MIT 4.602, Modern Art and Mass Culture (HASS-D)
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Spring 2012
Notes
Lecture 2

Lecture 2 – Introduction to Theories of Modernity / Mass Culture

I. What is Modernity? Modernism? Modern Art? (The City / the artist)
   A. Modern – the idea of *progress* in history
      1. Classical/Medieval reign of authority vs. Renaissance ideal of progress through rational empiricism
      2. Quarrel of the ancients and the moderns full-fledged by 12th century; "class vs. vulgar" played out in Latin versus vernacular ("Vulgate" Bible).
      3. Slow, ongoing usage of the binary through 18th century, when Enlightenment gave "modern" its propulsive thrust.
      4. By 19th c, music one of the battle grounds (1818 William Crotch lectures in England on the ancients versus the moderns) – but the line moves... (Now Beethoven, who died in 1827, is "classical")

> **Matei Calinescu:** (paraphrase) The idea of modernity was born during the Christian Middle Ages (*Modernus* = from *modo*, just now); 'Classic' was first used in the second century⟹ 'first class' Roman citizens, aristocrats -- (The antonym for this was 'vulgar'). The way to accommodate classical tradition and the modern came with Bernard of Chartres's 12th century (1126) idea of *rational progress*: 'We are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of a giant and thus able to see farther than the giant himself...'

   B. Modern*ization* – idea of *industrial* (scientific, technical) progress independent of any cultural reckoning.
   C. Modern*ity* – already by 1830s, the *experience or condition* of modernization, expressed by people as a split between time (moving) and aesthetic (static) experience.
   D. Modern*ism* – an *intellectual or aesthetic program*, from 1850s on (the "ism" word comes from 18th century replay of "quarrel"). We will focus on this self-conscious realm in which visual culture ("Modern Art" but also mass culture) is made from the experience of modernization and modernity.
   E. *Post*-modernism – emerges after 1970, although its seeds were planted in the 1930s, a rejection or complication of the modernist program..

II. Who are "the masses"? Is a mass audience *produced* by mass culture? (The people / a public)
   A. From peasants and serfs to "the people" and the proletariat, from subjects to citizens
   B. Early information technologies
      1) Shifts from oral to written culture
      2) Printing and literacy
      3) Universal education and "enlightenment"
   C. Early capitalism, commodities, and "alienated labor"

III. Mass Culture as a product of industrialization / modernization
   A. The factory and technology: more images and things for more people
   B. The metropolis: more is distributed, concentrated, displayed
   C. Dramatic demographic shifts: more viewers "subject" to images / messages

Images (selected) for lecture 2

Humanity, Individual Man (vs. "Man," "The People," or "The Masses")
Roman copy of Classic Greek sculpture, marble, compared with Renaissance sculpture by Donatello
Donatello David (first version), 1408-09 marble
Donatello David (second version), 1440 bronze
Rodin, Clenched Hand, 1885
Rodin, Burghers of Calais, 1884 and detail of heads (Jacques de Wiessant)
Roszak, MIT Chapel, 1958, compared with Bipolar Form, 1940

Millet The Gleaners 1857
Courbet The Stonebreakers 1849
Courbet Burial at Ornans 1849 and detail
Monet Boulevard des Capucines 1873-74
Seurat Sunday Afternoon on the Island of Grand Jatte, 1884-5

Urbanity and the Grid
Greek City (Miletus), Hippodamian plan, before the age of the catapault (~400 BCE)
Roman City (Pompeii), showing forum (market), temple, grid of streets, and extending roads (~1st century CE)
Ming (China) house of the Fisherman (1140-1770 CE)
Paris evolving in 12 centuries:
        the huts of the Parisi on an island in the river
        Caesar's plan: roads regularized, bridges built
        the medieval expansion and interstitial growth of the city
Paris under Baron Haussmann, mid 19th century (1830s-40s):
        Boulevards, Avenues, and Enlightenment "Stars" fanning through the *texture* of the medieval city
Haussmannian changes in Cairo under Is'mail Pasha, 1890s
from New Amsterdam to New York:
        1661 "Nova Amsterdam" and the topography of an island reflected in the streets and canals
        1807 the grid laid over Manhattan island, tilted to maximize the elliptic of the sun's path
        1907 the *systems* of railways, bridges, sewers, fresh water...
City plan of Chicago:
        1834 the grid over the river
        1909 the Burnham plan: *systems* of waterways, parks, transport, railways
        1920s Frank Lloyd Wright's aerial view of the gridded garden city

Information
(organizing the masses)
"Morris" poster column in France, 1910
Wall of posters – from theater to soft drinks, 1901
Newspapers in France, 1875 vs 1912 – toward a culture of the visual
Times Square, New York, 1938 and 1990
"Senseable City" lab here at MIT, *now*

Names/ Historical Figures:
Baron Haussmann - (1809-1891) born Paris, directed a vast urban renovation plan under Napoleon III, once quipped
       "My titles? I have been named artist-demolitionist!" Baudelaire identified Haussmann as the chief force in
       the constantly changing face of modern Paris.
Karl Marx - (1818-1883) political and economic philosopher from Germany, 1844 to Paris where he met Friedrich
       Engels, and the two of them wrote the "Communist Manifesto" (1848) followed by Marx's *Das Kapital*
       (1867), a theory of capitalism. Moved to London after the revolutions of 1848, died and buried in Britain.

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