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Introduction

Ieuan Franklin

In recent years there has been evidence across the humanities disciplines of a growing awareness of the relevance of space and geography, often referred to as a ‘spatial turn’. This has been assisted by new geo-mapping technologies and the productive relationships between locative media and local narrative or testimony (for instance, oral, urban and social history), that have received some attention from scholars of new media. In recent years a fertile set of dialogues have also emerged between literary studies and cultural geography, ‘in which the valences of space and place are open to processes of contestation and reimagining’ (book description, in Alexander and Cooper, 2013).

The relevance of space and geography in relation to UK media, and particularly UK media history, has hitherto (and by comparison) remained largely unexplored, due in part to the prevailing interest in the discursive formation or ideological mediation of national and globalised – rather than regional – identity through the (typically centralised) mass media. Arguably, such work has also been subject to a historicism that privileges time over space. Broadly speaking, there is a need for a historically and spatially based approach to the chronicling of the interactions amongst media producers, ‘users’ (or viewers and listeners) and places, equivalent to such developments mentioned above. Current work on locative media and the network society risks overlooking historical precursors – forms of ‘vernacular’ media that explore and exemplify the interrelationships between media, culture and locale. Tina Askanius has remarked:

The insistent focus in contemporary social theory on concepts such as mobility, de-territorialization, networks, flow and the abstraction of space brought about by digital information and communication technology shouldn’t make us lose sight of the continued importance
of place-based practices and discourses for the production of culture. (Askanius, 2010: 342)

The edited collection *Regional Aesthetics: Locating Swedish Media* (see foreword), in which Askanius’s remarks appear, has made a modest but significant contribution to the ‘spatial turn’. The brief, but highly descriptive, chapters in this Swedish anthology deal with a diversity of forms of media (film, television, print media, travel writing and new media, amongst others) and ‘navigate us through a variety of media landscapes’ (Hedling et al., 2010: 9). This collection is conscious of both geography and history and provides a kaleidoscopic view of Swedish culture. Our own edited collection is partly inspired by the example set by this book, and aims to map out, through detailed but accessible and concise case studies, some key historical representations of ‘regional aesthetics’ by the UK media, thus providing a set of coordinates for learning and for future research.

Another Swedish influence was the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, who in the 1950s and 1960s pioneered the study of spatial diffusion – the movement of new ideas, products and services over time and throughout geographic space. In a world connected by instant communications and integrated into an international economy, ‘one’s sense of place might seem to matter less than ever before..., in terms of ideas, news, and the production and exchange of goods and services’ (Mahoney and Katz, 2008: x). Yet, as the chapters in this book attest, region and place have come to be even more intrinsic to people’s sense of self due to the disorienting and dislocating effects of this rapid cultural diffusion. It is then only a small step to the disavowal of the ‘discourse of globalization and the narratives it dictates’ (Askanius, 2010, emphasis in original) to which local identities are being subjected, and/or the reinforcement or development of a regionalist ethos; ‘a cultural effort which attempts to endow a specific region with all that is unconsciously its own’ (E. W. Martin, quoted in Baker, 1950: 19).

Our sense is that Hägerstrand had an early understanding of this, particularly apparent in an article he published in 1986 titled ‘Decentralization and radio broadcasting: on the “possibility space” of a communication technology’, which is a useful text for any scholar concerned with local, regional or vernacular forms of media. In the article, Hägerstrand distinguishes between two key principles of human integration and sociability: the territorial and the functional modes.

In the territorial mode of integration *nearness* is the supreme category and therefore thinking, loyalty and acting become highly
place-bound. Conflicts arise across geographical boundaries between neighbouring groups. In the functional mode of integration, on the other hand, similarity is the supreme category. Thinking, loyalty and action become of a ‘non-place’ kind and unite what is similar in function over wide geographical areas. Critical boundaries emerge between interest groups, whether these are made of up of subsets of the population or of professionals in competing sectors. (Hägerstrand, 1986: 8)

Hägerstrand goes on to outline how, until the advent of rapid industrialisation in the second half of the twentieth century, Sweden had been a largely agrarian and territorial society based around face-to-face communication. Since 1945, Hägerstrand argues, the functional mode of organisation developed globally, but to an exceptionally high degree in Sweden (10). Although Hägerstrand acknowledges that no one mode is ever completely predominant in any given society (there is a balance), he notes that the electronic media (in comparison, e.g., to local and regional newspapers in the Swedish example) have a heavy bias towards the functional.

More broadly, Hägerstrand’s article can be seen as a call for the reassertion of territorial integration into a society predominantly organised along functional lines, through the development and cultivation of local and regional media. This is by no means easily achieved, given the concentration of media ownership, the unidirectional and centrifugal flows of broadcasting and their restriction to what he terms ‘a limited class of communication leaders’. But several suggestions are made by Hägerstrand at the level of broadcast content, including the possibility of the integration of oral history and regional broadcasting, which ‘offers a great opportunity to establish a widespread tradition of collecting (and preserving) accounts about times past’ (25). Hägerstrand advocates not a reactionary or nostalgic ‘withdrawal to the museum realm’, but a strengthening of the role of the media in balancing old and new cultural elements and ‘increasing consciousness of place’ (25).

All of the chapters in this collection likewise display keen attention to the ways in which media (particularly local, regional and grass-roots forms) can increase consciousness of place, whether this means film (feature films, amateur film and educational film); novels; television (drama, comedy, documentary and educational series); music, radio and digital media. Collectively, these chapters build up a concept of regional aesthetics, interrogating the ‘relationships between the immanent
qualities of certain representations and the locations they were either received in, produced at, or depict’ (Hedling et al., 2010: 13).

The structure and content of the book

All the chapters in this collection are interested in the idea of self-identification or self-definition through regional aesthetics, and they pay close attention to the generation of meaning and identity through localised cultural processes that operate in spite of, or in resistance to, globalisation. As Heather Norris Nicholson writes in her chapter about amateur film and other ‘vernacular media’ in Yorkshire, which opens this collection, ‘[if] globalisation erodes local culture and produces more homogenised spaces and lives (Cresswell, 2006: 8), the particularities of place and individual experience offer reassurance and direction’ (18). The book’s first section, in which Nicholson’s chapter appears, is entitled Living on Location, and concerns the way in which filmic and narrative imagery can document, shape and mediate the meanings and perceptions of place over time.

Predominantly concerning roots, memory, class, mediation and a regional ‘poetics’, this section covers a wide range of creative forms, including art, theatre, radio, literature, film (amateur, feature and documentary) and television. The first chapter starts with a local film night at the Holmfirth Film Festival, in the Pennine hills of Yorkshire, where Heather Norris Nicholson considers how different representations of the area contribute to a local aesthetic. The chapter includes analysis of the BBC comedy series Last of the Summer Wine, the early films of James Bamforth and the extraordinary output of Wylbert Kemp; barber, writer, poet, playwright and painter, amongst other things. Norris Nicholson convincingly argues for the place of the amateur producer in our understanding of a unique and rich local culture.

Daryl Perrins examines three competing versions of Wales: Welsh Wales, English Wales, and American Wales. Various films have provided very different representations of Wales, including, most famously, John Ford’s How Green Was My Valley (1941), but also the first Welsh language ‘talkie’, Y Chwarelwr/The Quarryman (1935), and Paul Rotha’s documentary, Eastern Valley (1937). In these films, industrialisation, especially coal mining, is depicted either as dystopian and inhuman, or tied to a more positive expression of Welsh radicalism, chiefly depending on whether the Welsh community is represented and defined as y gwerin (the folk), or as working class. Darryl Perrins’ chapter is concerned with the way in which ‘outsiders’ have constructed a version of Wales influenced
by external beliefs and ideology, often as a rural ‘Arcadia’ despoiled by industrialisation. In exploring what he terms landscape as ‘national redoubt’ (42), Perrins provides an excellent survey of cinematic representations of the Welsh valleys, influenced by art history and cultural geography. Through the incorporation of the indigenous Y Chwarelwr/The Quarryman and left-leaning ‘outsider’ documentaries like Today We Live and Eastern Valley (both 1937), Perrins makes a convincing case that the tension between the pastoral and the industrial (characterising Wales as a place of contradictions), which has frequently been a central motif in cinematic representations of the valleys, long precedes the ‘watershed moment’ of How Green Was My Valley.

The chapter by David Forrest and Sue Vice is also concerned with coal mining communities and the tension, not just between pastoral and industrial, but also between the working and middle classes. Their chapter explores two pairings of texts; two television plays known collectively as The Price of Coal (1977) directed by Ken Loach and written by Barry Hines, and the novels A Northern Clemency (Philip Hensher, 2008) and GB84 (David Peace, 2004), all of which build up, in their careful attention to the social texture of life in the South Yorkshire region in the 1980s, what they term a ‘poetics of the North’. Forrest and Vice here employ Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘chronotope’, which can be described as a unit of analysis for assessing the aesthetic construction of space in literary texts via ‘spatial and temporal indicators’ (55).

The decision by Vice and Forrest to employ a cross-media approach is reinforced by the way in which the chosen texts, themselves, blur the boundaries between visual and literary media and their supposedly medium-specific tropes. In the case of the Barry Hines television plays, this is largely due to the intertwining of visual and verbal effects. The plays cleverly incorporate symbolic motifs into the vernacular language of their characters, all related to the imminence of danger and concerning the attenuated nature of light, sight, foresight and future prospects, both in relation to mining as an industry and to the pit itself. In the case of the pair of novels about the 1984–1985 miners’ strike, there is another kind of intertwining: with the inclusion of both direct (from the perspective of a lead character) and mediated witnessing (e.g., descriptions of television news), the strike is presented as a series of images and media fragments that are constructed and narrated within both a national and regional iconography.

The next section, entitled ‘Urban Subcultures and Structures of Feeling’ examines the city as a depository of memory and experience, exploring aspects of everyday life and popular culture in Manchester, Glasgow and
London. Several chapters make use of Raymond Williams’s concept of the ‘structure of feeling’ to uncover and describe the lived experience of a particular time and place. It begins with Peter Atkinson’s chapter on Manchester and The Smiths, which explores the iconic status of the 1980s indie band through a historical prism that sheds light on Manchester as a site of artistic independence and radical cultural production, particularly in theatre, radio and music. In doing so, Atkinson establishes a surprising, original and productive connection between Morrissey, lead singer of The Smiths, and Ewan MacColl, the folk singer whose talents encompassed activity in all of the fields of cultural production referred to above. Both men aligned themselves at key junctures in their musical careers with a distinctive regional aesthetic, and were strongly influenced by female artists active in reflecting this aesthetic via radical strands of theatre, radio, film and music: Joan Littlewood and Peggy Seeger in the case of MacColl, who was married to both; and Shelagh Delaney (who sent Littlewood her first play, *A Taste of Honey*, which was first produced by Theatre Workshop in 1958) and Kirsty MacColl (Ewan’s daughter), in the case of Morrissey. Both outspoken singers grew up in Salford as working class autodidacts, and quickly developed left-wing political sympathies. As Atkinson suggests, especially in the context of the politically charged and polarised eras in which they produced their first work (MacColl in the 1930s, Morrissey in the 1980s), both songsmiths can be regarded as highly individual pioneers and exemplars of what Mark E. Smith (leader of the Mancunian post-punk group, The Fall) has coined ‘prole art threat’.

Mary Irwin’s chapter centres on televisual representations of Glasgow, a city that like Manchester is also often noted for its ‘edginess’, dialect, music and humour. Unfortunately, as Irwin observes, Glasgow remains ‘consistently poorly served and little understood by national broadcasters’, meaning that the city is ‘frequently and lazily deployed as cultural shorthand for the most violent and deprived of UK communities’ (93). In other words, the cultural shorthand determines that edginess equates to violence, and dialect equates to ‘belligerent incomprehensibility’ (93). Irwin’s chapter is concerned with a BBC Scotland comedy series that, by contrast, presents a racy but nuanced and affectionate view of the city. *Still Game* (broadcast between 2002 and 2007) was set on the fictional Craiglang housing estate on the outskirts of Glasgow, and it revolved around pensioners Jack Jarvis and Victor McDade and their friends and enemies on the estate. As Irwin observes, the cast and writers’ own specific social, cultural and *familial* heritage as post-war working class Glaswegians is ‘reanimated’ through this series, which
combines mischievous humour with genuine nostalgia and affection for the places, icons and tight-knit communities of Glasgow – communities that have been lost or irrevocably altered with the dislocating and disorienting social changes of the post-war era. At the same time the series is not merely nostalgic; it presents a modern-day Glasgow distinct from the ‘edgy’ or ‘grimy’ Glasgow we have seen in many film and television representations; Glasgow here is full of green spaces and is ‘refashioning a post-industrial future from the industrial past’ (100).

It is perhaps Kris Erickson’s chapter in this collection that best embodies Massey’s concept of ‘places as processes’, composed of social relations (Massey, 1991). Influenced by situationist theory, the chapter examines the affordances of certain London-themed mobile apps in mapping out new topographies or virtual depictions of present-day London. In doing so Erickson devises a highly original methodology for analysing mobile apps, influenced by situationist Attila Kotányi’s quasi-empirical idea of assessing societies on the basis of their capacity to generate new encounters. For the situationists, the encounter encapsulates ‘authentic connections between individuals as well as their surroundings, in opposition to the routinised interactions that characterised most of life in the modern city’ (114). Erickson’s methodology, applied to several case studies of mobile apps, points the way towards future potential research directions, as does the concept of ‘anonymised geolocative matchmaking’ (113) via mobile apps. Exploring the ‘politics of technologically mediated urban mobility’ (106), Erickson’s chapter is characterised by a vital concern about how every aspect of our lives is influenced and surveilled by an information economy and a physical architecture that have authoritarian, hierarchical and repressive structures, implications and effects. In this context, situationist strategies based on psychogeography and the unplanned encounter offer a potential means of resistance, and Erickson implies that pursuing such strategies through geolocative mobile technologies (whether consciously or unconsciously) offers political opportunities to transform, in the words of the artist Stephen Willats, ‘the object-based determinism of our contemporary culture [into] a counter consciousness of self-organisation based on people’ (quoted in Kelly, 1997).

The third section, entitled ‘Broadcasting and Belonging in an Era of Media Scarcity’, focuses on attempts to give representation in British broadcasting to places and communities of various kinds, whether local, regional or sub-regional groupings (e.g., Bodmin in Cornwall; the Black Country of the Midlands); an ethnicity or diaspora (in the case of local radio services for the Asian community in Leicester), or a small
nation (in the case of the ‘national region’ of Wales). The section is organised in chronological fashion, with each chapter dealing with a different time period and with a different media organisation or sector, from BBC West Region radio in the immediate post-war era (Franklin), to ITV programming about the Black Country between the 1960s and the 1980s (Robinson), to BBC Local Radio in Leicester in the 1960s and 1970s (Khamkar), and finally to the work of Welsh independent production company Teleiesyn for the Welsh Fourth Channel S4C in the 1980s and 1990s (Sills-Jones).

Franklin’s chapter explores the post-war output of the BBC West Region, which, aside from its renowned status as founder of the BBC’s acclaimed Natural History Unit, has received surprisingly scant attention from historians and scholars, despite having also pioneered hugely successful and long-running programmes, such as *Any Questions* (1948–) and *The Archers* (1951–). Indeed, Franklin notes that there has also been a neglect of the post-war period of BBC regional broadcasting, as compared to broadcasting in the inter-war period. Franklin’s particular focus is on the early work of the radio producer, Brandon Acton-Bond, best known for producing the fondly remembered serial, *At the Luscombes*, and for his radio and television adaptations of Thomas Hardy. Acton-Bond’s early work included several radio features that featured extensive use of voices and sounds captured on disc-cutting machines at a time when recording and editing such ‘actuality’ was a difficult and time-consuming business. These features were longitudinal studies of a tiny community (Bodmin Moor, in Cornwall) and relied on close cooperation with that community. Franklin contends that through incorporation of commonplace social rituals in these geographically pinpointed programmes, Acton-Bond was endeavouring to create both a microcosm of the West Country region, and what might be termed a parochial ‘calendar in sound’.

All chapters deal to some extent with the incorporation of vernacular culture in media; particularly Julie Robinson’s, which takes us to the English Black Country, an area of the Midlands lying immediately to the west of Birmingham. This industrial region is associated with heavy industries like chain- and nail-making, and is a place where a unique and colourful culture has developed. Black Country pursuits included dog breeding and dog fighting, its dialect and humour long distinctive and vital. The representation of the Black Country on ITV programmes from the 1960s to the 1980s, most notably *Gi It Some ‘Ommer*, embraced a rich and distinctive cultural heritage in an unusually performative style of documentary.
The chapters in this section are, to varying extents, also concerned with efforts to overcome ‘democratic deficits’ in media networks and media representation; to increase diversity, or to, in Raymond Williams’ words, ‘disperse the control of communications, and truly open the channels of participation’ (1989: 30). This is especially true of Gloria Khamkar’s chapter, which uses interviews and archival material to build a history of the development of BBC Local Radio programming for the Asian community in Leicester, in the East Midlands. The patterns of migration and settlement in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s had an impact on both the local and the media landscape of this area (and of Britain as a whole). In fact, Khamkar provides a useful account of the transition from programming for the Asian community to programming by the Asian community, and also the augmentation of what in this context is sometimes known as the orientation function of broadcasting (providing information about local services, etc.) with indigenous entertainment (e.g., Bollywood and Bhangra music) and the connective function of broadcasting – connecting immigrants to news and events in their home country (for an example of the use of these terms, see Matsaganis et al., 2010: 58).

The narrative of regional revival is then concluded by Dafydd Sills-Jones; his chapter looks at the launch of Channel 4 and S4C (in 1981–1982), and the attendant growth of small independent production companies and film and video workshops, developments which, in the words of David Morley and Kevin Robins, ‘succoured real hopes and anticipations for the deconcentration, decentralisation and democratisation of the audiovisual industries’ (1999: 343). Unfortunately these hopes were largely dashed for reasons that Dafydd Sills-Jones systematically explores and explains in his chapter. Sills-Jones tells the story of the acclaimed Welsh independent production company, Teliesyn, which – between 1981 and 2002 – produced work for S4C, BBC Wales and HTV (the Independent Television franchise area in Wales and the West of England, now known as ITV Wales and West). Teliesyn were run as a cooperative and had a ‘horizontal’ management structure that encouraged maximum participation, both in terms of the running of the cooperative and the germination of programme ideas. Sills-Jones’s chapter adeptly captures the changes in the television industry landscape in the ‘post-classical’ era following the launch of Channel 4 (in 1982); from the somewhat anarchic growth of small independent companies and workshops, to a more commercially driven consolidated and transnational independent broadcast media sector in which the smaller companies died out or were absorbed by ‘super-indies’. Teliesyn shared the
cooperative structure and radical ethos of the film and video workshops, but it was staffed by programme-makers who had experience working in public service and commercial television: for a significant period of time it was able to successfully ‘weather the storm’ of these changes. As Sills-Jones explains, this was largely due to their imaginative and innovative output, which was regionally specific and informed by the feminist movement and the grassroots ‘history from below’ approach associated with scholars like E. P. Thompson.

The final section of the book is entitled ‘Borders, Devolution and Contested Histories’. The opening chapter of this section, by Chignell, develops some of the issues raised around the relationship between regional broadcasting, vernacular culture and democratisation in the previous section; and it also introduces the final section’s engagement with borders and with contested histories. In the chapter, Chignell chronicles the key political, thematic and creative tendencies and preoccupations of Sam Hanna Bell’s prolific radio career at the BBC Belfast. Bell, a novelist, short story writer and playwright, as well as a radio producer and broadcaster, was a man of many talents and of socialist convictions. In retrospect it is surprising that Bell gained employment and sustained such a long career at the BBC Northern Ireland, which was conservative in its tendencies, had very close ties with the Stormont government, and was extremely wary of provoking the ire of the unionist majority. One key factor that played in Bell’s favour was that regionalism became something of an ‘officially sanctioned ideology’ under Andrew Stewart, who arrived at the station in 1948. Bell was empowered to pursue his belief in the need to document rural dialects, folklore, folk song and other forms of vernacular culture, the broadcasting of which Bell clearly hoped would circumvent religious and political animosities in the focus on shared heritage. However, Chignell also takes a critical view by pointing out that whilst Bell’s programmes were subversive insofar as they refused to divorce Ulster from its history as a Gaelic province, and refused to distinguish between people on the basis of creed, ethnicity and class, they stopped short of criticising (or even acknowledging) the partition of Ireland and thus challenging the status quo.

Sam Hanna Bell was a regular contributor to BBC schools broadcasting in Northern Ireland, often writing and narrating radio scripts that were influenced by his own Ulster Scots heritage. To this end, for teachers and pupils alike, Bell’s input in schools broadcasting (and that of the poets and writers whose careers he fostered) perhaps helped to bring history to life while playing a small part in mitigating the religious and social divisions in the province – divisions that were reflected in, and
exacerbated by, the divided school system. The state, under the control of the pro-British Protestant majority, funded schools for Protestants, while Catholics had to make do with voluntary, largely unfunded education. The historical ‘narratives’ taught in schools were directly affected by this polarisation, with Northern Ireland’s Ministry for Education seeking to promote the region’s identity as part of the United Kingdom, and discouraging any references within the classroom to long-standing historical and cultural ties between Northern Ireland and the rest of the island (198). Ken Griffin’s chapter describes the early work of the pioneering educator and broadcaster, Rex Cathcart, in commercial television in Northern Ireland, and his attempts to ameliorate this situation in a more pragmatic and organised manner as compared to Bell, with his poetic and somewhat idealistic approach. From the late 1960s Cathcart made programmes that were distinctive in their attempts to combine geography and history and to correct or avoid the omissions and distortions that had often characterised previous programming made in alignment with a Unionist view of Northern Ireland. Cathcart used schools programmes to present ‘Ulster’ as part of the whole island of Ireland and not just a British outpost.

Mandy Powell also focuses on the use of media in education; in this case the use of the educational film in Scotland. In charting the considerable policy networks that developed in Scotland to promote the use of the ‘educational film’ – particularly between the 1930s and 1950s – Mandy Powell’s chapter makes a complex and incisive argument about the contribution made by educationalists, filmmakers and policymakers to administrative devolution in Scotland. Powell’s painstaking archival research uncovers the considerable linkages between education policy and film policy in regards to the exposure of young people to forms of cinema in Scotland; Powell charts the confluence between ‘jurisdictions, national institutions, local networks and policy arenas in a converged media environment’ (224) many decades before the idea of ‘media convergence’ was even conceptualised. The considerable body of practice and evidence built up around the use of the educational films in schools became an area of cultural policy in which Scotland could assert its distinctiveness and particularity. Therefore, according to Powell, it represented a cultural precipitant for political devolution. Such conjunctures underline the lack of historical awareness in the separation of oversight of media and communications (oversight of which remained with Westminster) and of culture (which was devolved to the Scottish Parliament), following the 1998 devolution settlement. Of course, this is a highly topical issue given the 2014 independence referendum and
current possibilities and uncertainties surrounding the future regulatory framework for the media in Scotland.

Simon Gwyn Roberts’s chapter provides a useful point of comparison between the Scottish and Welsh media post-devolution landscapes, with particular attention to newspapers. Although Scottish newspaper sales have suffered in the downturn, Welsh newspapers face a more existential state of crisis, as, according to Roberts, there is ‘no real tradition of a Welsh national press to draw on and the majority of newspaper readers [are] dependent on London-based publications’ (230–231). The uneven nature of the media ecology in Wales, and the uneven spread of Welsh language acquisition and use, have led to the exclusion of some areas of Wales in terms of, for example, journalistic coverage and fictional or documentary representations on television. Whilst S4C has a decentralist approach, it predominantly serves Welsh-speaking communities and, tellingly, there is not one independent television production company in the (predominantly English-speaking) north-east of Wales. Roberts deploys a cross-media approach (examining long-established local newspapers from Wales’ north-eastern border with northern England, and a short-lived Welsh S4C TV comedy) to demonstrate the significant omissions and compromises that have characterised representations of the north-eastern Welsh county of Flintshire. Roberts identifies this county as being not just geographically, but also culturally and politically, peripheral and marginal, given its lack of attention from the Welsh media. The attempt of the S4C television programme Mostyn Fflint n’aye to depict the county and its culture through the medium of the Welsh language and the dialect of Flintshire was a rare and innovative exception, but, in fact, the series was produced by a Cardiff-based company and did not run to a second series.

Roberts’ historical case study of the newspaper coverage of the Mold riots in the 1860s (from archives of the Flintshire Observer and the Chester Chronicle) perfectly exemplifies the tensions and negotiation involved in simultaneously upholding a political ideology and attempting to cater to a specific local or regional audience. In turning his attention to their current-day descendants, Roberts identifies a tendency to avoid engaging either fully or meaningfully with either regional specificity or with how the region has adapted to the new devolutionary political realities. Roberts suggests that, were they were to ‘grasp the nettle’ in this manner, such newspapers could potentially foster an interest in political issues amongst their readership whilst asserting their own distinctiveness – something of a ‘survival strategy’ in a competitive marketplace in which the future of local and regional newspapers is threatened by the Internet.
Roberts and Powell both appear to agree that the major constitutional changes achieved through the gradual processes of devolution in Scotland and Wales have not been matched by a realignment of the UK media. This provides a suitably topical note on which to conclude this introduction, as well as an opportunity to underline the fact that – to paraphrase the Swedish *Regional Aesthetics* collection (Hedling et al., 2010: 11) – although predominantly historical in outlook, all these chapters have been exclusively written and revised with the themes and concerns of the present collection in mind, and therefore have been conceived during a period in British history marked by major debates and shifts in geopolitical affiliation.

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