The Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives 1, no. 2: 84–97 (2022)

The Mediated Polis:
Love Thy Urban Neighbor?

Susan J. Drucker
Gary Gumpert

Abstract: Who is a "neighbor" and how has the language of the polis, neighbor, and neighborhood changed over time? Is there a duty owed to a neighbor or a city? How does a city speak and how do we speak of the city and neighbors? Each new medium of technology realigns the nature of community. The overwhelming dependence on technologies to make life easier is enticing. But technologies effect the uses and functions of community, neighborhood, civic duties, and obligations associated with being a neighbor. Viewing the ethical obligations to a city and to neighbors in a city, this article explores the experiences of city life and ethical/civic duty to place. It examines the impact the rise of the mediated neighborhood may have and considers how Levinas's view of phenomenology regarding a responsibility for "others" in urban settings can be applied to mediated neighbors.

Keywords: polis, neighbor, Levinas, social media, duty

The title is provocative, but its meaning can be meandering and confusing, so we begin with a definition of "urban." The *Online Etymology Dictionary* tracks the following evolution of the term:

> "[c]haracteristic of city life, pertaining to cities or towns," 1610s (but rare before 1830s), from Latin *urbanus* "of or pertaining to a city or city life; in Rome," also "in city fashion, polished, refined, cultivated, courteous," but also sometimes "witty, facetious, bold, impudent;" as a noun, "city dweller," from *urbs* (genitive *urbis*) "city, walled town," a word of unknown origin. The word gradually emerged in this sense as **urbane** became restricted to manners and styles of expression. In late 20c. American English gradually acquiring a suggestion of "African-American." *Urban renewal*, euphemistic for "slum clearance," is attested from 1955, American English. *Urban sprawl* recorded by 1958. *Urban legend* attested by 1980. (Harper, n.d.)

And then there is the matter of the "polis." And the "mediated polis," referring to the concept of the ancient Greek city-state. The "polis," as found in "metropolis" and "megalopolis" refers to an "urban complex" that is heavily populated.

It is the city with which we grapple. In our attempt to confuse you even more, we return to the *Online Etymological Dictionary*, which traces the word "city" to the Latin root *civitas*, originally meaning citizenship or community member and eventually relating to place in a more physical sense.

All of this should help us figure out the issues with which we are about to grapple because the physical city and the social city have become hopelessly entangled over time, to a great extent, due to the link between communicative technology, the physical conglomeration of structures, and the social nature of its inhabitants as they have become interdependent. The polis, the city, its neighborhoods, and its inhabitants are simultaneously dependent and interdependent. Does urban interdependence bring ethical obligation in communicative interaction?

The acceleration of media technology is not a novel concept, but its interlocked impact on the shape, form, and structure of the urban landscape requires further analysis. In our work, we often return to Victor Hugo's classic novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, in which the character of the Archdeacon speaks of the impact of Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, saying, "This will kill that," referring to the impact that the new technology would have on the power of the church, with less dependence on the extraordinary edifice, the cathedral, and the redistribution of power to the ordinary worshiper via the Bible ([1831] 1964, 174). The theme is powerful and indisputable, and we take from it several major principles—a few of which we would like to set forth today—that are particularly relevant to "The Mediated Polis: Love Thy Urban Neighbor?" The first is rather obvious—that is, *each new medium of technology realigns the nature of community*. Few would argue with this observable aphorism, but we think it relevant that we reduce it to the personal and the observable.

The authors live 1.4 miles apart in the same urban community of Great Neck, immediately outside of New York City. We generally gather in the Gumpert dungeon to research, plot, think, and write. We live in a community consisting of nine autonomous and independent neighborhoods, an area just adjacent to the City of New York on the north shore of Long Island. The nine villages include Great Neck, Kensington, Saddle Rock, Great Neck Estates, Great Neck Plaza, Kings Point, and Russell Gardens, and a number of unincorporated areas. The population of each of these areas ranges from approximately 2,000 to 10,000. Our daily email inbox generally includes a message from Nextdoor Kensington, a social media app (Nextdoor n.d.-c):

> **Fire Siren from Great Neck Vigilant Fire Cuttermill Road.**
>
> *I don't know who else this might affect. But my office is on the middle of Cuttermill Road almost directly across from the fire station at 83 Cuttermill Road. 4-5 times a day at least they blast off that loud siren. They are really ear piercingly loud. Sirens aren't even necessary in this era where everyone has an electronic communication device. They used to be needed to alert the volunteers. I'm very supportive of the fire department. They are heroes. But why can't they get rid of the sirens?*

From another person:

> **Driver needed.**
>
> *I need someone to drive my mom to her appointments. Most are on Lakeville Road near to her home. 5-10 miles away at most and are scheduled a week or more in advance. She is 92 and taxi or Uber services difficult for her.*

Some seek activism:

> **Last chance to speak out against 733-741 Middle Neck Road High Rise.**
>
> *If you missed the Village of GN hearing on this proposed building, and most people did miss it because it was held on a Monday afternoon at 1:30 pm . . . This agency needs to hear from you—those of you who could not be present . . .*
>
> *Details on where to submit remarks against the project are provided.*

Some reach out to introduce themselves, seeking connection:

> **Hi, I'm Cathy.**
>
> *Nice to meet you. Hi everyone, I am Cathy on Emerson Dive. Nice to meet you all!*
>
> **Hi neighbors. I'm Terri.**
>
> *Live in apartments off Grace Ave. in Great Neck Plaza.*

Some are personally revealing:

> **Losing a parent and then taking anti anxiety to sleep and then feeling worse.**
>
> *My Mother died and I was put in klonopin for sleep but now it seems it is really not helping......she was my only family and I am so down......anyone else go through this? I don't do well on anti-depressants but the emotional pain is terrible ...I have lost weight and have no other family......*

Yet another entry suggests a face-to-face meeting:

> **Need Cycling Buddy.**
>
> *Hi! I'm Sherry, looking for a bike riding buddy. I ride moderate to moderate fast. Love doing the 9 mile loop around great neck and open to other locations.*

There is a great deal of traffic on the site—sometimes even suggesting and perhaps arranging an actual meeting of its participants. Interspersed between the local interactions are sponsored items, both from the immediate area and elsewhere.

Nextdoor is part of a national movement, part of a carefully choreographed community vista. There are thousands of Nextdoors. Their information is intriguing. Their CEO, Sarah Friar, has written this:

> As a society, we have become worse at connecting face-to-face and building impactful relationships with one another. Belonging is a universal human

> need, and in every corner of the world today people are yearning to feel more connected with real people in real places in real ways. So, how can we work together to combat the social isolation we feel and forge a more connected world? (Friar 2019).

The Nextdoor community in Santa Cruz explains that

> Nextdoor's stated purpose is to cultivate a kinder world where everyone has a neighborhood they can rely on, and our mission is to be the neighborhood hub for trusted connections and the exchange of helpful information, goods, and services. (Alejandro and tcnsc n.d.)

An additional option is available to sign up to volunteer to offer assistance to neighbors who need it. Nextdoor consists of 226,000 disconnected neighborhoods throughout this country (241,000 throughout the world) that thrive through sponsored content and partnerships. "Neighbors in the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, and Canada are using Nextdoor to meet, gather, exchange, and share," according to the Nextdoor website (Nextdoor n.d.-a).

Nextdoor's income depends on local deals, sponsored posts, and neighborhood sponsorship. The venture is estimated to be worth over $2 billion. It is referred to as a "hyperlocal social networking service for neighborhoods," and it is based in San Francisco, where it was founded in 2011 (Wikipedia 2021). In addition, "[u]sers of Nextdoor are required to submit their real names and addresses to the website; posts made to the website are available only to other Nextdoor members living in the same neighborhood" (Wikipedia 2021).

The stresses on orchestrated mediated relationships manipulated by a giant puppet master help to further redefine neighborhoods as electronic entities rather than physical ones. It is more convenient and encouraging to connect with the next-door neighbor electronically rather than on a physical, face-to-face basis. Increasingly, notifications provide reminders that Nextdoor allows small businesses to run ads to reach new customers in their areas. Reminders of this option appear frequently. It is the expressed purpose of Nextdoor to bring its constituents together—as long as the concept of "neighborhood" is financially viable?

On a usual day of checking emails from Nextdoor Kensington, the lead posting proclaimed that "[m]ost of us are committed to the right and necessity to walk, alone or with others" (Nextdoor n.d.-c). Few, if any, would argue with that statement. We were curious, and we clicked on the "learn more" box, which took us to a post asking us to "[j]oin me for a neighborhood walk." The Nextdoor posting, in partnership with the #WalkWithMe movement, explains the connection:

> During this time of social isolation, neighbors around the world have found new and unique ways to come together and unite around causes they care about. Nextdoor instantly connects you with everyone nearby, providing a great opportunity to spark a conversation and build real-world connections.

> There are endless reasons to join the #WalkWithMe movement. (Nextdoor 2021)

#WalkWithMe began following the murder of George Floyd when a 30-year-old Black man from Nashville, posting on Nextdoor, indicated his concern about walking safely in his neighborhood.

> In response, hundreds of neighbors commented to show their support, reflect on how to create a more welcoming environment, and ultimately come out to walk alongside him. Shawn shared, "I was scared to walk alone and now look who is behind me. Look who has my back." Countless other neighbors across the country followed in Shawn's footsteps to start a nationwide movement. (Cohen 2021)

One would not argue the sentiments of #WalkWithMe, but the partnership with Nextdoor is curious, as the one is dependent on the commercial intentions of the other. Is #WalkWithMe to be taken literally? Or is #WalkWithMe simply a rallying cry of a movement rather than an actual physical opportunity to walk and talk with our neighbor? Is Nextdoor a "mediated polis"? Does it pretend to be a polis? Is the mediated polis nothing more than a noncommercial endeavor based upon algorithms that deliver citizens to advertisers? Is the mediated polis a way to produce wealth or a civic entity, or both?

The classic Greek polis represented the politics and public life of the community and reflected the relations between self and others. The polis was a face-to-face community. Every polis had its own set of laws, and its own specific gods, its own values. In *Politics*, Aristotle notes that human beings need certain material conditions that are not attainable by the individual; therefore, human association, the polis, becomes the natural way to meet those material and moral needs. For Aristotle, the polis emerged as a way to ensure human existence; it endures so that humans can live well. The polis provides identity and the social requirements for an ethical life.

The pace of our lives has accelerated, the complexities have multiplied, and reliance on the *technologies of convenience* has grown. Technologies of convenience refer to the attributes of all media to facilitate the transfer of information, data, and interaction. Tasks that required direct interactional and transactional face-to-face communication can be accomplished through an array of mediated options to suit individual preferences. These technologies enable the completion of jobs, chores, and responsibilities and provide the apparent choice to engage or avoid others.

The contemporary citizen weaned on the *technologies of convenience*, prior to the pandemic, has come to rely more than ever on these technologies to meet their daily needs in an era of social distancing and lockdowns. The overwhelming dependence on technologies making life easier is enticing, but they affect the uses and functions of a neighborhood. For some, they redefine neighborhood.

The pandemic has compounded the march toward these technological affordances as we were all forced to seek ways to manage our professional and personal lives physically distanced from our neighbors. With a possible "return to normal," does such reliance become permanent? What does this mean regarding

an ethical obligation to the polis/city? Does the mediated polis require different civic duties?

Whither Duty and Obligation?

A "duty to the city" has been proposed as the counterpoint to the "right to the city," theorized in 1968 by Henri Lefebvre in *Le Droit à la ville*. While widely adopted internationally, what this right entails has been a matter of debate. To Lefebvre, the right to the city "stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants" (Purcell 2002, 101–2). The right to the city is seen as a right to urban life. The right to the city involves two principal rights for urban inhabitants: the right to participation, and the right to appropriation (Purcell 2002). The right to participation is rooted in citizens playing a key role in decisions about urban space, while the right to appropriation "includes the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space" (Purcell 2002, 103).

David Harvey (2013), professor of anthropology and geography at the City University of New York, further explains the right to the city as "far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city . . . the freedom to make and remake our cities." The "right to the city" proposed that rather than markets, it was residents who had a right to the benefits of urban life. This echoes Aristotle's belief that the highest good was the virtue and happiness of citizens, and the purpose of the city was to make it possible for the citizens to achieve just that.

The "Duty to the City" was recently proposed by Carlo Ratti and Saskia Sassen in the context of the catastrophic effect the pandemic had on some cities. They wrote,

> The "duty" we propose is easily defined: If you have property in the city, you should not leave it empty. This would apply both to owners and tenants. The urban container cannot service without its contents; as the ancient Romans put it, the physical city, or "urbs," is inextricably tied with the community of its inhabitants, the "civitas." The duty to the city could be implemented through various actions, including new fiscal policies coupled with more flexible zoning regulations, so that real estate assets are swiftly and dynamically repurposed. (Ratti and Sassen 2021)

While Ratti and Sassen (2021) do frame the duty in economic terms, they expand their call to include a duty to invest in "living" capital." They note the social impact of property and the importance of revenue to the lives of urban residents for addressing issues of segregation and for supporting those contributing to urban vitality, such as artists and teachers.

This notion of the duty to the city has captured our imagination as something that transcends the financially based obligation suggested by Ratti and Sassen. Does duty to the city extend to the civic nature of the city, to the city as a community of others? Can this be translated to a duty to check on your neighbor?

A duty to keep eyes on the street in a Jane Jacobs sense? A duty to acknowledge others walking down the street, a duty of civility? To get vaccinated? Rooted in the polis, how are virtue and happiness attained and manifested in a polis living in the interstice between mediated and corporeal existence?

Does the "right to the city" confront the reciprocal relationship to responsibilities? It has been said that "rights are meaningless unless there's an actor with assigned responsibility for their fulfillment" (Chawla and van Vliet 2017, 6). Are there embedded duties flowing from "rights to the city"?

In *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*, sociologist Richard Sennett (2018) deals more with who drives a city as an ethical issue than what is ethical in city life. In one of the book's fundamental themes, he distinguishes between the French terms *cité* and *ville*. Sennett defines the *ville* as the overarching conceptualization of metropolis, and the *cité* linked to particular place and neighborhood. The *ville* refers to the built urban environment, while the *cité* connotes our urban life, experiences, and attitude to neighbors and strangers. *Cité* refers to a sense of consciousness.

This subtle distinction links to online lives or mediatized lives as we enter physical space constantly connected via smartphones and other devices. If *cité* is about sense of place, what becomes of the sense of place experienced through virtual visits, Google Maps, GPS, and walks glued to screens, or even traversing the city with others playing games or sharing the walk with distant others?

Sennet suggests in both his title and acknowledgments that this book is, in part, about the ethical dimensions of city life. Much as the polis is an organizational or administrative concept, Sennett's approach to this examination emphasizes the organizational, operational, and perceptual dimensions of a city over the human interactional. He frames the question early on in an intriguing way: "This is the ethical problem in cities today. Should urbanism represent society as it is, or seek to change it?" (Sennet 2018, 3). Later, he asks, "What, then, is to be done?" (4). Ethics is then left to what the driving force of city life should be. He moves us in an interesting and valuable direction. Can the conceptualization of the city as "the ethical city" help improve the quality of urban life? Are there specific "though shalts" and "though shalt nots" to guide urban residents? Should we think of ethical principles that can form the foundation of an ethical lens through which to evaluate situations and decisions as we navigate the hybrid existence of citizens of the mediated polis?

One is reminded of deontological ethics, "deontological" coming from the Greek word *deon*, which means duty. Duty-based ethics associates right or wrong with an obligation to do the right things, regardless of consequence. Citizens of the polis are responsible to others—they have duties, but are there such duties in the mediated polis, and, if so, do they differ from duties in the place-based polis? Does the mediated polis affect or redefine the duties of the place-based polis?

Duty to the other triggers an examination of the relevance of the work of Emmanuel Levinas, specifically his conceptualization of ethics. His emphasis placed on encountering others, which initiates responsibility for others, offers a valuable framework when considering modern relationships within the polis. For Levinas, the French word *autrui*, or other, is at the heart of the matter. Levinas's

concern was for interpersonal relations and the relationship of self to "other" persons. It is a universal "other" to whom duty is owed. The duty may be toward attaining diverse ends, including the duty to act ethically or, echoing Aristotle, toward increasing the happiness of the collectivity.

Levinas deals with space in so far as an encounter between the self and the other, which leads to an ethical imperative, is an "intersubjective space"—that space in which one relates to the other(s) (Levinas [1947] 1989, 48). This is a moral space "in which ethics (responsibility, reciprocity, proximity, collectivity and co-existence) frame and temper interpersonal, structural and political relationships" (Howitt 2002, 300). But "space is not merely metaphorical. Proximity to the other involves a face-to-face engagement with difference which Levinas insists must involve that 'non-in-difference'" (Levinas [1947] 1989, 124).

Howitt (2002) argues that "Levinas' language is strongly spatialized. Terms such as 'distance', 'movement', 'transcendence', 'space', 'height', 'dwelling' and 'infinity' appear often in his work" (300). Levinas points to the common lived origin, in the importance of *rapport de face à face*, or the face-to-face encounter, and deals with the concept of embodiment. Arnett asserts that Levinas is essential for those interested in communication ethics, and this can be further modified to reflect significance for the development of a mediated ethics (Arnett 2017). Phenomenological research has sought to address the shift from material spaces of interaction to virtual and mediated experiences.

There has certainly been a propensity by some, including the authors, to consider or dismiss mediated interpersonal communication as inferior or substitutional for the richer and more genuine form of face-to-face interaction (Turkle 2011). "Virtual communities are often critiqued for being 'thin' and 'shallow' lacking the depth that local proximity in face-to-face communities brings" (Introna and Brigham 2007, 166). This assumption relies on classical theories of face-to-face interaction and the role of space. Increasingly, it is the concept of presence that is consequential to understanding the lived experience, distinguishable from the embodied experience (Bracken and Skalski 2009; Hahn and Stempfhuber 2015; Zhao 2015). While this examination is beyond the scope of this article, it is certainly necessary to note the work examining what constitutes the conditions of mediated experience and the implications of mediated encounter with the other (Introna and Brigham 2007).

In extending Levinas's thinking, Introna and Bingham (2007) have introduced an interesting interpretation into the relationship of virtual interaction and the other, asserting that

> [v]irtual interaction . . . reconstitutes proximity such that Others—strangers—are simultaneously those far away and near us. In virtually mediated environments, the Other disappears from an immediate face-to-face encounter, but simultaneously appears on our screens in ways that cannot be ignored. This paradox of virtual proximity is productive for rethinking the concept of community more generally. (168)

They argue that a new formulation of community, an ethical community, can be found through the encounters with the other based on difference and the

uniqueness of the other (Introna and Brigham 2007). It has been suggested that our increased "presence in on-line environments challenges our tendencies to ground moral and ethical behaviours in face-to-face or materially co-present contexts" (Miller 2012).

We grapple with the moral ambiguity of the mediated interaction and the technologies of convenience. What does Levinas's view of phenomenology imply regarding a responsibility for "others" only encountered through mediated spaces? How far does this duty extend? Does duty extend to those nonhuman/virtual others?

It is not a long way from the polis to Nextdoor and #WalkWithMe. Nor is it a giant leap from the virtual neighbor to the matter of ethics and obligation. While the concept of the virtual neighbor has its benefits, so too do the limitations and drawbacks emerge. The financial motivation, a core feature, colors the experience, as does the scope of what is defined *for* the participant as neighborhood. The personal, perceptual conceptualization of neighbor and neighborhood has been a matter of study by diverse scholars and practitioners in such fields as behavioral geography and environmental psychology. The importance of differing perceptions has been associated with "mental maps" (Graham 1976). These are connected with the unique subjective experiences and images individuals carry with them of the external environment. This emphasis on individual perception explores the personal model of the environment or perception of neighborhood or area of interaction. The work of Kevin Lynch (e.g., 1960's *The Image of the City*) comes to mind. Research in psychology has revealed that "mental maps vary widely with nationality, region, ethnicity, gender, education, and socioeconomic class" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Media studies scholars have examined how exposure to mass media images of places and foreign cities can influence perception and mental maps. Photographs, movies, news reports, and social media all contribute vivid images, providing the means for individuals to create their own mental maps of places they may, or may not, have ever physically visited (Redi et al. 2018; Hollenstein and Purves 2010; Avraham 2000). Neighborhoods have been studied using this concept as a tool to understand and measure them (Ciobaun 2008). While some neighborhoods are officially delineated, the mental map rooted in the perception of neighborhood is consequential when evaluating who one considers a neighbor and what duty, if any, is thereby owed. Individual sense of neighborhood is rooted in experience and has a history. The boundaries of what one considers "their neighborhood" and, therefore, who they consider their neighbor does not emerge overnight but rather is the result of time, effort, and interaction.

Nextdoor, however, does the work for you, defining the boundaries of your neighborhood, or, more accurately, these boundaries are established by the first user or founding member, who can choose the neighborhood name. However, "Nextdoor reserves the right to make corrections to names and boundaries based on feedback from other neighbors or to adhere to Nextdoor's guidelines on neighborhood names." (Nextdoor, n.d.-b). Founders are told that "Nextdoor boundaries and names should, to the extent possible, reflect the traditionally accepted boundaries and names for a neighborhood" (Nextdoor, n.d.-b). While the

help center provides instructions for changing neighborhood boundaries, the default boundaries and name may well not reflect the mental map of users. Nextdoor Kensington, for example, straddles not only diverse neighborhoods within Great Neck but also bleeds into the next county and encompasses a massive private cooperative community. The populations, densities, laws, regulations, and tax structure there are quite different from those in Kensington, leading to a sense of cognitive dissonance or distancing from those "neighbors" encountered online.

The gradual ebb and flow of neighborhood events and interactions, planned and unplanned, intended and unintended, incidental and accidental create, and are created by, rituals. According to Arnett, "[F]from a Levinasian perspective, communication ethics is an existential burden enacted each day, by each person and responsive to each moment through one's own uniqueness of responsibility to and for the Other" (2017, 3). Each day in a place, to some degree, is ritualized and experienced in an embodied encounter with place and neighbors.

The ritual view of communication proposed by James W. Carey immediately comes to mind. His widely adopted definition of a ritual view of communication is "communication linked to terms such as 'sharing', 'participation', 'association', 'fellowship', and 'the possession of a common faith'" (Carey 2009, 15). This ritual view embeds the communication process in social relations along with traditions and is associated with the continuation of society over time. It is thought-provoking to consider the significance that Carey ascribed to conversation in his scholarly endeavors as he attributed much of his early schooling to talk to his neighbors (Pooley 2016). Throughout Carey's career, and his insights into ritual and public life, one sees the thread of his upbringing in a close-knit, religious, ethnic, working-class "community bound by talk" (Pooley 2016).

Yet, disembodied spaces created by technologies of convenience offer authentic encounters, with proximity playing varying degrees of significance. Nextdoor offers a disembodied interaction established within a degree of physical proximity. There are other interactional spaces in which there can be no proximity. How do you deal with duty and obligation in a disembodied interaction? Do enforceable, institutionalized rules substitute for the ethical duty owed in the embodied relationship, or does duty to the other transport to aspatial encounters with a newly conceptualized sense of neighbor no longer rooted in proximity?

Are media technologies invisibly connecting and disconnecting people from the place-based polis? Local businesses are supported with orders for contactless deliveries and curbside pickups—technological magic delivers the products. Are the options for connection to virtual neighbors maintaining and updating connection to place, or are the technologies of convenience detaching and disconnecting us from authentic experiences of place and neighbor?

Our work is rooted in a fundamental principle that every communication medium connects and disconnects us at the same time.

Sophocles once said, "Nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse." This aspect of the vastness of media developments and its implications leads us to the following mantras:

a. The more we extend our connection, the more insular or isolated we become.

b. The more we control our communication environment, the less surprise or chance is a daily expectation.

c. The more we connect, the more we seek to control the connection.

d. The more we detach from our immediate surroundings, the more we rely upon surveillance of the environment.

e. The more individuality we achieve, the less community of place we seek.

f. The more we extend our senses, the less we depend upon our sensorium (Gumpert and Drucker 2020).

To these we add the following axioms:

a. Each new medium realigns the nature of the polis.

b. The city consists of geographically-connected and media-connected communities.

c. Each polis, or community, is defined by connection and obligation.

d. Membership in the polis requires a set of ethical obligations.

The differences between mediated and direct experiences have become less distinct. Interactions and information are guided by the nearly invisible media influence of omnipresent algorithms. "The less apparent or obtrusive the medium is to the audience, the less evident is the influence of the medium" (Gumpert and Drucker 2007, 192). The plethora of *technologies of convenience* offer constant connection. Are the necessary media connections directed by modern puppet masters pulling the strings of the polis?

***Susan J. Drucker** (Juris Doctor, St. John's University) is a Distinguished Professor of Journalism in the Department of Journalism/Media Studies in the School of Communication at Hofstra University. She is an attorney and the treasurer of the Urban Communication Foundation. She is the author and editor of thirteen books and over 150 articles and book chapters, including two volumes of* The Urban Communication Reader *(Hampton Press, 2007),* Regulating Convergence *(Peter Lang, 2010),* Voices in the Street: Gender, Media and Public Space *(Hampton Press,1997), two editions of* Real Law @ Virtual Space: The Regulation of Cyberspace *(1999, 2005), and* Regulating Social Media: Legal and Ethical Consideration *(2013) with Gary Gumpert. She co-edited* Urban Communication Regulations: Communication Freedoms and Limits *(Lang, 2018). Her latest book is* Fake News: Real Issues in Modern Communication with Russell Chun *(Lang, 2020). She received the Walter J. Ong Award for Career Achievement in Scholarship from the Media Ecology Association*

in 2018. She is on the board of the Institute of General Semantics and the Media Ecology Association. Her work examines the relationship between media technology and human factors, particularly as viewed from a legal perspective.

Gary Gumpert *(PhD, Wayne State University) is Professor Emeritus of Communication at Queens College of the City University of New York and President of the Urban Communication Foundation. His creative career as a television director and academic career as a scholar span over 60 years. He is series editor of Urban Communication Series for Peter Lang Publishing. He has authored and edited books include* Talking Tombstones and Other Tales of the Media Age *(Oxford University Press, 1987),* The Urban Communication Reader *(Hampton Press, 2007), and* Regulating Convergence *(Peter Lang, 2010), and* Regulating Social Media: Legal and Ethical Considerations *(Peter Lang, 2011). He was the recipient of the Media Ecology Neil Postman Award for Career Achievement in Public Intellectual Activity, the Franklyn S. Haiman Award for distinguished scholarship in freedom of expression (NCA), and the Louis Forsdale Award for Outstanding Educator in the Field of Media Ecology. His primary research and theory agenda focuses on the impact of communication technology upon social and urban space.*

References

Alejandro, Victor, and tcnsc. n.d. "Santa Cruz." LocalWiki. Accessed May 10, 2021. https://localwiki.org/santacruz/nextdoor.com#:~:text=Nextdoor's%20purpose%20is%20to%20cultivate,information%2C%20goods%2C%20and%20services

American Psychological Association. n.d. "Mental Map." APA Dictionary of Psychology. Accessed March 9, 2021. https://dictionary.apa.org/mental-map

Arnett, Ronald C. 2017. *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Avraham, Eli. 2000. "Cities and Their News Media Images." *Cities* 17 (5): 363–70. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0264-2751(00)00032-9

Bracken, Cheryl Campanella, and Paul Skalski. 2009. "Telepresence and Video Games: The Impact of Image Quality." *PsychNology Journal* 7 (1): 101–12.

Carey, James. 2009. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Rev. ed., Abingdon, England; New York: Routledge.

Chawla, Louise, and Willem van Vliet. 2017. "Children's Rights to Child-Friendly Cities." In *Handbook of Children's Rights: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Martin D. Ruck, Michele Peterson-Badali, and Michael Freeman, 533–49. New York: Taylor and Francis.

Ciobaun, Cristian. 2008. "The Mental Map of Neighborhoods in Bucharest Introductive Study of Mental Geography." *Human Geographies* 2 (1): 25–34.

Cohen, David. 2021. "Nextdoor Encourages People to Invite Their Neighbors to #WalkWithMe." *Adweek*, May 24. https://www.adweek.com/social-marketing/nextdoor-encourages-people-to-invite-their-neighbors-to-walkwithme/

Graham, Elspeth. 1976. "What Is a Mental Map?" *Area* 8 (4): 259–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20001137

Friar, Sarah. 2019. "How Neighborhood Connections Are Helping Combat Social Isolation and Loneliness: Nextdoor CEO Sarah Friar on Ways Your Neighborhood Can Rebuild Authentic Connections and Increase Happiness." Thrive, July 22. Accessed May 10, 2021. https://thriveglobal.com/stories/how-neighborhood-connections-are-helping-combat-social-isolation-and-loneliness/

Gumpert, Gary, and Susan J. Drucker. 2007. "The Technology of Distrust." In *Communication in the Age of Suspicion*, edited by Vian Bakir and David M. Barlow, 189–201. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gumpert, Gary, and Susan J. Drucker. 2020. "Searching for the Communicative City." In *Communicative Cities and Urban Space*, edited by Scott McQuire and Sun Wei, 11–27. London: Routledge.

Hahn, Kornelia, and Martin Stempfhuber. 2015. *Presence 2.0: Body Staging in Media Cultures*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04365-0

Harper, Douglas. n.d. "Urban." Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed November 17, 2020. https://www.etymonline.com/word/urban

Harvey, David. 2013. "The Right to the City." Urban Age. Accessed April 19, 2021. https://urbanage.lsecities.net/essays/the-right-to-the-city

Hollenstein, Livia, and Ross Purves. 2010. "Exploring Place through User-Generated Content: Using Flickr Tags to Describe City Cores." *Journal of Spatial Information Science* 1 (1): 21–48. https://doi.org/10.5311/JOSIS.2010.1.3

Howitt, Richard. 2002. "Scale and the Other: Levinas and Geography." *Geoforum* 33 (3): 299–313. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(02)00006-4

Hugo, Victor. [1831] 1964. *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Translated by Walter J. Cobb. New York: Signet.

Introna, Lucas D., and Martin Brigham. 2007. "Reconsidering Community and the Stranger in the Age of Virtuality." *Society and Business Review* 2 (2): 166–78. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465680710757385

Levinas, Emmanuel. (1947) 1989. "Time and the Other." In *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand, 37–58. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Lynch, Kevin. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Miller, Vincent. 2012. "A Crisis of Presence: On-line Culture and Being in the World." *Space and Polity* 16 (3): 265–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2012.733568

Nextdoor. n.d.-a. "About." Accessed May 24, 2021. https://about.nextdoor.com/

Nextdoor. n.d.-b. "How to Create Your Neighborhood." Accessed May 24, 2021. https://help.nextdoor.com/s/article/How-to-create-your-neighborhood?language=en_US

Nextdoor. n.d.-c. “Kensington, Great Neck.” Accessed May 15, 2021. https://nextdoor.com/neighborhood/kensingtonny--great-neck--ny/

Nextdoor. 2021. “#WalkWithMe: Join the Movement to Build More Inclusive, Welcoming Neighborhoods.” *Nextdoor Blog*, May 13. https://blog.nextdoor.com/2021/05/13/walkwithme-join-the-movement-to-build-more-inclusive-welcoming-neighborhoods/

Pooley, Jefferson D. 2016. *James W. Carey and Communication Research: Reputation at the University’s Margins*. New York: Peter Lang Inc.

Purcell, Mark. 2002. “Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant.” *GeoJournal* 58: 99–108.

Ratti, Carlo, and Saskia Sassen. 2021. “The Case for a Duty to the City.” City Lab, March 1, 2021. Accessed March 9, 2021. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-01/to-build-nyc-back-better-target-vacant-properties

Redi, Miriam, Luca Maria Aiello, Rossano Schifanella, and Daniele Quercia. 2018. “The Spirit of the City: Using Social Media to Capture Neighborhood Ambiance.” *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 2: 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1145/3274413

Sennett, Richard. 2018. *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Turkle, Sherry. 2011. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.

Wikipedia. 2021. “Nextdoor.” Last modified October 23, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nextdoor

Zhao, Shanyang. 2015. “Constitution of Mutual Knowledge in Telecopresence: Updating Schutz’s Phenomenological Theory of the Lifeworld.” *Journal of Creative Communications* 10 (2): 105–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973258615597376