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Position Paper for Media Industries and Media Studies Roundtable  
*Reassessing the Press-Media Industries Relationship*

Those involved in studying journalism frequently examine the relationship between the news media and the media industries. Many of us are familiar with discussions by individuals such as Robert McChesney and Ben Bagdikian about how the corporate media fail to serve the public interest and only present the most mainstream of opinions. While such discussions have their place, there are a range of other analytical and methodological questions that arise and remain unanswered. The emergence of new media forms also continues to throw existing arguments and paradigms into question as well.

For this roundtable, I would like to shift our focus explicitly away from “news” media and instead consider the relationship between the press and “entertainment”/popular culture reporting. A number of issues emerge if we re-frame our questions to think in these terms, including:

- 1) **Conceptual issues:** First, how do – or might – we study the relationship between the press and the media industries? Are all members of the press “part of” the media industries – or only certain groups? Where do we establish boundaries between the “media industries” and the “press,” especially the press that *covers* the media industries?

These days, the types of journalists covering the contemporary media industries are incredibly diverse. Bloggers, film critics, writers for trade publications, and reporters for mainstream publications such as *Time* or *Vanity Fair* all might be considered part of the industry in a number of ways. Not only are many part of the media conglomerates about which they write (or given special “perks” for promoting the products of these industries), but they also are heavily reliant on maintaining favorable relations with these conglomerates in order to gain continued access. If we do in fact consider these different types of journalists a part of the media industries, how might our research or analysis be affected? To what extent do journalists merely function as unofficial “public relations” arms of the media industries – and how does this pose a substantial challenge for us as researchers?

- 2) **Methodological issues:** Second, how do we use journalistic sources for our research? Those studying the Hollywood studio system, for example, can access corporate memos and financial statements about Warner Bros. or David O. Selznick fairly readily. Similarly, those looking at NBC’s early days of broadcasting can sift through these materials in existing archives. While the historical records may be incomplete, some corporate materials are at least available for public viewing.

Researchers looking at the contemporary media industries usually do not have these same opportunities. Because of the proprietary nature of today’s media corporations, those of us looking at more recent activities of the media industries are often forced to rely heavily on print publications. Issues of time, money and access might further prevent us from conducting the kinds of interviews and participant observation that can occur when studying audiences or texts. Are there potential “solutions” to these types of challenges?

- 3) **Critical challenges for future development of media studies.** Often those using journalistic sources for their research on the media industries have presented that information as “true” and “transparent” data. Yet actually this reporting is often inaccurate or incomplete. To what extent

do we need to foreground our use of journalistic source materials? Are there examples where this is done sufficiently now?

One approach that might be taken involves explicitly framing the use of these journalistic source materials as “discourse” and analyzing it as such. Another would involve viewing the prominent ideologies produced and reproduced through tales about the media industries and the people involved with them. For example, during the mid-1990s, the press in a herd-like fashion jumped on the “American independent films are hot” angle. We might consider why such narratives are prominent in the press at a given historical moment, and how or why they seem to be so consistently reproduced across a diverse range of media outlets. However, such an approach might demand significant knowledge of the “actual” workings of the media industries – and thus we return to the question of how this knowledge might be gained.