



MYRIA
GEORGIU

MEDIA AND
THE CITY

Media and the City

Global Media and Communication

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Media and the City

Cosmopolitanism and Difference

MYRIA GEORGIU

polity

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To Elektra and Leon, explorers of the urban world

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1 Introduction: The Mediated Cosmopolis

Fear and anarchy spread across the city. The citizens are hostages of the mysterious, violent and nasty *others*.¹ The camera frantically moves from an aerial overview of the city to the globally familiar urban skyline defined by skyscrapers and landmark buildings. The camera continues moving fast, now down at street level, taking the audience on speedy travels along the metropolitan avenues so often seen on the screen, so often used as symbolic and physical attributes of the big city. This is Gotham, one of the fictional incarnations of the city. In the latest Batman movie, *The Dark Knight Rises*, this is the city whose citizens single-handedly try to save the world; this is the city that attracts envy and which is always on screen. As dramatic events take place in the film, the rest of the world is irrelevant but at the same time ever present: television cameras and surveillance cameras provide instant and constant access to all that takes place in this important location: the city that really matters. The big and unpredictable city is integral to the film's plot, aesthetics and appeal. At the same time the urban locale cannot be separated from its mediated representations. The inevitable question that this example raises, among so many others in the media, is whether we can imagine less fictional cities, such as London, New York, Paris, but also Rio de Janeiro, Cairo and Shanghai, outside their representations, their representations' making and their consumption. After all, the ubiquitous presence of the city in the media is familiar, a tested and repeatedly affirmed choice in so many films, television series, fashion magazines, music lyrics and news stories. How possible is it to separate New York from cinematic imagination, Cairo from news headlines, or Shanghai from media visuals of its futuristic globality? And if what we know about cities is increasingly mediated, where are the meanings of these mediations and why does it matter?

While more than half of the world's population now lives in cities (UN 2010 [2009]), most of what we know about the city – the one we live in and the one we consume, desire to visit, migrate to, or avoid – is mediated. Films, television series, music lyrics, news headlines, but also social and personal media shape urban cultures both through representations and through communication practices. Utopian and dystopian representations of the city and responses to the challenges that the urban world presents to humanity are as much negotiated in the media as they are in the street. The

city needs Batman as much as Batman needs the city. Depending where one sits, Batman saves the city from troubles associated with diversity or the city with its diversity provides the necessary platform for Batman to even exist. The role of media and communications in making the city is multifaceted and, importantly, dialogical. Media support the symbolic power of the city by exposing its many layers, its differences and its rich trajectories that can be commodified, as the case of the Batman films demonstrates. But media also need the city as a global node in communication flows that support exchanges of information, images, commodities and narratives of 'the urban'. In both cases, urban dwellers, global consumers and prospective visitors are constantly reminded that the city is unpredictable, exciting and fearsome but also possibly welcoming, potentially a place of opportunities and potentially a space to see the *self* and *others* as part of the urban story.

Among all cities, a small but growing number, the so-called global cities, most forcefully invite us to consider the expressions and consequences of these possibilities. The global city is probably the most mediated city but also the most diverse and open urban centre in the world: it is welcoming to the cultural industries but it is also globally recognized for the long and intense flows of people, ideas and media that link it to the rest of the world and bring the world to it. Powerful imagery and histories of domination symbolically mark the territory of global cities and shape its cultures of creativity, experimentation and diversity. A global city is a city that, day in, day out, requires us to think of how we live in close proximity to each other and how we communicate across difference. With long histories of political and cultural domination, London, New York, Paris, Berlin, and Los Angeles are quite distinct. In their global appeal as destinations for people and money and in their reputation as centres of concentrated difference, they are very particular. But they are not isolated cases. These are the cities that help us understand the uneven, hierarchical global order of the urban world; these are the cities that capture most intensely urban trajectories in global times. These are also the cities that most vividly reveal the politics of a changing mediated world.

In a world where the Empire and western capitalism are not in full command, the symbolic power concentrated in cities of the global North relies on transnational networks of people, cultures and information for its reproduction. The media constantly remind urban dwellers, global consumers and prospective visitors that the city is open, potentially welcoming, potentially a place of opportunities. Paradoxically, the same symbolic forms that enhance and secure the hegemony of top-tier cities in a global urban order are the ones that destabilize their exclusive access to symbolic power. A number of cities of the global South, ranging from Shanghai to São

Paulo, are currently gaining ground as attractive destinations for prospective tourists, migrants, consumers and cultural industries. Emerging global cities provide a glimpse into the diffusion and intensification of some of the key challenges of the urban world, which we now associate with cities of the global North. While this book sustains a focus on the established global city of the global North, the issues it addresses are far from contained in it. Given how much is at stake, especially with the vast and fast growth of urbanization, the ways in which the city is shared, communicated and symbolically constructed can have enormous consequences for cultural and social life: most importantly, in the ways in which we are exposed to each other, and understand or misunderstand each other, in an increasingly mediated urban world.

The book explores these issues through a particular relationship of growing significance: that of the media and the city. The media need the city to feed their industry with talent, powerful representations and consumers for their media products and technologies. The city needs the media to help brand its global appeal but also to manage its diversity and communication landscape. From the mobile phone that helps tourists navigate the city to social media that help protesters organize trans-urban action, this relationship is becoming more and more one of interdependence. As discussed in the next chapter, this interdependence starts with the over-concentration of media industries in certain cities and the domination of those same cities in media representations. But, importantly, it expands to and depends upon the urban street: where appropriations and uses of media and communications invent, become evidence and reaffirm the uniqueness of the city as a creative hub, as a consumer paradise, as a space of identity, community and even possibly political recognition.

The conceptual and methodological proposition of this book is for the study of the media and the city from street level. The book approaches their relation through an analytical matrix that includes the four main interfaces where this relation unfolds: consumption, identity, community and action. These interfaces allow us to record and problematize the different layers of a complex and contradictory relation. The discussions of these interfaces develop in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively and present evidence of the intensification of the media and city synergies and their consequences, especially as expressed in cosmopolitanization. Cosmopolitanization is discussed as the process through which urban subjects are constantly exposed to difference through mediated and interpersonal communication. As music produced in the margins of the city, for example, reaches global audiences, both those on the margins and those in the centre of the urban world are forced to think of the *self* in relation to the *other* (as discussed in chapter 4).

Or, when media and city authorities brand the city as a cosmopolitan shopping destination, many urban dwellers adopt a celebratory cosmopolitanism discourse and adapt their own cultural practices to the branded city (as discussed in chapter 3).

The argument of this book is twofold. On the one hand, the intensification of mediation and urbanization advances proximity to one another. Close encounters with difference, when rubbing shoulders with others in the street or when being reminded of their proximity through the media, forces urban subjects to become more aware of the challenges and opportunities difference presents. On the other hand, those close encounters with difference become necessary ingredients for the media and the city to sustain their symbolic power, precisely because they feed back into invaluable creativity, branded cosmopolitanism and a city which represents marketable material for film-makers and advertisers. Chapter 2 starts from that top level of the media and city synergies, precisely in indicating the uneven concentration of symbolic power in corporate headquarters and their support through neoliberal policies. It shows how cosmopolitan narratives and practices are selectively incorporated into hegemonic discourses of the city but also how elites both desire to control the city's diversity and get access to it. A starting argument here is that we need to understand hegemonic ideologies while expanding our study beyond the corporate media headquarters. Most studies on media and cities focus on the top level of their interdependence. For this book, the corporate vision and practice of the mediated city represents just the beginning of the story. While starting the next chapter by recognizing the over-concentration of power in media corporations, the book invites its readers to navigate the city as a mediated space and to think of power not statically but as subject to the dynamics of mediation beyond the glass buildings.

Adopting a street-level analysis, the book aims to surpass the bird's eye view of the city and show that the symbolic power of the media and of the city is reaffirmed in everyday life. The media and the city take their meanings through communication practices across the city: from upmarket shopping malls where the representations of the city are made and consumed (chapter 3), to backstreets of impoverished neighbourhoods where creativity becomes a symbolic bridge to the other side of the world (chapter 4), to mediated networks that invent and re-invent communities (chapter 5), all the way to claims for recognition through acts of revolt in the urban and virtual street (chapter 6). This approach emphasizes that social actors are makers of *meanings* of the city and of the media: the urban dwellers, the consumers, the visitors, those seeking refuge are part of the story of the city, even if always from unequal positions. But there is a consequent and

important element of this argument: the city is a site of struggle. And the very many struggles for symbolic and material resources in the city increasingly unravel at the meeting of the media and the city: when protesters use social media to gain local and global presence or when music becomes a tool for representing marginalized urban identities.

The book's empirical focus is London. London is a very powerful but far from unique case: global connectivity, cultural diversity, representational appeal and histories of mobility, creativity and political action take their distinct forms in each location but they reflect conditions that are increasingly shared across cities, especially global cities. Thus London provides a comparative starting point for understanding a synergetic relation which is most powerful in the established global cities of the global North, but which is far from exclusively contained by those cities as argued throughout the book. London provides a platform for developing a thick analysis, avoiding indiscriminate generalizations. A starting point and an empirical basis, the discussion sets forward an agenda and an argument of wider relevance.

Grounded in the mediated city

The case of Batman, among so many cinematic representations, news agendas and consumption patterns shows that the relation of media and the city has become synergetic but ordinary, so much so that it is rarely spoken about, even in media and communications studies. In research agendas, this taken-for-grantedness is expressed as a paradox: the more mediation shapes and is shaped by growing urbanization, the further away we move from studying cities. The intense, and partly novel, centrifugal power of networks (Castells 2009) has become so overwhelming that the centripetal power of the city has ended by being almost ignored. Yet, the global city's power to attract people, ideas, money, technologies and media encapsulates in the most vivid and intense manner the empirical meeting point of Appadurai's 'scapes' (1996) and reveals the core nodes of Castells's network society (1996). No other city is more connected, more networked and diverse than the global city (Sassen 2001).

In this context and in the first instance, this book arises from a necessity to study what becomes obvious: those increasingly important synergies described above. Beyond the obvious lies the unexplored. This book represents an attempt to understand the ways in which media and the city co-constitute each other and the consequences of their synergies for cultural and social life. In the global city, these expressions and consequences are most striking, though not unique. If we start by looking from the top

down, these synergies are expressed in the over-concentration of cultural industries in a small number of global cities – elsewhere called global metropolises, alpha cities or world cities – as will be discussed in the next chapter. Neoliberalism's advance, expressed in the domination and celebration of the market as the driving and organizing force of public and private life (Lemke 2001), has been aggressively promoted in the urban governance of many cities around the world (Sassen 2001; Harvey 2009) – global or other – with direct benefits for the cultural industries. If we then look at these synergies from the bottom up, they become messier. They reflect neoliberalism's domination, especially when it comes to the commodification of culture and the neoliberal celebration of difference reduced to 'ethnic cuisines' and urban fashion. But they also reflect moments of resistance to the political and economic order through practices of revolt and urban dwellers' daily attempts to manage difference and inequality in the ways in which they communicate with others and use the media as interpretative tools for understanding the world that surrounds them. Most importantly, if we look at the media and city synergies as a dialectic relationship which is both bottom-up and top-down, it becomes possible to observe a complex and contradictory relationship, one that intensifies the proximity between individuals and groups and their ability to communicate across difference, while at the same time enabling them to hide from each other in segregated, mediated spaces and in individualistic and competitive spheres of self-interest.

The ambivalent consequences of the relationship between media and the city reflect the tensions of cosmopolitanization. If we think of cosmopolitanization as a process (Beck 2006, 2009), associated with Sennett's definition of cosmopolitanism as grounded in social experience (2002) and Robbins's definition of cosmopolitanism as lived (1998), then the city is where we can observe this with all its intensity and contradictions. The intensification of mobility and mediation has advanced cosmopolitanization as a process of individuals' constant exposure to one other, of boundary erosion, and of challenge to the domination of the nation-state as the primary organizing system of cultural and political life (Beck 2006). While cosmopolitanization opens up spaces for communication, it does not predetermine the ways in which we communicate, construct our identities and our sense of citizenship. As will be argued, cosmopolitanization in the city is work in progress, an unresolved condition: an asset for the city and its brand, an inescapable and constant exposure to difference, yet a process with uncertain consequences for citizenship, equality and recognition.

In the absence of much academic research on the ways in which media and the city become shaped by and shape cosmopolitanization, this book

begins an empirical exploration of a familiar but under-studied territory. I start by recording the evidence of powerful synergies – the over-concentration of cultural industries in global cities, the branding mergers of city and media as shown in numerous cinematic and televisual representations, and the collaborations between urban government and cultural industry, to name but a few. I then move outwards and downwards from these top-tier synergies in order to understand what happens beneath the surface and the glamorization of the media and the city synergies: when it comes to messy and uneven spaces of creativity, claims to urban territories or representation of urban difference in the media. Synergies at the top are the ones best recorded in media and communications research and in urban geography. Yet a singular focus on economics, even on the political economy of the media and city relation, is far from enough; most importantly it fails to understand the city as a multi-layered site of struggle. Corporate media and city government synergies play a strategic role in the reproduction of economic and symbolic power, precisely because neoliberalism depends on symbolic forms – information, communication systems and perceptions (Garnham 2011; Lemke 2001) – as commodities but also as regulators of the market. Importantly, these synergies represent the top tier of a complex and diffused cultural economy, which, however, expands across all layers of urban life in ways that both reproduce hegemony and occasionally challenge it.

Since every city is a place of inequality as well as a place of excitement, a place that is lived in and a place that is consumed, a symbolic space that is imagined on screens and on the street, a multi-focal and interdisciplinary approach is required. In both its spatial dimensions, the city reveals the ways in which place is currently configured through the media. The ways in which it shifts between the real and the virtual shape place as a commodity, as well as a space of expression and participation. The book engages with these conceptual and empirical incarnations of the city, as discussed in global city literature, but most importantly with the ways in which everyday life and the urban street become meaningful contexts for understanding complex and contradictory experiences and media appropriations in all cities. While strategic collaborations originating in corporate headquarters or urban government offices are driven by interests in profit, market growth and the expansion of networks and business capabilities, the story of the urban street is much more complex. Do we see only the reproduction of neoliberalism and its reinforcement through the enactment of prescribed roles among urban dwellers: as consumers, as labour, as audiences? Movements such as Occupy, urban riots, but also more nuanced forms of action such as graffiti and music production suggest otherwise, as

will be argued. Communication practices, which involve a vast range of ordinary acts, including the languages we speak in and over or the music we play or unintentionally hear, also challenge a prescriptive and top-down understanding of the mediated street.

Thus, and if we accept that cosmopolitanization is currently taking place in the involuntary close encounters of difference, especially as a result of the intensified transnational flows of people, ideas and media, it presents us with a challenge: the need to understand the cultural and political consequences of close – and intensified – proximities. Cosmopolitanization as a process (Beck 2006, 2009) is not neutral; it is confronted by the dual meaning of cosmopolitanism: as operational concept grounded in social experience and as an ambivalent vision attached to contradictory ideologies of worldliness, responsibility and citizenship (Gilroy 2004; Harvey 2009). Cosmopolitanization as a messy, lived reality in the global city forces us to pay attention to encounters of difference and their consequences. Expanded and extended in all layers of city life through physical and mediated encounters with difference, cosmopolitanism demands a particular kind of visionary orientation that challenges the taken-for-grantedness of Eurocentrism, western liberal democracy and the advance of neoliberalism. The increasingly intense, multiple and complex encounters with difference resulting from the diversification of flows of people, ideas, media and technology cannot be taken for granted merely as reflections of cosmopolitanization. Instead, we need to ask whether they give rise to possibilities for cosmopolitan agency (Papastergiadis 2012) and for cosmopolitan democracy (Calhoun 2002; Gilroy 2004). Cosmopolitanization may be incomplete, unpredictable and unresolved, but it creates unique opportunities for cosmopolitan trajectories and for making claims to symbolic and material resources in the urban mediated world.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will show that any claim to the city as a space of identity and citizenship is constantly confronted by and negotiated through the claims of other groups who occupy the same physical and symbolic spaces. If the city is a space of alterity (Isin 2002), it is also a space of communication: close proximity to difference makes contact inevitable, with consequences for the ways in which the city is lived and symbolically constructed. The multitudes and multiplicities of identities, communities, consumer cultures and political action associated with the city are not a result of things happening elsewhere; they are not small-scale representations of what happens on the national level or in the global markets. They take their forms *in* the city, but only and increasingly through the inevitability of physical and mediated encounters with difference. Since urban subjects have no choice but to encounter difference, they also have no choice but to think of the self

through the *others* (even if this means in opposition to them). How much this process becomes dialogical, and how much confrontational, depends on context and on a number of variants. Some of those most important variants will be discussed in the following chapters.

We can perhaps for a moment think of the mixed and contradictory meanings of cosmopolitanism through a historical and metaphorical reference to *flânerie*. *Flânerie*, i.e. the experience and method of wandering in the city, observing, reflecting on and possibly acting upon the opportunities and challenges presented by the concentration and the intense contact of differences, has historically captured the many different trajectories of cosmopolitanism. Representing one of the earliest forms of cosmopolitan exploration through wandering and a method for analysing the city, *flânerie* has also been associated with an elitist viewpoint for observing with fascination the city and its difference. If we think about cosmopolitanization we might consider whether this presents yet another way in which those subjects who are media savvy and well connected through networks can wander as contemporary *flâneurs* through the city in aesthetic explorations of difference. A possibility, and one of the many expressions of cosmopolitanization, this kind of aesthetic experimentation in the city can be observed in the middle classes' return to the inner city, in new forms of alternative tourism, in advertisers' appropriations of graffiti and urban music. At the same time, and if we go back to Benjamin's cosmopolitan *flânerie*, we can see that his cosmopolitan wanderings can be far from aesthetic explorations. For Benjamin, *flânerie* was a way of understanding the city as a site of struggle, as an unequal place, but also as an unpredictable place, precisely because it has always been a point of meetings of difference (1997, 2004). This possibility – both academic and urban – represents a very different expression of cosmopolitan practice from the one described above. This different kind of wandering in the city links to a possibility for cosmopolitan agency and cosmopolitan politics that are reflexive, critical and potentially more inclusive. As will be shown, different *flâneurs* – elite and working class; reflexive and aesthetic – exist next to each other in the city, in the same way that they exist next to each other in the academic community.

In this context, I am interested in exploring the contradictory expressions of cosmopolitanism in urban narratives and practice while reflecting on its diverse academic theorizations. More specifically, I am interested in the ways in which neoliberal cosmopolitanism can exist next to vernacular cosmopolitanism and in exploring different kinds of possibilities and limitations of cosmopolitan democracy (Calhoun 2002) and of a liberatory cosmopolitanism (Harvey 2009). Unlike Beck's analysis, which emphasizes reflexive individualism and the retreat of class antagonism, I want to

explore the persistence of classed and antagonistic versions of cosmopolitan discourses in the city. Thinking of cosmopolitanism through cultural and social experience, especially as this has been changing through mediation, I discuss the ways in which cosmopolitanism involves diverging discourses and practices that are subject to class, gender, ethnicity and urban and national identities.

This discussion captures a particular spatial and historical moment in the city's construction through difference, which is explored through the contradictory experiences and effects of cosmopolitanism. This moment is about the present: a time of intense human mobility, but also of intense mediation. This moment is about certain places of significance in our times: the cities with an intense concentration of symbolic power and diversity. These are the cities that cannot be imagined, internally or externally, without the intense juxtapositions of difference between people or outside sophisticated mediated systems that construct both the city's cultural identity and its value as a commodity. These are the cities that have accumulated these characteristics through centuries of colonialism, postcolonialism and concentration of capital. These are the cities in the top tier of the global order which so many cities aspire to compete with. These are the cities we need to turn to in order to most vividly observe and understand the tensions, limitations and promises of cosmopolitanism.

Revisiting the global city

The urban imaginary that emerges out of these processes is divided and political. Familiar images associated with the urban age (Burdett and Sudjic 2007) start with grim and overcrowded shanty towns, the homeless and the unemployed and expand all the way to sleek skyscrapers, affluent urbanites and prestigious cultural buildings. Turn to the publications of policy and charitable organizations and images of the first kind appear in abundance. Open up a tourist brochure or a popular magazine and representations of the second kind are plentiful, colourful and reaffirmed as familiar. Try to find representations of these two sides of the urban story in the same media location and it becomes almost impossible.

There is something about the two sides of city life that are hard to reconcile in urban representations. Perhaps these are sides hardly reconciled in human experience of the city. Indeed, there are at least two sets of realities in the city that appear to be worlds apart. Do shanty towns have anything to do with rich, gated communities or global financial centres? Do illegal migrants living in grim, inner-city neighbourhoods have anything to do