Geographies of the News

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Introduction: Journalism as a Practice of Cartography

This chapter considers journalism as a spatial practice and posits journalists as cartographers, as map-makers, as symbolic workers who forge geographies of news. That is, journalists, through their news coverage, map the "news world," selecting from a constellation of current affairs which events, issues, peoples and places warrant their audiences' attention. The first map journalists sketch is the map of the community their news organization proposes to serve. This community is a construction, comprising the news organization's principal audience and advertising markets, the spatial parameters of its distribution network, and the political, economic, social and cultural institutions within that space. This "community of journalism" (Nord 2001) or "imagined community" (Anderson 1989) becomes the place the news organization seeks to cover with its editorial and advertising content and the vantage point from which it aims to view the rest of the world. Whether we

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are talking about a community weekly newspaper, a metropolitan daily, a local radio station, or a national television network, news organizations construct a 'here' and an 'us'.[1]

Like all forms of communication, journalism is an interlocutory act, and what is considered newsworthy is defined by what is deemed by journalists to be important, relevant, interesting and current to a particular, implied audience (see Nielsen 2008, 2009). A state election in New South Wales does not have the same news value in Sydney, Nova Scotia as it does in Sydney, Australia. Thus, through the news packages they compile, journalists sketch out the boundaries of their community and make assertions about its core values, record its debates over shifting values, identify the key components of its political, economic and cultural infrastructure, describe its constituents, position this place with respect to its neighbours, highlight other regions with which its constituents have important political, economic and cultural ties, and relegate to the margins great swaths of the rest of the world. This map-making exercise produces centres and margins, peoples and places within the news world's purview and, of course, other peoples and places beyond that news world's boundaries. Not everyone makes it on the news map.

This conceptualization of the relationship between journalism and news audiences takes its cue from the historical work of Benedict Anderson (1989), who documented the role of media – initially eighteenth-century novels and newspapers – in creating "imagined communities" (p. 30). Anderson argues that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (p. 15). Novels produced a "sociological landscape" perceived by "omniscient readers" who made the connections between settings and characters (pp. 30–31). Newspaper stories were brought together on the page by two factors: their "calendrical coincidence" and "the relationship between the newspaper . . . and the market" (pp. 37–38). This market consists of two elements: a product or service and a geographic locale where potential buyers can be reached (see Picard 1989, p. 19). If the production of the newspaper – the inclusion, juxtaposition and framing of stories – is informed by who and where journalists imagine their audience to be, Anderson describes its consumption as a "mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction" (p. 39). "At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of

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[1]Digitization, of course, expands the range and increases the velocity of all news coverage and thus our understanding of how and where news stories circulate. This is putting an end to national communication systems (see Carey 1998) and may lead to the "cosmopolitan vision" of Uhlrich Beck (2008) and the "global journalism" imagined by Peter Berglez (2013). Digitization is clearly having some effect on how journalists imagine their audience, but news organizations have been very slow to exploit this potential. Considerable empirical research in the field of news-flow studies points to a news world that remains highly circumscribed, reinforcing the conventional news value of proximity – physical, cultural or emotional closeness – as a strongly determinant factor in producing news organizations' news worlds (Gasher 2007, 2009; Gasher and Klein 2008; Gasher and Gabriele 2004; Wu 2000, 2003). While select news organizations are operating internationally and the internet makes almost all news media available globally, news stories still tend to speak from a particular geographical/political/economic/cultural perspective.

his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (pp. 39–40).

Numerous scholars have echoed Anderson's observation about the media's role in producing audience communities or publics. David Paul Nord (2001), in a study of the historical relationship between two Chicago newspapers and their readers, insists: "Communities are built, maintained, and wrecked in communication" (p. 2). He describes the Chicago *Daily News* of the late nineteenth century as the first "thoroughly urban" daily, "the first to articulate a vision of public community." Nord defines public community as "a kind of association founded upon communitarian notions of interdependence and identity, of sentiment and sympathy, yet powered by formal organizations and activist governments and guided by the new agencies of mass communication" (pp. 108–109). These newspapers

> provided their audience with a limited, organized, common frame of reference, so that diverse city dwellers could communicate with each other – communicate in the sense that they could think about the same things at the same time and share a vision of social reality. These newspapers saw in the fragmenting forces of urbanization the germ of public community (p. 111).

Communication theorist John Hartley (2008) has described journalism as "the most important textual system in the world," given its daily assertion of objective truths, its production of audiences as publics, and its symbiotic relationship with society's central political, economic and social institutions (p. 312). Journalism does more than merely describe or report on current events; it is a constructive practice, contributing to the formation of communities, publics and audiences. These aggregations do not simply precede the media through which they are represented, but media, in fact, play an important role in their constitution and in their identity. As Herbert Gans (2004) argues, journalists "help impose unity on what is otherwise a congeries of individuals and groups acting inside a set of geographical and political boundaries" (p. 298). In a related vein, journalism scholar James Carey perceives journalism as "worldmaking" and his theory of communication is rooted in the idea that "a medium implies and constitutes a world" (cited in Rosen 1997, p. 196). The news has a "positioning effect" on audiences, Carey argues. "We first produce the world by symbolic work and then take up residence in the world we have produced" (Carey 1989, p. 30).

This production of the news world is governed in part, of course, by the business plans, the marketing strategies and the technical capacities of news organizations working within available distribution networks. News organizations, that is, target specific markets, markets with both geographic and demographic parameters. The news package they produce will present a particular rendering of the world, produced specifically for its target market. The audience, though, is always more than a market. Even if the permeability of digital networks may change this, news audiences are imagined to share a physical locale and a corresponding civic identity, as members of a particular polity whose affairs occupy a central place in news coverage.

But the "worldmaking" Carey describes is also governed discursively, and that is the principal concern here. News is defined, as noted above, by the pertinence of stories to an implied audience, and news judgement is the very subjective exercise of selecting which news items warrant coverage, how much and, most importantly for our purposes, what kind. What we think of as the news is a compilation of information-rich stories that its producers assert is what matters most to its audience at any given time. In addressing a particular audience community, then, the news plays a constitutive role in defining and demarcating the place that audience community occupies, and in situating that place in the news world.[2]

The geography of news, then, is the representational space that news organizations construct, the vantage point from which they report. This space is the predominant coverage area the news organization stakes out for itself, a space which its reportage depicts, describes, defines and positions, the perspective it adopts, the starting point for its "worldmaking." All news organizations mold their own geographies. Whether or not the boundaries of this coverage area were simple to draw and maintain in some bygone age when population centres were more clearly defined, separated from one another and largely self-contained, such mapping is a far more complicated prospect in the mobile and inter-connected world of today. Political boundaries do not neatly coincide with economic or cultural or even physical boundaries, and the constituent members of any one political community have ties to other communities constituted by social, economic, cultural, religious, racial and/or ethnic dimensions. What matters, what is relevant to people – what is *newsworthy* – is not confined to their immediate territorial domain. This means that news maps are constructed through business plans, marketing campaigns and, on a daily basis, the editorial judgements of editors and reporters.

Comparing News Reporting to Map-Making

News reporting and map-making are comparable activities. They do not mirror the world, but instead produce texts; they are representational practices, through which complex and multi-dimensional actualities are rendered discrete, with temporal and spatial borders. Journalists and cartographers construct these texts through symbolic systems; journalists primarily use words, but also employ illustrations, graphics and sometimes even maps, whereas cartographers resort primarily to graphics supported by various kinds of labels (e.g., titles, keys, captions). Both practices share an appeal to objectivity, relying on the fact-finding conventions and verification methods of their respective professions. Both journalism and cartography, in sum, orient their readers to the world, at a time when so much of the world their readers inhabit is experienced in symbolic form through media. As the cultural theorist Tony Bennett puts it: "[T]he power which the media derive from their reality-defining capability is

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[2]Audience members have agency; they use media content for their own purposes and can respond to media messages in numerous ways, including critically and oppositionally.

attributable to the service they perform in making us the indirect witnesses to events of which we have no first-hand knowledge or experience" (1996, p. 296).

Because it is not possible for journalism or cartography to *re-produce* the world, or even specific elements of the world, they are activities by which the real world is *re-presented*, or depicted, described, highlighted, made available to us in textual form. There are two basic steps to this process: the selection of elements to represent and the transformation of those elements from their materiality into some form of language (Fowler 2007, p. 2). In other words, the textual practices of journalism and cartography involve a translation of the material features of actuality into words, illustrations, symbols, diagrams, etc.

Translation, as always, entails transformation. At the most fundamental level, both journalism and cartography project a spherical, three-dimensional, interconnected and intensely dynamic material world into partial pictures of some select aspect of actuality, taken from the perspective of their producer, for that producer's particular purpose. Even the most skilled, conscientious and ethical reporter or cartographer must make a series of judgement calls about how best to render a complex and chaotic material world into text and make it comprehensible for the audience.

News stories and maps, then, are necessarily selective and reductive. The very purpose of news articles and maps is, in fact, to highlight some aspect of the material world at the expense of other aspects, to focus our attention on a particular subject matter. They frame rather than mirror. A newspaper story, for example, may be only 800 words in length, occupying part of a larger newspaper page. Those 800 words constitute the frame within which the news event must be described and explained. Because not even the most gifted and insightful journalist can address every conceivable aspect of a news event in 800 words, the reporter must decide which are the most newsworthy aspects of this event and what else must be excluded. This will result in a particular depiction of the news event. Similarly, no map can feature every possible element of the material world, so particular aspects – population centres, major roads, mountains, subway stops, etc. – must be highlighted and other features left out. The geographer Geoff King (1996) argues:

> There is and can be no such thing as a purely objective map, one that simply reproduces a pre-existing reality. Choices always have to be made about what to represent and what to leave out. It is here that cartographic meaning is created. To be included on the map is to be granted the status of reality or importance. To be left off is to be denied (p. 18).

News stories and maps render complex and multi-faceted features and activities of the material world into simplified portrayals, using their own forms of shorthand.

Because story-telling and map-making involve such decisions, they are constructive activities. News stories and maps are constructed by people according to the rules and conventions of their respective fields, according to the editorial decisions of their producers, according to the audience they hope to reach, according to the immediate purpose the story or the map is intended to serve, and according to their individual abilities and proclivities (Wood 1992, 2010). This may seem obvious, but the point is to draw attention to the distinction between actuality and representations

of it, to deconstruct the textual practices of journalism and cartography, "to break the assumed link between reality and representation" in the words of the historical geographer J.B. Harley (2001, p. 152).

Both journalism and cartography remain highly subjective practices, even if journalists and map-makers subscribe to a certain, even if naïve, notion of objectivity – seeking to represent the world accurately, independently and devoid of bias – and observe specific codes of ethics. Both practices require their producers to make choices. The use of language – any language – is a signifying practice, in that we assign particular words or symbols to stand for elements in the real world, and we always have a choice about which words to use. The acquisition of language is precisely this process of learning to associate particular signifiers – words, symbols, signs, gestures, sounds – with corresponding signifieds – the things, ideas or actions the signifiers conjure.

Because language is always value-laden, these representational choices produce meaning, forging our "mental maps" of the world. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2013) defines representation as "the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" (p. 3). Linguistics scholar Roger Fowler (2007) emphasizes that language establishes relationships and categories that are not *natural*, "but which represent the interests, values and behaviours of human communities." He writes: "Language and other codes, most importantly language, have a cognitive role: they provide an organized mental representation of our experience" (p. 3).

All utterances of language have both denotative (literal) and connotative (associative) meanings (see Barthes 1968). With the experience of seeing and hearing these various utterances, we learn what they mean, both denotatively and connotatively. And because utterances have no solitary and fixed meaning, each of us may understand them in slightly different ways. When, for example, we hear in the news of a demonstration taking place, we share the understanding at a denotative level that a group of people has assembled for some kind of protest. At a connotative level of meaning, however, that demonstration can take on a different hue, prompted by the language of the news report and/or by our own ideological leanings. The word 'demonstration' has meaning, then, but not always the same meaning. Fowler (2007) insists that "the very notion of 'representation' carries within it the qualification of representation *from a specific ideological point of view*" (p. 66).

Even conventional practices of journalism and cartography are value-laden. At the most basic level, to produce a news story or a map is to assert that the subject of the story or the map is worthy of an audience's attention, it is newsworthy or noteworthy. Further, both journalism and cartography are inherently ethnocentric. They speak to the audience, whether consciously or unconsciously, from a particular perspective or, quite literally, point of view. Lots of events occur in the world each day, but news assigns its subject matter gravity and relevance, a particular meaning to a specified news audience. Why is that event newsworthy to an imagined us? Sometimes the answer to this question is obvious and would prompt considerable

consensus about its importance and its meaning. Often, though, this question is more contentious. Similarly, maps do not include every feature of the material world, but include some and exclude others, put some elements at the centre and some at the margins, some at the top and some at the bottom. Maps commonly adopt the perspective of their imagined audience, and come to naturalize this perspective through repetition (e.g., putting north at the top of the map). Maps create hierarchies, privileging those features at the centre and at the top of the map where the eye is drawn, marginalizing, literally, those features at the left, right and bottom edges of its frame. The blank spaces on a map tell us there is nothing there, or at least nothing of importance.

This notion of construction goes one important step further. Not only are our texts constructions in and of themselves, but those texts in turn construct the world for us as audiences. The practice of representation is central to what the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) mean by "the social construction of reality." We occupy a material world, but our knowledge of it, our perception of it, our access to it, is socially constructed. Even what we come to think of as our direct experience of the world is shaped by our beliefs, values, prejudices, interests, expectations, experiences, history as we have come to understand it, what we perceive as normal and not normal, proper and improper. Morley and Robins (1995) maintain: "We are all largely dependent on the media for our images of non-local people, places and events, and the further the 'event' from our own direct experience, the more we depend on media images for the totality of our knowledge" (p. 133). Berger and Luckmann argue that "knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain position" (p. 10). Speaking to this point, Fowler (2007) argues: "A socially constructed model of the world is projected on to the objects of perception and cognition, so that essentially the things we see and think about are constructed according to a scheme of values, not entities directly perceived" (p. 92).

As noted above, the production of any text is an interlocutory act; a text is not simply put out there, but is proffered to an audience, intended to address an imagined group of readers with a particular purpose in mind: to inform, to convince, to instruct, to assist, to provoke. It is an invitation to people to adopt the subject position of reader, to form themselves into a readership community with the aim of consuming the text. These textual renderings of the world contain numerous rhetorical devices, which both constitute their specific form of audience address and situate audience members vis-à-vis their particular subject matter.

Journalism and cartography are unavoidably rhetorical, gaining much of their rhetorical power from their claims to objectivity. Journalists and map-makers make choices about theme (what the story/map is about), scale (how to bound the story/map), labelling (what to name, how to name), detail (what to include, what to exclude) and relations (how this story/map is connected to other stories/maps). Both news stories and maps affirm existence and significance, signalling that some things, some people, some places are worthy of our notice, and others are not.

Mediating Community

News is presented as a compilation of stories, and as with all stories, news stories have a setting in a specific time and place, a clearly-identified cast of characters, a narrative trajectory pulling these ingredients together and a vantage point from which the story is told. As *news* stories, though, their factuality lends them a certain authority and they have a necessary requirement to make audiences care. By extension, the people, places and events that don't make it into the news are, by definition, rendered unimportant, uninteresting, irrelevant, not worth the audiences' notice.

The communities that news organizations forge have both external and internal boundary markers demarcating spheres of activity and interest. Journalists do not provide blanket coverage of their community, because not everything that happens within that community could be considered news. Instead they cover what they deem to be its most newsworthy people (political and business leaders, first responders, athletes, artists), places (city hall, courts, schools, businesses, clubs, commercial districts), and events (meetings, press conferences, shows, festivals, demonstrations, crimes, accidents). Even though journalists like to think they simply provide a mirror-like reflection of their community to news audiences, they in fact, and necessarily, exercise news judgement to highlight those aspects determined to be of most interest and most import to audiences. Over time, consistent patterns in journalists' representation of their community and its relationship to the surrounding world come to give definition to community, to give this place and its people a particular identity, to explain its links to the rest of the world. The question to be considered here is how that highlighting works, how journalists pick and choose what is newsworthy, what patterns of inclusion and exclusion their editorial decisions produce, and how this matters.

The boundaries of any news organization's coverage area are shaped by a number of factors, but in ways particular to the community being served and particular to the goals – journalistic and economic – of the news organization. It is here that I want to make a distinction between news geographies and markets. While, clearly, both audience and advertising markets are key factors in shaping coverage areas, the economics of news production and distribution does not explain everything. News coverage extends beyond the immediate territory of the advertising and readership markets. Audiences are not interested only in what occurs within their own communities, but in current events elsewhere as well. How journalists determine the news value of such peoples and places cannot be reduced to a simple commercial calculation, but speaks as well to journalists' image of themselves as information-providers representing – and thus interpreting – the needs and interests of the public they seek to serve.

My interest in the geography of news is prompted by three contemporary factors which further complicate any news organization's occupation of a defined social space. The first of these is globalization, understood here not simply as an economic phenomenon, but in the fuller sense of the intensified global circulation

of people, goods and services, ideas, investment capital, symbols, weather patterns, environmental degradation and disease. We may dwell in specific places, but the lives we live are more globally inter-connected than in any previous historical period. Globalization has thus dramatically broadened our horizons.[3] Ulrich Beck (2008), in fact, argues that globalization means we need to move beyond our "national outlook" and adopt a "cosmopolitan vision," replacing "the either/or logic with the both/and logic of inclusive differentiation" (pp. 4–5).

With that, it can be argued that our news interests, too, have become more extroverted; what matters to us, what is relevant to us, is not confined to our immediate locale. The boundaries of our working and social worlds have expanded, governing where and how we work and who we work for, where we travel, who are neighbours are, where our friends and family are, where we shop, what we shop for and how we spend our leisure time. Foreign people, foreign places, foreign languages, foreign wars, foreign news are not so foreign any more.

The second, inter-related factor is the digitization of news and its circulation via globally-connected networks of computers. Whether we get our news from web sites, social media, e-readers, satellite television, satellite radio and/or from the newspaper delivered to our doorstep, digitization goes hand in hand with globalization, enabling the rapid exchange of every kind of communication between people, businesses, governments and other types of organization, no matter their location. Digitization has changed how journalists produce and disseminate news and how we consume news.

Digitization means we are no longer beholden to our local newspaper, radio or television station. If we still get at least some of our local news from these traditional sources, it has become commonplace for news audiences to venture farther afield for their news diet. News audiences also seek out portals and blogs that either have no explicit geographical boundaries or determine their boundaries based on topic specialization: the sports world, the arts world, the business world. In every case, the reader/listener/viewer is oriented to the world in a particular way.

The third factor is commercialization, or hyper-commercialization, the increasing tendency by the owners of news organizations to perceive journalism as simply another branch of commercial enterprise, to privilege the profit motive by defining news as a commodity and audiences as markets. If journalism, from the time of the earliest newspapers, has been organized predominantly as some form of commodity production, it has been characterized as well by a strong public-service ethos. In this sense, its business role was for a long time compatible with its sociopolitical role; a viable business could be built by providing the public with an array of news, information and analysis that would include the kind of information citizens of a healthy democracy require. Newspapers, magazines and, later, radio and television news and current-affairs programming included in their packages hard and soft

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[3]Globalization, of course, is an intensely uneven phenomenon, expanding the world for some, increasing the isolation of others (see Bauman 1998; Massey 1991).

news, news from the political, business, sports and arts worlds, news of serious import and news to amuse and entertain, thus serving a range of publics.

Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, and increasingly during the twentieth, news production shifted from small business to big business, first with the development of regional and national newspaper chains and radio and television networks, then with the creation of cross-media enterprises, and finally with the absorption of these companies within larger, omnibus and multi-national corporations. These media properties are increasingly required to generate profits, completing the transition of news to commodity and of audience to market. As Dallas Smythe (1977, 1994) was first to note, the product of commercial media is not its content, but an audience to be sold to advertisers. This affects what kind of news we get, how stories are told, and who journalists seek to address (and who, thereby, is excluded from the audience), shaping news geographies to accommodate commercial interest; serving the public interest has become serving what interests the public (see Hamilton 2004).

News geographies are in constant flux. The news media have altered their spatial parameters throughout the history of journalism, in periods when social, cultural, political, economic and technological changes encouraged and enabled such expansion. The circulation networks of newspapers, for example, grew with the introduction of train service, automobility, satellite printing and, in digital form, the internet. Local radio and television stations became part of regional and national networks before broadcasting ultimately went global via satellite and internet distribution. If our news consumption habits were for most of the twentieth century governed by the physical circulation of hard-copy newspapers and magazines and by over-the-air broadcast signals, circulation areas that corresponded roughly to political boundaries, today our news consumption is governed by whatever interests us. Journalists are thus saddled with an increased responsibility for understanding, satisfying, stimulating and shaping audience interests within newly and variously configured communities.

Journalism scholars have identified a number of news values, criteria by which journalists determine the newsworthiness of a particular person, place, institution or event. These determinants include: timeliness (events that are immediate or recent); impact (events that affect many people); prominence (events involving well-known people, places or institutions); conflict (events pitting two sides against one another); peculiarity (events that deviate from the everyday); currency (long-simmering events that re-emerge as objects of attention); and proximity (events that are geographically, culturally, or "emotionally close" to the audience) (Mencher 2000, pp. 68–76).

In the current news environment, the news value of proximity has taken on added significance. The intensified mobility of our globalized society brings us physically, culturally and, presumably, emotionally closer to the peoples and places of the world, whether we feel at times excited and at other times threatened by this redrawing of our frontiers. Journalists, whether they work for international news

agencies or local media, play a key role in sketching and patrolling these boundaries, determining on our behalf what peoples, places and events we feel close to, and the bases and nature of that proximity. Such news judgement provides an outline of the news world, revealing a range of assumptions on the part of journalists about what matters, and doesn't matter, to their community, as well as about *who* matters and doesn't matter (see Gasher and Gabriele 2004).

The Maps of the News

News organizations produce at least four kinds of maps. As discussed above, the first of these representational spaces is the micro-scale map of 'here,' the place, the community – the 'us' – the news organization intends to serve. This map is drawn gradually over time as the community's key institutions and political, economic and cultural leaders are identified, its constituents described, its history told, its central beliefs and values revealed, and the boundaries which distinguish 'here' from 'there' and 'us' from 'them' come to be drawn. This sense of community is reinforced by the advertisements featured and by the regular consumption by audiences of its news package. Content supply and audience demand constitute a symbiosis.

The second kind of map produced by news organizations is the macro-scale map of the world as seen from 'here.' This map, too, is drawn over time, by the inclusion and exclusion of news stories from various parts of the world, and from cities and regions beyond the borders of our community. This map of the news world only loosely corresponds to the map of the material world because news organizations cover some places much more intensely – e.g., close neighbours, political and military allies, trading partners, tourist destinations – than other places, and leave some off the map entirely (see Wu 2000, 2003). It is the map of the peoples and places we hear about regularly, a map of our perceived and actual connections.

The third kind of map is drawn by extended coverage of one particular event or one particular people, and corresponds to an inset map, a more detailed highlight contained within the larger, overall map. It is usually rendered over a much shorter period of time, and situates 'us' in relation to 'them', 'here' in relation to 'there.' These maps can be produced by news stories from within our own community – a specific district of the city that becomes the subject of dispute – or from farther afield – e.g., a natural disaster in a remote part of the world. They provide us with important information about how these stories are newsworthy, how they connect us to the people, places and events they describe, on what basis the news value of proximity is asserted or explained – why we should care.

Finally, each news story draws its own map, occupies its own territory, draws its own connections, creates its own temporal-spatial setting. That setting may be confined to one locale with no external links to anywhere or anyone else, or its narrative may bring into the picture people and places in other cities or regions or countries, from the present or the past. How the story is set says something about its singularity or, conversely, its universality.

Why News Geographies Matter

We rely heavily on media of all kinds for our access to, and understanding of, the world. Over time, the representational conventions of books, films, TV programs, news reports and maps become our cognitive conventions, such that the distinctions between actuality and representation can be forgotten, that we take their renderings of the world as the way the world actually is. Harley (2001) writes: "Far from holding up a simple mirror of nature that is true or false, maps redescribe the world – like any other document – in terms of relations of power and of cultural practices, preferences, and priorities" (p. 35).

The news situates us in the world, it assigns meanings to people, places, events and institutions, it focuses our attention on some news events and newsmakers and consistently excludes others. This is significant because how we understand the world and our place in it informs how we act in the world. Representations of the world connect us to, or distance us from, other peoples and places. They offer definitions of people, places and events, and they provide us with a menu of viable actions we can take.

These issues are important because journalists perform a validating function through their news judgement. To cover an event, to consider it *newsworthy*, is to define that event as important and relevant, not only to those who may be directly affected, but also to people who may have a more tenuous connection to the event. Beyond informing, this is a matter of granting human dignity, about allowing peoples to share in each other's joy or sorrow, about paying attention to the welfare of other communities. It is also about making connections between peoples, explaining in concrete terms why we should care, why these events matter.

Related to this is the point that journalists, through their reportage, give meaning to community, identifying who belongs, what the community's boundaries are – physically and culturally (its goals, ideals, values, notions of proper conduct) – and how this community is connected to, or cut off from, others. This is a complicated yet critical task in heterogeneous – multicultural, multi-faith, multilingual, multi-ethnic and multiracial – societies, as any number of news stories about school dress codes or immigration laws can attest. Here, journalism is implicated in providing answers to the questions 'Who are we?' and, correspondingly, 'Who are we not?'

Journalists, too, implicate their audiences in news events in a number of ways. The manner in which an event is defined can lead to a range of responses, or no response at all. If, for example, a hurricane is defined exclusively as a natural disaster, the response may be confined to disaster relief. If, however, the damages caused by that hurricane can be related to political negligence or incompetence or poverty, which affect the way storm damages are apportioned, other responses become available. News coverage can mobilize individuals, governments, resources and/or particular solutions to problems, depending on how those problems are framed. A lack of news coverage, similarly, renders events unimportant – at least to us.

Drawing attention to the journalistic, political, economic, social, cultural and technological determinants that shape news geographies calls into question Marshall McLuhan's (1964) iconic and happy global village. Research to date suggests that in spite of what would seem to be the centripetal forces of globalization and digitization, the maps journalists draw are exacerbating rather then eradicating the distinction between the news world and the material world (Kariel and Rosenvall 1995; Chang 1998; Manthorpe 1998; Wu 2000, 2003; Gasher and Gabriele 2004; Gasher and Klein 2008; Gasher 2007, 2009). This has serious implications for how we perceive our world, how we understand our connections to other peoples and places, as well as for how we understand and identify with our own immediate communities, our understanding of who we are, our sense of, and the bases for, belonging.

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