Media & Society Notes Packet #2:
Media Theory Comparative Roundup
Jour 485 Media and Society
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Lasswell:

Associated with:
    • Transmission model: one message goes out to many listeners, disturbed only by "noise" that can disturb transmission
    • Early propaganda studies
    • Hypodermic needle model: Propaganda is injected into us, and we have few defenses with which to fight it.
    • The idea that a society must fight bad propaganda with good propaganda: **"If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver."** (Lasswell isn't necessarily advocating this solution to what ails us, but he is describing it as modern society's response to its own increasing atomization—i.e., the use of mass media to counterbalance modern individualism and "willfulness.")
    • The idea that we must understand the workings propaganda in order to avoid being seduced by it.

Model of communication research: *Who says what to whom by what channel to what effect.*
Areas of study:
    Who: • Political economy
            • Creator studies (the creator's artistic aims, creative processes, social contexts, political/cultural predilections, and occupational pressures)

    What • Content analysis (social science)
            • Cultural studies (humanities)
            • Horkheimer
            • Lazarsfeld

    To whom?
            • Audience research / Reception studies
            • Lazarsfeld

    By what channel?
            • History of technology
            • Study of technologies themselves
            • Role of technology in our social, political and entertainment experiences

    To what effect?
            • Media effects studies
            • Lazarsfeld adds a crucial element to the mix: *How* is the message spread **after** media has broadcast it?

Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld & Merton; Lazarsfeld & Katz)

Identified with: "Two-Step Flow"—A corrective to the "hypodermic needle" model, two-step flow challenges the notion that media messages can easily transform the opinions and behaviors of audiences. In this model, media messages must be supplemented by person-to-person contact and discussion. Often an "opinion leader" within a peer group will either challenge or legitimize the media message, allowing it to take root and spread.

Narcotizing Dysfunction:
　　　　We consume media and have the false sense that in doing so we have *participated* in the social process, causing us not to *act* in the physical world.

Canalization
　　　　Traditional Lazarsfeld model: Identifying an existing mass preference, finding a twist, and creating a market. (My example: From a Hershey's chocolate bar to a bag of M&Ms).
　　　　　　Notion: That advertising is good at canalizing tastes, but propaganda has a much higher barrier for changing deep-rooted social mores
　　　　　　Critique: In some cases, the gestation period for change of deep-rooted mores is longer than Lazarsfeld and Merton were examining (e.g., they said that media attempts to reduce racial prejudice had been ineffective, but had they held on and looked at a 50-year timeframe, perhaps they would see that it was, in some way, effective.)

Modern "Niche" Canalization:
　　　　A campaign identifies a well-defined niche group and targets it with a particular narrative or information set. The members of the niche group then serve as the loudspeaker for the message, intensifying its hold on group members and in many cases reaching outside the group, perhaps even into the mainstream.

Lazarsfeld and Merton said that media messages work best when supplemented by face-to-face contacts. In some cases, this order is reversed: The mainstream media resisted covering Bernie Sanders, whose "democratic socialist" rhetoric fell outside the social-economic boundaries of corporate media. But when the Sanders message spread via social media and personal appearances, cresting into a series of rallies before thousands of enthusiastic followers, mainstream media increased its coverage. At the beginning, the coverage was sardonic but in time, again driven by the strength of Sanders' in-person appearances, coverage began to take his candidacy seriously.

Two-step flow
Lazarsfeld and Katz argue that media messages usually alter our opinions only after a *two-step* process. That, is, we are unconvinced simply by getting the message from the media outlet—we must first hear that message reinforced by trusted peers and **opinion leaders.**
So:
　　　　Step 1: From the media to the opinion leader.
　　　　Step 2: From the opinion leader to peers

Critics sometimes said this model "let the media off too easily"—that it underestimated the powerful impact of pervasive media messages. But more than half a century after Lazarsfeld and Katz developed their theory, we can see the power of two-step flow on social media, where it seems no sooner has a media outlet published information than an "opinion leader" in our network has already evaluated it for our consumption. Ask yourself: Do you ever find yourself developing an opinion based *solely* on an opinion leader's take on a media report, even without reading the original report yourself?

To review—the propaganda process:
1. Lasswell & Bernays emphasize: The propaganda message (to Lasswell, it's a warning; to Bernays, it's an opportunity)
2. Lazarsfeld & Merton: Finding the niche and expanding it (canalization)
3. Lazarsfeld & Katz: Opinion leaders complete the work for you (two-step flow)

Propaganda: Argumentation based on selective facts with the goal of persuading you to embrace a product, point of view or cause.

This is not *necessarily* the same as fake news or **disinformation**, which relies on falsification:

All disinformation is a kind of propaganda, but not all propaganda is disinformation.

Narrative can be an antidote to propaganda, *but only when* stories engage with the messiness of the world, find empathy with multiple figures in the story, and admit the nuances of human affairs.

Horkheimer:

 To put the core message colloquially: *Mass art sucks.*

Concerned with:
• The necessity of creating "inhospitable art"—art that questions dominant conventions. Mass media patterns make it more and more difficult for creators to distribute such art.
• Art
• Quality of the message
• Quality of the audience
      • **Negative feedback loop:** A low-quality message lowers the quality of the audience, which in turn creates a perverse market incentive for another low-quality, lowest-common-denominator message.
• Political economy: Who owns the media and therefore controls the message.

Some key quotes:

"Man has lost his power to conceive of a world different from that in which he lives. This other world was that of art. Today it survives only in those works which uncompromisingly express the gulf between the monadic individual and his barbarous surroundings … [I]nhospitable works

of art, by remaining loyal to the individual as against the infamy of existence … retain the true content of previous great works of art."

"There are times when faith in the future of mankind can be kept alive only though absolute resistance to the prevailing responses of men. Such a time is the present."

"… intellectual loyalty, without which truth cannot exist, consists both in preserving past insights and contradicting and transforming them." [So: Every new age bears the critically assessed and creatively redeployed DNA of previous ages.]

Ideas vs. Thinking
His main idea here is that 'ideas' have become streamlined, fixed and closed, like a sentence pronounced by a judge. Such closed ideas invite either acceptance or repulsion, but not additional thought. Horkheimer advocates for more complex, open-ended thinking.

"In our time, thinking is endangered not so much by the wrong paths it may pursue as by its being prematurely cut short."

"The demand for purity and clarity, applicability and matter-of-factness which is immediately raised to challenge any act of thinking that is not free from imagination, expresses a repugnance to going beyond the limitations of the 'statement,' to intellectual restlessness and 'negativism,' all of which are indispensable elements of thought."

"The truth of ideas is demonstrated not when they are held fast but when they are driven further."

"The pedantry of matter-of-factness produces, conversely, a fetishism of ideas."

"Today, ideas are approached with a sullen seriousness; each as soon as it appears is regarded **either as a ready-made prescription that will cure society or as a poison that will destroy it**. All the ambivalent traits of obedience assert themselves in the attitude to ideas. People desire to submit to them or rebel against them, as if they were gods. Ideas begin by playing the role of professional guides and end as authorities and Fuehrers. Whoever articulates them is regarded as a prophet or a heretic, as an object to be adored by the masses or as a prey to be hunted by the Gestapo. **This taking of ideas only as verdicts, directives, signals characterizes the enfeebled man of today**."

"Dependent masses and dependable sages throughout the world history … have always been united under 'ideas'; mental products have become fetishes. **Thinking, faithful to itself, in contrast to this, knows itself at any moment to be a whole and to be uncompleted. It is less like a sentence spoken by a judge than like the prematurely interrupted last words of a condemned man.** [Thinking, as opposed to ideas] looks upon things under a different impulsion than to dominate them."

McLuhan:

Core message: *The medium is the message*

A few key quotes:
• *"The message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."*
• "The latest approach to media study considers not only the 'content' but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates."
• Electronic media forms "eliminate time and space factors in human association."
• "True social and political navigation depend upon anticipating the consequences of innovation."
• "'The medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the "content" of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium."
• The medium in which we communicate determines the
        • Pace
        • Scale, and
        • Pattern
… of our daily lives. And McLuhan believes that this control shapes our lives far more profoundly than variations in the "messages" or "content" we receive.

Focus on: "What channel"

Background: History of media technology in social context—how have transitions in dominant media technology transformed human history and human societies?

Print society is dominated by logical sequences—after all, one sentence must *follow* the next, breaking human experience into coded moments and carving human awareness into steps of *knowing.* Alongside print society arose mechanical means of production, which seem to emulate the sequential consciousness of print, breaking work into fixed sequences of activity and human activity into specialized roles (the assembly line, the hierarchical 20th-century office).

McLuhan contrasts the sequential print world with an emerging electrical/visual society dominated by immediacy, simultaneity, and "full-field awareness". This world is networked rather than sequential: In this medium, relationships between things are *contiguous* (that is, they occur side by side), rather than *continuous* (occurring one after another).

So: The electric/visual phase of communications media brings the breakdown of sequence, enabling:
        • Multiplicity
        • Openness
        • Interpretation
        • Organic relations

This world, in McLuhan's vision, also breaks down the limitations imposed by distance, creating a **"Global Village,"** a networked world of simultaneous awareness.

McLuhan's futurism—his focus on what's next—is in many ways bound up with archaism, a harkening back to old "organic" traditions, lost in the mechanical age but reborn with the "full-field awareness" of the electric age.

He comes around, however, to a critique of the modern electrical age, in which we become so seduced (as we are in every phase of dominant media forms) by the technology that we fail to think critically about or even *recognize* the degree to which it controls the pace, scale and patterns of our lives. He calls this failure to recognize this domination the **"Narcissus trance"** and says that only artists view society with enough perspective and critical thinking to make us aware of this trance. (In recognizing their power as messengers, he is tacitly recognizing that 'content' is not as powerless as he has led us to believe.)

Narcissus Trance: We don't realize the degree to which communications media control our lives, in scale, pace and pattern.

Additional ideas:

Attention = Time

The Internet feeds on your attention, which means it hungers for your *time.*

Objectivity:

Objectivity is **asymptotic,** meaning that it is *a goal that we can move toward, getting ever closer, but never quite reaching it*. We are constrained by our point of view, no matter how much we try to expand it. All the same, it is a goal worth pursuing. Our flawed, subjective, humanity can actually be a strength, if we use *awareness* of our limitations as inspiration to expand our scope of inquiry, understanding and empathy.

Objectivity = Informed subjectivity + self-challenge