

Marcel Hartwig, Evelyne Keitel, Gunter Süß (Eds.)

Media Economies

Perspectives on American Cultural Practices

focal point

Arbeiten zur anglistischen und amerikanistischen Medienwissenschaft
Studies in English and American Media

Herausgegeben von
Edited by
Jörg Helbig, Angela Krewani

Band
Volume
15

Marcel Hartwig, Evelyne Keitel, Gunter Süß (Eds.)

Media Economies

Perspectives on American Cultural Practices

 **Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier**

Media Economies. Perspectives on

American Cultural Practices /

Marcel Hartwig, Evelyne Keitel, Gunter Süß (Eds.). -

Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014

(focal point ; vol. 15)

ISBN 978-3-86821-574-8

Cover Illustration: Daniel Wagner

Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014

ISBN 978-3-86821-574-8

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon,
may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means
without prior permission of the publisher.

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, D - 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, D - 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

Contents

Marcel Hartwig, Gunter Süß Media Economies: An Introduction	I
--	---

I: Media Branding and the Formation of Identity

Thomas Klein Web Series – Between Commercial and Non-Profit Seriality	3
Eero Laine Producing Consumers: Media, Branding, and the Experience Economy	15
Simone Knewitz The Aesthetics and Economics of Television Series in the Age of Digital Media	27
Frank Kelleter Trust and Sprawl: Seriality, Radio, and the First Fireside Chat	43

II: Teleconomics: Public vs. Private, Broad- vs. Narrowcasting

Darcey Morris No More Niche – ‘Widercasting’ and Cable’s Broad Move	65
Bärbel Göbel-Stolz Public Industry: The Commercialization of German Public Broadcasting	79
Seth Hulse Economic Repositioning for a More Viable Media Ethics: A Case Study of CBS and the Hiring of Scott Pelley	101
Gregory Vance Smith Amateur Podcasts and the Cultural (Re)Production and Distribution of Genre Media	117

III: Globalization and Corporate Culture

Daniel Stein

Popular Seriality, Authorship, Superhero Comics:
On the Evolution of a Transnational Genre Economy 133

Monika Pietrzak-Franger

Serial Politics of Appropriation and Transmedia Storytelling:
From *Breaking Bad* to the Occupy Movement 159

Sophie G. Einwächter

Fantastic Fan Marketing – Fantasy Fan Online-Communities
and Conventions as Markets of Cultural Goods 179

Notes on Contributors 199

Media Economies: An Introduction

Marcel Hartwig, Gunter Süß

Homo oeconomicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics* (226).

In this volume, we define media economies as a set of cultural practices that exert a direct influence on the aesthetics, tastes and ethics of a consumer's lived experience. These practices rest both on emotional and affective actions and investments that result from media branding as a specific form of media economy. It renders a social group's lived experience by teleonomics, i.e. the use of media forms as based on experienced limitations of public and private spheres and new media's discursive practices of broad- and narrowcasting. Last but not least, media economies are understood as a corporate and global set of cultural practices that inform standardized forms of production, reproduction, and distribution. As such they address issues of authorship, ownership and generic features of media forms. Our understanding of media economies informs the threefold structure of this anthology.

Initially, this project was an enquiry into a possible paradigm shift within Media and Cultural Studies. In their essay "Critical Media Industry Studies," published in 2009, Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz and Serra Tinic point out that Media Studies have habitually neglected economic and corporate issues: "If the ways that we have traditionally studied the media can be categorized into general areas of industry, text, and audience, then the vast majority of critical media scholarship has favored the latter two areas" (234). In the same year, Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren suggest in their "Introduction" to the anthology *Media Industries* that because of rapid changes to the production, distribution, and consumption of media texts in a globalized and digitalized world the academic discourse of Media Studies should be expanded to include an important new subdiscipline, namely the field of Media Industry Studies:

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 itself. (2)

Moreover, following the burst of the housing bubble in 2008, the financial crisis, and the economic meltdown in many countries of the (Western) world, discourses on the

economy, the banking system, and capitalism in general multiplied. As a result, economic and corporate questions have also become central to many approaches in Media and Cultural Studies. On her blog "Media Industries" Alisa Perren lists 99 books on the subject of media economies published between 2010-2013 alone.

As yet, primarily two academic disciplines have been engaged with the analysis of media economical issues: Political Economy and Cultural Studies. Approaches informed by Political Economy were traditionally concerned with "macrolevel structural issues of regulatory regimes, concentration of media ownership, historical change, and their larger connection to capital interests" (Havens, Lotz, Tinic, 234). There was a general tendency to neglect (individual) popular fictional texts and everything that was regarded as entertainment. As some of these approaches are informed by Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School this may not come as a surprise. Cultural Studies approaches, in contrast, have tried to integrate a broad notion of what could be called a 'text' within an analysis of culture as a complex, contested, and contradictory phenomenon; power, here, is a complex process not a state. While frequently employing popular texts as their objects of study, Cultural Studies approaches have often tended to neglect institutional and structural frameworks or foundations. In their analyses of media texts, the recipient's ability to produce oppositional readings may have been overstated; reception processes are not univocally 'creative' and 'resistant' *per se*.

In accordance with Havens, Lotz and Tinic we believe that a synthesis of approaches coming from the field of Political Economy on the one hand and Cultural Studies on the other may be advantageous and therefore worthwhile. The complex notions of power and culture as used in Cultural Studies may help to avoid too simplistic and reductionist explanations of macrolevel studies. Then again, some projects within Cultural Studies disregard institutional and structural frameworks or foundations in their analysis of media text and stress reception processes as univocally 'creative' and 'resistant.' A combination and rearticulation of both, Cultural Studies approaches and such informed by Political Economy, conceptualized as "middle-range theory" (ibid. 243), promises a more adequate analysis of media phenomena.

As stated above, the number of publications on media economies has increased dramatically in the last decade, which attests not only to the vitality and the dynamic, but also to the polyphony of this academic field. This becomes apparent not least in the multitude of titles for related projects. Havens, Lotz, and Tinic coined the term "Critical Media Industry Studies", while Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren call their sub-discipline "Media Industry Studies" (2). Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks and John Thornton Caldwell term their project in an anthology of the same name *Productions Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (2009). In all of these projects, the assessment of media industries is based on the interconnectivity of media products, media industries, and neoliberal economies. Such a view takes for granted the consumer's experience of institutions in the social contexts media industries exist in. It

does not explain, however, how media industries came about as stable units in the lived experience of its consumers. How, then, can media economies as a practice of media industries transform, define, and remake the sociopolitical realities of its customers? What is the link between the lived experience of consumers and new media forms? How do these intangible products inform the taste, needs, and values of their consumers? In which ways do media economies serve as accomplices to conglomerate control, privacy breaches, and the accelerations of class hierarchies in the lived worlds of their customers?

In order to approach these and other questions, this anthology seeks to consider media economies as a set of cultural practices. As will be seen the specific focus of this reader targets American media economical contexts. A counter example studying the branding and distribution methods of the German crime serial *Tatort* will show how American cultural practices in the field of media economies are realized in European contexts. These media economical practices are to be studied from a perspective that regards institutionalized frameworks and media texts as both results of and providers for both money- and meaning-making operations between individual consumers and the social world surrounding them. It is not to be forgotten how corporate media products also serve as a vital source for the production of a cultural knowledge that sustains and nourishes systems of power and knowledge on which media institutions rely and exist. That system is part of individual socialization processes that access and interact with media products on a daily basis. Therefore, it is essential to understand emotional affects as one of the key products media industries provide their consumers with. These media economical practices add to a “structure of feeling” (Williams 128ff.) whose exchange value rests not only upon commercial incentives but also upon investments of emotional affect, they become a social group’s lived experience. These practices then are manifold and to be studied as media economies.

Such thinking rests on insights current Media and Cultural Studies scholars are debating with regard to the commercial exploits of media cultural products. Jason Mittell, for example, rethinks the link between *Television and American Culture* (2010) along the lines of Stuart Hall’s circuit of culture. He proposes to read television not only as a technological medium or a textual form. But also he sees both elements as being related to each other and to notions of television’s cultural representations, as part of an everyday social practice, television’s democratic implications, and of course television as a commercial industrial product (cf. 9). Thus, television as an economic practice is also directly linked to “emotional appeals and implicit persuasive techniques” that allow consumers “to make decisions that are neither rational nor informed” (70). In short, the medium is a lived experience that structures the American community beyond its experience of social institutions – it is thus having a share in structures of feelings of its consumers (cf. Williams 2). Emotional appeal and affect become a currency in this equation. Media branding thus is directly connected to processes of a consumer’s identity formation. In this way, specific media forms are

turned into an essential cog of the machinery of what Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore describe as *The Experience Economy* (see Eero Laines article in this volume).

Steven Shaviro goes a step further, when he assesses new media forms as “new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience” (2). Media products here are studied as being directly connected to the aesthetics and possibilities of digital technologies and the neoliberal economic relations of the industries producing new media forms. Specifically, Shaviro reads films and music videos as “*machines for generating affect*” (3, emphasis in original) making again affect and thus “pre-defined and pre-packaged emotions” (4) a currency in the media economic experience that directly translates into lived social relations. Along these lines, Shaviro seeks for ways of describing or rather mapping labor in new media forms. By this, relationships between media producers and media consumers can become legible. New media’s teleonomics here rest on investments of affect, directly connecting media forms to media economies as a structure of feeling.

This is not only to address the exploits of media economies with regard to affective labor and commitment. Henry Jenkins’ long-term project on thinking about media change and media convergence also allows for assessments of the role of consumers as ‘fans’ in digital economies. Emotions here translate into user-generated contents of digital media formats, social networks become hosts for an aggregated intelligence. In this web of interconnections between new media forms, media economies, and media industries, Jenkins cannot get around describing “the way participation works within this new affective economy” in order to educate his readers in how to “direct criticisms at the actual mechanisms by which Madison Avenue seeks to reshape our hearts and minds” (64). On a positive note, Jenkins’ idea of an “affective economics” directly adds to notions of changing consumers to what Alvin Toffler once called “prosumers”: “Affective economics sees active audiences as potentially valuable if they can be courted and won over by advertisers” (64). Again, branding and emotional investments in this view translate into audience commitment. Commitment makes media forms a lived experience and thus its inherent structure of feeling more graspable.

Mittell’s, Shaviro’s, and Jenkins’ studies are exemplary in making visible the works of the affective economy of media industries. The results of such procedures are graspable for example in the increasing blur between advertising and entertainment, newer forms of product placement, and the confluence of storytelling and marketing. This is why the essays collected here will address several key issues of media branding, in particular formations of identity through branding, the relationship between commercial and non-profit narrative forms, early forms of branding through seriality, or representations of economic contexts in digital media formats. In all of these areas, it appears that current media industries have a stronger impetus on the creation and dissemination of content as a vehicle for a brand. Content itself, however, appears to