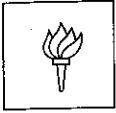


*Reprints*  
Lower class - idiots, villains, vulgarism -  
mid rev. French rev. & point At des cases.  
know - TV trampo  
Mass mind -



**New York University**  
*A private university in the public service*

School of Education, Health, Nursing, and Arts Professions  
Department of Culture and Communication

239 Greene Street, Suite 735  
Washington Square  
New York, NY 10003  
Telephone: (212) 998-5191

April 6, 1993

Dear George,

I finally get this thing mailed out. I inherited this course, but the original description read like this: "An inquiry into those forces in our technological society, especially those of the mass media, that significantly influence our beliefs, attitudes, and actions." Every course set up here at NYU (Media Ecology) is drawn from a narrow canon of technological determinism. There are no courses which introduce a theory of the social, or politics. So I tried to subvert this a bit by trying to get behind the notion of "mass mind" rather than teach it (whatever this it was supposed to be) as a fact. In a compromise, I put in two books which dealt with the mass media in a concrete sense, although I actually would have preferred to <sup>keep</sup> the entire course up at the theoretical level, to work out some of these ideas more fully.

This course differs from earlier versions not only in its focus and reading list, but also in the nature of student assignments. In years past 50% of the student grade was based on objective exams (fill in the blank, multiple choice). How's that!!! Quite a shock, coming from the University of California, where even undergraduates do not have such exams. I have so many stories to tell. What amazes me is that grad students pay \$480 a unit for courses which are--as you will learn, full of nothing. In one graduate course the students read two books: Darnton's cat massacre book and something else, and had only an objective exam. This course fulfilled a core requirement. NYU is simply a diploma mill. I feel like a hooker here. Never mind--I'll tell you more. I guess you don't know that I resigned from NYU in order to take the Annenberg offer. The dean wouldn't let me take a leave of absence **until my sabbatical seven years from now**. She said "There are two types of universities--MIT and NYU. At MIT a faculty member is hired but can go off on various research projects. At NYU you are hired to teach." Neil Postman is supposed to be the scholar and the rest of us are supposed to be in the teching trenches. Of course, that wasn't what she told me when I was being "courted" last year. She told me they wanted to hire a scholar and teacher... (I told you I was an idealist.)

You mention crummy places: Queens, Hunter, etc. My buddy Colleen Roach's situation at Queen's is bad, but even she can take a Fulbright to India, even though she isn't tenured and hasn't been at Queen's long enough to take a sabbatical.

See you on the 13th

*Maryellen*

The Mass Mind: E38.2091  
Spring 1993  
Media Ecology  
Professor Maryellen Boyle  
25 West 4th Street, Room C-13  
8:00-9:20 p.m.

Office: East Building, Room 735, Tel: 998-5396; home phone/fax: 212/228-2407;  
email: mboyle@acfcluster.nyu.edu

Office Hours: Thursday, 3:00-5:00, and by appointment arranged with me.

## READING LIST

*The Political Context of Sociology*, Leon Bramson. (class handout)

*Power: A Radical View*, Steven Lukes.

*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim

*Wealth of a Nation*, Adam Smith (selections)

*Alexis de Tocqueville*, ed. John Stone

*The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx.

*The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills, "The Mass Society"

*The Captive Public*, Benjamin Ginsberg.

*The Whole World is Watching*, Todd Gitlin.

*American Media and Mass Culture*, ed. Donald Lazere.

## COURSE SUMMARY

The following is a quick journey through the ideas in this course:

In communication studies it is commonplace to hear talk of a mass mind, a homogenized populace numbed by political propaganda, advertising, cultural drivel and the technology of television. The notion of a mass mind predates advertising, television and the sea of cultural drivel. Its origins can be traced to reactions to monumental social, economic and technological changes in western society understood by the catchword "modernity."

In the 18th and 19th century traditional patterns of life were swept away. Feudalism gave way to a capitalist social and economic order (individualism and market relationships), and the institution of divine monarchy was replaced by democratic institutions which, according to critics of democracy, was government by the mob and the incompetent. To these conservatives, such as Jose Ortega y Gasset and Gustav LeBon, the masses or the crowd had become a problem. The relationship of the individual to society was the fundamental question of modern philosophers, and this is our first inquiry in this course. Adam Smith and other liberal thinkers asserted that society was the sum of individual consciousness and action; the pursuit of individual self-interest

held society together. Opinion was the natural result of the pursuit of self-interest. Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of Sociology, rejected the fundamental premise of liberalism, sought to explicate the collective nature of individual consciousness and human society. The individual is a product of the social.

18th and 19th century European conservatives held that the French Revolution and democracy brought about social atomization--the dissolution of a social contract (social solidarity), the severing of generational sentiments and traditional reciprocal ties of obligation, and the destruction of habits of responsibility.

Karl Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), welcomed this very destruction of the "feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." With capitalism, Marx noted, "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." Conservatives agreed that all that was solid melts into air, arguing this melting down of social relations created the masses. Marx celebrated the new proletarian mass as world-historical agent in the quest for human freedom. But like the conservative critics of liberalism, the Marx was no proponent of individualism. For Adam Smith, individualism was the essence of human nature; for Marx, it was a characteristic of a particular moment in human history (capitalism). Cultural critics from the left welcomed the capitalist order (the disintegration of feudal relations of production) when it produced a unified proletariat, but criticized this order when the new power and ideology of capitalism worked to prevent collective solidarity. In the 20th century cultural critics from the left and the right focused their analytical attention on the atomizing effects of technology and the extreme rationalization of modern life (Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Max Weber, Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger).

Political democracy was one offspring of this melting. One of the earliest and most important students of modern mass democracy was Alexis de Tocqueville who developed a democracy typology and noted the potential threat of mass democracy as practiced in the young United States. As Tocqueville and others after him noted, one creation of the modern world was a new kind of collective--the public and public opinion. Democracy promised that governments would have to pay heed to their citizens, that the public and public opinion would control state action. C. Wright Mills argues that the ideal 19th century public of rational discuss has fallen victim to the complexities of 20th century life (*The Power Elite*, 1956). "The transformation of public into mass--and all that this implies--has been at once one of the major trends of modern societies." Publics have disappeared; mass society is the norm; atomized individuals are manipulated by elites in the political and economic order. Benjamin Ginsberg is concerned directly with the problem of public opinion. In *The Captive Public* (1986) he argues that, ironically, mass opinion (the potential for democracy) furthered the expansion of an intrusive state (Orwell's nightmare). One question we examine here is whether the "masses" and the "public" are the same entity. Do "masses" have opinions? Are the masses and the public one and the same?

In the final section of this course we turn to the mass communication order made possible

**WEEK I: January 26** Introduction. The question of "mass"--mass society, mass culture, mass media.

Reading Assignment: "European Theories of the Mass and Mass Society," from *The Political Context of Sociology*, by Leon Bramson. This reading provides a good summary.

Other useful sources:

Theodore Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*.

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the 18th Century Philosophers*.

Daniel Bell, "The Theory of Mass Society," *Commentary*, July 1956.

Paul Rabinow, ed. "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'," in *The Foucault Reader*.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

Eliot Friedson, "Communications Research in the Concept of the Mass," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18. (reprinted in W. Schramm, *Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1955.)

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*.

Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*.

**WEEK II: February 2** How to understand and discuss the question of power.

Reading Assignment: Steven Lukes, *Power*. [See Luke's bibliography for other readings on power]

**WEEK III: February 9:** Reading Assignment: Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 13-63, 121-182, 235-308, 362-496

Useful secondary sources on Durkheim:

Raymond Aron, *Main Currents of Modern Social Thought*  
Steven Lukes, *Durkheim*

**WEEK IV: February 16** Modernity, from a 19th century perspective.

Reading Assignment: Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* [entire pamphlet]

Useful secondary source:

Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*

**WEEK V: February 23** Democracy, communication and society.

Reading Assignment: Alexis de Tocqueville, (Sections on the United States)

Other sources:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*  
Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*

**WEEK VI: March 2** Tocqueville (cont.)

Reading Assignment: Alexis de Tocqueville (Sections on France)

**WEEK VII: March 9** The problem of masses and publics. A view from the 20th century.

Reading assignment: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* [handout]

Useful reading on the public:

John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. New York: Henry Holt, 1927.  
Gustave LeBon, *The Crowd*. London: Ernest Benn, 1947.  
Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*  
Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. New York: Macmillan, 1922

**WEEK VIII: March 16** Holiday. ☺

**WEEK IX: March 23** Public, Opinion and Power.

Reading Assignment: Ginsberg, *The Captive Public*, [entire book]; selections--Marx, "German Ideology"

Other useful sources:

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

**WEEK X: March 30** The public. Jay Rosen guest lecture.

**WEEK XI: April 6** Mass Media Practices:

Reading assignment: Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*

Other useful sources:

Herbert Blumer. "Moulding of Mass Behavior Through the Motion Pictures," *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, Vol. 29, 1935.

Stuart Hall, "External Influences on Broadcasting" (1972)

Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" (1973)

Stuart Hall, "The "Structured Communication" of Events" (1973)

Shanton Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*.

Stephen Reese, August Grant, and Lucig Danielian. "The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of CBS News, Nightline, MacNeil-Lehrer and This Week with David Brinkley."

Herbert Schiller, *The Mind Managers*. Boston: Beacon, 1973.

**WEEK XII: April 13** Gitlin, (cont.)

**WEEK XIII: April 20** Mass Culture

Reading assignment: Donald Lazere *American Media and Mass Culture* (to be determined in class)

Other useful reading:

Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: an Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*. Basic Books, 1974.

**WEEK XIV: April 27** Lazere, [cont.] Current media issues

**WEEK XV: May 4** Summing Up.

**PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 6.** Please hand in two copies of your paper. I will keep one for my permanent records.