

學術對談

作為批判研究的媒介政治經濟學

對談人：珍妮特·瓦斯科、徐亞萍

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珍妮特·瓦斯科教授
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「我認為，一旦提及政治經濟學，電影的、媒介的、傳播的政治經濟學，一般指的是某種批判的視角。它吸收了馬克思、法蘭克福學派等批判理論。它至今有了很大發展，很多人都在使用這一路徑。所以談及媒介政治經濟學研究的時候，我覺得基本上都是某種批判研究。雖然媒介經濟學、不同版本的產業研究也在發展，但它們並不一定是批判的。事實上，要是你對媒介持批判態度，你可能會說自己所持的是政治經濟學的研究視角。針對產業也有其他類型的研究，它們大多吸收了新自由主義經濟學者的路徑，多半和現狀和諧共存，所以它們展示的是不同的視角。對於政治經濟學而言，我們研究甚麼呢？我們研究媒介產業、企業、商品的生產等等。所以我們通常會聚焦於主流、核心、掌控者。我們關注這些是因為我們想知道如何理解權力，這是一個非常重要的概念。因為我們想探索為甚麼媒介鮮有多樣性，比如電影。我們也試圖質疑為甚麼所有產品都面向商業目的去定位。我們還有志於推動某些另類模式、獨立模式的發展。」

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The Political Economy of Media as a Critical Approach

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Abstract

Professor Janet Wasko is the Knight Chair in Communication Research at the School of Journalism and Communication in the University of Oregon. She is also the president of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). Prof. Wasko has been greatly involved in forming the tradition and the scholarly community of the political economy of communication, particularly working in the realms of the American film industry and Disney corporation studies.

Prof. Wasko worked with Thomas Guback—one of the pioneers of doing political economy studies on the film—at the University of Illinois and received her doctoral degree after submitting the dissertation *Relationships Between the American Motion Picture Industry and Banking Institutions*, which was published as the monograph *Movies and Money: Financing the American Film Industry* (1982) later. After that, Prof. Wasko continued researching the film industry and published a number of influential books, including *How Hollywood Works* (2003), *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (2001), *Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* (1994), etc.

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The Political Economy of Media as a Critical Approach

With several distinguished political economists of communication research, she also coauthored, edited and co-edited many collections, for example, *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications* (2011), *Media in the Age of Marketization* (2007), *Consuming Audiences? Production and Reception in Media Research* (2000), *The Political Economy of Information* (1988), and so on.

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珍妮特·瓦斯科教授簡介

珍妮特·瓦斯科(Janet Wasko)教授是美國俄勒岡大學新聞與傳播學院傳播研究騎士講座教授，同時是國際媒體與傳播研究協會(IAMCR)主席。瓦斯科教授是傳播政治經濟學路徑的奠基人之一，尤其她將此路徑發展到美國電影產業研究以及迪斯尼公司研究等領域。

瓦斯科教授曾在美國伊利諾伊大學師從電影政治經濟學研究的奠基人托馬斯·古拜克(Thomas Guback)教授，並以研究論文《美國電影產業與銀行機構的關係》獲得博士學位，後此論文出版為《電影與金錢：為美國電影產業融資》(1982)一書。此後，瓦斯科教授的研究聚焦於電影產業，出版了諸如《浮華的盛宴：好萊塢電影產業揭秘》(2003)、《理解迪斯尼：夢工廠》(2001)、《信息時代的好萊塢：超越大銀幕》(1994)等有廣泛影響的專著。

此外，她與傳播政治經濟學領域的著名學者格蘭姆·莫多克(Graham Murdock)、依琳·彌漢(Eileen Meehan)、文森特·莫斯科(Vincent Mosco)等人共同編著，出版了諸如《傳播政治經濟學手冊》(2011)、《市場化時代的媒介》(2007)、《消費受眾？：媒介研究中的生產與接受》(2000)、《信息政治經濟學》(1988)等合集。

W: Janet Wasko

X: 徐亞萍

X: 最初是甚麼讓您有志於研究電影與金融之間的關係？您在師從托馬斯·古拜克攻讀博士學位之前，曾經在媒介產業中任職，比如好萊塢、迪斯尼、美國廣播公司。您當時具體從事甚麼工作？這些從業經歷給您後來的研究帶來了甚麼影響？一個從事電影產業研究的學者是否首先應該是個媒介產業的從業者？

W: 其實我作為本科生在南加州學習媒介(廣播、電視和電影)研究的時候就非常渴望在媒介產業工作。所以我最終得以去到洛杉磯，任職於不同的媒體公司。這當然也是我們許多學生想做、也該做的事。但我覺得不一定要先在業界工作才能研究產業。在業界工

作的人如果能進行媒介研究，思考、了解、甚至從批判的視角認識媒介，這也是好事，這樣一來這些人可能會以建設性的、正面的方式改變產業。有此類經驗是好事，但我覺得不一定要先在業界工作過才能做產業研究。回到我自身的經驗，雖然我的工作時間不長、也不是任職於關鍵的或創造性的職位，但我發現在業界不同地方任職讓我明確這個產業有不同層面。

到了某個階段，我意識到傳媒蘊含如此多的潛能，它是一個不可思議的資源，是一個能跟人溝通的重要資源。然而我發現，至少在美國傳媒產業，很多資源都給用作搞推銷了。比如，在我曾經工作過的廣告製作公司，有些人投入那麼多時間和精力去製作30秒鐘廣告，而他們本可能去製作更富創造性的、更有趣的、更重要的、更激動人心的媒介信息和產品。換句話說，許多人才的時間都花在賣肥皂上了。於是我想，我得回去研究一下這些，可能集中於媒介研究的教育問題。我覺得教育會是媒介的最佳用途。但是在研究媒介如何用於教育（至少是在美國）的過程中，我發現媒介教育非常無聊、並不來勁。也許這是因為那麼多能量和資源都被用於商業用途了。這些議題將我引向對媒介的批判研究方向，當然這一定位也源於當時的環境。彼時許多人都在挑戰現狀，通過反戰運動、女性主義運動等等。你不能間單接受現狀，現狀需要某些改變。

所以我繼續研究，並在伊利諾伊大學師從托馬斯·古拜克，因為他對電影產業的批判研究。我覺得當時電影雖然是商業性的，但卻並沒有直接賣肥皂。電影中包含更多創造性空間，而我對這一點很感興趣。所以我繼續跟隨他做研究，我知道了甚麼是政治經濟學、它意味著甚麼，也意識到媒介政治經濟學這個視角非常重要、且源遠流長。但這個角度還沒有被電影研究學者們廣泛運用，除了托馬斯·古拜克，他屬於很多年來在美國專注於此的少數。雖然有越來越多的學者研究電影，但他們的重點在於內容、導演、作者、風格、類型等等。然而產業層面呢？那些與經濟相關的議題呢？一些間單的問題，比如電影是怎麼融資的呢？最終我開始仔細探究電影融資的問題、投資的問題等等。我的博

士論文旨在研究美國電影產業與銀行機構之間的關係，最後變成了《電影與金錢》這本書。基於許多不同的文獻來源，我發現這種關聯有種歷史性的變化。我覺得有關融資及所有權方面的問題仍然是非常關鍵的議題。雖然正如你所言，電影政治經濟學發展變化了，但是融資是根本性的問題，非常重要。

X: 您的博士論文採用了對銀行家訪談所獲得的材料。訪談法對於媒介政治經濟學研究來說，它的重要性何在？在《理解迪斯尼》這一研究中，您是否也對迪斯尼的企業管理人員進行了訪談？您有何方法對電影公司高管進行有效的訪談？

W: 好問題。答案是沒有，我並沒有在迪斯尼研究中做很多訪談。因為迪斯尼是一個非常具有管控性的公司，很難安排訪談。在我研究它的時候，我碰到一些管理者，即一些任職於這個公司的人，我請求他們接受訪問，但是他們說我必須要經過公司這一層，他們必須獲得許可，凡此種種；所以說他們非常不開放、非常有管控性。《理解迪斯尼》這本書試圖從這個企業出發，不僅研究它的歷史、融資、政治經濟方面，還有它的產品、文本、內容，以及它的受眾。所以在某種程度上，我發現我並不需要和公司的代表進行直接交談。我依賴於許多記者都能夠獲得的信息，以及某些歷史研究。在某種程度上，我是在利用其他的資料來源。我覺得有時候，記者能獲得的資料比我們研究者多。如果這是一個關於迪斯尼作為一家公司的深入的政治經濟學研究，我可能會想要切入公司內部。但我想要呈現的是迪斯尼的整體，它的歷史、融資、內容、受眾等方面，以此來顯示這些方面彼此的關係。這也是對批評傳播政治經濟學從不關心內容或受眾的一種回應。所以說這個研究嘗試呈現某種概觀。

另一方面，我在《電影與金錢》這一研究中對那些銀行業者所做的訪談卻非常有意思。首先，我覺得在我們做這樣的研究時，在真正實施採訪之前，你需要大量了解情況、了解訪談對象。所以我做了很多歷史方面和其他方面的調查，然後我認識到哪些銀行是曾經有用的，哪些是當下有用的。在收集到我能得到的大量信息之後，我開始約訪。我沒想到我能得到這麼多採訪機會，

因為你知道接觸到銀行家很難，可能比接觸到企業的經營者還難。我寫信給他們當中一些人，但是沒有多少回音。然後我採訪到了某家電影公司的一個財務主管，我想他是聯美(the United Artists)的人。他幫了我很多，推薦了一些我要採訪的銀行家。之後我才得以接觸到一些銀行家，在波士頓有一些，在紐約有幾個。他們中一些人以為我要籌錢拍電影(笑)。真的！這可能挺有意思的。但更重要的是，在我採訪他們的時候，我發現電影企業代表和銀行家們開始使用同一套語言，他們用同樣的話語來解釋彼此的關係。比如他們全都把彼此的關係描述成是一種婚姻關係，這助我理解問題。

另外，我決定在訪談時不使用錄音機，也不在書裡對訪談對象點名道姓。我認為正是因為我沒帶錄音機，他們在訪談中對我更無介懷。我僅僅在訪談的時候做了少許筆記，但在訪談後我會立即去到一個咖啡館，把我能記得的都寫下來。這種方法其實和我們教學生去做的並不一樣。然而，要是我帶了錄音機，或者筆記記得太多，他們就會心生芥蒂、變得謹慎。我很享受這個過程，並且也拿到了一些相關的文件。

X: 是他們提供的嗎？

W: 他們提供了一些，但大部份是由美國政府所收集的、公之於眾的資料。我對這個研究感到非常滿意，因為我得以完成那些訪談、由此找到許多一手資料。分析文獻是個好方法，但不同國家，文獻的可得性卻不一樣。在美國有很多企業機密，但是政府一直設有證券交易委員會之類的管理機構，會從企業那裡收集資料。這些資料非常重要，但你也意識到它們是為誰準備的，它們並未囊括所有信息。這種文獻收集過程是非常重要的。政府本身也進行研究和調查，雖然這會受到政治環境的影響。在1970年代，美國政府對銀行和企業進行了調查，很多人做了見證，產生了非常珍貴的資料。這又和你身處哪裡做研究有關。做此類研究的時候，你必須在所有力所能及的地方尋找資料。你還要審慎。針對如何尋找資料有一些規則，涉及信度和效度等問題。

X: 您的大部分研究聚焦於主流產業模式、經典產品和媒介集團的運

作，這是否說明針對主流的研究更這用於電影產業的傳播政治經濟學？

W: 我認為，一旦提及政治經濟學，電影的、媒介的、傳播的政治經濟學，一般指的是某種批判的視角。它吸收了馬克思、法蘭克福學派等批判理論。它至今有了很大發展，很多人都在使用這一路徑。所以談及媒介政治經濟學研究的時候，我覺得基本上都是某種批判研究。雖然媒介經濟學、不同版本的產業研究也在發展，但它們並不一定是批判的。事實上，要是你對媒介持批判態度，你可能會說自己所持的是政治經濟學的研究視角。針對產業也有其他類型的研究，它們大多吸收了新自由主義經濟學者的路徑，多半和現狀和諧共存，所以它們展示的是不同的視角。對於政治經濟學而言，我們研究甚麼呢？我們研究媒介產業、企業、商品的生產等等。所以我們通常會聚焦於主流、核心、掌控者。我們關注這些是因為我們想知道如何理解權力，這是一個非常重要的概念。因為我們想探索為甚麼媒介鮮有多樣性，比如電影。我們也試圖質疑為甚麼所有產品都面向商業目的去定位。我們還有志於推動某些另類模式、獨立模式的發展。

X: 你會從事獨立電影的研究嗎？

W: 不會。不一定要。但在研究大的媒介集團時，也會涉及到獨立電影公司。我們知道，大的企業集團仍然充滿活力，仍然在賺大錢。而且事實上，他們確實和獨立製作人合作，你要對獨立電影公司非常謹慎，因為有時候它們為大的媒介企業所有，或者與其緊密合作，以此發行自己的電影。我們需要研究這種產業結構。值得一提的是，批判政治經濟學的一個主要著力點就在於媒介 / 傳播在私人領域的資本主義 / 盈利化。這一維度的批判會對我們的社會產生貢獻，儘管不是對每個人都有利。尤其是當你能發現其實好萊塢的好多人都不可思議地富有。

X: 在中國尤其是中國電影業也有同樣的事情發生。

W: 當然。因為我覺得好萊塢模式在世界各地得到了廣泛的接受和應用。對於中國而言，這一過程很有趣，因為以往並不是這樣。然而，在國家的參與中，電影越來越被當做商品得到創造和生產。

- X:** 相對於針對其他媒介和傳播現象的政治經濟學研究來說，你是否認為針對電影產業和影視傳播的政治經濟學研究有其獨特的前提、議題和方法？
- W:** 有一些優質的闡述和討論是針對媒介的以及不同媒介產業領域、互聯網、信息技術的批判政治經濟學研究。比如，羅伯特·麥克切斯尼 (Robert McChesney) 對新聞的研究、依琳·彌漢對電視的研究、蘭迪·尼克爾斯 (Randy Nichols) 對電子遊戲的研究，以及文森特·莫斯科、丹·席勒 (Dan Schiller)、克利斯蒂安·福克斯 (Christian Fuchs) 對互聯網和數字技術的研究。這些不同的研究從整體到具體產業的角度來考量媒介。電影不一定是政治經濟學分析的首要領域，雖然早期有過一些研究，比如托馬斯·古拜克的研究。這些年來，世界上不同地區的很多研究都在幫助我們理解媒介和信息技術的各種不同維度。
- X:** 您在《信息時代的好萊塢：超越大銀幕》一書中向我們證明，新的放映技術帶來的並非媒介產業之間的衝突，而是單一媒體企業向跨產業的媒介間協同和媒介巨無霸的方向演變。電影可能僅僅是綜合多種媒介產業的增值點。面對這種產業現實，純粹的電影產業研究還有何意義？
- W:** 有人通常稱之為媒介融合。但是如果我們以歷史的眼光深入地研究一下電影業，我們可以看到，事實上它與其他媒介是互動的。引入各種技術後，電影業接受並整合了它們，不是嗎？電視電影、有線電視電影等等，都是如此。電影企業也進化了，變成了企業集團。我想也許現在存在這樣一個論斷，認為僅僅研究一個產業已經不再重要，或者不可能了。我對此尚不認同，因為電影的生產方式通常還是一以貫之的。可能它不是出現在膠片上而是數字化的，但在融資、生產等方面仍然採用和以前並無二致的方式，與以往很相似。

雖然可能產生了不同的窗口、新的屏幕，或者不管我們如何稱呼它們，人們通過這些窗口接觸到電影，但是電影企業也在開發這些窗口。電影企業將這些展示平臺整合到他們的業務中，還借此在全世界賺大錢。換句話說，好萊塢不會消失。它可能面臨

消失的境地，但它在調整，延續以往的規律：怎麼才能賺到更多利潤。同時將電影與其他商品嫁接起來。有時候某款視頻遊戲產生了，它後來變成了一部電影，或者某個電影出現了，它同時衍生出一款視頻遊戲。這樣一來，越來越多的媒介商品漸漸地出現了，也產生了越來越多的衍生商品。

X: 所以歷史分析對於傳播政治經濟學研究非常重要，歷史分析可以讓我們了解電影產業中的連續性和變化。

W: 是根本性的，我認為。你先從歷史上發生了甚麼入手，探究它如何變成現在這樣，比如數字技術是如何發展的？所有人都在談論新媒體，但我們需要探究的是到底新在哪裡？我們需要獲得對歷史發展的觀察，尋找變化和連續性。

X: 您是否會有意識地納入經濟電影史模式？

W: 媒介經濟學者討論的是產業模式，他們很多時候與政治經濟學者興趣一致。我們會提出同樣的問題，但是原因卻不盡相同。媒介經濟學者通常沒有批判意圖。這兩者還有許多其他的不同。近些年來，媒介產業研究正在發展，一些來自文化研究背景的學者參與其中，但他們更重視電影的制度層面、更注重細緻分析產業層面。雖然其中一些研究比較批判，但總體上排斥政治經濟學路徑。

X: 比如對於結構、做法、成效的系統分析，以期描述歷史現象的潛在機制。

W: 這是產業模式，也是一種研究產業的路徑，但它並不重視我們所認為重要的議題，比如與權力、控制、所有權等等相關的議題。他們對媒介和社會的相互關係並不關心。他們不會抽離出來，而只是關心經濟分析。所以彼此有頗多不同，儘管有時候我們也研究他們所關注的種種關係、結構。我以前的學生、現在西蒙弗雷澤大學(Simon Fraser University)就職的德威恩·溫塞克(Dwayne Winseck)與金達勇(Dal Yong Jin)合編了一本論文集叫《媒介政治經濟學派：全球媒介產業的變遷》(*The Political Economies of Media: The Transformation of the Global Media Industries*)。他們認為政治經濟學有很多派別，並且試圖把產業模式納入到政治經濟學派中來。我們對此有所爭論，但是這本論文集很有意思，值得一看。

這幾天的會議上出現了諸多批判分析，包括一些主題演講。昨天費因伯格 (Andrew Feenberg) 就在批判其他研究者¹。所以說有很多討論、不同的路徑、甚至不一致的看法。

X: 與格蘭姆·莫多克、彼得·古丁 (Peter Golding)、尼古拉斯·加漢姆 (Nicholas Garnham)、文森特·莫斯可等男性學者合作的經歷，對您有何影響？作為一名女性學者，您認為自己為傳播政治經濟學帶來了何種不同的視角或知識？

W: 很有趣的問題。看上去好像政治經濟學路徑被男性研究者主導了。這種觀點可能曾經成立過，但是越來越不然。我不確定是否因為我是一名女性，所以我的分析就不同於他們。也許使用政治經濟學路徑的女性會更傾向於女性主義視角。但是在讀文森特·莫斯可的書時，你會發現其中有一部分章節專門探討政治經濟學路徑和女性主義的關係，另外也有一些學者非常擅於在研究中整合女性主義視角。我的同事、就職於南伊利諾伊大學的依琳·彌漢和我有過多次合作，她就非常擅於這種整合。可能我們更容易將研究關聯到女性主義路徑，但是我不認為這就是我們能貢獻的全部。因為男性學者也同樣使用女性主義路徑。但你也可以問一下其他人，她們也許會給出不一樣的答案。

X: 以道德哲學和介入現實為前提是傳播政治經濟學的特點。您和一些批判性的傳播政治經濟學學者自我定位為公共知識分子。北美的公共知識分子所面對的具體現實是甚麼？在一個民主的社會裡，學界如何更好地與社會互動？

W: 每個人的具體情況有所差異。但是我認為總體上我們都有可能有助於美國的公共討論。我們所採取的立場非常有爭議、非常不主流。在美國，有些學者於公共論辯非常活躍，我首先想到的是羅伯特·麥克切斯尼 (Robert McChesney)。他的研究建基於政治經濟學，我認為他顯然就是一個突出的例子。他是真的努力在公共領域產生影響。但之前其他人也這樣努力過，比如赫伯特·席勒 (Herbert Shiller) 等人。扮演這種角色非常困難，因為我們還有那麼多其他的工作要跟學校打交道：教學、研究，以及行政工作。我認為我們應該做的更多，我們想要做更多，但是有時做不到。

我們一些研究、一些書，應該是為大眾而寫的。是的，我們應該做的更多。當然我可以給出一大堆理由為甚麼我們沒有做，但是我們應該去做，因為這很重要。

X: 傳播政治經濟學希望獲得何種改變，是影響宏觀上的政策、法規、體制，還是微觀上的個體意識和行動？

W: 一個真正民主的社會應該是人們的需求能得到滿足的公平社會，包括食物與居所這些基本的需求。這些需求雖然如此基本，但你看周圍蒙特利爾的街道，卻能看到有人流落街頭。這真的不可思議。我們社會中的不公令人無法忍受。當然，社會不公還包括族群、性別等等議題。我認為我們的目標是某種更人道的社會。

X: 您曾經提到，IAMCR在媒介與傳播研究領域是世界上真正最有國際性的學術會議。這種國際性是否體現在對未發展國家學者的關切和互動上？

W: IAMCR誕生於UNESCO(聯合國教科文組織)，或者說它源於UNESCO的一個理念，以及1950年代UNESCO的支持。這是一個很有趣的方面，也許這就是使其真正國際化的最根本原因：與聯合國保持一致。多年以來，很多人關注並討論諸如世界不平等、或者世界信息新秩序這些議題。但這些議題從未消失，世界上許多人都參與過這些討論。道理很簡單，IAMCR存在不同的政治立場。研究者來自不同的國家，帶來不同的視角。但有時候因為資源有限(如差旅費用等)，實現多元仍然很難。這也是為甚麼我們在2017年要把會場設在拉美的哥倫比亞的原因。匯集國際學者固然重要，我們也必須更關注印度、巴基斯坦、伊朗等國家地區的媒介學者，他們很難到蒙特利爾或者英國去參加會議。我們要到他們所在的地方去舉辦會議，創造機會讓他們參與進來。自始至終，協會一直努力做到更加國際化，納入全世界所有國家的學者。第三世界國家、尤其是發展中國家對我們十分重要，我們尤為關注。我們有一小筆旅費補助，可供發展中國家的學者、新學者、年輕學者申請。我們努力做到與會代表的多樣化，比如讓來自世界上不同地區的學者在會議上發言。我們也會非常有意識地去激勵發展中國家的學者來參加會議。這個原則是非常堅定

的，有時堅守起來也並非易事。

- X:** 近年來，研究中國電影產業成為華人學者的一個熱門課題。根據您自己研究好萊塢電影產業尤其是迪斯尼這種巨無霸式媒介集團的經驗，有哪些陷阱您希望提醒華人學者？
- W:** 我想有一批學者正在做這方面的研究。我過去有幾個研究生做過非常出色的中國電影產業研究。遺憾的是，最終並非全都得到發表。其中一篇論文是個出色的歷史研究，我認為它有助於理解1990年代以來發生的諸多變化。我覺得需要更多人來做這方面研究。雖然我們對於美國或其他地方的研究給你們展示出一些分析中國電影產業的理念，但是中國電影產業跟好萊塢是兩碼事。總的來說，我會提醒華人學者不要只是接受某個研究視角，比如經濟學或者產業模式，要考慮一下批判政治經濟學的路徑。我想這就是我的忠告，同時也期待看到這方面的研究成果。

註釋

- 1 此次訪談的時間是2015年IAMCR會議期間，瓦斯科教授所指的會議即此。費因伯格教授所做的全體講話題為《成問題的（正被討論的）互聯網》（*The Internet in Question*）。

珍妮特·瓦斯科著作選

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Academic Dialogue with **Janet WASKO**

The Political Economy of Media as a Critical Approach

W: Janet WASKO

X: Yaping XU

X: What stimulated your initial interest in researching the film-finance relationships? Before working with Thomas Guback on your PhD study, you had worked inside the media industry (e.g. Hollywood, Disney, ABC) for a few years. What particular jobs did you do then? And what kind of influence did such experience bring to your studies latter? Do you think for a scholar of doing film industry studies, it is necessary to be an actual practitioner first?

W: When I first started studying media—radio, television and film—as an undergraduate in Southern California, I was actually very anxious to work in the media industry. So I was able to move to Los Angeles and worked at different media companies. Of course, this is what many of our students want to do and should do. But I think it's not always necessary to work in these industries in order to do research on them. It's also good if people who work in the media industry have an education in media, perhaps to think about it, to know about it, maybe to even have a critical perspective of it, so maybe they can change the media in constructive and positive ways. So even though it's good to have that background, I don't think it's necessary to have worked in industries to study and do research on them. Back to my experience, I found that by working at different places of industries, not for very long or in key, creative positions, I got a sense of different parts of the industry.

And at a certain point, I thought that there was so much potential in the media. It's an amazing resource, an important resource to communicate with people. But I found working in the US media industry, at least, much of that resource is devoted to selling things. For instance, I worked at a company that made commercials or advertisements. So much time and effort went into making

30-second commercials, by people who probably could be involved in much more creative, interesting, important or exciting media messages and products. In other words, there are a lot of talented people who spend their time selling soap. So I would to go back to the university and study this, and maybe focus on media education. Education, I thought, would be the best use of media. But when continued studying the way media was being used in education (at least, in the US), it seemed very boring and not very exciting. Perhaps because so much energy and resources are directed toward the commercial use of media. Thinking about these issues led me to develop a critical orientation for studying the media. Of course, it was also because of the context of the period. Many people were challenging the status quo, through the anti-war movement, the feminist movement, and so forth. You can't just accept what is, but there needs to be some change.

So I continued studying and went on to study with Thomas Guback at the University of Illinois because of his critical work on the film industry. I think at the time I felt that film, even though it's commercial, is not directly selling soap. So there is potentially more room for creativity and I was interested in that. So I went to study with him and learned more about what political economy, what that means, and realized that the study on the political economy of media was very important with a long history. But it had not been applied so much to studies on film, except for Thomas Guback, who was one of the few people in the US who did that. Although many scholars looked at film, they focus on content, directors, auteurs, styles, genres, etc. But what about the industry? What about all those economic issues? Simple things like how films are financed? I eventually ended up looking more closely at this question of film finance, studying the sources of funding, etc. My dissertation was a study of the relationships between the US film industry and banking institution, which became the book, *Movies and Money*. I found that the relationship had changed historically, as I found sources in many different places. I think the questions of finance and ownership are still very key issues. Political economy of film has grown, of course, which you have talked about. It is still very fundamental and important.

X: Your PhD thesis incorporates materials collected from the mouths of bankers. What is the significance of the interview method in a political economist study? Did you also interview Disney Corporation's managerial side when accomplishing *Understanding Disney*? Do you have a theory on how to do a good interview with the senior executive of a film company?

W: Good question. The answer is no, because I didn't actually do so many interviews for the Disney project. Because Disney is a very controlling corporation, it was difficult to arrange interviews. As I was working on it, I encountered some of their managers—some of the people who worked for the company—and asked for interviews, but they said I would have to go to the company, they would have to ask for permission, and so forth; so they were very closed, very controlling. The *Understanding Disney* book was an attempt to look at this one corporation through its history, its finances, its political economy, but also at the products, the texts, the content, and also the audiences. So in some ways, I found I didn't need to talk directly to the company representatives. I relied on a lot of information that, for instance, journalists had access to, as well as historical studies. So in a way I drew on other sources. I think sometimes journalists are able to get access to more resources than scholars can. If it were only an in-depth study of Disney as a company, a political economy, I probably have wanted to try to get in. But I wanted to show Disney as a whole, the whole from its history, the finance, the content, the audience, so forth, in that way showing the relationships between these components. It was also a way to answer criticisms of political economy that claimed that we never pay attention to the content or the audience. So it was an attempt to present an overview.

On the other hand, the interviews that I did with bankers for the *Movies and Money* project were extremely interesting. First of all, I think when we do these projects, before you interview people, I think you need to know a lot about the situation, a lot about the people, before you actually do the interviews. So I did a lot of historical and other research, and then identified which banks had been important, which banks were currently important. After I had gathered as much material as I could, then I started to set up interviews. I didn't think I would be able to get so many interviews, because, as you know, bankers are difficult to access. Probably more difficult than corporate

executives. I wrote to a number of them, but did not receive many responses. But then I had an interview with one of the treasurers of one of the film companies; I think it was United Artists. He was very helpful and started suggesting bankers who I should talk to. I was able to, then, talk to a number of different bankers, in Boston, a group of them there with me, and then in New York, several individuals. Some of them thought that I was trying to raise money to make a film (Laugh). Really! Which is an interesting point, perhaps. But more importantly, as I interviewed them, both the corporate representatives and the bankers, they started to use the same language, the same words to explain their relationship. For instance, they all described their relationship as a kind of marriage, which then helped in understanding the situation.

Also, one of the other things that helped was that I decided not to use a sound recorder for the interviews and did not use their names in quotations in the book. I think the fact that I didn't use a tape recorder helped them to speak to me more openly. Also I took only a few notes during the interviews, but after the interviews I would go immediately to a café and write down everything that I could remember. So it wasn't the kind of interview we teach students to do. However, I knew they were going to be careful and guarded if I recorded them or took lengthy notes. I found this process very interesting, but also found documents that were relevant.

X: They provided that?

W: Some of them were provided, but most were public documents gathered and made public by the United States government. I really feel good about that study because I was able to do these interviews and locate many primary documents. Analyzing documents is a good method, but their availability varies in different countries. In the US, there's a lot of corporate secrecy, but there have been and still are government regulatory agencies, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, that gather documents from corporations. These are very important, even though you have to read them keeping in mind who they are written for and knowing that they don't include everything. So this kind of documentation is very important. Although it varies according to the political climate at the time, governments actually do studies and investigations. In the 1970s, the

US government conducted investigations of banks and corporations, which provided invaluable material including numerous people called to testify. Again, it depends on where you are. When you are doing this sort of research, you have to look for resources wherever you can find them. And you need to be careful. There are some guidelines available for looking at documents, including issues such as credibility, reliability, etc.

X: Most of your research concentrate on the mainstream industrial models, classic products, and the operation of media conglomerate; is that an indication that studies on mainstreams fit more into the political economic approach to the film industry?

W: I think if you say political economy, related to film, media and communication, it typically means a critical perspective. And it draws on those critical theories of Marx, the Frankfurt School, so on and so forth. It has grown a lot and I think a lot of people are using this approach. So when you talk about the political economic study of media, I think it's almost always critical. Even though there has also been the development of media economics and various versions of industry studies, they aren't necessarily critical. In fact, if you are critical of media, you are probably going to say that you study of political economy. But there are other sorts of studies on the industry. The other approaches mostly draw on neoclassical economics and are fine with the status quo, so they represent a different perspective. From political economy, what do we study? We study the media industries, corporations, the production of commodities, so on and so forth. So often we are focusing on the mainstream, the core, the dominant. But also we are focusing on that because we want to understand how to understand power, which is a very important concept. Because we also want to see why there isn't more variety, for instance, of films. We also want to question why everything is oriented to commercial purposes. And we are interested in promoting alternative and independent models.

X: Are you going to do any research concerning independent cinemas?

W: No. Not necessarily. But the study of the major corporations involves attention to independent companies, as well. As we know, the big conglomerates are still very alive, still making a lot of money. And

they actually do work with the independents; in fact, you have to be careful about independent film companies, because sometimes they are owned by the major companies or work closely with them for the distribution of their films. So the industry structure needs to be understood. It also is important to recognize one of the main criticisms in critical political economy is the development of media/communication within a capitalist/profit model in the private sphere. This may contribute to our societies, but not always for the benefit of everyone. Especially if you look at Hollywood, where many people are incredibly rich.

X: The same thing is happening in China, the Chinese film industry particularly.

W: Yes of course. Because I think around the world the Hollywood model is picked up and applied. For China, that history is really interesting because it hasn't always been this way. However, films are increasingly being created and produced as commodities, with the state's involvement.

X: In comparison to studies on other media and communications, do you think there are characteristically specialized premises, issues and methods for the political economic studies on the film industry?

W: There are many very good descriptions and discussion on the critical political economy of media, and also of different media industries as well as the Internet and information technologies. For example, Robert McChesney has written about journalism, television has been studied by Eileen Meehan, and video games has been described by Randy Nichols. Meanwhile, Vincent Mosco, Dan Schiller and Christian Fuchs write about the Internet and digital technology. So, yes, there is a wide range of work that considers the media overall and then specific industries. Film was not necessarily the first area to develop a political economic analysis, although studies by Thomas Guback, for instance, were early examples. There is quite a bit of work these days, which is growing in different parts of the world, which help us to understand the wide range of media and information technologies.

X: You suggest in *Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* that what new exhibition technologies have brought are better trans-industrial synergy and media conglomeration than inter-industrial conflicts. Film can be reduced to a value-adding point to synergize multiple media industries. With such reality, what is the significance of concentrating on the film industry alone?

W: People often call this convergence. But if we look specifically at the film industry, historically we can see how they actually interacted with other media. The industry embraced various technologies and incorporated them, right? Movies on television, movies on cable, etc. Companies evolved and became conglomerates. I think possibly an argument can be made that just studying one industry is no longer important or possible to do. I don't know if I agree with that yet, because I think, for instance, films often are produced and distributed in very similar ways. Maybe not on celluloid, maybe digital, but in very similar ways in terms of the ways they are financed, produced and so forth. There are a lot of similarities. There may be different outlets, additional screens, or whatever we want to call them, where people are being exposed to, where they access films. But the film companies are developing those outlets. They are adding to their businesses and still making a lot of money around the world. In other words, Hollywood is not going away. Maybe it will. But it is adjusting and following the same principles: how can we find more profits? Also, there is an important link to other kinds of commodities. Sometimes a video game is produced and it becomes a film, or a film is made and it becomes a video game. And, thus, increasingly there are more and more commodities, media commodities, merchandise, etc.

X: So the historical analysis is very important for political economist studies of communication; with historical analyses, we can understand the continuities and changes happened to the film phenomena.

W: Fundamental, I would say. You start with what has happened historically and then got from there. For instance, how did digital technologies develop? Everyone talks about new media, but we need

to ask what is really new? We need to trade the historical development, looking for change and continuity.

X: Do you consciously apply some kind of economic film history's model?

W: Media economists discuss an industrial model and are interested in some of the same things as political economy. We ask some of the same questions, but for different reasons. For media economists, there's not often a critical edge. And there are a lot of other differences between the two. Media industry studies is also growing these days, with people who are coming out of cultural studies, but then more often taking into account film institutions or looking closely at the industry. And some of that is critical, however, there is a tendency to dismiss a political economic approach.

X: For example, the systematic analysis on structure, conduct and performance, in order to describe the underlying mechanism of historical phenomena.

W: That's an industrial model, which is one way of studying the industry, but it doesn't take into account issues that we feel are important, having to do with power, control, ownership, and so forth. They don't look also at the relationship between media and society. They don't step back from a purely economic analysis. So there are a lot of differences, even though we want to understand those kinds of relationships. My former student, Dwayne Winseck, who is here in Canada, has done a collection with Dal Yong Jin, called *The Political Economies of Media: The Transformation of the Global Media Industries*. They are from Simon Fraser. They argue that there are a lot of political economies, and they want to include this industrial model in political economies. We have a debate going about that it might be interesting to look at that collection. Here at the conference there were a lot of critical perspectives represented, even in some of the plenary speeches. Yesterday, Feenberg was critiquing other researchers. So there is a lot of discussion, as well as different approaches, and even disagreements.

X: What influences did you have when co-authoring and co-editing with other political economists of communication, for example, Graham Murdock, Peter Golding, Nicholas Garnham, Vincent

Mosco? As a female scholar, what kind of perspective or knowledge do you bring to the tradition of political economy of communication?

W: Interesting question. It seems that the political economy approach is dominated by male researchers. That could be true, at one time, but I think more and more, it's not the case. I am not sure that my role as a woman brings anything necessarily different to the analysis. Perhaps the women who work in political economy are more sensitive to feminist perspectives. But when you look at Vincent Mosco's book, he has a section about these relationships and there are some people who have integrated these really well. My colleague, Eileen Meehan, from Southern Illinois University, I do a lot of work with her and she is very good with this integration. So maybe we are more able to connect with feminist approaches, but I wouldn't say that's something only we bring to our analysis. Many men are sensitive to that, too. You could ask someone else, and they may have different answers though.

X: Political economy of communication is characterized by its moral philosophy and reality intervention. You and many critical political economists position yourselves as public intellectuals. What are the pressing and particular realities for the North American public intellectuals? How to interact with the public and the society properly as an academic, living and working in a democratic society?

W: This is something that varies with individuals. However, I think overall we have the possibility to contribute to public discussion in the US. But it's not automatic. We take sometimes a position that is very controversial and not very mainstream. There are people especially in the US who are very active in public debate; Robert McChesney is one that comes to me immediately. He has built on political economy and I think he obviously is a good example. He is really trying to play a role in the public debate. But others did that before, too, such as Herbert Shiller and others. It's very difficult to do this kind of work because we have so much other work connected to the university: teaching, doing research, and administrative responsibilities. I think we should do more, we want to do more, but sometimes we can't. Some of our works, maybe books, should be

written more for the public. Yes, we should do more. I can give a lot of excuses why we don't but we should, because it's important.

X: Towards what kind of change does political economy of communication orient, to affect the macro-level change on policies, regulations, systems, or to influence the micro-level of individual consciousness and actions?

W: A truly democratic society would mean equitable societies with people having their needs met. Basic needs, that is, at least, food, and shelter. These are so basic, but look around the streets of Montreal, people sleeping on the ground. This is incredible, really. The inequities in our societies are intolerable. And, of course, there are also issues related to race, gender, and so forth. I think we are wanting a more humane society.

X: As you mentioned, IAMCR is a truly international association in media and communications studies. Is it because IAMCR is more involved in the interactions with scholars and research perspectives from underdeveloped countries?

W: IAMCR grew out of UNESCO, or was an idea of UNESCO, and grew with support from UNESCO in the 1950s. I think that's an interesting point because the original goal was for it to be truly international, along the lines of the UN. For some years, there was a lot of attention and discussion to these issues, for instance, inequality in the world or the new world information order. Those debates still are there and involve people around the world. It's just a very simple principle, however, even in IAMCR, there are different political positions represented. People are coming from different countries and different perspectives. But it sometimes is still difficult to include a diversity because of resources (travel, etc.). That's why, for instance, we'll meet in Latin America, in Colombia in 2017. Not only is it important to gather international researchers, but we must be sensitive to media researchers in India, Pakistan, Iran, and so forth, who may not be able to attend conferences in Montreal, in England. We have to go there and meet, making it possible for them to participate. Traditionally the organization has been trying to be more and more international, involving countries from all over the world. And special attention to the third world, or the developing world, is

fundamental. We have a small amount of money or travel grants that are available for researchers in developing countries, for new scholars, and young scholars. We try very seriously to have a diversity of representation. For instance, they speak at the conference but from different parts of the world. So we try very hard to encourage people from developing countries. It's a very strong principle, but it is not always easy.

X: Studies on Chinese film industries have found feverish topics since recent years. Basing on your research experiences on the Hollywood model and the media conglomerate of Disney, is there any pitfall that you would like to remind of?

W: There are a number of people doing work, of course. I have had several graduate students who have done really good studies on the Chinese film industry. Unfortunately, they are not always published. One was a very good history and I think it would be useful, since a lot has happened since the 1990s. I think more people should do this kind of work. Maybe some of our work from the US and elsewhere is providing ideas for your analysis of the Chinese film industry, but it's so different from Hollywood. Overall, I would urge not just to take one perspective, for instance, not just to take the economics or the industrial model. Consider the critical political economy. I think that's what I would encourage you to do and I look forward to seeing the results.

Selected Works by Janet Wasko

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Janet Wasko's selected works.