

Decentering Media Studies, Verbing the Audience: Methodological Considerations Concerning People's Uses of Media in Urban Space

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Media studies scholars are invited today to address the pervasive mediation of contemporary cities, together with researchers from human geography, urban studies, science and technology studies, and mobility studies. Current studies of people's uses of media in urban space, in particular, could play a central role in shedding light on the mediatedness of urban daily life. Drawing on a review of this specific strand of research within the broader field of "urban media studies," the article argues that participation in the interdisciplinary endeavor runs the risk of being hindered by overly media-centric methodological procedures. Their restrictive implications are most problematic in the taken-for-granted employment of "urban audience" and "urban media user" as key concepts in the study of how people use media in urban space. What we propose instead is to demarcate the research object by proceeding from the primary importance of urban practices. This methodological decentering of media necessitates the "verbing" of the notion of audience, thereby shifting the research focus to the activity of "audiencing" (media-related or not) and its interrelations with other urban activities.

Keywords: audiencing, methodology, practices, urban space, uses of media

Introduction

In the past few years, the proliferation of portable networked devices and ambient media has prompted media studies scholars to recognize the centrality of urban space as a context of media reception and use. Research agendas are now increasingly accommodating people's media-related activities in squares, streets, and other public and semi-public places, including shopping malls and pubs. These studies feed into an evolving scholarly subfield, where the largely disjointed issues of media and cities are addressed together.

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This broader subfield, which we call here “urban media studies,”¹ resonates with the ongoing work in human geography, urban studies, science and technology studies, and mobility studies that aims to tackle, from different angles, the pervasive mediation characterizing contemporary cities. Overall, due to the increasing centrality of media in any urban practice, media studies scholars are increasingly invited to contribute to this broader interdisciplinary endeavor. In particular, research on people’s uses of media in urban space could have a pivotal role. As Stephen Graham already stated a decade ago, the present forms of what he calls “remediation of urban life” cannot be understood without paying attention to how media are “adopted and shaped within the fine-grained practices of everyday urban life,” and how, in turn, they are “starting to influence the forms, processes, experiences and ideas of urban life in a wide variety of contexts across the world” (2004, pp. 17–18). More recently, Scott Rodgers, Clive Barnett, and Allan Cochrane have underlined how attention to practices not only “has the potential to draw together media and urban studies” (2014, p. 1066), but also helps to “reconceptualize the implicit and explicit relations of power enacted through pervasive mediated urban environments” (2014, p. 1063). Their proposal is to extend the focus advocated by Graham to “institutionalized media activities—for example, producing television, designing software, or making the news— . . . as organized-yet-everyday practical fields in their own right” (2014, p. 1063).

In this article, our focus will be on current research on urban uses of media—an effervescent strand of urban media studies that has proven receptive to inspiration from neighboring fields (human geography and science and technology studies, in particular). However, this strand still appears at a preliminary phase, and one finds very little systematic discussion on how to conduct research in the new interdisciplinary situation. Hence, while the present upsurge of empirical case studies sheds important light on urban media engagements, these studies rarely transcend the singular cases addressed. This prevents scholars from providing a broader view of people’s media-related activities in urban space and thereby confines their findings to the boundaries of media studies.

It is against this background that we find the main challenge in studying people’s media-related urban activities to be methodological in nature. One of the main issues to be tackled in this respect concerns the ways in which the empirical investigations in this specific field are guided by procedures embedded in the previous disciplinary traditions, most prominently in cultural audience studies. What is notable is that scholars rarely address the adequacy of the earlier frameworks that inform their research procedures in the urban spatial context. Our contention, in contrast, is that a reassessment of these procedures and frameworks is necessary for participating fruitfully in the ongoing interdisciplinary debate on mediated urbanism. This is because a common ground between different disciplines, in our view, cannot even be probed unless researchers first reflect on how their concepts and approaches relate or contribute to the construction of the social reality they claim to study (see Bal, 2002; Blumer, 1969).

The purpose of our article is to foster this kind of methodological reflection by scrutinizing the procedures through which the object of research is defined in the study of people’s urban uses of media.

¹ Urban geographer Stephen Graham (2004) coined this area of research “urban new media studies.” In our view, the distinction between old and new media, however, is not decisive for the definition of the subfield.

In particular, we will focus on how scholars in this specific research strand demarcate the boundaries of their research objects. As media studies scholar Klaus Bruhn Jensen points out, "to design an empirical study is to identify and delimit a portion of reality—which is to be examined with reference to a theoretically informed purpose, or conceptualization, and according to a systematic procedure of data collection and analysis" (2002, p. 237). The way in which this procedure is conducted ties in with the adoption of research methods. In ethnographic approaches, for example, we usually select a portion (or portions) of space in which to carry out observation (see Amit, 2000; for multi-sited ethnography, see Marcus, 1995). As for other methods, the procedure may consist in the selection of either a corpus of texts to be analyzed or a number of informants to be interviewed, observed, or included in a sample. In any case, the operations of boundary demarcation are never mere technicalities; rather, they are connected in fundamental ways—explicitly or implicitly—to the conceptual framework through which the researcher approaches the world.

A central argument in our article is that current studies of people's uses of media in urban contexts tend to delimit their research object in a strictly media-centric way, constructing this object as "urban media audiences" or "urban media users." Without reflecting on the implications of this methodological procedure, however, there is a risk of overlooking how people's media-related activities and urban daily life mutually shape one another. As a result, we may lose the opportunity to get a fine-grained empirical grasp of this process. Simultaneously, constructive participation in debates across disciplinary boundaries remains difficult.

In what follows, we will proceed in four steps. In the second section, we provide an overview of current research on people's uses of media in urban space. We review the theoretical issues addressed more systematically in the studies, discuss the research methods employed in them, and assess the procedures through which the studies mark the boundaries of their research objects. In this way, we highlight their methodological implications and make visible how researchers' attachment to the established ways of understanding the key concepts of "audience" and "user" in the field of cultural audience studies still informs their methodological procedures.

In the third section, we illustrate how the "disciplinary burden" discussed in the second section risks hindering researchers from getting a sensitive grasp of people's media-related activities in urban space.

In the fourth section, we outline a methodological route for circumventing the discussed limitations. What we advocate is a decentering of urban media studies by problematizing the implicit assumption of the notions of "urban media audience" and "urban media user" as starting points for the demarcation of the boundaries of the research object. Our own proposal is to take as the point of departure the practices and routines that, in our view, constitute urban daily life. As we will show, this shift necessitates the "verbing" of the notion of audience as a methodological lens (see Fiske, 1992; Fiske & Dawson, 1996). This, in turn, has profound consequences for the empirical study of people's media-related activities in urban space. Furthermore, we stress the importance of accounting for the complex ways in which audiencing and other media-related activities intertwine with one another and with non-media-related activities in the constitution of urban practices and routines. The methodological move we

propose resonates with the so-called "practice turn" in media studies (Fiske, 1992; see also Couldry, 2004, 2011), as well as with non-media-centric approaches to media (see, e.g., Krajina, Moores, & Morley, 2014; Moores, 2012; Morley, 2009).

In conclusion, we will discuss some of the major implications of "decentering media studies" and "verbing the audience" for the study of urban practices in an era of pervasive technological mediation of both space and human (inter)action.

Studying Uses of Media in Urban Space

The dispersed state of urban media studies renders the delineation of the entire subfield problematic and makes it difficult to provide an exhaustive map of current work on people's uses of media in urban space. Nevertheless, when taking the methodological notion of "a theoretically informed purpose" (Jensen, 2002, p. 237) as a yardstick, it is possible to discern three major and interrelated clusters of research. Studies in the first of these clusters are interested in different types of media use in urban space. The second cluster revolves around the relationships between media usage and urban sociability. The third research cluster focuses on the relationships between uses of media and urban space.

Studies in the cluster that deals with people's ways of using media approach the issue from two different perspectives. One of them focuses (most often comparatively) on how different cultural and cross-cultural norms shape uses of portable media in urban space, in terms of both purposes and styles of usage (see, e.g., Baron & af Segerstad, 2010; Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Sugiyama, 2013). Satomi Sugiyama explains how, in Tokyo, the custom of keeping the mobile phone muted in public places signifies "domesticating the medium" in a way that excludes "sound based telephone conversation" (2013, p. 116). Hence, in Japan, the mobile phone would mainly be used in public for visual and textual communication.

The other perspective shifts the focus from general cultural norms to the relationship between uses of media and the urban practices in which they are embedded. On the one hand, media use is approached from a micro-sociological and performative angle that emphasizes its entanglement with other activities, media-related or not, in the overall texture of urban practices or routines (see Esbjornsson, Juhlin, & Weilenmann, 2007; Haddington & Rauniomaa, 2011; Relieu 2009). For example, Licoppe and Figeac (2015) address activities that are performed in the mobile use of social networking platforms in "transport situations" (including public transportation or private cars), while Tobin (2012) focuses on the activities of "saving" and "pausing" in the usage of the portable game console Nintendo DS. On the other hand, some scholars investigate how these activities, and the use of portable media more generally, shape different urban practices. In this regard, attention is dedicated to diverse social micro-coordinations facilitated by the "perpetual contact" that mobile media afford (Ling, 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002). Robin van den Akker, for example, introduces the notion of *chance orchestration*—which differs from both organized and random sociospatial encounters—to illustrate how "geo-social networks" like Foursquare increase the users' "ability to take advantage of the moments or occasions that are born of the everyday and within the everyday" (2015, p. 44).

The second research cluster, dealing with forms of urban sociability that are supported and promoted by urban uses of media, likewise contains two kinds of approaches. The first of them directs attention to the occasions of socialization that arise from the diffusion of ambient and personal media, often addressing experimental or artistic media installations in urban space (such as Zadar's promenade in Krajina, 2014, or the experimental screen deployment in Bath in Fatah gen. Schieck, Briones, & Mottram, 2008) or investigating particular features of more mundane communication technologies (such as the proximity-based game encounters in Dragon Quest 9 described in Licoppe & Inada, 2012).

The other approach aims to understand how different mobile platforms and services both sustain and transform existing forms of urban socialization. Roderic Crooks (2013), for example, stresses how a mobile application like Grindr mediates the socialization practices that characterize a gay village. In a similar vein, Lee Humphreys (Humphreys, 2010; Humphreys & Liao, 2013) discusses how location-based social networks, such as Foursquare, can promote and extend the chances of urban "parochial relationships," similar to those that arise between people who are repeatedly involved in the same routines. Both these and other similar approaches demonstrate how urban media uses are informed by established patterns of socialization prevalent in urban contexts, and also how these patterns, in turn, are partly shaped in the process. Consequently, researchers dismiss any hypothesis of social atomization related to the widespread diffusion of portable media.

This, however, does not indicate a renouncement of a critical take on the mediation of socialization patterns. On the contrary, scholars refer to potentially problematic implications of the mutually shaping process and remind us that they cannot be restricted only to new forms of the divide between the haves and the have-nots (Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011). Crooks (2013), for example, warns about the risk of self-segregation as a side effect of the "empowering" use of Grindr: The application represents a sort of "backstage" where the typical socialization practices of a gay village run the risk of being excluded from public sight, and this after years of political struggle for visibility (see also Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2014). Similarly, Humphreys (2010) cautions against the "homophilous tendencies" that are promoted in urban space by "filtering" out particular kinds of users (see also Crawford, 2008).

Finally, the third cluster of studies aims to illuminate the relationship between media uses and urban space. Drawing on a phenomenological take on space inspired by the domestication approach in cultural audience studies in the 1990s (see Tosoni, in press), scholars representing this cluster focus on the transformations of the "experience" or "perception" of urban public space that are triggered by people's engagements with portable and ambient media. While emphasizing the possibility of a "privatization" of space through mobile media usage (Bull, 2008, 2013; Crawford, 2008), scholars generally refuse deterministic hypotheses of media-generated placelessness (Moores, 2012; Özkul, 2013, 2015) and claims of disconnection from physical urban space (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2012). Instead, they argue that the same communication technologies that can be used for "media cocooning" can equally contribute to practices of engagement with urban space and the attribution of symbolic meanings to this space (Hampton & Gupta, 2008; Itō, Okabe, & Anderson, 2010). Moreover, and in dialogue with non-representational theories in human geography, a more recent interest

in the role played by bodily habituation in the processes of place-making reintroduces the questions of performativity and materiality into this cluster of research (Moores, 2012; Sutherland, 2012).

The methods of empirical research employed in these three clusters are multiple and varied, with a general tendency to develop object- and site-specific approaches (e.g., Krajina, 2014). In order to accomplish this, ethnographic observation and qualitative interviews play a key role, often supported by a generous array of complementary research methods that range from focus groups and surveys to the analysis of video and audio excerpts recorded by researchers or informants. In some cases, researchers even have developed *ad hoc* experimental recording devices, especially when dealing with the performative aspects of media-related urban activities (Licoppe & Figeac, 2015). Yet it can be argued that the diversity of research methods conceals a rather conventional and standardized set of choices that actually mark the boundaries of the phenomenon as a research object.

In terms of methodological choices, in fact, nearly all of the above examples (we will discuss some exceptions in the next section) proceed in a similar, media-centric way. The linchpin of these studies is a prior, strategically motivated selection of a technological medium deemed relevant for the "theoretically informed purpose" of the research. The "medium" in question can be a communication device (e.g., the mobile phone in Sugiyama, 2013, or the MP3 player in Bull, 2008, 2013), a platform (e.g., Grindr in Crooks, 2013, or Foursquare in Humphreys, 2010; Humphreys & Liao, 2013), or a service (the SMS service in Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002). Engagement with these devices/platforms/services functions as the fundamental criterion for the selection of a number of informants (or a sample of people), whose activities related to the selected medium are then studied empirically. These selections are often narrowed down further based on an age typology, for instance (e.g., children and teenagers in Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002), or by restricting the observation of engagement with a medium to a specific place (e.g., Wi-Fi cafés in Hampton & Gupta, 2008).

In sum, the above procedures invariably produce as their research objects "(urban) audiences" or aggregates of "(urban media) users" that are constructed in relation to certain devices, platforms, or services. From the point of view of this methodological procedure, the concepts of audience and user are largely interchangeable, and the preference of the term "user" in the reviewed studies seems simply to follow from "the particular semantic infelicity of applying the term 'audience' to computer-based media" (Livingstone, 2012, p. 263). Audience studies scholar Sonia Livingstone warns against "the inexorable rise in . . . popularity" of the term "user" not only because it "lacks any necessary relation to the process of communication," but also because "it is difficult to conceive of users collectively" (2012, p. 263). Regarding current approaches to people's media-related activities in urban space, however, the problems of the term relate first and foremost to the methodological procedure it implies, and also concern "audience" as a methodological lens.

"Urban Audience" and "Urban Media User" as Methodological Lenses

The drawbacks inherent in the construction of an aggregate of media users as the research object in the study of people's media-related activities in urban space have thus far not been scrutinized in depth. However, there are scholars who have addressed some of the most evident limitations that result

from the methodological procedure we describe in the preceding section, or who have attempted alternative routes of demarcating their research object. Critical observations presented by Didem Özkul (2013, 2015), as well as methodological choices made by Mizuko Itō, Daisuke Okabe, and Ken Anderson (2010), serve as illustrative examples.

In her studies of “locational information sharing” and place-making, Özkul (2013, 2015) sides with scholars who work on geo-locative social networks (like Foursquare) when they claim that the use of these platforms can foster users’ attachment, familiarity, and attribution of symbolic meaning to places. For her, however, it is “the *act of sharing* such locational information as part of keeping in touch with people who matter to us” (2013, para. 45; emphasis added) that enhances our attachment to places. According to Özkul, this *act* can be performed not only through geo-locative *platforms*, but also through other smartphone *platforms* and *services*, such as blogs (2015, p. 110) or “Facebook status updates, phone calls, or photos” (2015, p. 105). Consequently, Özkul ultimately dismisses her initial plan to “limit the understanding of locational information only to location-based applications” (2015, p. 105), and instead advocates a methodological rethinking of approaches to locational information sharing. She argues that, “in addition to analysing different uses of particular mobile and location-based applications by different groups of users, employing a holistic approach towards the understanding and analysis of locational information sharing would be beneficial for future scholarly works” (2015, p. 105).

In our terms, Özkul aims to take into account all the different *services* and *platforms* through which the users of the smartphone as a *device* can perform the *act* of sharing locational information. By addressing her sample of informants as users of a device (“smartphone users”), rather than as users of a specific platform or service (“mobile and location-based applications users”), the author is able to account for the involvement of the smartphone in people’s urban place-making practices in a way that is simultaneously comprehensive and articulate. For example, Özkul describes how specific elements of the same place-making practice—like reviewing the pictures of a place shared with friends—can be performed not only through different services and platforms, but also across a plurality of spaces and times (Özkul, 2015).

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the methodological relevance of a practical activity (“sharing locational information”) over the means by which the activity is performed, Özkul still attaches her research object to a device (“smartphone users”). At the same time, however, she points to activities that are constitutive parts of practices of place-making through locational information sharing, but which do not seem to be restricted to smartphones. This particularly concerns the previously mentioned activities of reviewing photos as ways to “renew the meanings of places and the feelings they evoke, which strengthen our attachment to places” (2015, p. 109). Hence, one can spot a dissonance between the “theoretically informed purpose” of focusing on locational information sharing as a *practice* on the one hand, and the construction of an aggregate of users of a *device* as the research object on the other hand. We find that this dissonance contains the risk of losing the grasp of the complex diversity of media-related activities that co-constitute urban daily life.

The previous example helped us to demonstrate that an “aggregate of users” is too narrow a research object when investigating the multitude of ways in which media are embedded in urban daily life.

A brief look at Itō, Okabe, and Anderson's 2010 study of people's place-making practices allows us to highlight that these same aggregates are, paradoxically, also too broad, and thus must be narrowed down. In line with Özkul's call for holism, the authors claim that "not just the mobile phone, but also the whole range of portable objects that people use to inhabit, navigate through, and interface with urban environments" (2010, p. 67)—including "media players, books, keys, credit and transit cards, as well as identity and member cards" (2010, p. 67)—mediate their relationships with urban space. In particular, the authors want to address "financial transactions and work-related uses" of what they call "mobile kits" "among a population that have the resources and freedom to make full use of urban space" (2010, p. 69).

For this purpose, Itō et al. explore a methodological route that partially diverges from the one commonly used in the field. While they still conceive of their research object as an aggregate of users ("leading edge users of new mobile technologies"; 2010, p. 69), they do not attach its definition to a specific device, but instead to an occupational group: young professionals in the area of new media, with "a substantial proportion of freelancers . . . engaged in work outside of the home or office" (2010, p. 69). In this way, the aggregate of users is narrowed down to those subjects who are (likely) involved in those work-related practices in urban space that the authors are interested in. Another group of leading-edge users, teens, is for this reason excluded from the study. In this way, the authors can avoid the pitfalls of the potential dissonance between the "theoretically informed purpose" of focusing on a practice, and the construction of an aggregate of users as their research object. However, if the intention is to focus on specific practices, selecting informants on the basis of strategic age or professional typologies is not the only available methodological route.

With these two examples, we sought to illustrate how the construction of "aggregates of users" (or "audiences") of a given device, platform, or service risks missing the multiplicity of people's activities in the "fine-grained practices" and routines that constitute urban daily life and that shape—and are shaped by—the uses of media. Exploring this issue further would require an explication of the concept of "practice" that is mostly left undefined in this strand of research. We use the term *practice* here to refer to a bodily performance, as well as, following Theodore Schatzki, to "a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings . . . linked in certain ways." These ways encompass "understandings," "explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions," as well as "'teleoaffective' structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods" (1996, p. 89) and "casual chains." From this perspective, a practice is an arrangement of joined activities (Schatzki calls the latter "doings and sayings" or "actions") that can be media-related or not (hence the soundness of Itō et al.'s "radical" holism). A routine, in turn, is a succession of activities institutionalized and naturalized primarily through repetition.

What we particularly wish to emphasize is that the construction of an aggregate of media users or an audience as the research object in the urban context tends to lead researchers to disregard some activities, media-related or not, even when these activities belong to the same practices or routines. Simultaneously, this methodological procedure risks focusing on activities that potentially belong to different practices or routines. For example, "Foursquare users" may include people involved in diverse practices or routines (such as shopping or commuting). Media-related activities of urban shoppers and commuters, in turn, are not limited to using Foursquare. Overall, the separation of activities from the

practices in which they are actually included has severe empirical repercussions if, like Schatzki, we think that "an action [in our terms, an "activity," media-related or not] is the action it is as part of a practice" (1996, p. 97).

The discussed problems manifest when the methodological lenses of "audience" and "media user" are adopted from the previous disciplinary tradition of media studies—particularly from the media ethnographic strand of cultural audience research (see Livingstone, 2006)—and applied without a systematic methodological consideration to analyze people's media-related activities in the urban context. In cultural audience studies, traditionally, the discrepancy between "audiences" and everyday practices as research objects could be overlooked, due to the unique character of the household, where the focus of research was largely restricted. The concept of "household" refers to both a definite physical space and the group of people dwelling in it (Silverstone, 1994). This *social group* is more than a mere aggregate of people, however, because it shares the same domestic practices and daily routines while also potentially representing a "natural" segment of a wider audience (Morley, 1986). This convergence of a spatial context, of participating in the same practices and routines, and of potentially engaging in a similar way with a medium (or with an ensemble of media) can hardly be traced in urban space. In fact, the increasing hybridization of space and social situations brought about by the proliferation of location-aware and networked media devices has rendered even treating the household as a clear-cut spatial context of media use problematic (see, e.g., Morley, 2006). Overall, a different procedure for demarcating the research object is necessary to adequately address the complex relations between media, media uses, and urban practices.

Decentering Media Studies, Verbing the Audience

In order to get a firm empirical hold of people's uses of media as parts of the practices and routines that constitute urban daily life, we argue that involvement in these very practices should be taken not only as the starting point of theorizing, but also as the main criterion for the demarcation of the research object. In urban geography, such a methodological procedure has been applied, for example, by Monica Degen, Gillian Rose, and Begum Basdas, who in their case study of the town centers of Milton Keynes and Bedford address the "*variable* relationships between entities in urban space" (2010, p. 72; with the entities in this case including urbanites' bodies). For the authors, these relationships depend primarily on the practices in which people are involved. This is why they construct the research object by selecting informants on the basis of their participation in the following four everyday practices identified as prominent in a preliminary survey: "shopping," "caring," "socialising," and "maintaining." They used multiple methods in the study, including, for example, shadowing.

Degen et al. "focussed specifically on relations between human bodies and the 'offers' made to them by elements of the built environment" (2010, p. 72). In other words, they did not directly address the different forms of media usage that were potentially entwined in these practices. Nonetheless, their methodological procedure by no means excludes the relevance of media. Quite to the contrary, it can be fruitfully adopted by media studies scholars interested in people's media-related activities in urban environments. In fact, we find that the procedure concretizes the plea for "non-media-centric" media

studies advocated in recent years by scholars like David Morley, Shaun Moores, and Zlatan Krajina (see Krajina, Moores, & Morley, 2014; Moores, 2012; Morley, 2009).

One example of media studies that resonates with Degen et al.'s methodological take is provided by Simone Tosoni and Matteo Tarantino's work on media usage in urban conflicts (see Tarantino & Tosoni, 2013; Tosoni & Tarantino, 2013a, 2013b;). In a series of case studies revolving around a long-standing conflict in the Milanese neighborhood of Paolo Sarpi between Italian residents and Chinese workers, the main criterion both for the construction of the research object and the selection of informants was the involvement in the complex course of actions relating to the conflict. Inverting the order usually followed by urban media studies scholars, the researchers first identified the main stakeholders involved in the conflict, and then focused on mapping the devices, platforms, and services most often used by the same actors in different phases of the conflict. These dynamic ensembles were called "media territories" to highlight how media, as a part of the stakeholders' daily practices as both technologies and representations, contributed in significant ways to the evolution of the given conflict.

Notably, audiencing proved to be one of the key activities in the Paolo Sarpi conflict. Acting as an audience—following different media and word-of-mouth, as well as monitoring the other parties' assumed media territories—was central to how the main stakeholders (the Chinese migrants and the Italian residents) combined their diverse conflict-related activities. At the same time, it became clear that the prerequisite for adequately capturing the specific characteristics of audiencing (media-related or not) in an urban conflict is to not separate it from people's other activities, but instead approach it as interrelated with them (Tosoni & Tarantino, 2013a; see also Ridell, 2012, 2014).

What we wish to illustrate with the Paolo Sarpi case is that the construction of "an audience" or "a group of pre-selected users of a medium" as the research object would have excluded at the outset certain media-related activities pertinent to the conflict. For example, constructing a sample of the "users" of a website that stigmatized Chinese work-related activities in the area would have disregarded the activity of taking the pictures that were then published online. This, again, would have obscured how these pictures were overdramatically shot by members of an Italian association—an act that other stakeholders interpreted as hostile communication.

Moreover, we contend that approaching people's media-related urban activities in diverse actor positions (including the positions of presenter, audience, public, user, and producer) is not only fruitful in the case of urban conflicts. The idea pertains to mundane everyday practices and routines as well as to specialized practices, such as the ones addressed by Rodgers et al. (2014).

Indeed, our suggestion is that decentering media and consequently "verbing the audience" (see Fiske, 1992; Fiske & Dawson, 1996) is necessary if urban media studies scholars wish to develop a nuanced and critical grasp of the reciprocity of media and everyday life in contemporary spatially and socially hybrid cities.

Conclusion and Beyond

Our aim in this article has been to argue for the advantages of reversing the methodological procedure most commonly employed to demarcate the borders of the research object in the study of people's uses of media in urban space. In other words, we suggest that the preliminary strategic selection of a device/platform/service, the construction of a sample of its users or of its audience, and the subsequent analysis of this sample's uses of media can be fruitfully replaced by a theoretically informed focus on an urban practice or routine, and proceeding from this, on the construction of a sample of the social actors involved. Particular attention should then be paid to how the actors' media-related activities serve as co-constituents of the given practice, building up "media territories" that extend across single media and overlap different spatialities.

From this perspective, the three clusters of research reviewed in this article's second section represent valuable preliminary signposts for a more elaborated research program. The key focus of this program would be on how audiencing and other media-related activities intertwine with one another (and with non-media-related activities) as integral parts of urban practices and routines. Furthermore, it would be relevant to ask how the joining together of activities in a practice and the orchestration of different practices depend on cultural and cross-cultural norms (the first cluster); what kind of relationship these complexes have with different forms of sociability and social interactions, mediated or not (the second cluster); and how each activity complex relates with its urban spatial context (the third cluster).

Together with these preliminary foci, it is especially important to take into account that physical urban space today inseparably meshes with other technologically mediated environments. As a consequence, practices intertwine in time and unfold across different physical locations and mediated places. Moreover, in their media-related urban activities, people navigate constantly and swiftly amidst multiple spatialities, engaging and disengaging with differently mediated social situations (Ridell, 2014; Ridell & Zeller, 2013; Willis, 2007). Hence, one line of future research should examine how people in their daily relations with media "bind time-spaces," and how they act in different, often overlapping actor positions in this process, depending on the social situation and the given practices.

In the Paolo Sarpi case, for example, the Chinese immigrants linked physical locations with spaces on the Internet, such as blogs and discussion forums (Tosoni & Tarantino, 2013a). They photographed and published online pictures of a clash with the police. Later, they downloaded these images from the Internet, printed them out, and posted them on the neighborhood's walls. These pictures on the walls were then photographed and published online. In doing this, the actors moved back and forth between the positions of audience, circulator, and public, all the while (re)presenting a member of a community joined by a shared interest (or threat).

Regarding the future study of audience activities more specifically, attention should be paid to how audiencing often takes place as part of several practices and routines, and how the modes of audience activity themselves constantly vary and intersect. For example, a person who walks to go shopping with a friend may be engaged in chatting with him (rapidly shifting between the positions of a face-to-face presenter and audience), receiving an SMS message, absently noticing the sounds

surrounding the two of them in the street, and glancing at the advertisements vying for their attention. Furthermore, in the pervasively digitalized and networked urban context, we should account for how audiencing (and any other media-related urban activity) always actualizes simultaneously representational, presentational, and non-representational aspects—an analytical triplet that can be called “urban triple articulation” (Ridell, 2014). Empirical study of how these analytically distinct aspects intersect in audience activities in different urban practices would shed valuable light on the mediated dynamics of spatial power in contemporary cities.

In summary, the decentering of media studies called for in this article springs from a recognition of the diversity of urban practices and, based on this, portends an acute focus on how people’s media-related activities today co-constitute everyday life in cities. At the same time, starting from the fundamental theoretical relevance of practice provides media studies scholars with an entrance to a shared field with several neighboring disciplines, such as urban studies and urban geography. Participation in the interdisciplinary discussion, in turn, will greatly benefit the advancement of the subfield of urban media studies and enable proactive engagement in the collective attempts to capture the complexity of contemporary urbanism in all its multispatial mediatedness.

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