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A "French Touch" to the Political Economy of Communication? A Critical Epistemology of the "Cultural Industries" School

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Like many non-English-speaking approaches, the Francophone "cultural industries" tradition of the political economy of communication, although internationally recognized, is largely invisible in non-Francophone countries. Seeking its institutionalization in specific regional, historical, epistemological, and political contexts, it has nonetheless produced original categories for a critical analysis of changes in the media industry, alongside broader socioeconomic changes within capitalism. This article articulates two dimensions: It presents the history of this Francophone cultural industries tradition and its social, political, and scientific contexts of emergence along with its theoretical arguments—linking the latter with the former. It particularly focuses on the tradition's methodology of "socioeconomic modeling" and the theoretical propositions this methodology gave rise to in a materialist analysis of the changing media landscape.

Keywords: cultural industries, political economy of communication, critical theory, social logics, mutations of capitalism, epistemology

Studies aiming at a general epistemology of the political economy of communication (PEC) from a global or regional perspective have flourished since the mid-2000s (Bolaño, Mastrini, & Sierra, 2004, 2012; Calabrese & Sparks, 2004; Hardy, 2014; Lent & Amazeen, 2015; Miège, 2012b; Mosco, 2009; Wasko, Murdock, & Sousa, 2011). However, even though some of these volumes have included articles from French contributors, the Francophone "cultural industries" tradition, centered around the figure of Bernard Miège (born 1941), is still not widely known, let alone theoretically considered, outside of the French-speaking world of PEC. It is, however, hegemonic within it, to the extent that in France it stands for the political economy approach in general. French universities have long been relatively inward looking. Like other French institutions, they have benefited from strong state involvement, protecting them, to a certain extent, from outside forms of scientific imperialism while relying on a large French-speaking area of influence, especially in the social sciences. Thus, "while they have collaborated regularly with colleagues in non-Francophone countries, theorists of the cultural industries have largely relied on Franco-Quebecois cooperation, while recognizing that France is the primary location with a larger number of researchers working on this issue" (George, 2014, p. 30). And even when published in English (especially with the help of the political economist Nicholas Garnham, who translated and presented Miège's early works—see Miège [1989]—or with the remarkable English contribution of French-speaking Quebecois theorists Jean-Guy Lacroix and Gaëtan Tremblay [1997] on "The Information Society and the Cultural Industries'

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Theory"), the cultural industries tradition has never stabilized the translation of several major concepts (publishing/editorial logic; flow/streaming logic, etc.). This is unfortunate because this tradition, which has also played an active part in the institutionalization of information and communication studies in France, has formulated heuristic models for a scientific analysis of changes in the media. It is therefore deeply engaged in questions of methodology for a critique of communications within the broader critique of capitalism.

This article is divided into four sections: The first introduces the history of the theory of the "cultural industries," the second recounts the context of its emergence and development, the third explores its relation to critical traditions such as Marxism and critical theory, and the fourth presents some of its major contributions in the field of communication sciences.

A Materialist Approach to the (French) Cultural Sector

Most PEC approaches in the worldwide communication studies field emanate from the desire to adopt a materialist approach to the media (Garnham, 1990; Smythe, 1977). The tradition initiated by Bernard Miège (2007) is no exception: "A powerful 'activator' of social, political and cultural changes, communication (which should also include information) should not, in my opinion, be reduced to its ideological dimensions alone: it directly intervenes in social relations by contributing to organizational changes" (p. 6).[1]

The 1970s saw the predominance of idealist tendencies in the study of culture and communication, especially in work inspired by the post-structuralist authors collectively referred today to as "French Theory" (e.g., Barthes, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard). For these authors, notwithstanding the conceptual differences among their theories, the media first and foremost produce various forms of ideology and are mostly considered as a hypertrophy of the superstructures that totally cover the societies' economic bases. Furthermore, many public interventions of this time, stemming both from the industry and various commentators, presented technological evolution as the only agent of social change and consensus. To counter these approaches, the first French research laboratory dedicated to the analysis of the industrialization of culture and communication, "Groupe de Recherche Sur les Enjeux de la Communication,"[2] was founded in Grenoble in 1978 by Miège and his colleague Yves de la Haye, to place the analysis of mass communication *within* a broader economic and social context.

This perspective guides the collective volume *Capitalisme et Industries Culturelles* (*Capitalism and the Cultural Industries*; Huet, Ion, Lefèbvre, Miège, & Peron, 1978), which is generally considered to be the starting point of the "cultural industries" school. It draws on a previous research program and a report written in 1976 on "the cultural commodity" by a team of sociologists and economists. The first part of the book (Huet et al., 1978) formulates a theoretical canvas in opposition to the then prevalent analyses of the culture industry: On the one hand, "subjective" neoclassical economics—which consisted hitherto in the "simple application of the premises of standard economic analysis to the new field of cultural goods" (Huet et al., 1978, p. 15)—and on the other hand, the "objective" theory of social needs "emanating from authors claiming a Marxist affiliation"

[1] Unless attributed otherwise, all translations from the French in quoted references are mine.
[2] "Research Group on Communications Issues."

(p. 16)—that is, broadly identified with the French Communist Party. The aim of the book was to comprehend, from a Marxist perspective, the specific features of the cultural commodity within the capitalist mode of production. The particularity of the cultural commodity could not, in the opinion of Huet and colleagues (1978), be reduced to its use value, which was itself "inseparable from the nature of the concrete labor at its origin" (p. 25). In short, the cultural good "is not a product endowed with more or less magical powers gradually transformed into an ordinary commodity within capitalism but a specific commodity" (Huet et al., 1978, p. 21). A critical analysis cannot therefore be limited to seeing it as a mere ideological conveyor belt.

The second part of the book by Huet and colleagues (1978) offers an analysis of cultural commodities through four case studies (amateur photography, audiovisual products, the recording industry, and engravings). The third part of the book (Huet et al., 1978) aims at drawing transversal conclusions for a socioeconomic approach to the strategies implemented by capital to ensure its profitability within the cultural sector. The latter should not be thought of as being independent of the wider logic of the commodity. In this respect, in the afterword to the second edition, Miège (1984) writes,

> It would be a serious mistake to consider the cultural industries as being separated from other industries, in some ways protected; but it would also be an error not to remark that the valorization of capital is conditioned by the specific conditions of this sector (p. 206).

This first argument seeks to anchor culture and communication studies in heterodox economics deeply rooted in the social sciences. Thus, the question of ideology is constitutive of an analysis of how the conditions affecting the valorization of cultural goods tend to create "effects which, despite transformations affecting the social structure, perpetuate the dominance of the bourgeoisie" (Huet et al., 1978, pp. 173–174). In short, cultural goods lead to forms of consumption likely to reinforce dominant values. The critique of ideology also resides in the necessary deconstruction of discourses that accompany the economic development of the media.

This general perspective was summarized in an article on the "cultural commodity," translated into English by Nicholas Garnham (Miège, 1979) and republished in French (Miège, 1982), followed by two other collective books: The first on "the production of cinema (*La Production du Cinéma* [Miège, 1980]) and the second on the "audiovisual industry" (*L'Industrialisation de l'Audiovisuel* [Miège, Pajon, & Salaun, 1986]), cowritten with two of Miège's then doctoral students. These studies, along with another book by Patrice Flichy (1980), *Les Industries de l'Imaginaire* ("imagination industries"), laid the groundwork for media studies in France from a social science perspective. Mainly focused on the analysis of socioeconomic strategies in the cultural and communication sector, this tradition also articulated these with sociopolitical discourses, as well as with the "slogans on communications," which, influenced by "philosophical, sociological and even economic schools of thought," "play their part in the new narrative of communication and hence fuel the general myth" (Miège et al., 1986, pp. 104, 107).

Many of the conclusions of these studies are similar to those in other PEC traditions, internationally (e.g., the uncertain valorization of cultural products, which must be constantly renewed, and the resulting strategies of catalog building, formatting, and subcontracting; the structure of the sector where a small number of giant firms dominate the market and leave most of the creation and innovation to a myriad of

smaller competitors, etc.). But it is the emphasis put on different conclusions that defines the particularity of the French approach (e.g., the differentiation between specific types of cultural products depending on reproducibility, leading to specific socioeconomic logics; the small number of salaried workers in the process of creation), together with a specific reading of the concept of commodity in the cultural and communication field. In this respect, what is now called the "blindspot debate"—that is, the reactions to the influential article by Dallas Smythe (1977), "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," which considers audiences as the principal commodity of the mass communication industries—was echoed slightly in France. Flichy (1980) criticizes Smythe's (1977) conclusion, arguing that even in the United States, "networks have a key role in the production of information; as for fiction programs, they play a crucial ideological role because [. . .] the inculcation of social values is more profound 'in situ'" (p. 69). It is noticeable that a major difference in the comprehension of media systems is also due to national particularities. In the early 1980s, the European and especially the French media were far more integrated as a state-controlled public service: France's first commercial television channel, based on subscription, was launched at the end of 1984, and it was not until 1986 that the first commercial channel exclusively financed through advertising appeared, after an audience measurement company was set up in 1985. Therefore, the functioning of advertiser-supported television, based mainly on audience data, makes little sense to a 1980s' French media analyst. Thus, Flichy (1980) focuses mainly on television's social dimension: "Commercial television is simultaneously an advertising medium as well as a programs medium" (p. 69). Miège takes up the same argument in a 1986 article (published in English in 1987), arguing that "the operation of information in advanced capitalist societies" should not be overlooked, nor should the relation between audiovisual programs and the artistic or creative dimension: "they cannot be allowed to appear only utilitarian or functional but must retain something of an artistic 'aura'" (Miège, 1986, p. 98; 1987, p. 278). In the last section, we shall see how such an assertion is linked to a particular conception of the socioeconomic analysis of the media.

Contexts and Conditions of Emergence

Undoubtedly, the French media sector has its own particularities, which do not correspond to the American model, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, long characterized by state monopolies in TV and radio broadcasting as well as by strong state intervention and regional Francophone influence, the French cultural industries began to undergo a period of deregulation only during the 1980s and 1990s. To this day, many branches of the French media sector still rely on national and local production and distribution, with state support (e.g., sectoral subsidies for production, French or French-speaking content quotas for distribution). But the theoretical differences must also be sought in the research conditions that existed at the beginning of the French cultural industries tradition. Armand and Michèle Mattelart showed in 1979 that the emergence of the very notion of cultural industries, "which was to circulate far beyond the academic world" (Flichy, 1991, p. i), was connected to the crisis of industrial capitalism and a subsequent reorientation of the economies of the Global North toward the cultural, telecommunications, and media sectors. Indeed, beginning with the oil shocks of the 1970s, questions were posed at the government level, particularly in France, as to the possibility of finding other areas of capital growth, in sectors of higher added value that consumed less energy. Thus, in France, "even if many studies of the cultural industries were carried out by academics, they emerged from the dual demands of industry and government and the need to articulate these" (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1979, p. 119).

The late 1970s and early 1980s inaugurated an era of research on communications, funded by industry and government, with a view to modernizing the state, along with a second wave focusing on telecommunications, the latter "more oriented toward industrial planning" and "opening up research on communication systems to top public servants specialized in engineering and administration" (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1986, p. 33). As we have already seen, the first French publication on the cultural industries stemmed from a government-funded research program on the cultural commodity. The collective book on the audiovisual industry "followed up a study made in 1983 and 1984 as part of a research program on audio-visual communication proposed by the Ministry of Research and Industry" (Miège et al., 1986, p. 9) and was funded by the National Research Centre in Telecommunications, a governmental research organization under the general supervision of the then Ministry of Postal Services and Telecommunications. The National Audiovisual Institute funded Flichy's (1980) study. As Éric George (2014) notes, the cultural industries tradition of research was dependent on government contracts or mixed public-private subsidies and grants long before these became the norm in French academia. The emerging focus on the media and cultural sectors was also materialized in the (incipient) institutional recognition of communication studies. In 1975, the French National University Council, organized into "sections" representing officially recognized scientific disciplines, welcomed its 71st section, devoted to information and communication sciences.

Government interest in the economics of culture and media production was accentuated in 1981 with the appointment of the socialist Jack Lang as minister of culture:

> As early as 1981, I used the slogan: "economy and culture, it's the same combat" [. . .] Gone are the days when artists, creators and inventors kept well away from the economy for fear of being compromised. Also gone are the days when the economy could ignore the fermentation represented by knowledge and creation. The duo of economy and culture, the dialectic between them, concerns first a specific sector: the cultural industries. While I did not coin this expression, I did help popularize it. (Lang cited in Levy, 2011, p. 74)

It must then be recognized that the rise of the term *cultural industries*, which paved the way for a "cultural industries" school, occurred under strategic conditions: It irrigated academic debates in an interplay with official reports advocating innovative government policies. In a 1983 report (written in English) for UNESCO titled "Problems which the development of national and international cultural industries presents for artistic and intellectual creation," Miège (1983) described the spread of this notion of cultural industries:

> What matters is that in recent years, international organizations, particularly UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation and the Council of Europe, have taken up the subject; and it is largely under their auspices that studies have been written and working meetings held. [A]s a result, these studies or communications are reaching a wider audience, particularly among those with political responsibilities. (p. 8)

At the time, work on the cultural industries was "carried out by critical economists and sociologists focusing on cultural and cultural democratization policies and their increasing dependency on commercial networks" (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1986, p. 33). It is then remarkable that, alongside its constitution, an analysis of culture and the media giving priority to the processes of production should meet the needs of

economic policies involved in the transformation of capitalism. Between the demands of state and international institutions, the critical requirement of a materialist approach should be further explored.

From the Culture Industry to the Cultur*al* Industr*ies*: Institutionalization of an Approach

It is usually acknowledged that between the European tradition of the PEC and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, there is a strong connection (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). This is even more so with the Francophone approach: The simple pluralization in French from *industrie culturelle*—the usual translation of "*Kulturindustrie*" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002)—to *industries culturelles*—the term used in *Capitalisme et Industries Culturelles* (Huet et al., 1978)—implies a clear theoretical connection, even if this shift "demonstrates a significant change" (George, 2014, p. 34) asserting that the sector composes "an ensemble of highly diverse components" (Huet et al., 1978, p. 155). Likewise, the cultural industries tradition, along with other European PEC traditions, is generally considered to be more interested in forging a general critical framework based on the adaptation of Marxist theory to questions of culture and communications (Mosco, 2009, ch. 5).

Yet, strangely enough, one finds only very sporadic attempts at epistemological elaboration of Marxist theory in the French cultural industries tradition. The only exception is arguably the attempt of Yves de la Haye to formulate a "contribution toward a materialist analysis of the media," the title of the preface to a collection of texts by Marx and Engels in English (see de la Haye, 1984). This, however, does not mean that Miège and his colleagues at the end of the 1970s did not adopt critical concepts. In fact, many concepts from the Marxist critique of political economy (e.g., mode of production, monopoly capitalism, productive forces, commodity, the relation of capital and labor, etc.) are mostly taken for granted. They can be found, for instance, in the section titles of several chapters throughout the book *Capitalisme et Industries Culturelles* (Huet et al., 1978)—for example, "Cultural use value and social relations of production" (p. 20); "Transforming cultural use value in exchange value" (p. 25)—but are not specifically problematized in relation to the media, except for the concept of *commodity* (Miège, 1979). Similarly, the attempt to conceptualize the French media as a specific "state apparatus" lacked any theoretical precision (Huet et al., 1978, p. 144). Rather, Miège, who has worked with this concept since his second doctoral thesis published in 1974 on enterprise committees and cultural action, identifies the term with educational, cultural, and sports institutions and sees it as "playing a direct role in the valorization of cultural products from a dual point of view: as clients and as auxiliaries" (Miège, 1979, p. 306). This is probably due to the common use of these critical terms in French left-wing academic circles at the time, strongly influenced by Althusser. It is clear, however, that Miege's aim was not to develop a culturally informed Marxist epistemology, nor to take part in the Marxist discussions of the time, which in his view was insufficiently interested in the socioeconomic study of the cultural industries as a specific sector. In a 1988 debate on Marxism and communications, Miège explained, "I was sympathetic to Althusser's approach, but at the same time I was critical of the fact that he limited himself to a global vision and did not carry out any concrete analysis" (Miège, Mattelart, Mattelart, & Fourniau, 1988, p. 48).

Nevertheless, there has been no lack of critical analysis of the capital/labor relation in cultural production and, hence, of the structural instability of employment in this sector, especially in the early works of the cultural industries school. For instance, in the collective work *Capitalisme et Industries*

Culturelles (Huet et al., 1978), a critical analysis of the recording industry reveals that the copyright systems "condition the possibility of capitalist exploitation" (p. 100) in this form of production, while other commentators like Jacques Attali (1985) analyzed it as a victory over the capitalist process. For Attali (1985), creators were given back the ownership of their production, hence "reduc[ing] the capitalist's profit" (p. 40). In fact, in the recording industry, with constant uncertainty over product valorization, the salaried employment of creative workers would only increase the risk of losses on a large scale. Thus, the copyright systems advantage the producer, who is the "principal if not the sole provider of capital" (Miège, 1979, p. 304): Authors and composers remain unpaid as long as "they have not proved that their professional activity actually imparts use value to their productions" (Huet et al., 1978, p. 97). Under copyright systems, creators are paid only when they have *already* produced surplus value, which means that they must bear the greater share of the risks that characterize the sector. Copyright systems, which offer the capitalist "a real reservoir" of available workers "without the need to pay them wages," are then considered to be a cornerstone of capitalist strategies within cultural production:[3] The "construction of a catalogue, the only way to spread the risks" is possible only because most creators from the catalog will never receive any payment (Miège, 1979, p. 305). The resulting precariousness, which also contributes to the artistic aura of the cultural product (the romantic conception of "selfless artists" and their "artistic autonomy"), is partly concealed by significant inequalities among creators, between a very small group of highly visible superstars, who dominate the charts and the box office and can live off their work, and the huge majority of those who cannot. Such analyses are at the core of contemporary critical reflections on new forms of *free* or *digital labor* in the media industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2010) as well as on the increasing precariousness of work in general through the systematic use of contractual labor (Matthews, 2017).

The absence of a consistent epistemological elaboration in relation to the critical concepts is even more striking in relation to the works of the Frankfurt School's critical theory (and especially the analyses of Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and, above all, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno and the original concept of *culture industry*). Strangely, in the work of the French "cultural industries" tradition, these authors have been subjected only to a very general critique, which, before the 2000s, did not really discuss any specific text. In the seminal study *Capitalisme et Industries Culturelles* (Huet et al., 1978), Adorno and Benjamin are identified—and hence criticized—as advocates of the "autonomy of art," for whom art has an "autonomous existence as regards systems of social relations" (p. 20), with a single reference to a book *on* Adorno by the philosopher Marc Jimenez (1973).[4] Miège's (1983) report for UNESCO on the development of national and international cultural industries takes up the same argument for a rapid general disqualification of the concept of *culture industry* in an introductory paragraph, which refers in passing to "the well-known chapter of T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*" (p. 7). In Miège and colleagues' (1986) book on the audiovisual industry, which mostly focuses on the empirical analysis of the strategies of industrial actors, one can still encounter "the ghost of Th. W. Adorno" (p. 23), but this unexpected reference does not lead to any theoretical development, nor does it draw on any specific text.

[3] Especially within the "publishing" model (see the next section).

[4] Which is amusing, noting that, in fact, both thinkers were consistently critical toward "autonomists" in theories of art! (See, e.g., Adorno, 1980; Benjamin, 1980.)

Returning to the first works produced by the French cultural industries tradition, one can only be surprised by such overly rapid references to the Frankfurt School's authors and the concept of culture industry, aimed only at almost total disqualifications that tend to identify critical theory with "overarching" or "idealist" theories of communication. It is rather evident that the ideas of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, or Marcuse cannot be so easily caricatured, but if the French authors truly believed in the limits mentioned above, why affirm a connection that never leads to any epistemological advance? One explanation is that critical theory began to be taught in French universities at about the same time as the institutionalization of communication sciences. Founded in 1975, the 71st section, needed canonical figures, ever more urgently from the 1990s onward. Henceforth, scholars like Miège began to constantly refer to their approach as the theory of the "cultural industries," in continuity with Adorno and Horkheimer—"fathers of . . . the culture industry theory" (Miège, 2000, p. 15; 2017, p. 17)—and as an essential constituent of the French information and communication studies (Miège, 2004a, 2012a). It is thus remarkable that in Quebec, where the institutionalization of communications research followed a different path (Lacroix & Levesque, 1985), the need for a more stable term was felt to be more urgent. In fact, the only constant (although insufficiently elaborated) references to critical theory in the works on cultural industries came first from French-speaking researchers in Québec (Lacroix, 1986; Lacroix & Tremblay, 1997; Tremblay, 1997).

Once institutionalized, especially in the French context, the cultural industries tradition mostly worked toward a refining of its methodology. As president of the 71st section of the National University Council from 1992 to 1996, Miège (2012a) strategically positioned the tradition in the social sciences, away from "idealist philosophy" and at the (difficult) crossroads of media critique and the demands of industry and policy:

> If the "cultural industries theory" has progressively become an important approach within the information and communication sciences, [. . . this] is the result and the conjunction of several concomitant factors: the research work carried out in the theoretical and methodological framework that it proposes; the responses it is able to provide to demands for professional training; and its ability to follow and shed light on the profound changes in the sectors and professional fields through empirical analysis. To this must also be added its ability to cooperate with other approaches and to prioritize new epistemological problems. (para. 2)

Socioeconomic Models: Exploring the "Social Logics of Communication"

Indeed, the question of methodology consequently became of utmost importance. Therein lies one of the most interesting features of the "cultural industries" tradition. It is generally acknowledged that the PEC in general has shown little interest in methodological discussion. Representing the American tradition of the PEC, Eileen Meehan, Vincent Mosco, and Janet Wasko (1993) point out that "unlike positivist paradigms, political economy tends to treat its methods and criteria implicitly; practitioners are expected to follow criteria implicit in the paradigm and then to select the method best suited to the problem" (pp. 112–113). The French-speaking tradition is perhaps one of the rare exceptions to this rule. For instance, several texts since the 1980s have shown a strong interest in methodological elaboration, drawing on empirical analysis of the cultural industries and, in particular, on Bourdieusian

sociology (collected in Miège, 2004b). These initial methodological arguments laid the groundwork for a reflection on the identification of the "social logic of communication"—also referred to as "socioeconomic models" (Ménard, 2004; Mœglin, 2007)—at work in the cultural and audiovisual industries and "around which the strategies of social actors, whoever they are (dominant or dominated), are more or less forced to organize and develop" (Miège, 2004b, p. 125).

Methodological Principles

Asserting that the cultural industries are *plural* and that cultural commodification processes are multiple, diverse, and complex implies the need to properly identify this complexity as well as the common points between the different sectors that justify their consideration as a coherent whole. Thus, work in the late 1970s initially drew up typologies of products and industries, distinguishing between reproducible and non-reproducible products, and between the different levels of artistic work involved in the creation process (see Huet et al., 1978; Miège, 1979). Observing that valorization throughout the cultural sector is highly uncertain, these studies then explored how this uncertainty organizes the different branches and situates various strategies in relation to risk:

> Whereas traditional currents consider uncertainty as the cause of abnormality in cultural industries and markets, [the cultural industries school] turns it into the key to their functioning: differentiated socio-economic models place the production and marketing of each product in larger sets or series that statistically attenuate the uncertainty of their valorization. (Mœglin, 2007, p. 153)

In the French tradition, Flichy (1980) was probably the first to distinguish two different models at work within the cultural industries: A *publishing* model ("*modèle éditorial*"), which concerns purchasable cultural commodities (books, records, videotapes, DVDs, etc.), and a *flow* model ("*modèle du flot*"), which governs mass media like radio and television.[5] In the industrial sectors in which the publishing model applies, goods are purchased directly and individually by the consumer at the end of the production and distribution process (direct commodification). The central role is played by the *publisher*, who articulates the creative, industrial, and marketing functions. To cope with risk, the publisher must produce a catalog to balance the failures and successes through the exploitation of a pool of "independent" cultural workers. As we have seen, this is made possible by copyright laws that allow the producer to pay artists only when surplus value has been created. The sectors organized in terms of the flow model "can be characterized by the continuity and amplitude of distribution, which implies that each day new products render obsolete those of the day before" (Flichy, 1980, p. 38). Products are not directly paid for by the final consumer but rather indirectly through advertising or taxes and levies and cannot be directly appropriated. The flow model is organized around the *programmer*, who is responsible for the stabilization of audiences (Beaud, Flichy, & Sauvage, 1984): It is a matter of building a coherent program schedule over the day, likely to attract and retain

[5] Although there is no direct reference in Flichy's (1980) book to him, Raymond Williams was responsible for first using the concept of "planned flow" as "the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form" (Williams, 1974, p. 86).

different categories of viewers at different times. Staff—temporary or statutory—are salaried and employed in large, hierarchical organizations.

It is around these initial models and their evolution that socioeconomic mutations in the culture, communication, and media sectors are then linked to "the march of capitalism" (Bouquillion, 2008, p. 10). Henceforth, much debate has taken place within the cultural industries school as to whether emerging trends are stable enough to warrant the creation of a new model or merely reshape or hybridize the two canonical ideal types. Within this tradition, for instance, it was finally admitted that the printed press borrowed alternatively and in various degrees from the editorial logic and to the flow logic. However, the development of cable television (and satellite equivalents) during the 1980s and 1990s posed a theoretical problem for both models. Cable services were organized around a new actor that could use communication technologies "as a means of making cultural and information products available" (Lacroix & Tremblay, 1997, p. 63): Through these technologies, very large catalogs of premium programs were available for a flat fee to paying consumers. Hence Lacroix and Tremblay (1997) proposed the "club" model, revealing the growing centrality of telecommunication sectors within the cultural industries. The specificity of this model has since been the object of debate, as with other, more recent models: The "meter" logic of online portals and the "informational brokerage" model. The latter, as well as its hybridization as other models, is today under deep scrutiny. First proposed by Pierre Mœglin (1998) in his analysis of the education industry, this model defines personalized services performed by a user-mandated intermediary. The "informational broker," called so because his or her tasks are "close to those of a broker in finance and real estate" (Mœglin, 1998, p. 279) is an intermediary who "produces nothing, searching for ad hoc information and providing it custom-made on demand. The fit occurs when the information provided is considered relevant and is used by the person to whom it was destined" (Mœglin, 2005, p. 225). Internet and digital platforms then developed this model in which the intermediary

> personalizes his relationship with customers, registers preferences . . . and develops multiple applications likely to add surplus-value to his or her activity and justify payment. Whatever the nature of this information and the form of the "infomediary" payment are, what matters is that payment occurs on contact: by commission, referencing and selling keywords to advertisers, via the marketing of the information acquired during the transactions, etc. (Mœglin, 2007, p. 158)

Many recent analyses have confirmed the proliferation of this new logic in the cultural industries. Its stability is, however, still under debate:

> I see the publishing[6] and flow models as being generic models that have stood the test of time, while I consider the club, online portals, brokerage, and print-bound forms of the press as "logics" . . . that do not quite fit yet the designation of "models." (Miège, 2012b, p. 63)

[6] The proximity of the French word for "publisher," "éditeur," with the English "editor" sometimes leads to confusing translations. The translator here chose to render "modèle editorial" as "editorial model"; I have retranslated it here as "publishing model."

The Social Logics of the Contemporary Media Landscape

As some commentators in this tradition have noted, "Research and reflection will long continue around the subject of models" (George, 2014, p. 47). Indeed, even if this methodological reflection sometimes tends to be a mere description of economic strategies, socioeconomic models have a theoretical richness capable of producing a refined critical analysis of the complexity of today's media landscape. They do not limit themselves to describing simple business models. Instead, they seek to articulate economic strategies with the social narratives and discourses through which these strategies can be justified, amplified, diffused, and criticized. As Mœglin (2007) states,

> the humanist and middle-class universe of the personal library, proper to the [publishing] model, has nothing in common either with the mass culture [underlying] the flow model, nor with the feeling of belonging to a group or a cooperative [underlying] the club model, or with paying individualism conveyed by the meter model, [nor] with the personalized assistance ideal at the core of the informational brokerage model. These are five competing "cultures" superimposed at present, which, seen in an anthropological perspective, lead us to consider the socio-economic model as a total social phenomenon. (p. 159)

This methodology was developed "to link elements too often separated in analyses such as production and consumption (or uses); broadcasting and reception (or readings); the communicational and the social; techniques, social practices and even the symbolic" (Miège, 2004b, p. 128). Although some of these dimensions were only poorly integrated before the mid-2000s, socioeconomic models remain a powerful tool for a critical project that aims at understanding the media industries as concrete *totalities*. Therefore, the last two decades have seen the rise of new proposals that can be articulated with the contributions produced by other critical traditions for the continuous analysis of the transformations of capitalism in the media.

With the spread of ICTs over the last two decades the place of consumers in the cultural industries has been transformed. On the one hand, new uses have reoriented business strategies. An exemplary case is the recorded music industry at the turn of the 21st century. The practices that developed around the illegal downloading of digital files quickly changed traditional listening habits and led to new forms of consumption that had not been anticipated. Lucien Perticoz (2009) has shown how these more mobile uses, accustomed to free access to content, encouraged by both the deployment of domestic high-speed Internet and new devices such as MP3 players, had to be gradually integrated into new offers. Perticoz (2009) then argued for a better understanding of the interplay between commercial strategies and the transformations of social digital uses in the modeling of logics. In a separate study on video games, Perticoz (2011) explained how the video game industry induces new forms of payment associated with new forms of consumer engagement, requiring "the systematic analysis of the methods of articulation between the evolution of cultural practices mediated by technology and the visible transformation of the cultural and media industries" (p. 139).

On the other hand, the spread of ITCs has somewhat blurred the line between consumer and creator. In their study of the "Web 2.0," Philippe Bouquillion and Jacob Matthews (2010) analyzed the so-called "collaborative" Web's business models, showing how different products are linked to discourses on regaining

control from consumers and the necessary "democratization" of content production, leading to new forms of exploitation. The information sector was one of the first to be digitally transformed, placing online consumers at the heart of new strategies for reducing production and promotion costs (Rebillard & Smyrnaios, 2010). Organized around the informational broker logic, this transformation has led to analyses of informational diversity: The rise of this logic in online information is characterized "as much by pluralism (great variety of topics addressed) as by redundancy (focus of the attention on a small number of subjects excessively treated in comparison with others, very isolated)" (Rebillard, 2011, p. 93). Further studies have used socioeconomic modeling to analyze the growing "platformization" of media industries. Video or music streaming platforms relying mostly on user-generated content, such as Dailymotion, YouTube, or SoundCloud, have been used to define the "platform" model through a refinement of the informational broker logic (Bullich & Lafon, 2019). This model, which is concentrated around a socio-technical apparatus for making content available online, is characterized by "the absence of a transaction prior to being posted online" (Bullich & Lafon, 2019, para. 12). Its essential consequence is "the transfer of the uncertainty that weighs on valorization from the broadcaster to the creators and producers of content" (Bullich, 2021, pp. 57–58).

Finally, although it experienced a slow stabilization due to strategies of disciplinary legitimation, socioeconomic modeling as a methodology provides a heuristic richness that can now be adapted to further interdisciplinary research on the rapidly changing communication landscapes. In an article on social media, Benoît Lafon (2017) used this methodology to define a *medium* in terms of five dimensions: A business model, narratives, institutions (professional organizations), actors (users, consumers, and promotors), and social technique offering to articulate different levels of analysis of the sector around coherent (although sometimes disputed) logics. Socioeconomic models can even be used to reveal how the media landscape, with its rapid changes, may be analyzed as an articulation of different economic trends associated with their symbolic representations in the longtime history of media capitalism. In a recent work (Magis, 2022) on the transformations of copyrights in the music business, I suggest interpreting socioeconomic models within the broader framework of the Marxian periodization of capitalism. I argue that these models can be considered as representing different stages of maturity of capitalism in the media, the "publishing" logic, for example, being typical of a "liberal-capitalist" stage, characterized by what Marx calls the formal subsumption of labor under capital, where the "flow" logic is typical of a "Fordist-industrial" stage, characterized by what Marx terms the real subsumption of labor under capital, both models articulating the usual ideologies of their specific stage (Magis, 2022).

Conclusion

The mutations of Western capitalism since the 1970s, and the progressive shift to information, media, and communication, have revealed the importance of the cultural industries. The study of these was also taken up by radical theorists, especially in France, leading to a French tradition rooted in critical political economy and social science and mostly centered around the figure of Bernard Miège. This tradition, which progressively aggregated French-speaking theorists on both sides of the Atlantic, developed along several lines. The first, which adopted a materialist and critical framework, challenged the idealist and technological determinist views of change that were abundant in communication studies. The second was more concerned with the institutionalization of communication studies within the university. The third sought to produce empirical analyses aimed at decision makers, future employees, as well as critics. The latter two sometimes appeared to

be in contradiction to the original critical framework. However, the combined efforts of all three have led to the development of a methodology based on the identification of "social logics." Combining different dimensions in the analysis of the cultural industries and linking specific economic strategies and ideological justifications as well as the *Weltanschauung* of actors and the social representations that permeate the sectors, socioeconomic models aim at correlating mutations within the media with wider movements within capitalism. Although this approach has been given little attention outside the French-speaking world, it could be more largely invested by the communication sciences with a view to linking the economic dimension of the media to their cultural, social, technical, and political dimensions in the critical analysis of contemporary society.

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