



UNIVERSITY OF OSLO  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

# Political Economy and Cultural Studies Approaches to Media and Globalization

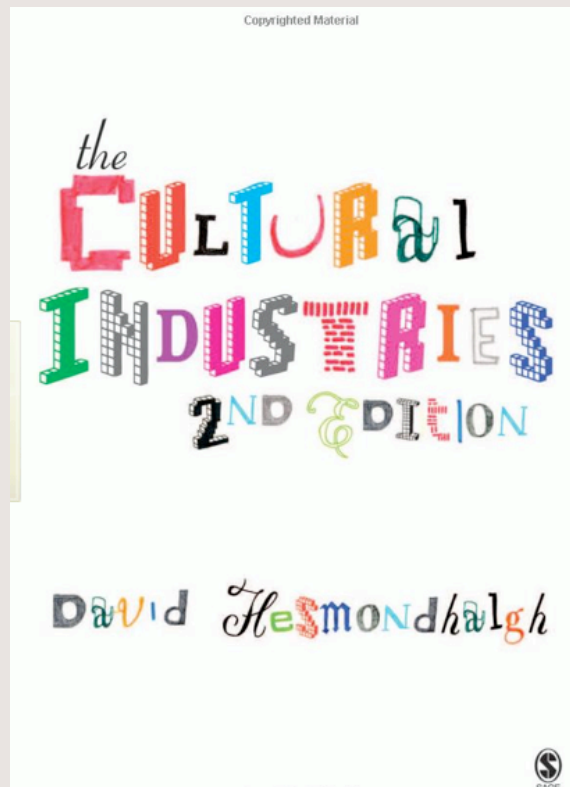
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Media and Globalization

Henry Mainsah - 3rd September 2009



# 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 philosophy**

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

## TimeWarner

### 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

[TimeWarner](#)



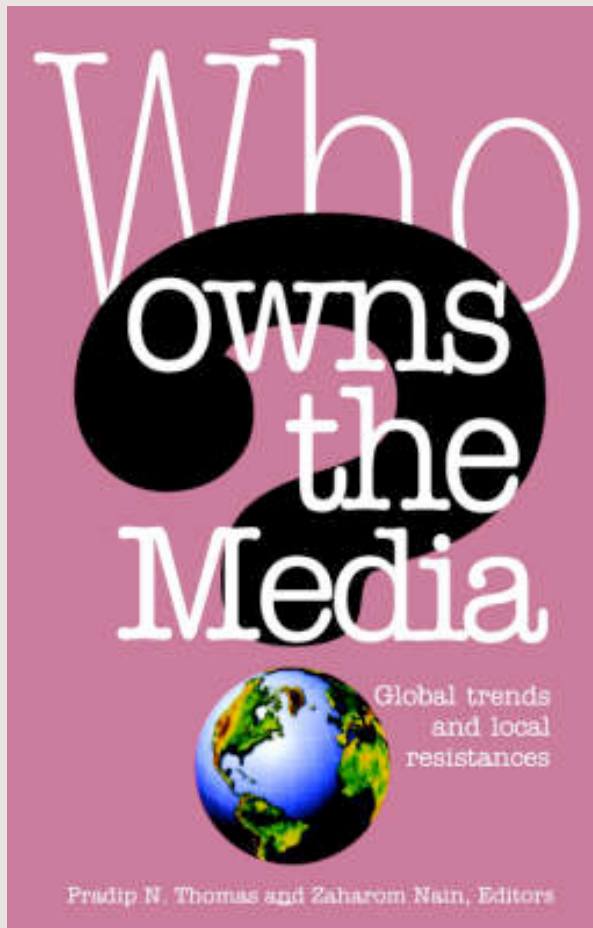
# Political economy analysis - example

## TimeWarner

### 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



Thomas & Nain (2004) Who Owns the Media  
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:

- Active audience theory - David Morley (1980), John Fiske(1989), Ien Ang(1990) -active negotiation process between audiences and media texts.
- 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).

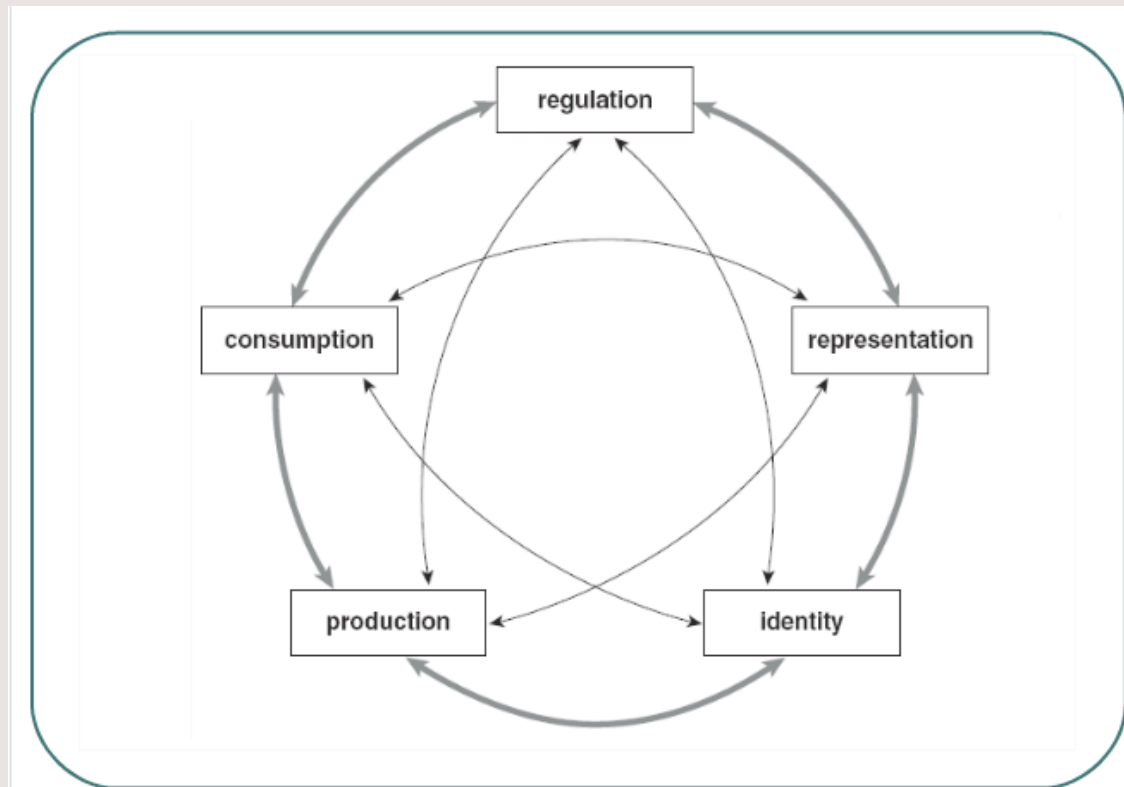
- Study of codes of television, film, popular music enhanced by examining formulas/conventions, investigation of production of culture.
- Can one really discern role of media in events such as Gulf War without analyzing production/political economy of news, as well as the actual text of media coverage 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:

Gripsrud (1995) study of *Dynasty* - traces production context, discusses textual elements, distribution, reception.

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



Circuit of Culture model du Gay et al.)

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).



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