

Editing Urban Environments: Territories, Prolongations, Visibilities.

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City, circulation, and interaction

The modern city emerges as an environment of flows and *circulation*, in which mobility is essential. Richard Sennett (1994) singled out the significant parallel between the medical discovery of blood circulation in the 17th century and the emergence a new urban model. The image of the fluidity of blood pumped around the human body by the heart, as described by the English physician William Harvey (1578–1657), is at the root of the type of social organicism that inaugurated the discipline of sociology.

At the beginning of the Twentieth century, especially in early American sociology, the city is seen from the perspective of natural history as a *diagram* of zones (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967[1925]) which were the product of both short-term and long-term flows. The emergence of such idea is part of a process that had already begun with the Humanists and their vision of Ideal City that transcended the Medieval walled town. However, the modern urbanisation process introduces into the urban pattern not simply a quantitative difference, but qualitative one. As the city becomes a site of flows and circulation, it turns into a complex territorial composition of vectors, trajectories, paths and directions that are both sustained top-down, through planning, and shaped bottom-up, through interaction. As André Leroi-Gourhan (1964) first pointed out, the whole history of human evolution is better observed as a history of mobility, rather than as a history of intelligence.

The influential functionalist urban theory propounded from the late 1920s through the '50s by the series of Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne – most notably

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summarised in the theses of the 1933 Athens Charter – did not content itself, as American sociologist did from a natural history perspective, to record and describe existing urban paths, trajectories and sectors as the outcome of human ecology. Rather, Modernist urbanism aimed explicitly at intervening upon urban circulation rationalising it, eliminating all the sources of chaos and disorder. Zoning, standardised dwellings, and functional analysis were the main tools deployed to such aim and they were clearly designed from a clearly top-down perspective.

Among the harshest critics of functionalist urbanism, in the '50s the Lettrists and the Situationists heralded by contrast the playful possibilities associated to free, non-rationalised and even random movement in the city. Traffic circulation, in particular, was seen by them as the opposite of human encounter, i.e., as organised universal isolation. The Formulary for a New Urbanism (Ivain 1953) and Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism (Kotányi and Vaneigem 1961) – which included urban practices such as 'drifting' (*dérive*) and the 'unarranged meeting' (*possible rendez-vous*) – constituted the Lettrists' and early Situationists' response to what they perceived as the 'frigid architecture' of modernism that lead to the fragmentation of the human being into a series of functionally defined, separate spheres of existence. Against the functional circulation of city inhabitants, imposed upon them by the imperatives of the spatial separation of the various dimensions of life (production, consumption, rest, etc.), the Situationists sought to reconstruct the unity of human existence through the free construction of situations and an alternative use of space and urban mobility.

Such type of experimentation – which, on the other hand, reprises some aspects of the Carnavalesque use of public space – has not completely faded away, as for instance a recent report David Pinder (2005) on an experience of urban exploration which seeks to engage critically urban space reveals. From Constant's *New Babylon* (Careri 2002) to David Le Breton's (2000) *eloge de la marche*, then, the idea of wandering in the city, of a type of movement that exceeds territorial fixations, constantly re-emerges as a vital reaction against the planned, functional aspect of urban mobility.

In short, the logic of circulation and mobility is not without conflicts – not least because modern media and new media (from the press to hi-tech portable devices) intervene upon this type of urban reality, adding a further layer of complexity because the material and

the immaterial become stratified one upon the other and constantly acting upon and reacting to each other, thus leading to an unpredictable mix of what, in Lefebvrian terminology, we could call conceived, perceived and lived social space. Urban mobility is stratified. In its most extreme consequences, mobility stratification results in territorial confinement, territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant 2007), and the emergence of socially differentiated and even deeply polarised spatial capabilities. Suffice to recall that Lefebvre's (1968) right to the city also included 'the right to the use of the centre, a privileged space, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos'. In respect of this, analysing the impact of new media and information technology on everyday life, Manuel Castells (1996) identified two contrasting spatial logics inside the contemporary city, which he called space of flows and space of places. Whereas the space of flows corresponds to the market logic of global networks of capital flows, human experience of workers' lives is increasingly cut out from the space of flows just to be confined into a type of space of places that gathers together everything that is not enough flexible and adaptable for capitalism, including, notably, identity.

As a consequence, spatial, horizontal mobility is inextricably linked to vertical, social mobility, as already understood by Louis Wirth (1938) (for a recent empirical study, see Camarero and Oliva 2008). It is important to remark that media and new media can actually enhance rather than reduce cleavages in the positive and negative effects of differential mobility. As observed by McCullough (2007: 388), 'effective layering of successive technological infrastructures amplifies the advantage of particular neighbourhoods and cities'. Therefore mobility should be described as the ability to move around autonomously, not only in geographical spaces, but also and especially in *relational* spaces. In other words, mobility is intimately interwoven with the type of *interaction in public* that has been explored by interaction sociologists, *in primis* Erving Goffman (1959; 1963; 1971). The construction of the urban public domain meant the development of an impersonal, role-based model of interaction, which can be observed at small scale and retrieved even in the most ephemeral episodes of everyday life. Some of the richest phenomenological accounts of this type of experience have been provided, for instance, by Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin – not to speak of novelists, from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*, through Virginia Woolf's *Street Hunting*, to Paul Auster's *City of Glass*. The matrix view of fluxes in the city, or of city as a pattern of traces and trajectories, is not opposite, as Amin and Thrift (2002) argue, but

rather nicely complementary to the phenomenological experience of urban circulation, precisely as, respectively, top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the same process.

For Simmel (1950[1908]), city life shapes its own peculiar socio-psychological type, a personality that is defined as the reaction and adaptation to the ‘intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli’. Similarly, Benjamin (1999[1927-40]) collected thousands of pages of material for his unfinished *Passagenwerk*, a project in which he delved into the peculiar, mixed, hypnotic, oneiric nature of that specific type of urban architecture which is the glass-roofed shopping arcade, ‘the most important architecture of the nineteenth century’. Because of the deep mutual interpenetration of city and subject, the human types inhabiting the arcade mirror the hybrid nature of in-betweenness that characterises these architectures: prototypes of the shopping mall, the passages were at the same time for Benjamin places protected against noise and the weather, separated from the ordinary and the prosaic: places in which the distinction between inside and outside, between daytime and night became uncertain, enigmatic places in which to rethink or recast the modern urban human figure (Benjamin 1939: §D).

The urban ecological environment results from a layering and mixing of different types of social territories, or *interaction regimes*. Lyn Lofland (1998) terms these regimes the *realms* of city life. She distinguishes three such realms: the private, characterised by ties of intimacy among primary groups members, such as families; the parochial, characterized by a sense of commonality among members of neighbourhood networks and other cultural and religious communities; and the public, characterised by the copresence of strangers, people personally unknown or only categorically known to one another. The stranger is an outsider to the private and parochial realms, but is a crucial figure of the urban public realm, which is founded precisely on the capacity of people to interact with strangers and to understand them at a specific level. These three realms, Lofland reminds us, are social, not physical territories. The fact that certain physical spaces become private, parochial, or public realms depends on the proportions and densities of the type of social relationship that are enacted there.

The public realm is constitutive of urban circulation, insofar as is defined by a series of well recognisable and recognised aspects. First of all, we have a situation of social *diversity*, where differences encounter. Stranger contact in practice means the mixing of people from

various socio-cultural and economic background within a single space. Typically, contact and mixing take place in a condition of density and concentration of both people (crowds are the urban phenomenon *par excellence*) and the built environment (urban architecture entails a constant reworking on previously built environment). In this sense, the city is the place of concentration *par excellence*, vis-à-vis the dispersal that characterises the territory, the countryside.

As a consequence, urban public realm is characterised by *compression*. This is not only space compression, but also time compression, or acceleration, as described for instance by Paul Virilio (1977). Compression leads to a sophisticatedly shifting balance in the public realm between the scheduled and the unpredictable, between the non-event and the event, or, with Jacques Derrida (2000), between the *futur* and the *avenir*. For Derrida, there cannot be *avenir*, there cannot be event without a type of opening towards the other which he calls hospitality. As recalled above, the interplay between the non-event and the event has been explored by the Situationists and their practice of drifting. Drifting was understood by the Situationists as an exploration of the psychogeographical contours of given urban zones and neighbourhoods. Urban drifters attempted to carry out a scientific and affective analysis of the urban network, with its continuities and fissures, its microclimates, and its attractors. Recognising the importance of concrete spatio-temporal variability, late Henri Lefebvre – who, not by chance, was strongly inspired by the Situationists, and harshly attacked by them – undertook a project of study of territorial rhythms, which he called *rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre 2004[1992]), aimed at understanding the interweaving of localized times and temporalized places in the city.

The balance between the different realms of city life, and specifically the balance between the public and the private, is intimately linked to both spatial mobility and the media (Sheller and Urry 2003). It was the modern mass media system – beginning from newspapers, magazines, and the film industry, through radio and television later, to the newest portable, locative and interactive media – that created the modern public, the *audience*. The relationship between the mass, the crowd and the public is indeed at the core of the debates that marked the birth of sociology, as in particular the work of Gabriel Tarde (1989[1901]) shows. As it will be argued more extensively below, each media technology defines a specific *public* regime or, even better, a specific *regime of publicness*. Contemporary reflection on media and new

media in the city push to the foreground a theme that is already present in the authors we have recalled so far, i.e., the issue of the convergence / divergence between planning and experience, between strategies and tactics in the use the urban public realm.

The material and the immaterial

On the basis of what said, the public realm has its material basis, which is defined in the first place by bodily experience, density and rhythmic dimensions. But the peculiar regime of public interaction in urban spaces cannot be reduced to such material basis. Quite the contrary, the public realm must also be appreciated and understood from the point of view of its social features, of the immaterial social relations that constitute it. In traditional ontology, *spaces* and *relations* are two different sets of things. However, the distinction between the spheres of the material and the immaterial is far from being fixed or absolute. Indeed, technology plays a crucial role in defining and redefining the balance between the two spheres. The massive introduction of media and new media in everyday life and the concurrent mediatisation of everyday urban environments during the 20th century has been significantly reshaping this balance. In practice, in contemporary urban environment the material and the immaterial ceaselessly *prolong* into each other.

The specific features of these prolongations between the material and the immaterial, and the related patterns of speed and slowness, of relative speeds, created in the heterogenous assemblages of elements coming from the two spheres, can be appreciated focusing on a set of interlinked concepts. In this chapter, we suggest to explore the relevance of three such concepts, namely *territory*, *prolongation*, and *visibility*. We also propose an ethnographic perspective on these phenomena and will consider some case studies that will help us identify the most promising areas of inquiry to which the proposed concepts can be fruitfully applied. Overall, then, our aim is to argue that the environments created and edited by new media in urban space can be conceptualised and studied as specific *territorial and visibility regimes* in the city.

Territory

Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980), a *territory* is not to be understood as an object, nor as a space, but rather as an *act*. A territory is something one makes vis-à-vis others. Emphasis on the act leads to the recognition that territories are not simply *relational*, but also and foremostly *processual* and *directional* entities. Territorialising is a way of carving the environment through some boundary-drawing activities (Brighenti 2006). Consequently, trajectories and boundaries should be conceived as complementary rather than opposite types of entities. Boundaries are not fixed objects, but rather processes or *operations* (see in particular Barth 1969 on ethnic boundaries). A boundary is the *operation* that leads to the instauration of a territory. Boundary-drawing can be described on the basis of the following aspects:

Who is drawing. The territory cannot be conceived outside its relationship with the agents who undertake the territory-making activity. Notably, individual as well as collective (group) territories may exist. Human territory-making activities encompass both types of territory. The *ratio* between individual and collective territories varies according to social groups, their culture, economy and technology. Of course, the most visible and stabilised political territories are usually collective territories.

How is the drawing made. There are many different technologies for drawing and dropping markers, which range from body secretions, postures and plumage, to graffiti, stone walls, cartographic projections and GIS technology, as well as situational, ad hoc procedures. Technology always matches with the specific sensibility and understanding of the boundary-drawing agent. Different technologies produce different types of markers apt for different types of inscription surfaces. Territorial markers are in themselves meaningful: each marker is a sign that bears its own individual characteristics, so that it can be more or less effective, impressive, memorable, and affectively powerful according to specific circumstances.

What kind of drawing is being made. Territory is not an absolute concept. Rather, it is always relative to a sphere of application or a structural domain of practice. Territory is always qualified: reproductive territory, proprietary territory, economic territory, political territory, psychological territory, affective territory and so on. Boundaries are more or less focused on a range of expressions and a given set of functions, that shape the rationale for a

certain territorial constitution. Expressions and functions manifest qualities as properties, or possessions. Because not all boundaries are of the same type, though, there may be no coincidence between different types of boundaries (e.g., contemporary economic and political territory clearly do not coincide).

Why is the drawing being made. Qualities pertaining to various domains of practice are inscribed into the territorial constitution. Projects, plans, and strategies, too, are inscribed. Because a territory is established as a semiotic device and as part of a plan to control resources, it can be thought of as *expressive* and *teleological*. Projects and plans transform territories themselves into resources. But this is not an univocal process. Here, the Italian word ‘piano’ can be helpful, given that it means both ‘layer’ and ‘plan’. Territories are ‘multipiani’, in the sense that they are both ‘multilayered’ and ‘multiproject’. Plans aim at establishing hegemonies, but hegemonic frameworks can always be resisted.

The image of territorial boundaries as the result of contingent acts of drawing may convey the wrong impression that arbitrariness rules over the constitution of territories. But to stress the dependence of territory on boundary drawing activities undertaken by interacting agents employing given technologies to carry on some plans in some domain of practice that is of concern to them, does not amount to saying that territories are merely arbitrary constructions. On the contrary, after being established for the first time – it may not be easy to tell when the first time was, though, because origins tend to be enveloped in mythologies – boundaries become the object of an on-going work of enactment, reinforcement, negotiation, interpretation and negotiation. In short, they become stratified.

As we have seen, each boundary-drawing is based on a technology that allows a specific type of sign emission and processing. In their turn, signs exist within a semiosphere in which the act of semiosis joins together representamens, objects and interpretants. Processes of territorialisation vary widely from finding one's place on a crowded metro train, through locating one's mobile phone with GIS technology, to engaging in face-to-face interaction. Distance management and civil inattention in the urban public realm are two crucial territorial endeavours, too. Each of these territories has its own specificities, but once a regime is set up, territory-making becomes a routinary activity.

Recently, Mattias Kärrholm (2007) has remarked that territorial complexity is due to the balancing between processes of territorial *production* and territorial *stabilisation*. Building

on the *acteur-réseau* perspective, Kärholm has identified four forms of territorial production and three forms of territorial stabilisation. His 2x2 matrix of territorial production accommodates territorial strategies, tactics, associations and appropriations. On the one hand, territorial strategies and tactics are ‘intentional attempts to mark or delimit a territory’ on the other hand, ‘territorial associations and appropriations represent productions that are not planned or intentionally established but are consequences of established and regular practices’ (*ibid.* 441). Following Michel de Certeau (1984), to which we shall come back, whereas strategies are impersonal and planned-at-a-distance, tactics are personal and situational. As to the second couple, while appropriations are the result of active usage of territories (although not of formal claims), associations are ascribed, i.e. attributed by others.

Kärholm’s threefold typology of territorial stabilisation includes networks, bodies and sorts. Networks of actants have been at the core of the *acteur-réseau* research programme. For Kärholm, networks are undoubtedly important as sources of stabilisation, but they are to be complemented with bodies and sorting in order to produce satisfactory descriptions of the different territorial roles of materiality. Bodies can function as territorial landmarks, reminders that somewhat ‘refresh’ the aim of a specific territorial configuration. On the other hand, sorting produces a classification and typification applied directly to territories themselves (*sorts* of territories).

Prolongations

The concept of *prolongation* emerges as an integrative and a corrective to media theory. Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously advanced the image of media as *sensorial extensions*. He claimed that one cannot conceive these extensions as if they were not mediated. Media are hardly neutral because their expressive characteristics affect the content they mediate. Media are content modifiers to the point that ‘the content of any medium is always another medium’ (McLuhan 1964: 15). This concept – which, in a more nuanced version sounds: ‘societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication’, *ibid.* 1 – was popularized by the slogan ‘the medium is the message’ (later ‘the medium is the massage’, as a result of a publisher’s typo McLuhan

warmly welcomed as corroborating his own theory).

However, McLuhan's theory – as well as later studies carried out by McLuhan's followers – remains unclear in accounting precisely *how* extensions work. Insofar as it tends to conflate the layers of content and expression, McLuhan's original formulation ultimately is at risk of reductionism. It fails to distinguish the *mediating* from the *mediated* medium. While, generally speaking – as observed by Lister et al. (2003) – McLuhan's ideas have undergone an important and timely renaissance in new media studies (arguably, a healthy corrective against pure culturological explanations in the British cultural studies vein), his media theory *per se* remains incomplete.

If one compares the two idealtypical situations of a face-to-face conversation and that same conversation on the phone or through any new media, one understands that the problem for a theory of prolongations is to explain how a *quantitative* worth (in this example, a spatial distancing) becomes a *qualitative* one (in this example, a mediated interaction) – or, with Bergson, how a difference of degree is replaced by a difference of nature. In fact, even face-to-face conversation involves a type of mediation: there is no *zero grade* medium (see e.g. Rice 1999). But an apparently similar conversation, mediated by different technologies, is no longer the same. A transformation occurs through the mediation process. This process has been explored and theorised by Régis Debray as a techno-social 'middle realm' in which the social and the technical meet and mix. Frédéric Vandenberghe (2007: 26) has described this mixing as the process through which 'the spirit gets materialized into technology at the same time as the social gets organized into society and reproduced through history'.

Each technological arrangement opens up a set of coordinated possibilities to create events and make them meaningful. Once we accept that mediation entails much more than mere transmission and draw our conclusions from that, we necessarily come to question the *singleness* of acts and events. In particular, attention to mediation shifts the focus from presumed single and unique events to *series* of event. In the case of the conversation considered above, it becomes clear that there is not any single conversation, but rather a cascade or series of conversations, a series (philosophically speaking we may call it a *virtuality*) in which each conversation is confined into or, on the contrary, pushed to the limits of its technological mediation. The convergence of the social and the technological is best captured in Leroi-Gourhan's idea that no tool exists except in a gesture ('l'outil n'est

réellement que dans le geste qui le rend techniquement efficace’, Leroi-Gourhan 1964: 35). Just as the *geste*, prolongation draws attention precisely to the existence of *series* and to relationships within and across such series. In practice, every mediation works through prolongation.

The concept of prolongation can be understood in relation to the phenomenological concept of *lifeworld*, or environment. Edmund Husserl (1970[1936]) describes the *Lebenswelt* as a ‘pre-given world’, something which is ‘always already there’, the horizon within which objects can be perceived by an experiencing subject. In interaction sociology and ethnography, the lifeworld category has been translated into Goffman’s (1971) *situation*, Garfinkel’s (1967) *plenum*, and Geertz’s (1988: § 1) *there*. The lifeworld, we may say, is the here-and-now of experience, that which provides its field without becoming its object, thus making it possible for social experience to take place. The here-and-now is not an isolated system. Each locale is porous, in that it prolongs towards an elsewhere which, though not present in the here-and-now of the locale, becomes part of the plenum through that same prolongation.

Hence, objects, actors, events, practices and concatenations not present in the here-and-now are important and even crucial for the plenum. These processes of importation and exportation come about essentially through the media, which act as bridges, corridors or thresholds which traverse the plenum to connect the various here-and-now. Portions of elsewhere and at-other-times are constantly imported into the locale, just as portions of the here-and-now are constantly exported, projected towards somewhere-else and at-other-times. The media that accomplish this import/export task work essentially as prolongations. Thus, they can be imagined as corridors enabling both the extension and the compression of here-and-now.

What does the concept of prolongation add to the conventional notion of medium? Prolongation is a type of connection that falls neither under the categories of evolution nor under those of system. The concept of prolongation can be traced back to the phenomenology of crowds and power developed by Elias Canetti (1973[1960]). The type of relationship existing between the individual and the mass, or between climbing and trading, between jaws and prison, between excrement and morality – as they are explored by Canetti – can be allocated to the category of prolongation. Clearly, a prolongation is neither an organic evolution nor a systemic prescription. Rather, it points towards the existence of *zones of*

indistinction between radically heterogeneous (material and immaterial) spheres. More recent sociological approaches, like *acteur-réseau* theory, move in a similar direction, as they stress the continuity *cum* ontological heterogeneity of the social. The concept of prolongation thus bears some similarities with what Latour (1993) calls *mediation work* or, elsewhere, *factiche*, or, again, *collective of beings*.

The concept of prolongation as a corridor or bridge shares some similarities with the much more fashionable concept of network. But whereas the network shape stresses the aspects of connectivity between points, thus ultimately pointing towards an image of closure, the concept of prolongation stresses the moments of opening, the *flight lines*, *lignes de fuite* or *lignes d'erre* that constantly open up in the here-and-now. Prolongations constitute territories which are hybrid, material-cum-immaterial constructs. Territories bridge spatial and temporal dispersals, they keep people engaged into social relations. Recognising that territories exist in the tension between the material and the immaterial enables us to avoid reductionism of both the medium-message type (McLuhan) and the space-extinction type (Virilio). Because, as we have said, territories are *imagined*, *relational* and *materially processual* entities, we can also describe them as *practices*. Territories are practices insofar as a practice is a set of repetitions and differences that prolong from one environment to another. Extensions and compressions (taking place as territorial rhythmic and melodic patterns) are inherent to prolongations, just as they are to practices. Connecting past knowledge to present circumstances, a practice enables to encode and decode signs, to share a meaningful environment, in other words, to territorialise environments.

Visibility

Visibility essentially regards the activity of introducing, establishing and negotiating *thresholds* that join together or separate territories. The point can be made clearly in relation to the city and its public realm. We have observed that urban public realm is characterised by encounters among biographic strangers. But this also means that those who access public space become *observable*. In other words, in the public realm one can look and be looked at. Yet, given that clearly the city does not coincide with the public realm, islands and layers of private and

parochial realms coexist and intermingle with the public. The constantly rearranged balance between the various realms depends on the management of reciprocal visibilities among actors. For instance, the capacity of managing eye contact – which is part of what Goffman (1963: 84) used to call ‘civil inattention’ – is essential to the maintenance of social order. In short, the domain of the public is a field of reciprocal visibilities, and visibility is an essential feature of social life one should always be attentive in the attempt to describe urban environments.

At the ecological level, accessibility and observability, which are characteristics of the public at large, proceed together. The public sphere has been described by political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas as being basically *accessible* to all. Arendt (1958) speaks of a ‘common world’ which provides the basis for all politics. On his turn, Habermas (1989[1962]) assigns to the public sphere a function of mediation between civil society and political society. In both cases the public sphere is seen as an *open* arena for communication and action. But how exactly does openness relate to publicness?

Notably, accessibility is tightly linked to the *visibility* of the public. Visibility relations are not simply visual relations, but form a more complex field, defined by the capacity of being aware of someone's existence and, consequently, being meaningfully affected by someone's action (Brighenti 2007). Visibility is a feature of the social world that makes it possible to establish a series of thresholds between visible and invisible, noticed and unnoticed, relevant and irrelevant, foreground and background activities, actors, and processes. Only apparently is the visible homogeneous, given that in practice it never ceases to introduce series of discontinuities between elements. And these discontinuities determine the formation of organized ways for exercising visibilities, i.e., *visibility regimes*.

The management of visibilities is a social enterprise whose output is a field of interactions defined by cones and vectors of visibility. Behind these geometric images lies one of the crucial aspect of visibility: namely, the social construction of subjects through their positionings within a field that creates and distribute visibility symmetries and asymmetries. The specific effects of the different forms of visibility, in fact, allow one to conceptualise the creation of subject positions in the field of visibilities. Clearly relevant here is the political and normative dimension of the visible: corresponding to every definition of a field of visibility is a series of demands, tensions, and conflict which seek to establish a connection between the

possible and the proper, between what can be seen and what should or should not be seen, between who can and who cannot see others. This is a type of ongoing, endless task that takes place in urban environments.

Visibility is a property of the social sphere which is grounded in the territorial dimension of interaction, i.e., in the interplay between the two spheres of the material and the immaterial. The field of visibility thus constitutes a zone of indistinction between the social and the technological. To have it with Léroï-Gourhan (1964) and followers – among which, of course, Régis Debray – every anthropogenesis is a technogenesis. But such intimate link between the social and the technological should not lead to overlook the ritual and political dimensions of visibility. As already noticed above, the public realm is a domain in which the management of reciprocal visibilities assumes a symbolic and ritual significance. As Goffman reminds us, the ritual does not simply refer to the repetition of a series of actions, but rather to the persistence of the *sacred* – in our terms, of radical territorial heterogeneity – in everyday life.

New media as territorial prolongations

The usefulness of the concepts of *territory*, *prolongation*, and *visibility* to understand the impact of new media on city life lies in the fact that these concepts cut across the spheres of the material and the immaterial – *urban space* and *public sphere*. This is of course a doubly articulated opposition. On the one hand, not all that is urban is public; yet, on the other hand, the public is undoubtedly a type of urban territoriality. Media determine the complexity of the relationship between the regimes of the public, the parochial and the private; new media do so to an even higher degree.

By acting as prolongations of the here-and-now, media edit urban environments and shape their specific territorialities. The role of media in multiplying and stratifying urban territories was acutely noticed by Walter Benjamin (1935: §xiii). In his famous passage on cinema's 'dynamite of the tenth of a second' he noticed: 'Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the

dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject'. With new media, the expansions and extensions of the here-and-now described by Benjamin are all the more enhanced. Indeed, new media make it possible to virtually mark points in space and bound multimedia information to specific places. In this way, increasingly stratified prolongations are obtained.

From a methodological point of view, we think that the impact of new media on the constitution of territorialities can be best assessed through ethnographic case-studies. At the same time, because, as noticed above, media are part of the editing of the environment, a media ethnography necessarily results into an ethnography of environments, or, as we may say adopting the concept developed by Bateson (1972), an *ecological* ethnography. Consequently, a *new* urban ecology – we call it ‘new’ to distinguish it from traditional urban ecology developed by Robert E. Park and his collaborators at the First Chicago School – is needed to study new media environments. The ‘new’ in ‘new urban ecology’ shares some similarities with the ‘new’ in ‘new media’. Indeed, as – following McLuhan – Bolter and Grusin (1999) have argued, media always operate upon other media. Media not only mediate: when observed in relation to other types of media, they in fact always *re*-mediate. The ‘new’ in new media thus refers to the process of refashioning and recasting that a new medium enacts on other (‘older’) media. An ecological ethnography of new media is premised upon the idea that mediation is remediation.

From a remediation perspective, what are the specific environments created by *new* media? Some of the key characteristics associated with new media are *digitality*, *portability* (or dispersal) and *interactivity* (or hypertextuality). Lev Manovich (2001: §1) enumerates the following five operational principles of new media: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding. These logical operational principles have practical consequences. Spreading in everyday life, new media are capable of creating *spatially mobile territorialities* that carve urban spaces from the inside. As observed by Martin Lister et al. (2003: 30), ‘ubiquitous computing offer a future in which there are no media free zone in everyday life’. On the one hand, new media are embedded in domestic and urban everyday life

settings. On the other hand, new media enable a peculiar stratification of territories, insofar as users are simultaneously engaged in multiple interactions of different types that prolong into each other.

The editing of the urban environment

Because new media introduce stratified territorialities with differentiated visibility thresholds, through prolongations that link the material and the immaterial, relational and positional determinations and interactions are fundamental in the process of shaping the urban environment. Social practices that shape territories and subsequently intervene upon them are increasingly mediated through new media and the space-time prolongations that they enable. Urban social territories consequently become a sort of palimpsest of different material and immaterial practices.

The case of ‘digital bohèmes’, urban hi-tech mobile workers, nicely illustrates the stratification of territories made possible by new media. Digital bohèmes are workers of new generation, who meet in places such as bars and shops they use as their own office, creating their digital workstation with laptops, webcams, mobile phones, and palm devices. Usually they are graphics, fashion and web designers, marketing consultants, arts critics, and curators who foster international synergies by community, forum and network in the web space. So called ‘journalists 2.0’, free-lance journalists who use websites and blogs to report independent news, could also somewhat be counted as digital bohèmes. Digital bohème is a type of economic, social and spatial lifestyle well represented for instance in Berlin Mitte district. Actually, according to official municipal data, in Berlin Mitte there are about 25,000 entrepreneurial one-person activities of this kind. Through the use of new media, digital bohèmes shape their peculiar type of urban territoriality.

The digital bohème case also reveals that the editing of the environment by a medium is most effective when the medium itself becomes *environmental*, i.e. invisible to users. In the words of McLuhan (1969: 22), ‘media effects are new environments as imperceptible as water to a fish, subliminal for the most part’. The urban environment is likewise infra-structured, but its infrastructures tend to systematically remain relatively invisible to users

(Bowker and Star 1999). For instance, increasingly diffused citywide wireless information networks (Mackenzie, in Cronin and Hetherington, eds, 2008) represent one such stable but relatively invisible infrastructure that enables multiple and stratified territorial usages.

The traditional concept of user as individual is not particularly useful to grasp the stake involved in the enhanced environments populated by new media. Of course, fashionable contemporary theories such as *acteur-réseau* theory are concerned precisely with demystifying the modern ‘subject versus object’ dichotomic conception. In particular, Bruno Latour (1993) spoke of ‘proliferation of hybrids’, and suggested to replace the subject/object dichotomy with the semiotic concept of *actant*. But an earlier suggestion in this vein, specifically applied to the task of interpreting the city space, can be found in the independent research of Vilem Flusser (2004[1988]). Flusser described a model of ‘new urbanity’ as a set of immaterial interconnections and relations, rather than a number of material independent egos. ‘The new city – he wrote – would be a projection of interhuman projects’ (ibid. 197, *our translation*) made possible by the development of ‘authentic networks’, which he characterised as polycentric and interactive.

Similarly, the ecological approach to urban ethnography we advocate draws attention on the heterogeneous plenum represented by the locale, the here-and-now. Here, users can be conceptualised as the poles of a series of prolongations that concur in the shaping of territories. In other words, users can be described as *thresholds* in the field of the visible. The ecological perspective understands users as parts of the processes of territorialization that define simultaneously the urban space and the public sphere. That is why new media can be explored on the basis of the territorial processes they sustain.

In the course of such processes, visibility may become empowering (*qua* recognition) as well as disempowering (*qua* surveillance). Indeed, the characteristics that determine the success of new media also make them particularly suitable as surveillance devices. Since surveillance is increasingly based on flow-tracking (Lyon 2002), visibility turns into a battlefield of strategies: new media are suitable for *sur*-veillance (visibility top-down) as well as *sous*-veillance (visibility bottom-up).

Examples of the first kind include the monitoring of the flux of people during the ‘Notte bianca’ event in Rome. On this occasion, a special WikiCity Roma website (<http://senseable.mit.edu/wikicity/rome/>) was set up, in which information usually available

only to police forces and city planners was made widely accessible. The project's statement of intent included tracking the movement of people within the city 'in response to this exceptional pulse of activities and events happening'. Tracking was made by recording the overall volume of cellphone usage in the various sectors of the city. Data were of course treated at the aggregate level, but moving from the aggregate to the individual level is, technologically speaking, a small step.

Examples of the second kind include the use of phone cameras and voice recorders during demonstrations as counter-surveillance tools. This type of media activism reveals that contemporary urban mass events have been profoundly affected by new media. Many of them, such as Critical Mass movement demonstrations, were organised and made possible through web forums and mailing list discussions. During the antiG-8 demonstration in Genova in 2001, evidences of police brutality were abundantly documented through portable devices. The documents which were not destroyed by the police themselves were subsequently collected in a *Libro bianco* (white book) and used in court during the many trials that followed. More generally, the case of urban activism reveals that contemporary mass events have been profoundly affected by new media. If indeed, on the one hand, new media appear to be deeply inscribed in the capitalist horizon – as the massive use corporate companies are doing of new media as means for ever more and more effective forms of advertisement demonstrates – on the other hand they may as well propel new ways of reclaiming the right to the city beyond current socio-economic hegemony.

Affecting visibility relationships, new media also affect the social perception of one's body in relation to others, thus enabling new ways of gathering together and interacting. So called 'flash mobs' are a case in point. Flash mobs are an example of 'instructed' crowds, where the instructions for the creation of the crowd are circulated through web protocols and SMS texting. At first sight, flash mobs may not look very different from other political rallies. But, in fact, a flash mob resembles more closely a rave party, or some performance art event. Flash mobs take place as happenings, usually in public spaces such as railway stations or large stores. Their aim is precisely to transform the nature of urban space gathering people together in an out-of-the-ordinary interaction regime. The human presence brings about a kind of new surface (Virilio 1993) that amplifies the use of such places. Some flash mobs consisted of a large silent hall crowded of people dancing at the rhythm of their own I-pod music. The

first flash mob took place in Manhattan in 2003. Its inventor Bill Wasik described it as a ‘sociological experiment’ designed to poke fun at the ‘cultural atmosphere of conformity it was breathed’.

Another very interesting case is reported by Vincente Rafael (in Chun and Keenan, eds., 2006). Rafael analyses the role played by the use of SMS texting in strengthening ‘People Power II’ movement during the coup that overthrew President Estrada in the Philippines in January 2001. ‘Cell phones – Rafael reflects – were not only invested with the power to overcome the crowded conditions and congested surrounding [in Manila’s streets] brought about by the state’s inability to order everyday life, they were seen to bring about a new kind of crowd that was thoroughly conscious of itself as a movement headed towards a common goal. While telecommunication allows one to escape the crowd, it also opens up the possibility of finding oneself moving in concert with, filled with its desire and consumed by its energy. In the first case, cell phone users define themselves against a mass of anonymous others. In the second, they become those others, accepting anonymity as a condition of possibility for sociality’ (*ibid.* 299).

All these resistant uses of the new media can be appreciated as *tactical* in de Certeau’s sense, as opposed to the *strategical*. Strategy is the dominant model in the political, economic, and scientific realms. It is essentially a territorial form exercised upon proprietary bounded *loci*, and articulated into discourses. In it, outsiders are subordinates or adversaries. By contrast, tactic is deterritorialised, because those who practise it have no territory of their own and have to act on a territory that belongs to others. It is not articulated into discourses, but into practical ways of operating, and it does not recognise outsiders (this would be impossible, because it has no bounded territory that enables identification of people as insiders or outsiders), but only allies.

Whereas strategy is self-centred, territorial, and spatially bounded, tactic is fragmentary, deterritorialised, and temporally (rhythmically) structured. Tactic has no cumulative character, it cannot capitalise on victories, nor achieve any overall coherence; it can only combine heterogeneous elements and constantly try to turn events into opportunities, or, again with Derrida, to open up the *futur* into an *avenir*. Resistance is always of tactical nature. Its social locations do not correspond to any institutionalised field of knowledge, but rather to the realms of the informal, the implicit and even the trivial. Resistance is the

acknowledgement that one cannot win on the enemy's field, but this acknowledgement does not stop short of the attempt to create constantly new fields for the game. Tactics are composed with the vocabulary of established media languages, and thus subordinated to their official syntactical form. But at the same time they trace territorial trajectories informed by 'other interests and desires that are neither determined, nor captured by, the system in which they develop' (de Certeau 1984: xviii).

New media can also be employed as technologies to *project* territories, to make them visible before they actually take place. This is what happens in some participatory design projects and in some experiences of independent mapping. Web protocols and communities enable people to take part in the transformation of cities themselves. Open forums on planning are in many cases becoming an integral part of official decision making processes. This kind of interactive planning is possible on the premise that people can access quickly and freely online territorial information systems. In other cases, independent mapping projects, based on an autonomous exploration of the space that recalls the Situationists' endeavour, aim at the re-construction of shared urban memory.

People draw their own *living map* and link it to maps made by others. Independent, personal mappings become part of open source searchable databases, created with softwares such as Twiki or Worldki. This type of software has been employed, for instance, in the Cartografiarésistente project. Based in Florence, Cartografiarésistente (<http://www.mappeaperte.net/cartografiarésistente/>) is an open, online project of urban territorial mapping aimed at promoting collective, independent knowledge of Florence urban area. The pivotal point of such projects is that databases are not simply accessed, but edited and in large part built by users themselves. So called *web space* therefore makes it possible to map territories and associated affects in novel and unprecedented ways in order to imagine and put into practice new transformations (Mattiucci ed. 2008). More generally, digital cartography generates representations of the city that centred around events rather than objects (Picon 2008).

Other technologies upon which new media are based, such as locative devices, potentially enhance this type of experience. The Headmap manifesto (www.technocult.com/library/headmap.pdf), for instance, argues enthusiastically that new forms of network organised dissent are emerging through collective use of location

aware devices. Indeed, portable devices easily allow users to locate each other, record their own spatial diaries, navigate urban space with instant webmapping support, and localise web forums and discussion groups into specific places. However, it would be a mere delusion to believe that, for this reason, new media technology is intrinsically liberating. One cannot fail to notice that the very list of technological possibilities just reported is as suitable for resistance as it is for control.

Conclusions

In this the chapter, we have attempted to conceptualise the relationship between new media and urban environments. We have argue that *territory*, *prolongation*, and *visibility* can be adopted as conceptual tools to produce rich naturalist ethnographic descriptions of the working of new media in the city as an ecology. More specifically, the environments sustained and edited by new media in the urban realm can be observed as specific *territorial and visibility regimes* in the city. This means that media edit the human environment setting the extent and boundaries of relationships in a way that cuts across and joins the material and the immaterial features of social life, i.e., respectively, urban space and public sphere.

At the same time, however, we have rejected any form of new media exceptionalism. What new media do does not represent something thoroughly unprecedented, but rather an amplification of certain effects that rest upon fundamental techno-social variables, i.e., upon that ‘middle realm’ that determines, to have it with Vandenberghe, the materialisation of the spirit into technology and, at the same time, the organisation of the the material as social. New media bring about an actualisation of some specific possibilities in the configuration of territories and visibilities. They stratify territories and concur to the definition of visibility regimes. As such, they are technical devised but at the same time they integral part of the social realm. The concept of prolongation has helped us to capture precisely this spanning process.

Ultimately, territory and visibility are categories that may be useful to understand the different meanings, conflicts, and controversies that are associated to mobility, circulation, and, more generally, the uses of space in the city. We have considered a series of case studies

to illustrate this. While, admittedly, our present effort is far from complete, we wish the points we have highlighted about the interweavings between the media and the city might be further enquired upon by future research.

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