(Continued)

- The *complex professional form* was the *dominant* way in which production was organised, which is why it gives its name to the whole era.
- *Patronage and market professional forms,* dominant in previous eras, continued to exist in *residual* forms. Sponsorship of artists is one important and growing contemporary example. Importantly, though, artisanal relations also exist in residue. This situation is produced by, and in turn reinforces, the creative autonomy ceded to cultural workers, as discussed in the Introduction and later in this chapter.
- *State and public service broadcasting* had emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and continued to expand across the world with the spread of television in the 1960s. It can be seen as an *emergent* form within the early stages of the complex professional era.

I therefore use the term 'complex professional' as a heuristic device to describe the whole era of cultural production from the 1950s onwards, but, in fact, it refers to a mix of different forms.

So, we have established, using a periodisation based on Williams, that, beginning in the early twentieth century, but expanding and accelerating as the century progresses, cultural production gained a new economic and social significance. One of the questions we need to ask, then, in considering change and continuity in cultural production since the 1980s, is whether cultural production has become even more significant. One way to tackle this broader issue is to ask **to what extent have the cultural industries become increasingly important in national economies and global business?** In Chapter 6, I put forward the view that they have, slowly and steadily, become more important, but not to the extent that many commentators claim (see pages 216–221).

A QUESTION OF COMMODIFICATION

How might we *evaluate* the changing social significance of the cultural industries? This is a vast terrain, but one way of apprehending it is to step back and ask what major changes have taken place in cultural production over the last four or five centuries. Writers from a wide variety of perspectives – economists, Marxist political economists and some cultural studies writers – would want to emphasise ***industrialisation*** and ***commodification***. As Lacroix and Tremblay (1997) note, these terms are used 'so often that authors often do not even bother to define them' (p. 68). *Industrialisation* involves significant capital investment, mechanised production and the division of labour, but *commodification* involves transforming objects and services into commodities. This commodification is 'a more encompassing process than industrialization' (p. 69) and does not necessarily entail the use of industrial production techniques. The two processes are intertwined but I emphasise commodification here. This is partly because, as Lacroix and Tremblay say, it is a more encompassing process than industrialisation, but also because such an emphasis can help to throw further light on the complexities and ambivalences of cultural production under capitalism, as discussed in the Introduction and my survey of approaches in Chapter 1.

What does it mean to transform something into a commodity? At its most basic level, it involves producing things not only for use but also for *exchange*.[1] With the development of capitalism, this involved exchange in markets increasingly extended over time and space, with money as the medium allowing for such extended exchange. This was crucially linked to systems of consumption and production. Production for extended exchange required the investment of capital and paying wages for labour. When commodities were bought, this involved private and exclusive ownership rather than collective access. When feudalism gave way to capitalism, many things became commodified – land and labour among them. John Frow (1997: 143–4) notes that even if we rightly resist the teleological notion of capitalism as necessarily involving endless commodification (for there has been some de-commodification, too, such as the sentimentalisation of love and the abolition of slavery), capitalism can nevertheless be understood as a system involving a continual, if uneven, extension of commodification.

The problem is how to judge commodification – and this is central to how we judge capitalism itself. This is a big question and one that some writers have, therefore, considered off-limits, but it still needs to be asked. Some Marxists, and other writers, too, in criticising capitalism, have made simplistic and sometimes romantic assumptions, opposing the commodities of capitalism to visions of a past or future society based on non-commodities. Other writers, including Marx himself, have provided a much more complex analysis,[2] seeing commodification as ambivalent, as enabling and productive, but also limiting and destructive. Various writers, including Frow (1997: 102–217), have engaged with anthropological perspectives that show how other principles for the exchange of goods, such as gift exchange (famously analysed by the French social theorist Marcel Mauss), might be compromised by hidden motives. Commodification produces massive proliferations

1 It can, of course, be used to mean basic goods, such as copper, oil and so on, but that is not the way in which I am using the term here.

2 It is a mistake to think that Marx was simply 'against' commodification. Marx was concerned with a number of aspects of modern commodities – most notably the way in which the immense collection of commodities that surround us conceal the labour that goes into them.

of goods, but there are many problems associated with this proliferation. To take just two here, on the consumption side, there is the problem that commodification spreads a notion of ownership and property as the right to exclude others, leading to huge inequalities, the promotion of private, individual interest and a threat to collective action for the common good; on the production side, there is the problem that labour goes unrecognised and is systematically under-rewarded. (Frow's orientation towards cultural studies is evident in his emphasis on the former rather than on the latter problem. I believe both are important.)

What of the commodification of *culture*? This has been a long and highly uneven process. It is entangled with industrialisation, but commodification preceded the large-scale industrialisation of culture that began in earnest in the twentieth century. To put this another way, industrialisation intensified and extended the commodification of culture. Again, we need to understand this not as a fall from grace from a non-commodified state of culture, but as fundamentally ambivalent, as enabling and constraining. This is, not least, because the commodification of culture is highly complex, happening in different stages and taking multiple forms.[3] To give an example adapting John Frow (1997: 139), we can distinguish three ways and stages in which printed texts have been commodified:

- The commodification of the material object ('the book') – taking place as early as the fifteenth century.
- The commodification of the information contained within the material object as 'the work' in copyright law – from the eighteenth century onwards.
- The commodification of access to printed text information via electronic databases and so on – in the late twentieth century.

Each of these forms and stages of commodification has different implications. There has been a massive profusion of books as a result of their commodification – a proliferation intensified by industrialisation. Copyright underpins the ownership of cultural commodities (and, therefore, the cultural industries as a whole: see Chapter 5) and the protection of works by copyright law has aided this proliferation, but at a cost of placing considerable restrictions on the use of such information. Arguably, such restrictions become more serious in the third stage identified here and inequalities of access become more marked also. As Frow stresses, there is serious conflict between commercial institutions that attempt to make cultural works their private property and common ownership of, or access to, cultural goods.

3 This is why a number of political economy writers have sought to distinguish between the different 'logics' involved in different forms of cultural commodity (Flichy, 1980; Lacroix and Tremblay, 1997; Miège, 1989). See also Dan Schiller (1994) for a useful discussion of the long-term history of commodification of information and culture.

This is a cultural version of the 'consumption-side' problem with commodification referred to above. Equally, however – and not so stressed by Frow – there is a cultural version of the production-side problem: the *cultural* labour that is necessary to produce the vast numbers of cultural commodities available to wealthier consumers goes unrecognised (and this cultural work is addressed below).

If the exchange of commodities over extended time and space leads to the problems identified above, then to draw attention to commodification raises questions about the line of demarcation between what can be sold and what cannot. All societies will attempt to withdraw certain domains from market relations: examples include religion, personal life, the political sphere and art. The penetration of market relations into culture and the increasing presence of commodification in the cultural sphere cannot be crudely dismissed as a problem in itself. It would be even more problematic, however, to neglect the negative implications for cultural production and consumption of further commodification. These issues are absolutely central to the current debates raging about the emancipatory possibilities of the internet. Digital networks make possible unprecedented sharing and collaboration, enabling new forms of commons, but they are also subject to a process of digital enclosure (Murdock, 2011).

Commodification, then, can be seen as a long-term and ambivalent process. We can understand the complex professional era as a new stage in the commodification and industrialisation of culture. If this is so, then the question we need to ask about the period since 1980 is as follows: **what are the implications of the further commodification of culture?** This question is addressed in Chapter 6 (see pages 221–225), but because copyright is so vital to the process of commodification of culture, the groundwork for addressing this question is laid in Chapter 5, where I consider changes in copyright law.

BUSINESS OWNERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

One of the most striking and significant features of the complex professional era was the increasing presence of large corporations in the business of cultural production. The biggest of these companies, such as RCA (Radio Corporation of America) in the USA, were huge ***conglomerates***.[4] They dwarfed the publishing companies and newspaper empires that had formed the largest companies of the market professional era. In film, recording, radio and television, significant oligopolies had emerged before the middle of the century. The most famous oligopoly was made up of the eight **vertically integrated** Hollywood studios (see Box 2.2). Rather less famous was the oligopoly that dominated the recording industry – the British companies Decca

4 For example, including its non-media interests, RCA was the thirty-ninth biggest company in the USA in 1972 (Murdock and Golding, 1977: 27–8).