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# In the Process of Becoming

*A Digital Media Department's Place within the Swedish Newspaper Industry*

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## Abstract

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I have in this thesis conducted fieldwork at the Swedish newspaper Sydsvenskan's digital media department. I was curious to find out how or if the financial instability that is currently sweeping across the newspaper industry is embodied through praxis within a department that many are eager to blame the instability for – that is, a digital media department. I wanted to pinpoint and observe real characteristics and consequences of what I, and many others, have labelled the new economy, i.e. a perhaps historical event in capitalism where (especially in media) business, companies, entrepreneurs, producers, users and technologies come together in unique, unexpected and almost promiscuous manners. I wanted to see how this flux of people and things find stability within such a schizophrenic climate. By taking the social constructivists' critique of never-static roles seriously and applying Nigel Thrift's notion of place in order to find an understanding of stability within a given context, I argue that the digital media department at Sydsvenskan is building stability through and with objects that the new economy tends to hide and, consequently, that this place runs the risk of creating and performing a media bubble by building products and systems that refer only to what the actors inside the bubble regard as important, instead of building for the actual users (what I will label digital narcissism). I will, through these conclusions, argue that this may lead to a new form of newspaper production process that rely more on expertise from completely new areas and perhaps less on in-house production and expertise. This study will therefore provide useful insights for media departments wishing to gain better understandings of (1) how to include factors that are not necessarily located within the popular media discourse, (2) the possible risk of digital narcissism and (3) how this may affect newspaper industries in general and digital media departments in particular.

**Keywords:** digitization; digital media; newspaper industry; Sydsvenskan; non-representational theory; new economy; new media; ICT

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## 1. Introduction

The newspaper industry is struggling. The industry is currently seeking its sense of belonging within a climate that used to be quite fixed and stable in terms of product sales, professional roles and division of labor (Picard & Ots, 2008:57ff). Many portray this almost existential wandering as a direct consequence of how digital media in general and information mediated technologies (ICTs) in particular have in the last ten years reshaped how we produce and consume media. Newspapers began experimenting with electronic publishing in the 1970s, providing valuable information about the precursors to the current online news industry (Boczkowski, 2002:271). However, five key newspaper companies have gone bust in the early 21st century (Raviola, 2010:4) while others are struggling for their very survival (Isaacson, 2009) – events that many see as a direct consequence of newspapers' entrance into the digital arena. In Sweden, the situation is similar yet not overtly detrimental. When Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet launched its digital edition in August 1994, others followed shortly thereafter (Hedman, 2008:173). The industry soon became frustratingly aware of the quite unstable implications of such a launch. In short: you cannot charge for your digital edition (ibid. 172). Or even shorter, you will lose money. Sundsvallstidningen tried to charge for its digital content, but failed (ibid).

The current consensus within the news industry in Sweden is therefore to hand over its news content free of charge through the digital editions and generate ad revenues through newer, less traditional forms of advertisement placements. The newspaper companies have thus looked less towards traditional and old media forms and more towards newer platforms and progressive techniques to spread its brand and product – a phenomenon that media strategists label convergence of media outlets. According to Teljas et al, convergence is when “different areas within media develop in a way that draws them closer to each other. This can lead to traditional media receiving new competition from actors that previously were associated with completely different media channels and media areas” (Teljas et al., 2007:221). This reevaluation of positions within the greater newspaper landscape certainly brought fear and anxiety amongst its practitioners. One need only recall media mogul Rupert Murdoch who, in front of The American Society of Newspaper Editors, exclaimed in April 2005: “Scarcely a day goes by without some claim that new technologies are fast writing newsprint's obituary. Yet, as an industry, many of us have been remarkably, unaccountably complacent. Certainly, I didn't do as much as I should have after all the excitement of the late 1990's” (Murdoch, 2005). Even a giant like Murdoch was (and perhaps still is) out of answers in terms of the

emergence of a culture consisting of convergence and fluctuating uncertainty. And so was the Swedish newspaper industry.

Yet the Swedish newspaper industry was quite reluctant at first in terms of the implementation of the digital format within their company philosophies. According to Alström and Hedman, due to the industry's monopolistic-like stability, all the new technology and jurisprudence together with an increase in globalization flows came to shock the Nordic media landscape in particular, perhaps more so than other regions or countries (Alström & Hedman, 2007:109). The authors are referring to a paradigm shift within these countries: new actors and new technology almost forced together in order to prevent the death of a complete industry, the newspaper industry (ibid.). Due to the fluctuation of the industry and the somewhat fragile (new) state of it, media companies in general were less keen on building longstanding strategies (ibid. 114). However, since the late 1990's, Swedish newspapers have been quite successful and quick in implementing new technology into their corporate affairs. The intentions and strategies behind the web-launch of the Swedish newspaper products in the mid 1990's were quite uncertain, developed somewhat sporadically and usually by a few web enthusiasts within the company (ibid. 119). By the mid 1990's, digital media strategies were hard to come by and the media landscape was hard for the professionals within the industry to learn and to relate to. Nowadays, more than ten years later, the newspapers' digital media departments have created their own knowledge of how to conduct business within a heated and intense business climate. It does not resemble the newspapers golden days in the late 1980's, an era with small investment sums, high subscription rates and customer loyalty (Lithner, 1998:143).

### 1.1 The problem

In this thesis I will seek an understanding of how control and meaning is sought within an environment where (1) humans and technology are intertwined in terms of work practices and (2) where these fairly new practices construct or affect the newspaper industry. It is not, however, a study of how technology (on the one hand) steers human beings and/or societies (on the other hand). This is technological determinism – which will be defined as “given a set of initial conditions, outcomes can be predicated with some amount of certainty” (Jackson et al., 2002:237). What I am after is rather how these interactions construct meaning together, how they are structured within a given spatial entity that is thickly inhabited by a particular type of technology and how human beings together with digital media and ICTs seek to make

sense within a financially fragile industry. For technology in general and digital media and ICTs in particular are often referred to as either utopian – in which the human is liberated through their use – or as dystopian – where technology and machines isolate the individual and/or deaden complete societies (Domingo, 2008:682-683). Perhaps Heidegger set the stage for the great 20th century academic critique of technology: “Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it” (Heidegger, 1993:311). But even if we would presuppose that the use of digital media and ICTs may constrain and perhaps burden our very *Being* (as Heidegger would label it) there is still something being made from this interaction between humans and technology. Even if we are chained, as Heidegger claimed, we are nevertheless chained to and within something out there. And that something is important, for it means a great deal to the people involved in these interactions.

But this sounds too broad for my current investigation. I will not be discussing Heideggerian Beings (at least in any direct sense). In this thesis I will look into a particular field where digital media and ICTs are forming new divisions of labor, ambivalence in terms of their use and even financial frustration. These new processes are part of a grand structure that is located within a constant flux of people, ideas, things, technology and so forth. Löfgren and Willim labeled this the new economy and sought to understand it in terms of heat “in order to describe a situation of acceleration and intensification” (Löfgren & Willim, 2006:3). The authors note:

*Economic heat can be produced by new energies and conversions that appear when capital, technology and management are combined in new patterns. Such transformations may result in quickened tempo of change as well as heightened intensity and a stronger emotional charge. Energy is generated by the importance of speed and innovation, which creates uncertainty and a constant fetishization of the future (ibid. 4).*

Similarly, and more concretely, Alström writes that “uncertainty rather than security suddenly covers the entire [newspaper] industry. Previous stable work places and traditional professions are being replaced in a haste of changing work tasks. It is obvious that such a paradigm change is putting a lot of pressure on the companies and the staff’s innovative will and ability (Alström, 2007:134, my translation). This is, I argue, a symptom of the new economy and it is of importance for us to keep this in mind as it is the embodiment of this economy we are seeking. It is fair to say that we can see the emergence of completely new

actors that newspaper companies have to size up, level with and listen to while seeking understandings and construct new bodies of knowledge surrounding these new actors and technologies and to find new modes of expressions and language to incorporate into its company culture. What I am after is how stability is sought for and reached amongst practitioners and actors located and involved within this messy flux. “Rapid changes accentuate the frailty of the present. But how do you control the future?”, they wondered (ibid. 7). And so do I.

In order to grasp these questions I conducted fieldwork within Sydsvenskan's department that deals purely with implementing and developing digital media products for the company. I thus formulated a project description (see appendix) and sent it to the digital media manager at the SDS-group in hope of being introduced to one of the group's departments<sup>1</sup>. The manager responded promptly and told me he was curious regarding my research. A few days later he and I were talking at the digital media department at Sydsvenskan, located in Malmö, Sweden. One week later I was introduced to the team and began conducting my fieldwork within the department.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

The question is thus, how does Sydsvenskan seek to find its identity within a fragile media landscape and how does the department seek to control this frailty of the present? Or in a more concrete form, this thesis is seeking an understanding of the following questions:

- How is the digital media department at Sydsvenskan seeking stability within a fluctuating information media economy and how is this economy embodied in the praxis of the employees?
- How are innovation processes carried out and how are the users manifested within this process?

And as time-space compression is becoming more pervasive through new technology tools, together with a decrease of the producer/consumer-wall, can we even talk about place at all? The following question is necessary to discuss:

- How is time-space compression and the convergence of producer/consumer manifested within the department and how does this affect our understanding of the term place?



I hope my results can be applied in a concrete fashion onto the organizational culture of the digital media department at Sydsvenskan. My aim is thus to seek to understand how our particular department is seeking to control this fluctuation in a given time. This I argue can provide insightful knowledge for newspaper companies in general and digital media departments in particular who seeks to control the uncontrollable, the fluctuation of our so called new economy. I will deliver concrete recommendations for the department in chapter 10.

### 1.3 Defining the New Digital Economy

I use the term *new digital economy* to denote what Löfgren and Willim were after when seeking key characteristics and upshots of environments in which media capitalism thrives. The fluctuating new economy is thus a “cult of speed, innovation and creativity. The focus was not only on acceleration, but also on intensity or ‘an emotional or passionate economy’, which also meant highlighting an aesthetization and performative qualities” (Löfgren & Willim, 2006:2). The ground for this intensified economy lies in the almost perverse application of ICTs within almost any given context, compared to just a few years back. It is thus an emphasis on the intensification of speed amongst actors, material and technology which inevitably will affect the production of products and services and the division of labor within any given company and particularly in the media industry (ibid.). Cooke's research on the new media economy reveals uncertainty and instability as its core characteristics: New actors and companies converge and exchange services and products in a more promiscuous manner, as opposed to old media which was quite easy to grasp conceptually and were “products and services that broadcast knowledge, information and entertainment in forms intermediary between the originator and the ultimate consumer of the product or the service” (Cooke, 2002:288). The line between producer and consumer was clearly drawn and the actors knew their position within its larger economy. This is no longer the case and it should be taken seriously for, as we shall see, it affects the construction of identity and place within our digital media department.

We also need to define *stability* within such an economy. I use the term to connote Nigel Thrift's ideas on place. A place, he argues, is a very much alive and embodied entity existing within a given time and space, in our case, the digital media department. The crucial point to understand here is that place, and thus stability, can be achieved through the material that exists within this department and how meanings and routines are achieved through this. As

will become clearer in the following sections this is very rewarding for our study for it will enable us to make sense of our department's quite static real-time practices and, in the end, create results that are concrete and hopefully applicable within the department itself. This will be explained in more detail in the Theory-section below.

#### 1.4 Limitations

This research is about a particular department located at a particular point in a particular time. Consequently, there are two things that I want to exclude from this study. Firstly, the department was – by and large – only devoted to the redesigning and restructuring of the company's entire website – a gigantic task considering the vast amount of information that the company accumulates. Secondly, as the newspaper company is undergoing financial instability and experiencing uncertainty in terms of the implementation the digital media staff, the re-organizing of staff and technology is inevitability. As these two points reveal, I was forced to limit my study to a temporal and unique environment. This is not a study concerning a general and permanent organizational culture. Nor is it a study that reflects the life of other newspaper's digital media departments. Nevertheless, Sydsvenskan is the largest newspaper company in the South of Sweden and the fourth largest in the country in terms of subscription rates and website users – excluding so called yellow papers (Tidningsutgivarna, 2009). As such, its digital media department is a powerful actor within the digital media environment. I argue therefore that this particular place is quite suitable for the study of stability and the embodiment of the new economy.

#### 2. Theoretical backdrop

As my work requires an understanding of how place is created and formed within a particular workspace setting, I have chosen to apply particular strands within the field of cultural geography. As this field can be applied in several ways, I will here explain my version, how I applied it during my field-work and explain why I believe this particular theory can be rewarding for our aim.

The notion of place lies at the very epicentre of geography: Common sense tells us that geography is about places (Cresswell, 2009:1). However, during the 1960's, geography came to be seen by its practitioners as anthropomorphic, exclusionary and limiting due to its ignorance of social processes and unstable life-forms and structures (Cresswell, 2009:5). During this rejection of logical positivism and an embrace of thinkers such as Heidegger and

Marx together with a more hermeneutic outlook, geographers started including human beings as necessary components in the making of place and taking a greater interest in how humans make sense and create meanings by being within a particular place. To understand place, therefore, you had to include the human experience of it (ibid. 4 and Crang, 1998:101). It was an obvious flirtation with Marxism on the one hand who “shared a concern that the world was becoming more alienating” (Crang, 1998:101-102) and social constructivism on the other. What the social constructivists wanted was to identify and deconstruct the normative ways of being within a given place by tracing power through “particular meanings, practices and identities on to places” - a set of clues that makes people, practices and things either “in place or out of place” (Cresswell, 2009:5). “The idea of social construction has been wonderfully liberating” Hacking notes, and continues: “It reminds us, say, that motherhood and its meanings are not fixed and inevitable...They are the products of historical events, social forces and ideology” (Hacking, 1999:2). What Hacking is after is the idea that, say, social structures and places can be arranged in entirely different ways than its actual current state. And this is certainly of interest to us for within work-place studies in general and media studies or the sociology of technology in particular, there is a great awareness of the potentials of social constructivism. Social constructivism within these particular fields have in general been applying “an active effort to privilege neither social nor technical factors in constructing accounts of technology design, development, implementation and use” (Jackson et al., 2002:236). In a simplified sense, this entails seeing technology as (1) a rejection of technological determinism, (2) a reflection of the social for the mere existence of technology, (3) unstable and never complete in terms of their position in any given context and (4) not the artifacts themselves but the processes that lie before, within and after the actual products (ibid. 237-238). This implies that it is possible to view even larger physical structures such as workplace settings as negotiations between various actors vis-à-vis ICTs and organizations (ibid). This is crucial to keep in mind when investigating place for it gives us a fundamental indication of how we view the place we are investigating. Yet social constructivism should not be seen as our sole theory due to its very broad character. We should rather see it as our point of departure – or perhaps as the framing of the painting rather than the canvas onto which we paint or the paint we are using.

So with this in mind we can set out to strengthen and concretize the theoretical backdrop or our canvas. But I do want to continue on the geographical path for it can tell us a lot about the making of place. But our place is a particular kind of place – a place where machines meet

humans and can thus easily form hybrids of relations between things, places, human beings and technology. We cannot claim therefore to conduct research of a singular, well-defined and easily identified tribe of people located in a specific place in time. For, as Gibson and Waitt's notes, "landscapes are always more than human" (Gibson & Waitt, 2009:420). In our case, the humans are always somewhere else, be it an absence in physical terms of perhaps an absence in virtual terms. So how can we seek to understand place where mobility is not just physical but also virtual? It is in a sense a need to "decenter the human" (Urry, 1985:23) by including other non-human factors such as materials, technologies, interactions and so forth. In this essay I intend to reveal a particular field within human geography I will argue is suitable for this task, namely Thrift's non-representational thinking. Thrift's style of thought and his ontological and epistemological reasoning will be applied modestly, being well aware of its "radical incompleteness and contextuality" which, consequently, will focus rather on "the importance of practices as valid in themselves, existing without need of validation by some fully settled, monochromatic theory" (Thrift, 1996:30-31). Thrift's non-representational theory, together with a social constructionist stance, is rewarding, I argue, for it blends things with the social and focuses on situated and practiced knowledge, all the while focusing on the creation of place, which is crucial for our understanding of the lived and embodied new economy.

## 2.1 Non-representational Theory and Place-Making

In short, we are dealing with the study of practice. What Thrift is after is the everydayness of practice and its making of place through and with mundane kind of actions. However, in terms of everyday practice, Thrift claims that we are restricted when using language as a tool for articulating mundane activities: "the articulation of something that is at heart inarticulate remains a constant problem (Thrift, 1996:10). Thrift is correct, for how does one translate mundane and perhaps banal actions into bodies of knowledge?

But there is hope, for Thrift is after both an ontology and epistemology that catches the unintelligibility of the mundane when claiming that "practices involve observing from situations as much as they involve being present with them". Thus, knowledge is produced and can be found in situations where the problem at hand is embodied and can be observed. Because what we know and how we know it, Thrift notes, is situated: "it follows that a practical or situated way of knowing is contextual, and rooted especially in embodiment (Thrift, 1996:33). Observing our given context is therefore a must – but certainly not enough.

For as Cadman notes, “[t]o be faithful to this encounter, non-representational geographies do not aim to resemble it through academic representations, but to experiment with the thinking which occurs on the interstice between thought and practice” (Cadman, 2009:5). This entails that knowledge about everyday praxis cannot be found by casually and partially observing our field but is gained through (1) investigating what thoughts lie behind the actions performed by the subjects and (2) seeking knowledge that stems from myself as an acting and embodied subject – reflexivity. But Thrift does fire off a warning, writing that the researcher's self should not “inexorably be written into accounts, as is the vogue in certain of the current autoethnographies” due to its constant privilege of the author's experience” (Thrift, 1996:33).

How is this related to the making of our place? According to Thrift's non-representational view, the material we humans use and act with is not only instrumental but fundamental for our subjects making of meaning. The author emphasizes that there is a need for the social scientists to acknowledge “the extent to which the object world is intertwined with the subject” (ibid. 40). The upshot is “that we only know our world through/with our tools, and this situation has become more rather than less the case as the human body has been significantly augmented in ways that directly impact on subjectivity” (ibid.). This is, I argue, ultimately constructing new forms of actors that act given a set of objects. This is linked to performativity, which Cadman defines as “not an act in time, rather it is the spacing which allows the next moment; it enables the unexpected and transformative but also the mundane ability to simply go on” (Cadman, 2009:5). Or even more concretely defined, in order to understand how our digital media department creates and performs place we need to pay attention to the objects and the technology that enables the department to act and perform. So in order to understand praxis, one needs to recognize the becoming of or the goals sought by the particular actors and to “the importance of physical presence and absences ... in producing breaks, lacunae and emissions which interrupt and transmute encountering” (ibid. 31). To reformulate this into a question, we must wonder: Where lies the constraints and the openings for actors to perform?

We must also consider the term context and here I want to divide between two separate but nevertheless intertwined contexts. I want to specify the new economy as a context to which media actors in general and digital media organizations in particular are forced to adjust to external actors previously unrelated to the organization itself. According to Thrift, the most significant contribution brought about by the new economy was perhaps the postmodern idea

that nothing is stable and certain but rather in flux and often linked to emotions, instincts and feelings which, consequently, leads to a new economic sense (Thrift, 2006:132), as oppose to rational and strategic decisions executed by top level management as this new economy's predecessor, *Fordism* (Löfgren & Willim, 2006). However, Thrift proclaims that the development of a new economic sense is not new: “it derives from a long and involved economic-cum-cultural history of the construction of passionate economic bodies” (ibid.). What is new is the conduct it affects: “all these means of producing commerce are corresponding to forms of conduct and subjectivity which give rise to various highly complex forms of imagination, forms which are sometimes converted into new kinds of consumer or organization or market but which oftentimes remain at the level of dreams or longing or desires, haunting the undergrowth of capitalism and seeding its unconscious” (ibid.). The “forms of conduct” Thrift is referring to are real events or embodied performances happening within a particular place. This is a minor place if considering the bigger picture, namely the new economy as a whole. Here, within this minor place, Thrift's non-representational thinking sees our particular place as a meeting where “subjects and objects are aligned in particular ways which provide particular orientations to action ... and particular resources for action. In other words, contexts are not passive; they are productive time-spaces which have to be produced” (Thrift, 1996:43). These spaces form social interaction that depends on physical and cultural barriers and openings which, in the end, dis/enables production (ibid.) – in our case the organizing and production of digital media. This minor context is thus linked to and feeds and is fed by the larger context explained above. The challenge is, however, as Thrift warns us, that the two contexts tend to intertwine, diminishing the possibility of seeing them as separate units and thus creating a decontextualized era: “concepts like time-space distancing, time-space compression and globalisation ... might seem to herald a new, decontextualized era in which the indirect triumphs over the direct” (ibid. 45).

Before getting into how I wish to apply this non-representational theory we must summarize its core ideas. I will seek the embodiment of the new media economy through Thrift's ideas on what place is and how it is created. As we saw above, place is more than a static and physical entity. My use of Thrift's cultural geography-theory extends beyond this, in particular to three crucial factors for the department's making of place:

- *Materiality*: It is difficult to imagine a place without physical material of any kind. We need to acknowledge the key objects that live in our department and the meanings they generate for the users of the objects.

- *Performativity*: Materiality, I argue, can disable or enable particular kinds of action. This results in the performance of our staff members as they execute their daily tasks in a quite routinized manner. It is my task to understand and describe how these routines are performed and what they entail for the department.
- *Embodiment and affective spatiality*: How senses are embodied affects the overall feel of the department and can be used as lenses into how the staff is experiencing the place. As will become clearer, this is a crucial point for how and what the department innovates and how they perceive themselves – key components for place-making.

These three aspects create a place that, consequently, can shed light on our media economy's embodiment. As my department is quite static in terms of its physical proportions, applying Thrift's ideas are rewarding for they make a stable physical entity come alive by making the researcher see the pulse that can exist within what appears to be rigid and static environments. How I applied this framework onto the department will be discussed the following chapter.

### 3. Method and Material

In my thesis I have tried to apply the theory above by using a number of methodological tools. According to Cadman, non-representational thinking prefers qualitative methods over quantitative as it seeks to observe praxis in action. Accordingly, I experimented with a various ethnographic methods.

The department was kind enough to let me come and go as I pleased. During my four weeks at Sydsvenskan I spent approximately 62 hours trying to find understandings of the department. I tried to formulate the construction of the place as vividly as possible by focusing on how the material that exists within here is imbued with meaning and how it enables or disables the department's production and the various staff members' actions. Early on I became aware of the very static nature of our place in terms of physical movements and verbal communication. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a lot of our staff members' time is spent in front of computers. Basing my research purely on observing the staff members' performativity is thus insufficient, for it cannot capture the performance that is acted out in the virtual worlds, mainly due to (1) my limited knowledge of the staff members quite technologically advanced routines and (2) the sheer discomfort that arises from having an observer watching the moves you act out on a computer. For how can we possibly observe

when all praxis is conducted in such an isolated and lonely manner without causing discomfort for our subject? I did, however, ask our fellow staff if such a thing was possible, something they understandably declined.

But participant observation was nevertheless a key activity for this study. The majority of my time at Sydsvenskan was spent trying to grasp the everydayness of this environment. Accordingly, I tried to follow our staff members in their everyday activities as much as possible, regardless of the importance of these activities. So I followed Sanna (the web administrator) to Sydsvenskan's office in Lund and I also attended several meetings (six in total) with both external and internal partners. But the majority of time spent at the department was for observing the everydayness of the actions and interactions happening within the offices. For I am interested in how our department is creating its place together with its objects and technology and it was therefore essential for me to understand how or if certain materials or even ideas that are usually found within the department has the ability to translate itself into different settings. How objects acts and is acted upon can reveal the objects' importance for the creation of our department's place.

But these are events that are located outside of our department's physical office and I was keen on seeking place as created within this context. I wanted to apply the social constructionist stance: "Fundamental to constructionism is the active effort to privilege neither social nor technical factors in constructing accounts of technology design, development, implementation or use" (ibid. 236). The risk is to tilt towards either the social or the technological (ibid.). I therefore tried to find how place is created by observing our staff members' interaction with each other and with objects and technologies. The majority of interactions are, as noted above, between humans and computers and the software that exists within the computers. These interactions are surely of importance to study yet during my observations I was more drawn to events and interactions that erupted quite spontaneously. For these events were not only practically possible to observe but also, as it turns out, highly crucial for the department's production process itself. I therefore tried to document these interactions closely by paying attention to the enablers that creates the possibility of such interactions but also the constraints that might disable these spontaneous eruptions. I wrote down my observations on my computer, which in the end resulted in a total of 16 pages. If my computer was elsewhere, I used a smaller notepad I kept in my pocket at all times.



However, according to Davies, participant observation should not be seen as “the major data-gathering technique. Rather, participation in the everyday lives of people are means of facilitating observation of particular behaviors and events and of enabling more open and meaningful discussions with informants. Without ethnographers' participation as some kind of member of society, they might not be allowed to observe or would simply not know what to observe or how to go about it” (Davies, 2008:81). The shadowing technique I sought to apply was thus impossible to implement due to this very stillness of our subjects. I sought to overcome this by focusing more on seeking empirical material rather than casually waiting for this material to evolve before my eyes. Consequently, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight of the department's staff members, ranging from 36 minutes (the shortest) to 1:04 hours (the longest). This material was recorded onto a digital voice recorder, which in turn was transcribed into my computer and later on printed for my analysis. These interviews were conducted within the department's office, yet without reach from other staff members in order to minimize the risk of the interviewees holding back information for fear of sticking out. The interviews were based on my theoretical departures but also on what I had observed earlier that day or week. I also tried to keep in mind what Davies was after when she wrote that “interviewing is better understood as a process in which the interviewer and the interviewee are both involved in developing understanding, that is in constructing their knowledge of the social world” (ibid. 108-109). This prompts the interviewees to reflect on and create their own knowledge of the work praxis, something that usually goes unreflected due to its very mundane everydayness. But these mundane activities are crucial for this thesis as we are seeking an understanding of the everydayness of work praxis, a knowledge that is often embodied and thus not known cognitively by the performer of these activities.

In order for me to make the empirical material clear for the reader when describing the context and but also for my analysis of the place I took 32 digital photos all together that focused on either the material that was constructed by the staff or the interactions between material or technology and the staff.

### 3.1 Critique of Material

The empirical material generated through my ethnographic accounts can be critiqued in the following three ways. Firstly, as I entered the department, I became frustratingly aware of my indivisible body. This awareness led me to the pose the question: How to study place when

the majority of events and actors are realized and performing elsewhere? Similar problems have been grappled with by Czarniawska (2007; 2009). Secondly, and related to the first point, the majority of interactions that take place within the department are between a human and a computer. To study these interactions are uncomfortable – not only for the staff member but for the researcher – and difficult as they demand, in the majority of instances, an expertise knowledge of the software used (something which I did not have). This study had to exclude these interactions from its research. It is therefore crucial to point out that the difficulty of indivisibility and exclusion of human-computer interactions affected the amount and quality of the material I generated during my fieldwork and the thesis to a large degree. These are intrinsic difficulties of ethnography in general – but not intrinsic and unsolvable dilemmas. I tried to overcome these burdens, which are usually tied to observation problems, by filling in the gaps through other means, such as interviews and photographic documentation, being somewhat frustratingly aware of the loss and quality of empirical material. Thirdly, the empirical material was gathered, as already mentioned, during a quite unique point in time. As such, the material is interpreted according to this point in time and makes no claim to transcend neither this particular department nor this particular time.

#### 4. Previous research

My study coincides with three different yet intertwined strands of research, namely (1) new media, (2) newspaper and (3) work-place studies. New media studies, as a research strand, was made (by and large) popular within academic circles through the launch of Lev Manovich's *The Language of the New Media* (Manovich, 2002), a text and a field that seeks to understand the “new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production distribution, and communication (ibid. 19). Newspaper studies cover a vast field of research. The current trend within this branch, however, concerns a wish to understand online journalism as a new phenomenon within the industry (cf. Domingo, 2008) and the effects that the digitization of the profession and culture has upon the newspapers' production process. (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). Work-place studies is more complex as it is more focused on how human behavior makes sense of a particular setting (the work-place) that contains technologies, objects and other humans and the practices that are performed within these webs (cf. Warfield Rawls, 2008).

I have blended these three strands of research. Other researchers have dealt with similar topics, and I want to emphasize four that I believe my work to mirror, but only in certain

aspects. For example, Raviola (2010) is seeking to find “how the encounter between old and new objects, and old and new work practices unfolds” (ibid. 7) within the Italian based newspaper company Il Sole-24 Ore. Czarniawska (2009) seeks to find how the newspaper company TT seeks control over excess of information. Boczkowski conducts fieldwork within Argentina's Clarín.com in order to find understandings of the staff's management of hard versus soft news (Boczkowski, 2009). Hössjer and Eklundh (2009) examine, by applying ethnographic methods, the role that emailing plays within the work-space of a medium-sized newspaper company – how it affects communication and what kind of interactions are produced through this particular medium.

The present study is similar to these four: We all apply ethnographic methods within actual work-spaces and we share an interest in newspaper and media studies. But we are different in terms of some aspects and these aspects can reveal the gaps I seek to fill. I argue that my study is unique in particularly two ways: (1) Seeking the embodiment of the digitization within a newspaper company has yet to arouse interest amongst scholars. This I believe is due to the interdisciplinary approach, drawing influences from various strands of disciplines. This leads to my second point (2): the three different genres of research have never, to my knowledge, been dealt with by applying theoretical perspectives that are otherwise used for completely different research areas. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski's concludes their thorough review of the last decades media studies by noting that “most studies continue to apply existing lenses to look at new phenomena, but the potential for theoretical renewal is becoming increasingly evident” (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009:575). With these two aspects in mind, by letting various genres of disciplines clash with unconventional theories, I believe it is possible to reveal new modes of thinking about not only these three genres of research, but about the blending of them all.

## 5. Structure of thesis

I will mainly focus on four aspects of the place-making and I will try to design my thesis according to these aspects. These aspects and chapters are as follows:

- As we are trying to situate a particular place within a larger context – the new economy – chapter 6 will outline a brief history of the department we are investigating.
- The people and material that create our place are located within a highly intense and financially fragile media business climate. In chapter 7 we will try to look within the internal

structures of the department in order to understand how it is seeking stability within a fluctuating media environment. I will argue that the department only permits stability through the objects and technologies that are deemed important according to the logic of the current media ecology.

- Due to the quite thickly inhabited use of (new) technology, and the expertise and interest that are needed from their user, in chapter 8 I will argue that these processes create, what Thrift argued as well, a new economic sense or organ. However, the consequence of this is a blinding of the department's most crucial actor for stabilization itself, namely the user of their digital products.
- These factors that create place will in the end give rise to a new form of newspaper labor that in the end may create what the theory of place and the newspaper industry are trying hard to resist, namely *deplacement*. This idea will be developed in chapter 9.
- In Chapter 10 I will shortly summarize the above conclusions and seek to develop ideas that the department can apply in their work.

I will begin each chapter by briefly explaining the specific problem we are addressing and what methods I used for gathering empirical material. I will intertwine my theoretical framework with my empirical findings throughout the analysis. A brief summary consisting of each chapter's results in a more concrete and dense format will be presented in the end of each chapter. After I have dealt with these four issues I want to conclude by discussing the applicability and relevance of my findings for the field I am investigating and hopefully discuss future research possibilities within this particular field.

## 6. Plan for the Worst but Hope for the Best: A Short Story of a Media Department

In this chapter I will try to present the department itself by briefly describing its history and its current situation within the new digital economy. The empirical material is mainly based on interviews conducted with the staff and newspaper articles that concern the launch of the department. This chapter is concerned with the following question: What are the origins of the place-making of the digital media department? And how is this related to the fluctuating and uncertain economy?

### 6.1 The Story

The Digital Media Department at Sydsvenskan is dealing with the quite heavy task of managing and constantly improving the newspapers' digital media products, most notably the website itself. The site is currently generating around 350,000 unique visitors every week. In Malmö, which is the SDS-group's headquarters, the department's office consists of eight developers including this group's developing director (Henrik), the web administrator (Sanna), the digital media developing director at the SDS-group (Martin), the executive director of all digital media departments under the SDS-group (Andreas), part-time interactive designer (Johanna) and numerous affiliates connected to this office<sup>ii</sup>. The department was officially launched mid-2006. The aim was to become a powerful actor within the digital media sphere in Sweden, or particularly in the south. The then deputy director at the SDS-group Johan Ståhl said prior to its launch: “We feel it is time to take that extra step for the development of this organization that until now has mainly focused on the [physical] newspaper. We will now focus more on [web] services and interactivity” (Andersson, 2006). The main concern was obviously the current frailty of the newspaper industry. The newly appointed executive director for this new department Andreas noted that “the web is the media that is growing whereas most other media is showing a falling downturn” (ibid.). The newly created digital media department was thus the obvious outcome of such financial worries and uncertain future.

The SDS-group had obviously made previous attempts to seek control over its paper on the internet. Shortly after the launch of the newspaper Aftonbladet in 1994, the majority of the major newspapers sought the web too, Sydsvenskan included, fearing to lose the future customer. As Björn, the director for design told me, “it [the paper on the web] went from being a hobby project produced by one devoted soul who just wanted to experiment with some stuff on the web to a real channel that is standing on its own legs”. Perhaps tellingly

enough, these originators of the website were first located in the basement at Sydsvenskan, isolated from the central desk of the print, creating an obvious and a very physical division between the old paper and the new digital medium. After moving between floors, they department is now located on the second floor, ready to move up to the third floor in order to be closer to the web editors and the central news-making desk (called *the desk*).

Three years after the creation of the digital media department, Sydsvenskan printed a physical paper entitled *Now! And Then What?* together with the launch of an open blog where staff could leave comments and ideas<sup>iii</sup>. It was exclusively made for the company's internal staff and can now be seen as, I argue, an example of a company seeking its identity within financial turmoil. For the web edition of the newspaper is, much like its physical counterpart, currently not financially viable yet nevertheless a crucial and independent medium for a company wanting to maximize profit, let alone survive. The aforementioned paper sought to find media trends within the current media sphere, where the digital media in general and the web in particular stand as its monumental symbols, and seek to identify its position within this fragile landscape. Johan Ståhl, who now serves as the company's executive director, notes in the paper's editorial, that “one truth is that the [physical] paper's role is overplayed.” He continues, “We must exist in more channels, provide new distribution roads and find new streams of income. We must work more efficient and produce a better paper to lower costs”. There is now a greater focus on the digital medium as compared to the previous cowboy-years (as one staff member called it) of pre-2006. Nowadays, Björn told me, the main focus within this branch is to become “ubiquitous, to be everywhere, all the time. We will reach you where you prefer to be, so if you are on the net we are there. If you are on your cell phone, we are there” (Björn).

However, to control this new form of delivering news proved more difficult than perhaps initially planned. This adventure, from being a side project to an independent source of income, has been a process that for a lot of people has been quite difficult to adapt to. There was originally unwillingness within the paper to adhere to the digital format, says the SDS-group executive director for digital media Andreas. There was a fear that “the web was to cannibalize on the print”, which in Anders' opinion is a quite ignorant position, for “even if we stop with the web, it does not mean we gain print subscribers. People seem to picture this as a choice” (Andreas). So the resistance towards the web was, and in some instances still is, as Andreas said, “of mental nature. For earlier you got away with large incomes generated from the print and could thus ignore large investments. Previous management did not

understand or did not want to understand how the net is affecting everything, which means we came pretty late” (Andreas).

With the launch came new ways of conducting newspaper business, new positions to be filled, new modes of work praxis and certainly new forms of material/technology to relate to and build knowledge around. As Anders notes, when he started as head of the digital media department in September 2006, a lot of time was spent on cleaning up the company's earlier shoot-from-the-hip style of producing digital content. To quote Andreas, “people did not care to find out how to relate to the phenomenon [digital media]. People did not care to check the servers. When I returned four years later they had the exact same servers, down in the basement. It was that level of stupidity” (Andreas). With the launch of the department, actors from external companies were hired and implemented within the department. Consequently, ever since 2006, there has been an emphasis on creating a more firm internal infrastructure and building knowledge that deals with the handling of that technological infrastructure. This prior rejection of our phenomenon at hand placed the newspaper badly adapted to the intense speed brought about by a fluctuating and restless newspaper user located within the new economy. It is only now, according to Andreas, that the new routines, technology and labor within our digital media department are beginning to stabilize. This stabilization is what we will seek in this next section.

## 6.2 Summary

As we can see from this brief chapter, the history of the implementation of the digital media department is a story filled with uncertainties, constraints and, according to some, even stupidity. It reveals the initial unwillingness – or at least nervousness – behind the creation of a department that is now crucial for the survival of the entire company. In the next chapter I will seek how or if this implementation has stabilized in terms of internal organization culture.

## 7. Place-making in the New Media Economy

When dealing with departments such as ours, the difficulty lies in demarcating where our context ceases to exist. Surely in the physical world, the department is quite well-defined in terms of location (its geographical position is easily spotted) and its three dimensional characteristics. However, when this world is confronted with acting subjects, this static situation changes. My embrace of social constructivism enhances this *unstatic* position: that our living subjects have the power to construct meaning through their routinized interactions with its surrounding objects, technology and other staff members. This construction of meaning, I argue through Thrift, is what I will label stability and place-making. I will in this chapter try to describe the context in which the department functions and the interactions that takes place within. Through these aspects I will try to answer the following question: How is control and internal stability sought for by the department located within a fluctuating environment and digital economy? The short answer is: by rejecting the old, the past and the now and by constantly referring to the new, the future and its own discourse.

### 7.1 Future Fetish

The digital media department at Sydsvenskan is located in Malmö, Sweden. The long and quite narrow office space of the digital media department contains many windows that glare onto the train tracks busting outside. This is the first of two rooms we will analyze for the creation of place. This room is quiet, only the sound of keyboard-pushing or mouse-clicking makes it not distinctly but surely alive. On the first table on our right lies what appears to be randomly placed printed sketches and handmade drawings of a website. On one of the walls hangs two posters showing the consultancy firm Inuse's two users the firm identified when Sydsvenskan hired them to find the types of users the newspaper has before the launch of their former website in 2008. This is where the department usually has its meetings. If we continue further down the office, the first two desks we will see are located to our right. These are the open desks used by the part-time employee or visiting employers. Except for some cables, unused post-it notes, a template designed by Inuse that deals with user-website-interactivity and one telephone that will soon be removed due to the company's extensive use of iPhones, these desks remain impersonal compared to the rest of the desks we shall encounter later on. This is usually where I sat, together with part-time interactivity designer Johanna.



On the wall to our left is where this department reveals its current strategies and digital products. The wall is itself divided into various areas. On this wall's far left staff members print inspiration they get from other sites and hang it here (see photo 1 below). Moving to the right alongside the wall the printed papers consist of basic structures of an incomplete



Photo 1: The left wall where the department's digital inspiration turns into its physical form and where social and innovative interactions occur.

website. This is where their prevailing project, namely their redesign of their current website, turns into physical form. These printed papers show the viewer how the department is thinking in terms of the new design (see photo 2 below). Even further down the wall hangs a whiteboard. Little or no interaction between staff members and this whiteboard is performed. However, the writing on the board tells us that it is still in use or that there at least have been attempts to use the board's function. The department sought to apply a what-to-do-list on the whiteboard where each staff members' name is listed together with their specific tasks beneath each name written on a post-it note. When asked about this particular function, the staff members I spoke to could not describe it in any meaningful way as it was not used in any routinized manner. Andreas sought some organization of his own tasks when scribbling

these down onto the left side of the whiteboard, but days later these notes were hidden by printed sketches in all sizes.

These sporadic movements for the sake of organization are not unique for this context. We all find new ways to interact with our surrounding material and make our daily contexts



Photo 2: The middle of the wall where the department reveals its newly designed product (the website).

meaningful and manageable. Materialistic determinism is not applicable within a context such as this. This becomes apparent when we look at our staff members quite personal desks and its immediate surroundings, whose spaces are located opposite to the whiteboard. As can be seen in photo 1 and according to our theoretical framework, a place such as a desk is imbued with meaning when different materials act upon other materials and thus performs place. They also manifest an identity or, as O'Toole and Were notes, office spaces can show “how objects can serve not only to mark a personal space, but to connect an individual to their life outside the workplace and to maintain a treasured identity while within the workplace (O'Toole & Were, 2008:626). The post-it notes, which appear to be random papers, coffee mugs, flowers and computers in photo 3 below reveals itself as disorder for the

distant observer, yet the user is aware of the material's relation to the bigger picture – namely, a place and the belonging to it.

This sense of belonging to this particular place is crucial to point to for it steers the digital media department in its production process and, as will become clearer below, might create traps that enforce the division between producer and consumer. Consequently, I want to push this a little bit further. Looking at photo 3 we will see two computer monitors. The larger one is stationary, meaning it cannot easily be used other than in its connected situation. The other computer is a Mac-laptop. This computer's monitor is connected to the stationary monitor, meaning we can use the two monitors as one monitor and thus have a larger visual field (so



Photo 3: Sanna's desk reveals instances of rejections of the digital medium in favor of old and more low-tech objects. This older medium is largely ignored within the department's plain discourse but is, I reveal, crucial for the life of the department.

called DualView). According to Sanna, she uses the smaller Mac-laptop monitor for social networking sites such as Twitter and the stationary monitor for everything else that is work related. She also brings the laptop along with her to meetings. The constraints lie in her refusal to use the computer for processing a certain type of information and instead she uses

materials such as post-it notes and notepads. This refusal of the digital format is of interest for the computer's greatest achievement is to compress a large quantity of information and simplify it for the human who is using it. Here, however, where one computer and two monitors are not enough for our users needs they are forced to apply and work on more low-technology material. This, I argue, is the crucial paradox of this thesis and the new economy in general: where the user rejects its own ideal, the digital, in favor of what is supposed to be less manageable, namely low-technology products. The great wall is revealing a similar situation, where the material produced digitally is resisted in favor of the physical space constructed by printed papers and a wall. The wall is where staff members interact with themselves and with external actors (such as other departments within Sydsvenskan and different companies). Here people get together, usually in quite spontaneous manners, and exchange ideas as they look onto the wall pointing with either their fingers or their pencils in their hand on the various sketches, or revealing in gestures how their line of thought represents the website they are building. These wall-poster-human-interactions can be a part of a meeting, but they can also, as noted above, take place spontaneously based purely on the quite random work patterns of its staff members or the visitors that come here. This is due to this corridor-shaped office, for it almost forces the moving humans to notice the digital products on the wall regardless of the intentions behind the outsiders' visit or the movement of the staff member. The positive and, for this department, crucial outcome of refusing the digital in favor of the low-tech physical material is that it enables people to interact with each other. And within this room, ideas are created and developed when humans interact with other humans – and ideas should be taken care of and certainly encouraged.

Interactions between staff members are also occurring by the first table we encountered, usually here too without any need of digital products but rather together with sketches printed via the printer in the printer room. The context is filled with these pendulums, as staff members and objects travel between the digital and the physical and thus being on quite sporadic terms with their staff members and the material located within this context. Perhaps surprisingly enough, there is little interaction between the digital product in its digital format and the staff members as a unified group. For ideas grow where staff members meet and for this to come about the digital is not enough, one must create spaces where the digital exists in physical form in order to limit the constraints that the digitization might bring about. The printed sketches together with the wall are thus the enablers that increase the amount of interactivity amongst staff members and increase the amount of ideas being developed. For

my observations reveal that there is less human-human-interaction without there being enablers that are not digital in its format. It is also important to point out that when external actors enter the department, the digital products are revealed and discussed by the wall and the table using low-technology objects such as posters and post-it notes. But due to the sporadic nature of these areas, there currently exists no well-defined logic in terms of presenting the department's strategies. It is based purely on an *ad hoc* level.

Our staff members are thus interacting like a pendulum between two connected yet different worlds: (1) where the humans are interacting with the digital products they produce by translating them into physical form such as a poster or ad hoc sketches and (2) where the human interacts with the digital format located within the computer itself. Each world is thus referencing to the other and is placing the thinking and feeling human as the negotiator between these two worlds. It is therefore of importance to study how these interactions are embodied, as it is the staff members who act in between these two worlds. The human stands as the motor of the department and without it the department would be quite useless, as much as the department would be useless without its computers. It is this entire department's task to develop and create new platforms and functions for the newspaper's website and it is the thinking and feeling human that generates this innovation process. This process is perhaps fundamental to the success or failure of the entire department for our fluctuation shows that our economy has little or no room for conservative ideas. This led me to wonder how the embodiment of the department's innovation process is carried out and, as we shall see from gaining an understanding of it, that the dichotomy revealed above is present here as well and, if they go unchecked, I argue, it might lead to unforeseen and perhaps detrimental consequences.

This is particularly true for the programmers (or developers). So if we leave our first office-space and enter more deeply into the department, literally passing behind the bushes placed neatly by the room's opening, we will reach the room within this office that hosts the programmers. There are in total eight programmers, including the head of this particular group and excluding the two programmers that work at Sydsvenskan's offices in Kristiansstad and Helsingborg. The room is small, located between the former office-space we referred and the non-place referred to above. The computers are aligned according to your typical office space divided by eight smaller cubicles. The programmers' task is to monitor what is going on in the backroom of the company's website and to develop and improve the functions of the websites themselves. To monitor the website the programmers use two

computer monitors, one for being notified when something alarming is happening in his particular division of the website and the other one for managing the actual problem. There is also a computer monitor that has been placed on one of the walls' top-shelves that shows the entire website's current status so everyone understands the current situation completely.

The developers, together with the first room described above, are working with an office method entitled Scrum. Henrik, the head of the developers and what they call the Scrum-master, described the Scrum-process to me:

*Scrum is an agile developing method. Instead of placing everything six months in advance and work towards that, we are now working in two-week sprints. We know two weeks in advance what we are going to do. And we sort of know what comes after that. We have a meeting every other week where we plan ahead and can say that this is more important than this and now we are going to do this. And so the developers are estimating how much time it will take. So we always have a goal every other week and know in advance how to get there.*

So it is always two weeks? I asked.

*Yes, always two weeks. Scrum has a lot of components so... it's a bit like chess, easy to learn but hard to master. One thing is that you will be able to quantify how productive the team is in relation to what should be done. So the team can estimate in points how things ought to be done and so you can see how many points the team gathers in two weeks. So you should be able to say that within half a year we will be able to do this. But we have not gotten that far in the process. We work more with each sprint.*

This particular work method was developed in order to create a certain rhythm within the workforce's production, Henrik tells me. During the Scrum-meetings, there is an open debate where the whole department discusses the upcoming sprint. During my observation of one of these meetings Henrik wrote down what the team felt was needed to be done during the next sprint on a large paper. Henrik's notes are then transferred and translated into the scrum-schedule (see photo 4), a whiteboard located on the wall in the developers office. On this whiteboard there are post-it notes. Each post-it note contains the developers name and the task he (for it is a he within the developers' place) assigned himself. The post-it notes can then travel within the 2-week sprint from Not Started, Started, For Test to Done. The goal is thus to get all the post-it notes on the right side of the whiteboard. If unforeseen events

disrupt one developer's task the post-it notes travels upwards and lands beneath the Impediments-section.



Photo 4: The Scrum-method as realized on whiteboard. The post-it notes traces the tasks carried out by the developers in the virtual world during one 2-week sprint, going from Not Started to Done before entering the next sprint session.

As we can see it is of interest that even in this office, where the digitization lies thick and the members are more connected with their computer(s) than with their co-workers, there is also a pendulum that swings between the digital to the physical when the department is in need of organizing the entire team's tasks. Löfgren and Willim's exegesis of the new and fluctuating economy notices that the old or the worn down is usually forgotten when intensity infiltrates the conduct of business. This is apparent here, where many comments were made regarding what the media environment considers old and stupid technology, for example, fax machines and the physical newspaper. Excluding the obvious fact that fax machines are quite useless today, it can still be of interest to point out that there are tendencies within economies of speed to disregard the pieces that are perceived as old and outside of the new economy's competitive environment yet still essential to the new economy's survival. Within the company, the digital media department is still struggling with translating their ideas to

departments that are focusing on more traditional news production. And there are other more detrimental gaps that can manifest themselves if the digital media department is not careful. This will be revealed in the next chapter, as we will see how the department may run the risk of blinding itself by making assumptions that are based on what the producers believe rather than what the user wants. One must, to draw from Löfgren and Willim again, try to find an understanding of what the left hand is doing when the customers' focus is purely on the right hand that reveals all the magic.

## 7.2 Summary

I have in the section above tried to construct an understanding how the staff members seek stability with the use of the context's material within the internal organization of the digital media department at Sydsvenskan. I have revealed how the digital is not enough when organizing the staff's tasks. Even though the digital medium's true self is the handling of a large body of information and makes it easy for the human to handle it. The staff members are always returning to the non-digital, the physical material, but more so on an *ad hoc* basis. It is surely difficult, if not impossible, for us to analyze the intentions behind such actions. But we can nevertheless say something about how this place's material acts and is acted upon and the place that is created from such activities. There was not much logic behind the rejection of the digital medium and the embrace of the physical material (post-it notes, notes, whiteboard, printed sketches). There are surely good reasons for the developers to apply the Scrum-method. However, within this method lies a sporadic use of physical material that creates a certain disorder within an overarching method of order. Our entire new economy is realized through the media companies in particular to push back the old in favor of the new and the not yet realized future, and Sydsvenskan's department for digital media is certainly subscribing to this principle.

The important conclusion is that we have spotted the quite paradoxical dichotomy that lies within the new economy, namely that the old might perhaps be invisible to our staff member but it is nevertheless very much present and quite crucial for our department's stability. The fact that the old is often invisible to our staff reflects, I argue, this economy's danger, namely to conceal factors that are deemed minor, but that are nevertheless crucial, not only for our department but for the entire economy's life. If looking too much ahead by seeking to tame the future one runs the risk of trembling on the obvious and perhaps even politically sensitive pieces. This puts pressure on the physical dimensions of the office and it reveals the



importance that physical distance has upon an acting subject. One must, to draw from Löfgren and Willim again, try to find an understanding of what the left hand is doing when the customers' focus is purely on the right hand that reveals all the magic (Löfgren & Willim, 2006). My observations reveal that there is less human-human-interaction without there being enablers such as the wall containing the digital products – enablers that simplify it for our actors to communicate and develop ideas and their products. In the following chapter we will see how this can potentially not only blind one's sight of organization culture, but also how it can potentially reinforce the distance between producers and their users – an obvious risk newspaper companies would rather live without as the users are crucial for the newspaper company's survival.

## 8. Performing in a Bubble

As our preceding chapter revealed, there is a tendency for actors within the new economy to forget or perhaps even deliberately ignore the importance of material that we can consider low-technology. In this chapter I will take this even one step further and argue that the new digital economy runs the risk of turning into an exclusionary field where its main actors reject pieces that are minor according to this economy's language, yet major for keeping the system in place and for actors that are situated outside of this bubble (i.e. the consumers). For, as we will see, the department is in a sense located within a technological bubble where only certain ideas are deemed as useful. How is this realized and embodied within the innovation process?

Since this department's main concern is the innovation process, it is fair to assume that what exists within this bubble affects to a large degree what the department is developing and it might be of interest to look into constraints that might arise. I will thus try to answer the following questions: (1) What factors steer the department's innovation processes and can we talk about an embodiment of innovation? And, consequently, (2) how are the users of the digital products situated within these processes? The aim is to come to an understanding of how or if the technological bubble manifests itself and how this may affect the innovation process. I will here draw heavily on my interviews and base the analysis on Thrift's ideas on the new digital economy as a new sensual organ that is embodied in the everyday life of the department. I also want to emphasize the importance the emotional and affective components play for our understanding and construction of place and thus stability (Gibson & Waitt, 2009).

### 8.1 Bursting the Bubble

Apart from the larger Scrum-meetings taking place once every two weeks and that deal with the upcoming 2-week sprint, the staff members join forces on quite a regular basis in order to plan their current and future products. During these meetings I kept wondering: How do they know what to create? Surely, as the staff members pointed out to me on several occasions, the most crucial factor that steers the department's development process is the end-user of the various products, for without the user's approval, the newspaper will lose its core income – ad revenues. Andreas explains the promiscuity of today's user:

*They [the users] don't give a fuck. If we are not on the net, if we are not there when they search in Google, well they just choose another search result in the Google-list. Or another site completely* (Andreas).

This is obviously detrimental for the financial situation of the newspaper as a whole for without the user there are no reasons for companies to buy ad-space on the newspaper's website. Jon, senior advisor and digital media specialist at Sydsvenskan, explains the process:

*If we are looking at the physical paper, the money we generate through subscriptions does not even make the newspaper go plus/minus zero... So ads are the hub that makes the things work, something a lot of people do not know. And this is in particularly true for the web since it is free to read* (Jon).

Yet there are other parameters the company's digital media department must relate to. Since the department is working within the newspaper industry there exists, according to my interviewees, certain rules that come with such an industry. Firstly, the products they deliver and develop must match what Björn called the “newspaper feel”, meaning the department must strive to position itself, through the products they deliver, as a newspaper company. This is not as straightforward as one might think for, according to my interviewees, a newspaper company is not your average company, it is more personal and is, according to Jon, considered “almost stately owned”, something which makes the user feel inclined to have an important say in the company's strategies. Customers do call off subscriptions if they do not receive the newspaper that morning, Jon tells me. So the digital media department is relating to their customer's expectation of what they believe a newspaper company is. There is then a need to understand who the user is and how the user is and how he/she is acting together with the products.

During my observations, however, I realized how the department is the user par excellence and, as will become clearer, it might therefore be difficult for the department to rid itself of the blindness that is caused by such expertise. Their user expertise takes its shape and is embodied as a result of routinized forms of interactions. When observing their use of digital media products and from listening to the discourse that is created from such user expertise, one is struck by the banal and mundane features of the routinized praxis. I observed instances where the laptop or the stationary computer screen serves not as an information medium but as a place where a staff member is enabled to hide from whatever goes on in the physical world around. This is realized, I observed, in spontaneous actions such as the need to

constantly touch the laptop's mouse-pad in order for the screensaver not to turn on – regardless of the user's need for the digital content during that particular time. It is turned into a safe and controllable world: By wanting to be absent from and thus rejecting the outer, physical world one is thus constantly present, online and there for communication through the constant use of the digital medium. Similarly, the digital is often referred to as the flawless communication medium. If errors arise between the human-technology interactions, it is the human factor we ought to blame, not the technological medium. Paradoxically, however, when the department itself turns into consumers of digital products (as when the iPhone-policy was launched) the situation is reversed as the overall critique of these human-technology interactions does not include their own human factors, but rather the construction of the technology itself. The important conclusion is that we can see how the department reflects a position that limits its own understanding of consumer consciousness by constantly referring to its own digital media expertise – an expertise that stems from other digital media experts and a routinized digital behavior. But digital media expertise is one thing; user expertise of digital media is another – a discrepancy I will push for even further below.

This is realized and embodied through larger means as well, and how it manifests itself depends on your position within the department. Jon, the digital media specialist, gives an example of how he communicates with his co-workers through Gmail's chat client:

*If we look here in the chat client, I have Johan who is working with development. We are sitting a few hundred meters from each other but if I need to fix something quickly regarding technology it can be comfortable to deal with him directly here.*

Via the chat?

*Yes, exactly. Then if I need to fix something with my boss when she is not here it is easy to do that here.*

So she is online? You can presuppose that?

*Yes. It may sound a bit weird to some but we chat a lot during the evenings as well [laughs]. You can then ventilate your thoughts you had during the day or if you want to prepare for something quickly for tomorrow.*

So you do not e-mail each other?

*Yes, that too. It sounds a bit strange perhaps. But sometimes we can chat about one thing and email about another, simultaneously. So communication finds new roads to take all the time and it all depends on what we want to communicate. So it may fit better in the email, for you can attach files here. We might also even discuss our work while we chat about stuff that is more on a personal note (Jon).*

Jon draws a sharp distinction between the digital media department he works for and the rest that exists outside of their expertise, the “some”, or the actual users of their products. This is position is reinforced as he and his department is constantly within and embodying the digital medium. In terms of communication as praxis, the digital medium is pervasive and we can assume that it will become even more so as the company will replace all its telephones with the more digital and user-friendly iPhone, making the digitization of the department even more prevalent. When I asked Martin, head and overseer of this department, to show me his office space, he ironically yet with a touch of seriousness took up his iPhone and exclaimed “here's my office”. Had I, however, asked one of the developers the answer would surely be different as they are depending on computers that can handle larger bodies of information and, vice versa, the computers are depending on human expertise in order for the maintenance and development of the website to function properly. This interaction reinforces the embodiment of their own production. Our developers are located, as we saw in the first chapter, in a quite remote area within the company and are, due to this highly embedded and isolated but thickly inhabited computer-human interaction, producing a routinized and highly familiar and habitual sense of belonging and, consequently, stability. As we shall see, this may however create boundaries and divisions between the developers and the end-user of their products.

This becomes clearer if we look at the process that leads up to the department's actual innovation. There is a presupposition within this department that you must also be interested in the media industry. It is thus a two-way communication, between the department itself and the media landscape located outside of its direct control. These two domains, which coincide with each other, are depending and converging into each other for the other's very own survival. It is thus a must for the digital media department to have a good sense and knowledge of the current situation of the media community as a whole. I asked Henrik if it is necessary to look at what other media actors are doing:

*Yes, that is a part of our work. Or you can do your own thing as well, but usually it works like this.*

So you are personally looking at the others?

*Of course. I am interested so it is hard not to.*

Where do you look? And what are you looking at?

*Well, we have been looking a lot at Huffington Post, Aftonbladet as well, DN, Svenska. You are looking at what is close to you. But we have also been looking at local sites. So we find inspiration where it suits us (Henrik).*

Henrik's last sentence is telling for it gives us a hint of the technological bubble we can see is emerging. And Jon is reaffirming this sentence by claiming that “what we who work with digital media have in common with each other is that we are in digital media as well” (Jon). He continues:

*[T]he first thing I do when I come home is to turn on my computer and check Facebook, check Twitter, check LinkedIn. I am in the media all the time. I mean, these common channels, like Resumé and Dagens Media, you have already checked that – that is the first thing you do when you arrive at work. We get our hands dirty all the time.*

So what are you looking for then? I asked.

*I have this gut feeling. I do believe I am pretty good at seeing when things will become huge. So we have to keep an eye on that (Jon).*

Martin shares Henrik's view and tells me that media trend-analysis is the very key to his position. Therefore, he says, as a development manager within the digital media industry, one must pose the questions: What do these particular phenomena entail? And when will they have its breakthrough in Sweden? One is then constantly trying to embrace the future by always assuming that an improvement of the present can be realized. This disposition is what Löfgren labeled the frontier spirit within businesses such as ours (Löfgren, 2006). This constant seeking for the frontier of things surely existed during other periods as well yet, as the author notes, “they all share elements of acceleration, innovation and economic (over)heating” (ibid. 65). But it is also a sense of euphoria about the industry they work in. Thrift noted that the years prior to the IT-boom of the 1990's, an era he called “capitalism's

summer of love”, the media business' core characteristics was how “business became caught up in a series of effects which made business seem like more than business: optimism, confidence, excitement, a kind of affective sheen” (Thrift, 2006:131). This is embraced and realized through existing, being and living within the media landscape. In an explicit form, Jon's friend explained what Jon was all about: “Jon, you eat, sleep and shit the internet”, which is true Jon concluded: “For good and bad. You can always reach me” (Jon).

This is reinforced as the digital medium's power lies in its ability to compress time and space. The obvious consequence is that one can conduct work from other, more distant places. There is thus, theoretically at least, a diminishing need for the place I describe in chapter three, or we can see how this place is extending its affecting tentacles. Our staff members' do work from home, yet as their actual interest lies close to what is considered work we can find a blurring of the distinctions between work and play. And the iPhone-policy will surely affect and most likely increase their connectivity with the digital media environment as one will always be one click away from it. These observations support what Thrift was arguing, namely that these new modes of interactions are creating a “new kind of movement sense, a sense of the world moving in a particular direction, a particular kind of pressure on event and their interpretation, a semi-skilled but still potent production of a vision of continuous intensity” (Thrift, 2006:133). In other words, we can see a new economic sense, or a *new organ*, of conduct taking its form through exactly what Jon was referring to when using his guts for knowing what the future holds.

The problem is, however, that this digital organ excludes important functions that are crucial for the survival of the entire organism. I realized that there might be a danger if obsessing about the future by rejecting the now and the past. This idea was rejected quickly by Jon:

*You can see it as a problem or as a possibility. I see it only as possibilities, that we in fact can change our product. If we look at the physical paper, what can you change there? Well you can make the paper weigh 1 gram less. That is the most extreme you can do. We can do whatever we want* (Jon).

Jon is right, the website is far more mobile than the newspaper and their new website is seeking to become even more independent from the physical paper. However, there are no or very few references to the actual users of the website. During my observations there were explicit references being made to their own expertise and how other digital media-actors saw the work of Sydsvenskan's digital media department as trend setting. I could not see this

expertise materialized in the products they deliver. Granted, I do not have the expert eyes as the department, but I am a user of their products. And, as we saw, the user is or at least should be the most important factor in terms of the newspaper's financial stabilization. We, the end-users, are, however, localized outside of the new digital organ's functions and outside of the entire digital media discourse. The user is mentioned only in passing and in quite loose and abstract terms. Jon, again, tells me how website users used to look and judge websites by using a vertical-perspective. Now, according to Jon, we look in a horizontal manner. I found it hard to understand where this information comes from. Jon describes it as follows: “Oh, that's eye studies. You look at how people move their eyes [when looking at websites]” (Jon). I could not help but to find myself slightly sceptical towards these two statements and I got interested in how the user is realized within the digital media department's discourse. I spoke with Björn about this. He compared their department with Facebook's innovation department:

*I read that they sit and design and that they have a laboratory with people and they sit and they look at how they read their website [laughs]. But that is a very good way to work. And that is something that we have not done yet and I think one must always do that which is something we have done with the paper a billion times, to do tests on people, to get them in here and they sit here and look and click and they will tell us what they think. User tests. We have not done that yet and I am a little bit worried about that [laughs]. We should have like 10 people who sit and click and tell us what they think. And then you realize stuff that is completely wrong. Then you have to think again.*

I proceed: That must be scary to have in mind that somewhere something might be completely wrong. But I guess you try to analyze the web-statistics?

*Yes, but sometimes something may happened that we have no reason for why it happens. Why are people not doing this or why do people click here.*

How do you relate to that? Say that you have one page that is very well-visited; I mean do you reflect on that at all? Do you understand why it is that way?

*Sometimes. But often people contact us, if we have redesigned or something, then thousands of people call and says “what happened?”. Then you understand that something is wrong. And then we can redo things. But the problem is when people do not come to us. Often, the majority of readers who calls us are older people, paper-readers. And my feeling is that younger people do not care enough to call us, like “OK if this does not work I will just go*



*somewhere else*". Older readers feel they can demand to exercise their right to make orders about these things (Björn).

Björn made it clear that the user, the most important actor for financial stability, reveals itself only when coming to the department. This is a quite unsettling fact considering the fluctuating nature of (particularly young) users. Knowledge about these groups should be seen as key information for the department. But my research shows that the user is manifested in the department's user-discourse only sporadically by references to the consultancy firm Inuse's research conducted in 2008, through the department's less frequent and casual analysis of their web-statistics, responses from website users and, more importantly, the department's own ideas on how the user is acting within the media environment. The media bubble that is created within the department may ultimately blur their perception of who their digital product is for and thus increase the distinction between the department and the end-user. For example, according to the Inuse's website, the company conducted both qualitative and quantitative interviews with 600 of Sydsvenskan's users who were later on categorized into six different categories based on their responses. However, as the media environment fluctuates, so does the user, and the question is: For how long can you rely on research about 600 individuals who undoubtedly are promiscuous in terms of their website usage? Not very long. And the only remedy then is to rely on one's own social group's expert opinion, something which, I argue, can potentially reinforce the media bubble and also, consequently and more importantly, the walls between user and producer. A division that a fragile newspaper economy cannot afford. Similar results were found by Domingo (2008). By looking into how newsrooms incorporate the idea of user interactivity, the author found that there is a production of myth-making involved, where staffs could easily refer to the hegemonic discourse, and thus find group consensus, by referring to "all the relevant actors (media executives, journalists, scholars)" (Domingo, 2008:683). But why it was important was a question nobody knew the answer to: the production was thus carried out prior to reflecting on who it was for: the group or the end-user? The producers are thus seeing themselves, narcissistically, in the user by believing he and she will handle the products in the same manner as the creator. This is technological determinism, something I argued against in the previous chapters.

## 8.2 Summary

Media researcher Deuze argues that “media should not be seen as somehow located outside of lived experience – for example as he artefacts (sic!) we used to connect to each other via the Internet, or as messages that are transmitted or decoded that may or may not have effects on people, but rather should be seen as intrinsically part of it. Our life should perhaps be seen as *lived in*, rather than with, media – a media life” (Deuze, 2009:468, my italics). This chapter revealed the lived and often embodied media life of the digital media department and I argued that a complete and almost endless self-referential discourse may increase the division between producer and user. Similarly, Czarniawska sees this as the circularity of news production where “[s]omebody else with the same criteria evaluates what has already been evaluated with the same criteria” (Czarniawska, 2009:153). Using the notion of circularity is useful for it discloses the negative aspects of the technological bubble – a possible narcissistic discourse within the current digital media circuit leading to a scratch-my-back-and-I’ll-scratch-yours-mentality that, in the end and very importantly for this research, makes it impossible to distinguish creativity from the production process itself (cf. Ibid. 166). In chapter 10 I want to push this further and deliver concrete ideas that the department can use in order to combat this circularity.

According to Marx, this is the alienating aspect of the division of labor, when ones products does not signify oneself but rather the production process and economy itself (Marx, 1976). However, this lived, and consequently, isolating and perhaps alienating embodiment is, I argue, a signified expression of place-making for the staff finds stability through hanging on to and advancing its expertise and knowledge within a fluctuating and uncertain business climate. What this may entail for the future of the newspaper industry in general and Sydsvenskan in particular is the main theme in the next chapter.

## 9 The (New) Laborers

The previous chapter revealed what I called the technological bubble – a creation sought by the department by purely having references to its own media discourse and production process. I will in this chapter reveal how this bubble is affected by three other components that are crucial to reflect upon for our understanding of place: (1) the consumers entrance onto the digital media stage, (2) the *de/reprofessionalization* of the employers and (3) time-space compression. For these three factors are key for the unstable newspaper industry and, I argue, its importance for the fluctuation itself will not diminish but rather increase in size and scope. So can we, with the results from the prior questions in mind, say anything on how a media bubble might be affected by these three factors?

### 9.1 Displacement

During my time at the department there was little that made me realize that I was in fact within a newspaper setting. There was no physical newspaper located within the department's premises, except for the ones I brought. The department had a newspaper bin, created specifically for throwing away the used physical newspapers. It was never used. Old mediums such as these are excluded from this setting. The question I always posed to myself was: How are these people related to the term *newspaper industry*? Some had in fact worked as journalists prior to their current profession. But how much of journalism manifests itself in their everyday praxis? Andreas was a reporter before becoming head of the digital media departments at the SDS-group. Martin – head of development – was an educated journalist. They now had little if anything to do with their former work practices. And Johanna is, I argue, currently involved in this process of de/reskilling her original journalist profession into a digital form of expertise. Having worked at various positions as a journalist at Sydsvenskan, she is currently working part-time with questions dealing with interactive design of the website (she seeks to optimize user experience of some of the digital products stemming from the department). Apart from her education in journalism she has an extended education in interactive design (she was unsure of what the field actually entailed before enrolling). She has also attended various courses and has thus gained certain certificates in interactive design. How can we interpret these shifts in professional roles?

In the paper *Now! And then what?* mentioned in the previous chapter, the writers try to depict how we consumers will use media in the future and predicts that the newspaper will be gone in 2025. The companies, they speculate, will still exist but its product will differ in terms of

design, format, frequency and reach. They conclude by mentioning that “more papers will focus on art directors” (Sydsvenskan & Helsingborgs Dagblad, 2009:28). It is possible that the importance of the *art director* – meaning a symbol for a more digital and design-based approach – will indeed become more pervasive and it is possible that this thesis has revealed a shift in the embodiment of newspaper professions. I argue that the *newspaper feel*, the embodied sense that steered the department in terms of developing their digital media products and creating a somewhat stable philosophy, will become less important as the digital media products will most likely increase its importance within the newspaper industry. The digital format is here to stay and perhaps even exclude the traditional newspaper formats and roles. Therefore, in order to seek financial gain the media companies must increase the potential of each professional role within their company. It might be legitimate to assume that the newspaper feel will be replaced with a *digital feel*, where the digital media departments become increasingly more like other media companies working exclusively with and for the digital field such as web design bureaus. This idea was rejected by the staff due to their perception of the importance of the newspaper feel. But I still wondered, how can the newspaper feel not turn into old news as, all things being equal, the ubiquitous wish of newspapers (be everywhere, all the time) will inevitably lead to new forms of interactions between new technologies, new users and new producers as new and external innovations of new communication channels will become the norm rather than the exception.

We must therefore see this in relation to *time-space compression* – an event I define as the diminishing importance of time and place for users and producers to create and consume digital media – and the consumers entrance on the digital arena. Starting with time-space compression, the producers (the department) tell me how their job is a reflection of their interests and how it becomes more difficult to draw a sharp line between their work and their play. New media companies and products will certainly seek to blur this distinction between work/play as they – much like the newspapers – seeks an ubiquitous character within people's everyday life. Thrift sees our understanding and construction of place as highly dependent on our perception and use of time – where time, he argues, is composed of separate yet intertwined divisions of rhythms (May & Thrift, 2001). Time can thus enable or disable our interactions and actions within a particular context – as when traffic lights that functions according to a specific clockwork affects the city's passengers or how places prohibit citizen-movement as nightfall's enters the city (Parkes & Thrift, 1977:359). Similarly, our department reveals rhythmic cycles (or time-enablers as Thrift puts it (ibid.)) that shape their

interactions and thus construction of place, ranging from 6-month plans, via their 2-week sprints down to their breaking down of work days into a pre/post-lunch categorization. However, it is now possible, theoretically at least, to erase these time-enablers almost completely. For example, the developers conduct daily Scrum-meetings with other developers who are localized in other SDS-offices using a computer monitor and the video conference software ooVoo – a software that enables multiple users from different places attend these virtual meetings at the same time. This is an example of how certain staff members are gradually becoming less dependent on the physical dimensions of a particular place in a particular time. The department is thus less a place for these developers located elsewhere as their interactions are less bound by it. They are, nevertheless, dependent on it (for the department is where decisions are made) but only in an abstract sense. The same erasure of time-space fixation is working through the company's new iPhone-policy (“One iPhone per employee”) - especially for employees who are in less need of managing a great amount of information, such as the developers. The phone comprises all the tools needed for conducting some of the staff members' tasks. Actors that are excluded from the department's immediate context can nevertheless affect objects, technologies, staff members and, consequently, places.

We therefore need to include the virtual into our discussion in order to understand place – the physical properties are not enough. For example, due to Sydsvenskan's great amount of stored information it is still highly dependent on servers and staff that can manage these ungainly amounts. However, Sydsvenskan is sending its packages of information to an external company that monitors these packages. Similarly, the digital products produced by the department are now more connected to other external companies who in turn protect and manage the information. Henrik, the head of the developers, told me that by incorporating products developed by companies who are located in the US – such as Facebook, Flickr and Wikipedia – Sydsvenskan automatically use these companies' servers, thus diminishing the expanding role of their own in-house servers. This is blurring our understanding of how the department construct place for it is shrinking in terms of importance, but only through and with tools that can enable such compression. As Thrift notes, “it is not simply that a sense of geographical distance has been radically compressed, but that more familiar understandings of location and position might have to be abandoned altogether” (May & Thrift, 2002:9).

This sense of abandonment in terms of place is linked with and affected by how the consumers are entering the digital arena. Örnebring looks at the newspaper industry through

the concept of labor. He argues that “[j]ournalism in the modern sense was born out of the medium of the mass newspaper, and the mass newspaper is a medium born out of industrialization. The patterns of journalism established in the mid to late 19th century still influence how we think about journalism today, and how journalists think about themselves” (Örnebring, 2010:68). What the author is hinting at is that our conception of what news is, how it is materialized and how we handle it cannot simply be erased due to the entrance and pervasiveness of new technology – or, simply put: history matters. However, with the advent of technology within the newspapers’ work settings, traditional forms of work conduct started slowly but surely to evaporate. This current digitization of the newspaper companies’ products is often seen in the light of a slow yet evolving process of democratization of information. By democratization I refer to a process where the user can directly and indirectly influence the larger media corporations. According to media researcher Deuze, this is a “new or modified power relationship between news users and producers, as well as between amateur and professional journalists. It can be heralded as a *democratization* of media access, as an opening up of the conversation society has with itself, as a way to get more voices heard in an otherwise rather hierarchical and exclusive public sphere” (Deuze, 2009:313, my italics). According to the author, this has the potential of flattening the hierarchies within the newspaper corporations “in the gathering, editing, publication and dissemination of news and information of public interest” (ibid.) by letting the “[c]o-creative activities of producers and consumers in constantly shifting roles challenge and reshape our understanding of how the media work, and generate exciting new ways of creating and marketing compelling content and experiences” (Banks & Deuze, 2009:420). It is a must that we see this as indirectly linked to customer loyalty, or a lack thereof. The general public shows an increasingly disloyal connection to newspapers as information is gathered not only more sporadically but also through a vast range of different and untraditional sources (Hvitfelt & Nygren, 2008). But this does not mean that newspaper companies approach their users but, rather, that the users overtakes portions of the traditional producers’ media shares – a difference that is crucial for the recommendations I will present in the following chapter. Is this the liberating effects of the digital media that Löfgren and Willim sought in the last chapter? Was the remote control given away by the producer to the consumer and are we therefore to assume that controlling power of the news corporations vanishes as the digital culture enters? Most likely not. But perhaps some organizational trends are worth discussing.

I argue that the specialization of work tasks and the increasing expertise in terms of digital technology will not only force new actors to enter the company but also replace or bring about a complete exclusion of traditional roles and staff. During my time at the department there were constantly questions and issues regarding who will be the next to fall. On the company's intranet there was information about what this would entail and how staff who wished to leave on their own accord would be compensated accordingly. Certainly this is the obvious downside of the new economy's fluctuating power for it brings about real and sometimes detrimental changes in peoples' lives. Quoting Deuze again, there is a "powerful redistribution of power taking place in the contemporary media ecosystem: a sapping of economic and cultural power away from professional journalists to what I like to call 'The People Formerly known as the Employers'" (ibid.). Deuze is however referring to the journalist profession, something that is quite different from the professions into which we have been looking. But he is touching on something that is crucial, namely the dis/replacement of staff as a consequence of a power-shift amongst actors within the media ecology. For the democratization process enables the user to blur the distinction between media provider and user. Deuze, again, is therefore correct when claiming that "[t]he ongoing merger of production and consumption across the various media, cultural and creative industries signals the emergence of a global convergence culture, based on an increasingly participatory and interactive engagement between different media forms and industries, between people and their media, as well as between professional and amateur media makers (Deuze, 2009:472). Also, during my fieldwork at the department, I became aware of the department's dependency on other media actors that work in sometimes entirely different fields. Cooke sees this as a contributing factor of the new media economy, where media actors come together by trading of information, products and services, often within a given geographical cluster and in a quite sporadic manner – events that were less spontaneous and frequent prior to the digitization (Cooke, 2002). The digital media department is obviously depending on and, more importantly, awaits information and products from other media companies in order for the department to successfully build a digital media platform. It is therefore safe to consider this a process of co-creative labor (Banks & Deuze, 2009), where everyday users but also other media actors turns into and affects the department's products to an increasing extent.

This was not foreseen by the media players and authors some ten years ago. For example, in 1998, the Society & Media-institute released *Ljusnande Framtid*, an anthology that sought to

find patterns within the evolving Swedish newspaper industry. To analyze trends and predict a future within a fluctuating industry is difficult, but I must point out that the book falls short for it rejects the user and concludes that the fate of the industry lies solely in the hands of the corporations (Hedman, 1998) and misinterprets statistics when claiming that “the habitual reading [of newspapers] is on the up again, to the levels we saw during the end of the 1980's. The newspaper is thus again a medium for our time” (Lithner, 1998:143). The current situation tells a different story.

We thus have three various aspects that highly influence our department's evolving place-making, or, as I shall call it, its current process of displacement. As the time-space compression of production intensifies and becomes more integrated into the department's routines, and as new actors enter, compete and force Sydsvenskan to de/reskill their current professions, a new sense of place is emerging: A place that was not foreseen by the newspaper companies some ten years ago. Is place then evolving into something more elusive? Do we have to expand our original understanding of place due to the all-consuming time-space compression? And how does this affect the department's sense of stability? These questions will be dealt with in the following summary.

## 9.2 Summary

I have in this chapter tried to reveal how three aspects are influencing and ultimately destroying our sense of newspaper place. These aspects are: (1) an intense use of time-space compression through various tools, (2) consumers turning into producers and (3) different media actors that seek to act on, with and therefore affect Sydsvenskan's digital media department. How can we understand this and how is this affecting place-making?

Urban scholar Petra Kempf understand the postmodern city life as “a process by which place appears in the differentiating restlessness of the becoming of something and the fading away of something. Only then, only between these two circumstances, can a location emerge” (Kempf, 2009:157). Similarly, as physical place decreases in terms of importance for the production process, I argue that we can understand place as evolving with and through objects, technologies and actors. It is not longer suitable to signify physical entities with the signifier place – at least not in this thesis – for it reflects and is constructed through objects, technologies and actors that are not connected to its immediate context but through various virtual networks located in other times and places. *Place*, as a physical entity, is thus superfluous in terms of inhabiting qualified (or unqualified) and dense labor. The



consequence is for the staff members to cling onto the unstable (non-)place by accepting the conditions under which the new digital media economy is shaped. For, as this thesis has sought to establish, creating a complete understanding of a place as mobile, virtual and physical is an impossible task. The digital media department – its network of virtual and physical objects, technologies and actors – should be seen as a vast and ever-changing web of interactions whose components are never stable but rather *displaced* in time and space but still capable of affecting the production processes of the department. Consequently, as time-space will increase in scope, together with the consumers' increase in production of media content, I argue that a new form of expertise will and must arise for newspaper industries to maximize its own position on the Internet. This leads me to believe that a form of unique specialization is required in order for the digital media department to thrive and separate itself from other media actors and companies that are growing increasingly similar. How this can be achieved will be developed in the following chapter.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this thesis I have sought to find out how the digital media department at Sydsvenskan seeks stability. By using place-making as a tool for understanding how stability can be achieved I have reached a few points that I believe are worth discussing. Hopefully these insights can be of value for the newspaper. I also wish to generate new ideas on how to conduct research for the digital media generations. So, what have we learned? And what can we use? I will deliver three conclusions and, consequently, deliver three recommendations that I believe can be of value for the department.

In chapter 7 we investigated how objects and technologies interact with the staff members and the immediate environment. I concluded by claiming that the new and intense digital economy tends to hide or ignore factors it considers belonging to the past and thus deem them as useless. This is paradoxical because the department is to a very large degree depending on old and low-technology objects. This becomes particularly obvious when the department deals with processes such as spontaneous innovation, meetings and communication with external and internal actors. I argue, therefore, that the department should put more effort into organizing its internal and low-technology structure, mainly in order to be able to (1) implement well functioning strategies that enable the department to communicate easily with the rest of the company and external actors and (2) create an immediate environment that enables the department to encourage spontaneous and sporadic innovation. These two points are factors that are crucial for the department to be successful – yet the department excludes their existence due to the digital fetish on which the new media economy thrives. Is it then possible to develop strategies that are creative and more in tune with the material and the interactions that are actually in use?

The Scrum-method is an organized way of implementing this line of thinking as it includes physical and low-technology objects into its very method. It does however exclude innovation that exists in spontaneity by constraining the staff's time through its detailed schedule and, consequently, disabling spontaneous innovation and creativity – a moment in time that is, as we saw in my analysis, crucial for the development of the department's strategies and products. The only thing within the department that enables these interactions is the wall-poster-interactions. Similarly, when external and internal actors visit the department for gaining an understanding of the department's work, the wall is where the products are revealed and discussed. The innovation and the exhibition of their innovation are

thus quite similar processes. So what is it within this interactions that spurs and maintains these moments? Can the department extract and optimize these interactions? I argue that the department should develop a similar situation as the one they currently have but to extract a better and more well-defined strategy for the physical and low-technology objects on the wall. The current wall exhibits disorder and complicates the ability of visitors and staff members to make sense of and control their work. By creating a more accessible, logical and a more included wall-system in the everydayness of the office, the department would enable an easier communication process when dealing with internal and external visitors and improving the enablers that spur creativity and innovation. This hypothetical wall should host a well-defined organization of low-technology objects that gives the staff members or visitors a quick idea of what is currently at stake at the department. This would enable everyone to be able to understand, explain and contribute to the department's innovation. This a more social and demanding yet rewarding communication process – instead of the isolated and quite blinding innovative situation that currently exists within the department. It also enables the department to be able to reveal and perhaps persuade its current strategies to outsiders more easily – something that is crucial for either consensus building within the company as a whole or persuasion in terms of selling ad campaigns to external partners.

The second conclusion I wish to develop concerns the rather thick technological bubble that the department is unintentionally building around itself. My analysis revealed that the department is exclusively referring to their own (perhaps unfounded) expertise of the user rather than building knowledge that deals with the actual user of their products. This knowledge has transformed into a new sense organ that steers the department according to its very own – not the users' – philosophy. I argue therefore that the department should seek to see their products not as digital products per se but rather as digital products created for the users' everyday activities. The digital format is composed of zeroes and ones and the combination of these two creates the digital product. However, the users are unconcerned with these background details – one only deals with and cares for what one receives. This is an important conclusion because to be an expert of digital media does not necessarily lead to an expertise in human digital behavior – they are mutually exclusive fields of expertise. The discrepancy between the two are now perhaps obvious – but the failure to recognize the difference might lead to an ignorance in terms of user behavior, a factor that should play a key role for a troublesome industry that tries to keep up with a promiscuous group of users. The department should create for their users – not for their own justification of knowing the

user. So can we extract a new philosophy or method that leans more towards the actual user? What would that entail?

As newspaper companies compete with more and more actors, it is important for the digital organ that the department has produced to extend itself onto other milieus than its own. In our case, the department needs to incorporate a new habit of including the actual users into its reasoning. Currently, as we saw, the department gains its knowledge from past surveys and interactive courses stemming from psychological factors, but mainly from their own idea of how users interact with the department's products. I concluded by saying that the department is the user par excellence. The department reflects and deals little – if at all – with how their users are actually dealing with their products. The only time the department communicates with the users is through indirect means, such as when the users post comment on the website or call the company's helpline. So how can the department extend its hand to the users and produce a more market-focused output?

I argue that the department should reach out to the users through other means than their actual digital products. In order to be ubiquitous – which must be seen as a process, not a goal – the department must seek the users in his and her actual doings. The general question that the department must pose and conform to is: Where and how is media consumed by the user? This question is different from the question the department currently poses: What is consumed according to other experts right now? I argue that the department should create an in-house platform that exists only for seeking knowledge and information about their own users' media habits and attitudes by applying continuous and perpetual user-tests, user-driven innovations and qualitative interviews in specific regions of interest. This is rewarding for their innovation of digital products, the recognition of their users' patterns and for the department's analysis of user-trends – factors that are crucial in order for the department to develop long-term strategies, increase its own stability and thrive in a fluctuating and uncertain economy. By creating this space that deals purely with these questions I do believe it can take Sydsvenskan to where the company wants to be – namely Sweden's most innovative digital newspaper. But this is only achievable if the digital media department dares to exit its own bubble and welcome its users into its creative process.

My third conclusion concerns the issue of place and the recommendation that follows is contingent on the recommendations above. How can we apply our knowledge of *place*? This thesis went from seeking a quite physical place to claiming the death of it, or *displacement*. In

a sense, the department's physical place devalued itself by simply adhering to the fluctuating nature of the market and its users and by adopting new tools for compressing time and space within its own physical office. These two factors have threatened our idea of place and made it more relevant to grasp digital media departments as displaced in time and space. Consequently, I argue, it is not of value to discuss the department as working according to the logics of the newspaper industry simply due to its physical nearness and financial ties to Sydsvenskan. There are, as I revealed, various physical processes within the department that support the claim that displacement is currently under way, such as through their outsourcing of their servers, their iPhone-policy and the multi-channel videoconferences with physically distant places. The threatening question is thus: As physical place becomes less important, and as media users becomes more promiscuous and well-educated in terms of handling and producing digital media, how can a department seek to excel and position itself while external and expert actors, arise and compete for the remains of the newspaper industry? The department can thrive if it gains and maintains (1) further independence within the company, (2) expert knowledge of its users by building an in-house platform that works purely with user-driven knowledge and (3) a clear and well-planned execution of its low-technology objects for the innovation and communication processes.

These generated insights were made possible by applying a set of theoretical tools onto new environments and discourses. Without the various theoretical concepts I would have been lost during my observations of the offices and the practices carried out and the discussions in which I engaged. There is therefore no doubt in my mind that my empirical material would have looked substantially different and be more difficult to gather due to the quite static work-space setting had I not applied a thick theoretical framework. With these tools I was able to make a very rigid place come alive by embracing events, objects and interactions I regarded as fitting my theoretical design. My conclusions obviously depend on the gathered empirical material and I strongly believe the recommendations I presented above would not only differ but be less concrete had I not designed and applied a quite dense theoretical framework.

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## 12. Notes

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<sup>i</sup> The SDS-group consists of Helsingborgs Dagblad, Trelleborgs Allehanda, Ystads Allehanda and Sydsvenskan.

<sup>ii</sup> I have changed all my informants' names.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://nuochsen.wordpress.com>