

**MEDIATED MODERNITIES : COMMUNICATIONS
AND CONTEMPORARY LIFE AT THE
CENTURY'S END**

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Approaching modernity

The social and human sciences, as they developed in the West, were born out of a desire to understand and master the dynamics of modernity- that complex of profound economic, political, social and cultural shifts that wrenched people away from familiar patterns of life and belief *rooted in tradition* and pitched them into a condition of permanent change and flux.

One of the most *frequently* quoted characterisations of this great transformation occurs towards the beginning of Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* where they describe the creative destruction *set in motion* by the arrival of industrial capitalism. The present, was, they argued, an age of "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation...All fixed, fast-frozen relations...are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels 1968:38).

Written a hundred and fifty years ago this year, this passage remains remarkably resonant and relevant to our own times. As does their insistence, *in the next* paragraph, that the captains of capitalism harboured ambitions to generalise their influence "over the whole surface of the globe".

With the benefit of hindsight we can see that Marx was absolutely right to see the the logics of capital as pivotal to the formation of modernity. At the same time, we can also agree with later commentators who have followed the great German sociologist, Max Weber, in drawing attention to two other major shifts ; the rise of