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Change and
Continuity, Power
and Creativity

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1.1 An overview of some changes – and the importance of continuity

Nearly all commentators accept that the cultural industries have undergone remarkable transformation since the early 1980s. Here are some of the major changes I intend to deal with in what follows.

- The cultural industries have moved closer to the centre of the economic action in many countries and across much of the world. Cultural industry companies can no longer be seen as secondary to the 'real' economy where durable, 'useful' goods are manufactured. Some of these companies are now vast global businesses and are among the most discussed and debated corporations on the planet.
- The ownership and organisation of the cultural industries have changed radically. The largest companies no longer specialise in a particular cultural industry, such as film, publishing, television or recording; they now operate across a number of different cultural industries. These conglomerates compete with each other, but, more than ever before, they are connected – with each other and with other companies – in complex webs of alliance, partnership and joint venture.
- Despite this, there are also more and more small- and medium-sized companies in the business of culture and there are increasingly complex relationships between large, medium and small cultural companies, and between the formal and informal sectors of cultural markets.
- Digitalisation, the internet and mobile telephony have multiplied the ways in which audiences can gain access to content, and have made small-scale cultural production easier. They have also enabled powerful corporations

from the information technology sector to compete (and sometimes collaborate) with more established cultural industry and consumer electronics businesses. Google, Apple and Amazon are now as significant as companies such as Disney, News Corporation and Sony for understanding cultural production and consumption.

- Cultural products increasingly circulate across national borders. Images, sounds and narratives are borrowed and adapted from other places on an unprecedented scale, producing new hybrids but also, for some, reaffirming the value of cultural authenticity. The longstanding domination of cultural trade by the USA may be diminishing, and not only because of the rise of China as an economic and cultural power.
- The way in which the cultural industries conceive of their audiences is changing. There is greater emphasis on audience research, marketing and addressing 'niche' audiences, and digitalisation has made possible new ways of tracking, analysing and influencing audience behaviour, most recently via 'big data' and algorithms.
- Government policy and regulation have altered drastically. Longstanding traditions of public ownership and regulation have been threatened and even dismantled. Key policy decisions are increasingly carried out at an international level. At the same time, the cultural industries have become more and more significant in local urban and social policy, as a means of regenerating economies and providing a competitive advantage over other cities and regions.
- There has been a huge boom in the amount of money that businesses spend on advertising, only partially interrupted by the economic crash of 2008–2009. This boom helped to fuel the spectacular growth of the cultural industries, and then advertising money started to move towards search engines and social media, controlled by the IT corporations, with powerful impacts on some cultural industries.
- Partly in order to compensate for this loss of advertising income, there has been increasing emphasis on the use of paid subscriptions as a means of paying for content (most notably the *streaming services* that look set to represent an important part of the foreseeable future in some cultural industries), and a shift away from direct sales to consumers of goods.
- *Texts*¹ have undergone considerable transformation. In my view, text is the best collective name for content and for cultural 'works' of all kinds: the films,

¹ Throughout this book, I use *bold italics* to denote key concepts on their first and sometimes second major occurrence, **bold** to highlight key phrases, and *italics* for titles and ordinary emphasis. The key concepts are defined in the Glossary at the end of the book and usually on their first appearance, too.

recordings, books, comics, images, magazines, newspapers and television 'programmes' produced by the cultural industries.² There is an increasing penetration of promotional and advertising material into previously protected realms. There are more and more products of all kinds, across a wider range of genres, across a wider range of forms of cultural activity than before. Various forms of cultural authority are increasingly questioned and satirised. Yet people often feel more confused, less well-informed and more distracted than ever.

To what extent, though, do such changes represent major, epochal shifts in the way that culture is produced and consumed? After all, alongside these changes, there are many continuities that might be obscured by an overemphasis on change. For example, television continues to play a huge role, as a source of information and entertainment, in people's lives; stars continue to be the main mechanism via which cultural industry companies promote their products; the USA is still thought of, across the globe, as the world centre for popular culture; and copyright remains fundamental to how companies and successful producers make money. Because continuities such as these are entangled with the above changes, I refer throughout this book to **patterns of change and continuity in the cultural industries**. The interweaving of change and continuity is its central theme.

Many commentators go much further than I have above in pointing to change. Some claim, for example, that digital networks have transformed cultural production beyond recognition. The internet and the mobile phone have triumphed. The 'music industry' is dying, television will soon be finished, and book publishing as we knew it is almost over. Some optimistically see a new age where distinctions between producers and audiences disappear, and 'users' become the new creators. Commentary of this kind often implies, and sometimes explicitly states, that all the old notions and models need to be thrown out, and the history of cultural production is irrelevant because we are now living in an 'information age' rather than an 'industrial age' (or some other similar term that overly simplifies the past). Others see transformation just over the horizon. In many cases, it is unclear whether we are reading analysis of what is happening now, or a prediction of the future. In spite of many obituaries, the cultural industries survive, and some sectors and businesses are thriving. They continue to pour out huge amounts of product, employ tens of thousands of people, generate considerable amounts of revenue, and occupy vast amounts of our time.

A more balanced assessment is required, one that is grounded in a longer-term historical perspective than many of the celebrations of a new digital age. The development of the internet and the web, and the entry of IT firms into cultural markets, has certainly brought about considerable change in the everyday cultural experiences of billions of people. But has it altered the fundamental underlying dynamics of cultural production

² The term 'content' has become much more fashionable than 'texts' in the years since the first edition of this book was published (2002). I think this reflects a way of thinking drawn from the world of technology, where culture is often reduced to content or worse still 'information', sidelining questions of meaning, form and affect/emotion. Nevertheless, I use 'content' interchangeably with 'texts' at various points in what follows.

and consumption? To address such issues of change and continuity, we need to understand what these fundamental dynamics actually are. Starting with the rest of this chapter, this book provides such an understanding. As a basis for such an account, we first need to think about the distinctive role of the cultural industries in modern societies, and the best way to do this is to ask the question, why do the cultural industries matter? Coherent answers to that question often involve their actual or potential **power**.

1.2 Why do the cultural industries matter?

The importance of the cultural industries in modern societies rests on three related elements: their ability to make and circulate products that influence our knowledge, understanding and experience (texts); their role as systems for the management of creativity and knowledge; and their effects as agents of economic, social and cultural change. I shall deal with each of them in turn now.

1.2.1 The cultural industries make and circulate products that shape knowledge and understanding

The cultural industries are involved in the making and circulating of products that, more than the products of any other kind of industry, have **an influence on our understanding and knowledge of the world**. Debates about the nature and extent of this influence comprise, in the words of a valuable survey of the concept, 'the contested core of media research' (Corner, 2000: 376) – and the most important cultural industries are also media industries, fundamentally involved in **mediated communication**. The best contributions to debates about media influence suggest the complex, negotiated and often indirect nature of media power, but of one thing there can be no doubt: the media do have an influence. We are influenced not only by informational texts, such as newspapers, broadcast news programmes, documentaries and analytical books, but also by entertainment. Films, TV series, comics, music, video games and so on provide us with recurring representations of the world and so act as a kind of reporting. Just as crucially, they draw on and help to constitute our inner, private lives and our public selves: our fantasies, emotions and identities.

Collectively, informational and entertainment texts contribute strongly to our sense of who we are, of what it means to be a woman or a man, an African or an Arab, a Canadian or a New Yorker, straight or queer. They shape our sense of how we might live together in modern societies, of how democracy, justice and rights might operate.³ They are the way in which we come to form our opinions about the

³ One way to think about this is that the media have come to be more and more involved in other realms and institutions, such as politics, sport, family, religion and so on, and have also become institutions in their own right, a process known by some commentators as 'mediatisation' (see Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009). Most contributors to debates about mediatisation seem to have more or less ignored the economic forces shaping media, and the role of powerful cultural industry and IT organisations in bringing about such mediatisation.

rights and wrongs of consumerism, and the prospects for the future of the planet. For these reasons, the products of the cultural industries are more than just a way of passing time – a mere diversion from other, more worthwhile things. All the same, the sheer amount of time that we spend experiencing texts, however distractedly we might do so, in itself makes the cultural industries a powerful factor in our lives.

So, studying the cultural industries might help us to understand how texts take the form they do and how these texts have come to play such a central role in contemporary societies. Importantly, most texts that we consume are circulated by powerful corporations. As we shall see, this is just as true in the age of the internet as it was in the decades before its emergence. These corporations, like all businesses, have an interest in making profits. They want to support conditions in which businesses in general – especially their own – can make profits. This raises a crucial issue: do the cultural industries ultimately serve the *interests* of their owners and their executives and those of their political and business allies?

We must avoid simplistic answers to this vital question. Throughout this book, I argue for a view of the cultural industries and the texts they produce as **complex, ambivalent and contested**. (Some influential analyses of the cultural industries have downplayed these aspects – see Chapter 3.) In societies where the cultural industries are big business, cultural industry companies tend to support conditions in which large companies and their political allies can make money: conditions where there is constant demand for new products, minimal regulation by the state outside of general competition law, relative political and economic stability, workforces that are willing to work hard, and so on. There is also a huge amount of bland, trivial and meaningless stuff produced. Yet in contemporary societies, many of the texts produced and disseminated by the cultural industries do not simply support such conditions. Often (not just occasionally) they tend to orientate their audiences towards ways of thinking that do not coincide with the interests of capitalists, or of patriarchy (structured domination by men over women) or racism, or those of powerful elites. (I address this issue further in Chapters 4 and 15.)

If this is true, why does it happen? Partly, it is for the simple economic reason that cultural companies have to compete with each other, as well as maintain the general conditions in which to do business, and so they attempt to outstrip each other to satisfy audience desires for the shocking, the profane and the rebellious. It is also because of social and cultural factors deeply embedded in many societies regarding what we expect of art and entertainment. This takes us to a second argument for the importance of the subject of this book and into a domain that has been neglected in academic and public debate in recent years:

1.2.2 The cultural industries manage cultural production and labour

The cultural industries are concerned, fundamentally, with the management and selling of a particular kind of work. Since the Renaissance – and especially since the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century – there has been a widespread tendency to think of ‘art’ as one of the highest forms of human creativity. In

response, sociologists and Marxists have argued that artistic work is not so different from other kinds of labour, in that both are orientated towards the production of objects or experiences.⁴ This view helps to counter the idea that ‘artists’ are different from the rest of us, that they are involved in some mystically special form of creativity. Nevertheless, there is something distinctive about that area of human creativity often called ‘art’. The invention and/or performance of stories, songs, images, poems, jokes and so on, in no matter what technological form, involves a particular type of creativity – the manipulation of symbols for the purposes of entertainment, information and perhaps even enlightenment. Instead of the term ‘art’, with all its connotations of individual genius and a higher calling, I want to use the more cumbersome term *symbolic creativity*⁵ and, instead of the term ‘artists’, I prefer the phrase *symbol creators* or symbol makers for those who make up, interpret or rework stories, songs, images and so on. This is a more inclusive term, and that means it also incorporates the work of those involved in the production and sharing of knowledge as well as of art and entertainment.

So the terms ‘symbol creators’ and ‘symbolic creativity’ are intended to cover the work of actors, writers (journalists, book authors, screenwriters, poets, bloggers, advertising copywriters), comedians, musicians, painters, photographers, cinematographers, camera operators, sculptors, dancers – and a whole set of terms that mean different things in different industries such as television, film, theatre and music: directors, producers and designers.⁶

Symbol creators were for many years ignored or at best marginalised in academic research on the cultural industries. This was perhaps because of an understandable, but excessive, reaction against the fetishisation of their work as extraordinary. Sociologists emphasised systems or rituals of production, rather than genius. In the academic fields of media and communication studies and cultural studies in the 1980s, many researchers began, quite rightly, to examine the pleasures and interpretative activities of audiences much more assiduously than in previous analysis. But this led to a shift in fashion, away not only from analysis of symbol creators, but also from cultural production in general. Some strongly implied that audiences trumped producers, because they had the freedom to make of texts pretty much whatever they wanted, and therefore the study of cultural production and cultural industries was irrelevant, or at least far less pressing than some had argued it to be (Fiske, 1987).

The study of cultural and media industries never went away entirely (see Chapter 3), but much of it paid little attention to the question of how symbol making was

⁴ Janet Wolff (1993: Chapter 1) provided an early, excellent summary of these debates.

⁵ My use of this term was originally borrowed from Paul Willis (1990), but I differ from him in focusing on industrialised symbolic creativity, whereas he is concerned with the creativity of young people as consumers.

⁶ Cultural production is centred on symbol making, but involves a complex division of labour encompassing many other kinds of workers besides symbol creators, and cultural production would not be possible without their input. See Chapters 4 and 13.

organised and circulated. In the 1990s, a new generation of writers began to put symbol creators back in the picture (Born, 1993; Toynbee, 2000). This was a good thing. After all, symbol creators are the primary workers in shaping how texts look and sound, what meanings they communicate. This does not mean that we should romantically celebrate the work of musicians, authors, film-makers and so on. Symbolic creativity *can* enrich people's lives, but it can often be banal, mediocre, stupid or dishonest. Sometimes it seems much more oriented towards making money or serving power than providing enlightenment, surprise or intrigue.

Other traditions of study, for example certain approaches to the analysis of literature, music or fine art, have focused on especially talented or fêted symbol creators, at times hardly referring to the means by which such authors, musicians and so on have reached their audiences, or how their work was funded, supported or suppressed. Some widely disseminated versions of such thinking also offer a pious and complacent celebration of the achievements of Western 'civilisation' (Clark, 1969), downplaying its dependence upon colonialism, patriarchy and exploitation, and marginalising other forms and sources of symbolic creativity. Instead, we need better ways of historicising symbolic creativity, and understanding the relationships between culture, society and commerce. Writers such as the Welsh cultural studies analyst Raymond Williams and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offer better models (see Bourdieu, 1996; Williams, 1981). They and others show how such creativity has been a more or less permanent presence in human history, but how its management and circulation have taken radically different forms in different societies. In Europe in the nineteenth century, for example, systems of patronage gave way to the organisation of symbolic creativity around the market. It was at this point that the cultural industries began to emerge. From the early twentieth century, this market organisation began to take a new, complex form (see Chapter 4). Examining changes in the cultural industries allows us to think about how symbolic creativity has been organised and circulated in our own lifetimes and – the key theme of this book – how this might and might not be changing.

Again, as already stated, we need to understand the cultural industries as fundamentally *ambivalent*. The way the cultural industries organise and circulate symbolic creativity reflects the extreme inequalities and injustices (along class, gender, ethnic and other lines) apparent in contemporary capitalist societies. There are vast inequalities in access to the cultural industries – and these persist in the era of digitalisation. Those who succeed in having their work circulated widely are often treated shabbily and many people who want to create texts struggle to earn a living. Failure is far more common than success. There are great pressures to produce certain kinds of texts rather than others, and it is hard to come across information about the existence of organisations and texts that attempt to do things differently. Some types of text are made much more available than others. These are bleak features of the cultural industry landscape, yet, because original and distinctive symbolic creativity is at a premium, the cultural industries can never quite control it. Owners and executives make concessions to symbol creators by granting them far more *autonomy* (self-determination) than they would to workers of equivalent status in other industries

and to most workers historically. Paradoxically, this freedom – which is, in the end, a limited and provisional one – can then act as a form of control because it makes the scarce and poorly-paid jobs offered by the cultural industries highly desirable; as we shall see, especially in Chapter 13, there is a massive oversupply of potential workers to the cultural industries, and this helps to keep wages low. However, the relative autonomy of symbol makers may also help to explain the ambivalence in the texts referred to above, because it provides a certain amount of freedom for at least some symbol creators to make strange, funny, pleasing work.

Cultural industry companies face another difficulty, too. They have to find audiences for the texts that symbol creators produce. Usually, this is *not* a matter of finding the greatest possible mass audience for a product. Different groups of people tend to have different tastes, so much of the work of cultural industry companies attempts to match texts to specific audiences, to find appropriate ways of circulating texts to those audiences and to make audiences aware of the existence of particular texts. This is a risky business. Many texts fail, even those that companies expect to succeed. The upshot of these processes is that cultural industry companies keep a much tighter grip on the *circulation* of texts than they do on their production.

The importance of symbolic creativity helps to explain the fact that the main focus of this book is on patterns of change/continuity in the cultural industries, as opposed to, say, change/continuity in the texts produced by those industries or in how audiences understand texts. As I think will be clear by now, however, this does not mean that I am interested only in the cultural industries as systems of production; my primary interest is **how production relates to human experience of culture and knowledge**. But all writers, given their limited time and energy, must make decisions about where to concentrate their attention and, rather than focusing on the texts themselves and then working backwards from there to the industries, my primary topic is production.

1.2.3 The cultural industries have a key role in economic life

A third and final reason for the importance of examining change and continuity in the cultural industries is that they are increasingly significant sources of wealth and employment in many economies. Measuring the relative size of these industries is difficult and there are controversies, occasionally useful but sometimes tedious, about how best to do so (see section 9.3). Much depends on how we define the cultural industries, an issue discussed in the next section of this introduction. Before the turn of the century, there were many claims that the cultural industries were going to become more and more important in economic life. The increasing digitalisation of culture complicated these claims, because of its threat to the business models of '*legacy media*', based on copyright: easy copying and sharing of cultural goods damaged the revenues of various organisations, initially most of all in the recording industry, but also eventually in sectors such as books, magazines and so on. Some digital enthusiasts predicted the death of these various industries, but the

cultural industries have continued to steadily grow as a sector of the economy – it's just that new entrants, particularly those associated with the information technology sector (such as Apple, Amazon and Google), have been taking more of the revenues.

That the cultural industries might be providing more wealth and employment is, of course, significant in itself, but it also has implications for how we understand **the relationships between culture, society and economy**. Many of the most important debates about these relationships over the last few decades have concerned what we might call theories of transition. An early version focused on whether Western nations in particular were moving from being industrial societies to post-industrial or information societies, based on a much greater emphasis than before on knowledge. This was a line of thought initiated in the 1960s and 1970s by the work of, among others, Daniel Bell (e.g., 1974) and maintained by writers such as Manuel Castells (1989, 1996). A later variant was concerned with whether societies have shifted from a state best characterised as 'modern', because of their increasing ephemerality, fragmentedness and flux, to a situation better characterised as 'postmodern', where these features become so accentuated that rationality and meaning seem to break down (Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1984). In one version of such academic debates, some analysts (notably Castells, 1996; and Lash and Urry, 1994) suggested that symbolic creativity and/or information were becoming increasingly central in social and economic life. An implication of this, drawn out more fully by Lash and Urry than by Castells, was that the cultural industries therefore increasingly provided a model for understanding transformations in other industries.⁷

Academic studies of this kind were echoed by business and management analysts, who placed increasing emphasis on firms' non-tangible assets, especially the value of these businesses' brand names (Wolf, 1999, was one of many popularising versions). Brands can only be made valuable as a result of massive amounts of work being put into product names and logos and how they are represented and circulated. Cultural industry companies such as Disney were often named alongside companies such as Nike and more traditional firms such as Coca-Cola as leaders in this field, because they were considered so experienced in developing brands; in a sense, every film, every star, every book is something like a brand.

Brands, however, were only one part of the hype about the increasing role of information, culture and knowledge in modern economies. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the rise of the internet and the world wide web fuelled these debates and sent them off in new directions. There was a seemingly unstoppable flow of books about 'the weightless world' (Coyle, 1999), about how, in the future knowledge economy, we would be 'living on thin air' (Leadbeater, 2000) rather than on material goods. There was much talk of 'the new economy'⁸ in which the traditional business

⁷ By contrast, others claimed that the cultural industries themselves were becoming *more* like other industries and losing their distinctiveness as an economic sector (Padioleau, 1987).

⁸ See Henwood (2003) for a critique of the concept of the 'new economy'.

cycles of boom and slump would be replaced by continuous growth; communication technologies, branding, information and culture were all seen as central to this new configuration. For a number of writers, the concept of creativity was particularly significant. In the 'creative economy' (Howkins, 2001), economic life would be based on a new centrality for creativity and innovation, of many different kinds.

The bursting of the so-called dot.com bubble in 2000–2001 provided only a temporary respite. The hype took off with unprecedented power in the mid-2000s, propelled by a potent mixture of credit-based economic growth and digital optimism. Some claimed that creativity would 'be the driver of social and economic change during the next century' (Hartley, 2005: 1). Leading US news magazine *Newsweek* devoted the 2006 version of its annual special issue preview of the forthcoming year to 'The Knowledge Revolution', including much discussion of the magical new buzzword 'creativity' (see also Florida, 2002, 2005). In one of the most over-quoted journalistic events of the twenty-first century so far, carried away by the rise of so-called user-generated content in new digital and social media, *Time* magazine made 'you' its annual 'person of the year' for 2006, rather than its usual choice of political or business leaders. The digitalising cultural industries were supposedly leading the way into an economy based on the provision of goods and services to niche markets, rather than mass markets; this would enable small companies to challenge big business (Anderson, 2006). 'Crowdsourcing' (Howe, 2006) and crowdfunding, social media and YouTube would enable anyone to succeed. More serious analysts wrote of a 'networked information economy' (Benkler, 2006) and of a culture now based on a democratisation of participation enabled by 'convergence culture' (Jenkins, 2006).⁹ The period around 2006 marked the high point of discussion about an expanded role for information, communication and culture in contemporary economies, now understood in terms of digitalisation. While the hype about the benefits diminished with the global economic recession of 2008 onwards (see the Preface), the concept of the 'digital economy', coined in the 1990s, became increasingly widespread as a way of describing economic change. Actually the role of culture in this new conception of the digital economy was greatly diminished compared with the way that the business gurus and prophets thought about things in the 1990s and early 2000s. Now the emphasis was more on the use of digital technologies across the economy as a whole, including the potential role of robotics, data and the 'internet of things' in a forthcoming 'fourth industrial revolution'. If the danger of the earlier hype was that culture was in peril of being captured by new and bigger corporate interests, the risk in recent discussions about digital economy is that the role of culture in people's lives is simply ignored in favour of a fetishisation of technologies. Nevertheless, it remains the case that culture has steadily grown as a component of economic life – and this book explains and evaluates the processes by which this came about. But first we need to be clear about what the cultural industries *are*, and what culture is.

⁹ See Chapters 10 and 11 in this book for detailed discussion of such claims.

1.3 Matters of definition

The cultural industries are difficult to define, and many researchers have demonstrated great confusion in trying to do so. One vital step is to take the concept of culture seriously.

If we define culture, in the broadest anthropological sense as a “whole way of life” of a distinct people or other social group’ (Williams, 1981: 11), it is possible to argue that all industries are cultural industries in that they are involved in the production and consumption of culture – for by this definition, the clothes we wear, the furniture in our houses and workplaces, the cars, buses and trains we use for transport, the food and drink we consume, are all part of culture and they are nearly all produced industrially, often in order to make profit.

The term ‘cultural industries’ has tended to be used in a more restricted way than this, based implicitly on a definition of culture as ‘the *signifying system* through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored’ (Williams, 1981: 13, original emphasis). To put this a little more simply, the cultural industries have usually been thought of as **those institutions that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning**. Nearly all definitions of the cultural industries would include television (of course including cable, satellite and subscription services), radio, the cinema, newspaper, magazine and book publishing, the music recording and publishing industries, advertising and the performing arts. These are all activities the primary aim of which is to communicate to an audience, to create and disseminate texts.

All cultural artefacts can be viewed as texts in the very broad sense that they are open to interpretation. Cars, for example, signify: they have meanings. Every car involves significant design and marketing inputs. However, if we over-extend the use of the term ‘texts’, we lose sight of crucial distinctions. The *primary* aim of cars as a category is not to provide a set of meanings to customers, or to look nice, but to provide transport. What defines a text, then, is a matter of degree, a question of balance between its functional and communicative aspects (see Hirsch, 1990[1972], for a similar argument). Texts (songs, narratives, performances) tend to be heavy on meaning (and sometimes emotion), and they tend to be light on functionality. They are created with communicative goals *mainly* in mind.

What about the *industries* bit of the term? An industry is ‘a particular form or sector of productive work, trade or manufacture’, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. In contemporary capitalist societies, cultural industries comprise mainly profit-making companies of various sizes, but also state organisations and non-profit organisations. All of them are heavily reliant on paid contracted and freelance workers – though by no means exclusively so, as we shall see in later chapters; unpaid internships and casual labour are rife. Such industries are the main way in which culture is produced and distributed in modern societies, but the organisations and institutions that comprise them co-exist with, and increasingly draw upon, huge amounts of amateur and semi-professional cultural activity, much of it existing in an ‘informal economy’ (Lobato and Thomas, 2015).

Box 1.1 presents the core cultural industries that are the main focus of this book. They are cultural industries because **they deal primarily with the industrial production and circulation of texts**.

BOX 1.1 THE CORE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

The following industries are centrally concerned with the industrial production and circulation of texts and they therefore constitute what I want to call the core cultural industries for the purposes of this book:

- *Television and radio*: formerly known as ‘broadcasting’, but now existing in a number of cable, satellite and digital online forms, including video streaming or ‘OTT’ services, sometimes called ‘internet-distributed television’.
- *Film industries*: this category includes the dissemination of films via television, streaming sites, and of course in cinemas.
- *Music industries*: recording (which, of course, includes the recording of sounds other than music, but is for the most part centred on music), publishing¹⁰ and live performance.
- *Print and electronic publishing*: including books, online databases, information services, magazines and newspapers.
- *Video and computer games* or digital games as many commentators now prefer to call them.
- *Advertising, marketing and public relations*: compared with other cultural industries, advertisements and marketing artefacts tend to have a greater functional element as they are intended to sell and promote other products. Nevertheless, they are centred on the creation of texts and require the work of symbol creators (see Chapter 2 for a further discussion of how marketers fit into the cultural industries).
- *Web design*: most internet industries involve high-functionality dynamics, but the strong aesthetic element in web design arguably makes it part of the cultural industries sector.

All of these core cultural industries have their own dynamics and I discuss these at various points in the book, but one of the most salient contributions of work on

(Continued)

¹⁰ While this term might seem to be about the printing of sheet music, music publishing concerns much more than this as it involves the ownership and control of the rights to musical *compositions* (as opposed to recordings). See Sterne (2012) for a valuable reflection on the need to understand the multiplicity of the industries that affect the production, consumption and performance of music.

'the cultural industries' has been to see that these industries interact and interconnect with each other in complex ways. Largely, *this is because they compete with each other for the same resources*. The most significant of these resources are as follows (see Garnham, 1990: 158):

- a limited pool of disposable consumer income;
- a limited pool of advertising revenue;
- a limited amount of consumption time;
- skilled creative and technical labour.

It is because of this competition for the same resources, as well as their shared characteristics as producers and distributors of primarily symbolic artefacts, that the cultural industries can be thought of as a sector or a linked production system (there are arguments in economic and business analysis about terms such as 'sector', but these need not concern us here). This point is not always clearly understood by commentators and analysts.

There is another set of cultural industries that I shall call 'peripheral'. These are important industries, and the term 'peripheral' is in no way intended to marginalise the benefits they can bring to a society, or the creativity of those involved in such work. There are two analytical reasons why I call them peripheral, and so discuss them somewhat less than the core industries in what follows. The first is that these 'peripheral' industries reach fewer people in modern societies and therefore, other things being equal, are of lesser social and cultural influence than the core cultural industries. A reason for this lesser reach and potential influence can be found in the second factor for my categorisation of these industries as peripheral. Like the core cultural industries, these other industries are centrally concerned with the production of texts. But they rely mainly on semi-industrial or non-industrial methods and are less involved in *reproduction* of texts – an activity that allows vast audiences to be reached. The making, exhibition and sale of works of art (paintings, installations, sculptures) generate enormous amounts of money and commentary each year, but reproduction is limited, where it exists at all. The art prints industry limits reproduction artificially and uses laborious methods in order to add value to the prints. In a sense, theatre, music and dance performances per se are difficult to reproduce. The actors in a theatre play or musical must perform the text repeatedly for the duration of a run, and each performance will be somewhat different. In fact, theatre does involve some industrial forms of production and reproduction (see Chapter 12), but industries such as theatre can be thought of as 'less' industrialised than, say, book publishing or music recording.

I wish I could have devoted more space in this book to these industries. I recognise that the core and peripheral industries interact with each other in various significant ways. Actors and writers might work in television and theatre, for

example, and art schools produce artists who might move in and out of various forms of commercial production, including film direction, advertising and music. But in order to make this book readable – and writable – I have had to focus on a limited number of industries: the core cultural industries listed in Box 1.1.

1.3.1 Key neighbouring industries: information technology, consumer electronics and telecommunications

The above definition inevitably means excluding a number of industrial sectors that might feasibly be described as 'cultural'. It is vital to understand that the cultural industries have always been in competition with (and yet often also in collaboration with) a particularly important group of 'neighbouring', related industries. The most significant in the twentieth century were the telecommunications and consumer electronics industries. The information technology industries have now joined this group of interlinked industries. (See Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for a representation of this shift, which is fundamental to understanding twenty-first century transformations.) Some firms in these three neighbouring sectors or sets of industries have significant cultural industry interests, but most do not.¹¹

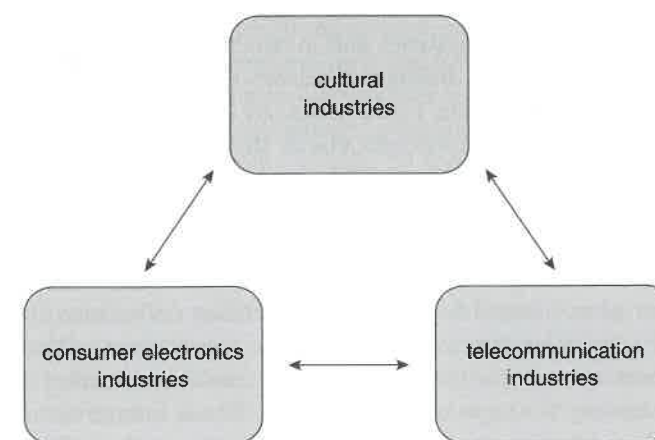


Figure 1.1 Industrial sectors most relevant for cultural production in the twentieth century

¹¹ Too many accounts of the cultural industries and media industries fail to pay adequate attention to these 'neighbouring' sectors, especially telecommunications and consumer electronics, or they fail to distinguish cultural and IT industries coherently. This is true of some important and worthwhile contributions. Some writers in the political economy of media tradition discussed in Chapter 3 are notable exceptions to this neglect and confusion, including Nicholas Garnham, Robin Mansell, Vincent Mosco, Herbert Schiller and Dan Schiller.

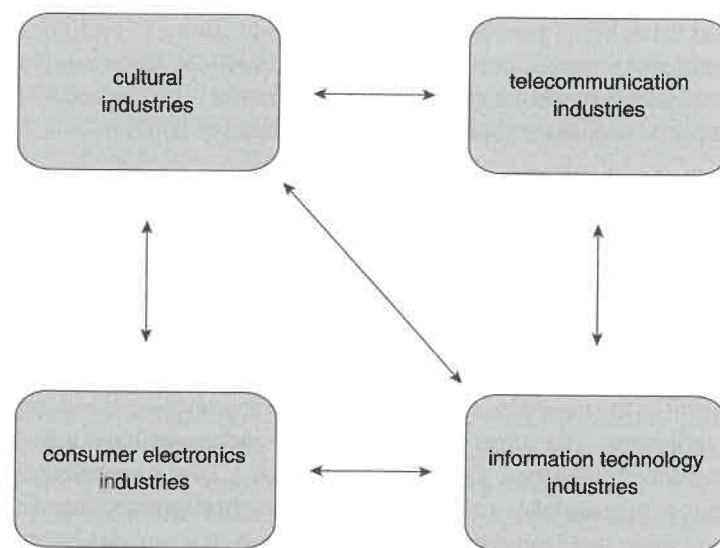


Figure 1.2 Industrial sectors most relevant for cultural production in the twenty-first century

The definition of any industrial sector (and indeed any complex phenomenon) is prone to ambiguity, porous boundaries and inevitable overlaps with other sectors. But we can, and indeed must, distinguish sectors in order to make sense of how businesses and economies operate. I briefly discuss each of these neighbouring sectors below, to acknowledge complexities, clarify their distinctiveness, and highlight important ways in which these sectors relate to the cultural industries sector.¹²

- *Consumer electronics/cultural industry hardware* Making television content or texts is based on an intentional act of cultural communication and would be included as a cultural industry in all serious definitions. But does the making of television sets, screens or boxes constitute a cultural industry? The consumer electronics industries develop, make and market the machines that are necessary for us to experience texts. These industries are extremely important for understanding change and continuity in the cultural industries because they provide the hardware on and through which texts are reproduced or transmitted (at different phases of history, this has included hi-fi, television sets, set-top boxes, MP3 and DVD players). These goods and others

¹² Information technology and telecommunications are often treated as part of one sector, information and communication technologies (or ICTs), usually by writers taking an approach that concentrates on technology, and its economic and business aspects. Questions of culture (in the specific sense I've explained above) and communication are often neglected in work that uses the 'ICT' terminology. An excellent overview of research on ICTs is the collection edited by Mansell et al. (2009).

(fridges, microwave ovens) rely on the crucial input of designers and of often poorly paid assembly-line workers, but they are not centred on the production of primarily symbolic goods in the way that the cultural industries are, and so they fall outside what I consider to be a useful definition. In recent years, many consumer electronics devices (such as television 'set-top boxes') have become increasingly centred on software; and mobile phones or cellphones are now probably the key consumer electronics device. But that does not mean that consumer electronics companies have actually become IT software companies or telecommunications companies. Corporations such as Sony and Siemens belong to different industry bodies, their staff attend different industry conferences, and they serve different business customers and consumers.

- *Information technology (IT)* The computer software industry has some notable parallels with the cultural industries. For example, creative teams work together to try and create distinctive outcomes. But the product, software, involves very different purposes, inputs and experiences than the culture-based texts that are central to the cultural industries. The functional aspects of software – to carry out certain computerised tasks – will nearly always outweigh the aesthetic dimensions of its design, however important aesthetics might be. Engineers rather than artists and designers are the key figures in this sector. Computer hardware design and manufacture is more akin to the consumer electronics industry, and is excluded from my definition of the cultural industries for similar reasons. In a host of ways, the IT industries have now replaced the consumer electronics sector as the main provider of the means by which texts are distributed or circulated, and this is important for understanding recent changes in cultural production; we shall come back to this issue in Chapters 10 and 11. We shall also see there how IT corporations have begun to invest significantly in content production, just as consumer electronics corporations did in the past.¹³
- Like consumer electronics and many other industries, telecommunications increasingly relies on software engineering, but the fundamental historical role played by voice telephony in the sector means that it has a distinct history and set of institutions. There is a basic concern with the provision of the infrastructure that carries the messages, from underground or underwater cables and pipes to telephones themselves. This focus on infrastructure has persisted even as the industry has grown and diversified to include the provision of internet 'backbone' and switching software. It has its own distinctive histories of policy and regulation, including the fact that it is much more closely regulated by governments than the IT industries, for reasons that will be explored in later chapters.

¹³ Chapters 8 and 9 provide further breakdown of the IT industries, and telecommunication industries, in terms of a set of 'layers' (Box 8.2) and they also provide more detailed discussion of the relationship of IT giants to the cultural industries.

BOX 1.2 ARE THE IT GIANTS CULTURAL INDUSTRY COMPANIES? NOT REALLY – BUT SOME MIGHT BE SOON

Is **Google** (now part of Alphabet¹⁴) a cultural industry company? In the documents that the company filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission in 2008, Google declared, 'We began as a technology company, and have evolved into software, technology, internet, advertising and media company all rolled into one' (quoted in Auletta, 2010: 16). That was partially true. Alphabet gains most of its revenues from the advertising on Google's search engine: nearly 90 per cent of its revenues, and most of its profits (*The Economist*, 'Alphabet's Google is searching for its next hit', 15 December 2016). And advertising is, according to my earlier definition, a core cultural industry involved in the production of texts (i.e., advertisements). But Google is not an advertising company in anything like the same way as, say, WPP or Omnicom, the two leading global giants of advertising, market research and PR. Those companies were built on the creation and planning of advertising campaigns on behalf of their clients, and diversified from there to offer marketing and PR services as well. Rather, Google is a company that sells advertising in the same way that cultural industry companies do. Its YouTube subsidiary derives income (much less than the advertising income generated by Google Search) from inserting adverts into content that it hosts in a way that is not unrelated to what television companies do. Moreover, its Google Books and Google Maps projects make available enormous amounts of cultural content that previously came to audiences via core cultural industry means. Without a doubt, it is impossible to understand the cultural industries now, without understanding the way in which Google (which gains some 96 per cent of its revenues from advertising) and to some extent Facebook have affected the advertising market which is fundamental to cultural industry business. And, like Apple, Google has begun to invest considerable sums in the production of content. But most of its business is still based on offering instead of content the ability to find websites and information online: search. What's more, the company is still based geographically and culturally in the heart of Silicon Valley and is driven by the values associated with engineering. It is still fundamentally a technology company.

Similarly, **Facebook** is a corporation whose revenues and profits depend almost entirely on the sale of advertising. It does not produce cultural content, but hosts

¹⁴ Since a 2015 corporate restructuring, the holding company that owns and operates Google and other entities such as YouTube has been known as Alphabet; Google is now the name of just one company within the Alphabet group. Google includes the search engine, the Chrome browser, YouTube and the Android operating system. Other divisions of Alphabet deal with artificial intelligence, driverless cars, fibre cables and more.

interactions between those who use their service: it is a social media company, not a media company. Like Google, Facebook's location (Silicon Valley) and company culture is that of a technology company, rather than a media or culture-producing business.

Amazon began as an online retailer of books, and so for a brief period it could be considered a cultural industry company in the same way as retailers such as Barnes & Noble and Borders (put out of business by Amazon's dominance in 2010). However, it rapidly expanded into general retailing, e-commerce and logistics, and it is now the world's dominant force in *cloud computing* via its AWS subsidiary. Amazon spends far more than Apple, Google and Facebook on producing content. In fact, it spends even more than HBO – which is undoubtedly a cultural industry company. But that spending doesn't make it a cultural industry company; it means that, for the IT sector, it has an unusually well-funded cultural industry subsidiary, and has been in the vanguard of the slow process via which more and more cultural industry businesses may end up, at some point in the future, being subsidiaries of IT corporations, in the way that many corporations were subsidiaries of consumer electronics companies in the twentieth century. This has not happened yet.

Apple is a particularly difficult corporation to assign to a category. It designs and markets devices that have affected the cultural industries profoundly, notably Macintosh personal computers, iPads, iPods and iPhones. It has had a vitally important role to play in the music industries, and to some extent in film and television distribution, via its iTunes system. It has come to play a major role in consumer electronics and telecommunications markets, but it is not really a consumer electronics or telecommunications corporation. And it would be very strange to think of it as a cultural industry company, as the circulation of texts/content (via iTunes) has only been a very small and rather unprofitable part of its operations. It has been still less involved in the *production* of texts, though that may be beginning to change, as it seemingly moves towards the launch of its own audio-visual streaming service(s), and poaches talent from cultural industry companies to oversee the production of television. Like other corporations, Apple may end up spanning, from its base in IT, a number of different sectors – including cultural industries. But that may take a little while yet, and perhaps the clearest defining element is its strong base in Silicon Valley, locationally and culturally.

Microsoft once made significant and unsuccessful efforts to engage in content, when Bill Gates famously and somewhat misleadingly, given his corporate aims, wrote that 'content is king' (see Bailey, 2010). For many years, its main relationship to the kind of content that cultural industries produce has been the commissioning of digital games for its Xbox. This represents a tiny fraction of its operations, which are focused on its famous software, but also increasingly on cloud computing, hardware and artificial intelligence. It has made significant investments in 'infrastructure', especially data centres and international high-speed fibre optic cables, and more recently in social media, with an expensive acquisition of LinkedIn.

(Continued)

These vast corporations, and other IT companies, have had a huge influence on what has happened in the cultural industries over recent years. This includes the way that increasing amounts of the cultural content that many of us experience on a daily basis is produced by amateurs and semi-professionals, especially if the texts and images that we upload on social media for our 'friends' and followers are included in a definition of cultural content. And there is certainly much more content available than there has ever been before, to most people in most countries (though access is highly uneven, as we shall discuss, especially in Chapter 14). Nevertheless, as I have shown, these corporations have their foundations in a very different world from that of the cultural industries, one rooted in cultures of engineering, and they pursue different business strategies, with different interests. The conflicts and collaborations between these and other IT entities, on the one hand, and cultural industry corporations on the other, is an important aspect of understanding the cultural industries in the twenty-first century. The fact that these IT corporations, sometimes confusingly known as platform businesses, have their roots in very different cultures than cultural industry organisations does not, however, mean that the content that their subsidiaries produce and that they distribute should not be subject to the same kinds of regulation as cultural industry and media companies, as they sometimes claim.¹⁵

1.3.2 Other borderline and problem cases

There are other borderline cases of industrial sectors that have a strong 'cultural' component, but which are not usually included in definitions of cultural industries – including mine.

- *Fashion* is a fascinating 'hybrid' of a cultural industry, in the sense that I use the term here, and a consumer goods industry. The high degree of balance between functionality and signification makes this a complex special case, made all the more interesting by distinctive forms of organisation (see McRobbie, 1998, for a valuable study).
- *Sport* industries such as football (soccer) and baseball arrange for the performance of live spectacles that are, in many respects, very like the live entertainment sector of the cultural industries. People pay to be entertained in real time in the co-presence of talented or not-that-talented performers. But there are notable differences, even from live entertainment in the cultural industries. Sport is fundamentally competitive, whereas symbol making isn't. Texts (in the sense in which I use the term in this book) tend to be more scripted or scored than in sports, which are essentially improvised around a set of competitive rules.

¹⁵ See the Appendix for my comments on a thoughtful article by Napoli and Caplan (2017) about this issue. For more comparison of the leading IT corporations and the leading cultural industry corporations, see Table 9.2. For discussion of the confusing term 'platform', see Box 8.1.

- *Design* 'arranges [mainly] physical elements to fulfil some specific function' (Mathers, 2015). This is a 'voluminous catch-all' term that covers activities as diverse as product design, graphic design, fashion design, interior design, industrial design and so on (Oakley and O'Connor, 2015a: 7). It has a strong link with notions of *style*, but as the former head of the UK Design Council points out, 'while aesthetic appeal is vitally important in many design contexts, it is not, in fact, an essential or defining element' (Mathers, 2015). Definitions of the 'creative industries' (see Chapter 7), which tend to be problematically wider in scope than the definition of the cultural industries offered here, often include this almost impossibly amorphous category.
- *Social media* are an extremely important new cultural development. They involve various everyday, usually unpaid forms of cultural production on the part of billions of people. They have significant though still emergent effects on how the products of the cultural industries are circulated. But while, like many cultural industry corporations, social media businesses make money out of advertising, they produce little or no content themselves. Even if some major social media companies (notably Facebook and YouTube) are now funding and commissioning content production or texts, for example drama and comedy series and shorts, this still constitutes a relatively minor extension beyond their core activities. Their fundamental activity is computer programming, and ultimately their basis is the commodification of ordinary sociality and communication, rather than of culture in the sense that I am using the term in this book.¹⁶

I could go on for pages more, dealing with borderline cases, which share features with the cultural industries but which are, I think, sufficiently different to merit separate treatment. I hope though that by now my point will be clear enough: that I am focusing here on industries that are based on the industrial production and circulation of primarily or highly informational and aesthetic-expressive products (texts) and that are centrally reliant on the work of symbol creators. If you are still not convinced, the Appendix deals with some objections other researchers have made to the way in which I have defined cultural industries here.

1.4 Alternative terms: media industries, creative industries, etc.

Clearly, the term 'cultural industries' is a contested, difficult one and, as I have implied, its problems derive from the difficulty of defining 'culture' (not to mention 'industry').

¹⁶ Chapters 10 and 11 on digital networks, and Box 8.1 on 'platforms', provide further relevant discussion. See also Sandvig (2015) for insightful comments on the resemblance of how the 'co-optation of culture' has been superseded (or perhaps it would be better to say 'supplemented by') the co-optation of sociality – of social relations between people. Many people would prefer the term 'commodification' to 'co-optation' – see below.

Given all these problems of definition, why not abandon the term ‘cultural industries’ altogether in favour of an alternative? A number of alternative possibilities can be discussed here:

- The cultural industries are often referred to interchangeably with the ‘**media industries**’, and my focus in this book is primarily (but by no means exclusively) with what might validly be called media industries. But the concept of media is not without its problems of definition either.
- Some analysts have used the term ‘**information industries**’, but in its most developed form, in a groundbreaking book by Eli Noam (2009), this concept of the information sector has been used to refer not only to the media industries (close to what I am defining as the cultural industries here), but also to the telecommunications, internet, and information and communication technology (ICT) sectors. In the way in which Noam develops the concept, this is a valuable move, because his analysis delineates the various industries that should be included in these categories, and outlines how the various sectors are related (though still separate).
- Some analysts (though very few policymakers or cultural workers) refer to *the leisure industries* (e.g., Roberts, 2004). This category seems intended to cover sport and tourism alongside what I am calling the cultural industries here, in line with the interests of the academic sub-field known as ‘leisure studies’.
- Business analysts often use the term ‘**entertainment industries**’ – especially in the USA. Their focus tends to be quite heavily on the television, film, music and book publishing industries, and somewhat less on journalism.
- Without doubt, though, the most often preferred alternative to ‘cultural industries’ is ‘**creative industries**’. Many policymakers and some academic analysts now use this term. Chapter 7 provides an account of some of the problems and controversies associated with the concept. This includes a discussion of the ways in which policy labelled ‘creative industries’ has generally differed from policy labelled ‘cultural industries’.

Leisure, information, entertainment, media and creativity are all addressed in this book, but I prefer to use the term ‘cultural industries’ than the alternatives. The use of the term ‘culture’ draws attention to the historical importance of the cultural industries in affecting relations between culture and economics, texts and industry, meaning and function. What’s more, ‘cultural industries’ not only refers to a type of industrial activity, *it also invokes a certain tradition of thinking about this activity*. As my own approach draws on that tradition of thought (along with others) I outline it in the next chapter. This tradition of thinking about the cultural industries is distinguished by its analysis of how certain distinctive features of these industries generate recurring dynamics in the world of culture; I present my own version of that account. I also outline the rest of the book and its arguments. First, though, let me briefly explain what motivated me to write this book.

1.5 Where I’m coming from

I outlined in section 1.2 above why I think the cultural industries matter: the power they have to influence people, the varied ways in which they manage the work of symbol creators, and their role in bringing about more general industrial, social and cultural change. Relating the fundamental concerns of the book to my own personal background may help to make them more concrete. I hope this will provide some context for the particular approach I take to the cultural industries – the approach developed in this book.

As a teenager, I was infuriated by what I perceived as the lies and distortions of television, and of the ultraconservative newspapers my parents read (typically for a certain section of the Northern English, working class/lower middle class). *The Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* seemed constantly to be attacking anyone who was trying to achieve social justice in Britain in the late 1970s – trade unionists, feminists, anti-racist and anti-fascist activists. They wrote as if the British role in Northern Ireland was one of making peace between tribal factions. Even at 15 years old, I knew enough about Irish history to find this difficult to accept. These newspapers were also decidedly lukewarm in their condemnation of far-right neo-Nazi groups, whose graffiti was all over the town where I grew up, directed at the British South Asian communities there. It seemed to me, right from my teens, that the cultural industries had a role in maintaining power relations and distorting people’s understanding of them.

My other main relationship to the media and popular culture was as a fan, and a fan I remain. Even if some media seemed to take a stance against most of the people and political positions I respected, there was plenty of exciting, interesting and funny popular culture around. I still find this to be the case today, and I cannot accept the view of the cultural industries to be found in some writing on the subject – that they are simply a monstrous system for the maintenance of conformity. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the musical genre of punk changed the way I thought about music, politics, culture and the world. Suddenly, the emotional range of my small record collection was massively expanded: music could be shocking or coolly detached; intelligent or belligerent; hilarious or deadly serious. Punk musicians were always talking about the music industries and were often arguing that they could be changed, to make creativity more widespread and to make sure that more of the money went to those creating the music.

My sense of the importance (and ambivalence) of media and popular culture eventually led me to a career in teaching, where I was fortunate enough to meet dozens of students who were prepared to share their perspectives with me. My love of US popular culture (particularly classical and Movie Brat Hollywood cinema, African-American music and Jewish comedy) and my fascinated loathing for the US government’s role in global geopolitics took me to the outskirts of Chicago for a postgraduate degree in the early 1990s. Teaching and learning provided the impulse to write this book, but it’s also informed by my experience, over the last 25 years or

so, of researching and writing about the cultural industries. There is an assumption among many academics that the most prestigious books will necessarily be more or less incomprehensible to students. I've worked hard to make this book interesting and useful for other teachers and researchers, but I've also endeavoured to make it accessible for students, by explaining difficult concepts as they arise and trying to get across why I think the issues I'm dealing with matter. I've had to assume some knowledge of and interest in the topic, but I've also tried not to assume too much.

2

The Cultural Industries Approach: Distinctive Features of Culture-Producing Businesses