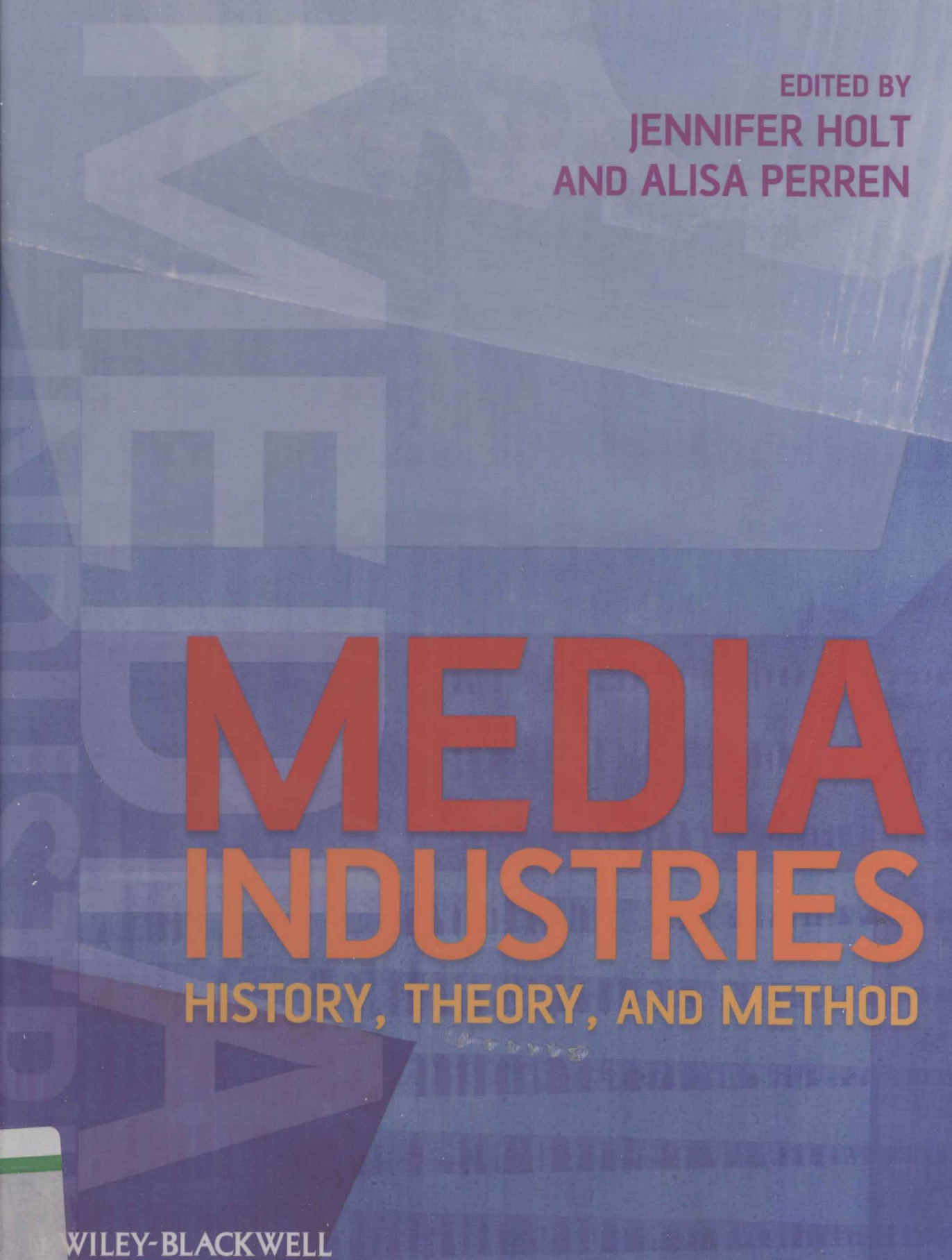
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JENNIFER HOLT
AND ALISA PERREN
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Media Industries

History, Theory, and Method

Edited by Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren

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Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren
March 2008

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Introduction

Does the World Really Need One More Field of Study?

Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren

The study of media industries is a varied and diverse project, incorporating research on everything from "mobisodes" designed for iPhones and the labor force manufacturing plasma television sets in Malaysia to the Creative Commons movement and trade shows in Budapest. Such work is conducted in film and television studies, communication, law, public policy, business, economics, journalism, and sociology departments. The research about these issues is dispersed across similarly vast terrain, as the media industries have been substantively explored and discussed in numerous arenas far beyond the traditional purview of academic study. Discourses in the trade papers, the popular press, and academic publications are supplemented by writing in digital communities, online journals and the blogosphere.[1]

This range of perspectives is both a necessary component and a constitutive element of this work; after all, to explore the media industries in the twenty-first century is to engage with an extraordinary range of texts, markets, economies, artistic traditions, business models, cultural policies, technologies, regulations, and creative expression. And yet, while such an array of resources and emphases sustains an inspiring breadth of scholarly endeavors, thus far these diffuse conversations have not been united by any specific disciplinary tradition. Further, there remains a dearth of formal gatherings and conferences for those researching the media industries,[2] as well as an absence of journals or anthologies devoted specifically to the study of media industries as a coherent discipline.

While academic organizations and cross-disciplinary conversations focused on the media industries have been in short supply, the media industries themselves have been experiencing a period of unprecedented influence, prosperity, cultural debate, and transformation. Shifts in regulatory philosophy and political power have led to dramatic clashes between Congress and the FCC, which have put the regulation of these industries on the front page and at the center of heated public discussion. Trade agreements and other economic and geopolitical alliances have led to more regional and transnational collaborations in a globalized media culture. Technological and industrial convergence has eroded old relationships between media while cultural policies have created new ones. Audiences have become newly valued and "monetized" by media industries seeking the latest user-generated content, and at the same time new modes of distribution have undercut decades of industry tradition and thrown well-established business models into disarray.

Further, as the media industries grapple with the evolution of their products and structures, they are also affected by a multitude of external developments. These include the ascendance of neoliberal economic policy, the increasing power of new global

markets and trade, the growth of an international middle class (and the erosion of an American one), wars in the Middle East and Africa, dramatic Internet-induced changes in social interaction, and the changing definitions and roles of labor in the digital era. Meanwhile, shifting hierarchies of taste and value in popular culture are having a profound impact on media products and strategies; one need only consider the proliferation of television programming across digital platforms to understand how audience behavior, advertising strategies, and longstanding conceptions of "old" media are changing rapidly in the new millennium.[3]

These myriad developments have created a pressing need to bring interdisciplinary scholarship on media industries into a common dialogue. It is therefore our belief that media industry studies should be mapped and articulated as a distinct and vitally important field unto itself. This has become increasingly urgent in the present landscape of convergence, technological growth, and global exchange, and we believe that the time is right for such an intervention. To that end, we have enlisted the help of internationally renowned scholars to delineate and integrate the various traditions, historical trajectories, critical parameters, and potential paths of inquiry that define this discipline. These essays represent the early imaginings of what the field of media industry studies might look like. This book is neither a definitive blueprint nor a final statement. It is not an exploration of specific media industries in any particular locale. Rather, it is an open conceptual discussion about the many ways that media industry research has been undertaken in the past and what interdisciplinary models, methods, and visions it might embrace in the future. It is also a recognition of the fact that, while the world does not necessarily *need* another field of study, one has indeed emerged.

Defining Media Industry Studies

In this volume, we focus on film, radio, television, advertising, and digital media. This list could easily be expanded to include music, newspapers, book publishing, and even telecommunications. Scholars who write about "creative industries" and "culture industries" incorporate all of the aforementioned as well as a host of other areas in discussing both the art and economics of media industries. Those focusing on creative industries[4] have also analyzed the realms of architecture, art and design, performing arts, fashion, and software, among others. Cultural industries scholars have included museums, art institutions, libraries, live performance, and sport in their purview.[5]

Choosing the appropriate scope for this project has been challenging. We have decided to narrow our focus to primarily audiovisual media (with the exception of radio, which is inextricably bound to broadcast and advertising histories) for the purposes of initially mapping this critical terrain. Our parameters were determined by the disciplinary cohesion and shared academic traditions of these media, as well as the degree of commonality or overlap between their cultural and institutional histories, objects of study and modes of analysis. By no means do we consider industries such as music, publishing, or telecommunications to be "outside" disciplinary boundaries or of lesser significance; they were merely beyond what could be substantively and productively addressed by this volume.

Our main objective is to articulate the diverse academic traditions and common threads defining media industry studies while also illustrating how the integrated analyses of media texts, audiences, histories, and culture could enable more productive scholarship. Another goal is to situate this discipline within a humanistic context; while some of the methodologies and models explicated here are more commonly employed by the social sciences, we believe that the textually oriented concerns of film and media studies could be enhanced and enlivened by a broadened base of analysis without threatening the larger commitment to the qualitative, critical work associated with humanist paradigms. To that end, the essays in this book attend to constructs of text and image as they relate to industrial structure and economics, connect politics and policy to issues of art and audience, and develop theoretical and methodological paradigms that not only engage with the past but also offer ways of thinking about media industries in the present (and presumably future) landscape of convergence.

In the essays collected here, the authors address several key themes and concerns, including:

- the relative power and autonomy of individual agents to express divergent political perspectives, creative visions, and cultural attitudes within larger institutional structures;
- the means by which the relationships between industry, government, text, and audience can be conceptualized;
- the need for a grounded, empirically based understanding of media industry practices, including the operations, business models, and day-to-day realities of the media industries, past and present;
- the aesthetic, cultural, economic, and social values associated with the media industries and their contents;
- the degree of diversity in both the industries themselves and the products that they create and distribute;
- the power of the media industries to shape cultural agendas in local, trans/national, regional, and/or global contexts;
- the moral and ethical issues that emerge as a result of the activities and operations of the media industries;
- the roles and responsibilities of scholar-citizens in the process of describing and analyzing the media industries.

The discussion that follows emphasizes both the historical and future importance of these issues for scholars of media industries. In looking back on the formative influences on this area of study, we have opted for a macro-level survey that sketches the diverse disciplinary roots of a media industry studies approach. Since our contributors effectively provide the background relevant to their particular topics, our goal in the next few pages is to outline the relationships between a range of scholarly traditions and to show how these traditions both inform this field at large and illuminate the dynamics outlined above. In the process, we indicate ways in which future work on the media industries can further engage in a transdisciplinary conversation about the converging global media landscape.

The Genesis of Media Industries Scholarship

The culture industry and mass communication theories

Many of the foundational ideas about the media industries emerged in critical/scholarly writing from the 1920s through the 1950s. The arrival of World War II – combined with the dominance of several forms of mass media including motion pictures and radio – contributed to the development of different strands of media industries research in both the humanities and social sciences. A key contribution to humanities-based scholarship came with the arrival of a number of German-Jewish emigrants, including Frankfurt School members Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, into the US. These Marxist theorists were previously based at the Institute of Social Research in Germany until the war led them to flee the country. As Douglas Kellner explores more fully in his essay, the ideas forwarded by the Frankfurt School influenced both political economy and cultural studies, as well as a wide range of other disciplines including philosophy and literature. For the purposes of our discussion, what is particularly significant is an essay written by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944 entitled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."[6]

This essay has influenced how media industries are conceptualized by scholars in a number of ways. Adorno and Horkheimer expressed concern about the extent to which mass media commodified culture. They believed the commercialized media produced within industrial structures – which they labeled "the culture industry" – contributed to the cultural and artistic bankruptcy of American society. Further, they were troubled by the potential degree to which such large-scale media industries shaped the minds of the "masses." They believed that the ideology perpetuated by mass media systems contributed to a depoliticized populace and to their willingness to accept the current social and political status quo. From their point of view, Hollywood represented the epitome of mass-produced culture;

its products cultivated superficial materialistic needs instead of leading people to see the way in which the capitalist system oppressed them and led to their continued domination by the established powers.

While many of these ideas are anathema to our current approach, they are important to understand because of the degree to which they have framed the discourses about the media industries for decades. Their work was significant in terms of raising questions about the kinds of texts produced by mass media industries and the ways these texts might impact audiences.[7] Nonetheless, from the perspective of contemporary media industry studies scholars, Adorno and Horkheimer's views become problematic for a number of reasons. First, inherent in their work was an elitist attitude toward what constituted art (e.g., such high culture activities as operas and symphonies qualified; Hollywood movies and network broadcasts did not). Second, they assumed a monolithic media industry when in fact, as Michele Hilmes and Cynthia Meyers show in their essays, even during the 1930s and 1940s there were numerous stakeholders *within* the industries that had different agendas. Though the metaphor of the "factory system" might have been applied to the Hollywood studios, for example, struggles continually took place between everyone from producers to directors to writers and cinematographers. The factory system also implied highly standardized, interchangeable products – a point that has been significantly challenged by work in such areas as film studies and cultural studies for decades.[8] Third, the vision of the industry constructed by Adorno and Horkheimer assumed a one-way flow of communication from a central industry out to a passive audience. This attributed a tremendous amount of power to the media, combined with minimal agency for individual viewers. What's more, it presumed that other social, cultural, and political institutions had little influence on movie viewers and radio listeners.

Concurrent with the rise of humanistically oriented research by the Frankfurt School, there emerged another strand of scholarship on the media industries out of the social sciences. This area, which was labeled as "mass communication" by the 1930s,[9] differed from the Frankfurt School in terms of its politics and its methodologies. The Frankfurt School used qualitative analyses informed by Marxian critical theory; these analytical tools were designed to advance radical, polemical arguments about overhauling political and economic structures. Conversely, mass communication scholars generally used quantitative methods such as surveys and content analyses in the interest of better understanding the "effects" of mass media forms such as motion pictures and radio on the public. Their interest was less in the radical social change pursued by the Frankfurt School than in modifying the existing system in order to make it more democratic. Mass communication researchers often assumed minor modifications in media systems could contribute to a more democratic society. These views and methods made their work more amenable to government and industry funding.[10]

Notably, much mass communication scholarship viewed communication via the "transmission model" of "who says what to whom to what effect."[11] This model assumes a linear communication process with the greatest power and influence residing with the "who" (typically sectors of industry or government) and much less authority residing with the "whom" (namely, the audience). Communication scholars – as well as related fields of sociology and psychology – often focused on the ways messages (the "what") could be modified. For the government, the modification of messages was pursued largely in the interest of increasing public participation and civic involvement; for industry, the goal was to sell more of the growing number of consumer goods being produced on assembly lines. These two primary objectives contributed to the direction of much of the initial work on the media industries. Specifically, early communication-oriented studies of the media industries were frequently geared to looking at either advertising or news and information programming. To this day, researchers coming out of mass communication departments continue to focus extensively on these topics. For example, prominent books like David Croteau and William Hoynes' *The Business of Media* and Robert McChesney's *The Problem of the Media* are centered on deficiencies in news coverage and the continuing expansion of consumer culture.

These topics are framed in terms how the media industries add to – or, more frequently, constrain – democratic discourse.[12]

As these recent applications of decades-old ideas illustrate, concepts developed during the 1930s and 1940s continue to shape the research questions and approaches of scholars across the humanities and social sciences. It is precisely these perspectives that the contributors of this book are contesting, challenging, and reconceptualizing. While the ideas formulated by "mass culture" and "mass communication" researchers are valuable, they must be viewed largely as of *historical* value. The essays by Thomas Schatz and Victoria Johnson on film and television industry history reveal the degree to which such views on mass culture and mass communication were produced within specific Fordist economic, political, and social circumstances[13] (e.g., the Hollywood studio system and the classic broadcast network system).

While the "mass culture" and "mass communication" approaches may inform media industry studies, they are not central to its future development. As will be explored in the following pages, media industry studies favors different models of the media industries than those developed in the Fordist era. This means supporting analysis that more fully considers the interrelationships between industry, text, audience, and society. Further, the "industry" spoken of by media industry studies scholars is presumed to be anything but monolithic – a point underscored by Horace Newcomb in his provocative essay, which concludes this book. Rather, our approach perceives culture and cultural production as sites of struggle, contestation, and negotiation between a broad range of stakeholders. These stakeholders include not only sectors of industry and government, but also "ordinary people" (e.g., media user/consumer/viewers). In addition, media industry studies is no longer bound to old frameworks that operated predominantly in terms of nation-based media systems. Nor should we necessarily think only in terms of specific media forms. Changes in the industries, the texts they produce, and the ways these texts are consumed make media-specific formulations increasingly problematic. A number of authors in this collection, including Thomas Schatz, P. David Marshall, Henry Jenkins, and Joshua Green explore the challenges that emerge in writing about "distinct" media, past and present, in light of industrial convergence. Thus, while this section has dealt with foundational and historical approaches to the study of the media industries, what follows is a sketch of influences and analytical frameworks that more immediately inform contemporary understandings of this discipline.

Disciplinary Influences and Analytical Frameworks

Sociology and anthropology

Mass communication and mass culture perspectives may have been prominent from the 1920s to the 1950s, but they were not the only ways media industries research was undertaken during those years. Indeed, a handful of scholars, including sociologist Leo Rosten and anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, initiated ethnographically oriented studies of the Hollywood community and filmmaking process.[14] Rosten and Powdermaker looked at Hollywood from the "bottom up." These individuals were among the first to employ interviews and participant observation in order to better understand the complex nature of power relations in the media industries, the tensions that arise in the process of making meaning, and the ways in which audiences are conceptualized by both executives and creative figures.[15]

In spite of the richness that such methods can provide, few media industry scholars employed these strategies until the 1970s. When this work was taken up again, it was predominantly by sociologists interested in exploring the day-to-day operations of news organizations. In the late 1970s, American sociologists Gaye Tuchman and Herbert Gans, as well as British sociologist Philip Schlesinger, undertook studies that examined the ways institutional structures variably enabled or constrained newsroom staffs.[16] A handful of studies on the production of entertainment programming emerged simultaneously. These included several works by UK-based scholars; examples include John Tulloch and Manuel

Alvarado's observation of the production of *Dr. Who* and Tom Burns' ventures down the halls of the BBC.[17] One of the few scholars to have conducted examinations of both news production and entertainment programming is sociologist Jeremy Tunstall. Over more than 30 years, Tunstall has interviewed hundreds of individuals involved in both public and commercial media systems throughout Britain and the US.[18] Of course, no survey of cultural production is complete without referring to Todd Gitlin's landmark *Inside Prime Time*, first published in 1983. This study is distinguished by the degree of access he had to prominent US television executives, writers, and producers, as well as by the depth and breadth of his analysis.[19]

The ethnographically oriented accounts above have been complemented by organizational analyses by individuals such as Paul DiMaggio and Paul Hirsch. These writers have taken a more macro-level approach in examining the "sociology of work" in the cultural industries; they evaluate cultural institutions in terms of how they deal with such issues as uncertainty and change.[20] As John Caldwell discusses in his essay, collectively these strands of sociology and anthropology strongly influence the direction taken in scholarship on cultures of production. In addition, as explored in the next section, these studies provide useful counterpoints to the kinds of institutional analyses undertaken by media economists.

Media economics and industrial analysis

In contrast to the "bottom-up" approach employed by many anthropologists and sociologists, early researchers with backgrounds in business and economics examined the film industry through a "top-down" perspective of industrial and organizational structures. This work includes *The Story of the Films*, a series of lectures at Harvard's business school in the 1920s compiled by Joseph P. Kennedy; Mae Huettig's 1944 study, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry*; and Michael Conant's *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry: Economic and Legal Analysis* (1960). Economists have provided media industry studies with models for discussing both the macroeconomic (e.g., industrial organization and structure) and microeconomic (e.g., operations of individual firms and agents within the marketplace).[21]

Douglas Gomery has played a pioneering role in bringing industrial and economic analysis to the study of media industries.[22] Drawing from applied neoclassical microeconomic theory, he offered a concrete framework for conducting economic analysis via a discussion of industry structure, conduct, and performance.[23] Gomery's *Who Owns the Media* (written with Benjamin Compaine, 3rd edn. 2000) represents an extraordinary effort to address matters of policy and economics across a range of media industries including newspapers, publishing, radio, film, music, and television. *Who Owns the Media* supplements its extensive survey of the media industries with an assessment of the amount of competition present both within and across sectors of the media industries.

The degree to which an industry is determined to be competitive by economists impacts the extent to which it is regulated – or deregulated. Since the late 1960s, the subject of media de/regulation has provoked debate from scholars around the world. The debates about media concentration have been conducted by "traditional" economists and political economists, as will be explored below in more detail. A significant portion of this work has focused on the arena of telecommunications,[24] but there is also dedicated work on television (e.g., Mara Einstein's *Media Diversity*, 2004) and media conglomeration (e.g., Marc Cooper, ed. *The Case Against Media Consolidation: Evidence on Concentration, Localism and Diversity*, 2006)[25] that illustrates how productive economic analysis can be for media industry scholarship. The humanist aversion to statistics has loomed large in the somewhat strained historical relationship between media studies and economics, but recent work on the economics of creative industries (most notably that of Richard Caves) suggests how this disciplinary divide can be overcome with artful analysis and an emphasis on conceptual issues.[26] In his essay, Philip Napoli productively bridges this historic divide, outlining possible ways in which media economics can be applied to a study of the media industries that are sensitive to cultural, political, and aesthetic issues.