David Hesmondhalgh

The Cultural Industries

Fourth Edition

SAGE

Preface to the Fourth Edition

When I was planning and writing the first edition of this book, from late 1999 to early 2001, the cultural industries were at a peak of power, influence and public interest. I wanted to show how that situation had come about: largely as a result of concerted efforts by businesses and governments to 'marketise' media and communication from the 1970s to the 1990s. As I was writing, newspapers and magazines seemed full of predictions about how new technologies were going to transform communication and culture. They foretold that media conglomerates would melt away in a new world of global interconnection, and that ordinary people would be empowered to be cultural producers. My original impulse to write the book arose from the scepticism I felt when reading such accounts, and the frustration I experienced when many academics and students seemed to give them credence.

By the time I wrote the second edition in 2006, there was a great deal to revise and update. The excitability of the turn of the century had turned into something approaching hysteria as new devices and applications proliferated – some of them genuinely exciting in their communicative possibilities. We were bombarded by terms such as 'Web 2.0' and 'The Long Tail', newly coined at the time to denote phenomena that were supposedly going to democratise cultural production across the world (see Chapter 10 of this book). By this point cultural industries were being widely presented as doomed dinosaurs. According to what I was reading and hearing at the time, television was dying, the days of printed books were numbered, newspapers were on their last legs, and the recording industry was completely finished. All this was supposed to be a Good Thing: amateurs were taking over and the old institutional privileges were being dismantled. At around the same time, there was also a global wave of policy rhetoric about the economic and cultural benefits of 'creativity'. The cultural industries, lumped in with IT and other sectors by policymakers and academics to create a strange entity known as 'creative industries', were dubiously portrayed as a new growth sector that would provide better futures and better work. In retrospect, 2006 now seems to me to have been the high point of the tide of enthusiasm for the transformative potential of digitalisation, the internet, 'creativity' and what were later to become known as social media.

That tide had receded a little by the time I wrote the third edition in 2011. Much of the world was still in the midst of a massive economic crisis, made worse by the unnecessary and heartless austerity policies of governments still in thrall to economic ideologies that punished the poor for the greed of wealthy elites. But the economic crisis had not prevented a small group of now vast information technology giants from consolidating their power. My revisions for the third edition paid greater attention to how the

crucial period of the late twentieth century laid the basis for later IT ascendancy, as well as the earlier 1990s' rise of the supposedly now moribund cultural industries. Meanwhile, phenomena such as 'crowdfunding' kept the techno-enthusiasts busy. So did misinterpretations of political movements such as Occupy and those of the 'Arab Spring': journalists and TED talkers often misleadingly attributed such inspiring surges of political hope to the affordances of Western social media.

Since then, those hopeful moments have descended into chaos and disappointment, and xenophobic and racist politicians have risen to prominence and even electoral triumph in Europe and North America. It seems finally to have become apparent even to the most fervent enthusiasts that the products of the IT industries might not be quite as beneficial as their cheerleaders had claimed. Pessimistic voices can now be heard more clearly, and the new jargon of the 2010s has been much less starry-eyed than that of the previous decade.

There has continued to be plenty of effort devoted to identifying new ways in which information technology might supposedly transform culture and communication: terms such as 'big data' and 'algorithms' have been heard with wearying frequency in recent years. But it is increasingly obvious that the new world of digital networks has some extremely worrying aspects. Some responded by merely turning digital optimism on its head, portraying digital technologies as heralds of a society of total control and surveillance.

Regardless of whether we were destined for glorious connectivity or a dystopia of corporate monitoring, many journalists and academics could still continue to claim or imply that everything we'd known about the cultural industries was about to become defunct, at some unspecified time in the future. The video streaming service Netflix was portrayed by some as an agent of communicative transformation akin to the invention of printing. Notions of creativity and innovation continued to play a big role in government and business rhetoric, now aided by the dusting off of older terms such as 'the digital economy' and 'disruptive innovation'. The neophiliacs took to calling cultural industry companies 'legacy media', outdated yet still inconveniently around, like old software.

The fetishisation of 'the digital' has by no means disappeared, but it has dispersed. The digital optimists and prophets have now largely turned their eager attention away from communication and culture towards other futures: those of robots, driverless cars, 3-D printers, bitcoin, and absurd predictions concerning 'the internet of things'. In my view that does not make the cultural industries any less important or interesting. It might even make it easier to observe them without a gauze of ideology obscuring our view.

There is no doubt that there have been considerable changes since I wrote the first edition of this book, and even some of the jargon and clichés at least draw our attention to such transformation. The internet, web and social media are now an important if often banal part of the life of billions of people, and this undoubtedly has significant implications for people's cultural experiences, and for how cultural production is organised. This new fourth edition discusses some of those effects, especially in Part Four. Parts Two and Three provide an (updated) account of how the cultural

industries and their crucial frenemies, the IT industries, came to be the way they are, emphasising the importance of the 1980s and 1990s in laying the ground for what followed. Even though the cultural industries and the digital networks that increasingly shape them have continued to mutate, as I wrote this version of the book in 2017–2018 there was an increasing sense that a more solid and lasting picture of the cultural industries was emerging after a period of pronounced (though by no means unprecedented) transformation.

For example, it's becoming clear that 'old media', or so-called 'legacy media', haven't been quite as devastated as the fevered accounts once predicted. Even James Murdoch, until very recently the principal heir to the massive Fox/News International media empire, and like his daddy Rupert a proponent of the idea that the internet would change everything for the better, has acknowledged that something still recognisably 'television' is at the centre of the world of digitalised cultural industries. While we now spend some of our leisure time and money in new ways, including of course on the social media that barely existed ten years ago, many people all over the world still watch a lot of television, see a lot of films, get much of our understanding of the world via the work of professional journalists, and dance to music distributed and funded by big companies. Young people today might now watch music videos via Google's YouTube, rather than via the MTV channel that occupied the hours of some of their parents. But a small number of music videos still dominate our viewing, in a blockbuster-driven cultural economy dominated by cultural industry corporations.

That doesn't mean that everything can be explained on the basis of what big powerful institutions do, and my account also stresses a range of smaller and informal ways in which culture is made and consumed. I take seriously the (constrained) agency of 'ordinary' people. Underlying the previous editions, and this fourth one too, is the view that the cultural industries will never settle into some fixed and final form. There is always change, and there is also always considerable continuity. To show this, the book takes a long-term perspective missing from many accounts of the cultural industries. However interesting it might be to speculate on the future, the primary job of a book like this is to look backwards, not forwards. History is unpredictable, complex and multilayered and that complexity needs to be recognised and clarified, so that a way can be found through the muddle of causes and consequences.

I have to confess that the task of revising and updating this book has felt even more overwhelming than for the previous editions. One change I've noted in all editions (including Chapter 15 of this one) has been an increasing cultural abundance. This is not necessarily something to be celebrated. Academic publishing, itself a sector of the cultural industries, has burgeoned in the online world, and universities have expanded in today's so-called 'knowledge economy'. As a result, there are more relevant academic journal articles and books to read than ever before, and the amount of 'trade' (i.e., non-academic) books and journalism on the cultural industries and related topics also seems to grow and grow. It's more or less impossible for any individual to keep fully up to date with the immense amount of research and commentary published on the subjects covered in this book, alongside keeping track of the economic, political, sociocultural and technological changes that shape

our lives. As the reggae artist and producer Johnny Nash once sang, 'there are more questions than answers, and the more I find out, the less I know'.

So my apologies to any fellow researchers who feel hurt or offended that I didn't include something they'd written – I really have tried to be inclusive and international, but have been limited by the space available in this book, and the time and energy at my disposal. I confess that I read mainly in English, and I know the societies of Europe and North America much better than those of other continents, though I've tried hard to learn about developments beyond the Euro-American world. As with previous editions, I've also added lots of references to research and commentary published in the years since the last one. I've expanded the glossary. I've made some cuts in an effort to make my historical account in Parts One and Two a bit more concise in places where it now seemed to me a little baggy, or where I was dealing with historical moments that had come to seem less relevant to the more recent changes discussed in Part Three. (And as Johnny Nash also sang, 'I can see clearly now'.)[1]

The book was written as an attempt to synthesise a great deal of research and thinking, and to develop a distinctive way of understanding cultural production, while explaining concepts that are often misunderstood. Perhaps because of this somewhat pedagogical approach, the book has been used widely as a teaching text across the world, and translated into various languages. I've even heard it described it as 'a textbook' (sometimes condescendingly implying *mere* textbook), and have been surprised and delighted by its wide uptake.

Even though this book is deeply sceptical about digital optimism, I'm not a pessimist, and this book does not aim to show that everything you thought was good is in fact bad. People who want to change the world for the better often claim that we're all going to hell in a handcart (i.e., heading to disaster). I too want to see radical change, but I think pessimism is a mistake. The world is always likely to give us many reasons to think that things are bad. Stupidity, ignorance, corruption, cruelty and self-interest often prosper. The cultural industries reflect that fact, and, because of their distinctive power, they can often make the situation worse. But the world also shows abundant evidence of intelligence, knowledge, integrity, kindness and altruism. If we abandon hope, then in my view we also compromise the possibility of making the world better. Wonderful things get done, made, written and played by people every day. Some of this happens via the cultural industries. This is not just because some good stuff manages to survive a broken system – though the system undoubtedly has serious problems, as I show in this book. It's also because there are people in the cultural industries who actively make good things happen. Those good things include products that enhance our understanding, imagination and pleasure, by making us laugh or think hard, and sometimes by shocking, challenging or disturbing us. For me, that is ultimately why culture matters, and why the cultural industries matter.

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[1] I've also continued to use footnotes, as in my view this is much more convenient, and therefore courteous for the reader, than endnotes. I find especially irritating the convention preferred by some authors and publishers of putting Harvard citations in endnotes, thereby requiring readers first to locate the endnotes, and then also go to the references to look up details of the book or article. I've spared readers this labour here.

Acknowledgements

Academic acknowledgements are often long, and that may appear self-indulgent. But I don't care that the acknowledgements that follow are lengthy because a) they're a rare chance for me to express appreciation for those who provide me with love and support, and b) this is the only bit of this book that many of the people mentioned below will read (and I'm afraid that may apply to some of the academics).

This book has benefited from the input of three very good academic editors at Sage Publications: Julia Hall for the first edition, Mila Steele for the second and third, and most recently Michael Ainsley for this fourth one. I haven't always felt grateful to Mila and Michael for persuading me to do new editions, but I've felt touched by their enthusiasm and support. My thanks to Michael, and to his great team, including production editor Imogen Roome, and also to Fabienne Pedroletti for a massive and diligent copy-editing job.

Anna Ozimek provided excellent research assistance for this edition. Thanks also to: Victor Pickard for comments on Chapters 8 and 9; Amanda Lotz for pushing me hard on Chapters 10 and 11; Chris Anderson (the journalism studies maestro, not the techno-prophet) for helpful guidance on news; Aphra Kerr for a reality check on games and Charles Cheung, Terje Colbjornsen and John Thompson for much-appreciated reading tips.

My ideas about media and cultural production were initially shaped by Georgina (Georgie) Born and James Curran in the Department of Media and Communication at Goldsmiths College in the 1990s, a wonderful place to do a PhD. I was lucky enough to get my first full-time academic appointment there before I'd completed my thesis – something that seems impossible nowadays. The supportive Deputy Head of Department, Christine Geraghty, suggested that I lead a module on 'Contemporary Issues in the Cultural Industries'. Working on that module played a major role in shaping the first edition. Before that, the stimulating teaching of Rick Maxwell, when I did my Master's degree at Northwestern University, also played a key role in forming my thinking.

The first and second editions of this book were written when I worked at the Open University (from 1999 to 2007), at the time still a truly great higher education institution (I feel anxious and sometimes angry when I read about recent changes there). Tony Bennett played a major part in making my time at the OU productive and rewarding, as did a number of other excellent colleagues. Jason Toynbee was already a good friend before he joined the OU. His generous comments on drafts of the first two editions of this book were vital, and I've learnt a huge amount over the years not only from his writing, but also from his stimulating, provocative conversation, often into the night.

I want to thank various people, very few of them academics, who over the years have provided intellectual and political stimulation, and lots of love, friendship

to join the family acting tradition, and their other daughter Alyssa will find other ways to enhance the world. My long-term partner Helen Steward is an accomplished philosopher, with specialisms that in no way overlap with mine, but the way she goes about research, teaching and life is a model: she's incredibly clever, a true 'good citizen' of her department, and she's also warm, considerate and open minded.

I was the first person from my family to go to university. I've only lately come to understand what that meant to my beloved parents, my Mum Maureen, and my Dad John (1929–2013), two very unassuming, but very remarkable people. I owe them such a lot.

I've dedicated previous versions of this book to Helen, but this one has to be dedicated to Rosa. As I worked on the final stages of revision, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the age of 23. By the time the book reached proofs stage, Rosa had thankfully recovered her health, having endured repeated rounds of chemotherapy with unbelievable courage, humour and spirit. What a woman.