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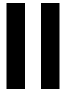

Media production

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chapter 8

Media industry studies, media production studies

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The study of media production is booming. Hundreds of books, seminars and conferences, and countless articles and dissertations, are now devoted to the media industries, and to the men and women who work in them. So much is this the case that new terms are now being used to describe this area of analysis: media production studies (Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009) and media industry studies (Havens, Lotz and Tinic, 2009; Holt and Perren, 2009).

What explains this boom? Partly it is the fact that the media industries themselves appear to have grown substantially. The largest media corporations are still dwarfed by banking, car and automobile businesses, but they are nevertheless vast enterprises. Time Warner earns more in revenues each year than the GDP of most countries in the world. The media seem on the face of it to offer attractive jobs, with the possibility of self-expression and even glamour. What's more, media industries are the object of great interest, not only in academic research, but in the media themselves. Over the last decade, newspapers and broadcasts have been full of reports about the continuing decline of the recording industry, the fluctuating fortunes of companies such as Disney and News Corporation, the rise of social networking sites, plunging broadcasting advertising revenues and a host of other production stories. But this isn't just a matter of business coverage: popular media constantly probe and narrate media production, sometimes narcissistically, sometimes satirically. Recent examples from the USA alone include *Ugly Betty*, *The Devil Wears Prada* and *30 Rock*. Across the world, texts abound that ultimately concern the business of making it in the world of the media industries. This includes the world's most successful television franchise (the various *Idol* programmes).

Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that media industry research is prospering. After all, production is one of the three 'moments' of communication, along with reception and texts. Yet until recently, it was rare for scholars to declare themselves specialists in the study of media industries or media production. Instead, researchers and teachers have tended to think of themselves as experts in a particular medium,

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such as television or film, or in the media of a particular nation or region, such as China or Africa, or in an aspect of media, such as journalism, political communication or international communication. All these are perfectly valid objects of study. But all of them surely require an understanding of production.[1]

Strangely, in the recent flurry of discussions of media industries and media production, the meanings of these terms have hardly been considered. To produce means to bring something into existence. So the study of media production examines the people (producers) and processes (production) that cause media to take the forms they do. Crucially this involves a question of *power*. Millions of us watch films and television programmes, listen to music, read books. The media industries may be large and growing, but making a living from media production is still relatively unusual, confined to a 'specialized cadre', raising questions about 'how that group is chosen and trained, why it acts as it does, and how it relates to other social groups'(Garnham, 2000, p. 82).

This does not mean that the media are all-powerful. Media industries are high-risk businesses, with high failure rates (see Caves, 2000), and audiences respond to their products in a wide variety of ways. Audience analysis rightly concentrates on the ways that pleasures and meanings are experienced and inflected as people consume texts. But as Jason Toynbee (2008, pp. 268–9) remarks, unlike face-to-face dialogue, this activity 'is based on a given – the text as produced – and there are no direct means of shaping the next text from producers'. So media communication is lopsided or 'asymmetrical', and analysing media production means thinking about how producers exercise their relative power to create and circulate communicative products. The simple temporal fact that production is, as Born (2000, p. 46) points out, prior to consumption *matters*. But the point is not that the study of producers should crowd out the analysis of audiences or texts. All of these 'moments' or elements need careful consideration.

What about the other key term here, 'industry'? This has come to mean 'an institution or set of institutions for production or trade' (Williams, 1983, pp. 165–8). Media producers are not acting as individuals who just happen to feel like making a film, or a book, or a song. They are organized into institutions, with established procedures, hierarchies and values, including in most cases the goal of making a profit – sometimes for shareholders. These institutional factors of commerce, organization and values have serious implications for media production, but they can be approached in a number of different ways, as we shall now see.

The changing field

From the 1970s, when media production started to be analysed in a serious way, until the end of the twentieth century, there were two dominant groups of theoretical approaches to media production.[2]

The first group of approaches emerged in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They grew out of the functionalist sociology of the post-war years, but reacted against it and also against Marxism by rejecting the idea that – to use their terms – culture could be read off from the structure of society (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Instead, the emphasis was on looking at the production of entertainment and art,

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but also at other 'cultural' forms such as science and religion, in order to reveal the social construction of practices which might otherwise be taken for granted. Many of these studies analysed a wide variety of factors in the production of culture, including technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organizations, occupations and market formation (Peterson, 1985). But within mainstream sociology of culture's approach to production, there is a striking focus on the close analysis of *organizations*, reflecting a longstanding preoccupation of US sociology with this important concept. For this reason, I'll call this group *mainstream organizational sociology of culture* – mainstream because it has dominated cultural sociology in the English-speaking world.

The second group consists of *political economy approaches to the media*. Political economists have often been sociologists of culture but they have tended to operate in media and communication studies, and on the margins of sociology. These approaches share a commitment to understanding both the production and consumption of symbols in modern societies in terms of questions of justice, power and equality (one highly influential approach within this category is outlined by Peter Golding and Graham Murdock elsewhere in this volume); but in practice the focus has tended to be on production.

The two groups of approaches are divided from each other on political lines. Political economists are either explicitly Marxian or are on the radical left of social democracy, whereas the organizational sociologists tend to adopt a more descriptive, neutral tone, whatever their own political positions might be. As Hirsch (1972, p. 643) put it in a highly influential study, the organizational approach 'seldom enquires into the functions performed by the organization for the social system but asks rather, as a temporary partisan, how the goals of the organization may be constrained by society'. Acting as temporary partisans of media organizations would be a form of false objectivity for political economists. They have different methodological orientations too: the organizational sociologists lean towards micro-empirical studies of organizations, whereas political economists incline more towards theory and the use of secondary data on industry trends (though there is a radical sociology of media organizations – the major work is Gitlin, 1983 – which shares some of the assumptions of political economy).

Because political economy approaches were for many years intellectually and politically vibrant, and focused to a large degree on production, it came about that in many areas of media and communication studies, perhaps especially in Europe, and for many years, the term 'political economy' was used as a rather lazy synonym for 'studies of media production' (or media industries). In recent years, though, as media production studies have boomed, it is no longer credible to make this equation. Political economy has stagnated. Although scholars sympathetic or committed to political economy continue to publish major work (e.g. Sparks, 2008; Zhao, 2008) there has been precious little *conceptual* development of political economy *per se* this century. Instead, all the running in media production and media industry studies has been made by new sets of approaches, two of which stand out.

First, there has been a growing interest in media production on the part of *economics* and of the three intertwined areas of *management studies, business studies and organizational studies* (which, for simplicity's sake, I'll refer to as management studies from

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now on). There has been a surge of interest in the idea of 'creativity' in management studies (Davis and Scase, 2000; Jeffcut and Pratt, 2002) and academics in this area have turned to the study of the 'creative industries' in the hope that this will reveal secrets about how to unlock the creativity of employees in organizations of all kinds (Tschmuck, 2003). Closely related to this has been a parallel interest in the location of media and cultural industries from *cultural policy and arts management studies*, as governments attempt to boost the prosperity and attractiveness of cities, towns and regions through cultural industries quarters, 'creative clusters', and the like (most notably Florida, 2002). Compared with political economy, and even with mainstream organizational sociology of culture, many of the contributions from these fields are notably uninterested in questions of power and the political ramifications of culture.

A second group of recent studies has been influenced by *cultural studies*. For years, there has been considerable animosity between scholars associated with political economy approaches and those associated with cultural studies. While political economy was crudely associated with production, cultural studies were even more inaccurately equated with the study of audiences and texts.[3] In fact, there has been a long tradition of cultural studies-oriented analysis of production in work on popular music (e.g. Frith, 1981; Negus, 1992) though for many years this was not given the attention it deserved. But recent years have seen an increasing interest in media production on the part of cultural studies, especially in the USA. Within this body of studies, there have been various camps. Some studies have been influenced by post-structuralist theory, and an interest in more richly theorizing questions of subjectivity (McRobbie, 2002). Some of these, via a neo-Foucauldian critique of the traditional Marxist distrust of reformist government policy making, have turned to analysis of public policy under the 'creative industries' rubric (Cunningham, 2004; Flew, 2004; see Hesmondhalgh, 2009 for criticisms). The major component of this cultural studies surge, though, comes from the USA. It invokes cultural studies to argue for attention to everyday or ordinary production practices (Havens *et al*., 2009, p. 248), for example close studies of the practices, beliefs and discourses of media producers (Caldwell, 2008). In this respect, this wing of 'cultural studies of production' is sometimes quite far removed from the Marxian concerns that informed British cultural studies in the 1970s and is closer to the anthropological concerns of Newcomb and Alley's (1983) early and in retrospect rather maverick study.

So we have four groups of approaches: two established and aging, perhaps in decline, two striding confidently, even arrogantly, into the arena. Where should we look to understand production and the contemporary media industries? I want briefly to examine how these different groups of approaches have addressed three fundamental issues:

- Organization: What is the process by which media products come to us? How is their production organized, co-ordinated and managed?
- Ownership, size and strategy: How important are the size and ownership of the media corporations, and what is the role of smaller companies?
- Work: What is the nature of work in the media industries?

Organization

Political economists and organizational sociologists agree that the media industries make products which are primarily aesthetic, symbolic or expressive, rather than serving 'a clearly utilitarian function' (Hirsch, 1972, p. 642). Meaning and aesthetic value are not just incidental to these cultural products, but integral. So, for many writers in these traditions, relationships between production and output, or texts, are of central concern. In other approaches to culture, particularly in the arts and humanities, these relationships have been understood through the lens of ideas of *authorship*: the emphasis on individual creators or authors – and the term refers to creators in all fields, not just books. Mainstream sociology of culture has questioned this view. Howard Becker's classic *Art Worlds* (1982), for example, argues that even works which seem to involve primarily one creator, such as painting, are dependent on a great array of other people. In Becker's words, 'art worlds, rather than artists, make works of art' (p. 198). Linked to this idea is the notion that creativity is incremental, that artists – and, by extension, media producers – do not create out of a vacuum, but innovate by tiny steps, modifying conventions.

The sociological emphasis on complexity and collaboration in production derives from a strong democratic and levelling impulse. It implies that art and entertainment are not the products of special, talented individuals, rather they are the results of social interaction and co-ordination. This critique of authorship and of individual creativity was echoed in a cognate but different form in literary and art theory, which began to question the way that the meaning and cultural significance of works of art were 'read off' the lives and intentions of authors (most famously, Barthes, 1976).

Yet the problem of authorship has refused to go away. Outside of sociological and literary theory, romantic, individualist notions of creativity still reign supreme in discourses about cultural production. Watch any TV documentary or read any newspaper or magazine article tracing the work of a filmmaker, musician or writer: the emphasis is nearly always on the achievements of great individuals, rather than on the many and various people involved. In a world where authorship is ascribed more than ever, as commentary on media production proliferates, the critique of authorship raises the question of who does what in complex culture-making organizations, and what it means to say that a film, TV programme or album is 'by' someone. In a 1980 article, political economist Graham Murdock made an important suggestion which has not been heeded enough in the years since. Analysis of media organizations, he said, ought not to liquidate authorship (as Born, 1993 points out, that would run the danger of denying agency to cultural producers); instead, it ought to examine how notions of authorship operate in different types of production, legitimating certain aesthetic and economic practices over others. So, in order to stake a claim to artistic status, projects are conceived and marketed as the product of a particular author; HBO's TV series *Six Feet Under* (2001–5) for example, was marketed as having been 'created by' Oscar-winning filmwriter Alan Ball. In areas of media production less concerned with artistic status, and more with commercial success, star names – singers, actors, presenters – are attached to products ~~(singers, actors,~~

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~~presenters)~~ but their authorship is less forefronted in marketing and publicity; creative control is not necessarily ceded to these figures.

This helps us to see the issue of authorship as integrally related to an even bigger issue in studies of media production: the tensions between creativity and commerce. A great number of empirical studies, many of them from mainstream organizational sociology of culture, illustrate, implicitly or explicitly, the tensions between creativity and commerce in operation in the everyday workings of media organizations. In a classic account, Coser, Kadushin and Powell (1982) showed how the book industry had been consistently anxious about 'commercialization' for nearly a century, but also how the rise of the blockbuster novel had in fact led to increased commercial pressures in trade publishing in the 1970s. Baker and Faulkner (1991) examined the effects of the rise of the blockbuster movie in the late 1970s on the division of roles in major Hollywood film productions. Business and artistic domains separated out: producers acted as directors much less often, in order to concentrate on business issues; track records of commercial success became more important, and led more and more directors and scriptwriters to take on combined director/writer roles.

Such detailed studies are important and valuable. But some studies, from both political economy and organizational sociology, have gone even further, by attempting to *theorize* how the creativity/commerce split is manifested in modern media organizations. Central to such efforts is the fundamental distinction, made by both groups of approach, between the 'creative' stage of production and other stages involving getting cultural products to audiences. Some clearing-up of terminology is necessary here. These stages are often labelled production and distribution (Hirsch, 1978; Garnham, 1990), but distribution makes it sound as though the main issue concerns delivery (vans and transmitters) when actually it concerns information and persuasion. A better breakdown of the stages of cultural production is as follows, adapted from Ryan (1992):

- Creation – where the 'original' of a product is conceived and executed, usually by teams. Creation is a better term than Hirsch's *production*, which I think is best reserved for the whole process of making and circulating cultural goods prior to their purchase and experience by audiences.
- Reproduction – where the product is duplicated.
- Circulation – this includes delivery (transmission, wholesaling and retailing), but more importantly, it involves marketing and publicity.

Now early work in organizational sociology of culture argued that distribution (reproduction and circulation in our terms) in the cultural industries was organized along *bureaucratic* lines, but that production (creation in our terms) by contrast was organized according to *craft* principles (see Hirsch, 1972 for a seminal account), and that this combination of contrasting forms was highly distinctive. Bureaucracies, characteristic of much modern factory production and of modern state government, provided continuity of employment and status to employees, but monitored employees closely, and provided hierarchies of command (Weber, 1978). Craft administration, however, was characterized by short-term contracts, with certain key features

of the work determined by the rules and conventions of the craft to which workers belonged, rather than by hierarchical command. It is this hybrid characteristic of the cultural industries, combining characteristics of craft and bureaucratic production, which has made it of special interest to management studies in recent years, as bureaucratic styles of governance have come under increasing attack (see Davis and Scase, 2000, pp. 1–12).

Political economy approaches broadly concur with this view, that the separate and distinctive organization of creation and circulation is extremely important for understanding the media industries. But they emphasize control, conflict and contradiction (the three cons) much more strongly. Importantly, in the most developed accounts, they also lay considerable stress on a *historical* understanding of production. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1996), whose ideas are closer to political economy than to the US organizational sociologists, showed how, in the nineteenth century, the idea that painters and writers should be autonomous of political power and commercial imperatives gradually created a particular structure of cultural production, divided between large-scale production for primarily short-term commercial products, and 'restricted' or small-scale production where artistic success was the main goal (and where, for businesses, the hope was that artistic success would lead to long-term financial rewards). Bourdieu hardly dealt with popular culture at all, and failed to show how the rise of the cultural industries affected the structure of the field of cultural production in the twentieth century (Hesmondhalgh, 2006); but his work has provided the fullest analysis available of the importance of the creativity/commerce pairing in cultural production.

The principle of autonomy for creators leads to a distinctive problem for owners of capitalist media businesses: how to make original and marketable cultural products but also at the same time discipline the creative process (Ryan, 1992). Recognition of such conflict is not altogether missing from the liberal-pluralist sociology of culture tradition (see DiMaggio, 1977, p. 443) or indeed from the more recent management studies literature (Jeffcut, Pick and Protherough, 2000; Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000). But whereas political economists portray creativity/commerce tensions as *struggles* over cultural work and creative output, organizationalists tend to portray them as technical *problems*, to be resolved by managerial strategy. How are these tensions resolved organizationally? Ryan points to the crucial importance of a strand of managers acting as mediators between the interests, on the one hand, of often shirty, independent creators and, on the other, the interests of the owners and executives of companies, who seek to make profit out of creative labour. Ryan calls these mediators 'creative managers'. Mainstream organizational sociology of culture has also recognized the centrality of these mediators: DiMaggio (1977) argued that cultural production was actually characterized not by craft administration – as opposed to bureaucratic administration – but by a previously unrecognized system called 'brokerage administration', where 'brokers' mediate between competing interests; most importantly, between creative autonomy and managerial control. Media businesses face other distinctive problems too, including the need to devote considerable resources to marketing and publicity – a point made by both

organizational sociology (Hirsch, 1972) and political economy. For some, especially political economists, the increasing power and influence of marketing personnel within media businesses threatens the autonomy of creative personnel.

These sociological themes of power, control and autonomy are somewhat more muted in the emergent cultural studies of production literature. The cultural studies researchers often claim to put more emphasis on the agency of workers than in rival perspectives, and to mediate between macro and micro, theory and empirical evidence (Havens *et al*., 2009); often the old sociological phrase 'middle range theory' is used to describe this latter ambition (Havens, 2006, p. 5). The emphasis is on the world of production itself as a 'culture', with its own codes and meanings. In some cases, this may involve close attention to the furnishings, clothing and rituals associated with particular workplaces (such as Nixon and Crewe's [2004] entertaining accounts of laddish homosociality among advertising creatives and men's magazine writers). Elsewhere, the stress is more on the discourses of producers. Caldwell's study of the Los Angeles film and television industries provides some rich instances; for example, he identifies a remarkable range of narratives and genres among the trade stories that practitioners tell among themselves. Among below-the-line technical craft workers, he discerns 'war stories', where the making of film and TV are compared to military struggles, involving allegories of survival against all the odds. This seeks to establish a sense of mastery and mystique among workers. From directors, writers and producers, Caldwell hears 'genesis myths' where 'practitioners muse on moments of seeming inevitability in which the industry is finally forced to recognize the centrality and broad significance of their given specialization' (Caldwell, 2008, p. 47). Here the function is to legitimate their occupations through a sense of pedigree and ancestry.

Such studies are enriching the analysis of media production and media industries. But the emphasis on culture, codes, rituals, representation and discourse is yet to be integrated into an explanatory and normative framework of the kind associated with critical social science. The invocation of middle range theory may seem to mediate between theory and method but the danger is that this concept 'smooths over rather than confronts directly the intellectual issues raised by specializations in theory, methodology and empirical research', as Alford (1998, p. 11) pointed out in relation to earlier uses of the term. While culture, representation and discourse are vital for analysis of the social, systemic and structural factors still need to be considered in order to provide the kind of explanatory and normative orientations vital for any critical social science worthy of the name (see Sayer, 2000). The goal for media production studies surely needs to be integration of these issues; otherwise, there is a risk that old sociological battles between institutional and interpretive approaches, later reproduced as political economy versus cultural studies, will simply be perpetuated in this sub-field of media and communication studies.

To summarize this section, organizational sociology and political economy accounts such as Ryan's are in agreement that control over circulation (marketing and publicity) is an absolutely fundamental feature of the media industries; and that the concept of autonomy has crucial implications for how media production is

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organized.[4] Extrapolating from such accounts, we can say that, at the broadest level of analysis, the distinctive organizational form of contemporary media production involves relatively loose control of the creative stage, and relatively tight control of the circulation stage (see Hesmondhalgh, 2007). However, within this consensus, there is an important difference of emphasis. For those oriented towards political economy, and some versions of cultural studies (e.g. Negus, 1992), the key point is that creativity/commerce tensions are manifested in 'conflict over control and autonomy in the work situation' (Elliott, 1982, p. 147) and in continuing struggles in media production, whereas organizational sociologists and their management studies heirs tend to see media businesses as involved in a more-or-less successful and rational effort to deal with the social and cultural constraints they face. More recently, the growth in cultural studies approaches advocates an orientation to 'cultures of production' that at its best provides rich and fascinating detail, but it remains to be seen whether such research can be integrated into an explanatory and normative framework.

Ownership, size and strategy

I began this survey with a discussion of differing approaches to the organization of media production, because this is the most direct way into an understanding of the way cultural products reach their audiences. It has to be said that while there are some fine political economy studies which pay close attention to the organizational issues under discussion (Murdock, 1980; Elliott, 1982; Ryan, 1992), this has not always been a strong point with this tradition. Rather, the emphasis in many political economy accounts has been on the ownership and market structure of the media, and the business strategies used by large corporations as they seek to dominate markets. Organizational sociologists have shown much less interest in these issues. The economics and management studies literature examines them, but often in a highly descriptive way, with little discussion of the consequences for the conduct of public and personal life.

Many of the major media markets have a similar structure: an oligopoly of large firms takes a very large share of the market, as high as 80 or 90 per cent in some countries; a fairly high number of smaller firms co-exist alongside these firms. In any market, large businesses pursue a number of strategies to reinforce and build their position. The crucial ones in the media industries are as follows (and these are overlapping categories):

- mergers and acquisitions
- conglomeration
- vertical integration
- internationalization.

To these, we might add other emerging approaches noted by a literature from accounting and finance studies, involving financing measures such as the spreading of financial risk (Phillips, 2004). Political economy accounts have consistently

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traced the operation of these strategies over the last few decades (Schiller, 1976 and McChesney, 2004 are prominent analysts). The approaches have been applied in a more uneven way than some accounts suggest, and they by no means guarantee success. For example, many of the big mergers and acquisitions carried out in the media industries, such as the widely hyped linking of AOL and Time Warner in 2000, have left the companies concerned saddled with huge debt, and have brought about considerable organizational problems. But the key fact remains: large corporations dominate the sector. Big companies have got bigger, more intertwined with other companies and sectors (especially, of course, the growing online provider and search engine businesses), more integrated and more international.

While organizational sociology and management studies, with some exceptions, tend to treat the growth of the big corporations as an inevitable feature of media business, political economy approaches worry about the potentially damaging implications for modern societies. However, it is important to distinguish some different concerns about the size and power of large media corporations, which are sometimes blurred in analysis.

Standardization/homogenization. The very earliest critiques of the growth of the cultural industries were concerned about the standardization of the goods created and circulated by these companies. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer, forerunners of political economy approaches to the media, 'Under monopoly all mass culture is identical' (1977, p. 349). Although few political economists would put the issue anything like so polemically, and the best approaches emphasize the complex and contradictory nature of cultural products (see Miège, 1989 for a critique of Adorno and Horkheimer) these concerns have persisted. The political economist Vincent Mosco (1996, p. 258) has made an important distinction between multiplicity (the sheer number of products) and diversity (whether these products are really substantially different from each other on crucial issues of public concern). These concerns have also been intermittently present in mainstream organizational sociology of culture; a classic study by Peterson and Berger (1975) aimed to show, not altogether successfully, that diversity in popular music was inversely related to the degree of concentration in the industry. In general, though, sociology of culture has tended to reject the mass culture approach of a previous generation (not just Adorno and Horkheimer, but also liberal critics of the industrialization of culture). DiMaggio (1977), for example, argued that while some industries produced standardized products, others didn't, and that there was diversity across modern societies as a whole. And even within political economy, the radical critique of standardization under oligopoly conditions has proved difficult to sustain. In fact, by the 1980s, political economists and others were turning to models which criticized cultural production on the basis of the social fragmentation it brought about, rather on the grounds of standardization, by using the theory of the public sphere developed by the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1989). (This is the basis, for example, of much of Croteau and Hoynes, 2001.) Nevertheless, it still remains possible and important to talk about situations in which the range of available expression in a particular medium or genre might become narrowed under the aegis of media

businesses with similar perspectives, especially when combined with a particular political conjuncture. Gitlin (1883), for example, from a broadly political economy perspective, showed this taking place in his study of US prime-time TV in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with issues of poverty, unemployment and ethnic difference almost disappearing from prime-time screens.

Ownership and control. A key concern of political economy approaches is whether, via their ownership of the means of communication, the wealthy and powerful are able to impose their values on audiences. The problem here is essentially that of ideology, of meaning in relation to power, though that term has a bewilderingly complex history. Other approaches have, at the very most, been tangentially interested in this issue. It is all the more surprising then that there have been so few organizational studies from political economy which have attempted to theorize the exertion of ideological control in the actual making of entertainment and popular culture (there have been more in the case of news). Part of the reason perhaps is that it is difficult to observe such control, because it is indirect – and here, again, we return to the way that creative autonomy remains present even in the contemporary, commercialized production of media entertainment. Recent political economy accounts, influenced by cultural studies, have stressed that media corporations still manage to produce texts which can be argued to be subversive. Perhaps the most striking example is *The Simpsons*, produced by Rupert Murdoch's Fox Television (see Downey, 2006). CBS, at the time part of the RCA empire, funded, distributed and marketed (heavily) the records of the great leftist punk group The Clash (from 1977 to 1982). These might be exceptions, sops to rebellious or cynical sections of society, but they are a reminder that the values of wealthy owners are not simply reflected in media products. However, corporations still exert control over the allocation of budgets and schedules; the right to hire and fire is still heavily influenced by corporate policy, which comes down from senior executives.

The power of media corporations in society. If debates about ownership and ideological control are difficult to settle empirically, more certain is that the huge resources of the large media corporations give them considerable power to influence the way in which cultural production is carried out in society, and how the rewards for making media are distributed (see next section). Whenever governments go about reforming media law and regulation, it is absolutely guaranteed that the major corporations and the trade associations they dominate will work extremely hard to persuade governments to undertake measures which will favour them. An important example of this was a reform to US copyright law in 1998, which extended the length of copyright ownership protection after an author's death from 50 years to 70 years, under pressure from the powerful corporations which owned many of the most important copyrights.

These are all concerns which political economy approaches have addressed far more than any of the other main theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter, and they have surely been right to do so, even if the debates surrounding these issues remain unresolved. But it is important to remember that small and medium-sized enterprises, including micro-companies, continue to play an important role in

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media too. Alongside the music majors, hundreds of small record companies operate in nearly all the advanced industrial countries. Most film companies are organized around particular projects. The important role of small companies is partly explained by the relatively low entry costs surrounding creation and reproduction (it doesn't cost that much to make a record, or produce a magazine). But there are cultural factors too, as discussed in the previous section. In many areas of media, amongst audiences and intermediaries such as journalists, small companies are considered to be where the most creative and innovative production is likely to take place; in some cases, actual cultural forms have been named after these small, 'independent' companies (indie rock, independent cinema).

Small companies have played an important part in debates about changes in the media industries. In the 1980s, various commentators began to analyse shifts in advanced industrial economies, noting a decline in mass production, an increased emphasis on the targeting of niche markets, and in some cases a subsequent return to craft forms of production (Piore and Sabel, 1984), along with various associated organizational changes, such as the increased use of subcontracting and freelancing, and new relations between large and small companies. Some used the term 'post-Fordism' to describe this new era beyond the Fordism of mass production, some preferred the terms 'flexible specialization' or 'restructuring'. These debates were an important factor in drawing management studies academics to the study of media production, where these features had arguably been present for many years (Robins, 1993). Others were drawn by an interest in the concept of entrepreneurship to the study of industries where small businesses are abundant, and where the products are perhaps a little sexier than some other areas of study (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). Such debates about post-Fordism and flexible specialization attracted the attention of geographers from the 1980s onwards, because they involved important issues concerning regional and urban development (Christopherson and Storper, 1989). Geographers noted that cultural businesses tended to 'agglomerate' in particular locations, and the spatial distribution of the cultural industries became a major topic of interest (Scott, 1988). It then linked up with an increasing interest amongst policymakers, on a national and local level, with the cultural and creative industries as sectors which might replace dying industries with new sources of employment, and which might also make cities more attractive places to invest (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). This in turn has occasioned a further surge in work in management studies and cultural policy studies on the creative industries, including further studies of entrepreneurship and small companies (Bilton, 1999).

Some of this work makes valuable contributions to understanding the extent and distribution of employment in the growing cultural industries (Pratt, 1997; Scott, 2000). Some of it makes important interventions in local and regional cultural policy, pointing to the unforeseen consequences of top-down initiatives and seeking to direct money towards grass-roots production (O'Connor and Wynne, 1996). The focus on city locales helps to ground the study of media production in the actual places where so many producers live and work, and looks at an aspect of the effects of such production on urban spaces which had been relatively neglected (Zukin, 1982

was a groundbreaking work in this respect). At times, there is significant overlap with the concerns of political economy (Christopherson, 1996; Scott, 2000, pp. 204–16). Recently, a further wave of analysis has engaged with the spatial complexity of media flows from a perspective combining political economy and cultural studies insights (Curtin, 2007). Elsewhere in these new waves of literature, however, there is little sign of effort to engage with the systematic analysis of the dynamics of production explored in the political economy and sociology of culture literature. There is much loose talk of a transition to an informational economy, or of a new economy based around culture. At times, there is evidence of complacency about the social repercussions of media production. The relations between media production and questions of social power, central to the political economy tradition, are often – though not always – missing. This suggests an urgent need for these new strands of literature to engage with the best contributions to political economy and sociology of culture approaches; and in turn for political economy and sociology of culture to engage with questions of space and local policy.

Media work

Perhaps the most promising area for interdisciplinary dialogue in the study of media production is the analysis of work. No examination of media production could be complete without thinking about the working lives and rewards of its key workers – and yet this has been a surprisingly neglected topic, within organizational sociology and political economy. This area has been illuminated by the new entrants. But their approaches have been very different.

A significant strand of management studies has addressed the changing nature of work and careers in modern societies. The notion of the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) refers to a range of supposedly newer forms of employment, which involve moving between different employers to work on different projects, and drawing validation from networks outside the organization in which people work. Careers in the media industries have always taken this form, and so there has been considerable interest in management studies and elsewhere in working patterns associated with these industries. Candace Jones (1996), for example, reports how, following the break-up of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s, film production increasingly came to be organized as a series of one-off projects, each one separately financed. It is hard not to get a sense in some of the management studies literature that the new mobile career represents a better, brighter future than the supposedly dour world of traditional organizations (see Anand, Peiperl and Arthur, 2002, and the concept of the 'creative career'). But studies of artistic labour markets and income patterns for artists by economists and sociologists suggest that the world of cultural production can be a difficult one (Towse, 1992; Menger, 1999).

Media work (often treated as part of a broader category of 'cultural labour' or 'creative labour') has come to be seen as a special case of some emergent features of contemporary capitalism, and so has a neighbouring set of labour practices, in new media. A series of studies of these forms of labour have added to a growing sense of

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a 'turn' to cultural work in the social sciences and humanities. Much of the impetus driving this turn has come from researchers who have been influenced by cultural studies (e.g. McRobbie, 2002; Banks, 2007; Ross, 2009). Like political economy's general neglect of media labour, this is perhaps surprising, given the hostility that cultural studies once showed towards studies of production, and its almost complete neglect of questions of media work in earlier times. Without doubt, a large part of the motivation here has been to counter some of the complacency surrounding cultural and new media work on the part of policymakers (including creative industries policy) and some of their academic cheerleaders who extol the benefits of creativity and entrepreneurship. These cultural studies writers have drawn, to varying degrees, on sociology and social theory concerning work and organizations, for their examinations of new media and cultural labour. Gillian Ursell's research on television workers, for example, applied Foucauldian insights to work in the creative or cultural industries, showing how 'pleasure, self-expression, self-enterprise and self-actualisation ... seem to be at the heart of explanations of why people want to work in the media' (Ursell, 2006, p. 161; see also Ursell, 2000). She was followed by others who have shown a similar interest in how self-actualization might serve as a mechanism for control and even exploitation in creative work. Angela McRobbie (2002, p. 517) argued that creative work was increasingly characterized by neoliberal values of 'entrepreneurialism, individualization and reliance on commercial sponsorship'. She pointed to the way in which aspirations to autonomy and personal freedom in fashion and music-related cultural industries often led to disappointment and self-exploitation. Notions of workplace rights were sidelined in favour of fluidity and speed. Andrew Ross followed with a very thorough ethnography of two New York City new media workplaces in the dot.com era, working environments that offered 'oodles of autonomy along with warm collegiality' but which ended up enlisting 'employees' freest thoughts and impulses in the service of salaried time' (Ross, 2003, p. 17). Ros Gill, in a study of European freelance new media workers (2002), found evidence that features of the work that seemed superficially attractive, such as its informality and high levels of autonomy, were in fact particularly problematic for women because of the lack of clear criteria for evaluating work and especially because of the difficulties such informality caused when seeking new contracts.

All this amounts to a bleak picture of these supposedly glamorous, autonomous and flexible forms of labour. A question raised, sometimes explicitly, by these accounts of cultural work is an important normative one in the study of culture. To what extent is it possible to do 'good work' in the media industries? Is it really as difficult as this body of research suggests? Drawing on other social theory (such as Keat, 2000) to qualify these pessimistic accounts, in the most important contribution to theorization of media work in recent years, Banks (2007) has pointed to the way that moral systems of trust, honesty, obligation and fairness remain present in contemporary capitalism, and he provides examples of the resilience of social and cultural values amongst the cultural workers he interviewed. He also finds evidence (pp. 108–11) that creative cultural workers continue to be oriented towards forms of production that can generate 'internal rewards' (those that can only be specified

and recognized in relation to the particular activity under question – see MacIntyre, 1984; Keat, 2000) rather than 'external rewards' such as wealth, fame and power: 'craft values and creative impulses remain vital motivations for action, and can support conditions where music production continues relatively autonomous of market imperatives' (Banks, 2007, p. 114). Other research seeks to fuse political economy concerns (ownership of rights and intellectual property, historical changes in the conditions of media labour) with cultural studies ones (subjectivity and discourse) in analysing media labour (see Stahl, 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010).

Challenges remain

The study of media work represents a key way in which cultural studies-influenced scholars have helped to revivify the study of media production and media industries. Yet, compared with the leading work in organizational sociology and political economy as it was once practised (e.g. DiMaggio, 1977; Miège, 1989; Garnham, 1990), or with other areas of contemporary media studies (e.g. Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Couldry, 2006) as pointed out above, there is still a need for greater conceptual development in cultural studies of production. There are, for example, some rather loose invocations of the need to explore the complex relations between culture and economy, with little serious engagement with such debates (e.g. Ray and Sayer, 1999). Media production and media industry studies need to pay much greater attention to interventions that draw on social and cultural theory, both classical and contemporary, as well as of course continuing the empirical work that is being carried out.[5] Nevertheless, the vigour of the field is not in doubt, and the coming years seem likely to produce some fascinating work. This is still likely to be the case in spite of the claims, still heard with dismaying regularity, that we have entered, or are on the verge of entering, a new paradise where everyone can be a media producer. This has led to the inelegant coining of various terms such as 'prosumer' or 'produser'; the claim is that the division between production and consumption that underlies analysis of economic activity, and much media studies, is now redundant, and therefore that the study of media production in the terms being used here is outmoded too. We are a long way from this supposedly wonderful world of democratized production. MySpace and YouTube pages generated by non-professionals typically gain very small numbers of hits, and while such links occasionally 'go viral', such cases are still extremely rare – and professional producers and managers often turn out to be more involved than originally seemed to be the case. Production continues to be a vital part of any understanding of the media.

Notes

1. In this chapter, a revised and updated version of my chapter in the previous edition of this book, I concentrate on the production of popular culture and entertainment rather than news, simply because news journalism is treated thoroughly elsewhere in this volume (Schudson, Zelizer).
2. There were of course numerous studies of industries such as film and broadcasting, many of them historical. But these were not part of sustained, theoretically informed and critical

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approaches to cultural or media production. The main exception was early studies of news production discussed elsewhere by Schudson.

3 I summarize these spats elsewhere and seek to move beyond them (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, pp. 33–49), making the point that, particularly with regard to normative judgements, these groups of approach cannot be treated as homogeneous; it is vital to recognize sub-categories and rival tendencies. ~~See also Peck (2007) and Kellner (2009).~~ AQ1 AQ2

4 In news production, autonomy is still a highly relevant concept, but it is maintained through ideas of professionalism and objectivity; tensions might be better described as between professionalism and commerce.

5 Critical realism may well be a helpful resource in this respect (Toynbee, 2007, 2008). Georgina Born's work continues to raise the bar by combining empirical richness with theoretical rigour and eclecticism (see Born, 2008).

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