CHAPTER SEVEN: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Media Industries and Media/Cultural Studies: An Articulation[1]

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The media industries today stand at the center of our economy, politics, culture, and everyday life. Radio, television, film, digital media, and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which individuals in contemporary media and consumer societies forge their very identities, including sense of self, notion of what it means to be male or female, and conception of class, ethnicity and race, nationality, and sexuality. Media culture helps shape both an individual's and a society's view of the world and deepest values, defining good or evil, their positive ideals and sense of who they are , as well as who and what are seen as threats and enemies, creating, in some cases, sharp divisions between "us" and "them." Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which individuals constitute a common culture and through their appropriation become part of the culture and society. Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is

allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the powers that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be oppressed.

The media industries are powerful forces in contemporary societies, and it is essential to comprehend how they work in order to understand, act in, and transform the environment in which we live our lives. The media industries produce entertainment and news and information, they are commercial enterprises and thrive on advertising, thus helping to reproduce a media and consumer society. The media industries are an essential economic force, helping manage consumer demand, constructing needs and fantasies through advertising and entertainment both of which provide promotion for consumer society. Further, the media are key instruments of political power, constituting a terrain upon which political battles are fought and providing instruments for political manipulation and domination. A central force in social life, the media dominate many people's leisure activities and help construct how many people see the world and insert themselves into the established society.

In this essay, I discuss the potential contributions of a critical media/cultural studies perspective to

theorizing media industries. First, I show the importance of the Frankfurt School and their theory of the culture industry for theorizing media industries, followed by discussions of how a model developed by the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies that engages production and political economy, textual analysis, and audience reception study can provide comprehensive perspectives to engage media industries and their production, texts, audiences and impacts.[2] I then offer a proposed model of a critical media/cultural studies to engage media industries, and illustrate it with examples from contemporary entertainment and journalism. One of my goals is to stress the importance of critical analysis of both news and entertainment, and the need to combine history, social theory, political economy, and media/cultural studies in order to properly contextualize, analyze, interpret, and criticize products of the media industries. The project thus requires inter- or supradisciplinary perspectives to engage the full range of the import of media industries.

The Frankfurt School and the Culture Industry

The Frankfurt School inaugurated critical communications studies in the 1930s and combined political economy of the media, cultural analysis of texts, and audience reception studies of the social and ideological

effects of mass culture and communications.[3] Organized around the German Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in the 1930s, their core members were Jewish radicals who later went into exile to the United States after Hitler's rise to power. Establishing themselves in a small institute in New York affiliated with Columbia University, the Institute for Social Research, they developed analyses of the culture industry that had emerged as a key institution of social hegemony in the era that they called state-monopoly capitalism (Kellner 1989). Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin (the latter of whom was loosely affiliated with the Institute), analyzed the new forms of corporate and state power during a time in which giant corporations ruled the capitalist economies and the might of the state grew significantly under the guise of fascism, Russian communism, and the state capitalism of Roosevelt's New Deal which required a sustained government response to the crisis of the economic Depression in the 1930s. In this conjuncture, ideology played an increasingly important role in inducing consent to a diverse spectrum of social systems.

Frankfurt School theorists argued that the media were controlled by groups who employed them to further their own

interests and power.[4] They were the first social theorists to see the importance of what they called the “culture industry” in the reproduction of contemporary societies, in which so-called mass culture and communications stand in the center of leisure activity, are important agents of socialization and mediators of political reality, and should be seen as primary institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural, and social effects.

They coined the term "culture industry" to signify the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives which drove the system. The critical theorists analyzed all mass-mediated cultural artifacts within the context of industrial production, in which the commodities of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: commodification, standardization, and massification. The products of the culture industry had the specific function, however, of providing ideological legitimation of the existing capitalist societies and of integrating individuals into the framework of mass culture and society.

Furthermore, the critical theorists investigated the culture industry in a political context as a form of the integration of the working class into capitalist societies. The Frankfurt School were one of the first neo-Marxian groups

to examine the effects of mass culture and the rise of the consumer society on the working classes which were to be vehicles of revolution in the classical Marxian scenario. They analyzed the ways that the culture industries were stabilizing contemporary capitalism, and accordingly they sought new strategies for political change, agencies of social transformation, and models for human emancipation that could serve as norms of social critique and goals for political struggle. Their approach suggests that to properly understand any specific form of media culture, one must understand how it is produced and distributed in a given society and how it is situated in relation to the dominant social structure. The Frankfurt School thought, for the most part, that media culture simply reproduced the existing society and manipulated mass audiences into obedience.

Yet despite their many virtues, there are serious flaws in the original program of critical theory that requires a radical reconstruction of the classical model of the culture industries. Overcoming the limitations of the classical model would include more concrete and empirical analyses of the political economy of the media and the processes of the production of culture; the construction of media industries and their interaction with other social institutions throughout history; and of audience reception and media

effects. A reconstructed critical theory would also involve the incorporation of emergent theories of culture, the media, and society into the project, just as the classical critical theorists, and more recently Habermas, have engaged and incorporated the insights of novel theories of the day into their work. Cumulatively, such a reconstruction of the classical Frankfurt School project would update the critical theory of society and its activity of cultural criticism by incorporating contemporary developments in social and cultural theory into the enterprise of critical theory.

In addition, the Frankfurt School dichotomy between high culture and low culture is problematical and should be superseded for a more unified model that takes culture as a spectrum and applies similar critical methods to all cultural artifacts ranging from opera to popular music, from modernist literature to soap operas. In particular, the Frankfurt School model of a monolithic mass culture contrasted with an ideal of "authentic art," which limits critical, subversive, and emancipatory moments to certain privileged artifacts of high culture, is highly problematic. The Frankfurt School position that all mass culture is ideological and debased, having the effects of duping a passive mass of consumers, is also objectionable. Instead, one should see critical and ideological moments in the full range of culture, and not

limit critical moments to high culture and identify all of low culture as ideological.[5] One should also allow for the possibility that critical and subversive moments could be found in the artifacts of the cultural industries, as well as the canonized classics of high modernist culture that the Frankfurt School seemed to privilege as the site of artistic opposition and emancipation. It is also important to distinguish between the encoding and decoding of media artifacts, and to recognize that an active audience often produces its own meanings and uses for products of the cultural industries, points that I will expand upon below.

In spite of these limitations, the critical focus on media culture from the perspectives of commodification, industrialization, reification, ideology, and domination provides an optic useful as a corrective to more populist and uncritical approaches to media culture that surrender critique. Against approaches that displace concepts of ideology and domination by emphasis on audience pleasure and the construction of meaning, the Frankfurt School is valuable for inaugurating systematic and sustained critiques of ideology and domination within the culture industry, indicating that it is not innocent and a "creative industry," as certain contemporary idiom would have it. The notion promoted by Hartley (2003) and other proponents of the

"creative industries" model provides an ideological gloss of positivity on media industries. Such perspectives suggest media are inherently bastions of enlightenment, creativity, and abundance and one might prefer the Horkheimer and Adorno notion of "culture industry" that is more critical and less ideological.[6]

Moreover, on the level of metatheory, the Frankfurt School work preceded the bifurcation of the field of media and communication studies into specialized subareas with competing models and methods. This bifurcation is documented in the 1983 *Journal of Communications* (*JoC*) issue on *Ferment in the Field* (Vol. 33, No 3 [Summer 1983]). Some of the participants in this discussion of the state-of-the-art of media and communication studies noted a division in the field between a humanities-based culturalist approach that focuses primarily on texts contrasted to more empirical social science based-approaches in the study of mass-mediated communications. The culturalist approach at the time was largely textual, centered on the analysis and criticism of texts as cultural artifacts, using methods primarily derived from the humanities. The methods of communications research, by contrast, employed more empirical methodologies, ranging from straight quantitative research to interviews, participant observation, or more broadly historical research.

Topics in this area included analysis of the political economy of the media, audience reception and study of media effects, media history, and the interaction of media institutions with other domains of society.

Some contributors to the 1983 *JoC* symposium suggested a liberal tolerance of different approaches, or ways in which the various approaches complemented each other or could be integrated. Yet I would suggest that the Frankfurt School approach is valuable because it provides an integral model to overcome contemporary divisions in the study of media, culture, and communications. Their studies dissected the interconnection of culture and communication in artifacts that reproduced the existing society, idealizing social norms and practices, and legitimating the dominant organization of society.

For the Frankfurt School, the study of communication and culture was integrated within critical social theory and became an important part of a theory of contemporary society, in which culture and communication were playing ever more significant roles. Certain theorists in the tradition of British cultural studies continue this project in a later conjuncture and overcome some of its limitations, as well as updating the project of analyzing the products and effects of the media industries.

British Cultural Studies and the Circuits of Culture

Over the past decades, British cultural studies has emerged as a globally influential set of approaches to the study of culture and society that has had wide international influence. The project was inaugurated by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which developed a variety of critical methods for the analysis, interpretation, and criticism of cultural artifacts. Through a set of internal debates, and responding to social struggles and movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, the Birmingham group came to focus on the interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, including media culture. They were among the first to study the effects of newspapers, radio, television, film, and other popular cultural forms on audiences. They also focused on how various audiences interpreted and used media culture differently, analyzing the factors that made different audiences respond in contrasting ways to various media texts.

Under its director Richard Hoggart, who led the Centre from its opening in 1964 to 1968, and his successor Stuart Hall, who directed the Centre from 1968 to 1979, the

Birmingham groups developed a variety of critical perspectives for the analysis, interpretation, and criticism of cultural artifacts, combining sociological theory and contextualization with literary analysis of cultural texts. The now classical period of British cultural studies from the early 1960s to the early 1980s adopted a Marxian approach to the study of culture, one especially influenced by Althusser and Gramsci.

From the beginning, British cultural studies systematically rejected high/low culture distinctions and took seriously the artifacts of media culture, while criticizing what it claimed to be the elitism of dominant literary approaches to culture. Likewise, British cultural studies overcame the limitations of the Frankfurt-school notion of a passive audience in their conceptions of the popular and of an active audience that creates meanings. Reproducing the activism of oppositional groups in the 1960s and 1970s, the Birmingham school was engaged in a project aimed at a comprehensive criticism of the present configuration of culture and society, attempting to link theory and practice to orient cultural studies toward fundamental social transformation. British cultural studies situated culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served

either to further social control, or to enable people to resist. It analyzed society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata. Employing Gramsci's model of hegemony and counterhegemony, British cultural studies sought to analyze "hegemonic," or ruling, social and cultural forces of domination and to locate "counterhegemonic" forces of resistance and contestation.

British cultural studies aimed at a political goal of social transformation in which location of forces of domination and resistance would aid the process of political transformation. From the beginning, the Birmingham group was oriented toward the crucial political problems of their age and milieu. Their early spotlight on class and ideology derived from an acute sense of the oppressive and systemic effects of class in British society and the movements of the 1960s against class inequality and oppression. The work of the late 1950s and early 1960s Williams/Hoggart/Hall stage of cultural studies emphasized the potential of working-class cultures. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Birmingham group began appraising the potential of youth subcultures to resist the hegemonic forms of capitalist domination (see Hebdige 1979 and 1988). Unlike the classical Frankfurt School (but similar

to Herbert Marcuse), British cultural studies looked to youth cultures as providing potentially fresh forms of opposition and social change.

As it developed into the 1970s and 1980s, British cultural studies successively appropriated emerging analyses of gender, race, sexuality, and a wide range of critical theories. They developed ways to examine and critique how the established society and culture promoted sexism, racism, homophobia, and additional forms of oppression -- or helped to generate resistance and struggle against domination and injustice. This approach implicitly contained political critique of all cultural forms that promoted oppression, while positively affirming texts and representations that produced a potentially more just and egalitarian social order.

Developments within British cultural studies have been in part responses to contestation by a multiplicity of social movements and distinct groups that have produced new methods and voices within cultural studies, such as a variety of feminisms, gay and lesbian studies, many multiculturalisms, critical pedagogies, and projects of critical media literacy. Hence, the field of British cultural studies at any given moment was determined by the struggles in the present political conjuncture, and their major work was conceived as

political interventions. Their studies of ideology and the politics of culture directed the Birmingham group toward analyzing cultural artifacts, practices, and institutions within existing networks of power. In this context, they attempted to show how culture both provided tools and forces of domination and resources for resistance and opposition. This political optic provided an extremely productive focus on audiences and reception, topics that had been neglected in most previous text-based or industry-based methods.

British cultural studies, in retrospect, emerges in a later era of capital following the stage of state and monopoly capitalism analyzed by the Frankfurt School into a more variegated, globalized, and conflicted cultural formation. The forms of culture described by the earliest phase of British cultural studies in the 1950s and early 1960s articulated conditions in an era in which there were still significant tensions in England and much of Europe between an older working-class-based culture and the newer mass-produced culture whose models and exemplars were the products of American culture industries. The subsequent work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues in the 1960s and 1970s was more influenced by the New Left, youth culture, and emerging social movements organized around race, gender, and sexualities, while the post-1980s work inspired by British

cultural studies became global in impact and responded to the new cultural and political conditions described in postmodern theory.[7]

The tradition of British cultural studies is valuable because it provides tools that enable one to read and interpret culture critically. It also subverts distinctions between "high" and "low" culture by considering a wide continuum of cultural artifacts and by refusing to erect any specific cultural hierarchies or canons. Previous approaches to culture tended to be primarily literary and elitist, dismissing media culture as banal, trashy, and not worthy of serious attention. The project of cultural studies, by contrast, avoids cutting the field of culture into high and low, or popular against elite. Such distinctions are difficult to maintain and generally serve as a front for normative aesthetic valuations and, often, a political program (i.e., either dismissing mass culture for high culture, or celebrating what is deemed "popular" while scorning "elitist" high culture).

Frankfurt School and British cultural studies approaches open the way toward more differentiated political valuations of cultural artifacts in which one attempts to distinguish critical and oppositional from conformist and conservative moments in a cultural artifact.

For instance, studies of Hollywood film show how key 1960s films promoted the views of radicals and the counterculture and how film in the 1970s was a battleground between liberal and conservative positions; late 1970s films, however, tended toward conservative positions that anticipated a right turn in U.S. society which helped elect Ronald Reagan as president (see Kellner & Ryan, 1988).[8]

There is an intrinsically critical and political dimension to the initial project of British cultural studies that distinguishes it from objectivist and apolitical academic approaches to the study of culture and society. British cultural studies, for example, analyzed culture politically and historically in the context of its societal origins and effects. It situated culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms, practices, and institutions served either to further social domination or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination. It analyzed society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata.

A common critique of cultural studies in recent years has been that it overemphasizes reception and textual

analysis, while underemphasizing the production of culture and its political economy. While earlier, the Birmingham groups regularly focused attention on media institutions and practices, and the relations between media forms and broader social forms and ideologies, this emphasis has waned in recent years, to the detriment of current work in cultural studies. For instance, in his classical programmatic article, "Encoding/Decoding," Stuart Hall began his analysis by using Marx's *Grundrisse* as a model to trace the articulations of "a continuous circuit," encompassing "production -distribution-consumption-production" (1980b: 128ff.). He concretizes this model by focusing on how media institutions produce messages, how they circulate, and how audiences use or decode the messages to produce meaning. Hall (1980a: 27) claimed that:

> The abstraction of texts from the social practices which produced them and the institutional sites where they were elaborated was a fetishization... This obscured how a particular ordering of culture came to be produced and sustained: the circumstances and conditions of cultural reproduction which the operations of the 'selective tradition' rendered natural, 'taken for granted.' But the process of ordering (arrangement, regulation) is always the result of concrete sets of practices and relations.

Against the erasure of the system of cultural production, distribution, and reception, Hall called for problematizing culture and "making visible" the processes through which certain forms of culture became dominant

(ibid).[9] Meanwhile, Raymond Williams, another of the formative influences on British cultural studies, called for a "cultural materialism... the analysis of all forms of signification ... within the actual means and conditions of their production" (1981: 64-65), focusing attention on the need to situate cultural analysis within its socio-economic relations. Moreover, in a 1983 lecture published in 1985/1986, Richard Johnson provided a model of cultural studies, similar to Hall's earlier model. This "circuit of culture" model was based on a diagram of the circuits of production, textuality, and reception. This analysis is parallel to the circuits of capital stressed by Marx, and places particular emphasis on the processes of production and distribution. Although Johnson highlighted the importance of production in cultural studies and criticized the British film journal *Screen* for abandoning this perspective in favor of more idealist and textualist approaches (pp. 63ff.), much work in cultural studies has replicated this neglect.

Indeed, in the mid-1980s a populist and postmodern turn became evident in cultural studies that has continued for decades (see McGuigan 1992 and Kellner 1995). Hence, there is a danger that media/cultural studies in various parts of the world might lose the critical and political edge of earlier forms of British cultural studies. Cultural studies could

easily degenerate into a sort of eclectic populism of the sort evident in the Popular Culture Association that is largely celebratory and uncritical of the textual artifacts that it deals with. Neglecting political economy, celebrating the audience and the pleasures of the popular, ignoring or downplaying social class and ideology, and failing to analyze or criticize the politics of cultural texts will make cultural studies merely another academic subdivision, harmless and ultimately of benefit primarily to the culture industries themselves. Avoiding such a conservative development of cultural studies, I submit, requires a variety of disciplinary and critical perspectives and linking cultural studies, ultimately, to critical social theory and radical democratic politics.

Political Economy and the Media Industries

At its strongest, both the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies contains a threefold project of analyzing the production and political economy of culture, cultural texts, and the audience reception of those texts and their effects. This comprehensive approach avoids too narrowly focusing on one dimension of the project to the exclusion of others.[10]

Since political economy has been neglected in many modes of recent media and cultural studies, it is important to stress the importance of analyzing the products of media industries' texts within their system of production and distribution, often referred to as "political economy." The term *political economy* calls attention to the fact that the production, distribution, and reception of culture take place within a specific economic and political system, constituted by relations between the state, the economy, social institutions and practices, culture, and organizations like the media. For instance, in the United States a capitalist economy dictates that media production is governed by laws of the market, but the democratic imperatives of the system mean that there is some regulation of media culture by the state. There are often tensions within a given society concerning how many and what activities should be governed by the imperatives of the market, or economics, alone, and how much state regulation or intervention is desirable. For some, the democratic imperative of media industries requires efforts to assure a wider diversity and sources of broadcast programming, or the promotion of "net neutrality" that would guarantee the right to fast wireless Internet access to all (McChesney 2007), as well as the prohibition in network

broadcasting of phenomena agreed to be harmful, such as cigarette advertising or pornography. Media politics is thus a contested terrain as some would preclude all state "interference" in broadcasting media under the banner of neo-liberalism. In countries with state-supported and managed media like the United Kingdom or France, the public interest and democratic imperative in state broadcasting media might be to promote national British or French culture.

A political economy approach highlights that capitalist societies are organized according to a dominant mode of production that structures institutions and practices according to the logic of commodification and capital accumulation. Cultural production and distribution is accordingly profit- and market-oriented in such a system. Forces of production (such as media technologies and creative practice) are shaped according to dominant relations of production (such as the profit imperative, the maintenance of hierarchical control, and relations of domination). As suggested below, the system of production and the relations between the economy and state sector are important in determining what sort of cultural artifacts are produced and how they are consumed. Hence, "political economy" does not merely pertain solely to economics, but to the relations between the economic, political, technological, and cultural

dimensions of the social context in which media industries function. The structure of political economy links culture to its political and economic context and opens up cultural studies to history and politics. It refers to a field of contestation and antagonism and not an inert structure as caricatured by some of its opponents.

Political economy should also discern and analyze the role of technology in media industry production and distribution, seeing, as in Innis (1995 [1951] and McLuhan (1964), how technology and forms of media help structure economic, social, and cultural practices and forms of life. In our era, the proliferation of new technologies and multimedia -- ranging from HD-DVDs and Blue Ray to I-Pods and satellite radio -- calls attention to the intersection of technology and economics in everyday life. In a time of technological revolution, political economy must thus engage the dominant forms of technology, new forms of culture being produced, and new audience practices, as well as developments and changes in the media industries.

Media industry studies should thus engage both old and new media, see the convergences and divergences, and track the changes. There is obviously a dramatic transformation going on in media industries with the explosion of new digital technologies that is affecting business and

political economy, production and distribution, the forms of texts, and audience reception. Obviously, a critical media industry studies must follow these developments, which also highlight the importance of political economy, as well as technology, to doing critical media/cultural studies.[11]

In the present stage of capitalist hegemony, political economy grounds its approach within empirical analysis of the actual system of media industry production, investigating the constraints and structuring influence of the dominant capitalist economic system and a commercialized cultural system dominated by powerful corporations. Inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced and distributed can help elucidate features and effects that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay. Rather than being antithetical approaches to culture, political economy can contribute to textual analysis and critique. The system of production often determines what type of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what kind of audience effects cultural artifacts may generate.

Studies of the codes of television, film, or popular music, for instance, are enhanced by examining the formulas and conventions of media production. These cultural forms are

structured by well-defined rules and conventions, and investigation of the production of culture can help elucidate the codes actually in play. Due to the demands of the format of radio or music television, for instance, most popular songs are three to five minutes, fitting into the exigencies of the distribution system. Network television news on the major corporate media in the U.S. has traditionally been designed to fit a small number of stories into short segments totaling about 22 minutes, thereby leaving plenty of room for advertising. The cable news networks' emphasis on "breaking news" and their need to fill 24/7 news windows creates a tendency to hype current events into media spectacles, displacing important news with extravaganzas of terror, natural disasters, or political scandal (see Kellner 2003a, 2005, 2007).

Because of their control by giant corporations oriented primarily toward profit, film and television production in the United States, and increasingly global media, is dominated by specific genres such as reality shows, talk and game shows, soap operas, situation comedies, action/adventure series, and so on. These economic factors help explain why there are cycles of certain genres and subgenres, sequelmania in the film industry, crossovers of popular films into television

series, and homogeneity in products constituted within systems of production marked by rigid generic codes and formulaic conventions.

Further, political economy analyses can help determine the limits and range of political and ideological discourses and effects. My study of television in the United States, for instance, revealed that takeover of the television networks by major transnational corporations and communications conglomerates was part of a "right turn" within U.S. society in the 1980s whereby powerful corporate groups won control of the state and the mainstream media (Kellner, 1990) And all three networks were taken over by major corporate conglomerates: ABC was bought out in 1985 by Capital Cities, NBC was absorbed by General Electric, and CBS was purchased by the Tisch Financial Group. Both ABC and NBC sought corporate mergers and this motivation, along with other benefits derived from Reaganism, might well have influenced them to downplay criticisms of Reagan and to generally support his conservative programs, military adventures, and simulated presidency. In addition, the broadcasting networks, thinking that the audience had turned right, produced a large

Developments in political economy are also generating further synergies in the media industries between the

entertainment and information sectors. In tandem with the ever-increasing convergence between the information and entertainment industries, there have been significant mergers between the different sectors of the media industries. Previously distinct media are melding together, as demonstrated by the fact that the computer has become a central site for multiple forms of entertainment, information, play, communication, and connection with the outside world.

Yet one must recognize the limitations of political economy approaches. Some political economy analyses reduce the meanings and effects of texts to rather circumscribed and reductive ideological functions, arguing that media culture merely reflects the ideology of the ruling economic elite that controls the culture industries and is nothing more than a vehicle for the dominant ideology. It is true that media culture overwhelmingly supports capitalist values, but it is also a site of intense conflict between different races, classes, genders, and social groups. Thus, in order to fully grasp the nature and effects of media culture, one should see contemporary society and culture as contested terrains and media and cultural forms as spaces in which particular battles over gender, race, sexuality, political ideology, and values are fought.

The conception of political economy proposed here goes beyond traditional, sometimes excessively economistic approaches that limit their focus to issues such as ownership, gate-keeping, and the production and distribution of culture. Instead, political economy in its broadest concept involves relations between the economy and polity, culture and people, as well as the interconnection between production and consumption, distribution and use, texts and audiences. Although some conceptions of political economy are reductive, focusing solely on the economic dimension, far richer notions are possible.

Moreover, in the present configuration of the contorted evolution of a global economy, a critical cultural/media studies needs to grasp the international, national, and local systems of media production and distribution. In the 1960s, critics of the global capitalist system described the domination of the world economy by transnational – mostly American and European – corporations as "imperialism" or "neo-imperialism," while its supporters celebrated their roles in "modernization." Today, the term "globalization" is the standard concept used to describe the new world economy and culture. One of the features of globalization is the proliferation of new voices and perspectives on culture and society and the politicization and contestation of forms of

culture previously taken for granted. In a global culture, the valorization of difference and the emergence of new actors are part of the landscape and the question of representation becomes intensely politicized and contested (Canclini 1995 and Flew 2007). Within the global communication system, the media industries have become increasingly important and influential, and so it is necessary to develop comprehensive theoretical perspectives and models to study their political economy, products, audiences, and effects.

Overcoming the Divides: Toward a Critical Media Industry Studies

In "Media Communications vs. Cultural Studies: Overcoming the Divide" (Kellner 1997b), I argued against splitting the field of media/cultural studies into competing camps such as a text and theory-based cultural studies vs. an empiricist and social science-based communication studies. Now I would again propose that the emerging field of media industry studies overcome the divide between media/communication studies and cultural studies. In addition, I would suggest that it explore and engage both entertainment and news and information. As I argue below, divisions between the two are imploding in an era of tabloid

journalism and politicized entertainment and media industry studies should follow their trajectories and interaction.

For a critical media/cultural studies approach to the media industries, both political economy and more sociologically and culturally-oriented approaches to the study of media culture should be combined, as should text and theory-based humanities approaches with critical social science approaches. For some decades now, however, advocates of media and cultural studies based in textual or audience analysis have been at war with those who advocate a political economy optic. The hostility between political economy and cultural studies reproduces a great divide within the fields of communication and cultural studies between different methodologies, objects of study, and, by now, bodies of texts that represent the two opposing schools.

The hostility between political economy and cultural studies replicates a bifurcation within the fields of communications and culture between competing paradigms. In my view, the divide is an artificial one, rooted in an arbitrary academic division of labor. These conflicting approaches point to a splintering of the field of media and communications studies into specialized sub-areas with competing models and methods, and, ironically, to a lack of communication in the field of communications. The distinction

between "culture" and "communications" is arbitrary and rigid, and should be deconstructed. Whether one takes "culture" as the artifacts of high culture, the ways in which people live their lives, or the context of human behavior, it is intimately bound up with communication. All culture, to become social, and thus properly "culture," is both a mediator of and mediated by communication, and is thus communicational by nature. Yet "communication," in turn, is mediated by culture; it is a mode through which culture is disseminated and rendered actual and effective. There is no communication without culture and no culture without communication, so drawing a rigid distinction between them, and claiming that one side is a legitimate object of a disciplinary study, while the other term is relegated to a different discipline, is an excellent example of the myopia and futility of arbitrary academic divisions of labor.

A critical media/cultural studies approach theorizes the interconnections between culture communication, and how both also co-constitute each other. The cultural studies tradition attacked the positivistic transmission model of communication dominant in the communication sciences in North American and offered a very different model of communication. In James Carey's useful summary (1997: 1ff), that I am reconstructing here, communication

was denaturalized, taken out of nature and put into culture and society so that its ritualistic, symbolic, and contextual features could be taken into account. The process of communication was seen as taking place in a space and time continuum and thus mediated by geography, history, and politics. Technology was conceived as part of the process of shaping social relations and experience and was not seen as a mere neutral instrument of transmission, as in the positivist tradition. Communication thus constituted experience and was at the center of social and cultural life.

The split between culture and communication reproduces an academic division of labor which -- beginning early in the century and intensifying since the end of the Second World War -- followed the trend toward specialization and differentiation symptomatic of the capitalist economy. The university has followed a broader trend that some theorists equate with the dynamics of modernity itself, interpreted as a process of ever-greater differentiation and thus specialization in all fields from business to education. This trend toward specialization has undermined the power and scope of cultural and media studies and should be replaced by a more transdisciplinary position.

Today divisions within media and communication studies continue to be severe, as are divisions within cultural studies and between media/communication studies and cultural studies. The academic fields that study media, culture, and communication are clearly contested terrains. Not only is there a division between text and theory-based cultural studies contrasted to social science based media-communication studies, but there are divisions and fragmentation within these fields, with some arguing for the primacy of political economy, some focusing largely on text or audience, and others specializing in topics in isolation from contextualization in the broader field of culture and society.

Further, there is a division within media/culture and communication studies between emphases on entertainment contrasted to news and journalism, as well as differences between methodologies, theories, and what issues count as important. In my view, both the spheres of entertainment and information/journalism are immensely important and my own work over the past several decades has attempted to embrace both. For some, hard news and journalism is the most important life-blood of a democratic society (McChesney 2007), while many within media/cultural studies argue that it is entertainment that is a dominant form of

pedagogy, a major source of political ideology and indoctrination, and the battleground upon which major struggles of class, race, gender, sexuality, and other politics are fought.

I would argue, however, that the division between news and entertainment is no longer even remotely justified in an era of convergence of media, communication technologies, and media industries. Since at least the 1980s, there has been a severe crisis in journalism that is part of a crisis of democracy. The media industries have been taken over by corporate conglomerates that have severely reduced news and journalism divisions, as pointed out above. Accordingly, corporate broadcast networks have cut news budgets, focused on further developing them as profit centers, and cut back on foreign bureaus, to the extent that certain forms of news have practically disappeared in contemporary U.S. corporate television (McChesney 2007). Likewise, newspapers are in crisis with corporate conglomerates taking over once locally and family-owned newspapers, making them profit-centers and cutting back The take-over of major broadcasting, print publications, and emergent Internet culture by corporate conglomerates, has thus severely undermined journalism, news, and information in the US,

producing a crisis of democracy that continues to accelerate (Kellner 1990, 2005).

Furthermore, within the production of news and information in the broadcasting industry in particular, there has been the incursion of values from entertainment and tabloid journalism. The result is what has broadly been described as "infotainment" which represents an implosion between news and entertainment. Tabloidized journalism was all too apparent in the 1990s with the media spectacle of the O.J. Simpson trials dominating the news for years on end, succeeded by the Clinton sex and impeachment scandals (Kellner 2003a). With the growth of 24/7 cable channels in the US there has been a growth of focus on human interest stories and "breakings news" stories orchestrated as media spectacles. These involve the latest natural disasters and weather coverage of hurricanes, political scandals, or human tragedies .

In addition to news and journalism being pervaded by entertainment values and forms, entertainment often takes highly political forms. *Camera Politica (*Kellner and Ryan 1988) argued that Hollywood film from the 1960s through the present was a contested terrain involving struggles between liberals, conservatives and radicals over issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, politics, and other key issues of

the era. Television too is a contested terrain with shows that are markedly conservative competing with more liberal ones (see Kellner 1990 and 1995), and with the advent of pay cable television, even progressive programming (see the articles collected in Johnson 2007).

Examples of how media spectacle has become a major focus of media industries abound. Such spectacles have supplanted traditional journalism and substituted a form of mass entertainment for news and information. In an arena of intense competition with 24/7 cable TV networks, talk radio and blogs -- along with the proliferation of emergent media sites like Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube -- competition for attention is ever more intense. This has contributed toward the mainstream media going to sensationalistic tabloidized stories which they construct in the forms of media spectacle that attempt to attract maximum audiences for as much time as possible.

Analyzing and criticizing the increasing role of tabloid entertainment in the news arena and the processing of political events as media spectacle requires a media/cultural studies approach that incorporates political economy of media industries, textual analysis of specific media artifacts and spectacles, and reflections on their effects on audiences. We must consider, for example, the

ways that political events like the Iraq war, the scandals of the Bush-Cheney administration, and the 2008 presidential election are processed as media spectacle, occurring in an increasingly contested terrain over which the battles of the present and future are fought. In this matrix, news, information, and key political events are presented as narrative, spectacle, and entertainment with image and framing as important as the actual discourses and video-footage of events. Unpacking the implosions between news and entertainment, and studying both dimensions and their interaction, requires a comprehensive tripartite approach to the media industries that I have suggested in this study.

Such comprehensive perspectives provide critical and political approaches that enable individuals to dissect the meanings, messages, and effects of dominant and oppositional cultural forms. Textual analysis should utilize a multiplicity of perspectives and critical methods, and reception studies should delineate the wide range of subject positions through which audiences appropriate culture. This requires an insurgent multicultural approach that sees the importance of analyzing the dimensions of class, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexual preference within the politics of

representation of texts of media culture, while also studying their impact on how audiences read, interpret, and use the products of media industries and emergent technologies.

A critical media/cultural studies attacks sexism, racism, or bias against specific social groups (i.e., gays, intellectuals, youth, seniors, and so on), and criticizes texts that promote discrimination or oppression. Articulating media culture discourses and representations with social movements, it illuminates how media artifacts advance or oppose specific political movements and positions in the contemporary moment. A critical media/cultural studies should be linked to a critical media pedagogy that enables individuals to resist media manipulation and to increase their freedom and individuality. It is deeply important to teach individuals how media function within contemporary societies and to critically read, interpret, and decode media representations, as well as to produce media themselves. A critical media industry studies can help individuals become aware of the connection between media and forces of domination and resistance, and can help make audiences more critical and informed consumers and producers of their culture.[12] It can empower people to gain sovereignty over

their culture and to be able to struggle for alternative cultures and political change. The blending of key components of media and cultural studies approaches into the emerging field of media industry studies is thus not just another academic fad, but can be part of a struggle for a better society and a better life.

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[1] In this paper, I draw on Kellner 1995 and 2003a and Kellner and Durham 2006 to elaborate critical perspectives on media/cultural studies that could contribute to the emerging field of media industry studies. Thanks to Jennifer Holt for inviting me to contribute, discussing possible contributions, providing comments which helped with revision and development of my perspectives, and skillful editing.

[2] I develop this tripartite model of media/cultural studies, that I find in both figures of the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies in Kellner 1995 and dissect the "missed articulation" between the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies in Kellner 1997a.

[3] On the Frankfurt School theory of the culture industry, see Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 and the discussion of the Frankfurt School approach in Kellner 1989.

[4] On earlier traditions of cultural studies in the U.S., see Aronowitz 1993 and Carey 1997, and for Britain, see Davies 1995. There are many different versions of media/cultural studies and many individuals and groups contributed to the tradition, but I am focusing on the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies, as they have developed some of the most articulated and useful models for studying media industries.

[5] For an argument that popular artifacts of media culture have utopian elements that appeal to audiences wishes, fantasies, and hopes, as well as ideological components, see Jameson 1979 and the development of this argument in Kellner 1995.

[6] For a critique of Hartley's model of cultural studies and cultural populism, see Hammer and Kellner 2006. For critique of Harley's and other's celebration of the "creative industries," see McRobbie 1999a and 1999b.

[7] For critical takes on the postmodern turn in British cultural studies, see Kellner 1995 and McGuigan 1992 and for a postive appropriation of a critical and political postmodernism, see McRobbie 1994. For defense of poststructuralist and other recent theoretical discourses within "new cultural studies" see Hall and Birchall 2006.

[8]While I am here valorizing the political-economic-ideological readings emphasized by the Frankfurt School and certain phases of British cultural studies, I would also support in many interpretive contexts more philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic versions of cultural studies since media texts are polysemic, with multiple dimensions of meaning, and multiples uses. [CUT=For an articulation of the importance of philosophy for cultural studies, see Kellner 2001; on cultural studies and ethics, see Zylinska 2005; and on cultural studies and aesthetics, see Berube 2005.ENDCUT]

[9] Yet in another article from the same period (Hall 1986 [1980]), Hall rejected the political economy paradigm as reductionist and abstract (46-47). But note that he is rejecting the most economistic base/superstructure "logic of capital" model and not the importance of political economy per se ("This approach, too, has insights which are well worth following through"). Yet from the late 1970s through the present, the dimension of political economy has receded in importance throughout the field of cultural studies and some have been arguing for reinserting its importance in a reconstructed approach that overcomes the reductionism of

some versions of Marxism and political economy; see McGuigan 1992, Kellner 1995, and Grossberg 1997.

[10] This model was implicit in the Frankfurt School culture industry model and adumbrated in Hall (1980a) and Johnson (1986/1987) and guided much of the early Birmingham work. Around the mid-1980s, however, some associated with British cultural studies began to increasingly neglect the production and political economy of culture (some believe that this was always a problem with their work) and some culture studies became more academic, cut off from political struggle.

[11] On convergence, see Jenkins 2006, who notes a broad spectrum of technological, economic, and cultural convergences and highlights contradictory trends between increased concentration and power of corporate ownership contrasted with new opportunies for the masses and grass-root groups to use new technologies to democratize society.

[12] For more on media literacy see Kellner 1998, Kellner and Share 2007 and Kahn and Kellner 2006.