The Matrix of Modernity: 
Industrialization and Everyday Life
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Life in the "grid" or "matrix" of the modern world: the sociological phenomenon of Modernization -- the shift from agricultural to industrialized ways of life.
Modernization

• Rise of heavy industry
• Use of highly technological production methods
• Formal, abstract social relations (law, bureaucracies)
• Changes in everyday life: the feel and rhythms by which people live
• Modern media play a key role in all of the above
Mobile privatization (from Raymond Williams): increased mobility and increased privatization
Mobility

• life in a peasant village vs. life today

• 150 years ago: relations based on traditional social ties: religion, family, tradition, place: home is the village you were born in.

• today: life is uprooted, transient: home is where the heart is, but not where you were born.

• side effects: e.g., the lonely crowd
Privatization

• The creation of "private" lives: a focus on barriers against rather than connections with strangers

• Division between work and private life

• The home as a place to be away from others, not a geographical place

• Privatizing technologies: refrigerators, apartment blocks, indoor plumbing, cars
Mobile Privatization

• Mobility and privatization combined: the portable personal bubble

• E.g., cars: sealed-off private spaces that can go anywhere

• Suburban home

• Smartphones
The Connection Between Media And Mobile Privatization
Are we "alone together?"

- "The strength of weak ties" (Granovetter) and the Social Media debates
- strong ties provide intimate bonds, weak ties provide access to resources
- Extensive vs intensive reading (and relationships)
Milestones in Media and Mobile Privatization

• 1880s: first telephone exchanges in cities

• 1900-06: first Victrola, first Brownie camera introduce cheap, casual recorded music and photographs

• 1910s-30s: phone service begins to become common, Model T Ford

• Late 1940s: beginnings of 45 records, television, top-forty radio, and suburbanization of U.S. cities

• 1979: first Sony Walkman

• 2002: Most phones in the world are cell phones

• 2005: Facebook
Social Constructionism for Understanding Media

- Key aspects of the theory of the social construction of reality:
  - Social "reality" is true only in so far as people believe it to be true
  - Social reality is constructed and changed through the use of shared symbols (language, narrative)
  - Institutions exist because people believe they exist (e.g., money, the nation-state)
  - The relation between individuals, symbols, and social relations are reciprocal, interactive (not one-way)
Social Constructionism for Understanding Media

• Social constructionism applied to media:
  • Media deal in symbols, and thus help make modern social reality
  • Media institutions are themselves socially constructed (i.e., not outside society)
  • Contemporary media are in a period of re-construction, redefinition.
Structural Constraint and Human Agency

• “Structure” and “Agency” are core concepts of sociology

• Structure
  • Any recurring pattern of social behavior
  • Examples: family structure, educational system
  • Structure limits the human agency

• Agency
  • Intentional and undetermined human action
  • Example: students under an educational system
  • Structure limits the agency, but agency reproduces and changes social structure
The Case of Oral Culture and the Print Revolution
Oral Culture

• Interpersonal and group communication: the human norm

• Promising on a handshake vs. a signed check

• All interaction is face-to-face: speaker always sees audience

• Emphasis on dialog and memory

• The spoken word is powerful
Two stories of dissent

• John Wyclif: 1379, religion should be personal revelation, bypassing priests

• 1415, follower Jan Hus burned at the stake for heresy, Wyclif’s bones dug up and burned along with them
Gutenberg's Press and Bible, 1450s
Martin Luther's 95 Theses, 1517
Critique via the Printed Image: Lucas Cranach and Martin Luther's *Passion of Christ and Anti-Christ*, 1521

Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.

The Pope makes others kiss his feet.
The Print Revolution

• Writing and print allow communication between people who do not see or know each other, across both time and space

• One-way communication, no feedback; the first form of communication that separated the bodies of the communicators

• Allows for impersonal, anonymous communication: a world of relations with people you don't know
Galileo's Discourses 1638

Newton's Principia 1687
COMMON SENSE;
ADDRESSED TO THE INHABITANTS OF AMERICA,
On the following interesting SUBJECTS:
II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
III. Of the present State of American Affairs.
IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous reflections.

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THOMAS Paine
Common Sense 1776

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By a Free Thinker.

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Ethan Allen, Reason: the Only Oracle of Man 1784
Mary
Wollstonecraft
Vindication of the
Rights of Women
1792
A Model of Media and the Social World

Readers / Audiences

Social World

Media Message / Product

Technology

Media Industry

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Applying the Model: The Civil Rights Movement

- Media messages about the movement affect audience
- Audience interprets the meaning and significance of the message

Readers / Audiences

- Audiences use new technology to access media messages
- Specific formats of technology influence audience’s media use

Media Message / Product

- Industry creates messages about the event
- Norms of news influence media personnel

Technology

- Technology affects industry practices
- Industry makes use of new technology to cover the event

Civil Rights Movement

Media Industry