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# Michael Chanan, From Printing to Streaming: Cultural Production Under Capitalism (London and Las Vegas: Pluto Press 2022)

Brian Fauteux

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capital so total that little room remains for resistance that is seemingly not predestined to brutal failure. This argument is far removed from the extraordinary agency exercised by the hundreds of thousands of workers across the US who fought in IWW struggles in these years. In a concluding chapter that provides a brief overview of subsequent US labour history and especially of labour law developments, the author finds little positive in the industrial union victories of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) or in the judicial free speech victories won under the Warren Court, even in those authored by William O. Douglas, who referenced the IWW experience.

While this reviewer has no illusions about contemporary capitalist and state repression, the current state of the labour movement, or liberal solutions to class conflict, White's view is so totalizing of capitalist power that it simply leaves no room for working-class struggle. Even in London's *The Iron Heel*, although it does take three centuries, the "Oligarchy," the triumphant embodiment of capital, is finally defeated (after two failed revolutions, eerily like the later repression of the IWW), "The Revolution" succeeds, and establishes "The Brotherhood of Man," a socialist utopia.

GREGORY S. KEALEY

University of New Brunswick

**Michael Chanan, *From Printing to Streaming: Cultural Production Under Capitalism* (London and Las Vegas: Pluto Press 2022)**

THE PRECARIOUSNESS of work in the cultural industries became explicit during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Artists across a variety of creative sectors were forced to pause or rethink their craft, many becoming reliant on funding or financial support to help endure

the turmoil. However, the issues facing creative workers that make earning a sustainable living difficult were present well before the pandemic, and this is an important point underlined by Michael Chanan in the book, *From Printing to Streaming: Cultural Production Under Capitalism*.

Grounded in Marxist theory and its offshoots (including, importantly, the notion that the arts were marginal to the accumulation of capital at the time of Marx's writing), *From Printing to Streaming* asks questions about the essence and practice of creativity and cultural production after the advent of mass media and beyond. More broadly, the book traces the histories of media technologies, like print, photography, sound recording, and film, to show how "each medium manifests its own idiosyncrasies as a commodity, corresponding to what Walter Benjamin called its technical structure, and therefore manoeuvres the market in its own manner; but also the ways in which, at the same time, cultural production defies commodification or escapes from it to fulfill its social functions." (xiii–xiv) The book draws on earlier academic writing on trade unionism and the British film industry, music and the history of recording, studies of documentary, and Latin American cinema to ask: How are art and commerce both linked together and distinct from one another as we move through historical and technological changes?

As it reaches its conclusion, *From Printing to Streaming* offers a pronounced emphasis on the tension between capitalism and art through cultural production, particularly in the shift from analogue formats to our contemporary digital era. The book's flow resists a linear approach and instead moves back and forth and sideways, meaning that as we learn about the ways new media technologies shaped cultural production, we revisit

nodes along their respective timelines to consider, or reconsider, topics, issues, and themes related to cultural production under capitalism. Chanan's book could serve as a textbook for an Introduction to Media Studies course, especially if it were paired with primary readings by the numerous influential thinkers it routinely references: Walter Benjamin, Jurgen Habermas, and Raymond Williams, for example.

Across six chapters, Chanan covers topics including the Changing Logic of Artistic Production (Chapter 2), Cultural Commodification (Chapter 3), and the Shift From Analog to Digital (Chapter 5). In Chapter 1, *Autonomy of the Aesthetic*, a conceptual framework is established, and the author works through ideas on how cultural products, the result of artistic creations, may or may not fall under commodity logic. In what ways does artistic creation resist capital, and in what ways is it subsumed under it? At the moment of mass (re)production of media, consumption becomes "tied in with the hardware needed to play records, listen to the radio, watch television, and nowadays enjoy the internet, all of which require physical manufacture and distribution." (3) The chapter also includes a discussion of authorship, which relies on Habermas's notion of the public sphere and then moves to engage with the shifting role of copyright in the creative realm. It's a substantial chapter that grapples with how art and creative work fit and don't fit with earlier ideas and models of production and capital. The topic of copyright appears again in Chapter 3 in the discussion of mechanical copyright and the development of the record industry.

In Chapter 4, *Countercurrents*, Chanan focuses on the uses of media technologies that work to resist or circumvent capital, even after the advent of mass media. It's a particularly illuminating chapter,

given the book's larger aim of grappling with the nature of art under capitalism. It begins with the example of amateur cinema, gesturing to the ways that amateur cine anticipates what happens when digital technology becomes part of everyday life, including amateur uses and applications (101). Some of the highlights of this chapter include a discussion of what recording culture means for working musicians, and it uses the example of jazz music and the way it straddles the art-commerce divide. As Chanan writes, "in becoming an art music, jazz becomes free to be taken up by musicians of any ethnicity who adopt its subaltern voice, which happens around the world, while at the same time, African-American musicians, insisting on their own identity against white hegemony, would reclaim the music for their own and propel jazz constantly forward." (118) Drawing on authors like Dick Hebdige and Tricia Rose, the theme of imperial geography helps to frame the circulation of popular music between geographic locations, discussing places like New York, Cuba, and Jamaica and the circulation of genres like R&B, jazz, ska, and hip hop. On the latter, Chanan says, "in thus becoming the epitome of globalized musical culture as the millennium drew to a close, rap became very big business, demonstrating at the same time the contradiction between the top-down process of economic globalization and the borderless, cultural grassroots globalization which surges up from below." (126–127) A further significant component of this chapter concerns Latin America and Third Cinema, a topic that Chanan has pronounced experience in, having made documentary films in Cuba and Latin America (xvii).

Throughout the book, there is a thread of digital utopianism that emerges from time to time. The author anticipates finding productive challenges to capital's grasp of the potential of creativity in the

digital realm, an aspirational notion that circulated widely in earlier iterations of the internet, such as in claims that social media platforms would engage the citizenry in new and inspiring democratic ways. As Chanan writes, the digital sphere “offers new means of countering reification through new forms of connection and expression, individual and collective, including new forms of aesthetic creation, which can only announce themselves as utopian and liberating, and for the time being, remain so.” (145) But at a time when social media platforms are shaped and altered by the individual will and interests of enterprising billionaires and when musicians continue to struggle to earn a sustainable living due in part to streaming music’s reduction of the income one generates from recorded music, the positives of the digital sphere can be difficult to ascertain.

The concluding chapter is especially clear and prescient. It continues to foreground the ways that media technologies bring along certain affordances and limitations with respect to how artistic creativity thrives or doesn’t thrive under capitalism. One such example of this tension from earlier in the book is the way magnetic tape was both a tool for participatory media creation but also a format that set the standards for professional commercial music production in the late 1940s, when the “tape recorder was taken up by professional music production from the moment Bing Crosby first used it in 1947 to record his network shows.” (128) In the final chapter, this dichotomy continues with a discussion of how everyday internet users have become unpaid content creators who are “monitored and monetized,” but who are also granted a “freedom of participation with profound social and political implications, for both good and ill.” (180) Ultimately, *From Printing to Streaming* makes a convincing

case for the need to understand the past in order to make sense of the nature of cultural production in the contemporary moment.

BRIAN FAUTEUX  
University of Alberta

**Sian Lazar, *How We Struggle: A Political Anthropology of Labour* (London: Pluto Press 2023)**

IN *HOW WE STRUGGLE: A Political Anthropology of Labour*, Sian Lazar argues that Fordist assumptions about labour and workers’ agency have confined perceptions of labour movements to particular sites and modes of action such as factory floors, unions, and overt social movements. Lazar suggests that, as a result, there exists an intellectual hegemony in studies of labour and worker agency that fails to meaningfully attend to the significance of everyday forms of political struggle found in the individual and collective action of workers, households, and kinship networks. In *How We Struggle*, Lazar bridges global political economy and Marxist feminist theories of labour to trouble this intellectual hegemony, offering an incisive and engaging meditation on how labour agency might be understood outside of Fordism.

*How We Struggle* is divided into eight substantive chapters that pull off the feat of tracing the interconnected dimensions of worker agency, political economy, local contexts, and labour processes across eight different economic sectors. Each chapter begins with richly detailed descriptions of the political economy for each sector and pays attentive attention to their interpenetrations and significant changes since the mid-20th century. The chapters then proceed by shifting analytical frames from macro-structural processes to micro-interactional behaviours,