The Lecture Room (1962)
– on dark rooms, antennas,
and the synchronization of education

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Introductory remark: What follows are notes to a presentation held at CAS (Centre for Advanced Studies) in Oslo, for a colloquium on “How synchronization and mediation produce collective times, then and now”. This occasion was the opening event of a CAS research project, “In Sync”, involving some 15 fellows from various disciplines and countries, located at and financed by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and led by Helge Jordheim and Espen Ytreberg. Aiming for oral presentation, this text is further affected by the request for participants to ventilate tentative ideas, on potential projects. At first sight, its topic may appear unrelated to the work of Göran Bolin. To me, it is not, as my decision to pursue this particular path was – as often – inspired by an engaged corridor conversation with Göran, about an odd and old book I had picked up.

My presentation today will mainly be about the spatial organization of classrooms in Swedish schools in 1962. The relation of this topic to the synchronization of collective time may not be immediately apparent, so a few introductory remarks are in order.

I came upon this material in the context of an ongoing project within media studies, called Media Citizenship and the Mediatization of School.1 One of its initial ambitions was to provide some sort of historical perspective to contemporary debates and policies on media literacy. It soon became clear that our attempt of looking backwards was fundamentally out of synch with the temporalities employed by most actors and institutions engaged in these issues. In fact, it seemed if as if imagining the educative formation of future generations in relation to some form of media-induced social change, more or less presupposed the application of a “modern” sense of time: in which time always moves on, the future remains open, and the past is continually discarded.

1 Michael Forsman & Staffan Ericson, Södertörn University, financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.
Still, there should be guidance in theories engaged in historicizing media and education. A natural first candidate was, as the project title suggests, the notion of *mediatization*. For all the recent debates on this emerging “paradigm” (cf. Lundby, ed., 2014) there seemed to be consensus that it could provide a “historical vision” (Livingstone & Lunt, 2016) to a strongly presentist (or future-oriented) discipline; after all, its main focus was on “historical developments that took and take place as a result of change in (communication) media and the consequences of those changes” (Krotz, 2007). Scanning actual research carried out under this conceptual banner did not, however, provide much of a vision beyond the latest decades (i.e. the era of “digitization”), and out of that, not much was concerned with the mediatization of schools and/or education (among the exceptions are Breitner, 2014; Lingard & Ravolle, 2015; Livingstone, 2015).

Turning to educational science, a historicizing approach was evidently offered by so called *curriculum theory*: the study of “how the goals, content and methods of educational processes are shaped in a certain society and certain culture” (Lundgren 1979/1989). But while its leading proponents (cf. Pinar 2003) tends to refer to media revolutions when illustrating outside forces of change, none of the strands of curriculum theory seemed to have developed a more systematic approach on how education may be influenced by processes of mediatization.

So, how was one to approach the historical relation between mediatization and education? In the case of this project, we moved further by simply delving into empirical material emerging during a specific year: 1962.

**1962, a time of shared experience**

Why 1962? This year is commonly referred to as the origin for the current Swedish school system. In 1962, the parliament decided on a new law for primary, compulsory schooling, and the first of the curricula regulating this nine-year system was issued by the Royal Swedish Board of Education (*Läroplan för grundskolan*, 1962). 1962 was also the year that Swedish public service broadcasting launched “school TV” in full scale, achieving close to daily broadcasts of series and programs, explicitly adapting to the expectations of the new curriculum. The same year also saw the Swedish press coming together in forming an organization called “Newspapers in school”, supplying learning materials for classes in history and social studies. In hindsight, 1962, was also a remarkable year when it came to recognizing media influence within the academic world. This year saw the publication of
three books which remain classics of media theory today: Marshall McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), predicting the arrival of an electronic “global village”; Jürgen Habermas *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), linking the historical development of the media to the rise and fall of the public sphere, and Raymond Williams’ *Communications* (1962), discussing the relevance of contemporary forms of communication for democracy and education, on the basis of the cultural theory he had just launched in *The Long Revolution* (1961). In what follows, I will relate some themes in these books to the Swedish 1962 curricula.

Within its first eight pages, the 1962 curricula stated its “aims and guidelines”. The overriding task of schools, it declares, is “fostran” (a term connoting formal education, but also nurturing, breeding, Bildung). This task is always double-sided: it concerns the free development of the individual, but also his or hers social training. Only by combining these two dimensions may schools prepare for life as an “active citizen in the society of tomorrow”. As all education must be “directed towards the future”, and as “society constantly changes”, the reforms suggested in the present curricula would soon be replaced:

Transformations of the cultural situation may imply – as was previously stressed – that the issue of the most suitable content of the most fundamental bildning (Bildung) is in need of reevaluation. At any rate, it should be indisputable that the common framework which the school should provide to every citizen in a complex, contemporary society, must cover a richer form of content than before. (*Läroplan för grundskolan*, 1962)

In what sense “richer”? And what sorts of “transformations” are implied? For one thing, it is “not sufficient”, the introduction states, “for the education of the school to breed a continued interest in the studies of books”. Rather, it should “open the road from the classroom to libraries and archives, to courses and study circles, to newspapers and journals, film, radio, and television, etc”. And while every teacher should seek variation in terms of method and content, each school must obtain “accessibility to a rich supply of suitable learning material and aids, which are to be used frequently”. It is particularly stressed how,

Modern mass media, film, radio and television, are increasingly used in the service of education and individual study, and many valuable pedagogical ideas may be collected from these fields. (*Läroplan för grundskolan*, 1962)
In all, these eight pages from 1962 certainly seem to identify social change with the process of mediatization. Those familiar with educational philosophy may also note how its general orientation towards the future, its emphasis on social change, its critique of outdated traditions, resemble declarations of faith to the principles of progressivism – a pedagogical philosophy dating back to John Dewey’s (1916) *Democracy and Education*:

> As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end. (Dewey, 1916)

A pattern to be noted in the 1962 curricula, is how some of its basic arguments are formed, rhetorically and conceptually, precisely by linking mediatization and progressivism: mediatization, an assumption on the nature of social change, may always motivate progressivism. While progressivism, a program for pedagogical change, may always motivate the mediatization of education. In terms of historical explanation, this link was obviously well in place before the era of “digitization”, and goes beyond the sort of one-sided logic according to which media is the cause, and modern education the effect. As stipulated within mediatization theory, this link actually concerns “the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other” (Couldry & Hepp, 2013).

So, how is this link formed? And in what ways, if any, may this be related to issues of synchronization? One possible lead may be picked up in one of those 1962 books: Raymond Williams *Communications*, the last book in a sequence of three (preceded by *Culture and Society*, 1957, and *The Long Revolution*, 1961) in which Williams, it is generally held, opened up the academic field of cultural studies. It is probably the least discussed of the three, perhaps because it ends up discussing quite specific matters of British educational reform (including suggestions for actual syllabuses). But it does start out with a theoretical/conceptual intervention, concerning the notion of communication. To Williams, this concept is not to be equated with the transportation of messages, but with the sharing of individual and social experience. Communication is not to be held as “secondary” in relation to social reality, it is rather the process through which such realities are formed:

> What we call society is not only a network of political and economic arrangements, but also a process of learnings and communication. (Williams, 1962)
This claim is remarkably similar to those raised by John Dewey, in the introductory chapters of *Democracy and Education*:

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. (Dewey, 1916)

Thus, while Dewey starts off his intervention with education by mobilizing communication theory, Williams ends his intervention with theories on culture and communication, by discussing education. This convergence may, I would suggest, involve synchronization, in that its key concepts – be it culture, education or communication – have been subsumed to a particular temporal/historical framework: the “great change” that Williams called the long revolution, the “process” that Dewey referred to as “the social continuity of life through renewal”. More specifically, this framework displays obvious affinities with a “modern” experience of historical time, as analyzed by Koselleck and others. Note, however, how both Dewey and Williams project another time scale over that of a modern, permanent revolution: the time of life. To Williams, a “theory of culture” should be about “the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life” (Williams, 1961). As the interrelation of various revolutions (artistic, political, communicative, industrial) occurs in the realm of “common experience”; the pace of that “great change” is not imagined as accelerating, in fact, its duration will be “long”. To Dewey, education is not “a preparation for life, but a process of living”. And the nature of this process as “shared experience” is what ultimately links education to communication:

**Summary:** It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being. Since this continuance can be secured only by constant renewals, life is a self-renewing process. What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience, until it becomes a common possession. (Dewey, 1916)

**The lecture room: a medium for learning**

The importance ascribed to practices of communication, and its roots in experiences that are specifically modern, does, of course, reappear in another of those 1962 books: Jürgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the*
Public Sphere. In Habermas’ analysis, attention is occasionally directed towards the spacing of shared experience (the organization of literary salons, coffee houses, and private homes). The title of my presentation, “The Lecture Room”, refers to a space in which the times of modernity, education and social life seem to converge. It refers to the title of another 1962 publication by the Swedish Board of Education, as a direct follow up to the 1962 curricula (which repeatedly refers to it, in its “aims and guidelines”).

As announced by the subtitle, the topic of this publication is “design and equipment with regard to the use of audiovisual aids”. In some 30 pages, it basically provides a manual on how to implement a spatial plan (fig 2), for accessing up to 12 audiovisual units (windows, speakers, electricity, antenna sockets, black boards, projectors, microphones, tape recorders, etc.) in every single lecture room of Swedish schools.
The fact that this dry, infrastructural topic would be one of the first to address, after having issued a national curricula covering nine years of compulsory education, may come as a surprise. Then again, Dewey might have
approved, judging by another chapter summary in *Democracy and Education*:

Summary: We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment /…/ The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment. /…/ the particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another. (Dewey, 1916)

Dewey’s use of the term “medium” here corresponds to McLuhan’s during the early 1960s: in contrast to the media studies of his days, McLuhan insisted that media does not so much transmit content, as organize environments. More specifically, media organizes time and space, and a “lecture room” represents an organization of both: providing a spatial environment for a temporal unit (originally, the time between prayers in monasteries, now, a basic unit for organizing the school day, thus, the daily lives of our young, during at least nine years).

So, maybe the first lesson of the 1962 curriculum is simply to regard this specific organisation of space and time – the lecture room – as a medium, in its own right. As something that precedes, but also determines, the content about to be communicated. This would not only be in accordance with McLuhan’s and Dewey’s views, but also with recent developments in media theory – for instance, the notion of “logistical media”, suggested by John Durham Peters (2015), a term for various “civilisational ordering devices” (maps, watches, and towers, are Peters’ examples) which “arrange people and property into time and space”, and are “prior to and form the grid in which messages are sent”. To regard the lecture room and its audiovisual equipment as a medium in this sense would, I would argue, identify a significant indicator of the mediatization of education, while also engaging the main question of curriculum theory (“how the goals, content and methods of educational processes are shaped in a certain society and certain culture”).

To exemplify the type of instructions prepared to supplement the 1962 curriculum, I will here mention just two issues, which together take up more than half of the pages in *The Lecture Room*: 1) requirements for artificially darkening/blackening out the room, and 2) the room’s connection to broadcasting networks of television and radio, via cables and antennas. Both of these measures were quite expensive, and the tone of the instructions turns slightly authoritative, as if resistance was to be expected:
Only when the practical sides of screening images and listening to sound have been properly attended to, there will exist a real opportunity of influencing teachers and education in direction of a right use of aids. A lack of consideration with regard to these aspects /…/ may seriously halt development, and preserve old-fashioned pedagogical methods. *(Lektionsrummet, 1962)*

Of course, the screenings of images had occurred in schools well before 1962. Still,

It is only in recent years that the view has come to be commonly accepted, that in order to be aids in the true meaning of the term, audiovisuals have to be fully integrated in daily teaching. *Consequently, the demand that every lecture room must be possible to darken, has become inevitable.* *(Lektionsrummet, 1962, emphasis in original)*

So, one of the main concerns for the spatial organization of a lecture room is, evidently, securing measures that would make that spatial experience go away. What is ultimately at stake here? The overriding task of audiovisual aids, states the 1962 curriculum, is to provide the kind of “information” that will give students adequate “föreställningar” (representations/ideas/notions), about phenomena and relations that may *not* be directly “åskådliggjorda” (visualized). In other words, a lecture room without audiovisual aids, and no possibility of blackout, remains stuck in time and place. While a lecture room including those aids may transport us to anyplace, anytime (and school TV, during these early years, produced the corresponding content: a series on life in India, a series on life in the middle ages, etc). Moreover, the suggested uses of audiovisual aids seem particularly directed at compensating for the restrictions of human sensorium, i.e. at providing the type of “information” that is real and adequate, yet not perceptible to the naked eye. Photography and film may escape such restrictions, for instance by freezing and studying in detail a lightning bolt striking across the sky, or the movement of a horse in slow motion, or by showing the growth of a flower, in higher speed. In other words, audiovisual aids were brought into the classroom to perform the task that McLuhan ascribed to all media: to serve as “extensions of man”. Thus, the need for artificial darkness, in the lecture rooms of 1962, corresponds to conditions for de-spatializing and desynchronizing immediate human experience, and the displaying of extended, media-displayed reality, beyond the restrictions of the human sensorium.
The lecture room: a sharing of space and time

But darkness may also be effective for introducing new forms of social organization: disappearing in the dark is not only the physical room, but also the peer group of the class. When it comes to relating the pupils to a social world outside the lecture room, the first Swedish curriculum has surprisingly little to say about their nation. It is more engaged in relating to their homes and families, their local communities, and beyond that – to the community of the world. How are such relations to be organized, in space and time? A short-cut to an answer that would resonate well with the 1962 curricula, may be found in another one of those 1962 books, McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy:*

> the electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous ‘field’ in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under conditions of a ‘global village’. We live in a single, constricted space, resonant with tribal drums. /…/ by the discovery of electro-magnetic waves, each individual finds himself henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in every corner of the earth. (McLuhan, 1962)

In this (McLuhan’s very first) usage of the notion of the global village, electromagnetic waves create access to, not only anytime and anyplace, but to that one single (constricted) space, in that one single time (the simultaneous) – and thus, to a truly global “sharing of experience” (Dewey). Access to this space and this time, to this constricted simultaneity, was apparently another necessary asset of the lecture room, in 1962.

Which brings us to the antenna sockets, of which there was to be at least one, in every room, for the purpose of simultaneous viewing and listening. Here, teachers offered resistance, and raised one pragmatic counterargument: at least with radio, probably also with television in a near future, most programs could be taped in advance, and played for students at the appropriate occasion. This issue directly concerns practices of synchronization and desynchronization: contrasting, on the one hand, the schedule of the national broadcasting company, on the other, the schedule of a local school (involving different grades, disciplines, teaching staff). A committee report from the Swedish government in 1963, on the future of school TV and radio (*Skolradio och skol-TV fram till 1970*, 1963), had picked up on this resistance, yet insisted that pedagogical material produced by public broadcasters should arrive in real time. The local use of reproduction technology might actually be
damaging to the overriding purposes of education, in at least two ways. Firstly, it would ignore the values of, in the report’s terms, “ethereality as such”. Secondly, there existed an outside audience for school programs, which, admittedly, was not very large (some 6% of the audience). But what had to be continually provided, was the opportunity of a mother or father at home, or at work, listening to the same program, at the same time, as their child in school. This argument refers to one of the main dilemmas acknowledged by the 1962 curricula: “fostran” was a responsibility to be shared by school authorities and families (and the latter would present considerable variations). Such a mutual responsibility could only be approached, it is assumed throughout the curricula, through efforts of communication (which, according to Dewey and Williams, is the realm in which societies exist, the fabric of experiences is to be shared and commonly possessed, as “elements in a whole way of life”).

Thus, what was at stake with that antenna socket was not only the availability of some specific educational content, nor the technological aiding of some specific learning process. (In fact, the watching of/listening to live programs remained a rather marginal practice in most lecture rooms.) But rather the potential access, through the technologies of broadcasting, to that single space, that single time, in which experience could be shared, by home and family, individual and society, was obviously not an option, for a lecture room that was to train future citizens.

Synchronizing education

To sum up, I have suggested that the example of schools being “mediatized” in 1962, have involved issues of synchronization/desynchronization in at least the following ways:

Mediatization (an assumption about social and historical change) serves to motivate progressivism (the need for continual changes of curricula and educational practices) – and vice versa. This interrelation is determined by, and may strengthen, the synchronization of a “modern” temporal regime (and the corresponding desynchronization of previous traditions, historical and pedagogical). As this temporality is related to the continuance of social life, the sharing of experience, through communication, is recognized as the central feature of education (culture, and society).

The effects of mediatization may also be registered in the temporal and spatial organization of the environment of education (cf. the lecture room as
“logistical medium”, antennas, artificial darkening). This environment is intended to prepare future citizens for a “sharing of experience” in a synchronized, simultaneous time (the present), and a “displaced” notion of space (cf. the global village). These notions were at the time contested, by competing organisations of time (offered by teachers, disciplines, educative practices).

But this was all back in 1962. A continued analysis of curricula, and the organization of class rooms, up to our own days, could, I would suggest, offer vital indications on practices of synchronization assumed to be collectively important in the formation of future citizens.

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