

Chapter 4

Electronic Geographies

Media Landscapes as Technological and Symbolic Environments

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Within the field of media and communication research, the media are often related to cultural and social processes. Takes on the relationship between the three entities are varied, however, as are the motivations for their study. Accounts of the relation often depart from the idea that the media are intervening in social and cultural processes, affecting already existing phenomena either in harmful ways in dystopian fears of cultural and social decline, or in utopian hopes for better futures. The critique has its roots in both radical and conservative research camps: A Marxist-inspired critique from the 1970s has argued that the centre of media studies lies outside the media themselves (Negt 1973 p. ix). This kind of critique was not restricted to the critical perspective on mediated ideological domination embedded in the conflict-ridden society outside the media. It was equally present in liberal and conservative accounts that saw the media as detrimental to the fine arts, and to social life in general, where they were seen as tools for 'amusing ourselves to death' (Postman 1985).

Another common apprehension, and one that usually follow from the first, is that the presence of the media in late modern society is continuously increasing. The media are supposedly becoming of increasing importance to economic corporate life as well as the formation of political opinions and cultural celebrities, etc. In short, the media are seen as interfering in processes once formed un-affected by the media whereas today they are becoming increasingly dependent on them.

I will argue in the following that this is not true today, if it ever was. The idea that there are processes or phenomena being developed in today's society outside the media is not tangible. We might think that there are such spheres or areas of our everyday lives that are free from mediated intrusion, for example when we socialise with our friends in our leisure time. However, also at those points when we are not explicitly exposed to mediated messages, our lives and our actions are so immersed in our experiences from the media that it is simply hard to imagine what they would have been like had the media not existed.

Questions on the relation between the media, culture and society will be in focus over the next couple of pages, and at this early stage of my account it seems appropriate to define what I mean when I say ‘the role of the media in culture and society’. I will therefore start with some preliminary remarks on the three foundational concepts of ‘media’, ‘culture’ and ‘society’. I will then, in the next section, discuss the media in relation to the categories of time and space, as these are of fundamental importance in the understanding of cultures and societies. In the third section I will expand on that discussion to a more focussed analysis of the concept of media landscape, and how this concept can be used in understanding the relation between media, culture and society. I will end the chapter by giving empirical substance to my arguments with an example from a promotional campaign aiming at re-articulating the social and cultural space of Estonia as a European nation.

Media, Culture, Society

On many occasions the concepts of media, culture and society are used without explicit definition. In order to avoid aligning myself with this trend in research, I shall say a few words about each of these concepts before taking on the wider discussion on the relation between them.

In late modern society, and especially in the (post)industrialised parts of the world, *the media* are held to be of fundamental importance for social, economic, political and cultural life. It is in fact very hard to try to imagine what society would be like if media technologies such as the telephone, newspapers, books, television, radio, the Internet and Worldwide Web, etc. did not exist. One could argue that the development of the media goes hand in hand with the development of society from early primitive or archaic societies to large scale, late modern, information and knowledge-dependent societies (see, for example, Crowley & Heyer 1995/1999; Ong 1982/1991; Nordenstreng 1977).

Having said this, one should also acknowledge the common motivation for doing social research about the changing nature of society: that the changes have never been as rapid as at that moment of writing. In the preliminary remarks in what is today considered one of the greatest endeavours in urban anthropology, the studies of Middletown in the early 1920s by sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, it is said that

[w]e are coming to realize, moreover, that we today are probably living in one of the eras of greatest rapidity of change in the history of human institutions. New tools and techniques are being developed with stupendous celerity, while in the wake of these technical developments increasingly frequent and strong culture waves sweep over us from without, drenching us with material and non-material habits of other centers. (Lynd & Lynd 1929 p. 5).

One such technique referred to in the quote above is naturally the media. For the Lynds, the media referred to was primarily the mass media: books, radio, film and periodicals, but also, although to a minor extent, other media technologies such as the phonograph and telephone. Thus, as the Middletown example reveals, it is not always entirely clear how we should think of the media and what counts as media. And this is true for many subsequent studies. For example, if we try to find simple definitions of the media in a widely cited work such as Marshall McLuhan's (1964/1967) account of the media as an 'extension of man', we need not hunt through many pages before things get quite confusing. Starting with his famous quote that the medium is the message, and that every medium's specific effect on society is not its content but the technology itself, things get increasingly obscure. McLuhan goes through a range of examples, including light, language, paintings, stones, railroads, airplanes, etc. One certainly has the suspicion that McLuhan confuses transportation with mediation. And, of course, it is possible to regard all these phenomena as media in some way. Language is a medium that converts ideas into communicable sentences, and is therefore a tool that serves in the aid of individuals communicating (cf. Ong 1983/1991). And it is naturally possible to use two stones to create messages in Morse code, but this is hardly a fruitful path to follow for someone who sets out to discuss the role of media in culture and society, as it is too inclusive: everything can at one point or another become a medium. A more fruitful way for the media researcher, then, is to not only include the material technologies, but also their organisational form. When Inca Indians in South America used patterns of knotting (Quipu) to disseminate information (Ascher & Ascher 1997/1999), this was performed using a code that had developed institutionally. Today we take television for granted, and do not normally reflect on why we make sense of it. But television is also in need of a code common within a given society if it is to be comprehended as meaningful (cf. Hall 1973). Thus, in order for a stone to become a medium, it has to be used within a coded system of communication in a given society or in a given cultural setting, just as television or any other medium does. This code needs to be produced socially and culturally. This is also why the concepts of culture and society are of importance in the analysis of the media, and these are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Culture is one of the most complicated concepts, as Raymond Williams once argued (1979, p. 154). This is undoubtedly true, although there are certainly many other concepts that are quite hard to define in any simple way. Although Williams found the concept to be extremely complex, he nonetheless pointed to three general definitions, or ways of using, culture in his seminal work *The Long Revolution* (1961/1965). Firstly, there is the way of using culture to point to an ideal 'in which culture is a state of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute and universal values' (p. 57). Secondly, there are those uses of the concept that point in the direction of a 'documentary' tradition; that is, as articulated by 19th-century cultural critic

Matthew Arnold (1869/1994 p. 5), that which comprises ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’, and which emphasises particular ‘works’ in art and science. The third use of the word culture that Williams accounts for, which is also the definition he aligns himself with, is the ‘social’ definition ‘in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’ Williams 1961/1965 p. 57).

It is quite evident that if we are to use any of these definitions of culture, we cannot neglect to include an analysis of the media or communication (cf. Williams 1974/1976). Not only do we need to look to the media because they reflect values, works of art and learning, but also because they reflect our ways of living. However, the media do not only reflect culture in these ways. They are also important institutions that help shape values, art and lifestyles. The media naturally do not in any way determine how certain individuals are going to behave or think. They do, however, play a significant role as an aid in people’s constructions of their own lifestyles, values, etc., and the structure of the media to a certain degree also privileges specific values and lifestyles over others. It is therefore possible to say that the media are cultural technologies that have a bearing on how cultures are constructed. Media as technologies, then, have an impact on, or privilege, certain forms of communicating, but they also have an impact through their content.

If we hold the above to be true, we could extend this argument to include the relation between media and society. *Society*, however, is very seldom defined explicitly in the literature. According to a basic definition given by Jürgen Habermas (1981/1992 p. 138), society consists of ‘the legitimate orders through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity’. Denis McQuail (1994 p. 61) has a more expanded definition, stating that society consists of a ‘material base (economic and political resources and power), to relationships in various social collectivities (national societies, communities, families, etc.) and to social roles and occupations which are regulated (formally or informally) by the structures of collective social life’.

Although the concepts of society and culture at times seem to overlap, or at least appear to overlap due to insufficient clarification of definition, it is quite evident that society most often refers to organisational forms of collective entities, and culture to the content at the heart of these forms. This is also how the concepts are used in this chapter. Societies and cultures exist in time and space: they have start- and endpoints. Both societies and cultures are often, although not always, considered to be equal with nations, especially since industrial modernity. We distinguish Soviet culture and society from Russian culture and society, to take an illustrative if slightly special example that has its own very specific start- and endpoints. However, although we might think of Soviet culture and society as coherent entities, they have also changed over time. The question is how to understand these changes.

Time, Space and the Media

The problem at hand, to repeat what was expressed above, is how to deal with the role of media in and for societal and cultural change (or stability). At the bottom line, both change and stability are temporal categories, dealing with movements through space, which is how French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) defines time. This means that temporal and spatial dimensions cannot be but analytically separated, as there can be no time without space and vice versa.

With the advent of writing, it became possible to expand societies in space as well as time. On the one hand, written communication made it possible to organise society in more complex ways, through legislation and through trade, which were the first areas where written communication was used. This meant that it became possible to control vaster areas of land and organise society hierarchically, thereby securing power. Through successive divisions of labour societies grew more and more complex, hand in hand with the development of written communication. However, written communication also meant that it was no longer necessary to rely on mnemotechnical devices to preserve knowledge. In a purely oral society, the only way to preserve knowledge and historical accounts was through technologies connected to memory – poetry, verse, etc. With the advent of writing, mental capacities became released and it became possible to preserve historical and cultural texts, contributing to the extension of the public collective memory and to the fact that societies could stretch out in time in ways previously not possible.

Throughout history, the communication technique of writing has developed through the rise of new media technologies, each of which has contributed to the increasing complexity of cultures and societies. We have also seen the birth of a range of metaphorical concepts that attempt to grasp the workings of the media and their role in society and culture. If we turn to a contemporary medium such as television, we can see that the metaphors we use can be related to temporal or spatial features. Raymond Williams's (1974/1979) concept of flow, for example, is clearly a temporal concept, dealing with the continuous adding of images to one another in a seemingly endless and seamless stream of pictures. As such, the two-dimensional images are moving through space, thus fulfilling the definition of time proposed by Henri Lefebvre. However, if we look at other concepts used in connection to contemporary television output, such as program slots, schedules and the like, we can see that these are spatial metaphors having to do with the distribution of program units over an admittedly temporal category such as the day, or over the unit 'prime time', but a category that also points to the distribution of programs in space. This is how we can also see that time can be transformed into a symbolic spatial category that occupies a certain *area* of our everyday lives. How can this be? Let me return to this question in a moment, and first expand a bit on the spatiality of the media and the spatial metaphors used.

It would not be too daring to argue that geographical metaphors have become increasingly common in relation to the media over the past couple of decades. One common concept used in media critique is that of the *media landscape*. A landscape naturally points to a spatial dimension. It has to do with vision, land or geography, and also with a specific view of a certain physical area. However, one should not restrict landscapes to their spatial dimensions. Landscapes also travel through time, and change according to the powers of either nature or individual subjects. It thus also has a temporal dimension.

Etymologically, the concept of landscape comes from the Dutch word *landschap* and seems to have first occurred in the late 16th century. Its semantic meaning can be described as a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery, as well as the art of depicting that scenery. In a more general way, it can also refer to the landforms of a region, or a portion of land that can be viewed at one time from one specific place. It can also indicate an area of activity (cf. Bolin 2003 for a more complete account).

As indicated above, the consequences of printing can be evaluated through the impact it has had on spatial and temporal features of culture and society. In precisely the same way, we can evaluate the growing complexity of the media in their ways of relating to each other, and how the combination of the media in organisational and technological forms as well as the media content (texts, information, representation) affect social and cultural processes – that is, how the media help shape both the form and content of modern culture and society.

Media Landscapes in Space and Time

Media landscapes exist in space and time. When it comes to space, media landscapes can be thought of in at least three ways: terrain, map and simulacrum. The dimension we could label *the terrain* concerns the physical surroundings, the obvious relations between different media technologies. This is the structure of media technologies and contents on a denotative level, to use the language of semiotics. It concerns the immediate apprehensions of television sets, newspapers, books, computers, etc., in their obvious appearance around us. This dimension can also be quite easily apprehended, at least when it comes to the individual's immediate surroundings. For example, if we take a look around our own home or workplace, we can easily observe which media technologies are at hand: we have the radio in the kitchen, the television set in the living room, a computer in the corner, beside the bookshelf with books of fact and fiction, a CD player, a DVD player, several telephones (some of which are mobile phones), computer games, etc. We could describe this environment to our friends, and although we might forget to mention some of the media, it would not be

hard for our imaginative friend to understand the way we have organised our home in relation to the media, since most people have similar ways of doing this. We could also show pictures of our homes, or make drawings to illustrate how we have organised our media technologies.

However, if we leave the micro level of individual arrangements of the media in our private homes, and look at societal or cultural levels, we need to make more general statements on the principles of organisation. Just as with geographical landscapes, it is not possible to fathom the technological structures of electronic landscapes in their entirety, and we need to give more abstract accounts of their organisation. We are naturally confronted with different media technologies in our everyday lives, but we cannot evaluate the structures that they uphold in anything but abstract terms. And when we rise to this level, we do not have direct access to these structures but have to rely on generalised reductive descriptions, metaphors, statistics or general accounts, theory being just one example. In the same way as it is easy to describe in a very exact way the arrangements of flowers in your garden in front of your private home, but more difficult to give an exact account of the environment in your city, there is a discrepancy between how you describe the organisation of the media in your home and the organisation of the media in your home region. The difference between these two dimensions is that of terrain versus map.

Within the dimension of *the map*, we are confronted with such general descriptions, or representations of the media structures on the one hand and of geographical, social, economic, political and cultural accounts represented in and through the media on the other hand. Like the map over geographic territories, the map of media structures is not equal to its referent, but is an abstraction, highlighting certain aspects of reality at the cost of others. The map, then, needs to be understood in relation to its purpose. Maps can focus on demographics, weather conditions, water supplies or other features that can be visualised to illustrate more complex features of reality. Moreover, maps 'are ranked according to their correspondence with topographical truth', according to map historian John Harley (1990 p. 4). They make claims on depicting or representing certain phenomena accurately.

However, although thought of primarily as representations, maps are in fact also constituent of reality. Think of the five-year plans of the Soviet economy. A plan is a map that stretches into the future, giving guidance for future actions. The symbolic thus has a bearing on reality, or, put more to the point: maps *are* also reality. We can speak of this in terms of *the simulacrum*, for want of a better term. This concept is borrowed from Jean Baudrillard (1976/1993), and using it highlights how media articulate physical and symbolic landscapes in space and time, and how these spaces are phenomenologically perceived by those who inhabit them. We could say that this level of analysis is involved in the thinking around the question 'How does the map work on the terrain?'. This means analyzing the links and articulations between the terrain and the map and how the map influences the

world, setting limits for and directing actions analogous to how Michel Foucault's 'archive' becomes 'the law of what can be said' (Foucault 1969/1991 p. 129).

The dimension of the simulacrum is involved in studying ideological discourses about the future, and how certain discourses work as self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, if there were a dominant discourse pointing out a certain region, say the Södertörn region south of Stockholm, Sweden, as the most promising and prosperous place for future investments, such a discourse could very well lead to increased interest from investors, entrepreneurs, politicians, etc. In the long run, an effect of this could be that the area became as prosperous as predicted.

The concept of simulacrum also involves another important dimension, as it points to the fact that some representations cannot be separated from the realities, that they are in fact the same. It has become increasingly important to stress this point, since few phenomena today have non-mediated dimensions, and thus very few things can be said to exist outside of representation.

Some things, however, exist *only* in representational form. These are the things that lack material substance entirely, and it can therefore be illuminating to think of them (the simulacra) in terms of speech acts. According to John Searle (e.g. 1965) and John Austin (1955/1975), these are social acts that are made entirely through language. A promise, for example, is a typical example of a speech act, as the action lies in the utterance of the words 'I promise'. In the same way, a fictionalised account of a phenomenon, a place or an individual is also an utterance that makes a statement. Speech acts can be of many kinds, for example perlocutions/imperatives, constatives or expressives (most relevant here). Perlocutions/imperatives are speech acts oriented towards success (strategic action), and are measured by effectiveness. Constatives represent the state of affairs and thus objectivate truth claims. Expressives aim at self-presentations, aiming at reaching understanding (Habermas 1981/1991 p. 329). Mediated constative utterances with claims on communicating truth, which are of significance here, are thus the basis for our actions in the world as long as we believe them to be true, and following from this, have real effects on social relations. In this respect they *are* the surrounding world. Like verbal utterances, these are performative actions that are not visible or tangible, but are symbolic in their kind.

Many of the speech acts exemplified up to this point are constatives. Many mediated speech acts are, however, expressive; that is, they communicate emotions, experiences, etc., which are communicative modalities often featured in fiction or entertainment (whereas the modality of journalism and other documentary genres is for the most part constative). In terms of communicative validity claims, expressive communication aims at truthfulness (Habermas 1981/1991 p. 329). Perlocutions and imperatives are representative of strategic action aiming at influencing the communicating other, for example through propaganda, advertising, public relations. I will soon return

to examples of how these forms operate, but first I need to further discuss the two basic kinds of structures of media landscapes.

Two Forms of Structures

The media landscapes involve two kinds of structures: those of technological relations and those of representations. Both of these can be related to space and time.

Firstly, when it comes to the structures of the media technologies themselves, these make up technological terrain – electronic geographies in which we orient ourselves in our everyday lives. These are the structures of how the media are organised technologically (networks, organisations, technological infrastructure). These are the material structures of the media – the material base, to make an analogy in Marxist terminology. This material base is distributed in space in the form of technological systems, sometimes visible for us in the form of telephone wires in the sky, which changed the character of the urban landscape dramatically around the end of the 1800s, and was observed and debated in the daily newspapers at the time (Garnert 2005 pp. 87ff). The telephone wires' appearance in the urban landscape was also frequently featured in poems and prose, for example in the works of August Strindberg (Garnert 2005 pp. 112 and 145ff).

However, not all of these systems are visible; at least, some are hard to observe. For example, we might observe the television aerials or satellite dishes on the roofs of our houses, but we have a harder time observing the waves in the air although we know that they are there, allowing our television sets to work (and in the increasing wireless communication via computers, the visible signs of connectivity gradually disappear). And although the satellite dishes are intended for receiving signals for our television sets, they in themselves make up what Charlotte Brunsdon (1991/1997) has termed 'landscapes of taste', which signal cultural and class belonging.

Secondly, there are the media landscapes that are a result of representational practice (Adams 1994). Through the production of accounts, images and maps a semiotic web is constructed, in which we can act as individuals, but which sets up limits, privileges certain kinds of actions before others, and guides us in our everyday lives. Each account of the world, each map, pursues its own argumentation vis-à-vis the surrounding world, and these accounts will have impacts on it. When the author August Strindberg writes a description of telephone lines along the roof-tops in Stockholm, he is engaged in a representational practice, producing a map over a technological structure – an image of a reality that is not accessible for us today as terrain, only as map.

Through the media we learn of places we have never been, some of which we will never visit. This is media as the map of the outside world (including

the map of the material structures). Just as with landscape painting in the 19th century, media landscape in this meaning is strongly connected to the nation-state and nationhood (in the same way as the technological systems are), and contributes to the geopolitics of the nation, giving way to imaginations beyond the local: the 'postmodern geography of the media' (Morley 1992) or the 'electronic landscapes', which ultimately lead us to the wider territorial discussion of the global (cf. Adams & Robins 2000 p. 9). This example (the map) could be divided into media landscapes (the maps themselves, the patterns they depict) and mediated landscapes (the system of semiotic referents in the maps).

The representational structures also vary over time and, similar to how they have been constituent of space, have always defined time: from the habitual – some might say ritual – practices of separating leisure from work time (cf. Bengtsson 2002), to the definitions of the quality of time itself (Christmas time, summertime, etc.). How these representational structures affect our perception of time can be seen in shopping malls, where the commercial seasons profoundly deviate from meteorological as well as cultural seasons – for example, Christmas is culturally spread over approximately six weeks beginning with Advent Sunday and ending with the Epiphany. As a commercial season it lasts approximately as long, but starts earlier – in Sweden around mid-November – and ends earlier, on Christmas Eve (in some countries) or Christmas Day (cf. Ganetz 2001).

The media texts make up landscapes saturated with ideas, values apprehensions. All these kinds of mediated landscapes are laden with ideology, just as landscape paintings can be seen as ideological:

Landscape [...] is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions. Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. (Mitchell 1994/2002 p. 1f)

The one problematic issue in this quote is the word 'artificial'. It should be clear from my argument above that symbolic landscapes are no less real than the material, geographical landscapes. There are in fact more similarities than differences between the two.

Although the similarities dominate, there are also some important differences between media and geographical landscapes. One major difference is that although both geographical and media landscapes structure our actions in the world, they do not do so in the same way. One could make a distinction between a 'hard' and 'soft' structuring mechanism, whereby the geographical landscape structures or sets limits on our actions in a hard way, and the technological and representational landscapes of the media structure

action in a soft way (cf. Bolin 2004). In a geographical landscape we need to climb over mountains, walk around buildings, etc. This landscape talks to our tactile senses. The symbolic landscape of the media, as both technology and content, primarily talks to our visual and aural senses. As such, the impact on our actions is not as direct and determining, but it is not always as obvious either. The soft structuring mechanism, then, cannot be described as weaker or less real than the hard. On the contrary, in its capacity of being naturalised, it is much harder to identify and therefore also to resist. We are not always aware of the impact of the symbolic landscape in the same obvious way as we are of the geographical, physical ones.

There is, however, yet another difference between geographical and representational landscapes. This is the fact that the possibility of altering a symbolic landscape is a much more complicated task than is the adjustment of a geographical or material landscape. If I were not content with the way my garden was structured and if I, say, wanted to have apple instead of pear trees, or tarmac instead of grass, I would be able to adjust this myself. There would also be little debate over the meaning of this adjustment to my physical surroundings. On the other hand, if I wanted to adjust the symbolic landscape around me, this would be harder. The semiotic labour that would be needed to conduct a transformation of my persona, for example, or of my ethnical or cultural identity, would not only need to involve efforts by me myself: it would need to be co-produced together with those I wanted to make this changed impression upon. I would then have less control over the production process. The adjustment of the physical landscape is a relation between an individual and a material object. The adjustment of the semiotic landscape is between an individual subject, a sign structure and one or more other individual subjects.

The material, as well as the representational landscapes, has symbolic dimensions. However, representational landscapes do not have material quality, but are instead pure sign structures. They are the result of signifying practices, and can only be adjusted through semiotic work. What we have, in conclusion, are two kinds of symbolic dimensions: those connected to material media landscapes (the symbolic meanings attached to technologies), and those connected to the symbolic dimensions of the sign structures (the symbolic meanings attached to texts).

The symbolic dimensions of the material media landscapes are, in turn, of two kinds. The first is connected to the media technologies themselves. A television set has a symbolic dimension, and the difference between having an HDTV flat screen is significant (sic!) compared to having an old black-and-white set. However, media organisations also have their material institutional basis: media companies occupy headquarters and offices that are material in kind and which have symbolic dimensions. And media institutions do set their mark on the surrounding social environment by, for example, giving names to specific places – Times Square in New York, named after the newspaper New York Times, being a case in point.

But symbolic landscapes also have symbolic or signifying dimensions. Groups of texts are laden with connotations, and in the same way as it matters to the surrounding social world which kind of mobile phone you have (especially if you are a teenager), or which kind of television set you furnish your home with, it does matter which kinds of texts you engage in and which genres you prefer. This means that media consumption patterns also make up signifying landscapes. In the same way that it is easier to adjust your material surroundings in your garden, it is easier for a media company to adjust their material milieu. And if it is much harder to adjust the symbolic dimensions of the material milieu, it is even more difficult to change the connotations of the symbolic dimensions of the semiotic surroundings, since you have to change not only the material dimension but also the apprehensions of it.

Spatial Qualities of Time

Geographical landscapes naturally stretch out in space; so do media landscapes of both the material and semiotic kinds. Although we are never able to overview the totality of the global media landscape, neither are we able to view the world in its entirety. And although media representations increasingly cover more parts of the world, we are a long way from a representational practice that is global in the semantic meaning of the word. However, mediated representations, no matter how representative they are, travel through history and set their mark on future realities, and thus have cultural and societal effects. At this point in the argument, I wish to address the temporal aspect of media landscapes.

When we think of time in relation to media landscapes, it might be useful to think of different kinds of time. It is possible to work with at least three such kinds: linear, circular and punctual. *Linear time* is the time that adds hours to hours, days to days, extending time continuously into the present or back to the past. This is also how we usually think of time in everyday circumstances. *Circular time*, on the contrary, is the time that constantly returns, in the same way as seasons return every year. The third kind is *punctual time*, which is characterised by its quality, by the fact that it is similar in kind to other points in time (Geertz 1973 pp. 391ff).

If we think of the ideology of news, for example, the privileged temporal perspective is that of the linear: things happen in the world and seem to unfold in a row of sequences. This is an effect of how news is constructed. It privileges linear perspectives: the 'now-ness' of news is always contrasted with the 'then-ness' of the immediate past. However, if we return to the example of slots in a television schedule, we can see that a program in the schedule is not only situated after certain programs (the evening news comes after the afternoon soaps), but before other programs (the late-night movie,

for example), which privileges the linear. It is also situated alongside other programs on other channels; that is, it is placed side-by-side and sometimes head-to-head with other programs, often of generic similarity. This makes television schedules multi-temporal, as they point to both the *linear* perspective of the day and evening, which in turn repeats itself every day of the week, and further by week, as well as by season in a *circular* form. But a television program is also representative of *punctual* time – the time that is imprinted by its character, rather than its relation – or *situation* – to other kinds of time. It is not so much that each television program is situated at a special point in the television schedule, but more that the social uses of (some) television programs have a semi-ritual character, and are used by viewers to structure their own everyday life habits, marking off work from leisure, weekdays from holidays, etc. Or, in other words: some programs have the function of events for viewers, and are the result of emotional investment by which they mark off a temporal space to enter into for an evening, if only for a few hours (Bolin & Forsman 2002, pp. 239ff; cf. Bausinger 1984).

The quality of being able to mark off time, thus also giving time a spatial quality, is not restricted to television. Quite naturally, it also applies to radio, perhaps even more so if we consider mobile phones and radios, portable CD players and other mobile technologies that enable the listener to cut him or herself off from the surrounding symbolic environment. However, these media do not only have the ability to cut the listener off. It is just as much a question of altering the environment through a change in its symbolic forms. Through giving the physical surroundings a new soundtrack, an alteration of space has occurred. We are still locked in the physical surroundings, but we have the power to adjust the symbolic dimensions of these surroundings. On an individual level this changes the nature of the landscape, although it might not change the overall structure of society. Taken together with other similar phenomena, however, I would argue that there is an alteration at the aggregated societal and cultural level. This will be the focus of the last section of this chapter.

The Mediated Construction of Culture and Society

We now return to the relation between the media, culture and society, and the ways in which the technological landscapes and the landscapes of representation interrelate with one another in constructing cultures and societies as spatial and temporal categories. I have chosen my examples from post-Soviet Estonia. Estonia is a particularly interesting object of study in this respect, as the country 'has been an unusually unstable time-space, repeatedly constructed and reconstructed in a more or less unbalanced interaction with surrounding spheres of power, in the last decade increasingly orienting itself towards Nordic politics and markets' (Ekecrantz 2004 p. 44). It is

thus suitable as an object of study, as the processes there are more pronounced than in other parts of the world.

The technological landscapes of Estonia have obviously changed quite substantially since the late 1980s – as has occurred in Europe in general with the entrance of digital and mobile computer technology, commercial broadcasting, restructuring of press and literary markets, etc. Naturally, these changes have affected both West European and Estonian societies and cultures in a range of ways. The shift from state-controlled to commercial media, however, can probably be judged to be more overwhelming in Estonia than the changes in other parts of Europe. Although the overarching trends might be the same, the quality of the changes and transformations differs.

It is probably easy to agree on the material side of this historical situation. That is, the general map of the technological landscape will not be disputed. When we come to the question of how we should *evaluate* these changes, however, to determine the meaning of or establish representational facts about technological change, we will run into difficulties, as there will be dividing opinions. Will the spread of Internet technology lead to increased Democracy and engagement by citizens? What are the social consequences of widespread access to mobile phones? Does broadband technology enhance corporate profitability? These are questions that are not easily answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’. But it will be possible to agree on the basis of their formulation in technological development: there is a material base from which to depart. This will not be the case once we move into the realm of the simulacrum, or the reality of representation.

In order to analyse the landscapes of representation, we need to consider the *signifying practices* that are fundamentally constituent of culture and society. On the one hand, these are the signifying practices strategically developed in order to actively attain effects, for example marketing, public relations, branding and other campaigning, and commercial and political communication. On the other hand, there are also more subtle and not always conscious practices around media use, which lead to cultural patterns (taste communities, for example). The latter of these are frequently discussed in the research literature on media reception, and I will consequently deal more with the former. As the endpoint of this chapter I will thus discuss some features in the restructuring of Estonia as a nation and a symbolic entity as an example of such landscapes of representation. I will focus on the nodes in the restructuring process at which commercial and political communication intersect.

The more specific example I will discuss is the discursive restructuring related to the branding campaign *Brand Estonia*, launched by the Estonian government in 2001, which aimed to promote Estonia prior to the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest in Tallinn in May 2002. The Estonian government engaged a British public relations consultant – Interbrand – that had specialised in ‘country branding’, and had previously worked on the Blair administration’s campaign ‘Cool Britannia’. Interbrand set about its work with the aim of ‘promoting the Republic of Estonia abroad’, through producing

‘targeted, strategic messages’, and ‘a clear visual identity’ for the nation. This strategy, summarised and accounted for in the report *Eesti Stiil/Estonian Style* (accessible from www.eas.ee), consisted of the production of four components: a bank of photographs to be used in promotional campaigns, a special ‘colour palette’ for Estonia, a special visual pattern, and a specific typography (see Figure 1).


Figure 1. Description of the special typeface designed for the campaign Brand Estonia.

The typeface

Information design is crucial for a country in its brand library. It enables visitors as well as locals to navigate their way throughout the cities and countryside with ease and consistency.

Developing an ‘Estonian’ typeface will deliver this consistency. As a starting point, the typeface Symphony has been chosen.

RAHVUSVAHELISED VÄLJUMISED
INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURES



(Source: Eesti stiil/Estonian Style, www.eas.ee, 2002.02.24)

As the text reveals, the typeface is intended to help visitors to Estonia ‘navigate their way’. A very tangible example has been chosen for this: the direction signs at airports. We can think of the specific qualities of the typeface semiotically, and ask why this typeface was chosen over other typefaces. We can see that Symphony is a quite simple, clean typeface. It is also a typeface that we would not reflect on if we were to see it at an airport: it is in fact quite typical of typefaces chosen at places like airports, train stations, etc. It is easy to read (letters are not easily confused with one another, for example). In short: it has directionary, or perlocutionary, power. This makes it effective as a guiding tool in other contexts as well, which are outside of airports, train stations and the like. But it would still connote a cleanness, purity, freshness, etc., even if placed in relation to signs other than those usually found at transitory spaces for departure and arrival.

At one level of analysis, then, the typeface has perlocutionary power and thus structures action through its representation. At another level of analysis the signifying practice is constative, as it argues for the similarity between Estonia and other late modern societies with late modern airports through which international passengers can arrive and depart. The linguistic combination of English and Estonian clearly confirms the place of Estonia in the context of global tourism and business flows.

Furthermore, the text proposed is a combination of Estonian and English – not Russian. Although there is a large Russian speaking population in Estonia, this has left no trace in the texts in *Estonian style*. The Estonian colour palette also carefully avoids red, and concentrates on bright and somewhat pale colours. In the ‘People of Estonia’ section, young men and women are portrayed, the men with neatly cut hair and business suits, portrayed in business settings, eyes firmly confronting the gaze from the spectator, etc. These are people uncontaminated by their Soviet past but representing the post-Soviet generations, symbolising the nation’s ‘return to the western world’ (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997).

The combination of signs is thus not done randomly. The basis for their combination has been planned in the communicative strategy laid out by Interbrand within the framework of the Brand Estonia project, just as it has in similar campaigns aiming at promoting regions (cf. Falkheimer 2004). Consider the combination of signs that interrelate in the example from the same campaign in Figure 2, which contains a combination of photographic and geographic messages.

In Figure 2 a map of Estonia is combined with portraits of – supposedly – Estonian young persons. We can note that the map of Estonia is cut loose from context, especially abrupt to the East, towards Russia, indicating the sovereign status of the nation through the sharp line to the East and its relatively openness towards the coastal line and the West (and the Nordic countries – further anchored by the campaign slogan ‘Nordic with a twist’). We can also, after having scrutinised the photographs, see the map of Estonia as a layer over the photographs, or, more precise, accentuating the combination of two pictures. As the accompanying text reveals, however, one must be careful in combining images, since not all ‘will be enhanced by this treatment’. The photographs depict young women and children, bright skies, birches, signs that connote future possibilities, fertility, optimism, etc. Through the combination of the map of Estonia and images that are supposed to connote ‘positive transformations’, the campaign aims at encouraging foreign investors, tourists and others to invest, visit or generally pay attention to Estonia.

Through altering the spatial understanding by marking distance towards the East (and the South Baltic neighbours), and connecting instead with the West and the Nordic countries – for example with the slogan ‘Nordic with a twist’ – the campaign tries to add symbolic values to the nation. These images are then backed up with information about Estonia, for example its Tiger Leap campaign to create e-estonia, which is expected to further attract visi-

Figure 2. Description of the special map and accompanying photographs designed for the campaign Brand Estonia.

Eesti kaart

Eesti kaart on graafiline element, mille eesmärk on rõhutada veel kord "paremaks muutumist". Kaart töötab kõige paremini, kui selle kaudu sulandatakse kaks "tegelikkuse" fotot, luues reaalse ja samas metafoorse illustratsiooni paremaks muutumisest.

Kui te loote sellist kommunikatsiooniväljundit, palun valige kaks "tegelikkuse" fotot hoolikalt – mitte kõigi piltide puhul ei mõju selline kasutus hästi.




The Map of Estonia

The map of Estonia is a graphic device which has been introduced to provide a further articulation of 'positive transformation'. This device works best when it enables the fusion of two 'actuality' photographs, generating a real as well as a metaphorical demonstration of positive transformation

If you are creating such a communication piece please choose the two 'actuality' photographs with care; not all images will be enhanced by this treatment.



(Source: Eesti still/Estonian Style, www.eas.ee, 2002.02.24)

tors and 're-brand' the nation in the eyes of the Western world (cf. Bolin 2003 p. 28). In this, the campaign is a complex speech act of a prescriptive kind: it points to the future and aims at effecting things to come. Through the combination of symbols in semiotic labour, new values are created in the symbolic structuring of East European spaces.

So, to connect back to the relation between media, culture and society that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, we can now see how these all interrelate in the example above. The Brand Estonia campaign adopts a cultural strategy, mediated through signs, typefaces, colour palettes and symbolically laden maps in electronic and print media, aiming to produce the post-Soviet image of Estonia as a society, a nation, a cultural entity – the

cultural connection achieved not least through images of specially selected handicrafts and (young) people, in specific cultural surroundings, engaging in specific cultural habits, etc. Through this, specific 'legitimate orders' (Habermas) are produced, portraying a certain kind of 'collective social life' (McQuail) for both inhabitants of Estonia and others to take part in. These are the representations of a 'particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour' (Williams). This is society as it exists in representation.

Representational Structures: Final Remarks

This way of life, and this specific cultural and social order, might not be perceived as accurate by some, but will remain uncontested by others. So, to what extent can we speak of society as it exists in representations in terms of truthfulness? If these are maps of Estonia, to what extent can we judge them to be topographically true or false? The answer to this question is that we cannot. We will never be able to judge these representations to be false, as they themselves *are* the reality of Estonia as a society and a specific cultural sphere, at least just as much as any other account built entirely of signs.

As semiotic utterances, these are examples of claims of representing a state of affairs regarding Estonia as a nation. They want to install in their interpreters certain impressions about Estonia, rather than others. These constative claims are made by analogy, masking themselves as being expressive. As long as such representational statements do not make claims on physical facts (it would be hard to claim that Estonia has a larger population than Russia, for example), as long as signs point to qualitative features, it is only possible to judge them against other representations. That is, we can argue about their accuracy but will never be able to prove them false. As long as we act in relation to these images – and no matter *how* we act – the sheer fact that we depart from these maps in our actions marks them as true in the sense that they have real-life effects.

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