

# WORKSPACES OF MEDIATION: HOW DIGITAL PLATFORMS SHAPE PRACTICES, SPACES AND PLACES OF CREATIVE WORK

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how online platforms co-construct spatialities of fashion design. Advancing the notion of workspaces of mediation, the article interlinks research on the geographies of creative work with debates on digital geography. It demonstrates that humans, online platforms, and spatiality are interrelated and come together in the constitution of everyday spatial encounters and experiences. Applying methods from digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, on/offline participant observations, and an analysis of Instagram accounts were conducted. The article demonstrates that Instagram has become a powerful non-human actor that reconfigures (i) practices, (ii) spaces, and (iii) places of work. With the notion of workspaces of mediation, the paper argues that spaces of work must go beyond concepts of hybrid space and beyond the geotag. Instead, mediated workspaces are constituted as a complex entanglement of online and offline socio-spatial relations and practices.

**Key words:** Berlin; digital ethnography; digital work; fashion design; mediation; online platforms

## INTRODUCTION

*Lisa starts her workday. She opens the door of her studio in Berlin, takes a picture of the shop front, and uploads it to Instagram. Under the photo, she writes: 'Open studio today from 4 to 6. Come visit me and inspect the new arrivals'. She enters the studio, makes some coffee, and checks her Instagram account to get a glimpse of what is going on in the fashion world, what other designers are doing, where her friends are on holiday, and which of the latest posts from her favourite artists and bloggers she had missed. She scrolls through her Instagram feed and inspects the*

*latest collections of one of her favourite designers, posting from the Paris Fashion Week. She then starts sewing and makes final adjustments to the items her seamstress had prepared. She takes a picture of her workplace and writes 'working on your latest online orders', adds Berlin as a GPS reference, and uploads the photo to her Instagram account.*

This fictional vignette<sup>1</sup> depicts the increasing convergence of online and offline work practices and workspaces in independent fashion design that has been initiated by its entanglement with Instagram. The impact of online platforms and the way they co-constitute work

[Correction added on 4 February 2022, after first online publication: Introduction section was previously omitted due to production error and has been reinstated. The running head short title has been updated and the placement of Figure 2 has been corrected.]

practices and spaces today requires that the on-offline relations of work spaces and practices be examined in a novel way. In this context, this paper aims to advance the empirically informed perspective of *workspaces of mediation*. Against the background of the concept of spatial mediation, *workspaces of mediation* are defined as products of ‘multiple yet contingent comings-together of technology, people, and place and space’ (Leszczynski 2019, p. 18). Spaces of work are therefore assembled from relational connections emerging between on-offline work practices and the spatial on-offline connections co-constituted by digital platforms (Leszczynski 2015; van Dijck *et al.* 2018). The perspective of *workspaces of mediation* thus refrains from reproducing the commonly met presentation of online and offline as a duality, since it conceives spaces of work as formed online and offline in an interrelated micro-process (cf. Leszczynski 2015). In addition, digital platforms are approached as mediators rather than intermediaries. They are therefore considered as shaping social practices rather than merely facilitating them (van Dijck 2013).

I introduce *workspaces of mediation* to further understand the digitalisation of spaces of creative work and to connect existing empirical studies on creative work and digitalisation to theoretical considerations from research in digital geographies. The concern in research on geographies of creative work to understand online and offline relations in actors’ working lives (Bathelt & Turi 2011; Grabher *et al.* 2018; Gong & Xin 2019) resonates with the concern of studies in digital geographies to uncover the role of online platforms as mediators of space (Ash *et al.* 2018; Barns 2019; Bauriedl & Strüver 2020; Leszczynski 2020). However, the relationship between these two fields of research has yet to be established. This article suggests bringing these research strands into dialogue while expanding the literature on creative work by introducing theories of mediation to investigate the interrelation of online-offline workspaces.

The perspective of *workspaces of mediation* thus addresses the following research questions that remain unresolved in current literature: How do actors, such as fashion designers, use online platforms in their daily lives, and how is this transforming their work practices,

workspaces, and workplaces? More specifically, what habits of exchange, altered practices, transformed meanings, or altered connectivity emerge? How are digital practices and ephemeral online contents embedded in the everyday spatialities of work?

The vignette above draws attention to three dimensions of *workspaces of mediation* that the article considers crucial to comprehending how platforms mould workspaces. First, there is the dimension of *mediated practices*, which illustrates how online and offline practices are intertwined, complement, and mutually influence each other (cf. Leszczynski 2015). The vignette shows that having and maintaining an Instagram account, as well as posting on and scrolling through Instagram, has become entangled within day-to-day work (Hracs & Leslie 2014; Parry & Hracs 2020). Sometimes these effects are subtle, for instance when the designer is subconsciously inspired by a picture she likes. At the other end of the spectrum, the online-offline interrelations are more pronounced, as when the designer works on a request received from an Instagram follower in England who ordered an item from her online shop. Second, the vignette introduces the dimension of *mediated spaces*, which depicts how Instagram interlinks online and offline spaces with local and trans-local information. The vignette portrays a spatial constellation typical of independent fashion designers based in Berlin: they own an atelier with an affiliated store while, additionally, Instagram provides an influential digital workspace. The designers utilise the platform in tandem with their online shop and their offline store while announcing sales or events on Instagram. At the same time, while designers provide Berlin and their studio as spatial references online, the city of Berlin gains a digital shadow and online representation. Third, the vignette points to the dimension of *mediated workplaces*. This dimension suggests that daily engagement with online platforms changes what is conceived of as a place of work. The designer in the fictional vignette, for instance, engages with the platform in between other tasks. Also, pictures of family and friends on holiday sit alongside high-end photos from design colleagues. The dominance of online platforms and their demand for constant and often mobile engagement indicate that the need for an

actor-centred, everyday perspective increases when studying workplaces, because online platforms blur the line between work and private places (Brydges & Sjöholm 2019), they are accessed daily and mobile via the mobile phone (Graham *et al.* 2013), and they mediate and interlink an increasing array of practices in a variety of everyday places (Barns 2019).

The altered everyday situation, conflating online and offline components, has repercussions for research on places of work. To investigate the concept of mediated spaces of work, this study applies the approach of digital ethnography in order to research mediated spaces with mediated methods (Pink 2012). This approach allows one to understand the interrelation of offline and online processes in more detail. It thus goes beyond the analysis of the geotag (Crampton *et al.* 2013) and beyond conceptualisations of hybrid spaces (Leszczynski 2015), since it understands mediated spaces as socially produced on-offline spaces that blur the binary distinction between virtual and material spaces.

Overall, the article is organised into five sections. The first introduces the theoretical groundwork driving the study. Concepts of virtual interaction in the debate on geographies of creative work are combined with those of spatial mediation from the discourse in digital geographies. In the light of these concepts and in close relation to grounded empirical observations, a definition of geographies of mediation is obtained. The case, the research design, and the methods are then elaborated. In the analysis and discussion, three central themes emerge: (i) mediated practices, (ii) mediated spaces, and (iii) mediated workplaces. The article concludes with the notion of workspaces of mediation and describes the relevance that the perspective of mediation has for research on spaces of creative work.

## TOWARDS CREATIVE GEOGRAPHIES OF MEDIATION

Different conceptualisations of virtual interaction have emerged in the literature on geographies of creative work. To introduce a few cornerstones of the debate, virtual interactions are understood as occurring alongside

co-present practices, extending the opportunities for interaction. Accordingly, applications facilitating virtual interactions are conceived of as tools that bridge interaction between distant actors (cf. Bathelt & Turi 2011; Grabher *et al.* 2018). Along similar lines, authors highlight the role of technological tools in shifting socio-spatial relations and providing new opportunities for interaction in time and space (Lange & Schübler 2018; Brydges & Hrac 2019). For instance, work is no longer bound to an office space but defined by engagement with technologies that are available in a multiplicity of spatial settings (Richardson 2020). This then allows one to conduct creative work in more peripheral places (Brydges & Hrac 2019). What is more, digital platforms are often highlighted for the potential they hold to re-configure hierarchies and introduce a levelled playing field in which, for instance, independent fashion designers and established high-end labels can meet at the same level (Crewe 2013; Prey *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, digital platforms are characterized as additional spaces of work that spur new possibilities and introduce new forms of precarity (Hrac *et al.* 2013; Hrac & Leslie 2014; Parry & Hrac 2020; Repenning & Oechslen 2021).

Intending to expand upon the profound insights of these studies, this paper introduces the perspective of spatial mediation to further understand the digitalisation of spaces of creative work and to bring existing empirical studies on creative work and digitalisation into dialogue with theoretical considerations from the research perspective of digital geographies. The concept of mediation has multiple histories, genealogies, and applications, which I cannot fully address here; I will therefore focus on the concept of spatial mediation introduced by Leszczynski (2015).

The concept of spatial mediation suggests that there is no duality between technology and space, but that technology and space are interconnected since technologies have 'become firmly entrenched within the practices and spaces of the everyday' (Leszczynski 2015, p. 731). The spaces of everyday life are thus constituted by an interrelated process of human and non-human actors. The process of mediation provides a conceptual framework indicating the way in which our lived

realities are produced by ‘multiple yet contingent comings-together of technology, people, and place and space’ (Leszczynski 2019, p. 18). Spaces of work are thus produced, perceived, and defined by processual, interrelated on-offline, technological, and socio-material practices and experiences (Pink 2012; Barns 2019). In this context, Instagram is defined as an example of spatial media and an integral actor in the process of spatial mediation. The platform captures information, contributes to its circulation, and generates forms of mediated sociality and spatiality experienced as daily life (Leszczynski 2019).

Against this background, I recognise connective media platforms as central actors in the mediation of workspaces. I define mediation as the process through which the three dimensions of work practices, spaces, and places are co-constituted by the engagement with connective media platforms (cf. Leszczynski 2015; Rocamora 2017). To start with, under the label *mediated practices*, this article emphasises that connective media platforms co-constitute work practices. This happens indirectly when everyday perceptions and experiences are seamlessly shaped by representations on connective media platforms (Pink 2012; Leszczynski 2015; Bork-Hüffer & Yeoh 2017). For instance, Bork-Hüffer and Yeoh (2017) examine how professional migrants in Singapore encounter their host society in a multiplicity of physical and virtual places. They highlight that physical encounters in everyday urban life and digitally mediated encounters on online forums or on connective media platforms such as YouTube shape the perception of the host community jointly. In addition, connective media platforms shape work practices more directly, since posting practices have become an additional, routine work practice that is interrelated with socio-material practices. Digital platforms are thus considered as an additional virtual space of labour that introduces new opportunities and altered constraints (cf. Hracis *et al.* 2013; Hracis & Leslie 2014; Parry & Hracis 2020). Musicians, for instance, regularly maintain their virtual profile. The platform accordingly generates an extended workload as well as additional benefits, e.g. marketing, sales, and direct and more personal interaction with fans (Hracis & Leslie 2014).

Second, with the notion of *mediated spaces* I point to the influence of connective media platforms, whose mediation of space occurs indirectly through the provision of augmented online realities of urban spaces. These contribute to the perception of the local atmosphere and the actors connected to a particular place (Graham *et al.* 2013; Brydges & Hracis 2018). Posts are also anchored in the immediate surroundings of the city through the facilitation of geotags (Graham *et al.* 2013). There is a long-standing research tradition in geography of examining geotagged data on connective media platforms to discover the significance, history, culture, or economy of places (Crampton *et al.* 2013; Casadei & Lee 2020). Graham *et al.* (2013) therefore speak of the ‘emergence of the geospatial web’ (p. 466) to foreground the increasing utilisation of geocoded web content. Spatial online references are characterised by the coalescing of local information, web interfaces, and user practices. Additionally, they indicate that the everyday practices of urban life are mediated and directed by online platforms. They introduce the term ‘augmented reality’ to refer to unstable, context-dependent, and multiple realities coevolving in virtual and material experiences of place.

Third, the notion of *mediated places* of work indicates that connective media platforms broaden the sense and the form of what is conceived of as a place of work (cf. Richardson 2020). Innovations in information and communication technologies have introduced the fragmentation of work tasks. Accordingly, virtual tools for interaction reconfigure where, when, and how people work. Work tasks are divided up into smaller portions that are performed anywhere and anytime. In turn, work and private spheres are increasingly blurred (Schwanen & Kwan 2008). This mobile and instant online engagement is not restricted to the office but connects home and workplace (Schwanen & Kwan 2008; Brydges & Sjöholm 2019), intertwines perceptions of leisure and work (Parry & Hracis 2020), and blurs the lines between professional and private networks (Brydges & Sjöholm 2019). Answering to the expanding use of online platforms in daily life and the ‘need to remain mindful of these diverse registers of everyday, embodied

socio-spatial experience implicated by platform intermediation' (Barns 2019, p. 7), social and economic geographers increasingly rely on everyday perspectives of platform mediation to examine everyday practices and provide an alternative, fine-grained approach to researching place (Barns 2019; Bauriedl & Strüver 2020; Leszczynski 2020).

Recent articles have claimed that we live in a platform society, indicating that with the advancement of Web 2.0 and the increasing dominance of connective media platforms, platforms have seamlessly become part of an ever-increasing array of actors' everyday lives (cf. van Dijck *et al.* 2018; Barns 2019). They underscore that, in daily life, online and offline worlds are increasingly interpenetrating and that virtual platforms are seamlessly shaping situations and contexts (Ibert *et al.* 2021). Accordingly, platforms cannot be defined as merely a tool for virtual interaction or an additional space of work. Instead, the perspective of *workspaces of mediation* answers to the need for a perspective investigating the deep entanglement of online and offline spaces, and the active role of platforms and their particular characteristics in co-constituting everyday practices and spatialities of creativity and work.

In the following sections of the article, I indicate how the connective media platform Instagram has become immersed in spaces and practices of fashion design to illustrate how the platform co-constitutes work practices, spaces, and places of work. To this end, the process of mediation describes how humans, connective media platforms, and spatiality implicate each other and merge in the constitution of social, material, and spatial everyday experiences and practices (cf. Leszczynski 2019).

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

**Case selection and description** – This paper is based on empirical investigation of fashion design, a case that is widely explored in the creative-industry discourse as a paradigmatic case of haptic products that are charged with symbolic values (cf. Casadei & Lee 2020). Discussions on the impact of digitalisation

(Crewe 2013; Hracz *et al.* 2013), platform mediatisation (Rocamora 2017), and particularly the role of Instagram (Brydges & Hracz 2018) have also been initiated. Fashion design is thus a critical example for examining how online platforms co-constitute work practices, spaces, and processes of symbolic meaning making that will always involve offline components and that were previously researched mainly offline.

This paper focuses on the platform Instagram to explore processes of platform mediation. Among the constellations of platforms and digital tools that have become important for independent fashion designers, Instagram is particularly important as it is the central platform on which digital interactions take place. Instagram thus functions as an anchor for many online practices, bundling the interactions and bridging the way to other digital tools such as online shops, e-mail, or Facebook posts. I selected Instagram as a case study because all interviews pointed to its centrality in the fashion industry and to the crucial impact of the platform in their daily work lives. Furthermore, the platform relates to users' practices while providing specific affordances and constraints that are inscribed in the platform's algorithms and digital interfaces, and that are governed by the platform's underlying business model (cf. van Dijck 2013). Platform users can create accounts with individualised information and post square photos and videos in their feed and vertical 'stories' that remain online for 24 hours. More recently, the platform has introduced IGTV and Reels as video features. Instagram also provides pre-configured filters for modifying photographs and descriptions can be added to both pictures and videos. Besides these, Instagram supplies features for evaluating other users' posted content in the forms of like-buttons, comments, and follow-functions. Accounts that are positively evaluated by other users are further rewarded by the platform's algorithms.

Instagram represents a multifunctional platform that is intertwined with a multiplicity of practices in the daily life of the designer and is thus a critical case in exploring how daily practices and spaces are co-constituted by Instagram, to look at platforms in use, and

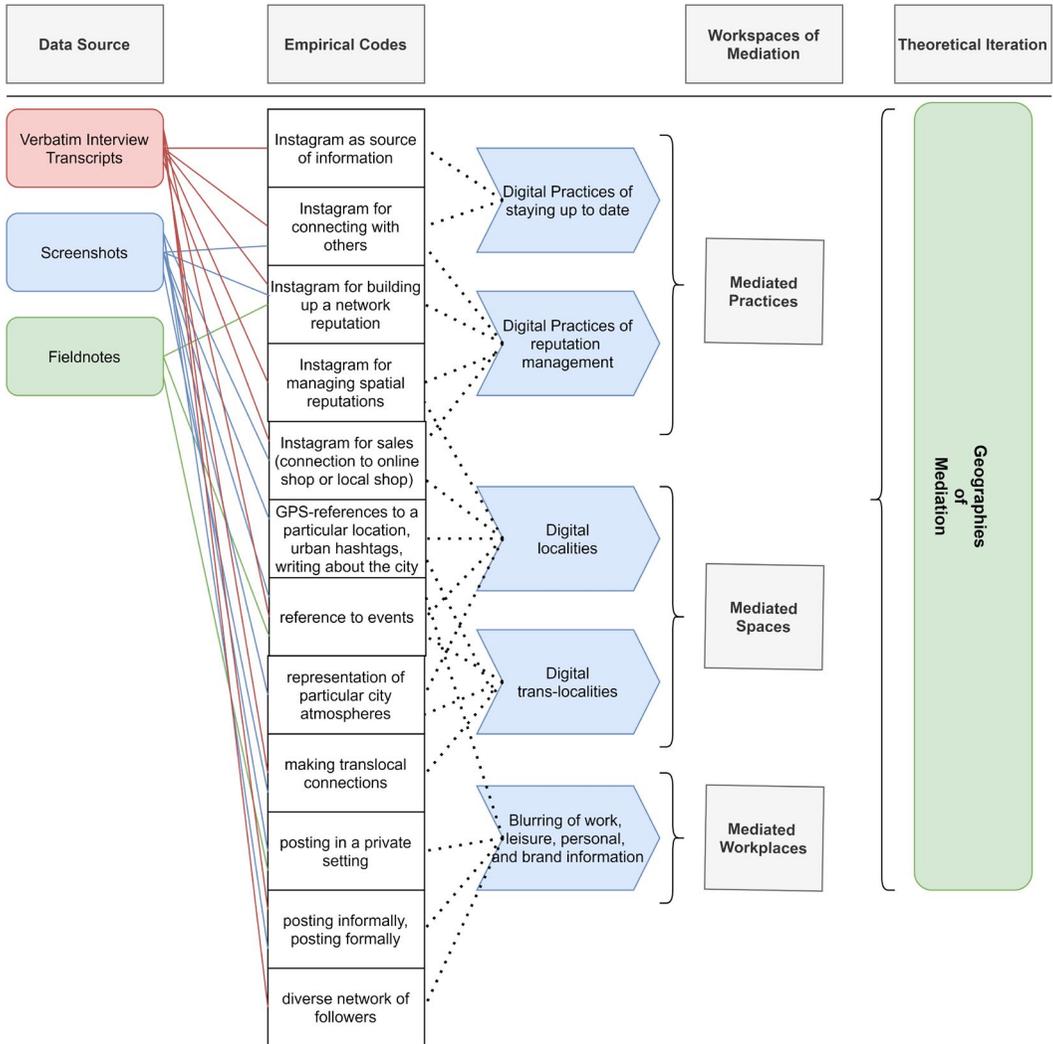


Figure 1. An overview of the empirical findings and the structure of the analysis. Source: own design.

to investigate posts as materialised practices. For fashion brands, having and maintaining an Instagram profile has become enmeshed with their day-to-day work. Posting on and reading through Instagram is intertwined with designing, producing, and marketing clothes (Brydges & Hrac 2018). Such online work can be seen as both an additional work task entangled with offline work, as an additional space of labour (Hrac & Leslie 2014), and as a space of leisure and pleasure (Parry & Hrac 2020). At the same time, Instagram

has become a digital business card that represents the aesthetic of a label. What is more, Instagram provides spatial information since the interface facilitates geocoded references. Users typically tie their visual representations to specific GPS locations (Yuheng *et al.* 2014). Accordingly, Instagram is a hybrid of a visual and a spatial media as it visualises daily design practices, forms fashion aesthetics, and connects these to localities.

Instagram’s presence in the fashion industry has initiated a levelling of the playing field

and an increase in the number of relevant actors. Small players and independent designers have the chance to reach customers directly and instantly, market their clothes, and build up a brand independently (Crewe 2013; Hracs *et al.* 2013; Brydges & Sjöholm 2019; Prey *et al.* 2020). However, the increased online possibilities come at a cost. Designers invest extra time and effort to manage their online reputation while operating in an environment of uncertain rewards (Hracs & Leslie 2014; Repenning & Oechslen 2021).

Independent fashion designers therefore fulfil the hybrid role of a designer, blogger, entrepreneur, and marketing agency at the same time. Instagram has become intertwined with entrepreneurial actions (Nambisan 2017), creative practices (Rocamora 2017), and leisure activities (Parry & Hracs 2020). Examining independent Berlin-based fashion is to some extent representative of the city's fashion-design scene as a whole, because Berlin is a creative breeding ground for many independent designers rather than a home of established fashion labels (cf. McRobbie 2013).

These considerations reflect Instagram's status as one particularly influential platform within a constellation of platforms and tools that independent fashion designers now interact with as parts of their mediated workspaces.

**The iterative process of data collection and analysis** – This paper relies on methods heavily inspired by digital ethnography (Postill & Pink 2012; Hine 2015; Pink *et al.* 2016). These methods allow the researcher to place themselves in the platform user's position and analyse the range of possibilities and constraints of usage that the user perceives. The paper is thus based on user-centred observations in the field and theorises on the basis of these observations. I conducted a total of nineteen semi-structured interviews lasting 1.5 hours on average. Ten context interviews were conducted in 2019 with professionals such as fashion journalists, fashion buyers, product managers, textile designers, social-media marketing managers, and fashion-design professors. Nine interviews were then conducted in 2020 with independent, Berlin-based fashion designers. The interviewees

were selected from newspaper articles and online blogs referring to these designers as typical or upcoming Berlin-based designers, as well as on the basis of recommendations from former context interviews. In addition, I followed the interview partners and the profiles they recommended on Instagram for the duration of 2020, documenting posts daily with fieldnotes and a total of 647 screenshots. I was connected to designers, fashion experts, local retailers, online marketplaces, key journals, local fashion events, and trend agencies.

In line with a 'non-digital-centric approach to the digital' (Pink *et al.* 2016, p. 7), I mixed and analysed the data while applying a qualitative content analysis of the screenshots, descriptions, and interview transcripts (Postill & Pink 2012; Brydges & Sjöholm 2019). This research framework allowed me to see how online platforms mediate practices and spaces from two perspectives. The offline methods enhanced the understanding of the online practices since the interviews allowed for reflection on how the online content came into being and with what incentives posts or comments were made, thus uncovering complex social processes that lie behind the online data. In addition, there was a natural connection between the online and offline methods. Throughout the interviews, for instance, interview partners referred to posts on their Instagram page that I had previously reviewed. They naturally took out their phone to show me a particular post and reflect on their posting practices and incentives. While I followed the designers' connections online, I also inspected new potential interview partners that I would not have otherwise chosen. At the same time, exploring the online field enhances one's insight into the frequency and character of materialised posting practices and spatial references. Furthermore, it gives the researcher an impression of what it is like to be exposed to fashion-related online content on a daily basis. By utilising this method, the article goes beyond the analysis of the geotag and beyond conceptualisations of hybrid spaces, as it understands mediated spaces 'as a socially produced space that blurs the often-reproduced binary of virtual and material spaces' (Crampton *et al.* 2013, p. 132).

Figure 1 indicates how I collected and analysed the data in an iterative process, contrasting and testing preliminary hypotheses by switching between online and offline data, and theoretical and empirical material (cf. Mayring 2012). After developing first-order codes from the empirical material, I then combined these codes with spatial mediation theory in an iterative process through which the theory was enriched by the empirical material, and vice versa. During this process, some first-order codes switched categories several times. Furthermore, some codes have components of two themes. The sub-code for 'managing spatial reputations', for instance, lies between the categories of mediated spaces and mediated practices since it unites features of both components. The iterative process allowed me to develop areas of interest in relation to the field data gathered, to stay open to different research avenues, and to move between theory and empirical material, adjust the questionnaires, and combine theoretical analysis with further empirical exploration (Postill & Pink 2012; Hine 2015).

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS: MEDIATIONS IN THE FIELD OF FASHION DESIGN

**Mediated practices** – To illustrate how Instagram mediates practices of fashion design, I start by describing how the platform influences design practices in an indirect way. All interviewees describe Instagram as a source of inspiration. Designers use Instagram to keep themselves promptly informed about what is happening among their peers' labels or other people of interest. One interviewee says that it has never been so easy to stay informed about what is going on in the fashion world, and that it is very convenient to do so since he can instantly check his phone wherever he happens to be (Des\_07). In addition, designers utilise relevant hashtags or go from one page to another to find personal design inspiration. How Instagram is being used for inspirational purposes is best summarised by the following quotation:

It depends on whom I am exposed to and whom I follow on Instagram. Then I leave Instagram and go to their website, and from there, I go again to different places online

(...) I get caught where something is interesting (...) it emerges somehow. (Des\_02)

The designer illustrates how online inspiration takes the form of spontaneous, contingent, fleeting everyday encounters that start on Instagram but might end on a different website elsewhere on the internet. The designers state that online inspiration effortlessly unites with other everyday impressions. However, they also emphasise that these emergent online encounters can have adverse effects on their creativity. They describe the way in which they are unconsciously led in one direction by personalised algorithms, summed up by one interviewee as a 'replication loop' (Cont\_09). The replication loop entails algorithms guiding their design inspiration seamlessly in similar directions based on what they have liked or previously looked at online. Designers' constant exposure to other designers' work online can also raise issues concerning novelty, replication, and copyright.

Designers also describe the way in which networking practices are co-constituted on Instagram. They use Instagram to connect with other users, for instance, by taking part in an online community that has never met face-to-face. They follow fashion magazines, photographers, artists, other designers, and gatekeepers, making online rather than offline connections. One designer describes her online community as follows:

Influencers who work in this high-end segment know each other, observe each other and look at what others do. We joined the network and became friends with the community without knowing each other offline. (Des\_02)

The designers interviewed also describe forming a local community of Berlin-based designers that meets regularly offline, and who each simultaneously follows each other on Instagram to stay updated about the latest developments. In addition, designers follow former colleagues, friends, family members, or other designers they find inspiring or have met before.

In the previous two examples, I described how practices such as finding inspiration or building a network are indirectly co-constituted and impacted upon by the platform Instagram.

In the next part, I will look at how Instagram directly mediates work practices as it becomes an additional space of both labour and reputation. In the interviews, practices of reputation management were referred to as ‘new’ online work practices that have become essential if one is to ‘become visible’ (Des\_02), build a brand reputation in the field, and sell clothes by linking to an online shop:

It was seven years ago when social media got way more popular, and I feel that we were on that wave. And that really allowed us to promote ourselves. (Des\_06)

Related to this, online networks have become an indicator of a label’s reputation. One designer argues:

You can imagine Instagram as if you are in a club and you want to be seen with the beautiful and cool people. (...) It makes a difference who follows your account and which people you have worked with before. There are relatively small profiles that work together with terrific people. And then you have an excellent reputation. (Des\_07)

I observed a high number of posts in which designers refer to each other and tag magazines and colleagues in the field to grow their reach or to showcase their relation to ‘beautiful and cool people’, as Des\_07 describes them. The fashion buyer interviewed emphasises how she examines the label based on a combination of offline and Instagram indicators. Numeric digital indicators, such as numbers of followers, are often criticised by designers as powerful digital gatekeepers that do not represent a label’s actual quality. Yet fashion designers spend part of their working time presenting their label in the right way while working on building a good Instagram reputation and a representative network and number of followers.

**Mediated spaces** – This section will look further into the ways that urban spaces are mediated. The post below (Figure 2), by a sustainable Berlin-based designer, is an example of how the city is represented online. It features a familiar urban scene. Perhaps the designer took the photo on her way to work or during another everyday situation. The



Figure 2. Screenshot of a post referencing Berlin. Source: @NataschaVonHirschhausen.

post shows a green car in the background, a cable-junction box sprayed with graffiti, and stickers for climate activism. Above the box, she writes ‘climate for everybody’ and below ‘Berlin colour inspiration’. This post unites examples of how urban spaces are represented online. First, the designer makes direct reference to Berlin in the post’s sub-headline. Similar to geotags referring to particular locations within the city (e.g. Berlin Alexanderplatz, Berlin Kreuzberg), or local hashtags (e.g. #berlin #berlinstyle #berlinfashion), this is a way of anchoring the post in the city so as to reach the right local audience, sell the product, and profit from associations tied to the city of Berlin. However, the post goes beyond the geotag or the description in its depiction of Berlin. It also represents a specific atmosphere to be found in the city. In this case an informal, run-down, graffitied, everyday impression

portrays Berlin as a city next door, a green city, and a city of activism and resistance. Posts like these, or other impressions of Berlin, are posted online daily and provide digital shadows of locations in the city as well as of the city's atmosphere.

The designers have different strategies for weaving together, respectively, Berlin's spatial and their own design reputations in order to gain an authentic online image. Some designers use specific atmospheres and associations connected to Berlin in their Instagram posts and relate them to their fashion label's perceived image. When I ask a designer if I should be able to identify from his Instagram profile that he is from Berlin, he answers:

I hope so! That is what we are trying for. We always add a GPS location. (...) I feel that we are extremely a part of Berlin. And Berlin is part of us. (Des\_06)

He then explains how the interrelation of city images and design images helps imbue authenticity and gain him opportunities to stand out. Other fashion designers point out that they use Berlin in the name of their label and their instahandle, but that they are aware their design is not typically associated with Berlin fashion. That is why they want to change the perception of Berlin as a fashion city with their design (Des\_08). Other designers, however, think that Berlin is not perceived as a professional fashion city. One designer emphasises that her label competes at an international standard, rather than being from Berlin. Thus, on her Instagram account, she combines international points of reference and photos from trans-local fashion weeks with local impressions from Berlin:

It is not good advertising to show that we are from Berlin. Berlin does not support positive images of fashion. On the contrary, I would say. Nevertheless, we do not hide the fact that we are from Berlin. We always write that we are based in Berlin. So, everybody knows that we are from Berlin. However, many people are surprised. They think we are from Scandinavia or Italy. We have an international image. We also cultivate that. (Des\_02)

Events provide another example of digitally mediated space in the city, since they no

longer rely on purely offline interactions, but are shadowed by online content. Locally embedded events such as pop-up shops, markets, or fashion weeks have gained importance because they provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction and digital engagement (Des\_09).

[At fashion weeks], everything will be documented, photographed, and posted immediately. (Cont\_09).

When the Berlin Fashion Week took place, I observed a peak in Instagram posts. Designers, organisers, and influencers all posted, referencing each other, and all tagging the local event to anchor their posts:

Thank you @designerX @fashionweekZ for an exciting cooperation @locationY. (Networking post from a fashion event)

The event itself is no longer only about being present – posting from the event has also become essential. Event-related posts range from the mundane, such as preparation of the venue and behind-the-scenes material, to posts capturing the atmosphere at events and to high-end posts presenting the latest collection.

At the other end of the spectrum, Instagram mediates trans-local connections and constitutes a new everyday translocality. The designers are in Berlin; simultaneously, the platform connects them with the everyday realities of distant people and places. Designers might find themselves taking more inspiration from fashion labels around the world than from the local scene in Berlin. Some designers describe how they follow fashion labels from Scandinavia, South Korea, Italy, and London online as a source of inspiration, rather than fashion labels in Berlin (Des\_01, Des\_02). As previously mentioned, designers have an international online network consisting of people they have never met in person, and whose progress they follow daily. A trans-local online network of customers also regularly connects designers to people outside of Berlin. For instance, one designer posted a picture of her latest online orders and described the way in which they would be dispatched to the various countries: 'USA, Canada, Australia, Italy, France, Spain,

Belgium, Denmark, Germany'. These examples indicate that the designers are exposed to trans-local information about what different designers worldwide, and what their local colleagues in Berlin, are doing. If we consider that the designer in question accesses this material while travelling around Berlin on the train, it becomes apparent that a complex online/offline/local/trans-local spatial entanglement is initiated daily.

**Mediated workplaces** – Finally, I will briefly point out how Instagram mediates the work place by blurring the boundaries of what is traditionally conceived of as a place of work, and how it includes an array of different places as work settings owing to the mobile engagement the online platform facilitates. I previously described how a post such as that shown in Figure 2 might be created on the way to work. However, when a designer sees graffiti on a junction box, takes a picture and thinks about when and how to post it, she is essentially working. Another designer illustrates how fluid the boundary between being and not being at work can become when mobile platforms that initiate reactions anytime, anywhere are involved:

I do the posting always a bit in between. I have another program where I can put together how the images should look. And most of the time I prepare it bored in bed already on Sunday morning. And then you have to give the post a title with text and hashtags, and then it's done. But then, when you've posted something, it's actually the case that you keep looking at it, 'Oh, who saw it? Who has liked it?' (Des\_07)

Instagram also blurs the boundaries between public and private, and work and leisure connections. Designers describe how their online network ranges from friends, friends of friends, family members, and former colleagues to customers, photographers, the press, fashion buyers, artists, and fellow designers. Accordingly, private connections are constantly mixed together with professional connections. In addition, I observed posts taken at home, on holiday, and at children's birthdays alongside high-end photos from the latest fashion show.

The boundaries between self-promotion and business marketing and between a professional and a private account were not clear cut. However, designers do reflect on how it is not always easy to merge work and private relationships, since different connections have different purposes.

## CONCLUSION: WORKSPACES OF MEDIATION

At the beginning of this article, I asked how actors such as fashion designers use online platforms in their daily lives and how this is transforming their work practices, spaces, and places of work. More specifically, I aimed to uncover how digital practices and fleeting online content is embedded in the everyday spatialities of work. In addition, I asked which habits of exchange, altered practices, transformed meanings, or altered connectivity have emerged. This paper draws upon mediation as a vital concept for grasping the on-offline spatiality of work. The paper points to how humans, connective media platforms, and spatiality implicate each other and merge in the constitution of social, material, and spatial everyday experiences and fashion-design practices (cf. Leszczynski 2019). The concept of mediation depicts the impact of online platforms as actors by describing how digital and material work are woven together and impacted by the platform. It shows how the platform's role goes far beyond that of a tool of interaction or an additional space of work. It illustrates, instead, how spatialities of work are constantly constituted by an interrelated entanglement of online platforms, humans, and localities. The paper identified the three dimensions of *workspaces of mediation* that indicate how platforms co-constitute work practices, spaces, and places in the field of creative work.

The first dimension concerns *mediated practices*. It indicates the ways in which the platform indirectly mediates practices such as searching for inspiration or networking. These practices are seamlessly co-constituted online and are woven together with other everyday encounters and experiences. Such networked practices bring benefits and constraints (cf. Ettlinger 2018). They are helpful for staying

up to date. The article has also illustrated, however, that engagement with platforms makes it more of a challenge to think outside the box and create something original, since designers are overburdened with information and ideas that are already in circulation. Additionally, the dimension of mediated practices indicates how platforms impact upon work practices more directly, since online practices have become additional work tasks. Platform representations contribute to processes of valuation and impact the potential for sales (cf. Hrac & Leslie 2014). In this context, numbers of followers are crucial online indicators that contribute to the evaluation of a label. The paper suggests that the practice of managing online reputations is a vital online practice, and shows that designers manage their network reputation, work to increase their follower numbers, and curate spatial online references to build up their online presence (cf. Brydges & Hrac 2018; Stark 2020).

The second dimension looks further into *mediated spaces*. The paper points out that posts have a spatial anchor such as a geotag, a place description, or a local hashtag (cf. Graham *et al.* 2013). It has also been demonstrated, however, that mediated online representations go way beyond the use of a geotag. Posted content illustrates the atmospheres of cities and contributes to the ways a city and design are perceived. While spaces are thus more than hybrid (Leszczynski 2015) or topologically anchored (Crampton *et al.* 2013), platforms contribute to spatial mediation since spatial online information is woven and circulates together with the perception of a particular place or an event and moulds the perception of people who take part in the event (cf. Leszczynski 2015). The paper illustrates that the way places are represented online depends on the way that the user wants to employ the city in the formation of their reputation. Designers will highlight certain urban atmospheres, for instance, and not others (cf. Brydges & Hrac 2018; Ibert *et al.* 2019). The example of events, the intense way they are shadowed online, and the fact that being at and posting from fashion events is part of what designers do, shows that platforms and their representations form what is perceived and performed as a local event

(cf. Rocamora 2017). Beyond an intense online web of localities, online platforms also mediate trans-local online connections. Connective media platforms have thus led to an altered, mediated translocality of the everyday: Distant actors and everyday representations of distant locations are seamlessly woven into daily interactions. They simultaneously stand alongside specific local connections and socio-material practices, and lead to an everyday situation where what I call 'mediated (trans-)locality' is the routine mode of operation (cf. McFarlane 2009).

The third dimension, *mediated workplaces*, indicates that platforms redirect what is conceived of as a place of work and a place of leisure. The mobile engagement with technologies at any time, in any place, and with anybody (business or leisure related) resonates with a call for a different approach for studying workplaces that 'is orientated less around the material division of space as a place for work or not, and more towards the capacity to define work as the operations of technology' (Richardson 2020, p. 360). Additionally, mobile, and frequent engagement with technologies indicates the significance of everyday perspectives on online and offline practices for studying platform-mediated places of work.

The mediation of online platforms foregrounds the need for geographers to address further research on how an internationally accessible, multifunctional platform infrastructure shapes the work situation, work requirements, and workspaces of actors at the micro-level. This research presents an in-depth study for the case of fashion design but is not restricted to this field. Future research could, for instance, analyse how politicians use Twitter and how this is changing their work practices, spaces, and places.

What is more, this paper sets the imperative for future research to combine qualitative online and offline methods, in order to research mediated spaces beyond the geotag, and to surpass conceptualisations of hybrid space. Since this paper contributes an innovative methodological approach and outlines its relevance to this endeavour, further, methodologically focused research is needed in order to extensively reflect on the way different methods might apply to different conceptualisations of

mediated space and what benefits and pitfalls their utilisation might entail.

Finally, mediation processes are evolving because I have engaged in a dynamic empirical research field. Different platforms and their applications might well emerge as the dominating practices of independent designers in the future. Further research at a later point in time will therefore be of interest for evaluating which platforms dominate the fashion industry, how platforms have changed, and what altered practices have evolved.

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#### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Although the vignette is fictional, it portrays elements observed in the online field and in interviews.

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