spaces for gaining such learning experience, and in this sense offer critical incubators for developing new social skills.

PJ : We understand that you cross disciplines like architecture, geography and communication by drawing on the media concept. This is quite remarkable. But, is this approach widely accepted in Australia? How do disciplines like architecture and geography react to your approach? What makes you adopt such a research approach? What do you think of the mainstream urban communication scholarship and its predominant theoretical paradigms?

SM : Communication and media studies does not have a very long history in Australia. It has predominantly been derived from the British critical media and cultural studies paradigm rather than the more sociologically oriented communication tradition in the United States. However, my own background was studying law, social theory and political science. As well as teaching sociology, I have also lectured in cinema, art and architecture, before I helped to found the Media and Communications program at the University of Melbourne. So, I brought this interdisciplinarity to my work in media.

I have been researching the media and the city problematic for a long time now. When I first began, back in around 2000, I found that disciplines such as architecture and design were far more receptive to this issue than were traditional media and communication scholars. They were always the ones who were inviting me to speak! This has changed over time, especially in the last 10 years. Part of this has been the profound transformations associated with mobile, digital and networked media. This has meant that more scholars from media and communications have had to become attentive to spatial and urban questions, while at the same time scholars from other disciplines such as architecture and design, or urban sociology, or geography and anthropology, have become more attentive to questions of technological mediation and communication.

As someone trained outside the mainstream communication paradigm, I find I

have an ambivalent relation to the field. In the end, I am less concerned with defending a particular disciplinary tradition than in pursuing a research trajectory—wherever it might lead! Fortunately, I think there are enough scholars working in the mainstream media and communication field, such as Gary Gumpert (founder of the Urban Communication Foundation) who are exemplary of this kind of interdisciplinary inquisitive endeavours. And, over the last three years, I have been extremely fortunate to work with Chinese colleagues from the Center for Information and Communication Studies at Fudan University, who share a similar interest in advancing cross-disciplinary research in this space.

PJ : The political system, media institution and cultural tradition of China differ profoundly from those in the West or in Korea. The boom of mobile media in China is phenomenal. In effect, mobile media are changing almost every aspect of Chinese cities. How much do you know about the situation in China? Based on your prior research in Melbourne and Seoul, what is the relationship between mobile technologies and social factors in different societies?

SM : The differences you describe are both undeniable and critical. I have been lucky enough to visit China fairly regularly since 2010, but I am hampered in my understanding by my lack of Chinese language, as well as the lack of widespread translation of Chinese scholarship into English. Moreover, most of my trips have been to Shanghai, which is a fascinating city, but a very particular part of China, with the highest per capita income and arguably the most cosmopolitan history. So, my answer to your question would be that I don't know nearly enough about the situation in China, but I am working hard to learn and understand more!

In common with a number of other territories across Asia and Africa, in China the primary mode of Internet access for many people has been mobile first. This is different to the history of the Internet in the USA, Australia and most of Europe. Mobile commerce is also notably more advanced in China than in Australia. One area I watch with interest is the strategies of the Chinese digital giants such as Alibaba, Baidu

and Tencent, as they seek ways to extend their operations globally. In this endeavour, I am fortunate that I teach a lot of students from China in my graduate class on digital convergence. They help to educate me!

You're right that when we were conducting research into interactive 'urban media events' between Melbourne and Seoul, we noticed significant differences between audience response in Australia and Korea. But I would be reluctant to elevate such differences into 'national characteristics.' I would also suggest that we need to expand our frame for understanding the kind of differences you point to. There is no single 'China,' and no single 'West' for that matter. Australia, for instance, has an ambiguous position as a western culture: it is geographically located in the global south, while also forming part of the wider Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, while it is a relatively young nation-state, Australia is also home to the world's oldest continuous and living indigenous culture. Since World War II, mass migration has created a very multicultural society.

These are formal indicators of the extent to which 'nation' is always an uneasy container for the complexities of a society. There are vast differences within Australia in terms of the impact of digital media depending on your position, understood not only geographically, but economically and socio-culturally. The digital capacities and capabilities enjoyed by those living in the major urban centres are entirely different to those living in regional and remote communities. While the latter are not entirely without access, the different conditions and cost of networked communication afford different patterns of social, cultural and political agency. I suspect much the same kind of analysis could also be made of China, and this is something I am keen to learn more about.

PJ : Your book *The Media City* has achieved a huge influence among Chinese readers and your new book *Geomedia* has also been translated into Chinese recently. Both attract many readers. Many Chinese scholars may relate your theorization to experiences in Chinese cities. How do you comprehend the nexus between digital technologies and

cities in China?

SM : While *The Media City* was written primarily out of my own experiences, it was an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for thinking about the changing relation between media and architecture. It addressed certain trajectories, such as the use of steel, concrete and glass in modern building, and how debates about transparency in architecture intersected with debates about the organization of visibility and witnessing in media. Given the globalized nature of certain kinds of modern urban infrastructure, such as high-rise construction, television broadcasting and digital networks, some of these concerns are common to all ‘modernizing’ cities. Similarly, *Geomedia* seeks to comprehend a specific historic moment in which the ubiquity of media infrastructure within cities, and the use of spatial data and location-aware applications, was creating a tipping point in how we inhabit urban public space. Again, I think there are enough shared experiences and common concerns for the work to be read in situations that are quite different from the one I inhabit.

Having said that, it is vital to acknowledge that there are real limits to the value of this kind of generalization. Those books attempt to point to the emergence of a new paradigm, one in which the role and function of ‘media’ seemed to be changing. They suggest that it is through the assemblage of heterogeneous elements—media devices, network architectures, urban design, material spaces, institutional forms, legal settings, cultures of use, and so on—that changes are being produced in how we inhabit contemporary cities. It is important to understand that these are fundamentally relational analyses which conceive urban communication as a complex ecology. In terms of outcomes and impacts, details matter. Changes in one single element can often result in changes in the whole.

In other words, I’m not interested in trying to develop a universal theory that can simply be ‘applied’ in new contexts. To speak of the co-constitution of spatial experience in terms of a media-architecture complex, or to suggest that media ubiquity, location-awareness and distributed real-time exchange are creating a new condition

(geomedia) is, above all, to produce heuristic tools. These concepts are ways for me to try to make sense of long-term shifts in the relation between media and social life, and especially to lay ground work for imagining alternatives to some of the current impasses in which we find ourselves. I've been fascinated and gratified that colleagues in China and elsewhere have found resonance in this work. But, as I said earlier, I'm very aware of the limits of my own knowledge. Rather than presuming to make judgements about the nexus between digital media and cities in China, I'm keen to learn. This learning happens in all kinds of ways, from formal academic exchanges to what I see and observe when I walk the street in Shenzhen or travel on the Shanghai subway, for example.

Scott McQuire 主要學術著作

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