Cultural Industries and the (Geographical) Political Economy of the Media

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This chapter provides an overview of the central findings and propositions of a multifaceted literature dealing with the political economy of "the media" and of the cultural industries whose products constitute today's most recognizable media forms: television, radio, music, magazines, the Internet, and so on. While its primary focus is on the *geographical* political economy of the media, its scope is wider and covers political economy more broadly conceived – partly since any specifically geographical issues cannot be understood except in terms of that wider framework, and partly in view of the fact that the political economy of the media is in many respects geographically-distinctive *by its very nature*. The chapter argues that notwithstanding the considerable progress that has been made in elucidating the media's geographical political economy, much remains to be explored, particularly in view of rapid and ongoing technological transformations in the cultural industries and the manifold political-economic implications thereof.

The chapter understands "political economy of the media" in a number of connected ways. To begin with, it follows Peter Golding and Graham Murdock (1997, pp. 11–14) in distinguishing media political economy from media economics. Where the latter treats "the media economy" as a separate sphere of activity, the former emphasizes "the interplay between economic organization and political, cultural and social life"; it actively considers both the economic *and* symbolic dimensions of the media, and it attempts to demonstrate "how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them."

What becomes obvious when examining these issues, however, is that the media, while displaying their "own" such political economy, are pivotal to contemporary

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political economy much more generally. Hence Robert McChesney's (2003) definition of the political economy of communication as not only the question of how ownership structures, economics and government policies influence media and communication systems, technologies, practices and content, but also how media and communication systems and content impact on wider social relations. While the main focus of this chapter is on the former, therefore, it also touches on key dimensions of the latter.

As we shall see, the political economy of the media and the cultural industries is in many respects idiosyncratic. There are numerous reasons for this. We will encounter several of these as we proceed, but two merit foregrounding at the outset because their relevance will be apparent throughout and because they help to explain the distinctive nature not only of the media's political economy but also of its critique. For, this critique, *unlike* many other strands of scholarly political economy, has been undertaken exclusively in recent decades and, more pertinently, with little direct "assistance" from classical political economy (whether of bourgeois or Marxian variants), even if the latter has decisively shaped its mood and basic analytical parameters.

The first of these two reasons concerns the fact that the media or cultural "commodity" is itself relatively distinctive. The political-economic structures and dynamics that crystallize around it do not exactly mirror the capitalist political economy more widely because the commodity produced and circulated is substantively different. In turn, the way this economy is conceptualized must also be distinctive, even if it leans on "generic" political economy. Hence this chapter follows Nicholas Garnham in his assertion that the "economic nature of the cultural industries can be explained in terms of the general tendencies of commodity production within the capitalist mode of production *as modified by the special characteristics of the cultural commodity*" (1987, p. 30; my emphasis). In short, classic political-economic analysis needs substantial reversioning since it did not – indeed, could not – grapple with the peculiar attributes of commodities that did not exist until the twentieth century.

The second reason ultimately derives from the first. According to Garnham, one of the principal implications of the distinctive nature of the cultural commodity is that the primary locus of power and profit in the cultural industries is found not in the production of such commodities but in their distribution (cf. Christophers 2008). In other words, to come satisfactorily to grips with the political economy of the cultural industries we must focus more on distribution than production, since power and its exercise and effects are what political economy, at heart, is about. And here we confront the second "limit" to the conceptual purchase of classical political economy. As is widely recognized, such political economy, in the hands of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo *and* of Karl Marx, was oriented predominantly towards the relations and forces of *production*. Production was theorized as general, and law-like; distribution (or what such economists termed "exchange" or "circulation"; "distribution" was something else entirely) was deemed particularistic, and contingent, and was effectively assumed away (Harvey 2012). The upshot, once again, is that the purchase of classical political economy is significantly circumscribed where the political economy specifically of the media is concerned.

As such, over the past three or four decades, political economists of the media have had to start, to some extent, from scratch. They have learned *from* classical political economy – and primarily, it would be fair to say, from Marx – in the sense that it is recognized that, as Ronald Bettig (1996, p. 3) observes, "the logic of the [cultural] commodity must be situated within the larger context of the logic of capital." But they have had to both creatively adapt the insights of such literature to the cultural industries *and* add substantially to them. In what follows, I sketch out these adaptations and additions in the form of ten linked sets of propositions.

Geographies of Production (Proposition 1)

Classical political economy, and Marx's political economy in particular, was heavy on time and the temporal dimensions of the productive process but light on space and the *geographies* of production. One of the core findings of research into the cultural industries in recent decades, however, is that such industries are characterized by a marked spatial clustering. Producers of cultural and media products, in other words, tend to locate close to one another in dense agglomerations. Not only that, but such agglomerations are overwhelmingly *urban* agglomerations, found in – and often lending considerable cultural visibility to – major cities such as Los Angeles, London, Paris, Tokyo and Milan (Scott 2000).

It is true, of course, that the urban clustering of productive activity has been identified in many other industry sectors, too; the phenomenon is not exclusive to the media environment. Yet it does appear to be especially pronounced here. And while there is considerable debate over why this might be the case, researchers typically appeal to distinctive features of the cultural commodity such as the particular innovation processes involved in its development. Mark Lorenzen and Lars Frederiksen (2008), for example, argue that cultural industries benefit from both localization economies (positive externalities arising from co-location with similar firms) and urbanization economies (externalities related to co-location with other clusters and to the broader benefits of urban location) since they rely upon three different types of innovation (termed "variety," "novelty" and "radical" innovation).

But such analysis of media production clustering, while a mainstay of economic-geographical analysis since the mid-1980s and the seminal contributions of Susan Christopherson and Michael Storper (Christopherson and Storper 1986; Storper and Christopherson 1987), does not usually warrant the label of "political economy." More often it takes the form of a "weak" economics in the sense that it is modeled on the insights into clustering originally explicated by Alfred Marshall in the late nineteenth century, but generally lacks the formal, quantitative model*ing* required by the "strong" neoclassical economic tradition that Marshall did much to help institute. Indeed, where such economic-geographical work on the cultural industries begins to approximate more to *political* economy, as in the work of Neil Coe and Jennifer Johns (2004), it tends to extend inquiry – as the title of their contribution suggests – "Beyond production clusters." It has done so, in the first place, by way of a dramatic jumping of scales.

From the Local to the Global (Proposition 2)

If analysts of cultural industry clusters have pointed to the peculiarity of cultural-industry products in terms of the innovation processes that spawn them, the political economist Garnham (1987) was minded to look elsewhere. In his view, cultural commodities have two key characteristics. We will consider only the first of these here; the second surfaces in the following section.

The essence of the first key attribute of cultural commodities, argues Garnham (ibid., p. 30) is that "in general the costs of reproduction are marginal in relation to the costs of production." Once one version of a film, television program or piece of recorded music has been created (often at extremely high cost, of course), it costs relatively little – and often, in the digital world, effectively nothing – to produce another. Because of this cost structure, it follows that "the marginal returns from each extra sale tend to grow" (ibid.): it will be vastly more profitable to sell a $10 compact disc to a million people than to one person because while revenues increase proportionately with each sale, costs clearly do not; as such, cumulative profitability increases, as Garnham observes, with each extra sale. And precisely because of the enhanced profitability associated with sales maximization, there is, in the cultural industries, "a very marked drive towards expanding . . . audiences" (ibid.).

Such audience expansion can occur along several axes (the targeting of new, untapped audience demographics, for instance) but perhaps the critical and most fertile one is singularly geographical: growing audiences by selling to the maximum possible number of international markets, and ideally to a global audience. The immaterial costs of reproduction, Garnham therefore shows, have historically tended to lead in the cultural industries to a profound globalizing impetus.

This globalizing impetus has been most frequently observed and most heavily researched in relation to music and *especially* in relation to film and television. The literature on such globalization can be helpfully – although, obviously, not entirely cleanly – segmented into two phases and two corresponding political-economic constellations. From the late 1960s through to the late 1980s, research focused largely on US-led media globalization, which was typically seen as a forceful, unbending political-economic force that trampled on "local" cultures in local markets and thus befitted the label of "cultural imperialism" (see especially Schiller 1969, 1976). Jeremy Tunstall's *The Media Are American* (1977) captured the overall gist of this analysis.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, research in this field has become markedly more diverse and textured. For one thing, the applicability of the label of "imperialism" to US media expansion was subjected to close critical scrutiny (e.g. Tomlinson 1991), with scholars suggesting that such a concept, inter alia, rendered inert and thus patronized active audiences around the world who interpreted and evaluated content in highly diverse and culturally-specific ways (e.g. Ang 1985; Liebes and Katz 1990). For another, researchers began to show that while Hollywood remained tremendously powerful amidst the circuits of international media capital, it was not *only* the US's cultural industries that harbored and realized globalizing ambitions. The rise of Bollywood, the international popularity of Latin American *telenovelas* and the emergence of television-formats development-and-export hothouses in the Netherlands and the UK have been just some of the more prominent phenomena to prompt a shift in scholarly discourse away from US cultural imperialism and towards "media globalization." But while the political economy of this new scheme of things looks quite different – less monolithic, less centrist, more competitive, and more open to notions of "active" consumers – the underlying conjuncture of low marginal costs with an associated expansionist impulse remains as pertinent as ever.

Creative Labor, Monopoly Rent and Public Goods (Proposition 3)

Capitalism, writes Bernard Miège (1989, p. 29), tends "to push cultural production towards the dominant model, namely that of material production." And yet, as we shall begin to explore now, the capitalization and commodification *of* cultural production is riddled with contradictions. Miège (ibid.) helpfully highlights one of the more obvious: precisely "in order to be standardized," he argues, "cultural products must continue to be marked by the stamp of the unique, of genius." They must look, and feel, distinctive. One implication of this, in turn, is that as Miège rightly points out, "the star system and the industrial organization of Hollywood are indissolubly linked." But there are two other implications with much wider political-economic significance.

First, something curious and vitally important occurs in the realm of labor. Again, here is Miège (ibid., p. 30): "The penetration of capitalism into the cultural sphere is thus not, unlike what happens in other sectors (commerce, leisure), necessarily accompanied by the generalization of wage labor and the steady disappearance of the independent cultural worker. The old system of royalties is maintained and even tends to grow more complex." In other words, "creative" laborers – writers, directors, producers and so forth – play a critical role, and are able to secure a portion of surplus value in the shape of royalties (cf. Garnham 2005). At the same time, however, the bulk of the labor force *does* comprise wage laborers; hence Mike Wayne (2003, p. 18) depicts a cultural-industry workforce bifurcated into intellectual or creative labor on the one hand and more manual or technical labor on the other. And as Miège (1989, p. 29) insists, *only* the former (a minority) "are in a position to claim a part of the surplus value produced." For the majority, the notion of creative autonomy "is a pure façade: it allows them to be paid at a rate markedly lower than the value of their labor power."

The second crucial implication of cultural commodities being "marked by the stamp of the unique" is that their producers are nominally able to extract from their distribution what political economists term *monopoly rents*. David Harvey (2002, p. 94) explains: “Monopoly rent arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable.” For Harvey (ibid., p. 93), “those products designated as ‘cultural’” constitute a quintessential example of such items.

But herein lies a profound contradiction or tension, one hinted at by Miège – in his assertion that cultural products must be rendered “unique” *in order to be standardized* – and fleshed out by Harvey (ibid., p. 95): “while uniqueness and particularity are crucial to the definition of ‘special qualities’, the requirement of tradability means that no item can be so unique or so special as to be entirely outside the monetary calculus.” An item must be commodified *to some degree* to enable monetization. But this process rests on a knife-edge; if it goes too far, the very source of monopoly rent is extinguished. “The bland homogeneity that goes with pure commodification,” notes Harvey (ibid., p. 96), “erases monopoly advantages. Cultural products become no different from commodities in general.”

All of which brings us to the second “special characteristic” of the cultural commodity identified by Garnham: the fact that “the cultural commodity is not destroyed in the process of consumption” (1987, p. 30). Another way of expressing this is to say that the cultural commodity is a “public good” since it is *nonrival in consumption*: consumption by one person does not limit or detract from consumption by another person. The significance of this, meanwhile, is that not only do nonrivalry and the easy, cheap replicability of commodified products not, as Harvey (2002, p. 95) observes, “provide a basis for monopoly rent.” They also, more materially, endanger the formation of meaningful economic markets per se. The fact that cultural products are nonrival in consumption means, says Garnham (1987, p. 30), that “it has been difficult to establish the scarcity on which price is based.”

What solutions have the cultural industries formulated to resolve this conundrum? What have been their strategies, in Garnham’s words, for “artificially limiting access in order to create scarcity” (ibid.)? More pointedly, perhaps, “how to assemble monopoly powers” (Harvey 2002, p. 98)? Three main strategies have, historically, been pursued. We now consider these in turn, in propositions four (the first), five and six (the second) and seven (the third).

Consolidation and Centralization (Proposition 4)

Harvey is quite clear about the first and in some ways most transparent of the strategies used to create scarcity around products to which none “naturally” adheres and, in the process, to enable the extraction of monopoly rents: namely, to “centralize capital in mega-corporations” (ibid.). If the requirement to trade and commodify “the cultural” – and the nonrival status of such commodities – makes monopoly rents elusive, then the simplest way to realize the latter is to *monopolize*.

Dominating cultural commodification institutionally and operationally helps protect the monopoly rents that commodification *itself* threatens to erode.

Not surprisingly, there is a large literature detailing the nature and extent of concentration and consolidation in the cultural industries at both individual national levels and, increasingly, internationally. In the case of the former, the US represents an especially stark example. When Ben Bagdikian published the first edition of *The Media Monopoly* in 1983, he reported that 50 major corporations controlled the national media; but as he revised his text through five successive new editions, the number was gradually whittled down, first to 29 (by 1987), then 23 (1990), 14 (1992), 10 (1997) and finally 6 (2000). At the international scale, Robert McChesney (2008) has similarly chronicled the pace and scale of industry rationalization. Not only has the number of major market participants been reduced through multiple large-scale cross-border mergers, but complex webs of cross-ownership make the pool of pertinent shareholders smaller still, leading McChesney (ibid., pp. 320–1) to conclude that in some respects "the global media market more closely resembles a cartel than it does the competitive marketplace found in economics textbooks."

One particularly interesting and important dimension of this consolidation trend can be brought into focus by returning momentarily to Garnham. We have identified already what he sees as the two special characteristics of cultural commodities – their trivial marginal costs of production and their nonrivalry in consumption – together with some of the respective implications thereof. But it is the *combination* of these two characteristics that is, for Garnham, particularly salient. It is the *combination* of "the drive to audience maximization" with "the need to create artificial scarcity by controlling access" that makes "*cultural distribution*, *not cultural production*" the "*key locus of power and profit*" (Garnham 1987, p. 31; original emphasis) because both are ultimately distributive (i.e. exchange-oriented) issues.

The relevance of this insight at this juncture in our argument is that because it is in distribution that power is most consequential and that the profitability of cultural commodification is essentially settled (one way or another), it is in distribution that "we typically find the highest levels of capital intensity, ownership concentration and multi-nationalization" (ibid., p. 32). If one is going to seek to monopolize, better to do it in distribution than in production, where the levers of political-economic control – to determine whether the cultural economy makes money or not – simply are not available. All of this is borne out in historical-geographical practice. If we look around the world at such realms as book publishing, video game publishing, television and film, and recorded music, one finds production sectors in which, to be sure, major firms participate, but where large numbers of small, independent, single-territory producers *also* manage to thrive. The same is not true, however, of distribution, where the field is dominated by a small number of consolidated and frequently transnational conglomerates. The creation of economic scarcity, with a view to securing monopoly rents, has been served by monopolization not of production but of distribution.

Copyrighting Scarcity (Proposition 5)

Yet as Garnham was also aware, centralization of power in the form of monopolistic or oligopolistic control of distribution has not alone been sufficient to create the scarcity required of the cultural economy. Even a single, globally-dominant distributor of all cultural products would struggle to generate profits without some way of dealing *technically* and *legally* – as well as economically – with the problem of nonrivalry. What good would selling to one person do if their (nonrival) consumption precipitated "free" consumption by others? While the advent of Internet-based file-sharing technologies has made this more of a live question than ever before, the question has never been an idle one for the cultural industries.

Garnham, interestingly, does not discuss this particular aspect of those industries' solution to the problem of market formation. Harvey, however, does, and he correctly points to the significance of the central legal institution of copyright. Copyright is, quite literally, *the right to copy*, a definition and legal privilege that clearly takes on particular force in the context of an economy of nominally nonrival consumption. (What worth is a right to copy, by way of counterpoint, when consumption of a good by one person intrinsically rules out consumption by another?) It is copyright that enables the cultural industries to make many of their outputs – in theory at least – *rivalrous* (to use the hideous economics terminology). As consumers, we are all aware of the copyright warnings on compact discs and digital versatile discs (DVD). We typically skim these without a moment's thought, but as Harvey (2002, p. 98) observes it is copyright, "[p]atents and so-called 'intellectual property rights'," embedded in the "international commercial laws that regulate all global trade," that enable the corporate world to "secure ever more firmly the monopoly rights of private property" (c.f. Christophers 2016, ch. 3).

Bettig (1996), among others (e.g. Gillespie 2007), has contributed to the writing of a broad and fascinating political-economic history of the work of copyright in enabling the monetization of cultural products. Notably, and not surprisingly, it is a history indelibly interwoven with the history of consolidation and monopolization touched upon in the previous section; strategies to enact scarcity have never operated in isolation from one another. Hence Bettig shows how "new" media technologies – he was writing in the mid-1990s, note – such as cable television and video recorders (VCR) ultimately came to be thoroughly integrated into the prevailing, Hollywood-dominated market structure despite being introduced into the marketplace before a set of copyright laws had been implemented, and despite appearing to harbor the potential fundamentally to disrupt existing markets and market power relations. His narrative is one in which the emphasis is placed on oligopolistic power allied to the role of the state in "recognizing, conferring, and protecting intellectual property rights" (Bettig 1996, p. 3).

Of course, the rapid development and uptake of new digital and networked technologies over the past 10–15 years have put the viability – and hence political economy – of cultural copyright under strain and in the spotlight as never before. Moreover, opponents of the cultural industries' attempts to shore up legacy copyright systems in the face of peer-to-peer file-sharing and related threats include not only large numbers of consumers but also notable influential academics (e.g. Lessig 2004). Hence, the spread of "gift economies" and the effective death of "copyright capitalism" have long been predicted (e.g. Leyshon 2003). But while space does not permit here of a detailed account of actual developments, it is increasingly clear that even in the case of products where the Internet has demonstrably revolutionized distribution practices (e.g. recorded music), the core political-economic trinity of oligopolistic corporate power, legal protections and monopoly rent extraction remains far from broken (Rogers 2013).

Territorializing Scarcity (Proposition 6)

In his analysis of the cultural industries' historical taming of threatening technologies such as cable television and VCRs, Bettig explicitly considers the geographical dimensions of the pertinent political-economic dynamics. Notably, he demonstrates that as Hollywood fought to maintain its iron grip on global film and television markets in the 1980s, it repeatedly "found itself engaged in foreign policy making alongside the U.S. government" (1996, p. 189), primarily to compel foreign governments to enforce the intellectual property rights of copyright owners. Which begs the question: what is, and has been, the geography *of* copyright in the international context?

This is a vital question to answer because the cultural industries' copyright scaffolding – and thus, we can suggest, the political economy of media in general – *has* always had a distinctive and economically-material spatial architecture. This, at the most basic level, has comprised a territorialization of copyright at the national scale: rights owners, whether it be in the recorded music sector, in book publishing, or in television and film, license the rights to distribute their products strictly on a territory-by-territory basis.

Why have they done this? This is not an altogether straightforward matter. Partly it has always been the most pragmatic approach: control over local distribution platforms (e.g. broadcast television, packaged media wholesale, etc.) has generally been nationally-circumscribed, so it has simply made practical sense to parcel up rights accordingly. At a deeper level, there is a rationale of *control* (Christophers 2014b): segmentation of the world into a series of discrete national markets allows the rights owner to tailor the details of local release to each local market (differentiating by price, by timing of release, and even by exact content) in such a way as to maximize overall revenues. At heart, however, we come back to the question of scarcity and market formation: competitive pressures look different in different national markets and buyers in those different markets can display widely varying abilities to pay. What scarcity "looks" like varies considerably from place to place, and so therefore must the supply-and-demand-oriented strategies for configuring it.

There is one especially critical point to note about the territorialization of scarcity and of cultural-products markets. Specifically, this industry strategy has come under considerable pressure in the last two decades from distribution technologies that transparently threaten to render national economic boundaries obsolete. First satellite television and then the Internet – with the latter extending the scope of the threat from television alone to essentially all media products with digital adaptations – have opened up unprecedented technical possibilities for *direct* cross-border distribution of cultural products. How, in such a world, could a strictly territorialized system of rights allocation and exploitation be maintained? Here is not the place to posit an answer. The issues are, necessarily, complex, embracing at once the cultural, economic, technical, political and – not least – legal spheres. Suffice to say that the cultural industries are grappling with those issues on a daily basis and that *despite* the manifold threats, territorialization remains the dominant approach (Christophers 2009, pp. 143–60; 2014a, b).

The Attention Economy (Proposition 7)

In many respects the third and final solution to the problem of manufacturing scarcity is the most interesting since it has effectively entailed abandoning the attempt, through circumscribing access, to make the cultural product *itself* scarce, and exploiting instead an *alternative* – albeit connected – locus of scarcity. That locus is found, ironically, in the stratum constituted by the consumers *of* cultural products, and its mining makes for a fascinating and crucial political and cultural economy.

We are referring, of course, to advertising, where the retailers of stubbornly nonrival cultural products such as, most notably, broadcast television, frequently eschew charging consumers to watch programming and instead charge advertisers for the privilege of access to the consumer and his or her scarce attention. In this respect, advertising is, at heart, an attention economy (Davenport and Beck 2001), one in which the audience is constituted as the commodity for sale and where, as Garnham (1987, p. 31) observes, "the cultural software merely acts as a free lunch." Free-to-air, advertising-funded broadcast television is perhaps the prototypical example of such an economy.

Political economists of the media have written extensively on the nature of the attention economy in the media sector. Among the most influential, early interventions was that of Dallas Smythe (e.g. 1981), who pointed out that classical Marxism had never dealt with the demand-management function of advertising and the mass media because it did not exist until the 1920s at the earliest. His answer to the question of "what is the principal product of the commercial mass media in twentieth century capitalism?" was original and powerful: *audience power*. It is audience power, he argued, that is commodified insofar as it is produced, sold, purchased and consumed. And the term "power" was, for Smythe, vital, since he insisted that the audience *is* working – even if unwittingly – *for* capital. Smythe posited that this was unpaid work. Sut Jhally (1991), deepening and extending Smythe's insights, agreed that audiences "work" for the cultural industries in consuming advertising and hence creating symbolic meaning for advertisers and profit for the media, but theorized entertainment as the "wage" they receive for doing so.

Again, however, new technologies have posed troubling questions for the manufacturers and retailers of scarcity. If the power and profitability of commercial broadcasters is predicated on their ability to aggregate audience "eyeballs" and sell them to advertisers, what do technologies such as digital video recorders – giving viewers the capacity simply to skip commercials – mean for the attendant political-economic configurations? Once more, such issues are in the process of being worked out (and researched); and once more, the industry, through innovations such as product placement and advertiser-funded programming, is proving itself highly adaptable.

Smythe's conceptualization of advertising specifically in terms of capitalist *demand management*, meanwhile, is particularly pertinent. For, what he demonstrated is that advertising – and the media more generally – is doubly implicated in the political economy of capitalism. The cultural industries, as we have seen, represent one part *of* the capitalist economy, and dance broadly to the tune of its political-economic laws, even if certain steps are different in view of the special characteristics of the cultural commodity. But, as the example of advertising shows, the media support and "lubricate" capitalist circulation in a much wider sense. We therefore cannot understand the political economy of capitalism per se without explicating the role of the cultural industries *within* it. In our three closing propositions, we shall reflect briefly on different aspects of that role.

The *Culture* Industry (Proposition 8)

Let us first return momentarily to Miège (1989), who usefully distinguishes between three different "modes of insertion of cultural labour into the general process of production" (p. 25). They are, firstly, non-capitalist production of cultural products (which we will touch upon in proposition number 10); secondly, capitalist cultural production (which has been our focus so far); and thirdly, the "integration of cultural products, normally in the form of non-material performances, into the process of circulation within the framework of the realization of value" (ibid.)

This last is our focus here, but what exactly is Miège getting at? For political economists, the "realization" of value means converting the outputs of production into money through sale in the marketplace. Thus it means, in Smythe's terms, consumer demand; and Miège, like Smythe, is pointing to the critical role of cultural products in general and advertising in particular in helping value to be realized and thus in helping capital – envisioned as perpetual circulation or flow – literally to *survive*. Miège (ibid., p. 36) calls this "the promotion of commerce by culture."

For some writers, this is much more than simply a matter of the mobilization of the media to sell *particular* products. It is about the media being used to sell products – commodities, commodification, capitalism – *in general*. This was the argument advanced by Horkheimer and Adorno in the famous essay on "The Culture Industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972[1944]). How could we understand the fact that workers were so docile – and seemingly, in most cases, contented – despite often-challenging economic circumstances? "The Culture Industry" was the answer: the mass media rendered mass society submissive by *selling* capitalism's merits.

Horkheimer and Adorno's argument was resolutely political-economic but it was also profoundly psychological (and, needless to say, highly controversial). "The Culture Industry" helped keep people "happy" because it convinced them that happiness was a function of commodity acquisition, and thus of the capitalist society that facilitated this. Others, writing more recently, but equally convinced of the role of the media in reinforcing and thus reproducing the political economy of capitalism, have emphasized other dimensions of the media's power. Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) was a famous example – arguing that the mass media simply reflect and entrench the capitalist interests of the capitalist institutions that own them – but, focusing on the news media, it was arguably not directly pertinent to the cultural industries. McChesney's *The Political Economy of Media* (2008), however, is; its particular polemic alleges the power of the corporate media to constrain the democratic public sphere and, in the process, to cement capitalist political economy.

Political Economies of Time and Space (Proposition 9)

One of the most influential writers on the political economy of the media in the past two decades has been Vincent Mosco. In his *The Political Economy of Communication* (2009), Mosco theorizes three concepts or what he calls "entry points" for the analysis of the political economy of communications media. One is "commodification" – the process of converting use values into exchange values, which much of this chapter has been concerned with to this point. The second is "structuration" – a concept borrowed from Anthony Giddens and intended to curtail a perceived tendency in political economy to focus on the "structures" of the material relations of production at the expense of the "action" or "agency" of individuals. The third, and the one we are interested in here, is what Mosco calls "spatialization."

By "spatialization," Mosco (ibid., p. 14) refers to the pivotal role of communications media historically in enabling the "overcoming [of] the constraints of space in social life." Communications media of all stripes, he argues, have progressively contributed to making the world a smaller place by annihilating space *with* time: reducing the time it takes for geographical distances to be bridged physically and, no less importantly, experientially. The great Canadian political economist Harold Innis had suggested much the same thing in identifying the "spatial bias" of modern communications media – media that were "space-binding" in the sense that they distributed information or entertainment to many people over increasingly long distances (see Carey 1988).

The primary emphasis of the literature on the spatialization associated with modern mass media and communications technologies has been on its cultural ramifications. Books like Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1997) are emblematic; so too is Marshall McLuhan's famous trope of the "global village." But the spatialization evoked by Mosco clearly has political-economic implications as well (hence its centrality to a book *on* political economy), and these extend well beyond the role of the media in facilitating – through spatialization – the globalization sought *by* the media (proposition two). Consider, for instance, the arguments of David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). In relation to communications media Harvey coined the phrase "time-space compression" to capture precisely the changing experience of space and time discussed by Mosco. And he argued, significantly, that time-space compression was intimately implicated in a formative shift in Western capitalist political economy from the Fordist system of production to the "flexible accumulation" characterizing the period since the early 1970s.

The Role of the State (Proposition 10)

To this point our focus has been exclusively on media mediated by the framework of capitalist political economy – which is to say, on profit-oriented cultural *industries*. And with good reason: the vast majority of mass-market cultural output of all forms is today produced and distributed by commercial organizations. But recall Miège's three categories of cultural production, the first of which was *non-capitalist* production of cultural products. His category includes, of course, all manner of small-scale cultural activities that occur outside – or at least, nominally outside – the market economy and its profit calculus. Here, however, where our interest is in industrial-*scale* cultural production, the one form of pertinent large-scale non-capitalist activity is that which is funded by the state.

What role or roles, in the West, has the state historically assumed in relation to large-scale media production? Far and away the most significant such role has been the chartering and funding of public-service radio and television broadcasting services. Such broadcasting has a long and (in many eyes) distinguished heritage, dating back to the founding of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the UK in the inter-war period. The primary rationale for public-service broadcasting (PSB) has long been that private-sector media organizations tend not to satisfy in isolation all public informational needs: a case of "market failure." As such, news and educational material have always been PSB staples, typically alongside entertainment, programming designed to promote national culture and identity, and programming geared towards minorities and various special interest groups. PSB organizations tend to be funded by the state indirectly – through, for example, license fees – rather than directly out of general taxation, although many are increasingly reliant on commercial sources of revenue as the pressures on state finances tighten.

So far as the political economy of PSB is concerned, we can point briefly to three main issues of interest. First, this public-sector cultural industry is, not surprisingly, characterized by a *different* political economy to commercial media (different motives, different power relations, different economics), although many would argue that the differences have radically diminished as commercial revenue sources become more material and as private-sector management regimes have been widely imported in repeated efficiency drives. Second, PSB not only bears its own political economy but impacts directly on the political economy of private-sector media. Witness the persistent complaints of commercial media groups in countries with a strong PSB presence that the latter “unfairly” distorts market competition; such distortion may in reality be less marked than the complainants allege, but it is indisputable that *some* effect on commercial political economy is exercised. Third, lastly, and most significantly of all, it would be hard to dispute that PSB affects a country’s political economy in the very broadest sense. It is frequently observed, for instance, that countries with strong PSB traditions – the Scandinavian countries, for example – tend to be more centrist or left-leaning than those that do not (the US being a good example of the latter). Again, however, the exact nature of this relationship is unclear. Indeed it is, in some respects, a classic chicken-and-egg question. Does a progressive political economy make space for an enduring PSB presence, or does the latter buttress and sustain the former? Ultimately, we do not know.

Conclusion

In this short overview of the cultural industries and of the (geographical) political economy of the media, I have developed a series of interlocking propositions about how researchers have sought to describe and account for that political economy. Hopefully, two general, underlying themes will have become clear, and I will conclude by drawing them out more directly (cf. Christophers 2012).

First, there is the question – to which the final three of our ten propositions sought to speak – about the media and their implication in political economy in the broadest, non-sector-specific sense. Both within geography specifically and indeed in critical social science more generally, political economists have, with notable exceptions, been oddly reluctant to engage with the materiality of the media. Given the brief account above of how important the media and cultural industries *are* to contemporary capitalist political economy, I hope to have shown that this analytical marginality is unsupportable and unsustainable.

Second, there is a narrower disciplinary question. As we have seen, the political economy of the media is, in so many different respects, deeply and fascinatingly geographical. Yet scarcely any economic geographers of the media and cultural industries have examined these political-economic structures and dynamics (which is not the same as saying that geographical political economists have largely neglected the media, note). Instead, we have seen, for the past three decades, a painfully narrow preoccupation with media production clusters – a literature from which, moreover, questions of *political* economy are also typically evacuated. This, too, seems unsustainable, and one therefore hopes that the tentative steps taken here help precipitate a much longer geographical journey.

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