

Introduction to Political Economy of Media/Communication

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Introductions

- who are we, what interests us?
- what is this course?

A quick exercise - what is on TV tonight? what is in a cinema near me tonight?

What is the political economy of communication?

The study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources.

EXAMPLE

Rare minerals to dumping grounds

The worst place on earth

- <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20150402-the-worst-place-on-earth>
- Videos:
- BBC
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_UdqZdFr-w
- Al Jazeera
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wPYbSjVrVQ>



A broader definition

More general definition: study of control and survival in social life; control=political process (how a society organizes itself, manages its affairs and adapts to change); survival=economic because it involves the processes of production and reproduction.

What characterizes a political economy approach?

HISTORY - social change as historical transformation

SOCIAL TOTALITY - a big picture of society, totality of social relations that make up the economic, political, social and cultural areas of life

MORAL PHILOSOPHY - values that help to create social behaviour and moral principles that ought to guide efforts to change it

PRAXIS - unity of thinking and doing

Major figures

Adam Smith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejJRhn53X2M>

Different traditions/foci of political economy of communication:

North America - Dallas Smythe, Herbert Schiller

Focus on a sense of injustice that the communication industry has become an integral part of a wider corporate order which is both exploitative and undemocratic. Public interest concerns before government regulatory and policy organs, renewed critique of global capitalism, movements.

Robert McChesney as a US media activist (Free Press)

<http://www.freepress.net/>

Des Freedman as a UK media activist (Media Reform Coalition)

<http://www.mediareform.org.uk/>

Different traditions/foci of political economy of communication

Europe - Armand Mattelart, Nicholas Garnham, Peter Golding, Graham Murdock

Integrate communication research with neo-Marxian and institutional theoretical traditions - class power and class struggle (using communication as a means of resistance to power), old examples and news ones (Arab Spring, though be careful about technological determinism)

Zappatistas - cyber guerillas of the 21st century

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/04/2013415112152991530.html>

Trump tweet use - from 1:40mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ke0zQhW2F7c>

A task for small groups

Can you find out more about a political economist and his/her work?

1. Karl Marx

2. Herbert Schiller

3. Armand Matellart

4. Robert McChesney

5. Janet Wasko

6. Graham Murdock

Development and modernization

When talking about less developed countries and their communication systems - media as one of the resources (with urbanization, education etc.) that stimulate economic, social, cultural development - a view that has been criticized much (dependency theory, technological determinism etc.)

Some contemporary examples:

Syrian refugee camps – Zuckerberg

<http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34373389>

access to internet, India - net neutrality and Facebook

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/08/india-facebook-free-basics-net-neutrality-row>

New technologies

We should also remember the role of "new" technologies in the global division of labour

UK call centres outsourced to India and then moved back

<http://www.theguardian.com/g2/story/0,3604,448955,00.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-15060641>

Computer games - not only their production but also how they are played

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/25/china-prisoners-internet-gaming-scam>

<https://www.ft.com/content/5e8ca83e-623d-11e7-8814-0ac7eb84e5f1>

Processes

Some processes that we will be encountering throughout the course

Commodification - process of transforming things valued for their use (e.g. food as nutrition, stories as a way of communicating) into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange.

This is important not just from the point of view of institutions and contents but also audiences - advertisers are sold audiences (a point we'll talk about more in relation to media economics), commodification of media labour - multiskilling, precarious contracts, outsourcing etc.

EXAMPLE

Introduction of commercial broadcasting in European countries alongside public service broadcasters, largely happening in the 1980s

Spatialization

Spatialization - process of overcoming the constraints of geographical space, media and communication technologies play a role in this.

Giddens writes about time-space distanciation while Harvey refers to time-space compression

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Time-Space-Compression-Harvey-1989_fig1_228579081

Technologies enable flexibility

Spatialization goes hand in hand with globalization

Does space become unimportant?

Google, clouds, storage

Google data centres:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBhUncx65I0>

Concentration

One issue linked to spatialization and the institutional extension of corporate power is concentration

<http://www.frugaldad.com/media-consolidation-infographic/>

Google - dominant among search engines

Processes

Structuration - process of creating social relations, mainly those organized around social class, gender, and race.

Social action takes place within the constraints and the opportunities provided by the structures in which action happens.

Social movements and media – Occupy, Black Lives Matter

<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>