MEDIA INDUSTRIES, LABOUR AND PRODUCTION

LECTURE 6 – MEDIA PRODUCTION RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

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1

PRODUCTION RESEARCH

1970s/80s: sociological and organisational studies of news organisations in the US and UK

- Interested in bureaucratic routines (decision-making, source relationships), questions of power, influence and ideology. Analysed claims of truth, objectivity and impartiality in journalism.

- But overall, media production as an "underdeveloped area of inquiry" (Corner 1999: 71).

Since 2000s a revival and expansion of academic research of media production with broader scope:

- Diversification of research subjects (TV drama and talkshows, publishing, music, screenwriting, …)

- Media production as work (cultural labour research)

- More research outside of Anglo-American context

PRODUCTION RESEARCH

- Expansion of industry/production research triggered by changes in media industries and policy

  - 1970: single highly unionised media organisation and fairly stable employment

  - Today: growth, deregulation, marketisation and commodification of media industries, proliferation and fragmentation of labour markets, impact of digitalisation → speed/costs of production, social media, lower entry barriers, new forms of production and distribution, etc.

- And shifts in theoretical perspective from focus on organisational practices and processes to subjective experience and everyday interaction in media production (cultural studies influence)

- But consistencies in critical/normative approach, interest in power and agency, role of commerce

SOME "CLASSIC" EXAMPLES (TV/FILM BIAS)

- Tunstall (1971) *Journalists at work: specialist correspondents: their news organizations, news sources, and competitor-colleagues*, Golding and Elliott (1979) *Making the news* and Tuchman (1978) *Making news. A study in the social construction of reality*, Schlesinger (1992) *Putting "reality" together: BBC news*

- Paterson and Domingo (2008) *Making online news: The ethnography of new media production*, Hassall Thomsen (2018) *Inside the TV newsroom: Profession under pressure.*

- Silverstone (1985) *Framing science: the making of a television documentary*. (BBC *Horizon*), Dornfeld (1998) *Producing public television, producing public culture*, Grindstaff (2002) *The money shot: trash, class, and the making of TV talk shows*.

- Tunstall (1993) *Television producers*, Gitlin (2000) *Inside prime time*, Caldwell (2008) *Production culture: industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television*.

- Burns *(1977) The BBC: public institution and private world,* Born (2004) *Uncertain vision: Birt, Dyke and the reinvention of the BBC*

- More examples in your readings (lecture 1, 2, 6)

- Other studies (though less) on music, publishing and video game industries …

MY EXAMPLE: CREATIVITY AND COMMERCE IN INDEPENDENT TV PRODUCTION

- Industry: Television

- Genre: Documentary and Factual

- Production stage: Development

- Subject: Relationship between independent production companies and broadcasters with a focus on culture-commerce relations and the impact on textual representation.

- Why?

  - Systemic power inequality in TV industry

  - Transformations in TV industry (notably marketisation and commodification)

  - Impact on textual representation (exclusion of voices?)

QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Research questions:

1. In what way do industrial structures and commercial imperatives in the television system constrain or enable human creativity in documentary development within independent production companies?

2. In what way does human agency within independent companies consciously or unconsciously resist or reinforce commercial imperatives and structural conditions?

3. What are the consequences of this setting for television documentary, firstly, as an original and authentic representation of reality, and secondly, with regard to the genre's social functions?

Method:

- 10 weeks participant observation (as development researcher) in independent production companies each, incl. analysis of production documents, and ca. 15 semi-structured interviews with workers in observed companies,

- Comparative (transnational): UK and Germany

- Focus on project development stage

FINDINGS

Institutional level: Structural economic dependency creates power imbalance in favour of broadcasters and leads to creative constraints including creative self-restriction in indie companies (demand-led commissioning rather than offer-led commissioning). Indies negotiate power imbalance by investing in personal relationships with broadcasters and building industry reputation with the aim to become a "preferred supplier".

Individual level: Contradictory values and discourses (genre versus business) cause creative tensions, which are (partially) resolved among media workers through detachment and displacement (form over content) drawing on professionalism discourses.

Textual level: Risk aversion in project development leads to repetition and familiarity, emphasis on exclusivity and extraordinariness, formatting and serialisation at the expense of classic social functions of documentary towards a "lighter" conceptualisation of "factual" programming.

International comparison: Structural similarities in both countries show similar outcomes on all levels but there are differences in degree linked to extent and intensity of marketisation of the respective TV industries and cultural differences esp. concerning documentary as a genre. However, clear difference in positioning in international television marketplace.

YOUR IDEAS?

In pairs (10-15 min):

- Think of a research problem in media production/media industries. Why is it important? What do you want to find out? What research questions could you ask?

- How could you answer these questions? Who would you talk to, what would you look at? (i.e. what would be your research subject/primary sources?) What methods could you use (and why these)?

- What might you need to know more about before starting this research? Can you think of theoretical approaches that would be suitable or concepts you would like to explore?

THIS WEEK – SUMMARY

Aims of the course:

- Know more about the main debates concerning media industries and media labour and be able to construct related arguments.

- Be able to interpret and assess evidence and explanations of media industries and labour.

- Know more about research approaches and methods to study media industries and labour.

Central question: What are the media industries and how to research them.

- (Particular) characteristics and of media industries

- Key issues and developments in media industries

- Working in the media industries

- Theoretical approaches to examine media industries and media labour

- Research methods to study labour and production

- Examples for production research and potential research projects

If you have questions or want to know more, get in touch: a.zoellner@leeds.ac.uk.

Thank you!