Political Economy Media Theory: A Bibliographic Essay

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In the following research article, more or less 21 entries including books and research articles have been reviewed; of course, this work is not all-inclusive but a bibliographic essay, and work has been done on the material to which author has the excess. However, this basic source guide may be of importance to the researchers who wish to conduct their studies on this topic. Hopefully, it would provide the researchers with starting point from which to carry out further research in the areas of their interest.

In International Encyclopaedia of Communication (1989), we can see that two principal themes have emerged, therefore in Marxist discussion of the communication of ideas, values, and attitudes: the dependence of mental life on the "relations of production" consisted by the ownership of productive force and the consequent class relations, and the (relatively) independent role of mental life in the reproduction or transformation of a form of social life. Thus in the structuralism Marxism of French philosopher Louis Althuser a society, or social formation, is conceived as hierarchy of structures or practices - economics, political, ideological, and scientific - in which the economic is causally

primary or determining only in "the last instance" (in Engles phrase) and the other structures have a large degree of autonomy.

Althuser (1969) says that in reaction against the classic Marxist explanation of the role of the mass media. We are offered an elaboration of the relative autonomy of the superstructure and within the superstructure of the ideological and political levels. All such theories in their effort to reject economism or, as he puts it, 'the idea of a" pure and simple non over determined contradiction, to a greater or lesser extent' have also removed economic determinacy, i.e. as he again puts it, in such theories 'the lonely hour of the last instance' never comes.

Commercial media organizations which are not exposed to the demands of different constituents through any formal channels may nevertheless pursue a variety of goals. Lane (1970) and Tunstall (1970) have pointed to the way in which publishing houses and newspapers pursue non-economic as well as economic goals. There is a formal difference between these two types of goal: Where economic goals are sought there may be conflict over the means to achieve them, but there will be a high degree of unanimity over both the definition of the end and the operationalisation of that definition whereas 'acute cognitive disagreements arise over both ends and means if the sought goals are cultural'.

Murdock and Golding (1977) opine that the voices lacking economic power or resources... the under lying logic of cost operates systematically consolidating the position of groups already established in there main mass-media markets and excluding those groups who lack the capital base required for successful entry. Thus the voices which

survive will largely belong to those least likely to criticise the prevailing distribution of wealth and power. Conversely, those most likely to challenge these arrangements are enable to publicise their dissent or opposition because they cannot command resources needed for effective communication to a broad audience.

Smythe (1977) concludes that a weakness of the political-economic approach is that elements of media under public control are not so easy to account for in terms of the working of the free market. While the approach centres on media as an economic process leading to the commodity (content), there is an interesting variant of the political economic approach which suggests that media really produce audiences, in the sense that they deliver audience attention to advertisers and shape the behaviour of media publics in certain distinct ways.

Garnham (1979) states that German ideology neglects both the specific effects of subordinating cultural production and reproduction to the general logic of capitalist commodity production and the specificity's of the varying and shifting relationships between economic ideological and political levels within actual concrete historical moments. Moreover, ideological forms can never be simply collapsed into a system of exchange values, i.e. the specifically capitalist mode of production, precisely because ideological forms, from of consciousness, are concerned with difference, with distinction; they are by definition heterogeneous (as Marx himself remarked when discussing the limited possibilities for the subsumption of ideological production under capitalism, I want the doctor and not his errand boy) whereas exchanges value is precisely the realm of equivalence.

Curran (1977) recognises that there is a decisive relationship between the growth of the mass media and everything that we now understand as characterising "monopoly capitalism" but at the same time reuses an analysis of this decisive relationship claiming that these aspects of the growth and expansion of the media historically have to be let to one side by the exclusive attention given here to media as "ideological apparatuses" One of the key features of the mass media within monopoly capitalism has been the exercise of political and ideological domination through the economic. Marx's own central insight into the capitalist mode of production stressed its generalising, abstracting drive; the pressure to reduce everything to the equivalence of exchange value. Before going on to the examine the economic level and its specific articulations within the cultural sphere, let us look at the relationship between the material conditions of production (not, as we have seen to be confused with the economic far less the capitalist modes of such production, which are specific forms) on the one hand and ideological forms on the other. That is to say how do we relate Williams' correct stress, within the limits indicated, upon the materiality of cultural production to Marx's famous distinction between the material transformations of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political or philosophic-in short-ideological-forms in which men become conscious of the conflict and fight it out. That is to say the process of consciousness and of representation for instance, language, are real processes by which human beings socially appropriate their environment (nature) which pre-exist and continue to exist within specifically capitalist modes of ideological production and indeed upon which these capitalist modes rest.

The culture industry, the most rigid of all styles, proves to be the goal of liberalism, which is reproached for its lack of style. Not only do its categories and contents derive from liberalism – domesticated naturalism as well as operetta and revue – but the modem culture monopolies from the economic area in which, together with the corresponding enterpreneurial types, for the time being some part of its sphere of operation survives, despite the process of disintegration so where.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1982) elaborate that in the culture industry, the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardisation of the means of production. The peculiarity of the self is a monopoly commodity determined by society; it is falsely represented as natural. The bourgeois whose existence is split into a business and a private life, whose private life is spilt into keeping up his public image and intimacy, whose intimacy is split into the surely partnership of marriage and the bitter comfort of being quite alone at odds with himself and everybody else, is already virtually a Nazi, replace both with enthusiasm and abuse; or a modem city-dweller who can now only imagine friendship as a 'social contact; that is, as being in social contact with others with whom he has no inward contact. The only reason why the culture industry can deal so successfully with individually is that the latter has always reproduced the fragility of society. Culture is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that is no longer exchanged, it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used. Therefore, it amalgamates with advertising. The more meaningless the latter seems to be under a monopoly, the more omnipotent it becomes.

O'Brien (1984) says that having better access to and control of information in a negotiating situation is an important factor of power; having poor access to information tends to incur present and future costs for the more parties.

Mc Quail (1987) explains that political – economic media theory is an old label that has been revived to identify an approach which focuses more on economics structure than on ideological content of media. It asserts the dependence of ideology on the economic base and directs research attention to the empirical analysis of the structure of ownership and to the way media market forces operate.

Severin and Tankard (1988) are of the opinion that modern society is nearly unimaginable without the mass media: newspapers, magazines, paperbacks, radio, television and film. The mass media are many things to many people and serve a variety of functions depending on the type of political and economic system in which the media function, the stage of development of the society, and the interests and needs of specific individuals. The purpose of the study of political economy of mass communication links to examine several views about how mass media actually function in several types of societies. Industrial revolution made itself felt in almost every field including publishing and latter, broadcasting. As technology made possible ever-faster and ever-wider distribution of newspaper, the economics of mass production became more and more important. Large newspapers began buying out or merging with smaller newspapers until today very few cities have competing newspapers. The caused thoughtful individuals, both inside and outside the media, to question the degree of usefulness of media in a democratic society. It was argued that with fewer and fewer voices, it was becoming more and more

difficult for significant and unpopular view to gain a hearing.

Developing an analysis along these lines means avoiding the twin temptations of instrumentalism and structuralism. Instrumentalists focus on the ways that capitalist use their economic power with a commercial market system to ensure that the flow of public information is consonant with their interests. They see the privately owned media as an instrument of class domination. This case is vigorously argued in Edwards S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's Work (1987).

Schiller (1989) points out that critical political economy is also necessarily historical, but historical in particular sense. Four historical processes as particularly central to a critical political economy of culture; the growth of the media; the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and the changing role of state and government intervention. Corporations dominate the cultural landscape in two ways. Firstly, an increasing proportion of cultural production is directly accounted for by major conglomerates with interests in a range of sectors, from newspapers and magazines to television, film, music and the parks. Secondly, corporations which are not directly involved in the cultural industries as producers can exercise considerable control over the direction of cultural activity through their role as advertisers and sponsors. The financial viability of commercial broadcasting together with a large section of the press depends directly on advertising revenue. Whilst more and more of the of the other 'sites where creative work is displayed' such as museums, galleries and theatres have been captured by corporate sponsors and enlisted in their public relations campaigns. Murdock and Golding (1989) narrate that the extension of corporate reach

reinforces a third major process the commodification of cultural life. Commercial communications corporations have always been in the business of commodity production. Hence, the audience's position as a commodity serves to reduce the overall diversity of programming and ensure that it confirms established assumptions more often than it challenges them. The main institutional counter to the commodification of communicative activity has come from the development of institutions funded out of taxation and oriented towards providing cultural resources for the full exercise of citizenship. The most important and pervasive of these have been the public broadcasting organizations, typified by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). At the same time, the corporation has also come under intensified political pressure, particularly in the areas of news and current affairs. The history of the modern communication media is not only an economic history of their growing incorporation into a capitalist economic system, but also a political history of their increasing centrality to the exercises of full citizenship. In its most general sense, citizenship is 'about the conditions that allow people to become full members of the society at every level'.

Most critical discussions of the political economy of culture have taken as their starting point with Marx's famous comment that:

> "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal. has control, at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those

> who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The vital issues concern how this control is established. How exactly does a ruling class establish control of the cultural realm?"

He summarises the options that are open in a capitalist society, and writes:

> "Under developing capitalism the means of cultural production may be provided either in commodity form as part of the accumulation process, e.g. records, or as part of the realisation process of other sectors of the capitalist economy, e.g. advertising or directly out of capitalist revenue, e.g. arts patronage or through the State".

All commodities have two fundamental features; they have an exchange value (that is, they are worth something and can be exchanged in the market place) and they have a use-value (that is, they do something that makes them useful to human beings).

Jhally (1989) inquires that what is the use-value of a cultural commodity? And then replies himself that its function, and its importance, stems from the meaning that it generates. Cultural commodities also have an exchange value within the sphere of the market place that is how the producers of the cultural commodities generate profit. The same is true in the realm of commodity culture. The system of exchange value (worth) subordinates use-value (meaning). The rules of the marketplace have been accepted unquestioningly as also the rules of cultural activity. Government is not the only enemy of freedom. The

marketplace can work through different means towards the same ends.

For the uninitiated Granham's (1990) views are founded on the political economy approach to media studies. Such an approach of course entails focusing on media history and production rather than on media consumption and the ideological analysis of media texts. A good example of Garnham economic (some might say economistic) approach is concerned with cautioning those who feel that increasingly widespread video ownership will bring into being a new kind of media democracy. As Garnham points out, it is not media institutions' economic control of cultural production which makes them powerful but their economic control of cultural production and distribution.

Everyone, from politicians to academics, now agrees that public communications systems are part of the 'cultural industries.' The popularity of this tag points to a growing awareness that these organizations are both similar to and different from other industries. On the one hand, they clearly have a range of features in common with other areas of production and are increasingly integrated into the general industrial structure. On the other hand, it is equally clear that the goods they manufacture – the newspapers, advertisements, television programmes, and feature films – play a pivotal role in organising the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world. A number of writers acknowledge this duality rhetorically, but go on to examine only one side, focusing either on the construction and consumption of media meanings (e.g. Fiske 1989) or on the economic organization of media industries (e.g. Collins, Garnham and Locksley 1988). What distinguished the critical Political Economy perspective outlined here, is precisely its

focus on the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications. It sets out to show how different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audience access to them. Liberal political economists focus on exchange in the market as consumers choose between competing commodities on the basis of the utility and satisfaction they offer. Against this, critical political economists follow Marx's in shifting attention from the realm of exchange, to the organization of property and production, both within the cultural industries and more generally. They do not deny that cultural producers and consumers are continually making choices, but they do so within wider structures. Critical political economy starts with sets of social relations and the play of power. It is interested in seeing how the making and taking of meanings is shaped at every level by the structure asymmetries in social relations. These range from the way news is structured by the prevailing relations. These range from the way news is structured by the prevailing relations between press proprietors and editors or journalists and their sources, to the way that television viewing is affected by the organization of domestic life and power relations within the family. It is especially interested in the ways that communicative actively is structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources. At the same time, it is essential to avoid the forms of structuralism which conceive of structures as building - like edifices, solid permanent and immovable. Instead, need to see them as dynamic formations which are constantly reproduced and altered through practical action (Golding Peter and Murdock - 1991).

Morley (1985) emphasises that in order to illustrate the concerns and distinctive priorities of a political economy of communications, there are three areas of analysis. The first is concerned with the production of cultural goods, to which political economy attaches particular importance in its presumption of the limiting (but not completely determining) impact of cultural production on the range of cultural consumption. Secondly, we examine the political economy of texts to illustrate ways in which the representations present in medical products are related to the material realities of their production and consumption. Finally, we assess the Political Economy of cultural consumption, to illustrate the relation between material and cultural inequality which political economy is distinctively concerned to address. Critical political economy is not only concerned with material barriers to cultural consumption, however, it is also interested in the ways in which social location regulates access to the cultural competence required to interpret and use media materials in particular ways. One of the strongest empirical traditions within cultural studies – running from studies of youth subcultures to research on differential 'readings' of television texts has concerned itself with how social locations provide access to cultural repertoires and symbolic resources that sustain difference of interpretation and expression. Golding and Murdock (1991) opine that this emphasis on social experience as a cultural resource is important, but it can be oversold consumption practices are clearly not completely manipulated by the strategies of the cultural industries but they are equally clearly, not completely independent of them. We need to see cultural commodities as the site of a continual struggle over uses and meanings between producers and audiences and between different consumer groups. At the same time we need to go on to explore other links between people's

location in the productive system and their communicative activity.

Economism assumes a series of correspondences or identities between the cultural text, its status within the circuit of production and consumption, the economic relations embodied within that circuit and social relations of power. Most frequently, it analyses the economic structures of media industries (e.g. modes of production, patterns of ownership, systems of distribution). But such "political economy" does not, by itself, constitute "economism" as an interpretative practice. Economism is based on implicit responses to the two questions discussed above, which allow it to read such analyses as making significant statements about the social functions of cultural texts, without any further interpretative mediation. For example, as Shore (1983) demonstrates the six so called "major" record companies control an enormous that of the record produced and sold in the world. But as he recognises, the issue is what this tells us about the music being produced, the constraints that the system imposes upon the concrete production of particular records, how the record is consumed, and what the relations are between this "economic" power and forms of ideological and political denomination. On the other hand, Symthe's (1977) article is certainly correct to argue that the product of the media is the audience itself. Advertisers buy time only to obtain the real commodity - an audience. The interpretation, however, slides from the commodity status of the audience to claim about the media's concrete function in structures of social power. To do so, it must equate the accumulation of capital (surplus value at the expense of labour) with the particular organization of political ideological and moral power (Murdock, 1978). And it must negate the ability of the text, as a cultural practice to

enter into the equation in specific (e.g., ideological) and even contradictory ways. (Lawrence, 1991).

Mulgan's work (1991) is essentially concerned with the political and economic implications of attempting to control information and communications networks in complex organizations indeed, his core argument is that the new electronic networks which are presently being employed in business organizations and state institutions are undermining traditional bureaucratic models and methods of information control. The central claim is that as complex organizations become increasingly networked electronically, older bureaucratic conceptions and techniques of administration find themselves confronting what he terms a 'crisis of control'. A crisis of control emerges, according to Mulgan, because of the organisational attributes which are inherent in the new information systems. For at the heart of these developments in Mulgans view is the paradoxical fact that electronic networks simultaneously both centralise and de-centralise information across time and space. Thus the ability of large corporations for example to achieve centralised control over information's flows is, for Mulgan, always and everywhere undermined by possibility of unauthorised information access and dissemination. Ultimately therefore, Mulgan argues that in an age of information proliferation and economic uncertainty only de-centralised control structures will be able to deal adequately with information needs of both firms and governments.

Mosco (1996) explains in detail the analytic tools that political economy can apply to today's increasingly global and technological information society.

He presents a historical overview of the discipline and defines political economy by its focus on the relation

between the production, distribution and consumption of communication in historical and cultural context. This comprehensive analysis of the commodity form in communication includes and examination of print, broadcast and new electronic media, the role and function of the audience, and the problem of social control. He concludes by addressing the relationship of political economy to the increasingly important fields of policy studies and cultural studies. This is vital discussion of today's media that presents a lucid, thorough and informed clarification of the modern global, electronic information society.

Conclusion

People depend in large measure on the cultural industries for the images, symbols, and vocabulary with which they interpret and respond to their social environment. It is vital, therefore, that we understand these industries in a comprehensive and theoretically adequate way which enables the analysis of communication to take its place at the heart of social and cultural research. A critical political economy provides an approach which sustains such an analysis, and in so doing, have illustrated in a preliminary way, the origins, character, and application of such an approach. Much remains to be done however, before we can claim to have fully established a critical political economy of communication.

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