Castells: Space of Flows and Space of Places

There is much to say about Castells' wide-ranging account of what he names the network society (Castells, 1996) [2], but for the specific purposes of this paper my main interest is in his social theory of space, and particularly in the distinction that he draws between the 'space of flows' and the 'space of places'. I should state at the outset that, while Castells' work seems to me to be helpful in making sense of current social transformations, his understanding of space is not without its problems. As I will try to show, those problems have to do with an apparent contradiction in the way in which place is conceptualized.

Space is defined by Castells (1996: 411), in general terms, as 'the material support of time-sharing social practices', although he is keen to stress that time-sharing practices today do not necessarily rely on the 'physical contiguity' of participants in social interaction. Indeed, in his view, 'it is fundamental that we separate the basic concept of material support of simultaneous practices from the notion of contiguity' (Castells, 1996: 411; and see Thompson, 1995: 32, on the altered 'experience of simultaneity' or 'sense of "now"' in modern life). This is because there is 'a new spatial form' (Castells calls it the space of flows) that is characteristic of the network society[3], which facilitates relationships across physical distances in 'simultaneous time'. He (1996: 412) tells us that 'our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information … flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols'. In turn, these flows are made possible by the social development of technologies such as 'microelectronics', 'telecommunications' and 'broadcasting systems'.

It is at the point where Castells advances his ideas on the space of flows that he first deals with the fate of place in the network society. Here it is proposed that, while the 'structural logic' of the space of flows might be 'placeless', in fact 'places do not disappear', rather they 'become absorbed in the network', in which 'no place exists by itself' since its position and meaning are 'defined by flows' (Castells, 1996: 412-13). In my view, this conception of places in relation to flows, as well as to other places, is generally a productive one. As will become clear later in the paper, it is potentially compatible with Urry's perspective on places as 'multiplex' and with Massey's discussion of the 'openness' of places. However, when Castells moves on to present a more detailed analysis of the space of places, offering a specific

example to illustrate his case, I believe there are certain difficulties that arise as a result of him seeing the space of flows as constructed in opposition to the space of places (so that these 'two   ohate2g2 toyo2space ' e y8.4(av)8.48(en)-6.7(wuall)-8yd(y82g2 t)o

Castells appears to choose Belleville as an example of the space of places because, according to the interpretation he makes of this place, it is 'socially interactive and spatially rich' (Castells, 1996: 425). Of course, his value judgement presupposes the existence of other places that must be considered less well off in 'physical/symbolic' terms. Drawing on the writing of Allan Jacobs (1993), Castells (1996: 425) points to 'the difference in urban quality between Barcelona and Irvine (the epitome of suburban Southern California)', arguing that whilst Irvine 'is indeed a place', it is a spatially impoverished one in which 'experience shrinks inward toward the home, as flows take over increasing shares of time and space'. No doubt lay individuals (not just academic authors like Jacobs and Castells) make value judgements about places too, some of them presumably preferring a quiet suburban life to the 'urban vitality' of a Belleville or a city such as Barcelona, but in my view there are further problems that arise as a consequence of this type of place-discrimination in Castells' work. There is evidently an assumption here that staying home to watch television, say, is necessarily a worse or less valid cultural experience than going out and encountering people in the street, that physical co-presence in public contexts is

for sociology in the twenty-first century, the main emphasis of which would be on the study of various transnational (and translocal) flows or 'global fluids', 'upon heterogeneous, uneven and unpredictable mobilities' (Urry, 2000: 38).[5] One way in which his work differs from Castells', though, is that this proposed emphasis on the 'social as mobility' leads him to question the 'central concept' of his own academic discipline to date, interrogating the whole idea of the 'social as society' (Urry, 2000: 2), including, presumably, even the idea of a 'network society'. For Urry (2000: 5-6), the concept of 'society' in sociological discourse is too closely tied up with 'notions of nation-state, citizenship and national society' to be usefully deployed in the analysis of flows that now criss-cross the 'porous borders' of nations. Instead, he advocates 'sociology beyond societies'. Whether or not we agree with him on this matter of terminology (quite frankly, I find myself wondering why he rules out any possibility of rearticulating the sign of society to suit contemporary circumstances), his general call for social theory to focus in future on various sorts of mobility does merit serious consideration here.

To the kinds of flow listed by Castells, Urry adds others. He talks, for instance, about flows of 'waste products' that bring with them 'new risks', 'the mobilities of objects' such as consumer goods and, crucially, flows consisting of people on the move (not just 'the social actors who operate the networks', in their 'global corridors of social segregation' (Castells, 2000: 20), but the movements of many ordinary individuals too). In his discussion of modern forms of 'corporeal travel', he observes that: 'The scale of such travelling is awesome. There are over 600 million international passenger arrivals each year. … International travel now accounts for over one-twelfth of world trade' (Urry, 2000: 50). These figures are indeed awesome, although

transformation of localities, rather than in the increase of physical mobility (significant though that may be for some groups), that the process of globalisation perhaps has its most important expression'.

The arguments made by Tomlinson and Morley point us usefully, in my view, away from any 'generalised nomadology' (Morley, 2000: 13) and towards a consideration of how places are changing today as part of those broader transformations that are often referred to as 'globalization'. However, I think Urry's account of the social as mobility can be defended in two main ways. Firstly, his later book does not seek to privilege the experience of corporeal travel over that of other fluids or mobilities, rather it situates physical mobility in relation to, for example, forms of 'imaginative' and 'virtual' travel. Secondly, far from ignoring place, he offers an enabling conceptualization of places as multiplex. Let me try to explain these aspects of his work in turn.

By imaginative and virtual travel, Urry means the instantaneous mobilities that are facilitated by broadcasting and computer-mediated communication, which media users can experience 'without physically moving' (Urry, 2000: 70). Providing specific

co-presence'), members of 'virtual communities' may occasionally feel the need to meet up physically.[6] The reason I am particularly interested in this observation is that it indicates the potential links between corporeal and non-corporeal travel, the fact that physical and other mobilities can sometimes be closely connected. Perhaps the best examples of such links are provided by contemporary 'diasporic' cultures (see also Morley, 2000). Referring to James Clifford (1997: 247), Urry (2000: 155) points to how 'dispersed peoples', who have made their homes away from 'homelands', live in a cultural context of intense 'to-and-fro' cross-border connections made possible by modern technologies of transportation and communication (and see Appadurai, 1996, on relations between global 'ethnoscapes' and 'mediascapes').

Despite his strong emphasis on global fluids, Urry does not neglect the issue of 'the transformation of localities' raised by Tomlinson and Morley. Indeed, we might say that he sees flows and places as parts of the same issue, contending that local places 'can be loosely understood … as multiplex, as a set of spaces where ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce, interconnect and fragment' (Urry, 2000:

as 'open and porous', 'constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places' and having multiple significances, 'since the various social groups in a place will be differently located' (that is, differently located 'in terms of the spatial reorganization of social relations') (Massey, 1994: 121). In her view, each place has its own 'uniqueness'. However, this special quality is not simply the outcome of 'some long internalized history' (Massey, 1993: 66). What defines the uniqueness of any place has to do with the particular 'mix of links and interconnections' to a 'beyond', 'the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside' (Massey, 1994: 5).[7]

Massey's concern, therefore, is with what she calls 'the openness of places' (Massey, 1995: 59) in 'global times', although she is careful to qualify her remarks about the permeability of localities in the contemporary period. To begin with, this openness is 'not a new phenomenon, just as globalization itself is not' (Massey, 1995: 61). Like Stuart Hall (1991: 20), Massey asks us to guard against 'historical amnesia' when it comes to thinking about the globalizing process, pointing to the case of a port city such as Liverpool, which has formed its own distinctive character out of links with other places through trade and migration over the past three centuries. What is new about globalization in its current phase, she suggests, is that 'the speed of it all – and its intensity – have increased dramatically in recent years' (Massey, 1995: 46). A further qualification is related to her more general argument about 'the power-geometry of it all' (Massey, 1993: 61), by which she means the inequalities associated with global (and local) social change. Experiences of locality and interconnectedness are highly uneven, even among people who are living in the same place. This leads her to see place and its multiple meanings as a matter of political, as well as geographical and cultural, importance.

Having briefly set out Massey's theoretical and political position on place, I now want to spend some time looking at empirical evidence that she provides, which arises out of research into specific localities. This research was designed to map the spatial locations and connections, which Massey (1995: 54-5) refers to as 'activity spaces', of members of different social groups inhabiting a number of small country villages in Cambridgeshire. As we will see, the 'reach' of these groups' activities varies enormously.

At one extreme, then, there are 'high-tech scientists, mainly men, whose work is based in Cambridge, though they often have computers with modem links at home

as well', who are 'in constant contact with, and physically travelling between,

What the two friends in Meyrowitz's example say, then, is likely to depend in part on whether, and if so by whom, the talk is being overheard. For that reason, I think telephone use, and electronic media use more generally, is best seen as pluralizing 'setting' as opposed to removing somebody from one situation, which becomes marginal, and putting them in another. We will be returning to this point in the following section of the paper.

bank manager'. Meyrowitz's perspective on the transformation of place as 'social position' is, therefore, rather too optimistic about the prospects for challenging established social hierarchies.

My difficulty with Meyrowitz's ideas, however, has more to do with his proposal that the relevance of place (understood as 'physical location') is being increasingly marginalized in contemporary social life. We live a 'relatively placeless' existence today, he contends, and so it is necessary to move 'beyond place' when theorizing communication and culture.[9] Whilst I would agree, of course, that many places have a greater degree of openness or permeability than they had in the past, and whilst I have also made a case here for considering the flows that connect places, this should not lead us to assume that people are experiencing a loss of the 'sense of place'. On the contrary, my position is that, through practices of electronic media use, place is instantaneously pluralized (and see Moores, in press).

Scannell: The Doubling of Place

I am borrowing (and extending) the idea of 'the doubling of place' from the work of Scannell (1996), a theorist and historian of broadcasting, who believes one of the remarkable yet now largely taken-for-granted consequences of radio or television use is that it serves to '"double" reality' (Scannell, 1996: 172-3). He develops this line of thought in his analysis of public events, and of the changing experiences of 'being-in-public', in modern life: 'Public events now occur, simultaneously, in two different places: the place of the event itself and that in which it is watched and heard. Broadcasting mediates between these two sites' (Scannell, 1996: 76). In proposing a 'phenomenological approach' to the study of radio and television (see also Scannell, 1995), which is concerned with the 'ways of being in the world' that have been created for viewers and listeners, Scannell (1996: 91) goes on to argue that, for the audience members in their multiple, dispersed local settings, there are transformed 'possibilities of being: of being in two places at once'. Of course, it is only ever possible for any individual to be in one place at a time physically, but broadcasting nevertheless permits a live witnessing of remote happenings that can bring these happenings experientially 'close' or 'within range', thereby removing the 'farness' (Scannell, 1996: 91; and see Heidegger, 1962: 140, on the 'conquest of remoteness' and the 'de-severance of the "world"').

My feeling is that Scannell's conception of the doubling of place and the reflections he offers on the altered 'possibilities of being' for media users, while they appear in a book devoted to the study of broadcasting, might also be applied more generally in the analysis of those electronic media, such as the Internet and telephone, which share with radio and television a capacity for the virtually instantaneous transmission of information across sometimes vast distances. Broadcasting, as Scannell has shown in his historical investigations (see especially Scannell and Cardiff, 1991), has its own distinctive communicative features, which mark it out in various ways from computer-mediated or telephone communication. However, I want to contend that radio and television can be considered alongside the Internet and telephone precisely because of the common potential that all these media have for helping to construct experiences of simultaneity and liveness in what have been called 'non-localized' (Thompson, 1995: 246) (I prefer translocalized) spaces and encounters.[10]

In order to try to illustrate my argument about extending the application of Scannell's writing on the doubling of place, I will discuss a couple of examples of electronic media use, each of which is drawn from recently published research. The first is taken from Kendall's ethnography of an Internet forum or 'multi-user domain' (Kendall, 2002), and is a personal reflection by the author on her day-to-day practices of computer use. 'Online interactions can at times become intensely engrossing', Kendall (2002: 7) comments, but if 'the text appearing on my screen slows to a crawl or the conversation ceases to interest me, I may cast about for something else offline to engage me.' That 'something else' may involve 'picking up the day's mail', 'flipping through a magazine', leaving the computer 'to get food' or talking 'to someone in the physical room in which I'm sitting' (Kendall, 2002: 7).[11]

Kendall's account is clearly about a pluralizing of place (and of social relationships). Indeed, she notes that 'although the mud [the multi-user domain] provides for me a feeling of being in a place, that place in some sense overlays the physical place in which my body resides' (Kendall, 2002: 7-8). While 'hanging out' with others in a virtual place[12], then, her corporeal presence is in a physical setting. This is a simple yet crucial point that needs to be recognized when studying global Internet cultures, because as Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000: 4-7) assert, much of the early academic literature in this area has tended to focus on the constitution of 'spaces or places apart from the rest of social life', rather than treating the Internet 'as continuous with … other social spaces' and 'as part of everyday life' (see also Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). As in the analysis of television cultures, our

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Notes

1. An initial version of this paper was prepared for a workshop held in Erfurt, Germany, on 'Network Society and Media Communication', organized by the Media Sociology Section of the German Communication Association. This revised version is based on a presentation to the research seminar of the Interdepartmental Programme in Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science. Much of the material in the paper has also been discussed with staff and students in the Department of Sociology and Communication at La Sapienza University in Rome, during my stay there as Visiting Professor of Communication in 2002-3. I am grateful to Andreas Hepp, Nick Couldry and Mario Morcellini, respectively, for inviting me to speak on those occasions.

2. For a general discussion of the concept of 'network' as 'a set of interconnected nodes', and for some concrete examples of networks, including 'the global network of the new media', see Castells (1996: 470-1).

3. It is worth remembering that there are those who would have their doubts about the newness of some of the developments identified by Castells, contending that the principle of networking has a long history (see especiallo ese

Massey), it makes little sense to me to conceive of 'the multiple space of places' as more 'disconnected' than hitherto. Having said that, there are certain places, particularly in rural regions of the so-called 'developing world', which are relatively excluded from contact with what Castells terms the space of flows. This point has been well made by geographers interested in the non-uniform or uneven process of 'time-space convergence' (Janelle, 1991; Leyshon, 1995).

5. An earlier version of this thesis on the need to understand fluidity or mobility as increasingly constitutive of modern life is to be found in Scott Lash and John Urry (1994).

6. This point is developed further in Urry (2002). For a recent ethnographic study of an Internet forum in which some of the participants interact face-to-face as well as online, see Lori Kendall (2002).

7. Implicit here is a rejection of the idea that globalization necessarily leads to greater cultural homogeneity, and a proposal that the heterogeneity of places may actually be intensified by the globalizing process. A complementary perspective on the ways in which 'transnational

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