

Society in America is comprised of the Proletariat, and the Bourgeoisie. The term “one percent” accurately reflects this essay’s investigation. Inside of this relationship between the wealthy and the remaining 99 percent, are devices put into place that began in early America to maintain societal structure. Media is one of these devices. The Mass Culture created by the few that are wealthy enough to afford and distribute media on a national and global scale impacts the lives of the consumers. The impact is that it changes the habits, preferences and thoughts of those who consume it. Media has always been produced and controlled by a select few, whether that be from the birth of media, to current times this control shows a shaping of society that has made it what it is today.

To begin Marita Sturken offers a definition of media in *Practices of Looking*. Media is a term that has been used as early as the 16th Century, and was originally the plural of medium, a term used to describe the means or technology used for storing and communicating information and other configurations of data and text (Sturken). The use of media to maintain societal structure in America began in the early 19th Century. Of the population at the time, the Bourgeoisie held the means of production, and Proletariat made up the working class. The Bourgeoisie made money by distributing goods and owning land while Proletariat grew up selling their time to make a living. The Proletariat, who had no land and no money longed for a cheap distraction in their small leisure time. The Bourgeoisie provided the cheap amusements. From there began the foundation of Mass Culture. Mass Culture is the outreach and shared interests and entertainment of millions of households of working class Americans (Sturken). This knowledge, that the Proletariat held, that they all belong to everyone in their category maintained the ongoing discrepancy between Proletariat and Bourgeoisie for the future. By adapting to some of the interests and demands of the Proletariat, the Bourgeoisie solidified their place in societal structure, providing media that began in the form of theatre shows. As time progressed, so did the technology. A term known as convergence describes this

phenomena, an example is radio, which was established in the early 1920's. Once radio became a household commodity, the distribution of media could occur inside the household in real time. Sturken explains that as media industries converge, mediation and consumption become intertwined, this combination supports the existence of new platforms (Sturken). As a result millions of Americans making up the working class shared their new source of entertainment, and the group that participated maintained radio's relevance by sharing their experiences from the previous night's show. Additional to this the distribution of world news came in real time as well. This made the world appear more accessible to the working class citizen, and thus gave them the illusion of agency. Yet the access to this world was still controlled by who produced and approved the content. In comparison to the earlier times, they did have more agency through new access, but its content was controlled as radio was a technology harnessed only by the Bourgeoisie, and the messages within it heavily monitored and filtered. The rapid growth was exciting but no one of this class stopped and processed the reasoning or tone of the content. The relationship became more blurred and generations after began looking to media not as a distraction but as a tradition; a shared interest of all their friends and family. It gave them a glimpse into the world, without having to stop their routine of work and short leisure that had been a part of their upbringing and their parents upbringing before that. The last pillar of the foundation of Mass Culture in early America came with the development and distribution of the television in the late 1930s. Now, households could not only hear media in real time, but they could watch another human, and see a film or program in their home. News programs brought the households to the doorstep of what was going on, with images in real time. Sturken states public culture was no longer an urban phenomena, and one could watch mass broadcast TV 'along with' others in the nation from ones own living room. She highlights a more modern occurrence of this group emphasized dynamic when interacting with television by "Cinema Tahrir", during the Arab Spring of 2011. In Tahrir Square

in Cairo artists installed large screens which showed films to crowds of protestors (Sturken). Being able to look into a screen and see other humans act or exist brought a new level of assumed agency to the Proletariat. This was a deception. Still people of the working class shared more of their thoughts and ideas about the media in social gatherings. Because of its capacity for instant transmission, its public presence and its situation within the domestic sphere, television played a primary role, as radio did before, in fostering a sense of national identity and a collective public sphere (Sturken). Two theorists from the Frankfurt School of Theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno accurately critiqued this system of Mass Culture. Adorno and Horkheimer believed, "Mass Media obscured the realities of life in class society and at best made conformity tolerable (Sturken).

As time passed in America and technology improved, new methods of distribution were created. Television converged with the new technology of the internet. Once the internet became prevalent and computers were established in the American market around the 1990's, more unique facets of media for entertainment were developed. In the internet, publics existed as a social space constituted through the reflexive circulation discourse, which is the circulation and exchange of ideas (Sturken). In the past media contributed to National, Global and Networked Publics. With the beginning of the internet more specific 'publics' within became more prevalent. Take social media for example. People of the working class now create virtual publics on a smaller scale within their accounts on social media. They participate in events that are specific to their interests, and associate with people who mainly hold the same interests and thoughts they have. Sturken emphasizes, people have the ability to comment on news and post it, this in turn leads to increasingly limited sources from which people surround themselves with to perceive information (Sturken). The internet offers more of an individual experience. Digital media furthers this. Since fragmenting of audiences and platforms would supposedly eliminate the Mass Culture discussed in the previous paragraph, a

new adaptation from the Bourgeoisie was required. The culture industry that has been in existence since radio and converged to the point of the internet adapted once again, no longer making a unified set of products, rather a diverse range of popular culture and media designed to appeal to niche audiences. Essentially an agenda from the Bourgeoisie still exists in the form of repetition of narratives, ideologies, formulas, and conventions, maintaining a standardization of culture in America. This is achieved through smaller more unique subsets of publics comprised within the internet (Sturken). A key point is in explaining what makes up the internet in physical material. Sturken states the 'cloud' has exceeded its technological platform and become a potential metaphor for the way contemporary society organized and understands itself. And that the disconnect between media infrastructure metaphors and their material realities reveals a fundamental myth of tech industries as immaterial in their relationship to the environment (Sturken). In reality 'the cloud' is made up of hidden storage farms that consume high levels of energy to run, and its existence is extended by miles of wiring often hidden underground. The inequality of media still exists and is more prudent than when it began in the 19th Century. Now, people receive media from influencers that are strictly monitored and filtered by the sites that allow them to create new content.

Moving onto the effects of Mass Culture on society. The beginning of Mass Culture created a group dynamic that allowed the Proletariat a sense of ease and belonging in the face of an impossible to ignore inequality of wealth among human beings. This inequality continues to this day in America, as habit of thought is part of what keeps an individual at a certain state of being or class. The inequality is more prudent than when it began in the 19th Century. Now, people receive media from influencers that are strictly monitored and filtered by the sites that allow them to create new media. For example, Youtube, which began in the early 2000's as a website that allowed most any video to be posted and distributed now is more filtered than ever. Community guidelines are instated that often restrict a creators content simply for music

playing in the background that infringes copyright. Beyond that, the algorithm that Google uses on Youtube further restricts new media or content of small creators and their access to a larger audience, thus controlling their message. In a time where we now believe anyone can make anything they want and share it with the world on the internet, we could not be further from the truth. Although technically this is correct, the distribution and exchange of media is still controlled by the Bourgeoisie that creates and allows for these communities to exist. Thus the saying about a tree falling in a forest holds weight to this day. This control is in fact the desire for a specific approved message. The problem in this case is the scale. The specificity of only a few human's preferences dictating the majority of media consumed by the remaining population is unbalanced. As far as consumption of media on the internet, it is filtered, and the working class that consumes this distraction fails to notice, or does not want to notice the fact that even the technology in which we interpret this new media, was created by the few. Take Apple and Samsung for example, between Apple and Samsung, most all smart phones on today's market in America are provided by these two companies. Two companies are distributing the technology that the majority of four hundred million Americans use as a way to consume media and entertainment. The Proletariat of modern day are simply responding to new media distributed to them from an algorithm that predicts the consumers interest and distributes new content for the niche category of interests they have already highlighted to be what they like the most since the beginning their interaction with that website.

Mass Culture that began so long ago is established even more so with each generation, and a self fulfilling prophecy is created. Thus comes the issues with a continuation of a society that only favors the Bourgeoisie and allows for them to exist in such a fantasy. The large majority of the population in America holds a similar subset of beliefs and instincts. The inequality is that one human, holding billions of dollars in wealth, can exist in a country freely alongside a human comprised of the same physical matter who is in possession of nothing but

debt. All because each was born into their respective families and classes, and born in America, no one questions this imbalance. This is a problem because a chance at a quality of life is taken from some and abused by others. If this was not the case more of America's best minds could be accessed through equal exposure. In turn more inventions, improvements and accomplishments can be attained and improve America in all aspects. Media has always been produced and controlled by a select few, whether that be from the birth of media, to current times this control shows a shaping of society that has made it what it is today.

Citation:

Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: an Introduction to Visual Culture*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2018.