Media and modernity
Comprehensive – David Newman

This comprehensive exam surveys the historical development of media in the twentieth century with a focus on the moving image. Although the development of the media started centuries before, it was the development of the motion picture technologies along with the public good-like economic attributes of the medium, which enabled true globalization of the mass media. As well as the entertainment value, the moving image has proved a potent force for the dissemination of ideologies and introducing to the public ideas outside of their immediate experience. On the one hand it has provided government's with a tool for nation-building, and at the same time, has led (in some areas) to greater cultural homogeneity.

There are two areas of exploration in this study: historiography of the media, and media and modernity. The historiographic area explores the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of media histories while media and modernity explores the role of media in the expression and facilitation of modernity, both in the West and outside of the West (Shanghai specifically).

Briggs and Burke (2005) along with Thompson (1995) and Winston (1998) provide the broad, general overview of media history for this study. Innis (1986) sets communication media within imperial epochs while Williams (1990) is included to provide specific background to television.

Historiography
This area explores the process of writing histories, how they have been constructed, what narratives are privileged, and where the gaps are. Trouillot (1996) attempts to show how history can be produced outside the dichotomies of positivism and constructivism. In the process he raises the issues of the silences in history at four crucial moments: the source, collection for archives, selection of facts and the writing of history (p. 26).

The silences are apparent when considering media histories written from a Western-perspective. Whether by design or oversight, there is a privileging of the Western experience of modernity. But what is the situation of non-Western societies? One of the issues considered here are counter narratives and alternative conceptions of modernity. The recognition of silences in histories also engender questions as to whose voices are privileged in the telling of histories, whose have been silenced, and what are the implications as a result?

Silences are also apparent in the writing of film history as pointed out by Allen (2006) where the text (film) has been privileged over the spatial and social conditions of the cinematic experience. Allen quotes Higashi's (2004) suggestion that this may be due to a lack of training by film academics in empirical research, and then goes further to suggest an uncertainty in the discipline as to the relevance of anything outside of the filmic text. Bloch would have wholeheartedly disagreed with the tenets of film history as he saw all history as related and interconnected. Bloch's unfinished work, The Historian's Craft (1963) is included to provide a counterpoint to this view.

Allen and Gomery (1985) address the problem of writing film histories by outlining four approaches: aesthetic, technological, economic and social. As an alternative, Curran (2002) presents media history as a series of seven narratives: liberal, feminist, populist, libertarian, anthropological, radical and technological determinist. Both of these approaches are essentially institutional perspectives. Other theorists such as Thompson (1995) and Innis (1986) approach the media from a more macro or cultural perspective,

or link it with social theory (Thompson, 1995; Garnham, 2000). This comprehensive will explore different discursive or narrative approaches to writing media history.

Media and modernity

Media and communication is an important aspect of modernity and the second broad area of exploration for this comprehensive area. One of the questions to be explored is how modernity has been defined and expressed. Hall (1996), for instance, defines modernity as the group of distinctive features or social characteristics that resulted from the modernizing processes in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres (p. 8). The media has operated in each of these spheres. What has been its role in each of these spheres in the formation of modernity? Where have the media fitted into different narratives of modernity? In examining these questions, three major theorists, Morley (2007), Thompson (1995) and Garnham (2000), provide the overall analytical framework. All three have examined the media in terms of social theory and its wider social impacts.

Changing political structures and the emergence of nation-states are a hallmark of modernity, with the relationships between the power elites and media under-theorised (at least, outside of political economy). One area where governments and power elites have used the media are in the nation-building projects of many countries. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1982, 1991, 2006) has been used as a theoretical starting point for considering the role of media in the formation of the nation as a cultural construct (Curran 2002: 246). Although Anderson used print media as the basis of his theoretical framework, I contend that in the twentieth century, screen media became the increasingly dominant force in the development of national identity. How has the screen media, both entertainment and informational, helped to define national identities and created Anderson's 'imagined communities'? Although now seen by some scholars as an inadequate analytical framework, the concept of national cinemas is useful as a discursive construct in exploring the development of a national screen identity, particularly in opposition to the dominance of Hollywood. Higson (2000) and Hayward (2000) provide a framework for exploring this further.

Globalisation has been a component of modernity from early on, with significantly increased importance in the media during the twentieth century. How has the globalization of the media impacted national identity? Has the dominance of Hollywood, first in the cinema and then television internationally, impacted the development of national identities? Has there been a growing homogenization of screen cultures as a result? What are the different discourses evident in discussing identity?

Experiences of modernity have been critiqued from a number of perspectives: postcolonial, feminist, post modern, as well as non-Western. Different critiques will be considered in my reading drawing from Quayson (2000), Bean (2002), Harvey (1989), Spigel (2001), Barlow (1997), Gaonkar (2001), Lau (2002), Young (2001) and Vitali (2006). Given that there were and are different experiences of modernity, what was and is the role of the media in these instances?

Most media histories (in English) are written from a Western perspective, and although they may note the existence of printing presses in China and Korea prior to or around the same time as Gutenberg (for instance, Thompson (1995) and Briggs and Burke (2005)), their significance is not elaborated on. The example of these early printing presses refute the technological determinism inherent in many histories, as without the same social and economic determinates found in the West (such as the Enlightenment and rise of capitalism), the impact of the same technologies in those societies was quite different. Development of technology alone was insufficient for a shift towards modernity as the

presence of the printing press had minimal impact on the wider society at the time. Briggs and Burke (2005) attribute this to the close control that the ruling elites maintained over the technology at the time. However, when the broader historical development of non-Western societies are considered, it is evident that the media still has had an important role to play in their transitions to (a different) modernity. The issue of multiple forms of modernity, many of them non-Western, is explored by Morley (2007).

Shanghai provides an interesting case study in this context that challenges some of the conventional notions of modernity and the media. It was both non-Western and a major urban centre in the early years of the twentieth century (and now the leading metropolis). It is true that with the foreign concessions in the early part of the twentieth century, it was considered an international city, and so we see in Shanghai the hybridity that resulted as cultures met and absorbed elements from each other. What was the role of the media in the Shanghai experience of modernity? Were the different social impacts technologically determined, or did the Shanghai populace (and by extension, other societies) adapt the technology and media to their own use and development? The cultural hybridity evident in Shanghai during the 1930s provides a contrast to the spectre of cultural homogeneity feared as a result of Hollywood's dominance elsewhere. There are also links between Shanghai of the 1930s and contemporary Hong Kong. Other than language, what were and are the determinates in the media contributing to this hybridity? A number of the readings investigate some of these issues (Lee 2001, Zhen 2002, Lau 2002, Rodriguez 2002, Zhang 1999).

Historiography

Allen, Robert C. and Douglas Gomery (1985), *Film History: Theory and Practice,* Alfred A. Knopf, New York

Allen, Robert C. (2006), "Relocating American Film History: The 'problem' of the empirical," *Cultural Studies 20*(1), pp 48-88

Bean, Jennifer (2002), 'Introduction: Toward a Feminist Historiography,' in Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra (eds.) (2002), *A feminist reader in early cinema*, Duke University Press: Durham

Bloch, Marc (1963), *The Historian's Craft*, Peter Putnam (trans), Alfred A. Knopf, New York

Gomery, Douglas (1985), "Technological Transformation and Mass Media History: The Search for a Method," *Film Reader* 6, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL pp. 169-173

Harvey, David (1989), *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Malden (selected chapters)

Lawson, Sylvia (1979), "Towards Decolonization: Some Problems and Issues for Film History in Australia," *Film Reader 4*, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1995), *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Beacon Press: Boston, Mass, (Chapter 1 &

Cinema Journal 44 (Fall 2004) Special Issue on Film History
- Richard Abel, "History Can Work for You, You Know How to Use It"
- Janet Staiger, "The Future of the Past"
- Janet Gaines, "Film History and the Two Presents of Feminist Film Theory"
- Charles Musser, "Historiographic Method and the Study of Early Cinema"

Media histories

Bean, Jennifer and Diane Negra (eds.) (2002), *A feminist reader in early cinema*, Duke University Press: Durham
- Kristen Whissel, 'The Gender of Empire: American Modernity, Masculinity, and Edison's War Actualities
- Zhang Zhen, 'An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: The Actress as Vernacular Embodiment in Early Chinese Film Culture
- Mary Ann Doane, 'Cinematic Vision in Modernity'

Briggs, Asa and Peter Burke (2005), *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 2nd edition, Polity Press, Cambridge and Malden

Carter, Thomas Francis (1955), *Invention of printing in China and its spread westward*, 2nd ed., revised by L. Carrington Goodrich, Ronald P.: New York (selected chapters)

Curran, James (2002), *Media and Power*, Routledge, London and New York (Chapter 1: Rival narratives of media history)

Garnham, Nicholas (2000), *Emancipation, the Media and Modernity*, Oxford University: Oxford

Gies, Frances and Joseph Gies (1994), *Cathedral, Forge and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages*, HarperCollins, New York, (Chapter, The Asian Connection', pp. 82-104)

Hall, Stuart, David Held, Don Hubert and Kenneth Thompson (eds.) (1996), *Modernity: an introduction to Modern Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, Mass. and Oxford (Introduction, pp. 1-18 plus a few other chapters)

Innis, Harold (1951), 'The Bias of Communication,' in *The Bias of Communication*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London

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Morley, David (2007), *Media, Modernity and Technology: The Geography of the New*, Routledge: London & NY, (select chapters... maybe)

Spigel, Lynn (2001), *Welcome to the dreamhouse: popular media and postwar suburbs*, Duke

Thompson, John (1995), *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, Polity Press

Williams, Raymond (1990), *Television: Technology and cultural form*, 2nd edition, Routledge, London and New York

Winston, Brian (1998), *Media Technology and Society: A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*, Routledge: London & New York   [available electronically]

Colonialisation/post-colonialism/alternative modernities
Barlow, Tani (1997), "Introduction: On 'Colonial Modernity'," in Tani Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, Duke University Press: Durham, pp. 1-20

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar (ed.) (2001), *Alternative Modernities*, Duke University Press: Durham
  - Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," pp. 1-23
  - Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Shanghai Modern: Reflections on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s," pp. 86-122
  - Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," pp. 172-196

Lau, Jenny Kwok-Wah (ed.) (2002), *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia
  - Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, "Introduction," pp. 1-12
  - Hector Rodriguez, "The Fragmented Commonplace: Alternative Arts and Cosmopolitanism in Hong Kong," pp. 128-150
  - David Desser, "Consuming Asia: Chinese and Japanese Popular Culture and the American Imaginery," pp. 179-202
  - Augusta Lee Palmer and Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, "Of Executioners and Courtesans: The Performance of Gender in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s," pp. 203-221

Quayson, Ato (2000), *Postcolonialism: theory, practice, or process?* Polity Press: Malden, Mass. (Chapter 2: Postcolonial Historiography and the Problem of Local Knowledge, pp. 48-75)

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (1999), *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*, Zed Books: London & New York, (Chapter 1: Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory)

Young, Robert (2001), *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Malden (Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-70)

National histories/identities
Anderson, Benedict (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition, Verso, London (or possibly the 2006 3rd edition)

Hjort, Mette and Scott MacKenzie (eds.) (2000), *Cinema and Nation*, Routledge, New York and London (select chapters)
  - Andrew Higson, "The limiting imagination of national cinema, " pp. 63-74
  - Susan Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas, " pp. 88-101

Vitali, Valentina (2006), 'Not a Biography of the 'Indian Cinema': Historiography and the Question of National Cinema in India'in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (editors), *Theorising National Cinema*, BFI Publishing: London

Zhang, Yingjin (1999), "Introduction: Cinema and Urban Culture in Republican Shanghai, " in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, pp. 1-26