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The Birth of Distance: Communications and Changing Conceptions of Elsewhere

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> Reading recently a batch of rather shallowly optimistic 'progressive' books, I was struck by the automatic way people go on repeating certain phrases which were fashionable before 1914. Two great favourites are the 'abolition of distance' and the 'disappearance of frontiers'
>
> [George Orwell, 1944]

Proximity and Paradox

For many commentators the development of modern communications is defined by the increasing ability to compress time and space and offer instantaneous and undistorted connections between places and people. This essay subjects the easy assumptions behind arguments for the 'death of distance' and the emergence of a 'borderless world' to critical scrutiny taking two key technologies, the telegraph and photography, as illustrations. The telegraph laid the foundations for the spatial networks that provide the essential infrastructure for organising global commerce and security. By seeming to offer democratic and objective access to events, landscapes and faces, photography altered popular experience of biographical and historical time. The frozen moment of the photographic image became the basic unit of personal and collective memory, summing up experience like a proverb but with the exacititude of a quotation from reality. Our personal mental stocks of 'hundreds of photographs, subject to instant recall' came to operate as a vernacular archive that never closed and could always be added to (Sontag, 2003:22).

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the increasing potential to see and contact distant others has been greeted as the basis for new national and transnational settlements based on empathy and solidarity. Many observers of the telegraph's erosion of spatial distance shared the hope, expressed by one contemporary enthusiast, that because 'the different nations and races will stand, as it were, in the presence of one another' they will get to 'know one another better [and] may be moved by common sympathies' (quoted in Standage, 1998:98). This optimistic reading of the impact of modern media has been reproduced with each successive innovation, from the legend 'Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation' engraved above the entrance to Broadcasting House, the hub of the BBC's radio services, through McLuhan's vision of the 'global village' inspired by the early days of television satellite relay, to contemporary claims for the borderless commons of the internet. These assertions embrace an ideology of progress that casts technological innovations as instruments of increasing betterment. They prevent us from grasping the paradoxes generated by time-space compression.

In this essay we focus on two of these paradoxes. First, we want to suggest that the increasing centrality of photographic images in organising accounts of personal and national change over time renders the construction of historical

understanding more not less problematic. Secondly, we want to argue that the collapse of geographical distance has been accompanied by the expansion of psychological estrangement rooted in a 'culture of distance' that objectifies people and reduces them to data entries and typologies (Williams, 1990).

From its inception the telegraph was assimilated to commercial and security interests and employed as a weapon of control in which the powerless were seen not as potential participants in an enlarged communicative sphere but as workers, natives, enemies, or threats to social order to be contained and disciplined. Photography too was deployed as an instrument of objectification playing a key role in anchoring new systems of classification and separation. To understand why this obvious point has so often been missed we need to look more closely at prevailing accounts of innovations in media technology.

Innovation and Application

Much talk about technology centres on 'invention (the creation of a new idea) and innovation (the first use of a new idea)' (Edgerton 2006: ix), and looks for a defining moment that ushers in a new 'age'. London in 1839 suggests itself as just such a turning point. In July, the first commercial electric telegraph system, based on Charles Wheatstone's needle system, opened for business. It ran for 13.5 miles along the Great Western Railway line out of Paddington Station. Earlier that year Henry Fox-Talbot, spurred on by Louis Daguerre's unveiling of his rival system at the French Academy of Sciences, had demonstrated his photographic process to the Royal Institution. Daguerre's images were sharper but Fox-Talbot's offer of multiple rather than single copies proved the more attractive option and laid the foundation for the positive-negative process that dominated photography until the arrival of digital technologies. In telegraphy too, being first proved not to be decisive. It was the process developed by Samuel Morse, based on his code of dashes and dots, launched in 1844 with a 40 mile link between Washington and Baltimore, that became the international standard. These narratives of ingenuity, persistence and rivalry have proved deeply attractive. Analytically they present major problems.

First, by focusing attention on breaks rather than continuities they oversimplify the process of change. In an influential essay, James Carey argues that by permitting 'for the first time the effective separation of communication from transportation', the electric telegraph freed communication 'from the constraints of geography' (Carey, 1989:203-4). Though Carey does not mention him, this proposition was first outlined by Charles Cooley in 1894. Remembered now as a founding figure in American sociology, he had, at the time, just completed stints in government service, first at the Interstate Commerce Commission, of which his father, a distinguished Supreme Court justice, was the first Chair, and later at the Bureau of the Census. Originally trained as an engineer, he had gravitated towards the study of political economy and become interested in transport issues. Following an initial article on urban transit systems (Cooley, 1891), he produced a major synoptic essay on 'The Theory of Transportation' in which the divorce of communication from transportation, made possible by the electric telegraph, is pivotal to the argument:

[S]ince the introduction of the telegraph it may almost be said that there are no space relations. Space – distance – as an obstacle to communication has so nearly been overcome that it is hardly worth considering. In the transportation of material goods and persons such a result is inconceivable, and in this field the 'annihilation of space' must remain a figure of speech (Cooley, 1894:292)

By presenting the telegraph as an unprecedented innovation Cooley, and those who have taken up his argument, offer a history of events rather than unfolding processes. A longer view reveals a complex interplay between innovations and general developments in modern state and commercial formations. The idea of flows of information moving independently of physical transportation had first been operationalised in 1794, with the completion of an optical telegraph between Paris and Lille using rotating arms to send semaphore signals along a line of towers. This technique, which was widely seen as aiding Napoleon's efforts to coordinate his military and administrative ambitions, was extensively imitated and by 1830 European governments were operating a thousand towers (Starr, 2004:157). The system lasted for another fifty years with the last semaphore link, in Sweden, ceasing service in 1880. In economic relations, we can trace the separation of physical goods transportation from the records of transactions back to the development of double entry bookkeeping in the late fifteenth century (Durham Peters, 2006:147, and see Postma and van der Helm, 2000). This ability to do business on paper was fundamental to the calculations that secured capitalist relations.

If a broader historical perspective is obscured, claims of the annihilation of distance are exaggerated. The electric telegraph never freed itself entirely from the constraints of physical movement. As the Indian strike of 1908 demonstrated all too clearly, if the messenger 'boys', who delivered telegrams to clients in their homes and offices, withdrew their labour, the system ground to halt (see Choudhury, 2003). To avoid this various efforts were made to mechanise delivery. In 1853 for example, a 'pneumatic' link was opened between the London Stock Exchange and the City's main telegraph office, using pressurised air tubes to send messages. Other cities built extensive pneumatic postal networks. In Berlin, for example, the system stretched for a total of 400 kilometres. Opened in 1865, it finally closed in 1976. The conventional postal system also expanded. In 1894 the British Post Office relinquished its monopoly control over post cards, allowing private publishers into the market. The introduction of picture cards in 1902, coupled with same day or overnight delivery, created a message system that was cheap and popular and operated as the forerunner of e-mail as a way of keeping in touch and making appointments. It also accelerated the mass distribution of photographic images.

As the continuing vitality of the postal system alongside the expansion of the electric telegraph illustrates, innovations need to be understood in terms of superimposition rather than displacement. The introduction of a novel technology does not necessarily cancel out or replace existing systems. Rather it modifies the prevailing ecology of communications, setting in motion a series of collisions between the potentialities it offers and the requirements of various social interests. As Paul Starr argues, nineteenth century media technologies created 'divergent possibilities. They could expand social connections, increasing the possibilities of association, exchange, and diffusion of information, but they also created new means of controlling communication that the state or private monopolies might use for their

own purposes' (Starr, 2004:155). Examining how technologies impact on prevailing relations of power, and how these relations might be contested, is the central concern of a critical perspective.

The 'long' nineteenth century, which stretched to the end of World War I, saw the cementation of the three central institutional formations of capitalist modernity: industrial capitalism, nation-states, and colonial empires. Each was fragile and needed to be continually secured. As Marx had famously pointed out, by bringing workers together in factories and high density urban neighbourhoods, capitalism had created the ideal conditions for popular mobilisations against economic exploitation and social inequality. The stability of nation states was threatened by the spectre of civil war, by secessionist movements, and by imbalances and antagonisms between metropoles and provinces. Colonial empires were subject to insurrections and continually contested as the major western powers vied for geopolitical supremacy, a process culminating in the 'scramble for Africa' and the advent of 'total wars' involving civil populations alongside military combatants. Against this background, power holders at every level found themselves continually struggling to impose order. This required two kinds of resources. Firstly, robust systems of classification that identified possible threats and gave faces and physiognomies to potentially 'dangerous' elements. Secondly, workable systems of extended communication that supported the exercise of command and control over complex processes of manufacture, administration, and warfare, occupying increasingly dispersed geographical arenas.

Classification and Coordination

From an early point in its development, photography was mobilised to construct visual records of those passing through institutions of order: prisons, asylums, police stations, and consulting rooms. The resulting images, showing the sitters fully illuminated, often holding up boards with their name and/or number, confirmed the unbridgeable gulf between the 'power and privilege of producing and possessing' and the burden of being an object of scrutiny (Tagg, 1988:6). These myriad impressions formed the raw materials for new forms of social classification designed to identify threats and dangers, so laying the foundations of contemporary surveillance systems. As David Lyon has argued, surveillance 'sorts people into categories, assigning worth or risk, in ways that affects their life-chances. Deep discrimination occurs' (Lyon 2003: 1). Although mostly confined to bureaucratic files, the typologies these records generated also found their way into popular circulation through caricatures, cartoons and photographic post cards. In a situation where the majority of encounters in the new urban centres were with strangers, images played a key role in mediating sociality. With no other knowledge to go on, appearances assumed increasing importance. Narrow typifications offered a handy resource. The resulting stereotypes were further amplified by much early documentary photography. Observers set off for the slums of the great cities in much the same spirit as they embarked for the interior of Africa. Their photographic capture of the exotic working-class species inhabiting the urban jungles of the industrialised world was embedded in the same discourse of imperial exploration. The evolutionary temporalising of a primitive 'then' and 'there' as opposed to a civilised 'now' and 'here' became mapped onto the modern urban landscape, with entrepreneurial acumen and the seat of Empire coexisting with low-

life degeneration and iniquity. As an early technology of surveillance, the photography of social investigation and documentation appeared to provide stark evidence of this as it was viewed across the distance of the class divide. More broadly, every photographic portrait was implicitly placed within this social hierarchy: 'The private moment of sentimental individuation, the look at the frozen gaze-of-the-loved-one, was shadowed by two other more public looks: a look up, at one's "betters", and a look down, at one's "inferiors"' (Sekula, 1989: 347).

In colonial administration and early visual anthropology too, photography was co-opted into ideological constructions of 'primitives' and 'savages' who, compared with modern civilised Europeans, occupied a far distant temporal elsewhere. Through mass-produced postcards, images of the exotic Other provided by photography were widely considered to reveal racial backwardness. In this way, photography was used to support evolutionist ideas of social development and eugenicist claims about racial difference. Spatial distance became temporal distance as images of 'primitive' peoples were perceived as representing a living early stage of human society long surpassed by the leading imperialist nations: 'savage and barbarous tribes often more or less fairly represent stages of culture through which our own ancestors passed long ago' (Tylor, 1913: 388). Culture became temporally coded in anthropology's 'denial of coevalness' or temporal co-presence to its referent (Fabian, 1983: 26, 31). In modernising nations photographs of the primitivised Other were viewed in contradistinction to industrial and technological advance, with photography itself considered as clear proof of that advance.

Photography's claim to offer a complete and disinterested capture of the world as it appeared in front of the lens provided a general metaphor for objective observation that was taken up by journalists and early social scientists eager to demonstrate their professional credentials. By claiming to be human cameras, manufacturing evidence untainted by personal values or commitments, these new social investigators presented themselves as servants of science rather than ideology. But objectivity all too easily became objectification, stripping those observed of their agency and subjectivity and repositioning them as problems to be worked on. The physical proximity entailed in photography all too often produced images that validated a new kind of psychological distance based on stereotypes of danger and destitution. This in turn opened the way for forms of administration and intervention that approached populations as raw data for risk calculations.

Electricity was widely regarded by nineteenth century observers as a force capable of clearing blocked neural pathways. Medical and mental health patients were subjected to 'Faradisation', named after Michael Faraday, the discoverer of electro-magnetic induction, the basis for electric motors and generators. The electric telegraph was seen likewise as an agency capable of regenerating the global body politic. As Ezra Gannett noted in 1858: 'The world will be made … a great assembly, where every one will see and hear everyone else' producing 'a practical unity of the human race' (quoted in Sconce, 2000:22). Seventy years later, Henry Ford, witnessing the rise of cinema and radio, could still argue that because technologies of communication 'pass over the dotted lines on the map without heed or hindrance', they were 'binding the world together in a way no other system can [and] will soon bring the world to a complete understanding' (quoted in Edgerton, 2006:113-4). It is particularly ironic that this pious hope should appear in *My Philosophy of Industry,*

his apologia for the rationalisation of industrial production that he, more than anyone, had helped bring about. The reorganisation of the factory system depended crucially on the new systems of command, control and communication based on transnational communication networks that extended and intensified connections between geographically dispersed people, places, suppliers and markets. The same systems that Ford celebrated as the basis for enhanced connection and understanding were deployed as instruments of economic management and social control. From the outset however, there were tensions between the requirements of commerce and the dictates of security.

While Britain opted initially for a commercially funded and operated telegraph system, elsewhere in Europe governments concurred with the opinion expressed by the French minister of the interior in 1847 that 'telegraphy should be a political instrument, and not a commercial instrument' (quoted in Starr, 2004:159). Its potential value in coordinating troops was demonstrated by the cable laid across the Black Sea employed in the Crimean War (1854-6), though it did not prevent the logistical incompetence that dogged the campaign. The Crimea also saw the deployment of photography as a weapon. While Roger Fenton, armed with a letter of introduction from Prince Albert, was taking his carefully orchestrated shots of military leaders and camp life for public distribution, two serving officers were pioneering photo intelligence by compiling a dossier for the military files. It was during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 that telegraphy first proved its worth as an infrastructural resource for military of command, control and communication. Between 1853 and 1855, William Brooke O'Shaughnessy had overseen the construction of an Indian network covering 3,500 miles, and it was this resource that was later credited with 'saving' India for the English (Hills, 2002:5). The Military Field Telegraph established in 1857 continued to operate as an integral element in British campaigns alongside a civil branch dominated by traffic generated by government and international business interests (see Choudhury, 2003: 49-53). By 1875 India, as the main overland link between the West and the Far East and Australia, had assumed a pivotal role within the imperial and global trading systems. As the French discovered in Africa, another major arena of imperial conflict, rapid telegraph links bestowed considerable political and diplomatic advantages. When Lord Kitchener's expeditionary force, bent on establishing control over East Africa, encountered Major Marchand's rival army in the Sudanese village of Fashoda in 1898, it was Kitchener's access to the British controlled Egyptian telegraph network and the link onwards to London that proved decisive in securing an advantageous settlement (see Standage, 1998: 149-50)

It was in Africa too that the intelligence potential of the telegraph was realised. During the Boer War the British state established a special unit, Section H, devoted to 'monitoring all traffic using the two main submarine cables connecting South Africa to Portugal and Aden', and 'maintaining strict control over the civil land line cables' (West 1986:11). In 1906, its activities, which had continued after the end of the War , were taken over by War Office's military intelligence division which later became MI5, Britain's major internal security agency.

By the turn of the twentieth century then, the telegraph and photography had become integral to the emerging apparatuses of state surveillance and security. The telegraph in particular had demonstrated the indispensability of networked systems

capable of coordinating activities across dispersed sites of military and commercial activity, but both of these media were used in ways which distanced different peoples and cultures from each other, rather than binding them together and bringing the world 'to a complete understanding'. They were integral to increasing social control, objectification and stereotyping. New forms of distance were born out of the drastic reduction in spatial distance. These are easily overlooked by histories of communications technologies which concentrate on invention and innovation, rather than longer-term interrelations of old and new technologies and their spatio-temporal patterns of social use. In this respect, time-space compression is a techno-centric concept.

Time and Distance

There are further problems associated with the concept. They begin with the question of how time contributes to it. Although time seems to share equal weighting, it is space that is privileged. The temporal dimension is largely confined to a specifically space-oriented conception where the emphasis is on how time is compressed as messages cross space. Temporal compression is considered primarily in relation to the speed with which spatial barriers are broken down. New forms of communication are seen as enabling the crossing of space in less and less time than in previous historical epochs. What counts most is the rapid traversal of space, not temporal reduction. Instantaneity comes to means the disappearance of time, or the 'timeless time' which Manuel Castells (1996: chapter 7) claims as characteristic of the network society. This privileging of space characterises cultural theory more generally, as in Edward Soja's indicative claim that 'space rather than time hides things from us … the demystification of spatiality and its veiled instrumentality of power is the key to making practical, political, and theoretical sense of the contemporary era' (Soja, 1989: 61).

It may be one key, but it is not the master key. Contrary to this, we argue for a conception of 'elsewhere' as multidimensional, as not only a spatial conception, but also a temporal one, encompassing experiential senses of time and raising the question of how we relate to the notion of historical time or, in any given present, to the evidence of other times. If the past is a foreign country, how do we respond to its foreignness? As stay-at-home xenophobes, as package tourists or as watchful itinerants?

In this section we want to redress the privileging of space in the concept of time-space compression by attending to changing experiences of the temporal elsewhere. Photography demonstrates very clearly that the spatially-oriented annihilation of temporal distance is only one aspect of how new communications technologies from the later nineteenth century onwards are linked to changing experiences of time and temporality. These involve different ways of considering and engaging with time and the temporal elsewhere in ways which can again be said to involve not so much the death as the birth of distance, with the photograph involving the peculiar experience of some fragment of the past being both here and not here at one and the same time.

Before we consider this in more detail, it is important to outline at least three major consequences of playing down or ignoring the temporal dimension when considering new communication technologies in their social and cultural usages.

First of all, the emphasis on volatility, ephemerality and the collapse of time horizons in the time-space couplet means that our sense of long-term continuities diminishes and we become increasingly present-focused, ruled by the 'tyranny of the moment' (Eriksen, 2001). Time horizons 'shorten to the point where the present is all there is' and 'past experience gets compressed into some overwhelming present' (Harvey, 1991: 240 and 291). Past images may be drawn on, but only for their contribution to an ahistorical collage of remediated elements of the past, primarily in the interests of ratings and revenue. This is part of the paradoxical condition of being surrounded with historical detritus while becoming increasingly dissociated from the past in its contemporary inheritance. The concept of time-space compression reinforces cultural presentism of this kind because of its emphasis on temporal speed at the increasingly ascendant point of 'now', so deflecting attention away from how technologies of recording and retrieval have over time contributed to shifts in the economy of perception and memory, and alterations in our sense of temporal location, movement and distance.

A second consequence of the privileging of space in time-space compression is that the relation of time to place is overlooked. While place exists in space, it is contrary to undifferentiated, levelled-out, global space in the ways it serves as a site for memory and belonging. Biographically and in relation to broader historical processes, the social experience of time becomes meaningful through place rather than space. The mystique of place is only a far extreme of what is otherwise a common feeling of attachment to particular towns, streets, landscapes. This can be reactionary and inward-looking, or exploited as fake heritage and historical façadism, but it can coexist with a more expansive outlook and may be a positive response to deracinated forms of cosmopolitanism. Time helps to configure place into a source of personal and collective identity and so becomes more significant the more people feel the world continually shifting around them. Developing such identity means turning space into place and investing place with a sense of temporal continuity. Photographs are used personally as a particular way of doing this in that they closely associate place with a continuous sense of self that runs counter to the experience of modernity's relentless change and disruption. Personal photos in albums or frames are associated with a sense of lived time and place. The paradox here is that time and place are always cross-cut by other times and places, either materially in the consumption of commodities and services originating at a distance or symbolically through the media representation of distant places and peoples. Individual, family and community uses of photography are not necessarily a defensive reflex in the face of this paradox. They are used in remembering as a way of helping to moor us in time, even if they also seem in this way to 'guard against the ravages of time-space compression' (Harvey, 1991: 292).

The third consequence we want to highlight is the conventional model of linear time that is invoked in either the sense of temporal speed across spatial distance or of temporal movement forwards in ever-increasing acceleration. It is at one with a sense of history as a continuous sequence of cause and effects leading ever onward from then to now. The relentless march of time proceeds under the liberal banner of

progress. Walter Benjamin contrasts this way of constructing historical narrative with another mode of engaging with the past which involves bringing historical moments or periods into alignment with the present and seeking elective affinities with the past. 'The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again' (Benjamin, 1970: 257). This alternative mode of historical narration is opposed to recreating the past as 'the way it really was'. It is an illusion that we can know the past in this way and so recreate it. It homogenises time, and empties it out by ignoring historical difference and historicity, change and the consequences of change. Instead, for Benjamin, to articulate the past means seizing hold of a memory 'as it flashes up in a moment of danger' (ibid).

Conceiving of history as in a continual state of emergency clearly made sense in 1940, while Benjamin was in flight from Nazism, but the past is remembered, experienced and understood in many different ways. What is more significant than Benjamin's conjunction of memory and alarm is his use of the language of photography to address the question of how we connect with and articulate the past. This was deployed in opposition to historicism and positivism which Benjamin understood 'as so many versions of a realism that establishes its truth by evoking the authority of so-called facts' (Cadava, 1997: 3). The irony here is that photography can be seen as closely aligned with empiricist realism, seeming to collapse temporal distance and bring a past event or scene starkly into the present, with all its so-called factual evidence. During the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photography seemed a vast improvement on human memory, infallible and flawless in what it recorded and reproduced. Its power lay in preserving something that was previously evanescent and carrying this forward over time with a claim to greater accuracy of representation than writing, painting or statuary. As well as altering the relation of images to time and temporal movement, photography freed visual signs from the human body, overcame the blindness of writing, and appeared to offer precise copies rather than an idealised version of the original. Despite the advent of digitally manipulated images, photographic realism continues to provide a key criterion of representational precision. What does this mean for our relationship to the photographic image over the distance of time? If we now look at a photograph of a street scene, or an individual portrait, from the late-nineteenth century, have we in fact been brought psychologically close-up to the past? Telegraphy and telephony produced simultaneity across spatial distances, but can we say that photography provides simultaneity across temporal distances?

While few people believe that the camera never lies, it is still widely felt that photographs maintain a strict fidelity to what they show. But even when not consciously stylised, what does a historical photograph actually show, and what does it convey across distance in time? There are various ways to address these questions. Personal photographs, as we've mentioned, relate to our own memories and speak to our own experiences of place, time and the passage of time, whereas most historical photographs we encounter bear little if any relation to our own experiences and memories. What we negotiate is the image alone or the image with reference to other images. It is when other associations are stripped away that we may become especially prone to the ultra-naturalist seduction of the photograph, seeing its capture of an event or group of people in one temporal fragment and taking its apparent indexical veracity as the cue for wanting passionately to know what led to and from

the event, who these people were and what happened to them. There are cases when we do not and cannot know. The photograph seems to be a direct imprint of a past event or scene, but it remains silent, locked inside its historical otherness. This increases our awareness of distance across time and the impossibility of travelling back to the moment when these people were alive, standing there in this setting, or when this event was fixed and flung up out of a lost sequence and range, becoming ever more attenuated in meaning as it moves across time. Photography monumentalises temporal fragments and tells us nothing of how to conceive of duration or how to negotiate the irreducible distance between then and now.

This doesn't mean that photographs are of no worth as historical evidence. Our point is that what seems most obvious about them as evidence is actually what is most problematic. Their stark claim to provide indexical links to the past – their emphatic quality of 'as it really was' – should make us suspicious of what exactly they seem exactly to represent and communicate, while the distance between then and now that is concealed by this claim should be the very starting point of our interpretation of them.

As we saw earlier with the relations between mechanically recorded images, colonial administration and urban documentation, temporal distance has not always been concealed by photographic realism. The influence of ideological values on photographic evidence is perhaps easier to see with the benefit of historical hindsight, as we try to dissociate how we see an image now from how it may have been seen in the past. That move should remind us of the provisional and partial nature of all interpretation, and especially of evidence which seems to deny the need for interpretation. It is this apparent denial which underwrites the pathos of expecting any communications medium to produce definitive contact, whether across time or space.

John Durham Peters makes the point that new media of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, 'claiming to bring us closer, only made communication seem much more impossible' (Peters, 2000: 143). The two new media of this period we have focused on show that just as much as abolishing spatial distance, they were intimately bound up with the development of a new culture of distance associated with objectification, classification and containment as means of maintaining social and imperial order. This has formed the basis of modern systems of command and control, security and surveillance. The psychological estrangement intrinsic to this culture of distance is arguably of much greater historical significance than the spatial compression generated by new media. Such media have also been associated with changing experiences of temporality and the possibilities of communication across time. Photography may seem to foster and enhance these possibilities, but a photograph on its own confounds communication precisely because it gives an image without a story, an instant without a duration. Its apparent technological fidelity to its referent seems to immortalise what it represents and so transcend temporal distance and historical difference. We do not and can not commune with the past in this way. Distance remains an insuperable barrier. In this sense new media of this period increased recognition of a key aspect of hermeneutics, which is that the historicity of experience means that communication always occurs in and through distance (ibid: 150). Media communications are inherently distantiated communications. The time/space separation that is a built-in feature of the disjunctions between media production and consumption is exacerbated by the

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reproduction of media images from the past, across the distance between then and now. Once more, communications technologies were pivotal to the modern birth, rather than the death of distance, and this has made the hermeneutic problem of negotiating the distance separating different historical horizons ever more insistent. It is only through such negotiation that understanding the past is possible.

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