Joshua Meyrowitz   The Rise of Glocality

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New Senses of Place
and Identity in the Global Village

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All experience is local. Everything we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste is experienced through our bodies. And unless one believes in out-of-body experiences, one accepts that we and our bodies are permanently fused. We are always in place, and place is always with us.

Similarly, as we move through our daily routines, choose places to live, to work, and to send our children to school, we are dependent on the nature of the specific locality. Our bodies are bound by the laws of space and time, and – barring the development of *Star Trek*-like teleportation – always will be. We cannot work in Budapest and stop home for lunch in Paris. Our children cannot attend school every weekday in Berlin and play soccer daily in Rome. We cannot get a tan on the Riviera in the morning and ski in Aspen, Colorado right after lunch. As much as we may flirt with others over the telephone or the internet, we cannot consummate a loving relationship, or produce offspring – at least through the most common and pleasurable method – without bringing the space and time coordinates of two human bodies into synchrony. Moreover, we are all very aware of how long it takes to commute to and from a work office or to travel to an international conference. The travel time is real, even when we work with or present conference papers about virtual space and telecommunications.

In short, no matter how sophisticated our technologies are, no matter how much we attempt to multi-task, we cannot be in two places at the same time. The localness of experience is a constant. And the significance of locality persists even in the face of massive social and technological changes. Our most basic physical needs for shelter and food must be met locally. Even in the era of online shopping and just-in-time delivery, there is still no convenience quite like the local convenience store.

The Generalized Elsewhere

Ongoing localism, however, does not negate the reality of globalization. Nor does the essential localness of experience negate the significance

of forms of communication that seep through walls and leap across vast distances. For although we always sense the world in a local place, the people and things that we sense are not exclusively local: media of all kinds extend our perceptual field. And while all physical experience is local, we do not always make sense of local experience from a purely local perspective. Various media give us external perspectives from which to judge the local. We may be mentally outside, even as we are physically inside.

The work of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead makes the convincing case that even the human sense of self is not defined by the physical boundaries of our bodies. The self, they argue, is a reflected concept. It develops as we come to see ourselves as social objects. That is, we understand the social "meaning" of our behaviours and words as we imagine how others are imagining us. The self develops through our perceptions of other people's perceptions. Cooley refers to this as "the looking-glass self". Mead speaks of "the generalized other" from whose perspective we view and judge our own behaviour and utterances. Mead also describes "significant others", those people with whom we have particularly important relationships and whose imagined views of us are especially powerful.[1]

The notion of a reflected self is related to media and locality in at least two ways. First, media have extended the boundaries of experience so that those whom we perceive as significant others or as part of the generalized other are no longer only the people we experience in face-to-face interaction. People from other localities also serve as self-mirrors. Although this "mediated generalized other" does not eliminate our reliance on locality and the people in it for a sense of self, it dilutes and modifies it.[2] Moreover, even within the general locality, those in our immediate physical proximity – inhabitants of our neighbourhoods, and even of our homes – have progressively less influence on our self-image as we increasingly use mobile and immobile phones, e-mail, and various modes of transportation to maintain contact with others who are more distant, but still relatively local and physically accessible.

Second, by giving us perspectives external to the locality, media expand

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[1] Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, rev. ed., New York: Schocken, 1964 (originally published in 1922); George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

[2] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 131–132.

our perception of what I call "the generalized elsewhere".[3] The generalized elsewhere serves as a mirror in which to view and judge our localities. We are now more likely to understand our place, not just as *the* community, but as one of many possible communities in which we could live. We are less likely to see our locality as the center of the universe. We are less likely to see our physical surroundings as the source of all our experiences.

Even for those of us who feel deeply connected to a locality, we are now more likely than in past centuries to think of where we live as it is imagined from elsewhere. We may, for example, think of our locality as being north of or south of somewhere else; as being more liberal or more conservative than another location; as older or newer, more or less exotic, or colder or warmer than other places.

Glocality: Being Inside and Outside at the Same Time

Consciousness of both self and place demands at least some sort of minimally external perspective. For most citizens of the globe, however, external perspectives are no longer minimal. Today's consciousness of self and place is unusual because of the ways in which the evolutions in communication and travel have placed an interconnected global matrix over local experience. We now live in "glocalities".[4] Each glocality is unique in many ways, and yet each is also influenced by global trends and global consciousness.

Although we continue to live in particular physical localities, we now increasingly share information with and about people who live in localities different from our own. We more frequently intercept experiences and messages originally shaped for, and limited to, people in other places. Not that long ago, even the general appearance of distant locations – and the appearance and mannerisms of the people who inhabited them – were not that easily accessible.

As recently as the Golden Age of Radio in the United States, an entire radio drama could be based on the mystery and danger surrounding a

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[3] Joshua Meyrowitz, "The Generalized Elsewhere", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 6, no. 3 (September 1989), pp. 326–334.

[4] As the concept of "globalization" has been refined in recent years to take into account the enduring power of local experience and culture, terms such as "glocal" and "glocalization" have appeared in many scholarly, business, and popular arenas, probably as the result of independent impulses to blend the words global and local. I first began to use the concept of "glocality" in talks presented in the mid-1980s, one of which was later published as *The Changing Global Landscape*, Atlanta: Quest, 1991.

trip from New York to California. (Such was the case with Orson Welles' *The Hitchhiker*, first broadcast in 1941, which was hailed as a classic of the medium.) Yet, at the start of the television era in the U.S., TV programs provided live hookups of scenes of New York and California. This began the process of demystification of cross-country travel and of distant parts of the country and the world. The same demystification of distant locales via television has occurred in many other countries.

Today, with hundreds of TV channels, cable networks, satellite systems, and millions of computer web sites, average citizens of all advanced industrialized societies (and many not so advanced societies) have images in their heads of other people, other cities and countries, other professions, and other lifestyles. These images help to shape the imagined elsewhere from which each person's somewhere is conceived. In that sense, all our media – regardless of their manifest purpose and design – function as mental "global positioning systems".

Mediated images, even when limited by false or ethnocentric assumptions, form a context for the use of voice-only mobile-phone calls. When American philosopher Henry David Thoreau assessed the planned construction of a telegraph line from the New England state of Maine to the southern state of Texas, he suggested that people in the two states might not have anything important to communicate to each other.[5] Today, most of us can conceive enough of the life space of distant others to imagine having at least a few important topics of conversation with almost anyone else on the planet.

Even seemingly insurmountable cultural barriers can be pierced, at least in small ways, in the glocality. In the Middle East, for example, the idea for the Hello Shalom-Hello Salaam phone hotline came into being when an Israeli Jew named Natalia dialed a wrong number on her mobile phone and reached a Palestinian named Jihad. With their numbers recorded on each other's phones, they began to call each other and established a phone relationship that included checking on each other after bombings and terrorist attacks. The hotline that developed from this accidental relationship allows Jews and Palestinians to listen to hundreds of voice messages from each other and decide whether they want to make direct contact. In the first three months of the service in 2002, 25,000 people used the hotline.[6]

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[5] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 52. (*Walden* was originally published in 1854.)

[6] Deborah Blachor, "Palestinian-Israeli Hotline Melts Hate", *New York Daily News*, 8 December 2002, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/wn_report/story/41678p-39336c.html.

The global view that modern media engender often alters the meaning of interactions in the locality. In the past, workers in a factory, women at home, children in school, and patrons of a neighbourhood shop typically conceived of their behaviours as taking place in local space and in keeping with what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has called "local knowledge".[7] Pleasure and pain, conflict and communion were thought to occur *in* the factory, *in* the family home, *in* the school, and *in* the neighbourhood. Problems with a supervisor, a spouse, a teacher, or a shopkeeper were once most likely to be viewed as personal difficulties between individuals. Today, however, the mediated perspective from elsewhere – which provides a sort of "view from above" even for those "on the ground" – redefines many local problems into "social issues"; that is, into struggles between more abstract "social categories". When a promotion is denied, it is now often linked to sex discrimination or racism; a problem with a husband is now frequently defined in terms of spouse abuse or sexism. Similarly, when someone is annoyed by the smoking behaviour of the individual at the next table in a restaurant, it is now usually viewed as part of the larger battle between smokers and non-smokers (or even a battle between health activists and global conglomerates), rather than as an issue of individual habit or individual lack of courtesy. Thus, although most intense interactions continue to take place in specific physical settings, they are now often perceived as occurring in a much larger social arena. The local and the global co-exist in the glocality.

Increased Attachment to Places

As I have argued extensively elsewhere, electronic media lead to dissociation between physical place and social place.[8] Yet, in many ways, electronic media also foster greater emotional attachments to place. Not that long ago in human history, only a small minority of people traveled more than a radius of a few miles during their entire lives. Before the Industrial Revolution, connections to place were pre-determined, in most cases, by where a person was born. Typically, everyone one knew was local, and local space shaped virtually everything and every person one experienced. Place-connection was similar to an arranged marriage made by one's parents at one's birth. There was not much conscious identification with place because there was little perceived choice. Today, the revo-

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[7] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

[8] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*.

lution in connection to places is akin to the historical shift from arranged marriage to romantic love. And it is attended by similar conflicting attributes: both greater emotional attachment and more potential for disruption, divorce, and remarriage. Ironically, we witness the expression of more explicit passion for localities, along with more travel away from them and more frequent relocations to elsewhere.

Not that long ago, a move from one city to another was marked by a loss of, or at least major changes in, contact with family, friends, and the overall texture of daily experience. However, as more of our interactions and experiences have become mediated through radio, TV, telephones, email, and other devices, we can now transport most of our nexus of interactions with us wherever we go. To the extent that people, using phones and e-mail, construct individualized social networks (or what Sidney Aronson, writing about telephones in 1971, termed "psychological neighbourhoods"[9]), the "community of interaction" becomes a mobile phenomenon. It does not exist in any physical space. For certain types of work – particularly those that involve writing or creating on the computer, either individually or collaboratively – even our co-workers may stay the same when we move to another city or country.

These changes do not obliterate connections to places. Indeed, they may even enhance some aspects of connection to physical location. Now that a move from one locality to another has a diminished impact on our networks of contacts with other people and places, we can choose the places we live based on other criteria. We increasingly choose our localities and react to them in terms of such variables as weather, architecture, quality of schools, density of population, available entertainment, general appearance, even "love at first sight". In addition, we may assess the wisdom of our choices by checking the ratings of our selected locales in printed and online guides to the "best places to live".

Locality as Backdrop

Although we now often choose a place *more* carefully than people did in the past, our interactions with place have come to resemble what E. Relph calls, in a somewhat different context, "incidental outsideness" and "objective outsideness".[10] That is, the more our sense of self and experience is linked to interactions through media, the more our physical lo-

[9] Sidney Aronson, "The Sociology of the Telephone", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 3 (September 1971), pp. 153–167.

[10] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion Ltd., 1976, pp. 51–52.

cales become the backdrops for these other experiences rather than our full life space. Other than that we must be in *some* place while we have various mediated experiences, there is often no essential connection between the physical setting we are in and the mediated experiences we are having in that location. Indeed, on mobile phone calls, we often find ourselves describing – in a manner that makes sense from a distance – where we are and what we were doing before the call began. Thus, we are, in a way, both inside and outside the locale at the same moment.

The dissociation between physical place and experiential space fosters the development of what might be called "glocal morality". Before the widespread use of electronic recording devices, many people felt that if they were in a remote space they could routinely act and speak in a manner they would not use were their mothers, priests, the police, or other audiences present. Now, we are all discovering that with the use of digital cameras and picture-taking mobile phones, behaviours that might be accepted, or at least tolerated, in isolated local places are condemned and/or punished when transported, via media, to more dispersed contexts and more diverse audiences. In some circumstances, this trend may limit the richness of the range of human expression and action. In many other circumstances, it may lead to a healthy sense of caution among those who might otherwise use secrecy and privacy to abuse others. Such caution, we might hope, will be one outcome of the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal, which has been driven by the wide dissemination of digital images.

As a result of multiple mediations of our experience, we can come to live in places without ever fully integrating into the place-defined community, such as the local government, local community groups, or local religious organizations. Moreover, we can exit places psychologically without ever leaving them physically, such as when we leapfrog over potential "significant others" in the locality to find more distant self-mirrors who are more to our liking. A gay teenager who feels demeaned and isolated locally, for example, may find identity-support in online chat rooms and websites for gays. The mere existence of a 24-hour gay hotline that can be reached via a mobile phone during a crisis may provide local comfort. In 2002 and 2003, antiwar activists in conservative pro-war U.S. towns used similar means to maintain their sanity without having to move to another locale.

The current more "romantic", yet ultimately relatively superficial attachments to place encourage more frequent physical relocations. The global dimensions of any glocality, after all, can be retained even as one locality is abandoned for another. Travel is also more easily managed as

distant places seem less strange and less dangerous and as contacts with those "back home" (or anywhere) can be maintained wherever we roam.

The media-networked glocality also affords the possibility of having multiple, multi-layered, fluid, and endlessly adjustable senses of identity. Rather than needing to choose between local, place-defined identities and more distant ones, we can have them all, not just in rapid sequence but in overlapping experiences. We can attend a local zoning board meeting, embodying the role of local concerned citizen, as we cruise the internet on a wireless-enabled laptop enacting other, non-local identities. And we can merge the two as we draw on distant information to inform the local board of how other communities handle similar issues and regulations. All the while, we can remain accessible to friends, family, and colleagues from anywhere via a text-message enabled mobile phone.

Boundary Disputes

The pre-electronic locality was characterized by its physical and experiential boundedness. Situations were defined by where and when they took place and by who was physically present – as well as by where and when they were *not* taking place and by who was *not* physically present at particular events. The definitions of situations (that is, the answer to the question: "What is going on here?") could, in sociologist Erving Goffman's phrase, "saturate" a time- and space-defined setting.[11] Now such boundedness requires some effort: Turn off the mobile phones, PDAs, and laptops; banish radio and television. Schools and churches continue this struggle to make "a space apart". Couples alone together in intimate settings often engage in the same effort. In many instances, the "rules of distraction" are now explicitly negotiated (e.g., "emergency calls only", "silence the ringers on your phone", "text-messaging will be considered cheating on an exam", "no mobile-phone calls, please, during the sessions of the conference about mobile-phones").

In most settings in a post-modern society, however, the definitions of the situation are multiple and unstable, able to shift with the ring or buzz of a telephone or with the announcement of a "breaking story". Different participants in a time/space field are more likely than ever before to be engaged in different activities with diverse frameworks for comprehending "what is going on". (Most people are less troubled by their own sudden shift in interactional boundaries and situational definitions than they

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[11] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Anchor Books, 1959, p. 106.

are by similar sudden shifts among those around them.)

Increasingly permeable situational boundaries affect more than the particular behaviours within them; they also reshape social identities in general. It is extremely difficult to maintain some of the traditional distinctions in life experiences that characterized the print era. In a print society, the different levels of coding of text served to isolate children from the informational worlds of adults and even from the experiences of children who were a year or two older or younger. Now, such distinctions are much more difficult to preserve. Children are routinely exposed to what was once considered "adult information". In a place-defined culture, it was also possible to separate men's places from women's places. At the height of influence of Western print culture, for example, the Victorians emphasized how the public, male realm of rational accomplishments and brutal competitions was very different from the private, female sphere of home, intuition, and emotion. Now, electronic media pull the public realm into the home, and push intimate topics, images, and sounds into the public sphere.

Yet, just as there is a blurring of traditional distinctions between children's and adults' experiences and between male and female spheres, so is there a breaking down of the traditional similarities among what people of the same age or same gender experience. We are witnessing both macro-level homogenization of identities and micro-level fragmentation of them.

Not long ago, a few key demographic variables could accurately predict a large chunk of the activities and social identity of a person. Today, while many class and economic differences remain, the patterns of distinction are not as clear. Indeed, I would argue that it has never been more difficult than it is now to predict what a person will know or be doing based on traditional demographic variables. A few decades ago, if we knew that a person was 16 years old, African-American, female, and living in rural Georgia in the U.S., we would have a good idea that her informational world and daily activities would be very similar to those of her local peers and completely different from those of a white, male, 18-year-old, living in a suburb of New York City and his local peers. Now, it is much more likely that people of the same demographic categories will be different from each other while also overlapping in knowledge, behaviours, and expectations with those of different demographic categories. Although advertising researchers keep coming up with increasingly sophisticated ways to segment the population into demographic clusters for the targeting of ads, the real trend is the rise in individual idiosyncrasy. These changes parallel and contribute to the chang-

ing nature of towns and cities, where we are seeing more similarities across glocalities and more variation within them.

Between Local and Global: Tension and Fusion

Such changes in the senses of "us" vs. "them" and in "here" vs. "else-where" are neither inherently good nor inherently evil. Yet, they are significantly different from older, place-bound experiences. We both lose and gain. We lose the old comfort and simplicity of being in bounded systems of interaction where our "insider" role is taken for granted. Yet, with a wide array of electronic media, including the mobile phone, we are also liberated from the same bounded and confining experiences. We are free to choose our own networks for membership and our own level of engagement in each network. We are free, as well, to shape our degrees of connection to local space. As a result, we can each create our own customized − and evolving − fusion of local and global identities.[12]