Post-war Industrial Media Culture in Sweden 1945-1960

NEW FACES, NEW VALUES

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Introduction

We only see what is and do not miss what has been. Our memory does not register the new – it only recognizes change. It preserves the first impression. Our memory never stops comparing new impressions with the first. Oddly enough, the first impression always lasts. We want everything without sacrificing anything. Let us at least sacrifice our prejudiced way of seeing. We have to accept interventions in nature for us to gain what we need from it, just as we have to accept changes for which no one can be blamed. We have to help nature heal itself. It is not a question of concealing change. It is about creating new values of beauty out of natural conditions. In the same way the plastic surgeon plans the recreation of a face, the designers, architects, and gardeners of the new landscape create new values of beauty in a landscape that has to change because we need more electricity. The landscape has to get a new face. You can, of course, miss the old, but the new is a good replacement. We have to accept deliberate changes, as well as those caused by chance, because we need electricity. If each interference corresponds to a positive value, we have not lost anything. The traces of man's attempt to gain something from nature do not have to be ugly. It is possible that they become values within the environment. Let us abandon the prejudices of memory and learn to see the positive values of the new face. It is not less beautiful just because it is different.[1]

This is what we can learn from a Swedish film from 1959 called *Det nya ansiktet* (The new face). It was made by one of the largest producers of industrial films in Sweden, Kinocentralen, and by one of its most original film-makers, Alex Jute, for one of the most important commissioners of films, the government agency responsible for the regulation of water and hydroelectric energy, Kungliga Vattenfallsstyrelsen (Vattenfall).

The film describes the work that was done to restore (as much as was possible) the landscape after the building of a hydroelectric power plant by comparing this reconstruction with restoring a woman's face after a car crash. "The landscape architects are the new cosmetic surgeons," the narrator

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1 *Det nya ansiktet* [The new face] (Alex Jute, 1959, Kinocentralen/Vattenfall, Sweden, 13 min.).

says. It is an odd film and not particularly representative of contemporary industrial films (in Sweden or elsewhere). The question I ask here is, How did this film come to be conceptualized and produced? To answer this question, we need to map the many discourses intersecting the sounds and images of the film. This makes it a useful case study to show the struggle to find media technological means of creating new (economic) values out of nature, people, and places.

In the same year, 1959, a group of companies, led by Norwegian insulation material manufacturer Glassvatt and Swedish truck and bus manufacturer Scania-Vabis, planned and carried out an extraordinary public relations event: the transport of three tons of ice from the Arctic Circle to the Equator. What began as a contest initiated by Radio Luxembourg became the most successful PR stunt ever carried out by Scandinavian companies. The journey was covered in print media, as well as in newsreels, on radio, and on television. For the latter, the organizers hired a film crew to document the achievement. It was not only a display of engineering mastery (focusing on the insulating materials and the transport technology) but also a humanitarian event, in that the companies also delivered 300 kilos of medicines to Dr. Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Lambaréné, French Equatorial Africa, just before reaching their final destination, Libreville, in what was soon to become the independent republic of Gabon. Geography and space had now become an object of conquest, won by new technologies. The expedition was not so much a display of the intended uses of the products as a speculation about what people could do with the new technologies, and what these technologies could do with, and to, people.

Just a few years earlier, on 17–20 May 1954, the Swedish Center for Business and Policy Studies (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, SNS) held a conference for top managers in Swedish industry under the title "Business and Industry Plan for the Future" at the summer resort of Tylösand, in southwestern Sweden. The conference focused on automation, atomic energy, game theory, operations research, cybernetics, and the social, economic, physiological, and psychological consequences of automation.[2] At this point

2   The presentations were collected in two volumes edited by Hans B. Thorelli, the president of the organising body, the Swedish Center for Business and Policy Studies (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, SNS): *Automation. Ny teknik – nya perspektiv i ekonomi och arbetsliv. Del I. De tekniska utsikterna*, and *Del II: De ekonomiska och sociala framtidsutsikterna*. SNS was established in 1948 as a response to what the industry identified as socialization tendencies by the Social Democratic minister of finance. They were, and still are, a key factor in public relations and research activities for a market-driven liberal society. It was also a "school" for policy development in business and industry. The people represented SNS frequently took part

automation had already been well established in industrial production for some decades, and it had proved to be essential for the development of Swedish industry and a key component in the economic progress of Swedish society after the war. Atomic energy was new and politically highly controversial due to the Cold War.[3] All these broad topics were frequently discussed within Swedish industry as well as in public debates. Within the context of these crucial issues for Western industrial progress the Tylösand conference took up the questions of interaction and overcoming distance, both literally and metaphorically. More importantly, at this conference and at numerous other industrial gatherings, on study trips abroad, in publications, and at training events, the conference delegates spent much time discussing how *they* could create interaction and contact between people and how to capitalize on it, in this modern world where so much had already happened during the last half century. Given the experience of the century so far, providing people with tools for interaction and contact was not only a question of efficiency; it was just as much a question of providing an ideological and, as we will see, aesthetic toolbox for the free world.

Contact

By 1945 the twentieth century had seen enormous progress in Europe, but also horror. There were so many lessons to learn, and there was no turning back. Change was necessary. Change became a scientific question; after decades of ideological combat, decisions had to be based on facts and sound reasoning. It became a technological question; people drive change, but not without tools. It became a political imperative; rejecting change and forgetting the evil forces of the past became almost impossible. It became an ethical question; it would be wrong not to do good after so much horror. Finally, change became an aesthetic question; everyone must be able to recognize what is new and find it attractive. "It is not less beautiful just because it is different," as the narrator says in *The New Face*.

World War II had forever ruined the face of early-twentieth-century Europe. The challenge for post-war cosmetic surgeons, figuratively and

in both industry and public debates concerning the economy and society. SNS's first CEO was Jan Wallander, who later was chair and CEO of the Swedish bank Handelsbanken for many years.
3   It seems, though, that this interest was not dealt with within popular culture, at least not according to historian Michael Godhe (2003). There is, of course, a possibility that space technology and atomic energy is more fashionable to study than automation among Swedish historians.

literally, was to decide which new faces to build, which to discard, which to celebrate, who will control the changes, and, most importantly, *how* to carry out the surgery.

The term used at the time for many of these changes was "contact." In Swedish business and industry discourse of the 1950s, the idea of "contact" offered a middle path to follow between individualism and the mass ideologies of the interwar years. However, for the "men in the grey flannel suits," individualism was a seemingly unattainable goal, not a description of the present. The term "contact" therefore becomes paradoxical. It was supposed to uphold personal exchange at a time when both public authorities and private companies grew larger. It was an attempt to use the old and new media technologies without losing personal interaction. So, what was *contact*?

Contact was a science of persuasion and organization, a set of technologies of interaction, a politics of democracy and progress, an ethics of efficiency and equality, and an aesthetics of the new. *Contact* was the antithesis of mass communication; it was everything television was not. With improved *contact* industries would be more profitable, adults and children would learn better, and housewives could make better homes. Using scientific methods and new technologies any company, organization, or public authority would be able to reach out, to make a difference, and to interact with people.

The 1950s culture of *contact* was the birth of modern advertising and marketing. Methods of contact can also be seen as a prehistory of gamification, literally in the application of game theory, and metaphorically in *contact*'s behaviouristic models of exploiting basic human traits. In addition, it is a fundamental element of the early history of interaction design.

Even if *contact* primarily was discussed in relation to industrial organization, marketing, and learning, it was something that required *tools* in order to work. Even face-to-face contact-based sales needed technological *enhancements*. Alternatively, in modern terminology, contact was by necessity mediated. Consequently, studying contact is a way to do media history while putting media in the background. We need to use analytical tools from media studies to understand 1950s business and industry, but we also need tools from science and technology, management, and design studies to understand 1950s media. Most importantly, we need the missing link, the elephant in the room, what everything was about but no one talks about today because we do not see the links. *Contact* was all about interactivity, which means that any understanding of the multifaceted processes of developing *tools for contact* in the 1950s must include a search for *tools for interactivity*.

The real beauty of change was a particular process of innovation based on a combination of scientific thinking, a new understanding of human behaviour, new technologies (sometimes old technologies reclaimed for new purposes), and a new aesthetics. And it had to be better than television.

In order to look beyond television we have to go to a place where television was not on everyone's mind: Sweden. Sweden is small enough to grasp, not in its entirety, of course, but in enough detail. Sweden after World War II was also extremely open to influence from other countries, mainly the US, but also Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. If an idea emerged in any of these countries, it was immediately examined, discussed, and often adopted in Sweden.

Another reason for studying Sweden is its political situation. Sweden had a legal framework similar to other Western democracies and its business sector considered itself to be a natural part of the Western capitalist system. This sector was facing a social democratic government determined to strengthen the exceptionalist Swedish "third way," that is, an intricate web of private, governmental, and cooperative movements. Therefore, I will argue that what in the US or West Germany, for example, may be entangled in other contexts can in Sweden be easier to identify and study. The reason is that, despite its deep engagement with the United Nations and the European Union in later years, Sweden has never been as international in its cultural, media, and business approaches as it was during the 1950s.

This book studies the quest for interaction, at the time when modern audiovisual mass media broke through, by looking at a vast array of objects and relations related to uses of media technologies in Sweden from the end of World War II to the emergence of television in the years around 1960. The book is an attempt to understand what was in place in Swedish business and industrial discourse and practice for a film such as *The New Face* to be made.

Contact: Method as a Spatial Challenge

Europe 1945, anno zero. The twentieth century, the short century that Eric Hobsbawm (1994) later would call "the age of extremes," started at full speed. Two world wars, an interwar period filled with hope and despair, progress and devastation all radically changed the situation that societies faced. However, the period also included the struggle for democracy and political freedom, industrial efficiency and growth, improved healthcare and social security systems, regulated working hours and pension systems, improved education, the questioning of social hierarchies, and reduced differences in

wealth and income. Advertising becomes both a science and an art. Popular media, in particular moving pictures, became the most influential provider of fiction and images of reality. Radio transformed news and entertainment, as well as education, consumption, national identities, and home decoration. Even if all this was a long and hard process – some of these phenomena had already emerged before World War I – the twentieth century had so far been a period of profound change (Judt 2005). For the young industrial visionaries of the post-war years, the future promised even more change.

Then came television. Everything new and most things old seem to converge after 1945 in the medium of television. Few cultural histories of the post-war years or the 1950s can avoid it.[4] Likewise, television has become so emblematic for this period in Western history that it has been used to explain almost everything that happened at the time.[5] What remains of the 1950s if television is not put at the fore? How can we even study the media of the 1950s, while keeping television in the periphery?

An analytic concept for understanding post-war culture where television actually is decentred is Fred Turner's argument for "a turn away from single-source mass media and toward multi-image, multi-sound-source, media environments – systems that I will call surrounds." (2013, 2). The theories of democratic characters, and what it meant to live in post-war America, becomes indirectly relevant for Sweden in the 1950s, due to the direct influences from the US and indirect via the western European effects of US propaganda. Nevertheless, the concept of industrial bureaucracy discussed by Turner is applicable to industry, to the state, and perhaps even to cooperative organizations (Turner 2013, 178).

Isn't this typical of interpretations of historical change; if, in retrospect, something new has proven to be important, must it not have already been important when it arrived? When film studies was institutionalized as a major discipline within the humanities in the 1980s and 1990s, the introduction of cinema was regarded not only as the birth of a medium, but as a part of cultural and social change together with immigration, urbanization, and new conflict lines between conservative and progressive political movements.[6] During the last two decades, both television studies and the recognition

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4   To such an extent that a lack of importance of television, due its late popular breakthrough in most European countries, has to be noticed, for example, when Kristin Ross argues that photographs in magazines were more important than television and newsreels in spreading images from the Algerian War in France during the 1950s (Ross 1995, 140).

5   For example, the argument linking television to glass windows in ovens (cooking as television) and washing machines (Marling 1994, 14).

6   From Sklar (1975) and Bruno (1993) to anthologies like Charney and Schwartz (1995).

of the cultural and social importance of early television have undergone a similar transformation.[7] Both have produced incredibly fascinating and important research and major theoretical and methodological advancements, particularly concerning new empirical sources and eclectic and pragmatic theoretical tools for analysing them.[8]

Similarly, on a much smaller scale and within other "neglected" areas such as studies of industrial films, groundbreaking studies have been published, conferences arranged, networks created, and university courses developed (sometimes even becoming popular).[9] Each time it has been driven by a combination of curiosity, career tactics, and a large amount of frontier mentality. Every new field seems to demand a particular ideological (or psychological?) stance: the research(er) as oppressed by the "mainstream" within "old" disciplines and the ensuing arguments about why the particular perspective or object of study is so important for so many other fields that it really must have funding, publications, conferences, programmes, etc.[10]

In a similar vein, if different in address, proponents of broader, comparative, holistic, ecological, environmental, and cultural approaches to the study of media fight for their perspectives.[11] If the former category of research is dominated by "narrow" specialists who, in order to reach out and create legitimacy for their subfield, must strive for a contextualizing competence, the latter have to struggle against accusations of not being experts in all the fields they aim to cover, and the particular problems that motivate causal explanations in vast, and complex, areas.

This book is an attempt to do the latter by way of the former. I will use the last decades' formative historical research on industrial films, early computing, management, accounting, market communication, advertising, vocational training, public relations, domestic research, etc., to explain

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7   From Morley (1980) to Spigel (1992).

8   Combining David Bordwell's pragmatic poetics of film with Henry Jenkins's conceptualizations of fandom and transmedia enables a broader understanding of what media research can do and highlights the importance of letting the questions guide the choice of theories and methods, rather than the other way around.

9   For example, the network interested in so-called "orphan films," that is, educational, informational, industrial, and other non-theatrical films lacking a clear provenance.

10   A telling example is Heide Solbrig's introduction to a special issue on "Orphans No More: Ephemeral Films and American Culture," where she states that "the [orphan] films' devalued characteristics" can "contribute to an expanded ideological framework of film study" and thereby challenge "the valorization of form over content, as well as some core hierarchies and research strategies in the field" (Solbrig 2009, 102).

11   There are numerous examples, but three that have influenced this book are Fuller (2005), Colomina (2007), and Parikka (2011).

a series of issues and objects related to media. Thus, I want to widen our understanding of the context of the time when television happened to break through, though in areas where television failed.[12] I am not arguing that conducting research on television history, industrial film, industrial and management history, etc., is wrong. With my book, I want to show what happens during the glitches. I want to study an interesting attempt at disrupting established ways of communication, because encapsulated in this disruption lay some of the seeds that would not grow until the breakthrough of modern-day, networked digital technologies.

There are many studies of the introduction of new media that analyse both the institutional and discursive consequences of media change.[13] Scholarship on television history has explored the political, economic, and cultural aspects of how television made its entrance as both a public and a domestic technology.[14] The relationship between media and the nation has been frequently discussed by film historians, often giving the UK as the prime example.[15] Interestingly, discussions on transnational approaches to television history seem to focus on the same issues emphasized in British research, that is, the importance of grounding the research in thorough analyses of local conditions.[16] One problem with research in this area is that histories of the development of media in the US or the UK are sometimes treated as synonymous with media history as a whole. A more positive approach would be to do just the opposite: to show what the alternatives are by revealing what the alternatives *were* at the time.[17] When discussing educational films in Sweden, for example, it is as relevant to study what was happening with them in Germany, in the Netherlands, and in France as much as it is in the UK and in the US.[18] The widespread use of film for

12   But also, indirectly, to problematize the arguments that electronic media constituted the major shift in twentieth-century history "by reorganizing the social settings in which people interact and by weakening the once strong relationship between physical place and social 'place'" (Meyrowitz 1985, ix).

13   From cultural histories of innovation, like Marvin (1988), to Gitelman and Pingree (2003), and Sigert (1999); or broader cultural histories of communication, such as Erikson (2011).

14   For example, studies by Turnock (2007) and Holmes (2008) on early British television have eloquently analysed the intricate relationships between British society after the war and the development of both public service and commercial television.

15   For example, see Higson (1995).

16   For a discussion of these problems, see Bignell and Fickers (2008).

17   Telling examples concerning France and Israel are Bourdon (2003) and Bourdon and Kligler-Vilenchik (2011).

18   Pedagogical uses of film had been discussed, tested, and evaluated at least since the 1920s. See, for example, Brandt (2003) or Vignaux (2009).

educational, informational, promotional, and even propagandistic purposes in Europe during the interwar period contributed to the emergence of media workers with commissioning and production skills as well as to the creation of a reasonably experienced popular audience. What also followed was a professional network in Europe that was reborn after 1945 and in 1953 took form as the European Productivity Agency (EPA). The EPA was a part of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) and, thus, was closely associated with the Marshall Plan (Boel 2003, 19). This occurred while Sweden, like most European countries, continued to develop its heavy industry rather than expand its consumer sector (Oldenziel and Zachmann 2009, 7).

Having argued against the dominance of a national perspective in media studies, and for the importance of rejecting totalities and systems, why am I still talking about a specific nation, and why Sweden? The aim of my study is to use a particular, *local* case – a broad study of the media ecologies of 1950s Sweden – to discuss the intricate web of relations and non-relations between media, culture, and society that are difficult to discern in a larger and better-known context.[19]

The Swedish third way, with its intricate relations between private, governmental, and cooperative movements, and with individuals constantly moving through these relations, must be studied as both a whole and a multitude of parts simultaneously. It is therefore important not to privilege any particular level. The key methodological point, though, is that they all are necessary for the analysis without having much to do with each other. They might create systems and form parts of systems, but they do not belong to *a* system. The social democratic government might have wanted to make all of society into a unitary whole. Nevertheless, many parts of society withdrew from political awareness, from media coverage, and even from the memories of those who lived through those things. Yet they affected other parts, and possibly even the whole.

Contact: Theory as a Temporal Challenge

Questions concerning small and large cultures, centre and periphery, dominant and subordinated countries are of course interesting, if not for

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19   My understanding of "media ecologies" is closer to Mathew Fuller's use of the term in *Media Ecologies* (2005) than the post-Postman North American Media Ecology movement. I will, however, use the term in both senses.

political reasons. A much bigger problem is how to use that level of scale at all. Media studies tend to use, or should I say misuse, theories developed for analysing governance on the national level or national cultural policy, or for that matter, even theories of national cinema that combine policy with ideas about an imagined national community. With the exception of some legislative issues (broadcasting regulations, national taxation and accounting laws, laws regulating work and safety, etc.), few topics in my study actually belong to the national level. Most people and things work at either subnational or transnational levels at least as often as at a national level. The latter has been heavily theorized during the last decades, but the former, the different kinds of localities, are most of the time left un-theorized. To put it bluntly, the local has become an empirical question and the global a theoretical question. Even if the lack of empirical research within *global* studies may be a problem, my concern here is how to perform a theorizing endeavour at the local level.

Theories are frames. They help us see things from certain perspectives. They shed light on certain things while obscuring others, just as media does, if we listen to Marshall McLuhan. This also means that theories, despite their claims of generality, have a local dimension, in both spatial and temporal terms. They were designed to frame certain phenomena and obscure others. There will always be a remnant of this locality in every theory; something for which it is custom fit and something that belongs to its original time and space. Much contemporary theory either tends to be designed from a top-down perspective, or is used for top-down analyses (what theorists of science call "deduction").[20] This may of course result in interesting and relevant results – if you are lucky. If not, it will still be a nice theory, but nothing more.

Even if *the national* was an important issue in the 1950s, the experiences of war and pre-war nationalism in Europe probably contributed to a residual fear of overemphasizing national or nationalist perspectives. There were also other, theoretical reasons for avoiding the national level, not because it was national but because it is a historically and culturally arbitrary level of organization, with real lived and material consequences. The national level is good for doing statistics, of course, and there was plenty of that in the 1950s. But the national level obscures individuals, and in the 1950s the individual was reintroduced, as citizen and consumer, which means his or her relation to individual things and to the *systems* of which he or she took

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20   David Bordwell's argument for "middle level" questions are relevant not only for film history, but for media and cultural history in general (2008, 21–22).

part, or had to belong to. Mass communications and mass media seem to have made this issue unavoidable.

In 1958, American anthropologist Julian H. Steward discussed the importance of recognizing the complexity and intricacy of the impact of "mass means of communication" on societies. Even if mass communications reached "nearly everyone," and thus resulted in "certain uniformities of behavior,"

> there is no way to measure the cultural effects of mass communications on a national scale. Indices of use of mass media are suggestive of the extent of their effects – a qualitative estimate – but since the quality or nature of the effects may well depend upon the subcultural context of their consumption, it must be ascertained through detailed ethnographic analysis of the subcultures. (Steward 1958, 50)

Decades later, this ethnographic perspective became fundamental to cultural studies, but since it could appear *en passant* in an anthropological methodological investigation concerning cultural evolution, similar analytical perspectives from the same period in time must be able to be found elsewhere. And they *are* possible to find. Consequently, they represent other ways of doing research, especially bottom-up research, while still avoiding the trap of (under-theorized) empiricism or scientism. They are scattered cultural and scientific models of explanation that, at least theoretically, were available at the time.[21] Looking at the 1950s, we find a multitude of theorizing activities that took place among scholars and scientists, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, workers and housewives, artists and teachers, engineers and philosophers. To some extent they can be compared to what – under the influence of Henry Jenkins, and based on research by Thomas McLaughlin and Houston Baker – has in media studies been called vernacular theory (Jenkins 2006, 61). The idea is that theorizing activities taking place outside the academy are also *theory*, and should be understood (and perhaps reused) just like other, academic, theories. Another part of this perspective is the profession-based (or artist-based) research that investigates practice through practice, which also uses and develops practitioners' theorizing activities.[22]

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21 Thus they are a kind of "dead theories," comparable with studies of "dead media": technologies that once had a future but were later replaced by other media. See Bruce Sterling, http://www.deadmedia.org/.
22 Too much of it, though, is just employing traditional top-down theories in order to explain bottom-up practices.

What unites traditional ethnographic research, vernacular theory, and practice-based research is that the researcher *is there*, at the place and time of the people, things, and practices under investigation. Such researchers interview people, observe people in a more or less participatory manner, or just *participate*.

In historical research this is, of course, impossible. Even if ethnographers and historians use interviews to learn about past people, things, and practices, the researcher is not *there*. The advantages and disadvantages of relying upon people's memories have been thoroughly and convincingly theorized and empirically investigated during the last decades. It is certainly possible to reach further with in-depth interviews, particularly concerning individual issues. However, it is still, I think, impossible to escape the problems of changing contexts when analysing ethnographic data. A certain person, thing or practice may have meant one thing then, but it would be surprising if it means the same thing for an individual today. Historical ethnography can therefore only say something to *us* about what people say or write about other people, things, and practices. Steward was early to reflect upon this fact: "While mass media are therefore undoubtedly potent in helping to level subcultural differences, empirical research must also be alert to the probability that their meaning is somewhat repatterned according to the total point of view of the consumer" (Steward 1958, 50). Bruno Latour, in his study *The Pasteurization of France* (1993), contributed to one way of dealing with the "repatterning" through his actor-network theory, and partly also to the "total point of view" of the individual. Even if actor-network theory, and ethnography for that matter, are far too little used in media studies, the "network" part seems to have been too tempting to avoid when researching media. Network models on a par with actor-network theory too easily bring us back to the national, because that is the level where important decisions have been made, and where data have thereby been produced.[23]

Even if it were theoretically possible to historically study the "total point of view of the consumer," it is most certainly impossible to actually do so. Actor-network theory may partially help us do it, as may traditional, document-based historical research, and modern media-archaeological methods. At least these theories and methods help make us aware of the complexity of actors and networks, of relations and non-relations, of the inconsistencies and dead ends, the dead media, the failed methods, etc.

I am not an ethnographer nor an anthropologist, so I do not even dare to go questing for the "total point of view of the consumer." To be fair, most

23   FAA in US research, BBC in the UK, etc.

modern ethnographers and anthropologists reject that perspective as well. Too many before me have walked that path, but never returned home with a full answer. Julian Steward knew all this, of course. Still, he spent his career researching it. His evolutionary thinking may help us here, too, because, of course, the "total point of view of the consumer" changes, or evolves if you will, over the course of a lifetime. Therefore, what counts is how we know what was in the range of this point of view, and what the consumer did with it. This could be studied by investigating what this point of view comprised in certain places, at certain moments, for specific people. Another way to proceed is to reverse the angle. But what is the "reverse shot" that complements Steward's "total point of view"?

It could be what Latour call *actors* or what philosopher Graham Harman and other object-oriented thinkers would call *objects*. I will empirically and theoretically investigate what lies within the range of the "total point of view of the consumer," including that which Steward's consumer did not even know was looking back. By doing this, both the woman's face and the power plant, both the truck and the ice block, become as important as the media technologies that were developed and used during the 1950s. Not having a network perspective enables the use of different scales and different perspectives. As I hope to show, by doing this we might better understand media change without becoming too local to generalize the conclusions, or too general to take the advantage of the local richness of empirical material. This is a problem that many historical studies try to frame, and it is still a problem in need of attention.

The question of scale, I will argue, is of particular importance for studies of small nations, which either tend to repeat what already has been said concerning larger nations, or become so local that they are of no interest to anyone else. In 1951, in the introduction to *The Mechanical Bride*, Marshall McLuhan likened his approach to that of the sailor in Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom" who "saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by co-operating with it" (McLuhan 1967, v). McLuhan's first book has often been seen (mistakenly, I will argue) as "straight critical cultural theory" and "straight content analysis," far-removed from the style of his later work (for example, Flayhan 2005, 240–241). Holding the view that *The Mechanical Bride* as just another theoretical starting point is anything but straight. McLuhan's resistance to imposing unity "upon this diversity" is significant (1967, 50). Given the allure of systems and cybernetics at the time, McLuhan's critique of "popularized science" and its risks is not so much a question of culture vs. technology but a clash of perspectives. In one chapter in *The Mechanical Bride*, "The Voice of the Lab" (90–93), McLuhan

takes the famous MIT mathematics professor and cybernetics popularizer Norbert Wiener as an example: "Popularized science encourages people to avoid many unpleasant truths only to confront them suddenly in practical life with Professor Wiener's type of prospect that the electronic brain will certainly eliminate the ordinary man from the human scene" (McLuhan 1967, 92).

This is not only a reaction by McLuhan, the humanist, against Wiener, the scientist, but also an argument by a humanist trained in formal textual analysis who acknowledges the complexities of the world against a complexity theorist who is reducing the same complexity into simplified mathematical and rhetorical arguments. We will see examples of this in the discussions on cybernetics that took place in Swedish industry. In the following chapter, the oft-quoted "Love-Goddess Assembly Line" (93–97), after discussing the machine-inspired, standardized views of women's bodies (ending with film director Cecil B. DeMille asking: "Maybe the average Hollywood glamour girl should be numbered instead of named"), McLuhan initiates a discussion of how to look at and understand the world:

> The meaning of this is very different for the student of popular culture, who develops the same sort of eye for morphological conformities as the folklorist and anthropologist do for the migration of symbols and imaginations. When the same patterns recur, these observers are alerted to the possibilities of similar underlying dynamics. No culture will give nourishment and support to images or patterns which are alien to its dominant impulses and aspirations. (McLuhan 1967, 96)

It is in the variations of these recurring images and patterns in a certain society that McLuhan finds "the 'laws' of that society; laws which will shape its songs and art and social expression" (96). However, the laws of McLuhan are not the laws of traditional scientific naturalism, as they appear to be in Norbert Wiener's account. If McLuhan had been able to go beyond Wiener's popularizing his ideas in *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950), and into the complexity theories in *Cybernetics* (1948), the difference between them would not have been that significant. As I will show below, from the perspective of post-war welfare societies they will both symbolize conservative modernists intrigued by modern technology.

Instead, McLuhan invokes mathematician and philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead in rephrasing the maelstrom analogy:

> A. N. Whitehead states the procedures of modern physics somewhat in the same way in *Science and the Modern World*. In place of a single

mechanical unity in all phenomena, "some theory of discontinuous existence is required." But discontinuity, whether in cultures or physics, unavoidably invokes the ancient notion of harmony. And it is out of the extreme discontinuity of modern existence, with its mingling of many cultures and periods, that there is being born today the vision of a rich and complex harmony. (McLuhan 1967, 96–97)

The way in which McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride* looks at *content*, with science and technology being made comparable with ethnology and anthropology, is perhaps far from his later focus on the "significance of the medium" (Strate and Wachtel 2005, 5). But this focus on content does what his later work so often does not, namely, it supplies an empirical grounding for his analyses. Scattered throughout his 49 chapters are revelations and the naming of things (what McLuhan calls "objects and processes"), similar to what computer game scholar and object-oriented ontologist Ian Bogost calls "ontographies." Not in the form of lists or litanies, but with each image and adhering text becoming a kind of self-reliant, semi-independent, half-withdrawn unit. To me, McLuhan's *content analysis* can be explained in the same way as Bogost defines ontographies:

> Let's adopt *ontography* as a name for a general inscriptive strategy, one that uncovers the repleteness of units and their interobjectivity. From the perspective of metaphysics, ontography involves the revelation of object relationships without necessarily offering clarification or description of any kind. (Bogost 2012, 38)

Even if McLuhan most probably aimed at both clarification and description, the great value of *The Mechanical Bride* is closer to Bogost's discussion of object relationships because, in contrast to many cultural analysis enterprises, McLuhan did not recognize the existence of a coherent world to be represented by any multi-perspectivist method: "We do not have a single, coherent present to live in, and so we need a multiple vision in order to see at all" (McLuhan 1967, 97). Although McLuhan's multiple vision may be the opposite of Wiener's systems, Anne Balsamo identifies a field where Wiener and McLuhan actually do meet: in the relations between technology and the human body. But they reach opposite conclusions:

> To this end, McLuhan critically examines a variety of images and texts from popular culture to demonstrate how communication technologies function as the new body sensorium. We know our bodies through

technological sense organs (self-surveillance devices), and the bodies we know have been irrevocably transformed by technological practices. If Wiener shows how cybernetics was founded on a simulation of the human body, McLuhan suggests the converse – that people have begun to simulate machines. (Balsamo 1996, 173–174)

For me, Julian Steward stands somewhere between the systems world view of Wiener and the fragmented, changing, and partially incomprehensible world that McLuhan creates through his analyses. Steward's theories, although obsolete within contemporary anthropology, are particularly important to me as they form a model for the industry's vernacular theories, a model that focuses on evolution, accepts the world's complexity while retaining the ambition to reach "full understanding," and yet has a pragmatic sense of the limitations of what is actually possible to do and understand. As an anthropologist, he puts the individual human body in both historical and geographical perspective by emphasizing both evolution and culture, change and consistency. Still, it was change that needed explanation, and perpetually needs explanation.

How can we describe the recurrent terms and general ambition to create an industry-specific discourse on tools for contact? During the immediate post-war decades modern, Western capitalist corporate organizations developed a particular, but tremendously influential, form of public sphere separate from, but still related to, both the private spheres of family and friends, and the traditional bourgeois public sphere. Here Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's concept of the "industrialized public spheres of production" ("*Produktionsöffentlichkeiten*") may be useful (Negt and Kluge 1993).

Negt and Kluge, writing during the late 1960s and early 1970s, described the public spheres of production as at the same time excluding and incorporating; they were direct expressions of organizational power relations and strictly material. More importantly, the public spheres of production "provide, without any real change in the class situation, the semblance of the human as a separate product" (ibid., 17) and "the consciousness of the worker becomes the raw material and the site where these public spheres realize themselves" (18). Negt and Kluge thus distinguished the public sphere of production from the traditional bourgeois public sphere in that the former does not even pretend to separate itself from the marketplace. This dichotomy opens up for an interpretation of industrial media use as a truly unique and individual experience, still profoundly gendered and class-biased.

Contact III: Localizing a Study

In a parliamentary debate from 1956, the Swedish minister of culture and education Sven Andersson declared that "television had no foundation in the consciousness of the Swedish people."[24] A few years later, television was as popular in Sweden as in any other country. The question is not whether or not Andersson was wrong. If anything, he was attempting to set an agenda that was already obsolete, even for his government colleagues. Obviously, television rapidly and profoundly, if late, became a firm part of the everyday life and media landscape in Sweden, in a form combining US commercial media culture and UK public service culture. But there are many more perspectives from which to study the 1950s media culture(s).

In a way, Andersson was right. Of course, his nationalist-conservative argument, ubiquitous among social democrats at the time, had little to do with what was going on. On a general level, it might be possible to argue that television had no foundation in anyone's consciousness. The ongoing processes of change took heed of neither foundations nor people, and hardly ever of consciousness. Rather, what was already going on, both behind the back and before the eyes of the Swedish government, was a local version of global processes of changing foundations, changing people, and perhaps even changing consciousness.

This is consequently a book about change: practices of change, objects of change, bodies of change, and the beauty of change.

This book uses film, sound slides, flannelgraphs, conferences, and management consultancy to argue that uses of (potentially) interactive media technologies, together with workers' personal experiences of media, created a kind of human-technological resistance – deliberately, out of sheer ignorance, or just by necessity – against prevailing corporate uses of media forms such as film, printed media, and traditional foremen's orders. Communication technologies were seen at the time as the most modern way of developing shared visions and strategies, creating new regulations and new methods, and improving safety and efficiency. In its footsteps followed the consequences of how experiences within the public sphere (democratic institutions and debates, as well as news and entertainment media) and the private sphere (family life, fantasies, emotions, nonprofessional competencies) interfered with corporate practices. I discusses how contemporary theorizations of information were developed, tinkered with, and applied to the specific challenges posed by public and private experiences to strategies

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24   "Skriv till Sven!," *Arbetsgivaren*, no. 11, 2 June 1956, 1.

of education and marketing. The increasing immigration from southern Europe and Finland to Sweden necessitated an interest in mobility and translation. Companies and public authorities had to communicate in new ways, and new media technologies were created to this end.

The book begins with the story of an unlikely early television celebrity, "TV Boman." Kjell Boman was a clerk at the household appliances manufacturer Electrolux who became a quiz show hero, and soon became was part of Electrolux's marketing strategy. After his victory, he travelled throughout Europe, as early modern noblemen had done, to study the landmarks of European civilization and the glories of post-war reconstruction. Here, household appliances went hand in hand with heavy industry in the rhetorical figure of the traveller. The explorer is now the travelling salesman, but disguised as a well-informed, though not highly educated, socially awkward clerk. The well-known image of the housewife as homemaker and consumer meets a media ecology without commercial television. The genre of "housewives' films" ("*husmorsfilmer*") – educational-informational-advertising films that travelled around the country and were screened in cinemas free of charge during the daytime and early evenings – is explored to discuss not only their consequences for families and homes, but also the contact, the interface between home and public life, and the merger of consumption and citizenship that they represented. The housewives' films thus became something other than what we recognize from 1950s commercial television advertising. It was also different from traditional industrial films. It became a true tool for contact, perhaps a form of useful cinema rather than useful films. The introduction of television in Sweden in the 1950s becomes a starting point to reflect upon the hegemonic ideological mechanisms of the Social Democratic Party's policies as well as of the organizations that formed much of Swedish public life. Television and housewives' films thus reveal some of the tensions and ruptures in the dominant political strategies of the Swedish third way (between capitalism and socialism). Sweden's third way was an option to "neutralize" both public citizenship and capitalist consumership by merging people into well-informed individuals, well aware of their social and national attachments. Public service television could thus experiment freely with commercial formats like variety and quiz shows without risk, since any television format could be translated into a vehicle for information. At the same time, it was the commercial formats that really engaged the audience and that interacted with them. Therefore, public service and commercial television joined forces to become both one-directional and interactive. The view was that human behaviour could, and therefore should, be changed.

The book ends with a truly original and exceptional industrial film, *The New Face*. This film is the starting point for a discussion on how media objects not only expressed ideas about the modern human being, but also contributed to its creation. The film was commissioned by Vattenfall, the government agency for hydroelectric energy production and distribution, to argue for the need to build new power plants, the construction of which harmed the natural environment of the rivers of northern Sweden. The film presents the possible benefits of change by way of two parallel stories. One describes the construction of a power plant and the efforts made to reconstruct the landscape afterward. The other one describes how a young woman who had suffered facial injuries in a car accident was helped to regain her beauty, though changed. Landscape architects became the cosmetic surgeons of nature, and cosmetic surgeons became the architects of new bodies. Here we see how audiovisual media is used for a re-enchantment of nature, this time by way of technology. Technology not only destroys and develops nature or changes our image of nature; it changes our bodies and minds, thus preparing the merging of the consumer and the public service human being.

Outline of the Book

The first two chapters set the scene by introducing key actors, ideas, and media formats that helped create an industry vocabulary and thus the background for an industrial public sphere. Chapter 1 analyses the Swedish social democratic, third-way vision of state, commercial, and cooperative interests acting in harmony (the "development triad"), through the cases of TV Boman and housewives' films, and examines how a small but growing consumer-oriented industry sector navigated though the Swedish media ecology with a public service broadcast media lacking commercial alternatives. Chapter 2 focuses on uses of industrial films among export-oriented large industries, and the infrastructure of these films in Sweden. The renewed interest in using industrial films had its roots in a 1948 regulation of company work councils (*företagsnämnder*), which boosted the demand for economic information. It also went hand in hand with the policy work of the Swedish Employers' Confederation (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen, SAF) on increasing the public interest and acceptance of private enterprises and private ownership (Westerberg 2020). SAF then took the initiative to create a human resources research and development organization called the PA Council (Personaladministrativa

rådet, Personnel Administrative Council) to further support business and industry to develop their own rhetoric and vocabulary, exemplified by applications of the term "contact."

Then follows a theoretical intermission focusing on how films, slides, sound slides, and flannelgraphs were integrated into organizational and educational contexts, not in the sense of predefined theories, but as encouragement of creating new concepts and practices. One of the main questions concerned the role of human involvement in instructional, educational, and promotional work. These debates coincided with the increasing interest in middle management, particularly the industry foreman.

Chapter 3 is thus grounded in the two contextual chapters and the theoretical intermission in a discussion of how the industrial public sphere evolved though spatial contact, through both public relations and industry conferences, courses, and exhibitions. Individual entrepreneurs and controversial state activities challenged the development triad and disrupted the harmony by increasing the level and treatment of risks: political, economic, and environmental. In Chapter 4, *The New Face* is put into the context of Vattenfall's promotional and community-building activities (around the construction sites), and its corporate ethnographic and quantitative storytelling.

In the conclusion, the creative treatment of the concepts of beauty, surgeons, landscape, and, most of all, values in *The New Face* are put into the context of an industrial public sphere.

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Det nya ansiktet (Alex Jute, 1959, Kinocentralen/Vattenfall).

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