Political Economy and Cultural Studies
Approaches to Media and Globalization

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Media and Globalization
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Cultural Studies and Political Economy in media and communication studies

Chapter 1 - clarifies approaches to culture

- Presents a comparison of Political Economy and Cultural Studies approaches.

- Outlines two main approaches within Political Economy: the Schiller-McChesney tradition and the Cultural Industries approach initiated by Bernard Miège.

- Prefers the Cultural Industries approach.

- Points out that the political economy - cultural studies split is based on a dichotomy
Political Economy of communications

Draws on 18th century Scottish Enlightenment thinking and its 19th century critique (Adam Smith, David Ricardo vs. Marks and Engels)

Vincent Mosco (1996: 25) defines it as: “the study of social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources”.
Political Economy of communications

Peter Golding & Graham Murdock:
- inequalities of power, prestige, profit
- Four central characteristics; social change and history; social totality; moral philosop

North American model - Schiller-McChesney:
- Strategic uses of power - link growth in wealth and power of cultural industries to political and business allied interests.
- Processes of concentration, conglomeration and integration.

Cultural industries approach (European) - Miège:
- Distinction between cultural industries and other forms of industrial production
- Production and consumption not seen as separate entities, links supply side - cultural production and distribution in political and social contexts - to consumption - activity of audiences.
- Link between market structure and organization of cultural production and making of texts.
Political economy analysis

Origins: innovation/production/distribution
How were the companies created?
How did they grow?
How do they compete?
In what political/regulation context?
What consequences will their presence have on culture/democracy/development?
Political economy analysis - example

Time Warner

Businesses:

- **Publishing** (Time Inc. (*People*, *Sports Illustrated* etc.), Little Brown & Co., DC Comics),
- **Film** (Warner Bros., New Line Cinema, Castle Rock Entertainment, Warner International Theatres),
- **Television** production and distribution (Warner Television, WB Network, Turner Broadcasting),
- **Cable** networks (HBO, Cinemax, CNN, Cartoon Network, Turner Classic Movies, etc.),
- **Music** (Warner Music Group, including Atlantic, Elektra, Rhino, Warner Bros., Columbia House Co.),
- **Computer services** (AOL, CompuServe, Netscape etc.),
- **Professional sports** (Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Hawks).

Market tendencies:

- Horizontal integration
- Vertical integration
- Synergy
- Market concentration

*Time Warner*
Political economy analysis - example

Time Warner

General media analysis:

– Consequences of such media concentration on availability and quality of media products – homogenization of content - “Blockbuster complex”
– Trends of commodification, integration, and diversification
– Internationalization/transnationalization - compare with corporations such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp., Disney etc.)
– Impact on domestic/foreign politics - “CNN effect”
– Public sphere, public citizenship, democracy
– Dominance vs. Resistance/opposition
Other examples from curriculum

A Political Economy approach

Chapter 1 - McChesney criticizes the anti-democratic character of the corporate media system
Chapter 6 - the Political Economy of media in Southern Africa
Chapter 12 - the Political Economy of media ownership in Nigeria

All other chapters deal with issues of media ownership, control, regulation, property rights - all connected to preoccupation of PE/C approaches.
Cultural Studies

Inaugurated by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies under its director Richard Hoggart and his successor Stuart Hall:

- Variety of critical perspectives for the analysis, interpretation, and criticism of cultural artifacts, combining sociological theory with literary analysis of cultural texts.

- Were among the first to study effects of newspapers, radio, television, film, and other popular cultural forms on audiences - encoding/decoding.

- Concentrated on interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts/media culture and audience interpretations.

- Forefront issues of textuality, subjectivity, identity, discourse and pleasure in relation to culture

- Aimed at political goal of social transformation - location of forces of domination and resistance
Definition of culture

Hesmondhalgh quoting Raymond Williams:
Culture is a **signifying system** through which...a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored

- Ideology - Marx, Engels
- Hegemony - Gramsci
- Politics of representation
Cultural Studies analysis - example

cultural imperialism

Western media as:
- Tissue of worldwide dominance of neoliberal capitalism on everyday life - people seeking self-realization through consumer commodities.
- Media as a site of framing various stereotypes through stabilizing dominant ideology - competing ground for political and cultural meanings behind seemingly neutral banner of realism

But:
- Gendered, raced, classed, generational, ethnic readings
- Postcolonialist/Postmodernist perspectives - hybridization of global cultural products with local elements thereby producing new meanings
Political Economy vs. Cultural Studies

Political Economy:

- Accused of sole focus on economy - too narrow, deterministic.
- Neglecting texts, discourse, audiences, and consumption

But:

- Hesmondhalgh argues that cultural industries approach does not ignore activity of audiences - production and consumption as different moments in a single process

Cultural Studies:

- Seen as lacking consistent and strong analysis of institutional/structural context.
- Too narrow focus on media texts, identity, audience reception

But:

- Cultural economy as cultural studies perspective on economic life - economic practice as formatted/framed by economic discourses
- Relations between culture and commerce
Beyond Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy

“political economy versus cultural studies is neither an accurate nor useful way to characterise approaches to the media and popular culture” (Hesmondhalgh: p.44).

– Study of codes of television, film, popular music enhanced by examining formulas/conventions, investigation of production of culture.

– Can one really discern role of media in events such as Gulf War without analyzing production/political economy of news, as well as the actual text of media coverage and its reception?

– Can one fully grasp, for example, the Madonna phenomenon without discussing her market strategies, her political environment, her cultural artifacts, and their effects?

– In appraising, for example, the full social impact of pornography, one needs to be aware of the sex industry and the production process of films, not just texts themselves and their effects on audiences.

Example:


Wasco (2001) study of Walt Disney Company - examines history, political economy, as well as textual readings, reception, resistance to Disney products
Beyond Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy

The Circuit of Culture is a theory or framework that suggests that in studying a cultural text or artifact you must look at its representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. Du gay et al. (1997) suggest that taken together (these 5 points) complete a sort of circuit... through which any analysis of a cultural text... must pass if it is to be adequately studied (p.3).

The framework has been applied and extended to organizing Media...