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The architectures of media power: editing, the newsroom, and urban public space

Journal Article

The architectures of media power:
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Abstract:

This paper considers the relation of the newsroom and the city as a lens into the more general relation of production spaces and mediated publics. Leading theoretically from Lee and LiPuma's (2002) notion of 'cultures of circulation', and drawing on an ethnography of the *Toronto Star*, the paper focuses on how media forms circulate and are enacted through particular practices and material settings. With its attention to the urban milieus and orientations of media organizations, this paper exhibits both affinities with but also differences to current interests in the urban architectures of media, which describe and theorize how media get 'built into' the urban experience more generally. In looking at editing practices situated in the newsroom, an emphasis is placed on the phenomenological appearance of media forms both as objects for material assembly as well as more abstracted subjects of reflexivity, anticipation and purposiveness. Although this is explored with detailed attention to the settings of the newsroom and the city, the paper seeks to also provide insight into the more general question of how publicness is material shaped and sited.

Biography:

Scott Rodgers is a Lecturer in Media Theory at Birkbeck, University of London. His research address the nature of urban social and political life in an increasingly mediated world. Current projects include a book on the transmuting relationship of the newspaper and the city, research into hyperlocal media experiments, and a collaborative project on the implications of networked and digital media for the constitution of housing markets.

The architectures of media power: editing, the newsroom, and urban public space

Introduction: the newsroom and the city

The Wire, HBO's acclaimed television drama, has become renowned for its near-sociological portrait of the American city of Baltimore, told through the city's police department, criminal organizations, port workers, politicians, and inner-city school system. In its fifth and final season, this portrait culminates with a focus on the *Baltimore Sun*, the former workplace of series co-creator and once-journalist David Simon. The main plot revolves around fictional reporter and serial fraudster Scott Templeton, who exaggerates and even invents his news stories, and Gus Haynes, his city desk editor. Templeton is obsessed with his own journalistic achievements. Smaller city newspapers are mere pit stops along an escalating career track ending with a job at a national newspaper. In contrast, Haynes is presented more altruistically, as committed to ethical journalistic practice and the enduring role of the city newspaper in urban life. Over time, Haynes increasingly senses deceit in Templeton's work, and sets out to expose the reporter. But Templeton has allies in the newspaper's senior editors. Templeton's stories have the right sort of resonance and timing to put them and their newspaper into the running for a Pulitzer Prize. Facing staffing cutbacks, the senior editors believe they have to 'do more with less', and so they ignore Haynes' warnings. In the end Templeton's fabrications are effectively covered up, his stories help win the *Baltimore Sun* a Pulitzer Prize, and for his attempts to expose Templeton, Haynes is demoted to the copy desk.

On the surface, the final season of *The Wire* is a tale about the tenuous relations of truth and fiction in journalism. There is also a deeper message, noted by David Simon and others, that a hollowed-out newspaper has serious implications for democratic life in

American cities. We might, however, consider the final season of *The Wire* from yet another perspective. As has been frequently pointed out, although *The Wire* is apparently a police drama, a strong meta-narrative across all five seasons is concerned with the relationships between situated institutional or social settings and urban life more generally. So, in the final season, viewers are presented with a fairly realistic portrayal of journalistic work and its environments, positioned both parasitically and altruistically against the unfolding life of the city. Baltimore amounts to a vast resource for reporters working various leads. Assigned reporters and photographers move through its familiar and unfamiliar spaces, collecting descriptions, quotes and images before returning to the newsroom to meet evening deadlines. Seasoned beat reporters make their rounds over the telephone, trawling for stories and information emerging from the city's institutional spheres in which they are immersed. At the same time, the city appears within the organizational settings of the *Baltimore Sun*, as an urban public space to which the newspaper is oriented and circulated. This appearance of the city is very much the remit of editors. Their work is defined not only by management duties, but by anticipating and reflecting on their role in assembling a media form. The environment for editing work is the newsroom. This is a place for professionals, wearing semi-formal wear, shirts and ties, seated at desks or being in places that imply organizational roles and hierarchies, governed by certain expectations of collegiality. Here, both the big picture and small details count, from expansive debates about the merits of stories or investigations, to last-minute, logistically-inflected discussions on story length, design, placement and propriety. So while in the former case, reporters work though various urban spaces, in the latter case, the newsroom *itself* is a site for addressing the city as a public space.

This paper focuses on the relation of the newsroom and the city as a lens into the more general relation of production spaces and mediated publics. Though 'the newsroom' has a

well-established pedigree in the journalism literature, it appears primarily as either a byword for the actually-existing journalism trade or as the default setting of classic newsroom sociologies (e.g. Tuchman, 1978). There has been little attention to newsroom spaces as such; those that have directly studied newsrooms tend to focus on their historical (e.g. Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003) or geographical permutations (e.g. Esser, 1998). This paper is more closely aligned with Hemmingway's (2004) analysis of the newsroom as a machine-like 'microcosmic environment' that corresponds to time-spaces exterior to the newsroom. While Hemmingway's concern is the translation of phenomena beyond the newsroom into news events, this paper focuses on the newsroom as the inherent milieu of editing practices, and their relation to urban public space as accessed through the reflexive re-enactment of a media form. I have attempted to foreshadow this through the above account of the *Baltimore Sun*, as portrayed in *The Wire*. However, I draw more substantially here upon ethnographic research on another, somewhat different, North American metropolitan newspaper, the *Toronto Star*[1].

The use of 'architectures' in the title of this paper calls attention to the links as well as differences between my approach and recent interests in how media forms are 'built into' urban architectures, and thus into the urban experience (see especially McQuire, 2008). This growing literature points to the pervasive mediation of urban spaces, through for example hidden infrastructures (Graham and Marvin, 2001), software automation (Shepard, 2011; Thrift and French, 2002), augmented reality platforms (Aurigi and De Cindio, 2008), proliferating televisual surfaces (McQuire *et al*, 2009; Krajina, 2009; McCarthy, 2001) and outdoor advertising (Cronin, 2010). Here, by contrast, I seek to highlight the material milieus of media organizations in relation to cities. To adequately account for this aspect of the media-cities intersection I argue that, following Couldry (2004), we should theorize media in terms of practices. More specifically, however, to account for organised media

production I argue that we need to think in terms of the *integrative* practices that surround particular media forms, and the specific material arrangements built up around such practices (Schatzki, 2002). The sense of form proposed here is inspired by Lee and LiPuma's (2002) notion of 'cultures of circulation' which suggest that cultural forms, including those related to media, are not transmitted from one point to another but rather are reflexively enacted through interpretive communities. This suggests that we attend to both the dynamic material environments of media organizations in urban space, but also their relational entanglement in an urban public space, constructed in part through the circulating media form they participate in (re)assembling.

The paper builds toward two key arguments. First, that the connection of editing and the newsroom is a result of the latter being the inherent environment for the former which, most importantly, is understood to be a practical entity. Editing work in the newsroom is powerful only so in so far as it collates bodies and technologies into an arrangement intrinsic to editing as an abstract integrative practice. Second, and in turn, the principle connection of the newsroom and urban public space is via its entanglement with the newspaper as circulated media form. My argument here will be that it is critically important to acknowledge the ambiguous power of media production. A media form such as the *Toronto Star* is not a fully original daily creation of such settings; it is also an inheritance of previously existing public circulation. These arguments are set within an overarching aim, which is to propose that despite its specificity, the relationship of the newsroom and the city nevertheless illustrates wider themes related to the material settings through which public life is perpetuated.

Production spaces, circulation and the mediated city

In my introductory vignette, I claimed that in the newsroom portrayed in *The Wire*, Baltimore appears as an urban public space, particularly for editing work. In casting a relation of newsroom and city in these terms, my use of 'urban public space' does not primarily refer to paradigmatic public spaces such as the city square. Instead, following Iveson (2007), I will suggest a procedural and relational meaning. As Iveson (2007: 32-47) argues, while urban spaces are often crucial *venues* for activities regarded as public, they can also become *objects* of public concern, while 'the city' can stand in for 'the public' as a social entity, that is, it can become a public *subject*. Urban public space, therefore, is not only material spaces in cities conceived as public, but also urban imaginaries stretched out over time, acting as reflexive objects or subjects of recursive, reflexive public address (cf. Barnett, 2007).

The work of newspaper editors in the newsroom, I will argue, is primarily entangled in the city understood as an object of public action and a collective public subject. The use of 'entanglement' here is deliberate, to suggest that editing work does not address its publics or public matters in a one-way direction. Rather, as Warner (2002: 67) argues, there is a 'chicken-and-egg circularity' to publicness. The public address of editing work is only possible in so far as it can take for granted a prior and successive urban public sphere. Having stated this however, there remains another issue to consider: how this relationship between editing work, situated in the newsroom, and this broader notion of urban public space is mediated. I will suggest that Lee and LiPuma's (2002) notion of 'cultures of circulation' provides us with a useful starting point. In the wake of various debates on globalization, Lee and LiPuma are troubled by an often simplistic framing of 'circulation' as the transmission of bodies, ideas, artifacts and commodities from one place to another.

They argue that circulation is more that something's mobility. Circulation is the performances or practices which constitute such movement:

> …circulation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them (Lee and LiPuma, 2002: 192).

For Lee and LiPuma circulating *forms* presuppose the interpretative, evaluative, and abstractive elements of the communities of practice to which they associate. At the same time, the *practices* of such communities are self-reflexive or indexical in that they refer to and simultaneously enact such circulating forms (ibid: 195). Forms, therefore, are not transmitted in a one-way direction, from for example producer to consumer or receiver. Instead, forms circulate through, and thereby partake in the reciprocal constitution of, sites of social and cultural life.

Within media theory, so-called audience research has come closest to conceiving of media forms in this sense. Ethnographic studies of audience practices, particularly over the last two decades, have largely deemphasised the 'reception' of media messages or forms. Instead, media forms are used, interpreted or appear with varying phenomenological weight within the routines and settings of everyday life (e.g. Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Bird, 2003; Moores, 2000). Over time, media forms may become 'domesticated' into particular environments, especially that of the home. For Roger Silverstone (1994), the specifically urban implications of this television-home nexus was a corresponding television-suburbia nexus. If suburbs are a hybrid of the 'public' and 'private' living embodied by the urban and rural respectively, television is corresponding hybrid, through which we connect to a public world yet usually from within an insulated and private space. These notions of television-home and television-suburbia nexuses exemplify what Livingstone (2010) calls Silverstone's 'double articulation': an approach to media which

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accounts for both its material and symbolic dimensions. Television form is partly made through material arrangements within particular practical environments (e.g. notably the home, but elsewhere also – see McCarthy, 2001), and partly made of symbolic qualities extending beyond – though made apparent through – such practical environments.

Couldry (2004) argues that such approaches to media forms, found in audience theory and elsewhere, lead to a general ontological and paradigmatic turn to theorizing media as practice. For Couldry, theorizing media as practice represents a turn away from prioritizing discrete relations between media forms and subjectivity, through for example textual analyses, and instead focuses on how media become implicated in a wide variety of practices. Couldry takes 'practices' to mean the localized and embodied taking-place of activity, as well as how such activity is explicitly understood (drawing specifically on recent interests in theories of social practices – e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki *el al*, 2001). The primary implication of such an approach is that questions of how to measure media 'effects' become moot, being substituted with two much more open-ended questions: "what types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media?" (Couldry, 2004: 121).

This potentially provides us with an account of how forms mediate between situated practical settings and circulatory public spaces, though as Ardèvol *et al* (2010: 260-250) argue, Coudry's image of media practices does not explicitly enough account for (increasingly-multifarious) practices of media production. They agree with Hobart's (2010) critique, which argues that Couldry's account falls short of the truly radical implications of practice theory for studying media. Hobart (2010) suggests that Couldry envisions practices as a supplementary approach, best directed at the practices of so-called ordinary people, which intentionally or not implies that theories of transcendental structure remain adequate

for understanding media production. While Couldry (2004; cf. 2000: 49) is correct that, relative to the fluidity of 'audience' practices, media production is comparatively rationalized, self-reflexive and exclusionary, I would argue it is precisely these aspects of media production that should be understood in terms of practices. Though what counts as 'production' is up for grabs in an era of digital and networked media (Ardèvol *et al*, 2010), even in centralized and bureaucratic production settings, Lee and LiPuma's (2002) notion of circulation suggests we fall short of assuming media production is the outward transmission of media forms. Instead, such practices should be seen as *participating* (if often very powerfully) in a wider processes of circulation.

This means however that if we argue 'newspaper editing' to be just as practiced, situated and everyday as being an 'audience', it remains an important task to conceptualize its qualities as a specific, *organized* practice in and of the city. Couldry's (2004) two central questions for theorizing media as practices – what people do and what people say in relation to media – respectively focus on 'doings' and 'sayings'. For Schatzki (1996), doings and sayings together define *dispersed* practices: open-ended activities which potentially come into play across several milieus. Schatzki however argues for an emphasis on the place of *integrative* practices in the social world. These are practices that involve many dispersed practices linked together by both normativity – what is acceptable to do, or ought to be done – and reflexive and epistemic knowledge of the past and present nature, conduct and common situation of the integrative practice (ibid: 98-103). Furthermore, such integrative practices inherently depend on arrangements of tools and technologies. In a follow-up book, Schatzki (2002) labels such assemblages of practices and material arrangements as 'sites'. Though Schatzki argues for an analytical priority on practices, his account of material arrangements, inspired by (if also critical of) actor-network theory is useful since it provides a way of describing the situated orders of editing practices in relation to urban

settings. It should be emphasized that these situated orders are not necessarily exciting; indeed such infrastructures are powerful precisely because in banal or boring ways they embody political decisions distant in time and space (Star, 1999). As a result, arguments are increasingly being made in organizational studies to account for the largely invisible materialities of everyday work (Orlikowski, 2007). This has been mirrored by calls to draw upon actor-network theory to better understand media production, particularly journalism (e.g. Hemmingway, 2008; Plesner, 2009).

Through the notion of 'circulation' I have sought to shore up some connections between urban public space, media forms, and the practices and material arrangements of editing work. This has led, or so I will demonstrate, to a slightly different sense of 'media architectures' than the body of work, mentioned in this paper's introduction, on media as pervasively and materially 'built into' urban space (McQuire, 2008). As Straw (2009: 23) argues, the idea of circulating forms is an anti-interpretive intervention that deemphasizes the interpretation of the social from *within* a media form's content, and instead emphasizes how media forms occupy and move *through* social spaces. So, the relation of media and cities becomes less concerned with the representation of the urban in media texts, and more concerned with understanding how media forms can become "a pretext for the building of structures and the organization of space" around their circulatory qualities (ibid: 27). Writings on urban media architectures such as urban screens (e.g. McQuire *et al*, 2009), outdoor advertising (Cronin, 2010) or hidden software infrastructures (Shepard, 2011) are all very good examples of how a circulatory reading of media forms can contribute to understanding contemporary cities. However, somewhat strangely perhaps, the urban milieus of more institutionalized media production settings have largely been left to one side. Strange, because media institutions, particularly through their buildings, are very clearly made materially present in cities. Certainly, media organizations seek to project their

authority through their structures, as illustrated for example by Wallace's (2006) account of the competition between newspaper buildings lining New York City's Park Row in the 19th Century. This material presence however runs deeper than exterior aesthetics in relation to an immediate setting or location; such material locations are first and foremost built around a circulating media form. Indeed, as work inspired by science and technology studies argues, buildings are best understood not as black boxes, but as permeable nodes in heterogeneous socio-technical networks (Jacobs *et al.*, 2006; Jenkins, 2002), which simultaneously enable and structure of social practices (Gieryn, 2002). With this in mind, I will now turn my attention to one such node of urban media architecture: the Toronto Star Building.

Editing at home in the newsroom

Number 1 Yonge Street marks the place where Toronto's most noted street meets its Lake Ontario waterfront. Running north to south, it bisects the city, not only imaginatively but also actually, as the dividing line for street names and addresses. At this prestigious waterfront address sits the 25-storey Toronto Star Building, an unremarkable instance of the international style of architecture. It is brutalist, blocky shaped and mediocre, and certainly not a valued building in architectural terms. Some symbolic significance can be ascribed to its time and location of construction. Appearing in the late 1960s, in what was then an empty post-industrial landscape of declining railway and shipping operations, this building was seen as a bold move by a newspaper company into a district that is today populated by high-rise offices, hotels and condominiums. For some, even many, this building symbolized the *Toronto Star*'s vision for the waterfront, and in turn for the city and its publics, with which it had been intimately entangled since the late 19th Century.

Let us zoom in a little further, however, to the fifth floor of this building:

> 6.13pm. From my loaned desk, I have a good vantage of the newsroom. It is an open plan, sprawling tangle of desks, extending from one end of the expansive fifth floor to another. It is colourful for an office space: support pillars painted blue, green and red. A flood of visual material seemingly marking out territories both departmental and personal: photos, posters, newspaper clippings, collages, lists, tables, maps, nature scenes and city skylines. Above the City Editor's office door are six white clocks, all set to Eastern Time, with labels affixed below each naming seemingly random local municipalities – Mississauga, East Gwillimbury, Caledon, Markham, Woodbridge, and Ajax. A reminder, perhaps, that all these nearby places share the same urban region with Toronto. (Observation Diary, 21 March 2005)

Here, in the interior spaces of 1 Yonge Street, we have a slightly different relation between this building and the city. We find the newsroom, and ensemble of practices and material arrangements related to the assembly of a media artifact, the *Toronto Star*, which is connected to the city as a public space, by virtue of its circulation. This workspace includes many types of staff, but I will focus on editors, for whom the newsroom is home; not only the location for their work, but also a significant aspects of its definition. I will focus in particular upon editing work in the *Toronto Star*'s City Department. For Lee Bourrier[2] (the City Editor), Wilson Omstead (his Deputy), and a coterie of assistant city editors, the newsroom is a kind of ballroom in which they perform their daily practical dance: congregating, visiting, meeting, and using information and communication technologies. Yet the newsroom is hardly an open and fluid terrain for these activities. The performance of editing work in the newsroom is ordered by at least three qualities: its places; its rhythms; and its technologies.

Newsroom places

At the centre of the newsroom, under a boxed-out, concave ceiling section is the city desk, a vaguely u-shaped table with two computers. It is immediately adjacent to the news desk, a group of approximately 6-7 paginators whose influential job is the final layout of the main news section. It is also near other major production areas, notably the copy desk, photo desk and radio scanner room. This is the hub of activity and attention during peak times,

with televisions tuned continuously to local 24-hour news channels, and staff congregating for debates and interchanges, peppered by arm gesturing. The city desk is just as often called the assignment desk: stationed here is a city assignment editor, who manages the assignment of reporters and the composition of the daily news file. For this reason alone, city editors visit and loiter at the city desk a great deal, and for Lee Bourrier and Wilson Omstead, this makes the city desk first and foremost a conduit. Via communicating, consulting and coordinating, this is where they can translate their preferences and decisions into adjustments in the timings and spacings of city reporter practices.

The city desk becomes this conduit principally through timely moments of brief yet exhaustive exchanges:

> 10.50am. Lee Bourrier and I arrive at the City Desk following the morning news meeting. Wilson Omstead and Erik Yongken (City Assignment Editor) are there, discussing the daily City file. Seeing us arrive, they look expectantly to Lee, who without the slightest pause begins a run-down of the City stories that seemed of prime interest to other senior editors in the news meeting. Again without pause, they shift directly into discussion on connected matters: unassigned reporters, the possible assignments, angles to pursue, what hasn't been considered, all filled out by indecipherably minor allusions to layout, photos, and graphics. (Observation Diary, 7 March 2005)

Though the city desk has practical significance largely because it is a conduit to places beyond the newsroom, the actual location of the city desk within the newsroom setting – near other important production spaces, near heavily-travelled passageways – itself matters too. It is a location from which to circulate about, shout to or hear from those proximate, and quite simply to be found by others. Wilson Omstead, for example, spends part of his afternoon, immediately following the news meeting, in the vicinity of the city desk. From here, he ferries back and forth: negotiating front page play with news desk editors; discussing layouts with paginators, or graphics with designers; arranging assignments with the photo desk; and so on.

Since it is such an important conduit and location, the city desk is also frequently used in looser ways, as simply a place to linger, not just for editors, but many others as well. It is an obdurate, 'human' place:

> … news is human, and the only way you're going to cover news, to make news relevant to other people, is it has to be done, [through] communication among people … what you hope to have around the assignment desk [i.e. city desk] is you try to create an atmosphere of, kind of a congenial, kind of, gathering spot, where people can come and go, and talk and say, you know, do you think this is a story, or I'd like to work on that story, or what, you know, what do you think of this, or I've got this idea, or I've heard this… (Dave Isaac, City Assignment Editor)

The city desk is composed of circulations, proximities, and connections. Despite the importance of technologies in making these qualities possible, editors like Dave Isaac equally equate it with atmosphere, congeniality and inquiry. More than just a functional space, the city desk is an important newsroom *place* for the work of city editing: certainly it is meaningfully so, since it was somewhere that the activities of editing activities are explicitly recognised as advantageously in-place (Cresswell, 2004); but it is also affectively so, as a setting where bodies feel part of an atmosphere (Borch 2009).

Newsroom rhythms

The daily work of city editors is not, of course, all about free-flowing times around the city desk. Their work is punctuated by newsroom rhythms; most notably the timing and spacing of meetings. Editing involves various types of meetings, many of which are impromptu, possibly even taking-place outside of the newsroom setting. Very identifiable newsroom rhythms are set into motion, however, by scheduled meetings, tied to predefined sets of issues. Particularly important for Lee Bourrier's or Wilson Omstead's daily work are the main morning and afternoon news meetings. These meetings focus especially on projecting, and then checking on the progress of, those stories planned for the next day's front page, as well as 'human interest' stories for page three. They are

defined by a degree of formality, inhabiting a boardroom consisting of a large table surrounded by chairs. Generally, only section editors attend, though occasionally with additional pertinent staff. A senior editor sits at one end of the table, chairs the meeting, and closes proceedings by indicating some decisions. Another meeting, however, which includes the entire coterie of City Department editors, is equally important. Held immediately before the afternoon news meeting this meeting is both a rundown of the city news file at that midday moment, and simultaneously a 'baton passing' between the morning and evening shift. These meetings are informal: set in the somewhat cramped office of the City Editor, with attendees seated in chairs of mixed height and qualities, around a low-level coffee table piled with newspapers. They are also familiar: here a good degree of sarcasm and black humour is tolerated, and it is generally a more open discussion of the City Department news file.

Both the main news meetings and the informal City Department meeting are 'local' gatherings which are reflexive of and enact the 'larger picture' outside of the meeting time-space (cf. Boden, 1994: 192; Hemmingway, 2004). At some moments, they are times for fantastic imagination and speculation about the potential public impact of stories; at the very next moment, however, imagination and speculation can be tamed with talk about logistics and available resources. Such meetings are in this sense exercises of heterogeneous engineering: between fantasies and enrolling allies and resources (Law, 2000: 350); and between breaking new ground and stabilizing existing organizational practices (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008).

Of course, another feature of such meetings is that they are not open to everyone:

> … part of the point of being an editor-driven paper is that reporters are actually kind of shielded from a lot of the bullshit. So I can go into [Bourrier's] office and we can bang heads for fifteen

minutes about what's wrong and what's right, and then I can come out and sugarcoat it, explain it in a positive way, so that the reporter doesn't get sucked into a great big debate about stuff. (Innes Witcar, Assistant City Editor)

For city editing work, meetings *enclose* bodies, spatially, amongst the material arrangement of offices or conference rooms, and procedurally, as the place for certain types of practical reasoning. Meetings also enclose bodies temporally, by opening and closing organizational episodes (cf. Cooren and Fairhurst, 2004) which participants both work towards and work from. Such enclosure is by no means permanent; during the research there was much debate amongst senior editors on the appropriate time, length, conduct and location for daily news meetings (see also Rodgers, 2010):

> … the idea was that we don't want to troop people into a conference room where they sit down, and they start having coffee ... I mean the joke was we should not only have it standing up but that everybody should stand on one leg … the theory being that if you bring in the right people at the right time, the right decisions are going to be made anyway, it doesn't matter that you're sitting around in a conference room. (Lee Bourrier, City Editor)

In this sense, attempts were made to better align the actual, reified, chronological time of meetings with their kairotic, or *timely* timing (see contributions to Jones *et al.*, 2004).

Newsroom technologies

Practical activity taking place around the city desk and during meetings is haunted by a wide-ranging backdrop of technical devices and technological capacities. One of the most important of these is what might be called the 'digital newsroom': the computer-based content management system at the *Toronto Star*. This is a more distributed newsroom than the physical space bearing the same name, made of computers and local area networks, connected up by wide area networks, and crucially, mediated by CCI NewsGate, a proprietary software platform produced by a Danish company. A content manager like NewsGate allows different pieces of 'news data' (e.g. stories, photos, graphics, layouts), destined for the same newspaper page to be handled by different staff (e.g. editors,

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reporters, paginators, graphic designers) with little or no cross-consultation, co-presence, or need to sequentially order tasks.

This does not mean everything is done simultaneously, seamlessly or without co-presence. There is plenty of last-minute commotion on a daily basis. But for editors, NewsGate provides a specific visualization of dispersed staff and the continuously mutating 'news file':

> People in Ottawa and, um, Queen's Park [bureaus of the National Department] … they're really not outside the newsroom in a sense, because of the connections to our computer system, they might, they could be just as easily, you know, (be) in the corner of the newsroom here, because … they have all the same access to our sys-, the computer system, and I have access to, you know, what they do. So, really, [physical distance] hardly matters frankly. (Camron Young, National Editor)

Distance, of course, is hardly as meaningless as Camron implies. Indeed, reporters on the national or provincial political beats define their work primarily by the fact that it is *not* conducted in the newsroom, but 'on location'. However, the visualization of proximity and simultaneity made available through NewsGate is a crucial backdrop for editing practices.

Perhaps ironically, editing work makes use of NewsGate's visualizations, in significant part, through the medium of print. For example, at certain key points in the day, NewsGate's constantly changing information is distilled into printed lists of stories called skeds. The city sked lists all City Department stories intended for the next day's newspaper. Each entry on the sked includes: a 'slug' denoting a short label for the story, which coincides with the NewsGate file name; a 'sked line' reflecting the main angle for the story; and details on staff assigned to the story. Though these skeds may appear mundane, they are powerful everyday infrastructures (Star, 1999). In the time-space of meetings, for example, skeds allow editors to momentarily stabilize the continuously unfolding events and work practices presented to them through NewsGate:

> … the sked gets captured in time. After about three o'clock, it's not supposed to be updated. Once it gets put out and distributed, that's it. That's the (start of day) sked. I mean it's just a clerical thing that, people are always working from the same amount of, the same bunch of information. (Erik Yongken, City Assignment Editor)

For Erik, skeds are "just a clerical thing". For sure, in meetings and elsewhere, they act as a useful tool in discussions. They provide a visual reference to stories being discussed, make present those stories not discussed verbally, and, by providing 'slug' names, afford a way to mention stories with little more than a single word. However, in their humble work, skeds also translate a range of complex associations into an ordering – and not just any – but a particular teleological and affective ordering that expresses editing authority. In one sense, then, skeds *do* things for editing work. They are immutable mobiles that, however temporarily, transport "meaning or force without transformation" (Latour, 2005: 39; cf. Cooren, 2004). In another sense, however, they cannot be understood apart from their practical use. Indeed, the practice of creating ordered, paper lists of stories predates NewsGate and even the introduction of computation capacities into the newsroom. Skeds may now be texts dependent on the data stored in CCI NewsGate, but their practical use is bound up in longstanding practical understandings and rules around their status as objects for editorial decision making.

Editing, media form and urban public space

Through the previous section sought to theorize editing as 'at home' in the newsroom, by describing its inherent dependence on newsroom places, rhythms and technologies, it necessarily left aside how editing orients to urban public space. As I indicated earlier, this orientation to the city is principally via the newspaper as a media form, the prior public circulation of which editing work takes for granted. In this section, therefore, I consider the

phenomenological appearance of the newspaper form in relation to editing practices. I will claim that this appearance of form is both material as well as immaterial. This reading is partly inspired by Barnhurst and Nerone (2002) who, though not phenomenologists themselves, provide a broadly similar account of form in their history of 20th Century newspapers. Barnhurst and Nerone describe the different aesthetics and arrangements of newspapers over time as consisting in both material and 'ideal' form. On the one hand, historically- and geographically-specific techniques and technologies of newsgathering, editing and reading materialize in layout, design, typography and printing. On the other hand, these forms also embody particular ideals of a shared social world, expressed for example through illustration conventions, distinctions between reporting and comment, and the departmentalization of content. I will suggest that both the material and immaterial aspects of newspaper form have traceable 'edges' (Gaonkar and Povinelli, 2003: 392) in relation to editing work in the newsroom.

A distinguishing feature of the *Toronto Star* is that, as a so-called metropolitan newspaper, it has a distinctively 'urban' circulation. In material terms only the printed edition is so confined – that is in terms of physical circulation – to the Toronto region (and some other Ontario localities); the web edition is of course available globally. However, both are principally addressed towards a dispersed urban public, and this has elusive implications for editors in the City Department. I will illustrate briefly in relation to the *Toronto Star*'s 'GTA' section, to which city editors devote a great deal of their time. Like similar sections in many North American newspapers, the GTA section is generally inserted immediately after the main news section (it is also a primary sub-page on thestar.com). It has its own regular columnists, features, news from City Department beats, and pre-allocated space for such matters as regional weather, television listings, and obituaries. It is also constrained by a practical rule that its content must somehow relate to events within the Greater Toronto

Area. A common mythology amongst editors and reporters alike was that when introducing this section, in the mid-1990s, the *Toronto Star* introduced the very phrase 'GTA' as a regional colloquialism.

I will focus here on how the GTA section is a daily negotiation for Lee Bourrier and Wilson Omstead:

> 5.20pm. Wilson Omstead is visiting Natalie Phifer, a senior news desk editor. Holding a printout of the city sked, Wilson runs through the news file. He seems to be looking for signals from Natalie as to what the news desk is planning to take for the main section. In the earlier news meeting, there had been much interest in a story about 2000 people showing up at a public meeting to protest major commuter rail works proposed for the Weston area of the city. Wilson: 'okay, what about GO?' Eyes on her computer, Natalie shakes her head. Wilson nods, 'OK so that is front page of GT.'
>
> Ten minutes or so later, Wilson walks back to the city desk, where Lee is reading over a story draft. Lee looks up, and Wilson outlines what he thinks about a possible makeup for the next day's GTA section. Wilson thinks the GO commuter rail story should be on its front page. Lee seems more interested in an attempted suicide that occurred earlier in the day, in front of a crowded protest at the provincial legislature: 'well I think we want VUONG[3] for the front page'. They both lean over a chart showing the column space available in the section, making some provisional scribbles in pencil. Lee: 'what do we have for GO?' Wilson: '25 inches'. Lee: 'yeah but what kind of package do we have?' Wilson: 'oh, we got some visuals … a photo which I have yet to see, and a map of Weston, large one, and a smaller map of the rail link.' Lee: 'is this all colour?' Wilson 'yes.' Lee: 'okay, lets do that inside on page 3.' (Observation Diary, 10 March 2005)

The interactions described above may seem slightly technical, but what they illustrate is attention to both material and immaterial aspects of form. On the one hand, Lee, Wilson and Natalie explicitly negotiate production matters: logistics, placement, layout, length and design. On the other hand, they implicitly judge the relative merits and appropriate presentation for each story. In the former case, form is materialized as the possible categories, resources, and timeframes of editing as an integrative practice. In the latter case, form foregrounds much more abstracted or 'immaterial' types of reflexivity, anticipation and purpose around what might resonate or be proximate to Toronto's publics.

While certain stages and aspects of material form identifiably transpire through the newsroom places, rhythms or technologies described in the previous section, it is very

difficult to similarly locate what I am labelling immaterial form. The GTA section is not merely a technical matter of production; it also embodies a kind of historicized intersection of phenomena, publics and journalistic authority related to Toronto and its hinterland. In principle, the immaterial form is involved in the practices of city editors virtually everywhere and all of the time: in meetings, at the city desk, in an office, passing in a corridor, over lunch, to name just a few places. Editing at the *Toronto Star* involves having a sense for a specifically urban and regional audience, 'the GTA', but this is not something usually vocalized or explicitly set out in the practical doing of the task. It substantially relies on implicit 'gut feelings' which, to use Bourdieu's language, are *doxic* – self-evident and thus requiring no explanation (Schultz, 2007: 194). This is why, when asked about how they know their audience, many *Toronto Star* editors answer indirectly, referring to other situations, events, or resources, instead of the actual editing practices where thinking through the specifically urban audience hypothetically counts the most. The immaterial form of the *Toronto Star* presumes implicit knowledge, often fleeting and cluttered, of the interests, backgrounds, education, politics, icons and places important to people in the Toronto region.

A profound implication is that editing work at the *Toronto Star* not only creates a media form, it also *inherits* a form. Just as we zoomed into the fifth floor of the Toronto Star Building at 1 Yonge Street, and saw in the newsroom a dizzying palimpsest of furniture, ephemera, departmental territories, and old and new technologies, we can see a kind of palimpsest in the *Toronto Star* as an abstracted media form. It is not, and cannot be, reinvented quickly.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset, the inclusion of 'media', 'architecture' and 'public space' in the title of this paper is a self-conscious attempt to place my argument alongside, yet also in contrast with, those approaches which have sought to describe and theorize the media-city intersection with analyses of how media are materially 'built in' to cities. While these approaches helpfully foreground media power through, for example, hidden software infrastructures, augmented reality applications or proliferating urban screens, my sense of urban media architecture has been slightly different. I have by contrast directed my attention towards the material milieus of media organizations in and in relation to the city. First, this involved accounting for City Department editor practices alongside their intrinsic material arrangements, which I described as the places, rhythms and technologies of the *Toronto Star* newsroom. It is worth underscoring in this context that Schatzki's (2002) distinction between practices and material arrangements is not a distinction between *humans* and things, nor humans and technologies. A practice is basically an abstract potentiality, made actual through the performances of bodies, objects and technologies. This means 'editing' is a practical entity, a remembered and enacted integrative practice. The implication is that, even though the newsroom at 1 Yonge Street is a permeable space (cf. Jenkins, 2002) through which more widely distributed bodies, ideas, information, etc all pass, such relational phenomena are partly *collated* into a setting or arrangement inherent to the taking-place or performance of editing. The material arrangements, normativity and knowledge involved in editing as integrative practice make it an obligatory passage point (cf. Couldry, 2000: 5; Callon and Latour, 1981) for the reassembly of the *Toronto Star* as circulating media form. In turn, and perhaps not so surprisingly, we can affirm that city editing at the *Toronto Star* is a site of power in relation to urban public space.

The second aspect of my argument concerned the connection between the newsroom and urban public space, where the latter was conceived of as a relational object or subject of recursive address (cf. Barnett, 2007; Iveson, 2007). In as far as editing is a site of power in relation to urban public space, it is through its relation to the newspaper as circulated media form. More so than most other practices in the newsroom or across the newspaper organization, editing work brings together a heterogeneous range of elements and practices – copy and reporting, photos and photography, graphics and designing – and translates these into the representational environment of printed or digital news pages. My account emphasized the degree to which this process of translation involves the complex interweaving of material and immaterial aspects of form. As noted earlier, one of the most interesting observations made by Barnhurst and Nerone (2002) is that historical transformations in news form are not only related to shifts in techniques and technologies, for example of page layout or printing, but also related to shifts in shared ideals of the social world. News form is a historicised compact of sorts between its creators and publics. The *Toronto Star* as media form has been entangled the unfolding public life of Toronto over much of the 20th Century, and exists as an immaterial public artifact as much as a material newsroom creation. In this sense, critical analyses that envision centralised media production as loci for 'bad' power may be missing something significant about media power and its constitution. I have sought to show that there is a degree to which, in relation to the practices of editing, the *Toronto Star* is a type of *inheritance*, a form with a complex and shifting prior circulation to which editing work itself is partly subjugated.

It is worth acknowledging that, for some readers, the empirical focus of this paper may place limits on its relevance for understanding media more generally. The printed newspaper form, and the centralised newsroom setting, may appear somewhat anachronistic in relation to the rise of digital and networked media, as well as highly

dispersed media production. As I have argued elsewhere (Rodgers, under review), however, the newspaper should be seen as an *expression* of the professionalized journalistic field, which despite the hyperbole about 'citizen journalism' is quite unlikely to completely disappear. The more general remit of my argument, summarized above, is to emphasize how relational and procedural public spaces are materially shaped through both media production settings and media forms (cf. Carpignano, 1999). While in describing the newsroom and the city I have illuminated only one instance of this material shaping, a claim I implicitly make is that practices taking place in production settings are just as radically situated and everyday as those of so-called audiences. The former are anchored to a particular media form in ways much more rationalized and teleological than the latter, but the task is to study and conceptualize how this crystallizes through practices. Taking seriously the real ambiguities of institutionalized media and their material milieus opens up more productive inquiries into the constitution of media power.

Notes

[1] This research formed part of a larger project on the transmuting relationship of the newspaper and the city, focusing on organizational change at the *Toronto Star*, 2005-2011. This study period was 'bookended' by two intensive ethnographic studies: the first taking in six months of research in early 2005, which entailed six weeks of participant observations, 58 interviews, an analysis of secondary documentation, and the tracking of news content over six months; and the second taking in two months in 2011, which entailed four weeks of participant observation, 23 interviews, and in-depth archival research.

[2] The names used when referring to *Toronto Star* staff in this paper are pseudonyms.

[3] In speaking of 'GO' and 'VUONG' Lee and Wilson are using 'slug' names from the city sked, a newsroom practice mentioned earlier.

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