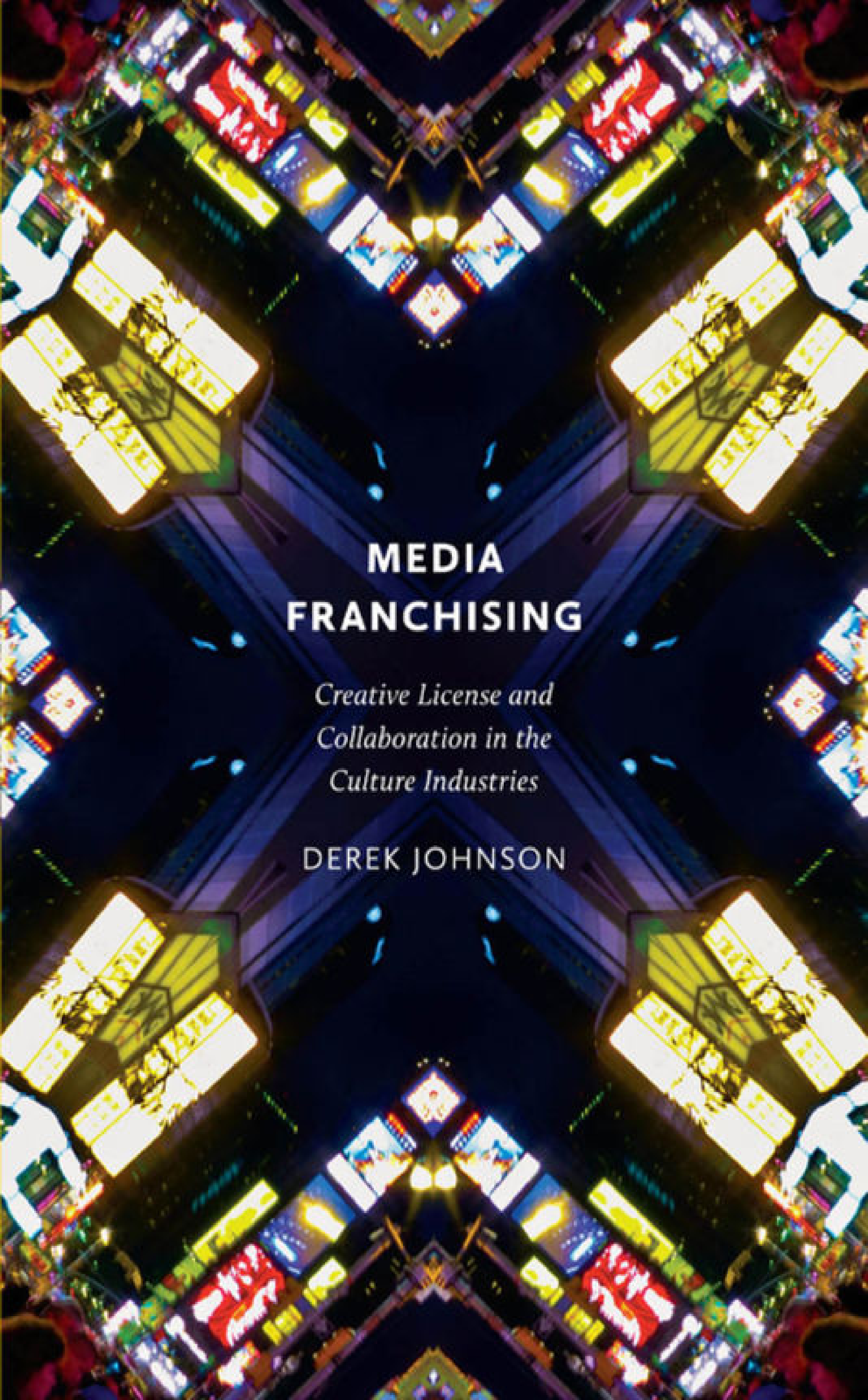

MEDIA FRANCHISING

Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries

DEREK JOHNSON

MEDIA FRANCHISING

POSTMILLENNIAL POP

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Introduction

An Industrial Way of Life

To some, media franchising is a bit of a joke. In the 2010 mock educational video "The Science Behind *Law & Order*," for example, CollegeHumor.com offers a satirical skewering of the "regenerative properties" that support the ongoing and multiplied industrial reproduction of the NBC television police procedural, spun off four times since 1990. "To understand the future of the *Law & Order* franchise," the didactic narrator explains, "you must first explore the complex biological system that has sustained the show for two decades." What that complex system has produced, it appears, is a cultural monster: "like the mythological beast Hydra, when one *Law & Order* meets its demise, two more sprout in its place." The irony of the franchise's monstrous longevity lies in its "awe-inspiring resilience to harsh predatory factors such as changing tastes, aging actors, much better shows, and Benjamin Bratt. As the mother pod reaches maturity, and begins to sense its impending extinction, its outer membrane sends out a series of rerun seedlings . . . assimilating the entire ecosystem into one homogeneous blob."[1] The humor, yet implied cultural tragedy, of media franchising derives here from the dominance of its patterned sameness and the imposition of an unthinking, instinctual biology over any human creativity or social agency within the media industries. A video on *The Onion News Network* in 2011 similarly skewered the industrial practices of franchising by pointing to the mindless drive toward self-replication animating Hollywood blockbusters like the comic book superhero adaptation *Green Lantern*: "A *Green Lantern* sequel is already rumored to be in the works," the fake newscaster explains despite public indifference to the film, "due to the fact that this franchise has now been created."[2] As an awkward punchline, franchising explains the creative bankruptcy and foregone economic determination of contemporary media industries. Sometimes, that joke extends to the masculinized juvenility of those industries as well, as in another *Onion* video that portrays the screenwriter of the 2011 *Fast and the Furious* sequel *Fast Five* as a five-year-old boy who "wanted to return to the franchise's roots of cars driving, going boom."[3]

This understanding of franchising as monstrously homogenized, self-determining, and childish has not merely been the province of humorists.

Media critics too lambast the culture industries for their franchising practice. Summarizing the 2004–2005 television season in terms of the "good" and the "bad," *USA Today* television critic Robert Bianco awarded "TV franchisation" a spot on the latter list. "In September, we wondered how many *Law & Order*s and *CSIs* were too many. Now we know: for *L&O*, four; for *CSI*, three. As it turns out, it takes more than a name to make a show. You also have to come up with a few compelling characters and some workable distinction that separates the copy from the original." For this critic, the "franchise creep" colonizing primetime programming endangered the art of television in favor of replicated, multiplied sameness.[4] *Time*'s Feifei Sun similarly marked the release of the 2010 remake of *The Karate Kid* with an online feature on "The Top 10 Franchises That Won't Die." Captured in the insistence that these film franchises "just won't go away" was frustration over the persistence of their industrial multiplication over time.[5] Moreover, when *Salon*'s Matt Seitz lamented the reliance of Hollywood studios on comic book adaptations, he simply deployed the one-word exclamation "Franchise!" to forward a culturally legible critique of industrialized media culture.[6] So commonsense had the cultural bankruptcy of franchising become that it worked as punctuated shorthand. Even the most rigorous of media scholars cannot help but confront franchising as a cultural blight. "Such is the nature of the successful media franchise," Bob Rehak wordsmithed in 2007, "doomed to plow forward under the ever-increasing inertia of its own fecund replication."[7]

The perceived mediocrity of *Law & Order*, *Green Lantern*, or *Karate Kid* might not make such franchising seem worthy of all the fuss, much less a whole book. At stake in the multiplication and replication of these media properties over time, however, is the very manner and logic by which popular culture is produced and, crucially, reproduced. Through franchising—an industrially driven process perceived as unchecked expansion and assimilation across cultural contexts—media products have proved culturally threatening not just in their seeming lack of sophistication, but in the challenge to choice, diversity, and creativity posed by their mechanistic, almost viral drive toward self-replication. Yet to truly understand that reproduction and problematize the terms by which franchising has been popularly and critically conceived, this book develops a more complex picture of franchised cultural production that challenges assumptions about self-replication to more effectively account for human agency and social meaning within the industrial institutions that produce culture.

Too often, we assume that all we need to do to understand franchises is to track their monolithic replication, counting up the number of spin-offs, tie-ins, and other branded products across the unified corporate footprint of conglomerates like Time Warner, NewsCorp, or Disney. When we focus on the replication over time of the franchised media content controlled by these companies, the persistence of these major media brands seems to bear out the inane repetitiveness and stagnation of their cultural production over the past 30 years. The longevity of science fiction franchises like *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*, for example, made 2009 look at least on the surface much like 1979. Thirty years after introducing the cast of *Star Trek* to the silver screen, Paramount released an eleventh film with a new cast and new narrative continuity to move forward as if the previous three decades never happened. On television, the conclusion of a similarly reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* in 2009 amid plans for a planet-bound spin-off called *Caprica* only added to a litany of formulaic reworking, recalling both the cancellation of the original *Battlestar Galactica* in 1979 and its retooled, Earth-set replacement *Galactica 1980*. To quote the oft-repeated line from the reimagined *Battlestar*, "all this has happened before, and all this will happen again." To comprehend these repeated happenings, however, we must go beyond recognizing, counting, and bemoaning their occurrence; we must ask how and why they have propagated in meaningful ways. Franchises do not replicate themselves: they are produced in negotiated social and cultural contexts that demand exploration. Even if wedded to the notion that franchises pose a cultural threat, we can only really grasp the scope of that threat by giving serious consideration to how industrial processes and cultures of creation have unfolded over time and across different sites of production. This requires inquiry not just into the products of media *franchises*, but rather the process of media *franchising* constituted by complex social interactions within the industry structures supporting and driving cultural replication.

To understand how and why franchising has developed as it has over the past several decades, we have to go beyond the glib suggestion made by College Humor that franchises might be powered "by a unique electromagnetic force of depression given off by sad old people sitting in front of a television."[8] Instead, we have to take seriously the investment of popular audiences and the meaningful labor of social actors working through franchising. By what patterns, practices, and strategies do producers working within industrial franchising structures engage in these multiplications and replications of culture? How is that replication shaped and reshaped by the ways producers conceive and manage their own professional identities within those structures? If franchises prove as culturally monstrous as critics maintain, what kinds of negotiations and struggles must producers perform to understand their creative practice within them? How do workers embedded in the culture industries serve as a front line in making sense of, managing, or enabling that challenge to perceptions of their own creative agency and identities? The replication of franchising extends not from the agency of corporate monoliths, but from producers working for and within industrial power structures. Without attention to the experiences of those cultural producers, the replication implied by franchising remains mythologized rather than theorized.

The Context for Franchising

Toward this more complex conception of franchising, this book asks how institutionally situated media producers have managed the continuous production of culture from intellectual property resources shared across multiple sites of production. How has franchised media production generated social relations, market discourses, creative identities, collaborative exchanges, and above all, tensions and struggles among stakeholders imagined into industrial relationships through use of the same shared, branded resources? This inquiry has been designed as a historical project, exploring the emergence of franchising as a production logic within specific industrial and cultural circumstances throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The scope of that historical examination, which spans from discourses about franchising in 1950s business culture to the emergence and dominance of franchising logics in the production of contemporary media culture, has been defined by at least four crucial shifts.

First, on an economic level, the culture industries have been marked by a coordinated push toward both deregulated consolidation and post-Fordist flexibility. In the 1970s, a few companies controlled each media industry: ABC, NBC, and CBS dominated television; Warner Bros., Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Universal, and Columbia controlled the film industry; Marvel and DC Comics split the comics industry. By the 1980s and '90s, those oligopolies had extended across media, with larger conglomerates like Time Warner, Viacom, NewsCorp, and Disney operating across multiple media sectors. As Michael Curtin, Simone Murray, and Reeves et al. argue, these structural changes made the production of content more important, rather than less, as corporations sought to develop brands that could be deployed across media channels.[9] However, in the shift toward post-Fordism, where corporations favored flexible, temporary labor arrangements that reduced operating costs and limited long-term corporate risk, cultural production need not be fully consolidated under a single corporate umbrella. Instead, conglomerates frequently joined with independent partners to develop and extend intellectual properties across those multiple delivery channels. In this context, control of intellectual property resources became increasingly central to corporate strategy, both in their potential to be protected as proprietary and their potential to be widely shared and flexibly multiplied on a production level.

Emerging media technology such as personal computers, the Internet, and video game consoles have also created new markets in which intellectual property resources could be multiplied and leveraged as franchises. On the one hand, new technologies since the 1980s provided a host of venues into which established media companies could insert themselves via franchising. As *Broadcasting & Cable* reported in 2006, video games and other digital technologies generated an audience segment—the so-called lost boys—whose interests could no longer be held by traditional media platforms like television.[10] Yet while established media institutions aimed to adapt their franchisable properties to digital markets that attracted these valuable, assumedly male audiences, the games, web video, iPhone apps, and other new products to which they turned were on the other hand just as much the source of new competition. The markets surrounding digital technologies have supported new media institutions similarly reliant on the older production logic of franchising—game publishers like Nintendo, Eidos Interactive, or Rock Star, for example, whose *Super Mario*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Grand Theft Auto* franchises, respectively, depended on multiplied, successive production over time. So while new technologies sustained industrial reliance on franchising, they did so in fragmented, competitive markets as much as media oligopolies.

Changes in the social character of media consumption have shaped the emergence of franchising over the past several decades as well. According to Joseph Turow, the swing from mass popular culture to targeted niche segments reduced the size of "primary media communities" or "image tribes," transforming "society-making media" into "segment-making media."[11] So while content came to be replicated across a multiplicity of media channels, the total audience for that content often contracted; the seeming expansiveness of franchising sat in tension with its deployment in search of smaller audience groups. Moreover, as markets shrank quantitatively, qualitative relationships between audiences and media also shifted at the end of the twentieth century. Thanks to online and social media, audiences could more easily communicate with one another, enabling and encouraging participatory responses to popular media. In parallel to industrial reiterations of franchised culture, consumers crafted and distributed their own contributions to corporately owned properties like *Star Wars*, as Henry Jenkins shows.[12]

Participatory consumers seized their own stakes in corporate cultural production—so much so that scholars Simone Murray and Sara Gwenllian-Jones consider audience practices as part and parcel of the culture industries, regardless and perhaps in light of industrial attempts at disciplining those practices.[13] Franchising, therefore, has developed as a logic of multiplied cultural production alongside an increasing industrial focus on niche groups and their social capacity for participation.

A final, crucial shift that defines the franchising of media production as a historical phenomenon concerns a migration to the media industries of market logics from other business sectors. As a means of describing media production over the last three decades, the idea of "franchising" came borrowed. Prior to the 1980s, the term "franchise" held two primary meanings: first, the right to vote and exercise agency as the subject of an institution; and second, a retail operation (like McDonald's) in which independent operators in local markets paid a license fee for the right to conduct ongoing business under a shared, corporate trademark. In the last 30 years, however, franchising took on a third cultural significance, used as in the critical and comedic forms discussed above to explain the multiplied replication of culture from intellectual property resources (the expansive product lines described as "the *Star Trek* franchise" or "the *Lord of the Rings* franchise"). If the retail industries made networks of cooperating outlets legible as "franchising," the later emergence of media franchising implied a new way of thinking about networks of collaborative content production constituted across multiple industrial sites. To adapt a basic definition from Robert Iger, who as president and CEO led Disney's embrace of the strategy since 1999, the franchising of media content production came to be understood as "something that creates value across multiple businesses and across multiple territories over a long period of time."[14] The adoption of franchising as a conceptual model for organizing media production evinced media industries in search of new ways to understand and make sense of their businesses. This means that in addition to its strategic and organizational dimensions, franchising played an imaginative role in the media industries, framing their responses to other economic, technological, and sociocultural shifts in a specific set of cultural terms.

With these shifts in mind, this book theorizes franchising not as proof of the self-propagating and seamless nature of the industrial production of culture, but instead the ongoing industrial negotiation of tensions surrounding cultural production by social agents. Particularly in the past three decades, franchising has put into tension the conglomerate consolidation of intellectual property and a drive toward sharing it; the utility of emerging media to established institutions and the potential threat of those same media; market expansion through multiplication and niche market contraction; economic rationalization and the affective imagination of new models for generating culture. By situating the industrial organizations and cultural patterns of franchising within their historical contexts, this study captures the nuance and complexity of its production. From that position, this book argues that the media franchise of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has constituted and been constituted by the shared exchange of content resources across multiple industrial sites and contexts of production operating in collaborative but contested ways through networked relation to one another (frequently across boundaries of media platform, production community, and geography). At each of these industrial sites, media institutions and producers laboring on their behalf have become stakeholders that, even when lacking ownership of a shared property, develop vested interests in its ongoing productive use. Conceived in this manner, the participatory consumers of contemporary social media too might be considered stakeholders, lacking economic claim, but developing a wide range of interests and sometimes even performing labor as part of the economic organization of franchised production. In negotiation of industry tensions, shifts in genre and narrative boundaries, differences of media specificity, as well as a host of increasingly interactive and collaborative reception practices, franchising has situated multiple industrial stakeholders in economic but also creative production relations with one another. The products and content offered by media franchising, therefore, might be considered less in terms of unified brands and singular corporate interests, but instead as contested grounds of collaborative creativity where networked stakeholders have negotiated the ongoing generation, exchange, and use of shared cultural resources. As a result, the history of franchising has been marked by institutional relations, claims to creative identity, and the production of heterogeneous cultural differences—all meaningfully imagined in the context of the industrial production of culture.

While production and exchange of intellectual properties sit at the heart of these industrial collaborations, this book is not focused on intellectual property law. Many scholars have juxtaposed the idea of intellectual property with creativity. Siva Vaidhyanathan suggests that the intellectual property regimes of modern capitalism pose a threat to creative cultures.[15] Similarly, in discussing authorship, Matt Stahl makes a careful distinction between creativity and the intellectual property structures that support legal claims to creative work: "authorship is a function not of creativity or responsibility or originality but of the ability to employ or contract with creative workers."[16]

Intellectual property is not creativity or the product of creativity, therefore, but a result of contractual and legal control over creativity. To be sure, franchising has depended on contractually defined creative relationships, where the unequal autonomies of "franchisees" (whether paying licensees or for-hire creative labor) and "franchisors" (intellectual property owners) have been codified. This book takes these contractual and legal dimensions of media franchising as a given, but it is less interested in analyzing contracts and ownership claims than in examining how the resulting unequal relations of exchange between producers working in franchise structures have been socially negotiated, managed, and imagined in production practice. While interested in claims to intellectual property, this book looks beyond the formal and legal dimensions of those claims to consider the practical and lived experience of their negotiation in production contexts. Intellectual property is relevant here to the extent suggested by Albert Moran that it is a format for cultural production and a "technology of exchange."[17] Although intellectual property claims must never be confused with creativity itself, the cultural resources protected and monopolized by intellectual property law might simultaneously be considered a shared medium of exchange and social interaction obfuscated by the more stark claims of intellectual property law. By considering how the shared use of cultural resources in highly industrial contexts exceeds the precise prescriptions of intellectual property law and ownership, we can start theorizing franchising beyond the business terms of contracts to look to the cultural realms of discourse, affect, and creativity.

Existing Paradigms and New Directions

To that end, the following chapters complicate the purely economic interpretation of Robert Iger's insistence that franchising "creates value" (that it does so on behalf of intellectual property owning institutions like Disney) to consider how media producers generate, hold investment in, and extract other kinds of value from creative resources. The multiplied media production under examination here will highlight franchising not just as industry and business, but as shared and iterative culture. This intervention into popular and critical assumptions alike draws significantly upon a foundation of research in business and organizational communication that has already conceived franchise structures in social terms by examining the interactions and tensions in traditional retail franchisor-franchisee relations.[18] In media studies specifically, this books also interfaces with a number of key works that aim to make sense of franchising in the media industries. Scholars like Geoff King and Brad Schauer have held up blockbuster film franchising as popular art.[19] In his book, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins argues similarly that the industrial push toward franchising has enabled the emergence of a "transmedia storytelling" that generates narratives across multiple media platforms and markets.[20] Though Jenkins does not suggest that franchises are themselves new, he sees transmedia storytelling as a participatory mode of culture enabled by the decentralized collective intelligences of emerging media. By tracing a longer history of franchising on its own terms, however, we can both challenge the understanding of franchising as a strictly transmedia phenomenon while also uncovering some of the cultural groundwork for that convergence. Franchising is addressed by name in *The Frodo Franchise*, an analysis by Kristin Thompson of the production of the *Lord of the Rings* films. Yet her rich, detailed focus on one particular franchise outweighs considerations of wider industrial interest in franchising, leaving room for further consideration of the implications of these multiplied production practices.[21] And though Jonathan Gray offers a theoretical model for understanding the constellations of licensed products in media franchising as "paratexts," his keen insight into how meaning is shaped, erased, and augmented across texts leaves significant room to consider how different producers imagine, manage, and negotiate that paratextuality in collaboration with one another.[22] In situating paratextual formations within the decentralized production networks of a larger franchise culture, this book aims not just to identify paratextually related constellations of content, nor to acknowledge those products as art, but also to examine the constellations of social and institutional relations surrounding the production of that content.

Far more controversially, however, my intent to embrace the creative and sociocultural dimensions of franchising puts this project at a potentially contentious crossroads between two overlapping, but often conflicting intellectual perspectives on the relationship between industrial structures and subjective experiences within them: political economy and cultural studies. While a summary of the complex history of political economy lies outside the scope of this project, a study of franchising in relation to industrial structures of cultural production necessarily engages with a field that Vincent Mosco describes as a study of "the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources."[23] For political economists of the media such as Janet Wasko and Eileen Meehan, for example, the examination of these social relations has turned to the study of how media conglomerates like Disney and Time Warner establish monopolies over cultural and communicative resources and exert corporate control over their use.[24] Political economic examination of franchising means appropriately considering the organization of the social relations of the media business, and the unequal exchange of creative resources within it, asking who has the power to produce culture in what ways. However, as Keith Negus has argued, one of the challenges of industrial approaches to the social relations of the culture industries "is that the form, content, and meaning of texts are often neglected or assumed from patterns of ownership or structures of ownership."[25] In the work of Robert McChesney and others, structural approaches too frequently stop at who owns media channels without paying full attention to social complexities and tensions within that conglomerated media environment.[26] Nevertheless, political economists of the media like Bernard Miège have, to their credit, accounted for the role of smaller, independent firms in introducing innovation into, absorbing risk for and supplying creativity to monopolistic media institutions.[27] So while a political economic study of franchising can interrogate the power relations shaping industrialized production and reproduction of culture, that structural concern need not be economically determined if it looks beyond ownership to the social relations whereby licensees, consumers, and other non-owning stakeholders negotiate their own interests in production resources.

Yet a cultural studies of media production would go beyond even this political economic approach to production in the media industries to consider power in the terms of meaning, identity, and representation. While a recounting of the history of cultural studies would similarly waylay this short introduction, Julie D'Acci offers at least one definition of the interdisciplinary field as "the study of cultural products from their subjective and consciousness-oriented points of view."[28] Cultural studies of the media do not merely critique complex networks of power relations within structures of communication; instead, they are attuned to how subjectively and affectively meaningful textualities, identities, and discourses emerge within social relations and structures marked by power. If political economy asks how domination occurs within social relations, cultural studies frequently explore how those subject to that domination understand and make meaning of those circumstances. In contrast to the focus on political economy of media institutions, this focus on subjectivity often leads cultural studies to examine consumers and their everyday lives. While often criticized for overplaying the possibility of subjective resistance to structural domination, cultural studies' interest in what Antonio Gramsci called "hegemony" offers productive models for understanding how cultural subjects also come to consent to their domination by making it meaningful.[29] Although the focus is not on media consumers per se, it is in this cultural studies tradition that this book also seeks to understand media franchising; media professionals can be conceived as subjective users of cultural resources who have to make meaningful sense of and form professional identities within industrial relations marked by power. A cultural studies approach informed by a Foucauldian model of power—where power is dispersed and regulated across social networks and practice, rather than by centralized nodes—allows for a more complex model of media franchising than the structural approaches of political economy alone would suggest.[30]

A significant challenge in marrying these two seemingly complementary approaches to understanding cultural production lies in their historical animosity. In claiming allegiance to either tradition, I risk alienating those too invested in ongoing, binaristic debate to see the potential for productive dialogue. This book is certainly not the first, however, to propose such integration. Robert Babe, for example, has recently argued for the urgency of bringing together these two modes of cultural analysis, seeing potential to account for human volition and freedom without mistakenly ignoring elite control of political, economic, and cultural resources.[31] In advocating rapprochement, Babe is hardly an impartial mediator, blaming the rift between the two perspectives on the poststructuralist turn in cultural studies and its problematization of objective reality and rationality in favor of a subjective, relativistic interpretation (thus hindering the critical evaluations necessary to pursue social justice). In his hostility to radical contextuality, Babe makes for an ineffective peacemaker. Yet in identifying between political economy and cultural studies a shared interest in cultural materialism—where material conditions sit in dialectic tension with language and other cultural practices—Babe synthetizes culture both as a means of maintaining asymmetries of power and a meaningful struggle with those conditions. Indeed, Babe even grants begrudging approval of a poststructuralist project that defines culture and language in the terms of such struggle.[32] Appealing to foundational theorists in both fields, Babe ties Harold Innis's and Theodor Adorno's political economic concern for how culture organizes and controls social relations with Raymond Williams' cultural interest in social totalities and "relations between elements in a whole way of life."[33]

While not endorsing Babe's rejection of poststructuralism and his prescription for its elimination, this book nevertheless seizes on his call for an integrated, cultural materialist approach by considering how franchising has been organized as a way of life by and within the culture industries. How is the multiplied cultural reproduction of media franchising, as a materially structured industrial practice, tied into more subjective struggles over identity, meaning, and affect? In taking media franchising seriously as an industrial way of life, this book aims to make contributions to both political economy and cultural studies, but in doing so, it also has the potential to be seriously misunderstood. Taking media franchising seriously does not signal an endorsement of that industrial way of life and its unequal exchange of cultural resources. To calm the fears of political economists but also tamp down the more celebratory impulse of cultural studies, we should proceed from the assumption that franchising is not simply "good" by virtue of supporting negotiations over creative agency, collaboration, and autonomy. A refusal to make claims about the goodness of franchising, however, is not the same thing as accepting the popular and critical assumptions about it as "bad" by virtue of its industrialized structures. Without identifying the openings for difference, innovation, and agency by subjects within industrial structures of repetition, we cannot hope to imagine the possibility of change. So instead of simply endorsing or dismissing franchising, this book argues that the creativity and collaborative relations constituted by media franchising are instructive for how they illustrate the complex operation of power in cultural production. Any political economic orientation that would dismiss the study of media franchising as a waste of time, because of what can be simply imputed and listed based on its corporate structures, is a political economy of far less critical value than one that can account for the subjective struggles and tensions that occur within those structures. Meanwhile, a denial of the industrial basis of franchising in favor of its operation as popular art would ignore critical concerns about control of cultural resources while also sidestepping more complex and pressing cultural studies questions about how art, creativity, and value are constructed by and negotiated in industrial practice. Both political economy and cultural studies have the potential to resist the serious scholarly examination of franchising in the media industries—yet both might see their projects enhanced by it.

While political economy and cultural studies may offer broad theoretical frameworks, a foundational model with which to pursue this integration of the structural and the subjective comes from the production of culture perspective—or what Andy Pratt appropriately calls "the study of the material culture of production."[34] Early scholars working in this vein suggested that the organization of cultural production influenced its content.[35] From this, an increasing number of scholars have considered how that organization of cultural production also works to shape, construct, and manage reflexive understandings of the creative process itself. This means studying not just the production of culture, but also the cultures of production in which that work unfolds. For example, Keith Negus complicates the notion that creativity is a conflict between artists and industry, suggesting instead that creative work is something codified by rules, conventions, and expectations within industrial cultures and genres.[36] Pratt similarly uses the culture of production perspective to point to the construction, coordination, and control of creativity with and across different institutional contexts. Studies of cultural production and production cultures should perform, in his view, "the analysis of complex organizational forms that constitute particular cultural forms, as well as individual positioning within them. Production in this sense is not only suggestive of creative and innovative ideas, but also of the conditions under which those ideas may be mobilized."[37] For Pratt and the emerging group of researchers, the production of culture is institutional and personal, economic and social, public and private.

The utility of these perspectives to theorizing creativity, therefore, undergirded scholarly research into the "creative industries." Growing out of national policy discourses that recognized in the new millennium the value of intellectual property generation to emerging information economies, the term "creative industries" attracted scholarly interest both in theorizing the media labor these policies meant to support, and in inquiry into the role of individual creativity within the structures of mass produced media industries.[38] To theorize the creative nature of media work in contemporary convergence culture, Mark Deuze draws both from Manuel Castells' notion of "networked individualism," in which the networked users of digital culture collaborate but do so to enact their own interests, as well as Hallett and Ventresca's "inhabited institutions," where people situated within and across different positions within transnational corporations "do things together and in doing so struggle for symbolic power in their respective fields of work."[39] Yet Deuze does not downplay the continued power of institutional structures over creativity. "The creative industries approach to sites of cultural production also focuses our attention," he writes, "on the seminal role that (the management and organization of) creativity plays in any consideration of media work."[40] Even when cultural production occurs under significant corporate control, Deuze suggests, scholars can examine creativity as that which is institutionally managed and organized. In situating the creativity of media work in tension between the corporate control of institutions and the potential for autonomy and self-determining interest within those structures, Deuze and other proponents of creative industries research offer a productive model for starting to conceptualize the tensions of media franchising.

Nevertheless, that examination of franchising would be wise to avoid some of the potential blind spots creative industries research faces. Both Deuze and William Uricchio deploy a creative industry approach to suggest that contemporary convergence culture has enabled greater creativity and autonomy from corporate control, thanks to open source movements, "copyleft" discourses, peer-to-peer sharing, and other heterarchical challenges to hierarchical logics in the media industries.[41] Though both fully acknowledge the persistence of corporate hierarchy, their identification of a net gain in creativity via alternatives to industrial hierarchy risks losing sight of creativity as something equally structured and managed in industry. A study of franchising as a means of organizing creative cultural production, therefore, could usefully call attention to the complex and negotiated status of creativity in the persistence of closed and proprietary industrial models. Jing Wang also reminds us of the specific national policy contexts in which the rebranding of culture industries as creative industries occurred, arguing that the notion of "creative industries" is a traveling discourse with varying power to make sense of media in different global contexts. The privilege accorded to individual autonomy and freedom by Western discourses of creativity have held less explanatory power in China, for example, where imagination and content production remain subject to state surveillance.[42] As a discourse, creativity seems biased toward making distinctions between modes of cultural production, with only some formations of media work being recognized as creative, and only some media workers recognized as part of a creative class. As a production logic marked by a managerial surveillance and branded homogeneity not often recognized as "creative," franchising thus offers a useful test case for challenging scholarly inquiry into industrialized creativity. That test should not seek to identify franchising as another site of celebrated creative freedom, but instead as a site where the autonomy and freedom of individuals laboring within media institutions might be imagined, organized, and contested. So defined, creativity is not something that emerges despite industry, but true to Deuze's reminder, is something at play in any media work. Openly hostile to creative industries research, Toby Miller suggests that scholars should work to problematize creativity rather than endorse it.[43] This suggestion should be taken to heart, but not in a way that dismisses—as Miller risks—the existence of creativity. Instead, by considering creativity as something constructed, managed, negotiated, and imagined in direct relation to industrialized structures like franchising, we might find surprisingly complex answers to Miller's interest in "how an international division of labor links productivity, exploitation, and social control."[44]

David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, however, caution against concluding simply that "recognition, self-realisation and creativity become the basis for exploitation" within that industrial division of labor.[45] Characterizing both creativity and the quest for autonomy within the media industries as contradictory and ambivalent, they argue for analytical balance among

> the recognition that these workers may not always be fully aware of their own conditions and experiences; the need to analyse the forms of structural causality that influence these conditions and experiences, and which result in profound inequality of access and reward; and the obligation to take seriously these workers when they recount positive experiences and not dismiss these as the product of ideology and disciplinary discourses.[46]

Moreover, the authors firmly situate creativity within the frame of culture, arguing that what defines media work as cultural work (distinct from something like information work) is the status of media workers as makers of expressive and symbolic products that carry social meaning.[47] Creativity, they suggest, is that which generates meaningful culture—allowing for different organization dynamics and power relations within culture industries compared to other industries.[48] Configured in this way, analysis of industrial creativity demands the structural and subjective tools both of political economy and cultural studies. Acknowledgment of franchising as creative does not therefore constitute an endorsement of it, but recognition that it is an expressive and meaningful enterprise that unfolds within the structures of industry.

John Caldwell's *Production Culture* offers an excellent model with which to understand the industrial machinations of franchised media production as meaningful. Caldwell understands media production as defined by meaning, imagination, and community as much as it is structurally determined, investigating the managed discourses, "self-disclosures" and "deep texts" through which Hollywood producers collectively imagine themselves as communities and construct culturally meaningful identities for themselves. This research even includes a brief discussion of franchising in which he discusses tensions between the singular, homogeneous brand images of media franchises and the heterogeneous production communities working to produce them. Shared so widely, franchise brands represent "a systematic denial of certain fundamental identities (the corporations, networks, or workers that make the franchise) in order to spotlight an identity that is institutionally transcendent, transportable, and event oriented."[49] Caldwell recognizes in this analysis the multiple production communities laboring under the sign of a franchise, contrary to assumptions about the industrial homogeneity behind such monolithic brands. In holding franchise identities in opposition to local production identities, however, Caldwell leaves room to consider how the identities of production communities might also be constituted by and through their franchise work and in relation to the other production communities sharing franchise identities. At the same time as it obscures them, franchising might also productively generate identities, deep texts, and self-reflexive disclosures about that potential sense of shared work (even, or especially, in a conflicted, ambivalent sense). This might also make the cultural products of franchising into sites at which the multiple production identities colliding through franchising would be differentially expressed.

Looking at franchising in terms of these multiple industrial identities and communities in collision further means recognizing production as networked. Media studies have long concerned themselves with networks like NBC and CBS that distribute commercial content in U.S. broadcasting. More recently in studies of online and social media, networks have attracted attention not just as means of delivering content digitally, but as social relations shared by users that can support collaborative, peer-based content creation. Axel Bruns, for one, argues that new media networks have begun supplanting proprietary models of industrial production with the hybrid model of "produsage," in which content is productively generated through continual use and reuse by networked consumers.[50] His argument echoes Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, who herald "wikinomics" as a new model of cultural production supported by open, peer-based collaborative networks.[51] These authors identify shared use and networked collaboration as an emerging alternative to industrial modes of production. Yet in identifying franchising as an industrial production logic that works by exchanging cultural resources over time and across multiple communities of workers, this project complicates claims about networked production, extending our concern for collaborative creative use to the proprietary media culture these authors see emerging media moving past. As an analog antecedent to the digital "social networks" that support contemporary forms of collaborative creativity, the media franchise demands that we consider industrial networks beyond distribution and delivery, and into the realm of collaborative production. Of course, like online communities, media workers engaged in franchising may never meet or exchange direct dialogue with their creative collaborators. Yet Phillip Gochenour defines such a networked community as "a coordinated set of behaviors" and "a distributed communications system, in which individuals function as nodes in the overall system."[52] In this sense of distributed networked communities and nodal subjectivity, it is not direct interaction that defines the industrial communities engaged in and to some degree constituted by media franchising, but instead the communicative exchange and use of shared cultural resources.

From these community and network frameworks, we might ultimately understand franchising in terms of shared relations—often ambivalent—within a wider industrial system of creative cultural production. In his study of “media capitals,” Michael Curtin identifies regional hubs of media production in the global economy like Hollywood, Chicago, and Hong Kong not as containers determined by the domination of national and economic forces, but as “switching points” or “sites of mediation” where a number of complex social and cultural forces interact. For Curtin, the theorization of media capitals “is a relational concept, not simply an acknowledgement of dominance.”[53] Similarly, this book proposes that media franchises are sites of mediation where complex relationships between social and cultural forces complicate the economic function of media institutions. Although not relying on cultural geography, as Curtin does, this examination of franchising shares his aim of forwarding empirically grounded analysis of the temporal dynamics and spatial complexity of the media industries.[54] By conceiving franchising in terms of a multiplicity of production communities dispersed in time and across space, but working in social relations to one another, we uncover a more complex array of forces shaping cultural production than institutional analysis alone would suggest. Just as Curtin suggests that the nation proves an insufficient site of analysis compared to the complexity of local and regional relations within it, we cannot rest our analysis of franchising at the level of a conglomerate intellectual property holder without concern for the network of creative relations constituted by franchised production from the wider and more complex exchange of its intellectual property resources.

A Way of Study

To specifically examine the networked production relations of media franchising along both their structural and subjective dimensions, this book has gathered its evidence by four primary means. First and foremost, media trade journals such as *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Advertising Age* provide an invaluable means of assessing the economics and strategic logic of media franchising as well as its redefinition and elaboration over time as a discursively institutionalized way of life. To gain a supplementary sense of the cultural imagination and management of franchising from positions outside the media industries, this research also consulted popular publications, online magazines, and fan websites. To actually access the production practices and production relations undergirding media franchising, however, it was necessary to examine the everyday conditions under which franchised production has been historically sustained. Without that, my view would be limited to either the institutional perspective of the trades or popular perception, obscuring the subjective perspectives of professionals participating in and identifying with the creative production of franchises from a number of different positions. Therefore, archival sources provide a third, historical set of insights into the development, imagination, and management franchising by those laboring within media industries. The Gene Roddenberry papers housed at the University of California, Los Angeles proved particularly useful as a historical lens to detail the early, proto-franchising of the *Star Trek* property between 1965 and 1969. The Ronald D. Moore collection at the University of Southern California provides a useful point of comparison in an era of franchise ascendancy; Moore's career as a writer for *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* in the 1990s and developer of the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* in the 2000s provides insight into how creativity changed and multiplied through franchising. Meanwhile, a set of loosely ethnographic interviews conducted with media workers between 2007 and 2009 provide a final means of accessing the experiences and identities of those currently working with the industrial production logics of franchising.

I call these interviews loosely ethnographic because, unlike traditional ethnography, my relationships with research subjects did not afford real entry into the spaces, practices, and communities of franchised production under examination. Though this extended as much from the secrecy preferred by risk-averse media industries, it also followed one of the methodological difficulties of studying franchises as a distributed, networked community—the only way to enter the communicative system would be to participate in the industrialized creative exchange of resources and become as researcher another subjective node in the network (something a media manager would not likely permit). Thus, interviews only offer a partial glimpse into the cultural life of franchising. Further complicating analysis, as Philip Howard suggests, is the fact that ethnographic observations are "confined to content analysis of the subjects' analytical frame."[55] Interviews rely on the subject's own interpretation of his or her social world, and while that may provide a rich, descriptive picture, they also demand skepticism about what industrial motives or narcissistic investments motivate respondents' answers. As a result, interviews alone would not have sufficed, demanding the equal attention paid here to trade, popular, and archival sources. Nevertheless, if analyzed not for their truth value but for their self-reflexive attempts to imagine and position media franchising in ways advantageous to or preferred by media workers, these interviews (and trade, archival, and popular sources alike) can still tell us much about subjective negotiations of and identification with the relations of franchising. Without even these limited interviews, moreover, this research would be hobbled by what Howard calls "organizational determination," where the community and culture of franchising would be baldly inputed from an analysis of the formal structure of its hierarchies and social networks alone.[56] By articulating in-depth individual subjectivity and experiences of franchised media workers to analysis of wider industrial organization, this project aims to approximate the "network ethnography" that Howard mobilizes to situate "micro-level group interactions" within the "large-scale machinations" of wider social structures. While Howard proposes network ethnography as a means of understanding digital social networks, I aimed for an at least evocative approach that could be attuned to the similarly "trans-organizational" networks of franchising.[57]

These interviews relied upon a "snowballing sampling method,"[58] in which I started with a single contact and then asked at the end of each interview for further referrals. By the end, I had conducted at least one in-depth interview with more than 15 executive and creative professionals (and one aspiring amateur) working with key franchises in the television, film, video game, and comic book industries. At CBS Television, I was able to discuss the programming and management of franchises like *CSI* with Senior Executive Vice President of Programming Operations Kelly Kahl, as well as with key executives in the business affairs and interactive media divisions (who spoke with me on the condition of anonymity). Ed Skolarus, a senior programming executive at the Fox Reality Channel, proved similarly crucial in framing reality television in terms of franchising. Another anonymous network executive shared with me his insights into the relationship between television programming and the game and video content developed for mobile media platforms. Elsewhere, I interviewed a number of creative professionals who have worked with franchised intellectual properties across a wide range of media. These included Marti Noxon, a television writer and showrunner whose franchise credits include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *Grey's Anatomy* spin-off *Private Practice*; Flint Dille, who has written for the *Transformers* toy franchise in its television, film, and video game incarnations; Jeff Gomez, a writer who has produced narrative worlds for *Turok: The Dinosaur Hunter* and *Hot Wheels* in comics, television, and video games; Danny Bilson, a writer whose credits include *The Rocketeer* in film, *The Sentinel* on television, and the James Bond game *Everything or Nothing*; Mark Warshaw, a writer who has produced webisodes and other transmedia content for television series like *Smallville*, *Heroes*, and *Melrose Place*; and Bear McCreary, the key music composer on the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* television series. Finally, the video game industry in particular proved a fruitful site through which to examine collaboration among licensors, licensees, and other contracted production partners. This included interviews with

Justin Lambros, a Marvel Studios licensing executive; Brian Raffel, president of Raven Software, a game studio that has frequently worked with Marvel's licenses; Dan Vondrak, the project lead for Raven games like *X-Men Legends 2* and *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*; Jim Tso, a producer who has worked on numerous *Star Wars* games (both on behalf of the licensor, Lucas Arts, and later licensee Pandemic Studios); and Hassan "Karajorma" Kazmi, the project lead for an amateur yet professional-quality *Battlestar Galactica* game.

The evidence drawn upon here admittedly betrays several cultural biases, perhaps most obvious in terms of gender. Most of the professionals interviewed were men, and many of the media properties they worked with cater at an industrial level to male-centric gaming, comic book, and blockbuster cinema markets. Indeed, while I have as author selected detailed case studies like *X-Men* or *Transformers* because of the analytic advantages offered by my own lifelong familiarity with them, I recognize that familiarity was acquired in the course of having been invited and encouraged since childhood to adopt a masculine (and also consumerist) subject position. This suggests a fascinating connection between the cultural reproduction of something like masculinity and the ongoing reproduction of masculinized culture through franchising (one explored in chapter 1). Yet none of this is to suggest that franchising is an exclusively masculinized terrain. Franchising industrially targeted at girls and women—from *Barbie* to *Hannah Montana* to *Glee* to *Oprah*—proves equally rich for analysis, and whenever possible, such feminized sites of franchising will be examined in parallel to their masculinized counterparts. Nevertheless, as an industrial practice, the masculinist bias of franchising persists, undoubtedly shaping this project. In the management of even feminized franchises like *Twilight*, Melissa Click and Jennifer Aubrey argue, marketers drift toward "clinging too tightly to the well-established formulas of male-targeted franchises" and "missing an incredible opportunity to develop the terms for future female franchises."[59] Yet despite the fact that franchising leans toward genres and markets industrially aimed toward boys and men, cultural products like *Battlestar Galactica* and *X-Men* do draw significant interest from girls and women and extend from the participation of women on a production level (despite being obscured by gendered marketing and promotional strategies). Furthermore, as a form of ongoing cultural production, franchising shares key cultural characteristics with feminized forms like the soap opera. As scholars from Andreas Huyssen to Elana Levine argue, soap operas, seriality, and mass culture writ large have been historically devalued and discursively gendered as irrational and feminine.[60] Even as we might read it as somehow more masculine (likely thanks to practices and discourses that imagine mass production of culture as franchising instead of as soap seriality), franchising shares much of the cultural devaluation more typically accorded to femininity. Thus, it would be a mistake to look at many of the genres and case studies selected for examination here as a move to consider franchising solely and essentially in terms of privileged masculinity. Masculinized or feminized, the fact that so many of these franchises do have a specific gender orientation (heavily policed especially in the case of cultural products targeted at children) hints at a fundamental relationship between franchising and the cultural reproduction of gender worthy of exploration here. We might easily wonder the same thing about race, class, and sexuality.

From the evidence and examples gathered across all these sites, historical contexts, and communities of production, each chapter in this book explores a central set of tensions between the structural and the subjective that has worked to define franchising as an industrialized means of reproducing culture. Chapter 1 situates franchising in tension between rationalized economic logic and cultural imaginary, theorizing how the networks, practices, and discourses of media industry have been organized and ultimately imagined as franchising. This examination considers where the economic logic of franchising came from, tracing the emergence of retail franchise strategies and discourses in the 1950s. However, instead of generating a homogenized, McDonaldized culture, as some critics might suggest, the importation of franchise logic from retail brought with it ambivalent industrial relations in which contractually constituted business networks contained multiple competing and unequal stakeholders. So although media franchises, like McDonald's, offered unified, branded, and shared cultural experiences across markets, they remained relationally constituted through licensing agreements and other formalized practices of collaboration. At the same time, because this logic of production propagated through language —a process of conceptualizing media production as "franchising"—the first chapter acknowledges the imaginative and cultural history of the franchise, not only its economic and practical evolution. So while licensing and other collaborative industrial arrangements now understood as media franchising existed in earlier moments in the history of commercial media, their conceptualization in terms of franchise relationships can be traced historically to a cultural imaginary coming into dominance in the 1980s. Within this context of this imaginary, chapter 1 also considers the cultural work franchising has performed in disciplining and giving gendered meaning to industrial markets, practices, and strategies.

Building on this framework, chapter 2 examines historical tensions in media franchising between the control of consolidated ownership and the autonomy of independent production. Exploring in greater depth the corporate pursuit of "synergy" by developing content brands across parallel culture industries, the chapter suggests that institutionalization of franchise strategies and practices starting in the 1980s problematized common claims about media consolidation. Instead, as multiple industries came into interoperation, franchised production networks served as sites of struggle and negotiation for and between media institutions (often thwarting synergy in the process). Chapter 2 identifies three distinct stages in the institutionalization of media franchising: first, a moment in the early 1980s when autonomous, non-conglomerated companies sought to multiply their production operations in response to market challenges; second, a moment in the late 1980s and early 1990s when conglomerates tried but often failed to mobilize franchising in service of consolidated ownership; and third, a moment in the late 1990s when franchising offered more flexible production relationships as alternatives to conglomerate ownership. To illustrate these shifts, the chapter explores the franchising of *X-Men* by Marvel Comics, tracing its evolution from a "family" of comic book titles in the 1980s, to a means of supporting corporate consolidation across media in the 1990s, and finally a means of recovering from bankruptcy in the 2000s by granting increased autonomy to licensees and other corporate partners.

Zeroing in on the negotiation of shared creativity by production communities networked via franchise relations, chapter 3 considers tensions between hierarchy and openness as well as between rationalized efficiency and creative excess. While scholars like Jenkins and Thompson acknowledge franchise creativity in terms of the art of "world building," this chapter shifts that focus to the significance of world *sharing*, where multiple communities of production share that process of construction in collaborative but also ambivalently competitive ways.[61] Central to this examination is how creators make authorial claims about their labor while working in relation to one another, how they identify that cultural labor with privileged loci of creativity, and how they situate themselves within self-reflexive discourses of distinction. By focusing historically on the creative management of both *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*, science fiction franchises shared among a number of creative stakeholders across multiple production communities, this chapter defines franchise worlds as contexts for the production of creative resources, the exchange of them across industrial contexts, and the meaningful negotiation of the legitimacy of their uses within the unequal power relations of industrial hierarchies. On one level, the excessive design of these shared franchise worlds facilitated decentered, open production that in some cases generated divergent iterations independent of a centralized authorship and in service of competing claims to creativity. Yet chapter 3 also elaborates how power differentials shaped and structured the shared use of seemingly open franchise worlds. Taken together, producers working within media franchising situate and have made sense of their own creativity by subjectively negotiating a pull between difference and deference. "Peer" producers working from similar institutional positions and identifications could position their parallel uses of shared worlds through difference, while producers in subordinate industrial positions deferred to authorial privilege and preferred uses. This tension between open difference and hierarchical deference suggests that while many subjective claims to creativity have been made in franchised production networks, such claims remain structured by power.

Chapter 4 builds upon this understanding of franchise creativity by considering collaboration in terms of globalized exchange of franchise resources, asking how networked industrial production puts into tension cultural continuity across geographic space and cultural change over time. In this case, the history of the *Transformers* franchise—an intellectual property formed in 1984 from a partnership between American and Japanese toymakers, and sustained since through successive reiterations across both markets—demonstrates that franchises are not only replicated products traded between and often imposed upon global markets, but formatted processes whereby local franchising has fed back into an evolving transnational system of creative cultural production. The chapter first identifies transnational exchange between global production communities as integral to the media industries' attempts to sustain franchise production over time despite diminishing audience returns. From there, the chapter contrasts the transnational infrastructure of franchises like *Transformers* to historical popular discourses about its perceived singularly American or Japanese national origins, identifying a nostalgia that anchors franchise production in specific places and times, despite an ever-shifting global constitution. These discourses—and the moral panics they included—illustrate both cultural anxieties surrounding franchising and the role of nostalgia in sustaining it contextually over time. In Japan, marketers used this nostalgia to transition consumers from toy markets to luxury markets as they aged, whereas in the United States, nostalgia allowed marketers to transfer consumer patterns from parents to children. The transnational character of franchise production ultimately fed its transgenerational persistence.

The final chapter extends these concerns about creative collaboration to tensions between production and consumption, labor and leisure, and the use of the cultural resources controlled by industrial regimes. Drawing significantly from the work of Erica Rand, this chapter explores the double meaning of "collaboration" within franchised production.[62] While collaboration can refer to the decentralized or distributed co-creativity of media users (and has most often in studies of media participation), it also carries a political meaning: cooperation with an occupational regime. Through an examination of contemporary television series like *The Office*, *Lost*, and *Battlestar Galactica*—which have all invited and directly licensed their audiences to become laborers on behalf of the franchise—the social production relations of franchising are revealed to extend past the professionalized realms of media industries proper. In this network of production relations in which they take up their own subjectivities, consumers too become franchisees pursuing creativity in ambivalent ways. Of particular interest here will be the amateur video game production *Diaspora*, a "mod" that uses Microsoft's *FreeSpace 2* game engine to create a play experience in the world of *Battlestar Galactica*. This amateur game can be understood as a collaboration both in the sense that its production relies upon the collective labor of media users working outside the hierarchies and intellectual property claims of industry, but also in that their creative labor has been deployed both indirectly and directly in service of the industrial regime that makes hierarchical claims to those resources. Ultimately, this analysis unpacks the politics of franchising, arguing that collaborative participation in the reiteration of franchises constitutes an ambivalent but hegemonic form of media reproduction, where users of shared creative resources reproduce themselves the hierarchies that structure their subjective experiences. Furthermore, if professionalized media workers are also creative "users" of franchise resources, chapter 5 asks how the politics of franchised collaboration extends to industrialized labor as well.

A brief reflection on the subtitle of this book offers some final clarification on its aim. In positing the culture of media franchising in terms of a "creative license" and a dynamic of "collaboration," I seek to explore both the subjective experiences of collaborative creativity within media franchising and the licensing relationships and other hierarchical industrial structures shaping it. Through franchising, the media industries exert a cultural license to shape creative practice and even what workers, critics, and consumers imagine and understand as creative practice. Yet I also mean to take license myself with accepted assumptions about terms like creativity and collaboration—refusing to understand them as simple autonomy from industry, conceiving them instead as something understood and constructed in relation to industry, and exploring them through a form of cultural reproduction often considered to be the replicative antithesis of a creativity defined by originality. There is some license taken with the very idea of licensing as well, in that this project considers not just licensees proper (those who pay a fee to gain access to creative resources), but a wider range of creative and collaborative relations situated within for-hire industrial labor and institutional work structures. In denaturalizing the terms and conventions by which we understand popular culture, I believe I may also be taking license with what some scholars may see as disciplinary boundaries between cultural studies and political economy; but my aim is to problematize easy assumptions about the social relations and cultural ways of life of concern to both intellectual traditions. Instead, by examining "creative license and collaboration in the culture industries," I mean to explore franchising as a mediation of creativity and highly industrialized collaborative production that calls into question our assumptions about both.

So while critiques of franchising like those of *The Onion* or *College Humor* often prove quite funny, media franchising itself is no joke. Though we certainly may look at it with a skeptical eye due to its constant reproduction of cultural products deemed kids' stuff, commercial fluff, or even worse, franchising has proven to be both an economically significant and culturally meaningful way of life in the media industries of the past three decades or more. Franchising has offered a cultural imaginary with which industry analysts, media workers, and critics alike have tried to make sense of the ongoing production of cultural goods over time and across networks of creative stakeholders. As media firms have pushed toward expansion and consolidation, franchising has served as a key strategy by which those aims have been pursued, but also by which partnerships have been forged by and with smaller independents. Media workers within these franchised industrial structures have forged their own professional identities in relation to the wider production networks in which cultural resources have circulated, navigating industrial hierarchies in the course of their creative labor. The creative exchanges demanded by the industrial practices of franchising have also supported collaboration on a global level, paradoxically extending the replication of homogeneous media brands by inviting local production communities to develop their own iterations. And into this collaborative network of cultural reproduction, consumers too have been invited, performing their own labor in the process of reiterating a shared and ongoing culture. Thus, the intellectual properties that enable franchised exchange must be considered more than mere corporate holdings: they have transformed into cultural resources upon which a host of other parties have made competing claims of use and interest.

Yet the importance of franchising might be best conveyed by reference to its industrial meaningfulness. For many consumers who engaged with the media culture of the late twentieth century and beyond (like myself), the persistent reproduction of these media franchises has played a meaningful role in the ongoing process of identity formation and a sense of a culture that might be shared across both geographies and generations. There is no reason to expect that franchising would work any differently for the media professionals working with shared cultural resources across creative, corporate, and global boundaries and the networks of relations between them. Franchising is something with which participants in the media industries have imagined, negotiated, and identified in their attempts to navigate both economies and creativities. Its significance and complexity as a production logic derives from providing creative resources to a wide range of social actors struggling for autonomy within an industrial system while also disciplining those actors and asking them to adopt certain industrial subjectivities. So even while it may be devalued as a cultural joke, franchising—and the study of it—should remain of significant value to those who want to understand how and why the culture industries reproduce shared culture.

1

Imagining the Franchise

Structures, Social Relations, and Cultural Work

In August 2007, the premiere of *High School Musical 2* on the Disney Channel drew an estimated 17.2 million viewers, setting a new record for basic cable television viewership in the United States. The phenomenal reach of this made-for-television movie about singing teenage athletes extended far beyond the television screen, however. As an intellectual property owned by Disney, *High School Musical* provided the germ for film sequels, ice shows, concert tours, character dolls, tween apparel, and sing-along CDs and DVDs. Considering all these offerings, the *New York Times* described *High School Musical* simply and without reflection as "a budding franchise" that rivaled Mickey Mouse.[1] Irreducible to a single media platform, this migratory property could be more easily understood as a coordinated system in which multiple profit centers worked under a shared brand name—just as the McDonald's franchise unites hamburger shops in different locales to function more efficiently and profitably under a standardized corporate umbrella. The *Times* spent no time explaining this metaphor to its readers; instead, the idea of media franchising had clearly become cultural shorthand for understanding the expansion of cultural production across different media and industry sectors.

Similar shorthand marked the January 2008 premiere of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* on the Fox broadcast network. From the shared premise of killer robots sent back in time to kill the humans that oppose them in a post-apocalyptic future, the original 1984 Arnold Schwarzenegger *Terminator* film had already spawned the sequels *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* in 1991 and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* in 2003, while also supporting action figures, video games, and even 3D theme park experiences. Though the ongoing writers' strike may have helped bring script-starved viewers to the next iteration in *Sarah Connor*, making its delayed debut the top-rated premiere of the 2007–2008 season, many critics applauded the series for successfully reinvigorating a wilting *Terminator* property.[2] In *USA Today*, for example, Robert Bianco exclaimed, "Now this is how you rejuvenate a franchise."[3] *Terminator*, therefore, evidenced the critical and popular grasp of media franchising not only as cultural production spanning multiple industries, but also as persisting over time.

Of course, *Terminator* and *High School Musical* were only two examples of television and other media industries' embrace of franchising. That same year, trade publication *Variety* reported that the 2008 remakes of "dusted-off franchises" *Knight Rider* and *Beverly Hills 90210* generated more audience awareness than any other freshmen television series premiering that fall.[4] Even if dusty, franchising offered an industrially celebrated potential to multiply and extend brands with a proven history of success. In that context, it was less surprising when *Variety* suggested two days later that premium cable outlet Showtime would apply the same production logic to niche lesbian drama, "hoping to extend the life of its 'L Word' franchise with a spinoff."[5] By 2011, film studios similarly dependent on this kind of multiplied production envisioned the conclusions of serialized *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* franchises as reason to acquire the rights to other fantasy book series with "the potential to spin off sequels" anew.[6]

From these brief examples, one could define media franchising in the terms of products and intellectual properties extended in an ongoing fashion within the culture industries. Such a definition would include repeatedly reproduced or reinvented intellectual properties as *James Bond*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Law & Order*, *CSI*, *The Matrix*, *Pokémon*, *X-Men*, *Batman*, *Teen Wolf*, *Sex and the City*, and *Transformers*. Newer properties such *Glee* could be considered emerging franchises, positioned for long-term management and investment across a range of media markets. Properties like *The Golden Compass* constitute would-be franchises, intended to support long-term development but mismanaged at some point to impede continuance. Despite many such franchises sharing roots in science fiction and fantasy genres, franchising clearly cuts across genres. It is not a generic category of its own. Yet any attempt to define media franchising by reference to the texts it produces invokes many similar challenges to those facing genre analysis. Andrew Tudor has identified an "empiricist dilemma," in which genre means to generate deeper understanding of a group of texts, but the genre category itself is paradoxically defined by way of texts already assumed to fit the analytic conclusions that constitute the category.[7] As Jason Mittell argues more recently, when we define cultural categories like genre according to the texts we already assume to be contained by them, we lose sight of the dynamic industrial and cultural factors that shape and transform the categories over time. Instead, "by regarding genre as a property and function of discourse, we can examine the ways in which various forms of communication work to constitute generic definitions, meanings, and values within particular historical contexts."[8] My aim is not to make an argument for franchises as a genre (there are already too many generic categories operating across franchising: *Lord of the Rings* as fantasy, James Bond as thriller, to name just two). Nevertheless, as a cultural category, the franchise must be understood not just as a function of textuality, but as an industrially and socially contextual dynamic constituted by historical processes and discourses. If we claim that *Star Wars* is a franchise, but cannot explain franchising without reference to *Star Wars*, we can only tread intellectual water.

Instead of trying to define franchising in terms of lists of products, the key here will be to consider the economic and cultural forces that have shaped, imagined, and structured franchising, as well as the industrial structures, social relations, and cultural imaginaries that franchising has in turned facilitated. We must explore the way that franchise structures enable exchanges between nodes in industrial networks, and how social relations on an industrial level underpin those exchanges. From there, we must also consider more thoroughly how media came to be understood through the lens of franchising in the first place, how that imaginary developed in response to specific institutional and cultural conditions and struggles, and how that imaginary makes meaningful sense of those conditions and struggles. As a way of organizing, enabling, and giving meaning to collaboration across multiple sites of production, the franchise has been a shifting, slippery, and historically contingent phenomenon. Given that complexity and contingency, the media franchise will not be reducible to a tidy, universal definition. While at the most broad level, we might start by conceiving of franchising as an economic system for exchanging cultural resources across a network of industrial relations, we also have to recognize it as a shifting set of structures, relations, and imaginative frames for organizing and making sense of the industrial exchange and reproduction of culture.

In pursuit of this understanding, this chapter will identify the social relations of franchising, the industrial structures they enable, as well as the cultural discourses historically brought to bear on media objects to conceive them in the terms of "franchising." This requires an analysis that begins outside of media studies proper to consider the history of franchising as a means of sharing business formats within the retail industries. The origins of the franchised media of the latter twentieth century lie as much in the culture of McDonald's, Mr. Goodwrench, and Chicken Delight that emerged in the 1950s and '60s as any specific media culture. As previous research in business management and organizational communication has shown, these business systems operated not just through economic structures, but through social and cultural relations as well. With that social and cultural understanding in mind, we can then ask how similarly franchised relationships might structure and enable production in the media industries. Although retail franchising does not perfectly map onto media production, the social relations shared by both allow us to better understand the industrial exchanges facilitated in and by media franchising. Rather than impose this borrowed franchising logic upon media production in pursuit of a new theory, however, this chapter also seeks to examine how media work has already been theorized and imagined as franchising by practitioners, critics, and consumers. How did franchising emerge as a cultural logic to explain these relations and exchanges in the media industries of the late twentieth century, and what impact did that imaginary have on the organization of and meanings attached to cultural production? To explore the cultural work performed by this imaginary, this chapter will examine the cultural consequences of franchising through the lens of gender. On the one hand, franchising has enabled on a structural level the differentiation and multiplication of production along gendered lines of marketing and consumer appeal. On the other, the multiplication of production itself has been imagined in gendered terms through franchising, ascribing to these industrial structures and practices culturally constructed meanings and values. From these analyses, this chapter argues that franchising works to both organize and give meaning to production practices of the culture industries.

Franchising Beyond Transmedia

Any study of the franchised production of culture must acknowledge Henry Jenkins' theorizations of transmedia storytelling and world-building in their keen understanding of the formal and practical relationships between texts in different media. Jenkins analyzes media franchises as a manifestation of "transmedia storytelling, . . . a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities."[9] Transmedia storytelling results in the production and maintenance of fictional "worlds," like those of *The Matrix* and *Harry Potter*, that consumers experience in collaboration with one another by piecing together narrative materials professional producers have strewn across media platforms. Yet as a paradigm for understanding franchising in its historical and discursive industrial dimensions, transmedia storytelling remains somewhat limited. First, the privilege accorded to transmedia storytelling by its association with the "new" formal relationships, productive practices, and digital platforms of convergence culture points us away from consideration of the longer industrial history of franchising. Second, while Jenkins' exemplars of transmedia storytelling feature serialized narratives in which each piece of the dispersed story plays a unique, integral role, franchises like *Star Trek*, *Batman*, and *X-Men* have also been extended in narratively episodic, redundant, even clumsy ways that do not fit this more coherent, unified aesthetic. Further, while Jenkins recognizes audience participation in transmedia storytelling, he privileges franchises like *The Matrix* in which strong authorial figures like the Wachowski brothers manage the worlds "co-created" across platforms.[10] Transmedia storytelling envisions a unified, serialized, and centrally authored mode of franchising, but provides less insight into decentralized, episodic, and non-narrative modes of multiplied industrial production.

However, franchising has been both overshadowed by and synonymized with transmedia. Long before Jenkins' descriptions of convergence culture, Marsha Kinder identified in the late 1980s another set of textual forms and practices of production and consumption as "transmedia." Exploring how children consumed film, television, and video games in tandem, Kinder observed a "transmedia intertextuality" positioning children to recognize genres, identify with characters, and perceive the value of systemic operations across media.[11] Feeding this transmedia intertextuality were what Kinder called "entertainment super systems": properties like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Muppets* that could be experienced in unique ways through textual offerings in different media. While Kinder's descriptions differed from Jenkins' transmedia storytelling, one could retrospectively hypothesize that entertainment super systems prepared children of the 1980s for the aesthetics of adult franchises like *The Matrix* a decade later, evincing the historical character of transmedia beyond contemporary convergence culture. Michael Kackman, in fact, articulates transmedia to his historical study of product licensing for the 1950s *Hopalong Cassidy* television series. Kackman demonstrates how a set of industrial circumstances and intellectual property logics led to a specific and historical form of cultural production and consumption defined primarily by licensing agreements between companies, the growth of international television trade, and trademark law.[12] Jenkins, Kinder, and Kackman each examine different contextual manifestations of transmedia culture, identifying a shared historical trajectory into which franchising might be situated.

Nevertheless, the study of franchising as an industrial structure, set of social relations, and cultural imaginary cannot be fully subsumed within the scholarly inquiry into transmedia. Though the term "transmedia" has taken on industrial use, with the Producers Guild of America introducing transmedia producer credits in 2010,[13] this current institutional vogue obscures other discursive buzzwords and logics that have alternately imagined creativity within intellectual property management, each with their own histories, biases, and industrial meanings attached (including "franchising" but also including "total merchandising," "toyetic" media, or "synergy"). Theories of transmedia also offer reduced insight into the production of franchises like *Star Trek*, *Law & Order*, or *CSI* that multiply within a single medium like television (resulting in spin-off series like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *CSI: Miami*, and *CSI: New York*, for example). Similar dynamics structure the comic book industry (with franchises like *X-Men* supporting numerous monthly titles) and the sequel-driven film and video game industries (which depend and thrive upon perennial franchises like *Saw* and *Halo*, respectively). The question of the multiplied production and reproduction of franchising is not always one of transmedia. Nevertheless, the two terms have become nearly inseparable in contemporary media scholarship. In addition to individual research projects that link the two inquiries, whole academic conferences (often in partnership with the industry) have dedicated themselves to an interest in "transmedia franchises."[14] We have become too enamored with the sexiness of the transmedia in transmedia franchising to think much about what other cultural trajectories and industrial formations have been entangled in franchising. So while franchising has been most commonly understood as a function of transmedia storytelling, this remains only one manifestation within a much longer and more complex history that demands greater attention.

While some scholarship has tackled franchising on its own terms, this work rarely aims to illuminate the historical structures, relations, and imagination of media franchising at large. Most scholars do not make the explicit connection between media culture and franchise culture. In his study of the global influence of American popular culture, Lane Crothers comes extremely close to articulating the two, but pulls back by situating global franchise businesses like McDonald's and Coca-Cola as something to be examined "in addition to American music, movies, and television programs."[15] Though addressing some interplay between these retail franchises and the media industries through promotional tie-ins, Crothers stops short of considering media culture as something that is itself franchised. Other scholars more explicitly recognize the franchising of media culture, but still avoid exploring what that might actually mean. *Lord of the Rings* is certainly extraordinary in terms of its critical and commercial success, and Thompson's subsequent treatment of it in *The Frodo Franchise* as an exemplary case obscures its participation in a longer history of franchise development. It remains up to the reader to draw connections between her single case study and other franchised content systems. Similarly, Matthew Kapell and William Doty's edited anthology, *Jacking in to the Matrix Franchise: Cultural Reception and Interpretation*, adds to the academic research on media franchising without stopping to problematize the terms of that focus. In their introduction, the authors share in the "vast international fascination with the franchise," describing *The Matrix* as such at every opportunity, but they never explore what is implied in imagining the property as a franchise.[16] One contribution to their collection by Bruce Isaacs and Theodore Louis Troust defines a "franchise aesthetic" based in consumer participation in which "[e]ach product purchased, each viewing of a film, or, for that matter, each chapter in a book that deals with the subject of the *Matrix* franchise, implicates and welcomes the consumer into the franchise fold."[17] Yet still confined, as is the rest of the book, to the bounds of *The Matrix*, this work struggles to connect insights such as these to wider industrial and cultural contexts of franchising. One of the few scholars to make that connection, Albert Moran, does so by considering the business formats of retail franchising in relation to program formats that enable industrial exchange across global markets.[18]

Taking that kind of interest in industrial exchanges as a starting point, this project shifts the site of analysis beyond transmedia products to consider what franchising has connoted and enabled at the levels of both culture and industry. Whereas transmedia storytelling suggests cultural artistry and participatory culture, "franchising" calls equal if not more attention to corporate structure and the economic organization of that productive labor. Franchising recalls popular yet culturally maligned systems of mass production like McDonald's, suggesting familiar, undifferentiated, homogeneous cultural products churned out ad nauseum without innovation or creativity. As George Ritzer laments in *The McDonaldization of Society*, fast food chains offer a seemingly irresistible model of rationalized culture catered to local conditions based in efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control over consumers, workers, and managers alike.[19] In describing the global trade and localization of television formats like *Big Brother* as "McTV," Silvio Waisbord recognizes the capacity for local variation within a franchise system, yet critiques broadcasting structures on the whole as "a global industry solely concerned with quick commercial success and no patience for innovation."[20] Framing multiplied media production in terms of franchising therefore demands that any cultural innovations or production cultures be considered in relation to industrial structures that manage and shape them. The potential pitfall, of course, lies in following this path to an economically determined end. Yet even a cultural analysis of media franchising must take into consideration the powerful and meaningful role that this industrially oriented language plays in making sense of production. By calling the attention of critics, consumers, and practitioners alike to industry structures, often instead of creative concerns, franchising performs significant cultural work worthy of greater critical attention.

So instead of shying away from the idea of franchising, we can embrace it to account for both the cultural and industrial consequences of organizing and imagining cultural production in those terms. By adopting an integrated, "cultural economy"[21] approach that would problematize more deterministic accounts like Ritzer's, franchising can be understood both as an industrial and a cultural logic in which product innovation, decision-making processes, and cultures of production become sites of negotiation among a range of stakeholders. To fill this gap in scholarly accounts of franchising, it will therefore be advantageous to consider how studies of corporate organization have previously unpacked not only the structural logic of franchising, but also its negotiated social and cultural logics. This allows us to take ownership of the shared heritage between media production and operations like McDonald's and explore it in greater detail: how might our understanding of franchising as a business practice affirm or challenge the economic and cultural assumptions we make about this industrialized reproduction of media culture?

The Business and Culture of Franchising

The first structural attempts to understand franchising emerge in the post–World War II context as American business management and organizational communication scholars grappled with emerging forms of American corporate organization. Among the first of these voices was David Schwartz, a researcher from Georgia State University's School of Business Administration who penned a 1959 research paper entitled "The Franchise System for Establishing Independent Retail Outlets." While the franchise system predated the 1950s, Schwartz attributed its significant postwar growth to corporate desires to build sales volume across a range of retail and service industries: fast food, laundromats, car washes, hotels, and accounting services. Schwartz identified the franchise as an agreement between stakeholders—a franchisor who develops the system and a franchisee who invests independently in that system: "The franchisor advertises nationally . . . and in other ways attempts to create public recognition of the franchised outlets. The franchisee, following the merchandising and business procedures outlined by the franchisor, proceeds to operate his outlet as an independent establishment . . . to develop a 'chain' of independent business. In the ideal situation, the franchise system has the advantage of both the large and small business."[22] Complicating Ritzer's later portrait of a monolithic McDonald's, Schwartz emphasized franchising as cooperative enterprise. As part of its agreement to create national recognition for the franchise, the franchisor assigned and protected territories, supplied merchandise, and developed trademarks, signage, and logos to identify each franchisee as a member of its affiliate network. For its part, the franchisee paid a fee to invest in the system, purchased merchandise and supplies from the franchisor, and used those materials "in exactly the manner prescribed."[23]

For this relationship to be successful, Schwartz wrote that each party must share a cooperative attitude. According to one executive quoted by Schwartz, "the greatest problem in working with franchised independent operators is to cause them to think and act as a group instead of as individuals—to integrate them into a smooth-functioning team."[24] Undoubtedly, these systems provided numerous benefits to each party: franchisors could develop new products and markets with little capital risk and without the administrative headaches of managing so many outlets; independent franchisees gained national identities and proven merchandising programs. Yet crucially, Schwartz acknowledged tension inherent in franchise relationships: "To achieve maximum success . . . [f]ranchisees must be willing to sacrifice some independence of action and conform to a substantial degree to the franchisor's methods. By the same token, franchisors must accept the fact that complete control over the franchise outlet is impossible because it is an independent business."[25] Recognizing these dissimilar goals, Schwartz devised a series of guidelines to help shape each party's expectations. Even at this early stage, franchising was understood to be a site of negotiation between distinct stakeholders, rather than an entirely perfected tool for top-down corporate control, calculability, efficiency, or predictability.

Other analyses followed in Schwartz's footsteps. In 1968, subsequent Georgia State researchers Robert Mockler and Harrison Easop traced the emergence of franchise practices to 1898, when automobile manufacturers signed independent dealerships as authorized local dealers. By the 1920s, grocery, drug, hardware, and auto parts wholesalers had formed alliances across networks of independently owned stores to compete with expanding national chains. Though Mockler and Easop did not include them in their analysis, the emergence of broadcast networks and theater chains too might be considered as part of this general shift in business strategy. Only after World War II, however, did franchising move to the center of corporate strategy, thanks to key social, psychological, and economic shifts identified by the authors. Suburbanization necessitated smaller but more numerous retail outlets, while participation in franchising proved attractive to ex-GIs and other entrepreneurs supported by the expanded credit market of the 1950s as well as by Title IV of the Economic Opportunities Act of 1964 (which aimed to extend start-up support to African Americans and other disadvantaged groups).[26] Moreover, for corporations facing increased competition in the booming postwar economy, franchising offered relatively low-cost means to develop specialized products, strengthen distribution, and expand market reach.[27]

Institutionalizing this franchise boom, the International Franchise Association formed in 1960 "to promote better franchising, to protect the investor in franchised businesses, and, through this activity, to better guarantee the efficient marketing of goods and services to the American consumer."[28] Self-help publishers also fed this boom by promoting investment in franchise outlets as a means of achieving the American Dream. As Robert Metz writes in his 1969 book, *Franchising: How to Select a Business of Your Own*, "in this country we have that wonderful quality in our society which the social scientists call upward mobility. There are few barriers to the man who wishes to make something of himself. Our society may not be perfect, but the man who has talent, drive, and strength of purpose can succeed. Social barriers can be easily overcome through business success."[29] Metz and others imagined franchising in the mythic terms of upward mobility. Writing for similarly entrepreneurial readers, Harry Kursh characterized the franchise boom as "just a new American opportunity to make good if you are wise in your choice and prepared to work for it."[30] Kursh further suggested that franchising was not just a business model, but a social phenomenon contingent upon changing cultural meanings and values as well. Explaining the term's derivation from the French verb *franchir* (to free), Kursh noted that in pre-industrial contexts, "franchise" commonly expressed a freedom from restraint, and in political and policy matters specifically, privileges accorded to an individual or group by a sovereign institutional force. Yet this positive right to do something (to vote, etc.) took on more sinister connotations in the late 1800s, Kursh explained, as franchise became "the word that was batted around . . . when tycoons slit each other's corporate throats in bloody battles over the right to buy, sell, or exploit utility, streetcar, and railroad franchises."[31] As a business practice, he suggested, franchising also held cultural meaning and value that shaped how those practices would be understood. During the 1960s franchise boom, therefore, the emergent economic models subsumed under the name franchising could sometimes be viewed with similar contempt, a dirty word soiled by the acts of "shady operators."[32] In popular discourse of the 1960s, retail franchising was already caught contradictorily between the promise of the American dream and a perceived threat of cutthroat capitalism.

In his more cultural understanding of franchising, Kursh argued that "there is no single definition of franchising"[33] and that "[a]ny attempt to define a franchise, in effect, is nothing more than an exercise in academic pedantry."[34] Although not couched in such theoretical language, Kursh's argument portrays franchising as a meaningful discourse that unites diverse practices as a recognizable cultural unity. Fittingly then, Kursh, Metz, and their contemporaries in postwar America did not merely study franchising, but helped to constitute it as a historical imaginary by producing knowledge about it. As T. S. Dicke argues, the term franchise did not function in the American business vocabulary to describe such retail outlets until 1959[35] —just as Kursh and the George State researchers first started to understand this organizational phenomenon. Dicke, too, traces the development of American franchising back to the nineteenth century, but clarifies that these franchised business operations only later came to be legible as such. Though franchising has a longer structural history, Dicke shows us that it was constituted as a meaningful cultural discourse by the very attempts of those like Kursh and Schwartz to understand those business relations and practices in the postwar period.

Kursh also recognized that the "key to a successful franchise is *continuing relations*"—an observation that more contemporary business management researchers and organizational sociologists reinforce in theorizing the inherent inequalities that lead to discontent and struggle within franchisor-franchisee relations.[36] Exploring the perspective of the franchisee, Peter Birkeland has conducted participatory ethnographic research as a mock employee of several retail and service outlets. Of primary concern to Birkeland are antagonisms and "inherent tensions" in relations with franchisors resulting from the geographic dispersal of each franchisee and their incongruous interests in that relationship.[37] Birkeland frames this differential—the extent to which franchisors and franchisees truly share the same interests and goals —as lack of "alignment."[38] Though Blair and Lafontaine explore this issue from the alternative perspective of the franchisor, they identify a similarly antagonistic relationship. Though franchising is in their view a contractual alternative to vertical integration that combines national brands and economies of scale with the knowledge and drive of local entrepreneurs, Blair and Lafontaine demonstrate that internal corporate relationships prove far more fraught in franchising than vertical integration.[39]As they explain it, franchisors generally pursue quality and lower prices across the entire franchise system in order to protect system integrity and raise demand, whereas individual franchisees work to reduce operating costs, raise prices, and maximize local profits.[40] What results from these accounts is a portrait of franchising as an imperfect system based on negotiated relationships of economic inequality. Furthermore, Birkeland reminds us, the dyadic franchisor-franchisee relationship alone proves insufficient for us to understand the scope of the social relations undergirding that economic system: "The complexity of franchising extends far beyond the franchisor-franchisee relationship to include other obvious parties such as customers and suppliers, but also not-so-obvious parties as relatives and friends."[41] As Birkeland describes them, franchisees also frequently express feelings of regret, "compounded by the high cost disillusioned franchisees had paid to enter the system."[42] The disillusioned in Birkeland's experience became the "malcontents of the system. . . . They harbored a skepticism and cynicism about franchising and directed their anger toward the franchisor."[43]

These relational dynamics have informed several of the key historical practices of franchising. While they exist to enable the efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control that critics like Ritzer ascribe to economic rationalization, these practices also mitigate the sociocultural relational factors that push against compliance with top-down hierarchy. In *The Corporate Paradox*, Alan Felstead examines "how franchisors organize their networks, and how they motivate, lead and control their franchises."[44] Control can be authoritarian in nature, he argues, but can just as frequently result from practices designed to facilitate a stable, cooperative, and supportive relationship with franchisees. As Mockler and Easop similarly recognized in 1968, "The line which divides franchisor services from franchisor controls is often a thin one. In many instances, controls are another aspect of franchisor services, for they protect the franchisee from costly errors and guide him towards more profitable operations."[45] Too stringent control practices, Mockler and Easop argued, can impede the success of franchising:

> To avoid conflicts in the franchise relationship a partnership attitude must be developed. The franchisor is the managing partner and the franchisee is the operating partner, but each should have a voice in determining the policies of the organization, each should be able to suggest changes, and each should share in the problems as well as the rewards of the system.[46]

Birkeland echoes this position: control mechanisms must give franchisees a desire to be independently efficient without franchisors providing direct management.[47] The practices of franchising, therefore, have aimed to engender a sense of cooperation and perceived common interest despite the countervailing interests of franchisors and franchisees.

The primary practice that has structured franchise organization is entry into franchising contracts: temporary licensing agreements that grant rights to product and territory while formalizing the responsibilities of each party.[48] Mockler and Easop identified four general types of legal clauses in 1960s franchise contracts. Informational clauses established fees and services exchanged between parties; the franchisee generally paid an upfront franchise fee and future sales royalties to buy into the system, while the franchisor provided management advice and training. Regulatory clauses set controls on how franchisees could operate. Procedural clauses prescribed strategies for managing potential threats to the franchise relationship. Finally, termination clauses provided the parties with devices for severing relations in the event of dissatisfaction.[49] Despite the fact that the customization of franchise contracts to local market conditions might help to maximize profits, most contemporary franchise agreements remain in practice very uniform so as to enable easier enforcement across the entire franchise system.[50] In doing so, contracts give franchisors dominion over the franchise relationship, setting up procedures of reward and punishment that motivate franchisees to self-police their own behaviors in the interests of the overall system. Moreover, the franchise contract does not extend any kind of ownership of the shared franchise system to the franchisee. From a contractual standpoint, franchising offers tenancy in that one party maintains economic and legal ownership over a property used by another.

Trademark and intellectual property management practices have also structured franchise relations. On the one hand, the trademark shared with franchisees provides the franchisor with control over both the local outlet and the consumer markets they serve. Not only do shared trademarks force franchisees to submit to a position of identification with the franchise system, they also mitigate the threat of franchisees going into business on their own once provided training by the franchisor. As Tom Arnold argued in a legal conference on franchising in 1968, the shared trademark provides an "artistic theme" under intellectual property protection that cannot be used without authorization.[51] The rogue franchisee might be able to replicate the operating procedures shared with him by the franchisor, but he or she could not copy the trademark that made those business models legible and meaningful to others. Thus, trademarks also had utility in managing consumer markets. Mockler and Easop identitified as particularly amenable to franchising any product "that is distinctive and has a readily identifiable trademark, so that the customer will put forth more effort than usual to purchase the product."[52] The franchise system has thus been most often mobilized through meaningful brands that motivate both franchisee and consumer loyalty. Brand researcher David Aaker argues that to be effective, a brand name must exhibit a consistent extended identity coordinated across all outlets, markets, and product lines and "organized into cohesive and meaningful groupings that provide texture and completeness."[53] However, this trademarked unity also creates tensions within franchise systems, straining relations at the same time as promoting efficiency. As Birkeland stresses, every franchisee can in practice take actions contrary to the health of the overall system, yet every outlet in the system proves "interdependent precisely because of the trademark," shared in practice between them.[54] Shared trademarks thus generate tensions over conformity—or the lack thereof—between all members of the franchise. As Birkeland claims, "trademarks forced franchisees to adopt standard procedures but these procedures could be at odds with what worked best in a franchisee's local market,"[55] challenging the franchise system's ongoing social stability. As franchisees realize their vulnerability to one another's actions, resentment and competition emerge within the system, and the trademark becomes "as much a shackle as it is a key to profits."[56] The consequences of having multiple independent companies operating under the same trademark result in what Birkeland terms "intrafirm competition"[57] and Blair and Lafontaine call "encroachment"[58]—the sense that multiple franchisees share too much of the same territory and thus pose a threat to one another.[59]

Franchising has also relied upon the creation of shared corporate cultures to organize labor. Schwartz maintained that rather than seeking out the most entrepreneurial and pioneering candidates for franchise agreements, franchisors sought those with "[n]o previous related experience" who could be more easily molded to existing franchise methods.[60] Birkeland echoes this sentiment, writing that franchisors "want someone who follows the rules. . . . You do not want any risk takers."[61] Franchisors typically train franchisees to communicate their standard operating procedures and ensure that they operate and invest in the best interests of the larger system. The franchise relationship is thus negotiated not just structurally but also culturally through the "many subtle interactions" that occur between stakeholders: "The quality, frequency, and intensity of visits, the thoroughness and frequency of audits, the speed of response by the franchisor to franchisee requests—[all] have cumulative effects on the overall relationship and serve to keep franchisees under control. . . . Perhaps the most effective method of control is to develop a belief system that is shared by both franchisors and franchisees."[62] The franchise relationship works through the generation of a shared culture among stakeholders despite structural inequalities, a managerial ideology aimed at imagining into being a felt sense of cooperation and solidarity that does not exist economically.

Apples and Oranges?

The business of franchising, therefore, can be understood structurally, but must also be complicated by the social relationships and cultural imaginaries that emerge within that structure. Yet is it really appropriate to consider these retail dynamics in relation to media franchising, a phenomenon that may share a similar imaginative frame, yet maintains its own social and cultural specificities?

For example, in the traditional retail franchise, the social relations of industry center on the distribution and sale of ready-made products. Of course, a McDonald's hamburger does have to be assembled from all of its various pre-prepared and prepackaged materials; yet instead of the right to create a new hamburger recipe, franchisees pay wholesale for the right to connect existing product with consumers (after standardized, mass produced assembly, if applicable) in new retail markets. Design and development are most certainly key moments in the life of a McDonald's hamburger, but it is in the social and economic relations of distributing and selling product, not generating it, that franchisees generally participate. Furthermore, in contrast to corporately owned and operated chains, franchising depends upon contractual relationships between separate parties willing to cooperate. There can be no franchise without both a franchisor and a franchisee.

Yet media franchising frequently confounds these criteria. While retail franchising uses contractual relations to emulate vertical integration across production, distribution, and sales, media franchising pursues horizontally multiplied production of media related through some shared, familiar content, each product with its own separate considerations of distribution and consumption. So whether an instance of sequelization or transmedia extension, media franchising proliferates from a logic of multiplied production, rather than multiplied distribution. Franchising is not generally about intellectual property holders trying to acquire the theater chains, television networks, and big box stores that interface with consumers; instead, it multiplies the sites of content production. In addition, that content production is modulated at the same time as it is multiplied. While franchise products like Coca-Cola and McDonald's hamburgers are mass produced—each item coming off the assembly line should be identical to the next—it would be more accurate to consider franchised media content as *serially* produced.

Though Janet Staiger characterizes studio-era Hollywood filmmaking in terms of mass production, she stresses that "filmmaking mass production never reached the assembly-line degree of rigidity that it did in other industries. Rather it remained a manufacturing division of labor with craftsmen collectively and serially producing a commodity."[63] Franchised media production is no different, generating variation among different product offerings. In a bottling franchise, manufacturers like Coca-Cola produce syrup in a wide variety of different flavors and sell it to a local distributor to mix with water according to a specific recipe. In a media franchise, corporations do frequently sell and/or share commodities to be used in local processes of production, but that commodity is intangible and the final product more negotiable. Although it may come with style guides, processes of approval, and other managerial instruments, the shared intellectual property does not come with a complete recipe for its use: the franchise producer must figure out what to do with it within the bounds allowed, and how to make that use sufficiently differentiable to find a market. Comparatively, no one at the bottling company is expected to come up with innovative ways to use the manufacturer's syrup. So while retail franchising creates new outlets to physically connect uniform product to consumers in local markets,[64] in the media industries, where content differentiation is a key to profitability, the point of franchising is to connect intellectual property resources with producers who can generate new kinds of products.

Another potential difference lies in the decreased reliance of media franchising on licensing agreements with partners external to corporate organizations. In the case of the *High School Musical* franchise, for example, a significant percentage of content production could be organized within the confines of the Walt Disney Company without recourse to licensed labor. As *High School Musical* moved beyond television and into the film, music, and video games markets, the horizontally integrated Disney conglomerate could manage that expansion internally through its subsidiary divisions. As Janet Wasko explains, every division of Disney often participates in the mobilization of its content brands: each intellectual property is conceived as a wheel whose spokes represent corporate subsidiaries in parallel position to exploit it.[65] Other conglomerates like Time Warner are no different, holding copyright and trademark to franchises like *Batman* and using them to support content production across film (*Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*), television animation (*Batman: The Brave and the Bold*), and comic book publishing (*Detective Comics*, *Batman and Robin*). While many Disney, Time Warner, and other conglomerate-driven productions are imagined as franchises, there is often no franchisee contracted by a franchisor at first glance.

Conglomeration seems to have obviated the ongoing industrial relations associated with franchising in retail.

But upon closer examination, these seemingly monolithic conglomerates complicate the social relations of franchising rather than eliminate them. If we look a little deeper, we see that even conglomerates like Disney and Time Warner enter into contractual agreements with independent parties seeking mutual beneficence. Disney did not single-handedly produce the *High School Musical* phenomenon, eventually relying upon licensed partners like toy manufacturer Mattel for merchandising efforts farther down market. Time Warner too contracts with companies like Electronic Arts and Mattel to produce *Batman* games and toys, respectively. While these licensed production partnerships between fellow Fortune 500 companies differ markedly from relations between national retail franchisors and their family-owned outlets, they speak to the persistence of social relations within industrial models understood through franchising. Most other media conglomerates like Viacom, CBS, NewsCorp, and Universal have also acquired vast intellectual property holdings in film, TV, and print, but their interest in franchising them through merchandising and emerging digital media consistently leads them to industrial contexts in which they do not have their own foothold. Having examined contemporary and historical media respectively, Simone Murray and Avi Santo remind us that conglomeration does not stand in opposition to continued licensing. Even if Time Warner and Disney held their own toy companies, they might prefer the flexibility of outsourcing this productive labor to minimize risk, investment, and/or management hassles.[66] These licensees pay an initial license fee and share a percentage of their revenues with the conglomerate licensor, and though these are production relations rather than distributive ones, the economic and relational continuity with retail franchising is quite keen in that respect. If anything, the continued interest of media conglomerates in licensing reminds us of the true status of franchised retail operations like McDonald's —national and later transnational companies that forge contractual partnerships when convenient, but do not hesitate to take ownership of outlets when more advantageous.

Given the persistence of licensed relations within conglomeration, media franchising is similarly constituted in practice by the management of shared resources. Much like retail franchisees, contracted media partners can become disillusioned in the relationships permitted by the system and take action to resolve the dilemma. For example, video game publisher Activision secured in 1998 a ten-year master licensing agreement that permitted it exclusive rights to any aspect of the *Star Trek* franchise. Five years into the partnership, however, Activision sued Viacom for mismanaging the franchise and devaluing the license. According to the legal complaint:

> A continuing pipeline of movie and television production, and related marketing, is absolutely crucial to the success of video games based on a property such as *Star Trek*. . . . By failing and refusing to continue to exploit and support the *Star Trek* franchise as it had promised, Viacom has significantly diminished the value of *Star Trek* licensing rights including the rights received by Activision. Moreover, in so doing, Viacom has breached a fundamental term of its agreement . . . and has caused Activision significant damage.[67]

Though Activision was merely a tenant of the *Star Trek* property, its legal maneuvering claimed real economic stakes in the franchise nonetheless.

Furthermore, even when conglomerates forego licensing, their sustained interest in the multiplied production of franchising might remind us of the persistence of collaborative—and often ambivalent—production relations between stakeholders inhabiting the same shared corporate hierarchies. As Andrew Currah argues following his own interviews with media executives, corporate decision makers often have limited incentives to pursue initiatives requiring internal coordination. Subsidiaries are generally ruled as mini-fiefdoms, with leaders earning social capital by the relative strength of their divisions. Thus, decision makers competing for status under the same corporate umbrella have somewhat unaligned interests to be negotiated in the social relations of resource sharing.[68] Sharing content across divisions, therefore, requires cooperation contrary to social stratifications within corporate culture, and thus a negotiation of unequal status and interest. Furthermore, even in intra-industrial franchising under the aegis of single executives, solidarity among creative personnel working in different institutional nodes cannot be guaranteed. Ira Steven Behr, the executive producer of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (the fourth television series in the franchise, airing concurrently with *The Next Generation* and *Voyager*) resisted studio suggestions that his series cooperate creatively and share resources within the franchise, seeking to establish a unique niche.[69] Corporate structures thus do not guarantee cooperation at a production level without managerial and creative negotiation of the industrial relations that cooperation would require. Moreover, though their terms remain different from those of retailing franchising, contracts also play a significant role in structuring these relationships and defining the stakes media workers hold in conglomerate franchise production. While media license holders pay intellectual property owners for the right to participate in the multiplication of production, neither licensed creative laborers nor creative laborers working directly for the intellectual property holder enjoy any claim of ownership over their contributions. Even in direct employ of conglomerates, media workers still operate contractually as for-hire labor without definitive power over the resources they use in the course of their labor and in which they hold creative stakes as a result. This requires negotiation not just with corporate employers, but also with any other worker authorized to use those shared resources. Though a corporate entity may hold economic ownership of trademarked and copyrighted intellectual properties, franchised production from them requires contractual exchange and sharing across the social relations of industry.

To be clear, media franchising is not equivalent to retail franchising, offering a modulated set of industrial organizations and social relations. The conceptual yield of the comparison, however, comes in recognizing the significance of social relations, however different, to the industrial operation of media franchising (just as in the traditional retail sense). This understanding of media franchising as similarly constituted by social relations can actually help us to conceptualize its specificities as an industrial system for producing and reproducing culture, rather than its distribution. As the multiplication of production from cultural resources shared across a network of social and labor relations within the media industries, a franchised television concept like *CSI*, for example, can be understood as a cultural resource—the premise of hi-tech crime scene investigators solving mysteries in visually flashy ways—shared across productions concurrent or successive to the original. Television, comic books, and other episodic and/or serialized media forms lend themselves well to franchising in this regard, in that every premise must support ongoing elaboration in installments that will be produced in different industrial contexts by different writers, artists, and crews. Franchise systems support serialization and sequelization to keep generating content over time—whether confined to a single medium like television or multiplied more promiscuously across media. Content is aimed at repeatability and multiplication—and a focus on the industrial relations of franchising calls our attention to the social nature of that ongoing exchange. In that light, the industrial structures of franchising can be distinguished by at least two modes of social interactions: *inter-industrial* franchising (transmedia extension across the social and industrial context of multiple media industries) and *intra-industrial* franchising (multiplication across productions in a single medium or institutional context). Certainly, these two modes overlap: *CSI* has multiplied across television production contexts, while video game publisher Ubi Soft has released several *CSI* titles (including *Dark Motive*, *3 Dimensions of a*

Murder, and *Hard Evidence*) and comic book publisher IDW has fielded at least one comic book miniseries for each television series. Nevertheless, in both instances, the franchising of *CSI* is best understood not as a brand or even a narrative, but as the multiplication and exchange of cultural resources across a network of industrial relations.

Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman theorize games as systems that, once put into play, allow the emergence of unpredictable behaviors by users of the system.[70] Not all media share all the qualities of games, but I believe that similarly systemic approaches to cultural production have the advantage of pointing analysis toward the inputs, outputs, and relationships among moving parts in complex social networks of production. By putting users of the franchise system in socially networked relationships through exchange of industrial resources, media franchising offers a potential analog antecedent to the social networks and participatory production models of the digital age. In that light, the difference between intra- and inter-industrial franchises proves particularly apt, describing both networks internal to a medium (intranets) and those that cross institutional and cultural media boundaries (internets). Just as Tim Berners-Lee and others designed the World Wide Web interface as a means to link data sets to one another in a persistent, decentralized structure,[71] franchising has created links between content production in different institutional spaces and temporal contexts, making them nodes in a shared, institutionally and culturally meaningful structure.

The meaningfulness of this structure, moreover, is a crucial factor. While this discussion may reveal some potential insights into media industries by drawing a comparison to the organizational systems and social relations of traditional retail franchising, what matters more is the fact that the connection had already been made in the cultural imaginary with which that industry is understood. Because both media industries and their critics have historically imagined cultural production in these terms, I am less interested in the aptness of the metaphor than the cultural consequences of a metaphorical understanding of cultural production already in play. This requires that we try to understand franchising not solely as a pattern of social relations and industrial structures, but as a historical discourse for making sense of those structures.

Making Meaning of Multiplication

Although it is dangerous to get too caught up in a single term, I argue that it matters that the industry and its critics imagine and organize media production in terms of franchising. The discourse of franchising articulates specific values and meanings to cultural production that would not be activated if we called such multiplied and collaborative production by any other name. The discursivity of the term often makes franchising as much a slippery cultural logic as any kind of fixed industrial strategy or mode of production. This discourse has been deployed to estimate the value of the *Peanuts* comic strip and all of its attendant advertising and licensing, with the trade publication *Advertising Age* finding in 2010 that, indeed, "It's a Great Franchise, Charlie Brown."[72] At the same time, marketers at Warner Bros. Television Distribution claimed franchise identity to express their own sense of industrial self-esteem. In the headline of an undoubtedly expensive four-page foldout color advertisement attached to the front page of *Broadcasting & Cable* in January 2010, Warner Brothers exclaimed, "nothing speaks louder than the familiar voice of a proven franchise." Followed by images of syndicated programs as diverse as *The People's Court*, *Cold Case*, *Best of Tyra*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Ellen*, *Extra*, *TMZ*, and *The Closer*, this ad claimed franchise status in such a wide-reaching manner as to fully synonymize the multiplicity of franchising with episodic television production. The messy discourse of franchising has indeed called into question any definition based solely in observed industrial structures or networks of social relations.

So when asking industry practitioners to talk about franchising in relation to their own subjective experiences, I found myself asking them to theorize it as much as talking about nuts and bolts strategies. These practitioners did deploy the imaginative framework of franchising to make sense of this systematic multiplication of cultural production—but in complex and contradictory ways that belied the cultural work at play in making sense of industry. As senior executive vice president of Programming Operations for CBS Television, Kelly Kahl described franchising in terms of "digital extensions," focusing on the need to augment television content to capture viewer attention in emerging media markets (and thereby direct attention back to television).[73] Similarly, a television executive working to extend intellectual properties from television into mobile video and game applications framed his interest in franchising in terms of the multiplication of content across "platforms."[74] Danny Bilson, a writer who had worked on films, video games, and television programs like *The Sentinel*, and later became executive vice president for game publisher THQ, offered a further systematized theorization in defining a franchise as a "stable engine" that could "power" the ongoing production of content (be it 100 episodes of television, or digital extensions of that program across platforms). "What's the repeated experience?" Bilson asks. "What's the franchise for the show?"[75] Ed Skolarus, a programming executive at the now defunct Fox Reality Channel, echoed this logic in suggesting that he sought "franchise shows . . . [s]omething [where] you produce 30 episodes every year. . . . You're looking at the repeatability."[76] In these practitioner theorizations of industry practice, a franchise is that which offered resources to the media industries to systematically produce more content.

Yet many professionals also responded to questions about franchising with disavowal or evasion. One licensing executive stated that before talking to me, she had never heard the term in the course of her everyday practice of negotiating licenses. This particular cultural shorthand apparently did not hold explanatory purchase within her subjective experience of the industry.[77] At the same time, creative personnel more familiar with the notion of franchising outwardly dismissed its relevance to their day-to-day work. Marti Noxon, a writer who has worked on the television spin-offs *Private Practice* and *Angel*, explained that "[t]he truth is that I have very little to do with 'franchising. . . .' All we do is try to extend a creative enterprise into a new world."[78] Though her characterization of her work as creative extension from existing resources fits the multiplicative definitions offered by other practitioners, the discourse of franchising is not one that Noxon was eager to reflexively mobilize to give meaning to her creative practices. The economic connotations of franchising had to be managed and downplayed in favor of focus on the creative enterprise that better fit her sense of professional identity. Noxon is not alone in constructing a professional identity in opposition to franchising. With some industry analysts talking about Disney's potential to continue franchising the cult television series *Lost* after its conclusion in 2010, for example, showrunner Carlton Cuse sought to disarticulate this possibility from his own sense of creative enterprise. "It's a franchise that's conservatively worth billions of dollars. . . . Sometimes the franchise transcends the storyteller," Cuse explained to *Hollywood Reporter* in acknowledgment of franchising as an economic practice. He distanced himself and called the creative legitimacy of that practice into question, however, by adding that "[t]he definitive edition of 'Lost' ends this May. . . . It has a beginning, middle and end."[79] Cuse repeated these sentiments in other venues, suggesting a concerted attempt to claim professional identity in opposition to this franchising.[80]

Even in this negative sense of disavowal, franchising has become an industrial imaginary for media workers to position themselves in relation to and to reflect upon in their practice—particularly as other workers and larger media institutions increasingly embrace it as a logic for organizing and giving meaning to that practice. In some cases, franchising has even become an object of self-reflexive meta-commentary. After a multiyear run as writer of DC Comics' flagship *Batman* title, for example, in 2010 Grant Morrison presented a new entry in the franchise, called *Batman Incorporated*. Positing that Batman's alter ego, Bruce Wayne, has begun multiplying his crime-fighting operations by licensing his resources and trademarked persona to superheroes across the globe, the comic book reflects as much upon the industrialized nature of producing *Batman* as it seeks to create a new chapter in the ongoing mythos. The industrialized practices of franchising that organize creativity become the subject under creative examination. In other cases, franchising has more simply been deployed in industrial attempts to theorize new strategies and economic models for organizing creative production. In 2008, upstart firms like the Bureau of Film and Games offered their services as contractors to those in control of or seeking to control intellectual properties, promising to "create and develop intellectual properties that become franchises across multiple media."[81] Even my own failed attempts to secure research interviews at Disney confirmed franchising as a dominant discourse with great importance and meaning for industrialized media production. As one executive who rejected my request explained:

> Indeed, franchise management is one of my key areas of focus, and an area of great strategic importance to our company. Unfortunately, we get many requests for interviews on this topic, and I'm afraid I simply can't do it because (1) there are lots of requests, and we can't handle them, and (2) this is an area of strategic differentiation, so we generally don't care to speak about our franchise/brand management practices and processes. You have chosen a very current topic, . . . and when you are on the job market, you should certainly keep in touch with us![82]

Seeing franchising as a valuable means to organize and make sense of media industries, this Disney employee protected access to that imaginary, even while expressing ongoing interest in the project of trying to discover what franchising might mean. So even in its slipperiness, franchising plays a powerful role in giving meaning to both creative practice and business models. Even Shakespearian actor Patrick Stewart tells reporters, based on his experience working on both *Star Trek* and *X-Men*: "I don't have a film career. . . . I have a franchise career."[83]

This franchise imaginary operates within the popular sphere, too. In 2002, *Newsweek* declared Hollywood to be in the midst of "franchise fever," criticizing sequel extension and merchandise multiplication with the accusation that "[a] franchise movie typically works backward from the Happy Meal to the plot."[84] Such popular discourse often devalued the industrial multiplication of cultural production by explicitly invoking its imagined connection to the world of fast food culture maligned in contemporaneous books like *Fast Food Nation*, films like *Super Size Me*, and even an activist game at mcvideogame.com simulating the deleterious effects of McDonald's corporate organization on working conditions and the environment. This same fast food franchising metaphor was also used in 2011 by Council of Foreign Relations President Richard Haass to describe the criminal organization Al Qaeda as "the golden arches of terror."[85] In giving meaning to media production, therefore, this franchise imaginary has not been culturally neutral. While some have embraced it as a logic for making sense of media production and professional identities within it, others have deployed it as a scathing criticism of those same industrial forces. In either case, franchising remains a powerful means of making sense of and imagining the value of industrialized media production.

Of course, in asking about franchising, I have prompted industrial professionals to theorize it in ways that may have unfolded differently had I not posed the question. Therefore, it may be equally useful to consider some of the contexts in which franchising has been imagined into industrial being without prompting by researchers. Furthermore, that kind of examination could seek to answer how the discourse of franchising came to make sense of media production in the first place. So if not imagined into being simply through the analysis of this research, when did the historical process of imagining and structuring media culture by reference to franchising actually begin?

This cultural question demands different answers than a history of franchising as merely a set of stable production practices, economic mobilizations, and narrative strategies would suggest. To trace the history of franchising as a production logic based in replication and reproduction, we could perhaps most radically look to works like the Christian Bible as an evolving franchise constituted by the exchange of its stories over centuries between different contexts of production, including not just translations of the text, but also religious painting and icons that reiterated those stories in new ways. We could quibble about the industrial nature of that production over most of its history (most often underwritten by the religious institutions instead of commercial ones). However, with the rise of mass media, that reproduction became resolutely industrial as biblical stories were made into films like *The Ten Commandments*—in 1923, 1956, and again in 2007. Even more appropriately, the cross-promoted novel and video series *Left Behind* drew from the Book of Revelation (or at least certain wild interpretations of it), leveraging its end-time narratives across industries in an ever-renewable stream of content.

While this potentially heretical description of the reproduction of the Bible has the added drawback of casting franchising in an almost ahistorical, omnipresent shade, we could alternatively find more concrete examples through the industrialization of mass culture in the first part of the twentieth century. As Roger Hagedorn argues, many emerging media industries—including newspapers, radio, film, and television—adopted ongoing, serialized forms of cultural production in their infancy as a means of generating audience interest and loyalty.[86] Barbara Selznick has similarly uncovered the way that this seriality permitted interplay between emerging media industries, with serials like *The Adventures of Kathlyn* being produced as both an ongoing newspaper feature and a film series in 1913 to cross-promote and amplify mass audience interest in both industries.[87] And if this promotion of serial properties anticipated the transmedia narratives of inter-industrial franchising, the rise of early film sequels—and even crossovers—suggests a similar precedence for intra-industrial multiplication. At Universal Studios, monster concepts like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Mummy* were multiplied and exchanged across a number of film productions between 1931 and the end of the studio era. Comedy teams like Abbott and Costello offered Universal a similar opportunity for reproduction across dozens of films in the 1940s and '50s, with that continued industrial exchange reaching beyond its initial genre formations with the production of the 1948 crossover film *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Any number of similar multiplications of production within and across industrial relations could be identified. As a mode of multiplied production and industrial exchange across production contexts, franchising would have quite a long history.

The cultural imagination of these productions as franchising, however, is far more historically circumscribed. In 2002, *Newsweek* identified Universal's *The Mummy* as a franchise begun with the 1932 film.[88] Yet in 1932, no such discourse was in play to make sense of that ongoing production; remember that the language of franchising would not come to be deployed in even the retail industries until 1959, despite the preexistence of the economic practices and relationships that would come to be known as franchising. *Newsweek*'s description of *The Mummy*, therefore, effectively franchised it, performing cultural work on it by articulating it to a specific historical strategy for making sense of industry. As a discourse, franchising is a far more recent phenomenon that can work to reframe historical practice. To look back upon historical texts like *Little Orphan Annie* organized and licensed across the production of radio, comic, and merchandised content and call it franchising would be to read back onto it an anachronistic cultural logic. Moreover, while we certainly could describe the Bible as a franchise, the resistance such a statement would likely face extends at least in part from a disconnect between dominant cultural meanings and values accorded the work (timeless, self-evident, authentic), and the reworking posed by making sense of it as franchising (historical, produced, replicated). Franchising has not just organized systemic structures and social relations; as a discourse, it also carries imaginative meaning, value, and history.

Franchising discourse does not come borrowed exclusively from the retail industries of the 1950s and 1960s, as early U.S. telecommunications policy had framed both broadcast licensing and the operation of municipal cable monopolies as franchise rights bestowed upon those who would act as stewards of the media on behalf of a public interest. However, with these regulations speaking to distribution of media content, and not its production, the meaning of franchising in relation to media work at some point took on an alternative significance to describe the shared production and multiplication of content. Identifying that shift is no easy task, but a crucial link between postwar retail cultures, media regulation, and local children's television hints at how the logic of franchising may have been extended on an imaginative level to make sense of cultural production. With national broadcast networks far more interested in appealing to lucrative primetime audiences, the programming of morning and especially afternoon hours when children were assumed to watch television fell largely to local broadcasters. While many of these local broadcasters chose to purchase programming from syndicators, others, like Baltimore's CBS affiliate, experimented with producing their own children's fare, resulting in series like *Romper Room* in 1953. Though CBS offered to distribute the program nationwide following its successful reception, creators Bert and Nancy Claster looked to the booming fast food and service industries for alternative inspiration.[89] Instead of syndicated or network distribution, why not sell directly to other local broadcasters the rights to produce their own version of *Romper Room*? By the 1960s, the format would be sold to more than 100 local broadcasters in the United States as well as those in Australia, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Recognizing this collision of retail business formatting and media exchanges, Albert Moran suggests that "1953 may come to be recognized as a key date that saw not only the establishment of new fast food restaurant franchising . . . but also saw the franchising of *Romper Room* as a harbinger of the TV programme format industry that was to come."[90] Nor was *Romper Room* the only children's television program tied up in both this industrial logic and its fast food cultural imaginary. The *Bozo the Clown* show followed a similar production model starting in 1956, eventually extending to Mexico, Greece, and Brazil. Evidencing the continued proximity between *Bozo* and the fast food industry, Willard Scott claims that his creation of the Ronald McDonald character for McDonald's "was really born out of the Bozo show in Washington [D.C.]."[91] As the local Bozo from 1959 to 1962, Scott had presided over the opening of a local McDonald's in character; after the cancellation of the local program brought an end to his Bozo performance, the fast food franchisee asked him to create a new clown character for their outlet in 1963. Once only imagined in the same terms, the franchising of Bozo and of McDonald's restaurants became formally entwined. Ultimately, these developments in children's culture suggest a nexus of imaginative interplay, whereby the multiplication of television production came to be envisioned in the same franchised terms as fast food retail.

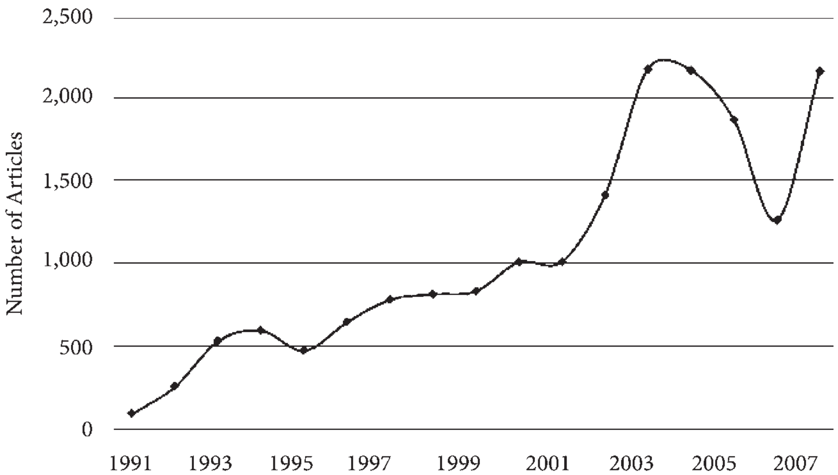
Emerging from the margins of local children's television, the imagination of media production as franchising did not come to discursive dominance overnight. However, the success of programs like *Romper Room* that were focused on children's fantasy play brought the possibilities of multiplied production to the attention of potential collaborators, as well as critics. By the 1970s, *Romper Room* had attracted the eye of both toymaker Hasbro, which saw the reach of series as a potential marketing outlet, and activist group Action for Children's Television (ACT), which took issue with the fact that "a major purpose of the program is to promote its toy products."[92] While ACT continued to push for greater regulation of marketing to children, Hasbro used *Romper Room* not only as a platform for promoting its existing product, but also further manufacturing branded *Romper Room* toys. The so-called program-length commercials later produced by Hasbro in the 1980s to promote its toy lines—*G.I. Joe, Transformers*, and *My Little Pony*—should therefore be considered in direct lineage to its partnerships in local children's television production. As the strategies and industrial relations initially imagined as franchising in local children's television came to be adopted more broadly, that cultural imaginary was not always as fast to travel, however. Flint Dille, who later founded the franchise-oriented Ground Zero Productions and the Bureau of Film and Games, does not recall his time working as a writer for the 1984 animated *Transformers* series (and the 1986 feature film) as one explicitly conceived in the same terms of franchising. While the series was produced in partnership between Marvel Productions, toymaker Hasbro, and Sunbow (the creative agency that employed Dille), the tactical challenges of producing 65 episodes a year prevented much reflection about franchising or desire to do too much coordination in using the characters across media. Instead, he suggests that only after productions like this found success in the 1980s did executives, agents, and creators alike begin to self-reflexively theorize this production logic and imagine its strategies for television and toy marketing in specific terms like franchising.[93]

Based on his analysis of media fandom, Henry Jenkins seems to concur that the discourse of media franchising first acquired significant industrial usage—at least to the degree that consumers would become aware of it—around 1991. Conducting his ongoing ethnographic research of *Star Trek* fans at the end of the 1980s, he observed little fan imagination of the series as a franchise, despite the fact that *Star Trek* had already been extended across films, books, and more. It was only after the death of series creator Gene Roddenberry in 1991, Jenkins recalls, that rights holder Paramount, in a position of both economic and now greater creative and moral authority, began to commonly refer to *Star Trek* as a franchise—much to the chagrin of some fans who disliked the mass-produced connotations.[94] Yet over time, this logic of franchising came to be significantly embraced and even celebrated by fans. In an online discussion of video game culture, for example, one contemporary fan writes, "I'll almost certainly get Lost and any Indiana Jones games, just out of love for those franchises."[95] Taking a more contradictory position on the replication of franchising in taking to task a positive review of Michael Bay's 2007 *Transformers* film, another wrote: "Your mindless praise for Bay's raping of a great franchise was as retarded and simple-minded as you wanted to pretend the 80's [*Transformers* television series] was."[96] Clearly displeased with the film, this viewer could express his/her ongoing fandom nonetheless by reference to a continuing franchise made up of many discrete and differentiable production nodes (ablism and casual references to rape aside). Franchising functioned imaginatively to make sense of the ongoing reproduction of culture by media industries through an affective compartmentalization.

The gradual rise to dominance of franchising as a means of making cultural sense of industrialized media production can be borne out by an analysis of the term's use in narratives published by the Hollywood trade press. First, the *Variety Review Database*, a collection of film reviews from the trade publication dating back to 1914, suggests little attempt to understand film production in terms of franchising until the early 1990s. The first film to be referred to as a franchise by *Variety* reviewers was the 1992 Disney adventure-comedy, *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*, the sequel to 1989's *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*: as the reviewer wrote, "The 'Honey' franchise is Disney's contemporary equivalent of its successful 1960s special effects comedies featuring Fred MacMurray's absent-minded professor."[97] This suggests that for trade reviewers, at least, franchise discourse only started to have purchase in the early 1990s—despite any formal "equivalencies" to earlier Hollywood production models. A second survey of articles from *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter* (the two trade publications most likely to report on both intra- and inter-industrial trends across film, television, and video games) also suggests that this emerging franchising discourse came into far more significant usage by the end of the decade. A search for every available full-text document to refer to media in terms of a "franchise" from 1991 to 2008 returned a substantial 18,079 articles (8,111 from *Variety* and 9,968 from *Hollywood Reporter*). Of the 93 *Hollywood Reporter* articles returned for 1991, for example, only 28 significantly referred to the multiplied production of media content like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Saved By the Bell*, *America's Funniest Home Videos*, and *Batman*. The remaining majority referred to franchising in the context of distribution, regulating cable franchises, growing Blockbuster video franchises, and media licensing deals signed with fast food franchises. Instead of referring to multiplied production, franchising suggested more of a sense of market niche and channel identity when it was exclaimed that "CNN has the franchise when it comes to global news coverage,"[98] or that the Nashville Network would introduce a new live concert series to "strengthen its music franchise."[99] Franchising did emerge in discussions about the curbed potential for further production following the box office failure of *The Rocketeer* ("as to subsequent sequels, all those polled expected the film to have little chance of being the first of a franchise"[100]), but this notion was by no means a dominant meaning.

From 1992 onward, however, franchise discourse began growing at a considerable rate, and by 1993 that discourse centered more on the production of content like *Star Trek*, *Terminator*, *Mr. Bean*, *Look Who's Talking*, *Matlock*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Today*, *NBC Nightly News*, and the Super Bowl than franchise regulation or niche network identities. The balance of franchise discourse shifted toward describing the ongoing production of content across a range of genres and industrial contexts. There were 157 total discussions of media franchises across both publications in 1992, but that ballooned to 532 in 1993, and reached more than 1,000 by the year 2000.The initial imagination of multiplied media production as and through franchising certainly may have occurred prior, but the expansion evidenced here suggests that it came into discursive dominance in the media industries in the 1990s.

So, although we could look today at something like *Star Trek* and consider it a franchise, and even look back to the 1960s and 1970s to uncover the origins of that franchising (as chapter 3 will), it was not until the 1990s that expansive productions like these were rendered widely legible as franchising in both industrial and popular discourse. The significance of this difference



Trade discussion of franchising in *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*, 1991–2007.

comes from the realization that media industries have been worked upon by this discourse, and that cultural work is not without its effects.

Gendering Production

As a culturally constructed means of producing difference, gender is itself a discourse—a way of imagining distinctions, giving essential meaning to them, and organizing groups of people into social hierarchies on that basis. As a culturally constructed means of understanding and giving meaning to the culture industries, meanwhile, franchising has frequently worked through gendered logics. The social relations and multiplied production practices of franchising, on the one hand, have been frequently structured by gender. The imagination of that production in the terms of franchising, on the other, has been tied up in gendered meanings and values. Understanding media franchising as a cultural phenomenon, therefore, means finally conceptualizing it in terms of the meaningful differences used to both shape and make sense of the industrial reproduction of culture.

To develop franchise iterations attuned to the increasing niche market orientation of post-Fordist media industries over the past 20–30 years, industrial actors have relied upon gender as a primary means of differentiation to govern multiplication. In television, for example, where franchise multiplication often results from the creation of spin-offs, new series have long been imagined as gendered variations of the parent. *Xena: Warrior*

Princess offered a powerfully feminized variation on *Hercules*. Reality television spin-offs like *The Bachelorette* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl* similarly invert the gendered identity of the original production. Clip show *The Soup* has spawned the more female-marketed spin-off *The Dish* as well as the more masculinized *Sports Soup*. Appropriate to the origins of the franchising imaginary, franchising propagates through children's popular culture as well, where gender difference is deployed both to satisfy marketing logics and in the name of policing proper childhood development. Not coincidentally, franchising comes to industrial dominance in parallel to what Emilie Zazlow calls "girl power media culture"—an ideology that simultaneously reifies gender difference and rejects masculine/feminine dualisms, thereby asking girls to "identify both as traditionally feminine objects and powerful feminist agents."[101] Zaslow takes issue with girl power media culture for commodifying opposition to traditional femininity and rendering it less potent, and an analysis of media franchising can forward that feminist critique by showing how the gendered diversification of often masculinized franchises like *Batman*, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, and *Super Mario Bros.* worked to be more inclusive of young girls, yet simultaneously enclosed feminized power fantasies within a gender-specific space. The gendered multiplication of production has thus often confined feminine power to specific production and reception contexts within the resulting franchise.

For example, the premise of *She-Ra: Princess of Power* held that He-Man, the muscle-bound protector of the planet Eternia, had a twin sister similarly sworn to defend the planet Etheria. Thus, the original television series and toy line multiplied into a second set of products aimed at young girls—part of what scholar Gary Cross referred to as a "me too" industrial strategy.[102] Dave Capper, director of marketing for *He-Man* manufacturer Mattel, explained that he sought "open-ended, timeless fantasy that can be adapted to changing play patterns."[103] Market research proving the appeal of the *He-Man* concept to young girls, moreover, suggested that this open-ended fantasy could be effectively adapted to them: girls were believed to constitute a significant one-third of its television audience. Furthermore, Mattel found that 10 percent of all *He-Man* action figures were purchased for or by young girls.[104] Thus, in the context of the emerging franchising logic reshaping children's media, girls offered a lucrative opportunity for leveraging the *He-Man* concept. Such "me too" franchising might therefore be considered foundational in the history of girl power media culture, and as such, fraught with contradiction between the rejection of traditional feminine ideals and the reification of gender difference. As a warrior woman, She-Ra could be powerful, but gender-defined marketing logic prevented her from being powerful in exactly the same way as *He-Man*. As many critics noted, while He-Man was quick to solve problems through violence and aggression, She-Ra proved more likely to use magic and cleverness than muscle and sword. Though critics like Joanne Oppenheim and Peggy Bulger disagreed as to whether these gendered differences empowered or disempowered girls in relation to boys, this franchised multiplication sought to divorce a once co-ed market, using gender to structure the production of different kinds of power fantasies.[105]

Indeed, according to toy marketer Paul Kurnit, children's culture industries had little reason to pursue mixed gendered audiences. Executives like Kurnit viewed gender in the biological terms of a "hormonal space" that encouraged boys and girls to embrace different cultural experiences.[106] Even when recognizing the potential for cross-gender play, Kurnit perceived obstacles both in potential parental discomfort with it, and the belief in industry lore that play too inclusive of femininity would alienate boys. With this need to cordon off masculinity from femininity, franchising gave Mattel and its television partners a means to create a space specially marked for girl power, rather than an inclusive one. The franchising logic taking hold in children's culture in the 1980s, therefore, effectively reversed the mass marketing dynamics of the 1910s, where, according to Barbara Selznick, serials like *The Adventures of Kathlyn* had been deployed across multiple industries in order to create common appeals across divisions of gender and class.[107] Instead, with the case of emerging franchises like *He-Man/She-Ra*, the multiplication of television and toy production through spin-off practices aimed at breaking down the mass audience into more differentiable segments. The effectiveness of this gender-divisive franchised production, however, remains in some question. In November 1985, ratings data indicated that 2.9 million households viewed *He-Man*, whereas 2.8 million watched *She-Ra*.[108] Usually block scheduled in first-run syndication, it is likely that the evenly matched audiences for these series overlapped by gender more than they diverged, with brothers and sisters often watching both together. Identifying *She-Ra* as a queer icon, *The Advocate* notes that many boys played with *She-Ra* toys outright and others encouraged their sisters to ask for the toys so that they might be played with in secret.[109] Furthermore, the spin-off television series' frequent use of villains from the *He-Man* toy line encouraged the overlap toy manufacturers sought to avoid. So although franchised production strategies may have sought to reify gendered boundaries, those lines of division were frequently crossed at the level of consumption.

If *She-Ra* provides insight into the gendered production logics of franchise spin-offs, we might understand the way gender structures the exchange of resources used in production by looking to *Gotham Girls*, the Flash animation web series that similarly extended Warner Bros.' *Batman: The Animated Series* from television to online video in 2000. Produced at the height of girl power media culture, these three- to four-minute webisodes focused on Batgirl with appearances by female villains from the *Batman* rogues gallery like Catwoman, Harley Quinn, and Poison Ivy. The ten-episode serialized narrative arc of the third season, moreover, evinced the gendered logic by which narrative elements of the *Batman* franchise would and would not be used. The season begins with every single male character disappearing off the face of the earth (into another dimension, of course), leaving just women to occupy the narrative. Surprisingly, this mystery also introduces to the franchise the character of a transgendered female cop—though her disappearance along with the rest of the men of Gotham suggests a biological gender essentialism, and makes clear that there is no room for even former men in the series. Though familiar male character Commissioner Gordon returns mid-season as an antagonist (forcing Batgirl to join forces with the female villains), it is revealed in the last episode that he was only ever a robot replicant created by his female assistant, Dora. Revealed as the villain, Dora falls into a vat of liquid nitrogen, becoming a "Ms. Freeze" to stand in for established Batman adversary Mr. Freeze. *Gotham Girls* offers its female empowerment not by making femininity more equal to masculinity, but by refusing to make use of franchise resources not marked by femininity and producing new markers of femininity in place of the masculine elements extracted. So, while the web series creates a space for the production of girl power within the *Batman* franchise, it does so by putting it in a vacuum devoid of masculinity.

In his study of gender and video gaming, Nick Yee argues that the reason fewer women play games than men has not to do with content, but rather it is because of their lack of social access to the masculinized "hardcore" gaming culture.[110] I similarly want to suggest that if franchising is ever assumed to be the province of boys and men, it is because the production practices of franchising have limited the social access of girls to specific arenas within those franchise cultures. In using social differences like gender to multiply production, franchising cleaves newly gendered audiences off from another market focus. Rather than just being an economic force of marketing and capital, media franchising is a site of social and cultural reproduction where gender difference is structured, policed, and given value. Put another way, we tend to think about media franchises mostly in terms of sameness and homogeneity, but these examples suggest that franchises function as much through markers of difference very much worth our attention. The promise of franchised girl power has often been just that—girl power—not power or power fantasies shared equally with boys.

The gender differences that structure multiplied franchise production, moreover, have also given it meaning and value. Spun-off or replicated productions of franchising like *She-Ra* or *Gotham Girls* have rarely accrued as many perceptions of legitimacy and cultural value as the originals, and whether products have been differentiated by gender or not, that devaluation of industrial production has often been tied to gendered ideas and ideals. As a means of imagining industrialized media production, franchising imbues it with both economic and cultural values informed by gender. Indeed, the industrial production of culture has long been gendered as feminine in opposition to more legitimated and authenticated masculine cultures.[111] In amplifying the repetitious logic underpinning episodic and serial forms like television, and highlighting its industrial basis, it is exceedingly likely that the imagination of cultural production in the terms of franchising would intersect with what Charlotte Brunsdon calls "the historical connotative femininity of mass culture" as a whole.[112] A feminist analysis of the discourse of media franchising, however, reveals it as a complex and contradictorily gendered phenomenon in which tensions between the feminized devaluation of industrially produced culture and the masculine value accorded economic rationality are negotiated. Throughout these cultural negotiations, gender has often anchored the imagination of what franchising is and how the production practices and products it generates should be valued. In the franchise imaginary undergirding both popular and trade discourse, therefore, we can see how the cultural and economic values accorded to multiplied media production work through these contradictory gender codes.

For example, while the CW's *Gossip Girl* fits squarely into the feminized soap genre and its modes of serial production, the program simultaneously acquired distinctions of greater institutional and economic legitimacy through its imagination as a franchise. Its culturally devalued feminization sat in opposition to an industrial value based in economic rationality. Focusing on petty jealousies, social backstabbing, and other melodramatic conflicts facing New York socialites Blair Waldorf and Serena van der Woodsen (in service of the CW television network's desire to reach young female consumers), *Gossip Girl* sits in odd relation to the intergalactic explorers and tough detectives of series like *Star Trek* or *Law & Order* more typically associated with franchising. Nevertheless, it was precisely the ability of trade discourse to imagine the television adaptation of the ongoing *Gossip Girl* teen novels in the same franchise terms that allowed its feminized seriality to acquire a similar sense of economic primacy and legitimacy within the industry. In the case of the CW's ongoing attempts to establish a stronger network from the remnants of the defunct WB and UPN networks, its industrial challenges were often framed by trade analysts as problems based in franchising. Following the network's loss of male-targeted *WWE: Friday Night Smackdown!* to MyNetworkTV in 2008, for example, *Mediaweek*'s Marc Berman proclaimed: "Rebuilding a network is never easy, particularly when one of its most-watched franchises has relocated elsewhere." In offering an ongoing narrative appeal to female viewers, however, *Gossip Girl* was positioned as a solution to this franchise dilemma: "By shifting its strategy to serialized dramas like *Gossip Girl*," Berman opined, "[t]he CW has found its niche: young female viewers."[113] Moreover, given the potential for serial production to be further multiplied beyond television in publishing, DVD, and online video markets, *Gossip Girl* presented attractive alternatives to waning broadcast economics.[114] In affirming that "Gossip Girl is a legitimate franchise," analysts like Maria Guthrie validated the serialized production of content aimed at female audiences as sound economic practice.[115]

This validation operated within a largely masculinist industrial culture. Michele Hilmes argues that broadcasting executives, policy makers, and other figures of discursive authority have historically ignored or downplayed the production of content for female audiences, surrendering soap opera and seriality to clearly circumscribed, marginal, and often female-controlled production cultures.[116] At the center of primetime strategy on a network that only programmed in primetime, however, the production of *Gossip Girl* and its replication of the teen sexuality depicted in the original books occurred directly in view of masculinist agencies and institutions. Although some executives saw this potential to raise parental hackles as a tool to generate a rebellious brand identity appealing to youth demographics (evidenced by the infamous and visually titillating "OMFG" ad campaign), the objections of groups like the Parents' Television Council gave pause to Broadcast Standards and Practices and other risk-averse executives. Particularly following the 2006 FCC fines levied upon CBS for depicting a teen orgy on *Without A Trace*, *Gossip Girl* faced pressure from the CBS-owned CW to "play it safe."[117] Imagination of *Gossip Girl* as a franchise, however, likely helped to defuse that concern over content, framing its excesses as part of serial production strategy proven to be economically successful. In 2007, *Publishers' Weekly* had similarly framed the original book series, its potential for controversy, and the ability for that controversy to be multiplied and extended over time as an economic advantage. Cataloguing the *Gossip Girl* products coming down the pipeline, the trade publication explained that "the franchise is poised to attract a new generation of fans and perhaps even more detractors," adding that "[r]egardless of what some adults think of it, GG's seemingly irresistible brand of small talk with a sexy backdrop has equaled big business.[118] In an industry where masculinized, patriarchal notions of taste, decorum, and quality had historically helped define perceptions of cultural legitimacy, the imagination of *Gossip Girl* as a franchise emphasized not its soapiness or trashiness, but its economic potential, thereby rationalizing its ongoing, multiplied production.

By no means was *Gossip Girl* the first time television executives may have ignored patriarchal taste cultures to reach a gender-defined audience in primetime. However, its particular case evinced the deployment of a franchising as a discourse to smooth over contradictions between the feminization of genres and culture industries and the masculine privilege accorded rationality in capitalism. Significantly, the cultural imaginary of franchising acquired this function in a moment when female executives took on greater positions of programming authority. In legitimating her own programming policies, CW President Dawn Ostroff appealed directly to the discourse of franchising, pointing out to *Hollywood Reporter* that *Gossip Girl* was "based on an established franchise of books."[119] Similarly, in *Hollywood Reporter*'s 2008 "Women in Entertainment" feature on the most influential women in the entertainment industry, the business acumen of nine of the one hundred women featured were legitimated at least in part via this franchise discourse.[120] Franchising offered a significant narrative through which the presence of the feminine within patriarchal institutional structures and strategies could be imagined as intelligible and strategically rational.

As we have seen, the same discourse of franchising has often worked to call into question the cultural legitimacy of these economically rationalized production models. That devaluation of the industrial reproduction of culture as franchising has implicitly, and often explicitly, extended assumptions about the devalued and essentially femininized nature of mass culture. In the case of the cultural backlash against shifting gender representations in the Sci-Fi channel's 2003 "reimagined" production of *Battlestar Galactica*—particularly the contributions to that backlash by one of the actors involved in the original 1978 series subject to this reproduction—we can alternately see how the franchise imaginary links the critique of industrial production to ongoing moral panics about the feminine. At significant issue in this controversy was the effective transgendering of the character Starbuck—a tough-talking, cigar-chomping, male action hero played by Dirk Benedict in the original series who was transformed into a tough-talking, cigar-chomping, female action heroine played by Katee Sackhoff in the remake. The gender flexibility enabled by industrial reproduction discomforted audience members and industrial agents alike who had been invested in the masculinized bravado of the original. As Carla Kungl explains, this produced a misogynist backlash against the reimagined series—all despite the irony identified by critic David Greven that the female Starbuck still embodied stereotypically masculine ideals of aggression and swagger.[121] Yet while the controversial textual transgendering of the character has been well explored, scant attention has been paid to how the backlash drew upon the discourse of franchising to inscribe the industrial modes of production driving these changes with gendered values, while also tying them to heterosexual panics.

A central figure in the backlash, appropriately enough, was the original Starbuck himself. Preferring that Sci-Fi had renewed production in narrative continuity with the original *Battlestar*, Dirk Benedict repeatedly harangued the reimagined series in convention appearances and interviews, becoming a significant contributor to publicity about the series despite his lack of involvement. Under attack in Benedict's critique was not just character change, but whole industry practices perceived to privilege women and oppress men, masculinity, and heterosexuality—a system he ultimately described as "franchising." In his 2004 essay, "Starbuck: Lost in Castration," Benedict claimed that the negative feedback he often received as an actor from executives and other "suits" was based in his potential to offend feminine sensibilities, presenting himself as an artist victimized by political correctness. He posited a cultural shift where the feminization of culture in the 1970s had today given way to open hostility to masculinity (of which he, of course, was a paragon). "There was a time," he wrote, "when men were men, women were women and sometimes a cigar was just a good smoke. But 40 years of feminism have taken their toll. The war against masculinity has been won." A male, heterosexual Starbuck could not survive in this social context, he suggested, and therefore had to be reimagined to make the new series "female driven."

Crucially, Benedict framed this cultural war in industrial terms, arguing that in the victory of feminism, "creative artists have lost and the Suits have won. . . . Metro-sexual money-men (and women) who create formulas to guarantees profit margins." Benedict gendered industry as undesirably feminine in opposition to his vaunted heterosexual male creativity, but most importantly, he united his critique of femininity, sexuality, industry, and formulaic cultural reproduction by imagining their threat to masculinity and heterosexuality in the terms of franchising. "Without risk you have Remakes," he argued in his critique of industrial culture, "You have *Charlie's Angels*, *The Saint*, *Mission Impossible*, *The A-Team* (coming soon), *Battlestar Galactica*. All risk-free brand names, franchises. For you see, TV Shows (and movies) are made and sold according to the same business formula as hamburger franchises."[122] To drive home his attack on feminism, Benedict linked femininity and the industrial infrastructure purportedly serving it to the threat of a McDonaldized society whose standardized, bland, highly controlled product threatened ideals of freedom, individuality, choice, all around good health, and, ultimately, heterosexual manhood. In articulation to one another, the threat of feminism and the threat of industrial franchising became one and the same. Benedict's misogynistic and homophobic rhetoric revealed the discursive power of franchising as a means of establishing gendered hierarchies of difference between masculinized creativity and feminized industry.

By using gender and sexuality to inflect the values and meanings accorded to the industrial replication of culture, the discourse underlying media franchising has performed significant but contradictory cultural work upon that production. While franchise discourse imparts masculinized values of economic rationality upon the serialized production of feminine content like *Gossip Girl*, that same cultural imaginary has been deployed to call the legitimacy of productions like *Battlestar Galactica* into question. Franchising does not, therefore, carry a stable set of meanings and values, but proves to be an imaginative field in which gender differences and other vectors of social power can structure and shape ongoing bids for economic and cultural legitimacy. Though instances such as Dirk Benedict's *Battlestar* critique represent rare moments when that work becomes most explicit, franchising makes industrial production of culture imaginable not only through a history and form of economic organization shared with retail business formats, but also through cultural terms such as gender and sexuality.

Conclusion

As a dominant mechanism for organizing the reproduction of culture and the relations of that reproduction within the media industries, it should perhaps be no surprise that franchising has become a significant nexus for the ideological reproduction of gendered and sexed meanings. As this chapter has shown, the cultural meaningfulness of franchising has extended from the organizational and imaginative frame with which it constitutes the multiplication of production and exchanges of resources across industrial relations. With that in mind, media and cultural studies may wish to engage more significantly with media franchising in the future, moving past dismissive critiques of it as the mere homogeneous product of corporate conglomeration and branded synergy, and instead seeking to understand franchised production and reproduction of culture as a dynamic site where power, meaning, and value collide.

As part of that dynamism, the economic and cultural relations of franchising are constantly in a state of reimagination. Henry Jenkins adeptly relates franchising to a number of other industrial forces in writing: "Industry insiders use the term 'extension' to refer to their efforts to expand the potential markets by moving content across different delivery systems, 'synergy' to refer to the economic opportunities represented by their ability to own and control all of those manifestations, and 'franchise' to refer to their coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content under these new conditions."[123] In clearly positing these conceptual relationships, Jenkins helps to imagine the media franchise into a new, more tangible kind of being. Perhaps the best example of this kind of imaginative power lies in Jenkins' similar definitions of "transmedia storytelling," now increasingly disseminated and circulated by industry practitioners and frequently deployed to make sense of media franchising practices. Citing Jenkins, television producer Jesse Alexander writes on his blog that "Transmedia Storytelling extends narrative across multiple platforms: TV, Movies, Cell Phones, Websites, Toys, Video Games, Etc. Reaching new consumers, and immersing existing fans in the world of their favorite franchise."[124]As this imaginary is shared among Jenkins, Alexander, and others, new knowledge is generated about what a franchise is and should be. Thus, the conceptual tools theorized by scholars are not solely objective reflections, but increasingly are part of the discursive field continually imagining and reimagining slippery cultural logics like franchising.

My own work in this chapter, therefore, finds itself caught in a paradoxical place—trying to understand the structures and historical discourses that have shaped franchising and imagined it into economic and cultural being, while also producing claims that will inevitably add to the cultural theorization of franchising. In that regard, it is crucial to remember that defining franchising, once and for all, is not the object of this inquiry. Though working definitions will likely rise to the surface in the chapters that follow, the more crucial task before them will be to identify what complex and shifting economic structures, social relations, and cultural discourses have accompanied the franchising of culture and our understanding of it in those terms. In seeking to understand the exchanges and relations between media industries (and the trajectory shared with retail industries), we should therefore remember the foundation shared with Albert Moran, who in the study of television formatting suggests, "the key question to ask is not 'What is a format?' but rather 'what does a format permit or facilitate?' "[125] Similarly, serious inquiry into media franchising should concern itself less with what franchising is, and more with the complex and slippery set of economic relationships, professional identifications, cultural exchanges, and meaningful discourses it has supported. The point of theorizing the franchise lies not in defining the phenomenon, but in creating an opening to see the collision of contexts and cultures of production brought together in the course of navigating its economic and creative possibilities.

Starting with the economic relationships facilitated by franchising, the next chapter examines in greater depth the tensions among ownership, corporate culture, and the contractual exchange of media licenses negotiated through franchising. How did media firms imagine, manage, and institutionalize franchising in the course of entering into collaborative industrial relationships?

2

From Ownership to Partnership

The Institutionalization of Franchise Relations

In a world where cultural critics decry the consolidated power of "big media," contemporary franchises like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Harry Potter* might be assumed to be "biggest media," embodying the wide cultural reach of contemporary corporate institutions. Framed this way, the franchise could be most basically perceived as an expression—a product—of no fewer than three axes of corporate power. First, the branded product lines of the franchise owe much to corporate ownership, management, and protection of culture as intellectual property. Second, franchising enables corporate interests to exploit those properties in service of increasing consolidation and conglomeration. As of 2012, the oligopoly of Disney, NewsCorp, Comcast, Viacom, CBS, Sony, and Time Warner controlled most film, television, and print media outlets in the United States. Two publishers, Activision and Electronic Arts, each owning a number of subsidiary development studios, dominate video game console software sales in North America, while Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony split the hardware market. In comics, two publishers, Marvel and DC, hold an even greater market share—78 percent of units sold in 2009—with Diamond Comics enjoying a distributional monopoly.[1] And in the toy market, giants Hasbro and Mattel share production and distributional hegemony over one-third of the market, while three dominant retailers (Walmart, Target, and Toys "R" Us) push out smaller competitors.[2] With so few companies in control of our media outlets, the multiplied production of their franchises appears to reflect their consolidated power. As a result, franchising seems to evince a third dimension of corporate power: the industrial promise of "synergy," where the same content can dominate multiple markets and generate more value than the sum of its iterative parts. According to film historian Robert Sklar, the 1980s saw cross-ownership become not just attractive, but essential for media companies hoping to fully exploit the power of their content brands.[3] For film scholar Kristin Thompson, synergy means "selling the same narrative over and over in different media," an industrial project in which sequelization and spin-offs emerged as creative strategies to feed that repeated selling.[4] The development of entertainment franchises that span film, television, and game production could thus be situated within that sales-oriented trajectory.

In these three senses, franchising is reduced to an effect: the product most suited to the needs of media institutions. Framed this way, media franchises can be understood by listing all their extensions and all the markets they have captured by way of intellectual property monopoly, horizontal integration, and the synergy ideal. Such analyses, however, emphasize the structural concerns of media ownership at the expense of understanding how franchising might, relationally and discursively, constitute a greater site of cultural activity and struggle than "big media" critiques allow. If we try to understand the media franchise as a list of markets, products, and corporate owners, we miss the processes and moments of instability as that multiplication has crossed boundaries of institution, territory, and culture. Alternatively, then, we might consider something like synergy as an ideal negotiated in tension across a range of institutional contexts. Simone Murray, for one, argues that the pursuit of synergy often proves impractical: even the biggest media conglomerates rely on licensees to expand content brands while reducing their own investment in ongoing production.[5] She adds to that several other obstacles: management styles and corporate cultures clash across subsidiary divisions; debt incurred in corporate expansion leads to risk aversion; and poor performance in anchor markets multiplies failure across ancillary markets.[6] Murray points to the role of strategic partnerships as a more flexible alternative to internal production and ownership. This makes the implementation of synergy a contestation among a number of forces within the culture industries, according to Murray, and not a simple, foregone effect of a monolithic culture industry.

In dialogue with this work, this chapter suggests that media franchising is not just an imperfect vehicle for implementing synergy, but also a set of industrial production relations that emerged outside of the ideals of synergy, only later to be adapted to its logic, and even then only partially. The histories of synergy and franchising are overlapping but distinct industrial and cultural developments. If the previous chapter argued that the media franchise came to dominance as a means to organize and imbue industrial production with cultural and economic meanings in the 1980s and 1990s, this chapter offers an institutional analysis to explain the factors driving shifts in the structures and relationships given meaning by that discourse. I argue that institutional developments within and across film, television, comics, video games, and toys in the 1980s fueled the embrace of multiplied production, institutional partnerships, and exchange across institutional networks.

These shifts occurred in industrial contexts not only as empowered by media consolidation, but also marked by struggles to adapt to those changing conditions. Just as significantly, media infrastructures themselves changed as a result of the institutional embrace of franchising. Rather than having produced the media franchise as a simple effect, synergy, horizontal integration, and intellectual property monopolies have been shaped and reshaped by franchising.

This industrial negotiation with franchising can be traced across at least three distinct moments since its cultural and economic logics began to acquire currency in the 1980s and 1990s. I begin exploring a moment in the early 1980s in which multiplied content production emerged in response to new challenges faced by media institutions in non-horizontal, intra-industrial contexts, and only experimented with in inter-industrial contexts where parallel commercial interests aligned to support partnerships. By the end of the decade, however, the development of successful franchises helped encourage a wave of corporate mergers, acquisitions, and expansions—a response that often led to spectacular failure. Subsequently, beginning in the late 1990s, growing skepticism about the potential of such synergy drove a reworking of franchise relations where the exchange of resources in strategic licensing partnerships required negotiation of organizational, managerial, and creative structures.

As a case study, this chapter explores these three moments in relation to Marvel Entertainment and its attempts to franchise the *X-Men* comic book property, as evidenced in trade and popular accounts of industry strategy.[7] In each moment, the production of *X-Men* in comics, television, video games, toys, and film reveals a complicated, nuanced, and imperfect relationship between franchising and media power structures. In the early 1980s, *X-Men* took off as an intra-industrial franchise across comics productions, but could not attract the production partnerships needed to extend across media markets. From 1991 to 1995, however, the inter-industrial success of *X-Men* drove Marvel to expand its corporate footprint to maximize exploitation of franchise production; franchising helped drive conglomeration, rather than exclusively the reverse. Yet following the massive failure of these institutional transformations, Marvel adopted a more risk-averse reliance on licensing and creative partnerships across industry lines, a strategic outlook embodied by the success of *X-Men* in twenty-first century media. As Robert Brookey has shown, Marvel's expansive production agenda in the cinema has also extended to video games.[8] The relationships among Marvel, its master video game licensee Activision, and the developer Raven Software tasked with the actual production of *X-Men* games, can therefore be analyzed through interviews with production personnel as a site of partnered negotiation among franchisor, franchisee, and for-hire contracted labor.

Ultimately, this chapter suggests that conglomeration and synergy are crucial but inadequate on their own as lenses for understanding media franchising, proposing that we also consider the institutionalization of media franchising in terms of the complex industrial relations and negotiations it has effected. Franchising emerged in the 1980s in response to new distribution patterns in a variety of heterogeneous, non-horizontally integrated markets. At the end of that decade, as new institutional relations and partnerships began to push content more fluidly across media markets, the desire to control that exchange helped to feed conglomeration and the promise of synergy. Yet, the media franchise failed to perfectly serve or be served by institutional consolidation in the 1990s, persevering not through conglomeration, but in the negotiated, licensed, and partnered exchange of intellectual property resources. Institutionally, therefore, franchising can be best historicized not as the effected product of a monolithic culture industry, but as a process that has depended upon and facilitated institutional relations among markets, firms, and sites of productive labor.

Institutional Histories and the Culture Industries

This analysis speaks to industrial dynamics that reach far beyond single franchises like *X-Men*, engaging with three bodies of scholarly inquiry into the intersection of culture and commerce. An institutional examination of media franchising can contribute to extant media histories contextualizing the production of culture within its industrial context, nuance critical political economic theories of the culture industries, and contribute to production studies by examining the processes, hierarchies, and narratives by which labor and content have been organized and imagined.

Popular culture has historically propagated not from tidy, bounded institutions and stable corporate logics, but the collision of multiple, competing structures and business models. Media histories have frequently recognized adaptation, borrowings, and contentious collisions among conflicting media institutions. Christopher Anderson explores the obstacles faced by the film studios in their initial attempts to gain a foothold in television production. Without networks of their own to provide distributional control over programs they produced, studios like Warner Bros. initially declined to invest in television as a long-term profit center.[9] Independent film producers, however, looked to television as an alternative to studio distribution and more successfully adapted to and shaped the new medium. Television production in the 1950s, therefore, was a site of negotiation for Hollywood as well as independents. Likewise, Michele Hilmes characterizes relationships between the film industry and the evolving institutions of broadcasting not as a smooth relationship lubricated by shared interest in monopoly capital, but as a rocky convergence operating at cross-purposes as much as in cooperation. Arguing that the "ongoing process of conflict, compromise, and accommodation between the two has shaped the economic and expressive structures of both media," Hilmes offers an apt historiographic model for conceiving media franchising as a cause of creative and economic struggle among a confluence of industrial interests rather than an effect of unified media capital.[10] By adopting such a "model of historical narrative that focuses on process rather than outcome, on conflict rather than consensus," this chapter can look to the fraught role franchising played in the processes and struggles by which media institutions operated, organized, and imagined themselves.[11]

The relationship of franchising to media institutions must also be considered in terms of critical theories regarding the political economy of the culture industries. While the notion of a culture industry is perhaps most closely associated with Adorno and Horkheimer and their critique of mass-produced culture, the perspective of fellow Frankfurt School intellectual Bernard Miège better serves this book's interest in the production of culture.[12] Miège rejects Adorno and Horkheimer's stark opposition between art and industrial processes that suppress all creativity and critical power in cultural work, identifying three major limitations.[13] First, it ignores how reproduction technology might enable new kinds of art. Second, in referring to culture industry in the singular, Adorno and Horkheimer posit a unified field where literature, painting, and radio function in unison, despite complex differences and incompatibilities among each industry's inner workings and logics. Third, Adorno and Horkheimer concern themselves too much with the consumption of commodities to consider the crucial but imperfect and contentious function of industrial labor: "Their approach to industry is only incidentally concerned with the production process, the extension of the division of labor to the conception of artistic products, and the resulting production relationships. . . . If capital is trying to use cultural production as a source of profit, . . . this process does meet with resistances and limitations."[14] As a corrective, Miège conceptualizes culture industries not just in terms of reproduction, but also creative processes. Industry, he argues, is "itself responsible for the emergence of new arts" that correspond to its needs.[15] Miège offers a critical perspective with which to conceptualize media franchising as derived from the needs of media capital, yet constituted by competing interests and labor struggles that call into question its ability to perfectly serve those industrial needs.

Bernard Gendron also orients political economic critique toward examination of institutions as sites of struggle and negotiation. Addressing diachronic change in popular forms, Gendron argues that the planned obsolescence and quick turnover of media product required by consumer capitalism calls for constant innovation. Yet because media institutions cannot guarantee success for any new innovation, they must settle for an unpredictable hit-based market, where a few products generate most of the revenue, and capital faces obstacles of genre exhaustion, market saturation, and instability.[16] Todd Gitlin unpacks this same uncertainty in *Inside Prime Time*, where he suggests that the solution preferred by television executives in the 1970s and 1980s could be found in repeated extension of successful content over time. Longevity was the key to success, as "advertisers learned that regular characters meant reliable audiences. . . . In series, each episode is a billboard advertising the next."[17] The multiplications and exchanges of franchising, therefore, work similarly to generate new product while hoping to stave off uncertainty. Franchises, like episodic television, generate stability by modulating the production of the familiar. The success of that modulation is not a given, however, making the multiplied production of franchising a site of tension and struggle as much as unchecked institutional power. Instead, a critical perspective can look at franchising as a strategy meant to address the limits of institutional power in the face of uncertainty.

To understand the experiences of media workers negotiating and struggling with that uncertainty and other institutional conditions, production culture approaches have considered the way industrial relations and media labor have been meaningfully organized and imagined, as well as how the self-conscious logics, practices, and discourses industry uses to make sense of itself shape its media products. Narrativized and managed by media professionals through what John Caldwell refers to as self-reflexive disclosures, franchising works (as we have seen in chapter 1) to organize production, imagine relationships among industry sectors, and give meaning and value to certain creative and economic initiatives. It is therefore the production culture of franchising—the meanings and values attached to it within the industry—that might provide insight into how patterns and structures of ownership are negotiated. Consolidation and partnership among discrete media production communities alike might be legitimated as a response to institutional conditions. Caldwell argues against the idea of a monolithic production culture, instead arguing the everyday practices of production cultures prove to be sites of struggle among the interests of management, creative personnel, and below-the-line laborers.[18] Julie D'Acci has similarly characterized production as a negotiated process of cultural struggle among networks, producers, and even audiences.[19] Thus, what production offers is a basis for examining struggles and negotiations within the media industries as both cultural and economic in nature. As an industrial logic that puts a multiplicity of production cultures into relations, however, the media franchise offers a unique opportunity to intervene in this field by exploring the organizations, hierarchies of labor, and narratives that result when different industrial production sectors collide.

The Media Franchise Prior to 1989

In the film, television, video game, comic, and toy industries of the 1980s, the franchised production of content emerged in strategic response to new distributional structures within each market. The primary factors driving the institutionalization of franchise structures, relations, and discourse in this period—loosely from 1978 to 1989—came from the challenge of holding on to shifting markets as much as the desire to expand into new ones. By analogy, if the retail franchise surfaced in the postwar 1950s to help retailers reach consumers geographically redistributed by suburbanization, media franchising multiplied production of content to help guide consumers from one media experience to the next in the shifting and fragmenting cultural markets of the 1980s.

Of course, reproduction of familiar content had previously served this purpose in shuttling consumers between media experiences. The standardization of episodic narratives in 1960s television linked every episode in a series through familiar characters, situations, and themes. Television spin-offs, moreover, used familiar characters to launch wholly new series, bringing established audiences in tow. In the 1970s, successful series like *All in the Family* had spun off into *The Jeffersons*, *Gloria*, and *Maude* (which would itself spin off *Good Times*). James Bond films functioned similarly over the course of the 1960s and 1970s as an ongoing, aggregating content system, with the "floating signifier" of the title character unifying an ever-changing diversity of products.[20] The toy industry, too, moved from one-off products toward the generation of perennially extendable lines such as *Barbie* and *G.I. Joe*, which emerged in 1959 and 1963, respectively.[21] And as Matthew Pustz argues, Marvel Comics differentiated itself from competitor DC in the 1960s and '70s by embracing continuity across its entire catalog and enabling heroes like The Avengers, the Fantastic Four, or the X-Men to guest star in each others' stories. By constructing a shared Marvel Universe across all of its titles, Marvel produced a participatory world that encouraged loyal readership and multiplied consumption.[22]

The years between the 1950s and 1970s also saw experimentation with production of content designed to elicit consumption across industry lines. During the transition from network radio to network television, for example, programs would be simulcast in both markets. Yet this content linkage across media was only a temporary arrangement, not a long-term strategy.[23] Ina Hark similarly explains how some early television texts moved on occasion between broadcast and film venues. In these "transferals," television shows like *The Goldbergs*, *Dragnet*, and later *Batman* were spun into new, longer stories for theatrical release.[24] More long-lasting, however, were the "total merchandising" strategies pursued by Disney through 1950s television series like *Disneyland* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*. In promoting a wide range of Disney products, these shows, Anderson argues, rejected the idea of a singular, unified television textuality to direct the viewer to subsequent consumption experiences in comic books or theme parks.[25] Nevertheless, Disney and its promotional partners discovered that these transmedia practices could backfire. As G. Wayne Miller explains, in 1962 Hasbro produced a toy version of "flubber," the fictional, rubbery substance introduced in the 1961 Disney movie *The Absent-Minded Professor*. Because of parent complaints about allergic reactions, however, it could not sustain market interest long enough to capitalize on the 1963 sequel *Son of Flubber*. Having invested heavily in this cross-promotion (including production of a Marvel comic book), Hasbro took a $5 million loss and buried the remaining supply.[26] The 1970s, as Heather Hendershot recounts, subsequently saw an increase in FCC regulations designed to protect children from marketers, and the FTC similarly blocked television series like those based on Mattel's *Hot Wheels*.[27] With a hostile regulatory atmosphere, and continued cross-promotional failures (Hasbro took another $5.2 million loss on its 1978 *Charlie's Angels* dolls), collaboration and production of familiarity through exchange across distinct industries like toys and television remained an unsure prospect.[28]

These precedents demonstrate that the culture industries surely recognized the promise of reproducing familiarity prior to the 1980s. By creating not just cultural products, but systems of cultural products, the episodicity of something like television could be extrapolated to even greater scale, and the problem of uncertainty could be mitigated. In the 1970s and '80s, however, the reorganization of global capital would create incentives for these experiments in reproduction to become far more institutionalized. At that time, manufacturing economies began to shift from Fordist mass production to new models based in flexible labor, geographic mobilizations of resources, and local markets. Michael Curtin addresses the significance of this shift to the culture industries by arguing that it impelled a significant number of media institutions to reorient the marketing and distribution of popular culture toward smaller, more valuable, localized markets.[29] For Joseph Turow, this meant a shift from shared mass culture to segmented niche markets fragmented by allegiance to "primary media communities."[30] Familiar, shared content in which audiences could effectively invest offered a meaningful way to disaggregate mass audiences as intensely engaged niche communities. With Thomas Streeter, Curtin suggests that media monopolies in this context were served less by ownership of technology, hardware, or delivery channels, and more from the ownership of content brands that could lead audiences from channel to channel.[31] Meeting the demand for content thus became a primary challenge for Post-Fordist media institutions. As Miège explains, "the history of media shows that the preparation of programs—and even more so catalogues of programs—requires time, repeated testing, and above all the development of specific products for each media."[32] Franchising, therefore, offered a solution to this supply dilemma, when evolutions in the distributional capacity of several industries increased demand for familiar content.

This post-Fordist shift corresponded with what Thomas Schatz calls "The New Hollywood": a mode of production, institutional structure, and set of narrative conventions that emerged in the 1970s as film studios came to terms with these new economies as well as their increasing participation in conglomerate structures.[33]As Justin Wyatt argues, market segmentation and conglomeration encouraged the "high concept" style that emphasized surface level narratives, matches between image and soundtrack, and bold images and logos easily extracted for marketing across media.[34] But while an eye toward content that could move inter-industrially became key in the New Hollywood, these strategies focused largely on redistribution across emerging cable, music video, and home video markets, not multiplied production. In her political economic critique of Warner Communications, Eileen Meehan identifies this inter-industrial logic as one of repackaging and recycling (for example, extracting scenes from *Purple Rain* to be repurposed as music video), rather than describing it as parallel or successive productions in multiple markets.[35] Similarly, the 1983 industry primer *The Movie Business Book* acknowledged that merchandise production offered additional economic opportunities, particularly following the success of *Star Wars*, but downplayed that potential because of concern about long lead-in times required for manufacturing timed to coincide with film release.[36] So while the conglomerated studios of New Hollywood were thinking inter-industrially by the 1980s, it was largely to repurpose products, rather than to support production relations that would create new products.

One significant exception to this focus on redistribution was New Line Cinema, a firm on the relative margins of the film industry. New Line started in 1967 by distributing 16mm films to college campuses; by 1978, New Line had expanded into film production itself thanks to increased opportunities for distribution in cable television, television syndication, foreign territories, and other alternatives outside the Hollywood mainstream.[37] To support the diverse production required by these distibutional outlets, New Line developed a supplementary franchise strategy based in ongoing, serial production that would guarantee continuing revenues. Beginning with *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984, New Line sought not only to repurpose the film in a series of distribution windows, but also kept producing new content from the property, releasing sequels in 1985, 1987, and 1988. Ultimately, the franchise was a means to an end: as Wyatt puts it, "Revenue from the franchise was funneled back into the company rather than into hasty and sizeable production and distribution expansion."[38] By keeping one franchise film in production at all times, New Line could subsidize its overall costs, including art market production. After *Elm Street*, New Line partnered with Image Comics to develop a 1990 film version of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. "Immediately on release, New Line executives began referring to the Turtles as a franchise," Wyatt explains, planning sequels for 1991 and 1992.[39] While the Hollywood establishment had also embraced sequelization, New Line's example on the margins of the industry suggests a more fully theorized and rationalized imagination of franchising as a means of organizing film production in response to distributional shifts in the industry.

Similar arguments can be made about the institutionalization of intra-industry franchising in television. While counterintuitive to consider Hollywood studios as outsiders, television historians like Hilmes and Anderson remind us that the studios remained largely shut out of network distribution until the 1990s, relegated to the role of content providers for the more powerful networks. From its attempts to buy CBS in 1927, to its experiments with pay television in the 1950s, to the aborted Paramount Network in 1977, Paramount's efforts to start its own broadcast distribution outlet had failed repeatedly.[40] However, the growth of independent broadcasting and the FCC's implementation of the Prime Time Access and Financial Interest and Syndication Rules in the 1980s strengthened the hand of Hollywood suppliers by limiting network control and opening up new markets for non-network programming like first-run syndication. For Paramount Television, it made sense to invest first-run syndication production dollars into properties like *Star Trek* that had already proven successful in second-run syndication, resulting in spin-offs like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. These inter-industrial exploitations of familiarity were also reinforced by cross-market factors; the spin-off followed immediately on the heels of the feature film *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* in 1986, the highest grossing of any entry in the franchise to that date. Moreover, first-run syndication had already emerged as a nexus for experiments with inter-industry franchising earlier in the decade as program suppliers offered children's programming to independent stations. At the beginning of this boom in 1983, there were three animated children's programs in first-run syndication; that count expanded to six by 1984, twelve by 1985, and a remarkable thirty-three by 1987.[41] The vast majority of these emerged from production partnerships with the manufacturers of toy lines, such as *He-Man* or *Transformers*, thanks to Reagan-era deregulation that rolled back restrictions on toy-based television introduced in the 1970s. Such syndicated programming evidenced how independent program suppliers and partners from outside of the traditional network oligopoly embraced franchise relations to exploit the widening of distributional and regulatory bottlenecks that had previously kept them in subordinate positions. Like in film, television franchising did not unfold primarily in response to the needs of networks with the greatest consolidation and dominance over the industry, but from more marginal institutions.

In the fledgling video game industry, franchising similarly presented a challenge to the core of the industry, albeit of a different kind. Until the late 1970s, however, the market centered on the sale of arcade cabinet and home console hardware; not until the Atari 2600 introduced cartridges in 1976 were software sales a significant market sector. By the late 1970s, recognizable genres began to emerge from this content market, and soon the first third-party content providers appeared: Activision in 1979, then Electronic Arts in 1982. As video games transitioned from a technology into a functional, hit-based culture industry, third-party developers looked to inter-industrial licensing as a way of negotiating uncertainty and multiplying hits.[42] Pac-Man, arguably the first video game character, generated "Pac-Man Fever" in 1982, supporting the spin-off game *Ms. Pac-Man*, a Saturday morning cartoon, a Christmas special, and an array of merchandising.[43] Publishers drew on characters licensed from other media just as quickly, producing games based on *Star Wars*, *He-Man*, and *E.T.* This open exchange of licenses ultimately stymied the industry, however; frustrated by titles with attractive licenses but poor gameplay, consumer interest in the cartridge market cooled. By 1983, thousands of unsold *E.T.* cartridges were buried in the New Mexico desert (echoing Hasbro's *Flubber* fiasco) amid the virtual collapse of the North American video game market.[44] In leading the market's recovery in 1986, Nintendo distinguished itself by imposing strict quality controls and limiting the ways in which valuable characters like Super Mario could be used by licensees outside the game industry.[45] Nintendo had learned that unchecked inter-industrial franchising was no surefire means of success.

The American toy market also faced new distributional realities in the 1980s that fed demand for product lines that could be renewed and reinvented over time. The most significant of these shifts was the emergence of Toys "R" Us as the leading U.S. toy retailer. From four stores nationally in 1966, the company ballooned to 63 nationally by 1978. By 1981, that number had exceeded 100, the company's sales had doubled to reach $750 million annually, and its market share increased from 5 percent to 9 percent of total toy U.S. sales. While the industry at large grew 37 percent from 1980 to 1985, sales at Toys "R" Us expanded by 185 percent, bringing its market share to 14 percent (higher in some cities, by some accounts, where the lack of smaller toy stores gave Toys "R" Us up to half of all toy sales).[46] By 1988, 313 stores operated in the United States alone, and the company's international operations included a deal with McDonald's of Japan to launch co-owned storefronts in that market.[47] This creation of a transnational specialty toy retailer significantly altered the industry's need for product. Bigger stores required more product, and their permanence meant shifting the toy market from a seasonal to an ongoing endeavor. This regularized demand, enhancing the need for product lines with renewable production cycles that could help regularize the temporal rhythms of consumption. Eric Clark identifies *Strawberry Shortcake* in 1980 as the first in a new wave of toy lines conceived as a business to be extended indefinitely: "the first buy was just for openers."[48] Although this practice may have actually decreased market stability by exchanging unchanging, classic toys for constantly evolving lines that would burn out in two or three years,[49] the logic of post-Fordism suggested that familiar, meaningful content systems could encourage loyal, repeat consumption. To generate that meaning, the extension of product lines within the toy industry drew heavily from narrative media sectors. According to Miller, Kenner's 1978 *Star Wars* action figures "redefined the market, reaching almost $100 million in sales, unprecedented for action figures."[50] This success, Dan Fleming argues, depended on the toys' ability to tap into meaningful narrative contexts from the film and make them playable.[51] By 1980, executives like Hasbro CEO Stephen Hassenfeld no longer showed much interest in toys without that narrative capacity, seeking instead carefully scripted fantasies—which, like those underpinning the most enduring TV series, could be leveraged into years of line extensions.[52] Without significant holdings of their own for producing and distributing narrative media, consolidated toy manufacturers nevertheless remained reliant on partnerships with firms in other media industries (such as Marvel Comics, as we will see later) to sustain their own intra-industrial interests in franchising.

Unlike television, film, video games, or toys, the 1980s witnessed a distributional contraction rather than expansion for comics —yet one in tune with the niche markets of neo-Fordism. Whereas comics had previously retailed in mass market outlets like drug stores, grocery stores, and newsstands, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the rise of the "direct market."[53] While newsstands could return unsold stock, new speciality shops adopted an inventory burden by ordering titles from distributors on non-returnable terms based on perception of consumer demand in their niche market. This niche market encouraged the intensification of seriality and continuity between comic titles at both Marvel and DC Comics. While continuity had the potential to generate loyal customers and create interest in the unsold back issues held by retailers at a potential loss, they often did not fit the distribution patterns of the mass market, frustrating casual newsstand readers.[54] As one 1979 letter to Marvel editors bemoaned: "comics are too expensive these days for you people to assume that even the biggest fan reads *all* your titles." The reader goes on to mention that her retailer received issue #116 before #115, "so, having missed an issue, I was confused."[55] The direct market, therefore, transformed the content needs of the industry by regularizing distribution and creating a niche market in which loyalty and continuity would be assumed. Marvel Comics, like so many media institutions of the 1980s, negotiated distributional changes within its particular market that had increased the value of content, incentivizing strategies that systematically enabled cross-promotion and multiplication of appeals from successful product lines. Yet, like companies in these other institutional contexts, Marvel's embrace of franchising in the comics industry constituted an uneven struggle with industrial circumstances and relationships, rather than the inevitable expression of unchecked corporate dominance.

X-Periments with Franchising

In this context, successful properties like *X-Men* became key resources around which Marvel could seek to multiply production of content on both intra- and inter-industrial levels. Marvel's efforts in those two regards, however, were not met with equal success in the 1980s. To understand *X-Men* as a franchise historically is not to list its many productions over time, but to understand that in different moments and contexts, the scope and nature of the industrial relations underpinning its multiplied production entered into flux. The history of the franchising of *X-Men*—from its most successful to most troubled moments—evinces a persistent tension between control and exchange, ownership and partnership within and across media industries, helping us to see franchising not as a dominant state of being, but as a contingent process of evolution (or perhaps most appropriately, a mutation).

Marvel Comics first published *X-Men* in 1963, two years after *The Fantastic Four* had inaugurated a period of success that would allow the company to declare a "Marvel Age of Comics." Considerations of branding played no small role in this success: as chief editor Stan Lee later recalled, "I guess I treated the whole thing like a big advertising campaign. I wanted to give the product . . . a certain personality."[56] *X-Men* in many ways emulated the team-based super-heroics already working with *Fantastic Four*, using genetics instead of cosmic rays to explain the particular abilities of the mutants Cyclops, Beast, Angel, Iceman, and Jean Grey. However, despite the civil rights topicality often read back onto the social conflict between their mutant integrationist mentor Professor X and the more radical villain Magneto, the title failed to resonate with 1960s comic readers. According to later industrial analyses, *X-Men* had been "only a moderate success,"[57] but "not one of Marvel's best sellers."[58] By 1966, "new" issues were merely reprints from earlier in the decade. Thus, *X-Men* held lower priority as Marvel began out-licensing characters like Captain America and Iron Man to other media markets in the 1960s. Only when the Canadian animators producing *Marvel Super Heroes* for television syndication hoped to adapt an existing story featuring the Fantastic Four—and learned they lacked rights to the more popular team—did the less iconic X-Men team make the cut. Renamed "The Allies for Peace," however, the X-Men characters ironically served as the generic Brand X of the Marvel superhero set, failing to convince Marvel and its production partners of their own ability to support licensed, cross-media production.

In 1975, however, Marvel Comics reinvented the *X-Men* property, producing original content for the first time in almost ten years. By this time, sales of *Fantastic Four* had faltered, giving Marvel greater need for another hero team.[59] *X-Men* had the benefit of being both pretested and malleable. Less iconic than the Fantastic Four, the underperforming original characters could be set aside, while the familiarity of the *X-Men* brand could be repurposed to introduce a more modern and international roster of superheroes (including Wolverine, Storm, Banshee, Nightcrawler, and Colossus). Yet despite greater sales, the "all new all different" *Uncanny X-Men* did not immediately lend itself to franchised production relations. Outside of guest appearances in other heroes' titles, the X-Men remained confined to

Cover art for *X-Men* #1, the 1963 debut of the mutant heroes, and *Giant Size X-Men* #1, the 1975 relaunch.

a single title in the comic book market, despite avowed interest in 1976 by writer Chris Claremont and artist Dave Cockrum in seeing *X-Men* brought to life in other media.[60] While these creators may have been daydreaming, or indulging reader fantasies, many other Marvel properties were attracting interest in Hollywood, where film options had been picked up for *Thor*, *Ghost-Rider*, *Daredevil*, *Man-Wolf*, and even *Howard the Duck*, as well as in television, where Columbia and Universal developed *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*, respectively, for CBS in 1978.[61] *X-Men*, however, attracted little to no interest from either industry. While *X-Men* would become one of Marvel's hottest comic titles in the 1980s, it lacked the same appeal to television programmers as *Spider-Man*, which added to its 1978 live-action television series two cartoon series (one network, one syndicated) in 1981. Without an interested partner, Marvel had little means to leverage *X-Men* into inter-industrial exchange.

Nevertheless, Marvel had increasing motivation to set its sights on these external production possibilities. Fearing that the shrinking direct market would lead to an unmanageable decrease in revenues, Marvel purchased DaPatie-Freleng animation in 1981, renaming it Marvel Productions. With this new asset in place, Marvel set out to build relationships and establish footholds in other markets, finding some success in inter-industrial collaboration with the toy industry. Prior to Reagan-era deregulation, toy companies were restricted in their ability to use television and narrative to advertise products. The fantasy worlds of animation, regulators believed, could too easily misrepresent toy products to impressionable children—an advantage nevertheless sought by marketers. In 1982, Hasbro realized that while it could not advertise its toys with TV animation, it could use animation to advertise something else instead. So Hasbro granted Marvel Comics a no-fee license to publish *G.I. Joe* comics, in exchange for royalties and a commitment to advertise the comics on television (with commercials to be produced by Marvel Productions at Hasbro's $5 million expense).[62] The idea of commercials for comic books was just as unorthodox in 1982 as it would be today; and consequently there were virtually no relevant regulations in place. Hasbro wagered that so long as the *G.I. Joe* brand could capture broadcast exposure through advertisement of these comic book stories, its toys would be implicitly promoted. While this strategy established an axis of production collaboration between Marvel, Hasbro, as well as Hasbro's advertising agency Griffin Bacall and its production arm Sunbow, it also helped institutionalize the narrativization of toys as media characters. By 1983, Reagan's FCC had gutted the rules prohibiting entire television series based on toys, leading to the debut of *He-Man*, *Transformers*, and a full-length *G.I. Joe* series.

Yet while these emerging franchises propagated through inter-industrial relations of the type forged by Marvel, Hasbro, and their other collaborators, each partner was first and foremost concerned with its own interests. Hasbro's aim was to prop up their core toy business, not to horizontally expand a corporate footprint. For Marvel, the aim was to sell comics and help the fledgling Marvel Productions gain a foothold in television production—goals that shared a corporate umbrella, but in practice proved to be fully separate pursuits, as the relations between each division of the company did not produce an alignment of interests or smooth coordination. Marvel Comics editor Jim Shooter publically characterized new Head of Production David DePatie, and Marvel Production management in general at that moment, as having "hated us comics people. . . . They thought of us as amateurish morons, and our work as garbage."[63] In addition to describing conflicts over Marvel Productions' refusal to acknowledge its corporate identity as a Marvel subsidiary, Shooter claims that Sunbow worked to widen that divide by increasingly interfering and insinuating itself in the creative exchanges between them, as well as those with Hasbro.[64] Shared corporate identity did not guarantee that the two wings of Marvel would recognize and pursue shared inter-industrial interests. Franchising, in this case, emerged not out of a set of unified, cross-ownership solidarity, but tension-marked partnerships in which stakeholders with interest in different media sectors sought common economic and creative interest, but often struggled to find it.

Furthermore, while under contract to provide programming to buyers like Hasbro, Marvel faced significant challenges in acquiring the distribution needed to support the multiplied production of its own content holdings across media lines. Marvel actively sought to transition *X-Men* into television, applying the *GI Joe* model to its own intellectual property, but NBC rejected its 1984 proposal.[65] While *X-Men* may have been hot in the niche comics industry, and Marvel may have had its own television production capacity (assuming it could massage the tensions within its corporate hierarchies), it still needed a distributional partner, and network gatekeepers had little interest. At this point, Marvel could only participate in inter-industrial franchising through development of strategic relationships; unilaterally, it could not franchise anything.

With this corporate in-fighting and lack of alliances limiting potential for inter-industrial expansion across media, Marvel focused instead on multiplying *X-Men* content to meet demands within its core comics market, where it could make more unilateral production decisions. This too was a process of trial and experimentation rather than a smooth, preordained strategy reflecting corporate organization of production labor. In 1981, for example, Marvel publishing underwent "a complete reorganization of the editorial department," in which its three dozen comic titles were assigned to one of five new editors, each responsible for managing a specific group of titles.[66] This reorganization of production resources, however, did not reflect any specific orientation toward franchising or co-branding. While the same editor managed two *Spider-Man* books, the related *Spider-Woman* and *Spidey Super Stories* each went to different editors. Narratively, the grouping of *X-Men* with *Conan* and *Star Wars* isolated the mutant title from other superhero books like *The Avengers*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *Iron Man* that shared the same space of the Marvel Universe. Marvel's 1981 editorial structure, therefore, did not reflect institutionalized orientation toward franchise relations, despite a proclivity for inter-title continuity. The grouping of *X-Men* with *Dazzler*—a title focused on a mutant rock star first introduced in the pages of *X-Men*—suggested possible coordination between the two, but Marvel's overall editorial strategy did not extend from a clear franchising mind-set.

By 1982, however, Marvel had multiplied the *X-Men* property beyond a single title into an ongoing family of books, beginning with *Wolverine*, Marvel's first miniseries.[67] In 1983, *The New Mutants* became the first ongoing

Marvel Comics Editorial Groups, 1981

The Avengers	Ghost Rider
Captain America	Marvel Tales
Iron Man	Marvel Team-Up
Marvel Super Action	Peter Parker the Spectacular Spider-Man
Marvel Two in One	The Micronauts
Spidey Super Stories	Sgt. Fury
Thor	What If?
Conan the Barbarian	The Defenders
Dazzler	Dr. Strange
Ka-Zar	Incredible Hulk
King Conan	Marvel Superheroes
The Savage Sword of Conan	Rom
Star Wars	She-Hulk
X-Men	Star Trek
Bizarre Adventures	
Daredevil	
Master of Kung Fu	
Moon Knight	
Power Man & Iron Fist	
Spider-Woman	
Amazing Spider-Man	

title spun off from *X-Men*. This more systematized multiplication of production was not the natural development of success or standard operating procedure for this media institution, but instead a negotiated response to economic forces in the industry. While Marvel dominated the niche direct market, competition from DC Comics as well as several new indie publishers appealing to alternative tastes collectively threatened its market share. Given that direct market retailers only ordered as many comics as they thought they could sell in a finite market, Marvel saw a zero sum game where every competitor's sale meant one less potential Marvel sale. Thus, market analyst Robert Overstreet called 1983 "the year that Marvel made a determined effort to hold or even increase its market share, . . . 'flood'[ing] the market with Marvel product so the consumer who wanted to keep up with his Marvel collection would have little money left over to spend on other publishers."[68] By multiplying *X-Men* across a greater number of books, Marvel forced readers to choose: get the full experience by spending more or all of their comic budget on *X-Men* titles, or spend on the competition and miss out.[69]

Despite this new direct market focus on multiplied franchise properties, weakened mass markets for comics persisted, often with divergent sales results. According to 1981 figures from Marvel and DC, for example, the top seller in the industry was *Amazing Spider-Man*, moving 298,000 copies monthly. While *X-Men* outperformed all of DC's competing titles, it was still only Marvel's tenth-best seller with 192,000 copies, behind *Star Wars*, *Hulk*, *Fantastic Four*, *Avengers*, *Conan*, and others.[70] Concurrent surveys of direct market dealers told a different story, however, where *X-Men* dominated, followed by *The Avengers*, with *Spider-Man* in a distant eighth place.[71] *X-Men* performed far better in the niche market, offering a partial explanation for the lack of interest in *X-Men* on behalf of Hollywood and the networks. Without the greater mass appeal of *Spider-Man*, Marvel's interest in *X-Men* remained out of alignment with that of would-be partners in other media sectors transitioning more gradually to niche market logics, making attempts at inter-industrial franchising unviable. This lack of alignment vis-à-vis *X-Men* continued through 1989, when Marvel's use of the syndicated *Marvel Action Universe* to air a back-door pilot for *X-Men* failed to find a buyer once more. So while *X-Men* conquered the comics industry, and MacAndrews and Forbes even purchased Marvel in 1989 as a way of getting into the inter-industrial "business of the creation and marketing of characters,"[72] mere ownership of successful characters and cross-media production capability was not sufficient to effect inter-industrial franchising. Marvel held neither the institutional power to move its property out of the comics market, nor the right type of content to forge a strategic partnership with dominant film and television institutions. Marvel's inter-industrial franchising efforts in its partnership with Hasbro did prove more successful in emergent, alternative, or marginal markets such as first-run syndication (as in the case of *G.I. Joe*). On the one hand, this suggests that Marvel's efforts would have been better served by a conglomerate structure that would allow it access to the distribution channels denied it by NBC and others external to comics. On the other, Marvel's success with franchising *X-Men* on an intra-industrial level, and even its failed attempts to multiply its production across media, demonstrate that franchising emerged to meet demands other than those of media conglomeration. Marvel embraced franchising in the 1980s in the face of new threats to its core publishing market, and while it participated in the franchising of properties owned by others, it found gatekeepers in other media industries uninterested in the franchised partnerships it could offer through *X-Men*.

The Embrace of Synergy in the 1990s

The early 1990s, however, altered these dynamics by reducing the institutional barriers—or at least the imagined perception of them—that impeded collaboration across cultures, industries, and market orientations. Several factors drove the reformulation and reimagination of franchising to be more compatible with the promise of synergy. First, corporate reorganization and consolidation intensified to focus corporate interests across media industries in new ways. Although Eileen Meehan considers the difference between Time Warner in the 1990s and Warner Communications in the 1980s as one of "size, not kind," her own analysis recognizes that the company began to reorient diversification away from cosmetics, consumer credit, and other non-cultural industries toward the acquisition of media-specific companies.[73] So although the company continued to expand, its media focus narrowed, creating more opportunities for exchange across the whole of the company. The march of deregulation also enabled this pursuit of conglomeration and synergy. In removing the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules in 1992, regulators permitted networks full ownership of the programs they distributed and thereby allowed them to participate in their syndication profits, jeopardizing the bargaining power of independent program suppliers. As such, networks and independent suppliers alike began to reposition themselves to take advantage of the repeal.[74] Paramount and Warner Bros. each launched new networks to guarantee channel space for their programs. Both extended recognizable brands to draw audiences: the WB called upon the Warner Bros. cartoon library in naming Michigan J. Frog its spokesperson, while UPN premiered a new *Star Trek* spin-off. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 similarly encouraged conglomeration in the media industries by institutionalizing the idea of economic convergence between media. As the FCC explained, the law aimed "to let anyone enter any communications business—to let any communications business compete in any market against any other."[75] In this sense, the Act codified the notion that boundaries between media and media systems could and should be overcome, institutionalizing synergy not just as an economic possibility, but a cultural imperative.

These structural changes were accompanied by new discourses, and in particular, a reworked notion of franchising, that identified and gave meaning to production strategies within this context, rationalizing them as "good" ideas. At the close of the 1980s, prototypes like *Batman* legitimated franchising as the practice of Hollywood conglomerates and narrativized the economic potential of the network of productions it could support. Peter Bart, industry analyst and editor of *Variety*, the paper-of-record for stories Hollywood tells about itself, claimed that the 1989 *Batman* blockbuster "did not emerge magically from the studio development machine. Rather it was more like a sinister stew, simmering on some back burner but never quite achieving the focus of anyone's attention."[76] As Bart recounts, the studio "didn't get it,"[77] and as Meehan adds, licensors too questioned the film's merchandising potential prior to its release.[78] The way Bart tells it, producer Peter Guber had to convince Warner Bros. to see the value of the project by appealing equally to the studio's merchandising department and its film development bosses, pitching the film in terms of its service to multiple corporate divisions. In Bart's narrative of legitimation, the studios were eventually convinced that "a new epoch of filmmaking was dawning—one in which the studios would rely more and more on sequels and so-called tent pole pictures that would help support an entire program of films. Studios could not depend on sleeper hits emerging. . . . They needed franchises."[79] This was very much the New Line model of the 1980s, appropriated by the larger Time Warner conglomerate (like New Line itself would be in 1993), and re-narrativized to fit its interests across multiple media. Films like *Batman* produced less innovation in form and practice than they served as new exemplars in emerging trade mythologies to institutionalize franchising as conglomerate logic. With similar logics in place across culture industries, the discourse of franchising helped shape and imagine further corporate expansion, driving conglomeration as much as being driven by it. Increasingly, media conglomerates targeted for acquisition firms like New Line and contracted personnel that had demonstrated skill in the development of franchise forms and practices.

These shifts would have crucial implications for a company like Marvel already experimenting with franchised media production. Unquestionably, the embrace of franchising as a conglomerate logic made Marvel's expertise more valuable and rendered the company a more attractive partner, opening up opportunities for the inter-industrial relationships denied Marvel in the 1980s. However, the value of relations with conglomerates would increasingly come into question for Marvel as the pursuit of its own conglomeration made increasingly more sense in the context of the industrial imperative of synergy and the new forms of franchising articulated through it. The conglomerate institutionalization of franchising therefore generated economic tensions and contradictions of industrial ideals that required negotiated corporate response. As Marvel's disastrous attempts to resolve the competing promises of conglomerate synergy and franchising showed, those tensions were not always simply overcome.

Synergy X-pansions and X-pirations

As the logic of franchising came to be institutionally reimagined through synergy and conglomerate expansion, *X-Men* comics continued to persevere in the direct market, with sales reaching an all-time high in 1991. To strengthen that comic brand, Marvel discontinued *The New Mutants* at its sales peak and relaunched it in June as *X-Force*. Given "the name change to include X," one analyst predicted that direct market retailers could expect a "meteoric rise" in sales.[80] Now even more explicitly branded as part of the *X-Men* franchise, *X-Force* #1 sold 3.9 million copies, obliterating the 2.65 million record set by mass market favorite *Spider-Man* in 1990. In August 1991, Marvel issued a second *X-Men* series to run alongside the original *Uncanny X-Men*, selling 7.5 million copies of the first issue.[81] While the speculators who hoarded extra copies in hopes of appreciation inflated these numbers, that practice also attracted stronger mass market sales, and the cool reception *X-Men* received from potential partners in other media sectors with wider consumer bases began to thaw. Seeking to seize less competitive Saturday morning market share from the Big Three networks, the upstart Fox television network saw potential niche alignment with Marvel's *X-Men* in a post–*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* media environment (where the proven appeal of mutants already prompted players like Hasbro to consider "mutating" G.I. Joe).[82] Undoubtedly, the relationship between Marvel and Fox grew from value the latter placed on the former's previous expertise once franchising and the synergy imperative had become more institutionalized in conglomerate Hollywood and television. In 1990, the new Fox Kids division hired Margaret Loesch to oversee its operations, following her experience as CEO and chairman of Marvel Productions since 1984 (where unlike DePatie she had embraced Marvel's comics heritage). This put Marvel in a much better position to gain access to network television. Partnered with Fox and Saban Entertainment, Marvel Productions' animated *X-Men* series debuted on Fox in October 1992 to #1 ratings. This would not be the first success *X-Men* had outside the comic book world, already out-licensed as a 1992 Konami arcade game and a series of Toy Biz action figures. But in the minds of analysts, the cartoon added far more value to the property.[83] Even Marvel's overall newsstand sales increased from $21.4 million to $33.4 million between 1992 and 1993, "driven no doubt by the mass market exposure of the X-Men."[84]

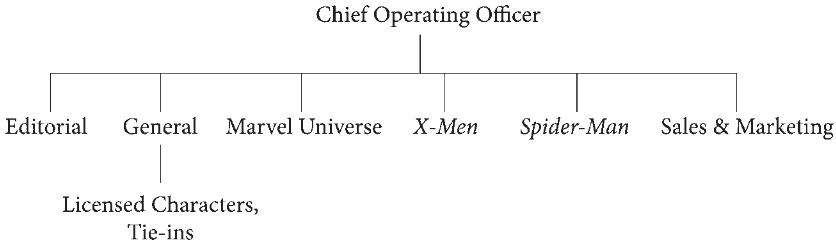
While the long-sought television success of *X-Men* surely pleased Marvel, this development provided a new set of economic relationships and conditions to negotiate. Despite increased comic sales, the property returned greater dividends in out-licensing where Marvel was forced to share revenues with the production partners generating television, video game, and toy products. In response, in late 1992 Marvel began a process of horizontal diversification designed to afford it greater control over previously licensed markets. After buying the trading card company Fleer for $286 million, Marvel quickly announced a new set of 150 *X-Men* trading cards as its first self-publishing venture.[85] Similarly, in 1993 Marvel granted Toy Biz a no-fee license to make toys based on Marvel characters in exchange for a controlling interest in the toy company; Marvel would no longer receive a license fee, but it gained increased leverage over its *X-Men* action figure partner and corporate control over profits.[86] Based on this partnership with Toy Biz, Marvel also offered former Kenner and Hasbro executive Bruce Stein a $1 million salary, hoping to acquire not only his expertise in the toy industry, but also his success in coordinating and building bridges across industrial sectors through his experiences with the *Star Wars* line. Marvel additionally used *X-Men* to launch Marvel Made, a branded line of self-produced and distributed merchandise of the sort typically handled by licensees—including phone cards, Christmas ornaments, and character busts. Calling the quality of licensed products into question, Marvel's solicitations to retailers promised that customers could "count on much more high-quality merchandise from Marvel Made—because who can make Marvel products better than Marvel?"[87] Marvel's narrativization of its expansion thus appealed to an ethic of do-it-yourself corporate self-reliance and traditional assumptions about the illegitimacy of licensing as a means of cultural reproduction. Marvel's embrace of inter-industrial franchising as a conglomerate logic had ultimately driven and even pressured the company to expand horizontally in order to more effectively leverage its lucrative intellectual property. By 1994, Marvel reported that only 37.3 percent of its revenues still came from comics, down from 90 percent in 1988.[88]

As suggested by Marvel's newfound willingness to either absorb or disparage its would-be licensees, this market expansion had real impact on its relations with longtime partners like Hasbro. The cultural imperative of synergy put former collaborative partners into newly competitive relationships as market interests increasingly began to overlap. To be sure, the partnership that enabled Marvel to produce comics and television series based on Hasbro's *G.I. Joe* toys had always been marked by friction between the unaligned interests of each partner, but this lack of alignment came into greater relief as Marvel's *X-Men* footprint exceeded the comic book market and began to compete and even eclipse *G.I. Joe* in television and toy sales. With Marvel having acquired its own holdings in the toy market, its interest in serving as the promotional partner of Hasbro came into question. In this context, Hasbro executives came to suspect Marvel of sabotaging its continued work on *G.I. Joe*. One executive reportedly exclaimed: "I want to scare Marvel!

I want to kick the shit out of them! . . . We're the biggest toy company in the world, damn it!"[89] The 1990s context of conglomeration thus placed the inter-industrial franchising partnerships of the 1980s in jeopardy.

Marvel also leveraged its franchise success vertically in its core comic book market, introducing not just its own Marvel Mart catalog, but also plans for a chain of Marvel Stores across the country. This worried independent comics retailers who feared competing with Marvel.[90] In July 1994, Marvel implored retailers to stop shelving comics alphabetically, and instead group comics by franchise, so that all comics within the *X-Men* family could be grouped together.[91] Evidencing the industrial acceptance of this franchising logic, *Internal Correspondence*, a trade journal for specialty retailers, actually began ranking comic book sales by "family" in August. Over the next year, the aggregate family of *X-Men*-related books—between 20 and 30 titles each month—would capture 13–19 percent of the entire U.S. comic book market.

Witnessed by *X-Men*'s appearance on the August cover of the *New York Times Magazine*, 1994 represents a peak for both the franchise and Marvel's reactive corporate restructurings and reorganizations. That year, market research conducted by a jealous Hasbro suggested that when measured in "Q scores" of consumer awareness and intrinsic appeal, *X-Men* held the top spot of any media figure, tied with Michael Jordan.[92] So as 1994 went on, *X-Men* literally became the model around which to internally imagine and direct Marvel's aggregate of business operations. Marvel hoped to duplicate *X-Men*'s television success with the syndicated *Marvel Action Hour*, developing characters like Iron Man and the Fantastic Four to similarly "take advantage of the extensive reach of Marvel Entertainment Group companies."[93] Marvel also reorganized its entire publishing division in November to adapt to the challenges of managing franchises like *X-Men*. In this new organization, dubbed "Marvelution" by COO Terry Stewart in 1995, properties were distributed among four executive editors who would "run their particular family of titles as a separate publishing entity under the Marvel umbrella," each with its own brand logo.[94] The move was seen as a response to the doubling of output by Marvel publishing over the past several years, designed to make the management of franchise families more decentralized and flexible. With editorial labor now structured according to franchise relations, Marvel's institutional organization came to reflect its dependence on that frame for making sense of production. According to Marvel executive Mike Martin, "Everyone knows that the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* franchises are two of the most successful ones in comics. *X-Men* alone dwarfs entire comic book companies in market share. . . . Marvelution is a way to apply the principles that distinguished *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* to the entire Marvel



Marvel corporate reorganization designed to bring greater efficiency to the management of franchises, dubbed "Marvelution" in 1995.

enterprise."[95] The *X-Men* franchise was deployed as a means of reimagining Marvel's organizational structures, rather than the other way around. Yet in admitting that one could "change the course of a Coast Guard cutter a heck of a lot faster than you can an aircraft carrier," Martin also acknowledged that this move came out of the challenges Marvel faced in continuing to manage these franchises.[96]

The tensions underlying Marvel's negotiation of franchising became most obvious in 1995, as the speculation bubble burst in both the comics and trading card markets, causing sales to plummet. Retail analysts had also begun to question the wisdom of Marvel's family structures: "with ever-increasing title spin-offs . . . some collectors must devote their entire budget to keep up with one or two of these franchises. Inevitably, market conditions (i.e., sales) will force the cancellation of some of the redundant titles. The danger is that publishers will prop up failing titles after they are no longer viable."[97] The scope of Marvel's franchise footprints risked not just narrative mediocrity, but also economic liability—multiple products to worry about in multiple failing markets. *X-Men* remained in over-production, while Marvel's take of the comics market alone shrunk.[98] And as its fortunes fell in comics, a ripple effect impacted ancillary markets. Marvel stock fell from a high of $34 to $15 in late 1995, with Toy Biz remaining the only division to turn a profit.[99] That year, Marvel posted a loss of $48 million, which ballooned to $464 million in 1996.[100] Moreover, mired in debt from its prior purchase of companies like Fleer, Marvel filed for bankruptcy and retreated from its horizontally expansionist strategies.

Ultimately, Marvel's management of *X-Men* through franchising occurred in response to market conditions that Marvel could not fully control, tried to embrace, but struggled to negotiate nonetheless. The embrace of corporate conglomeration as a corollary to franchising arose as a means to accommodate and exploit its growing but un-monopolized success in other markets.

Franchising was not a response to its conglomerate structure, but a set of strategies and discourses that helped Marvel to reimagine what more complex forms of corporate organization it might take. Conglomeration was as much an attempt to tame the potentially unruly and unaligned partnerships of franchising as a cause of it. Amid a desire for corporate self-reliance, Marvel negotiated the meaningful promises made by synergistic notions of franchising, and at least in part as a result of that struggle, it went under. While not exemplary of all franchising in the 1990s, Marvel's *X-Men* revealed the pursuit of franchising as an embattled corporate ideal that could challenge, reshape, and even destroy those who pursue it, rather than a magic bullet that delivered the promises of conglomeration.

The Death of Synergy and Rebirth of Licensing

As the history of Marvel Comics in the 1990s attests, synergy and conglomeration were as much cultural logics as economic logics—contradictory and even faulty as a result. As Paul Sweeting pointedly asked in *Video Business* in 2002, "Who Still Wants Synergy?"[101] In addition to Marvel's folly, other moves toward corporate consolidation including the over-valued AOL-Time Warner merger in 2000 challenged conventional wisdom that bigger is better. Similarly, in 2004, CBS and Viacom split from one another, convinced that each could fare better on its own. Writing about conglomeration in the 1980s, Miège questioned "whether or not this group of industries now forms a 'system' with long-lasting ties between its components," and recent history suggests that these ties may have indeed failed to last.[102] Thus, while franchising may have been institutionalized through discursive and strategic articulation to conglomerate synergy, it may be that media institutions have found greater stability by remapping franchise production in the terms of collaborative partnerships as much as conglomerate content monopolies.

What emerged in the late 1990s, as the promises of synergy increasingly went unmet, was a revised institutional logic for supporting the production relationships of franchising across media lines. The relationship established between Hasbro and upstart film studio Dreamworks in 1995, for example, offers a compelling prototype for this new model of franchised media production. While licensing remained an important part of brand extensions throughout the entirety of the 1980s and 1990s, even as conglomerates sought to move content multiplication in house, the most successful companies were those like Disney and Nintendo that implemented strict, top-down restrictions for its licensees, policing uses that might harm their intellectual property ownership. As J. C. Herz explained, "Every time Mario mugs for a sweatshirt or a soccer shoe, Nintendo chaperones the process."[103] Instead of this supervisory role, however, Hasbro and Dreamworks explored a more collaborative, two-way licensor-licensee relationship. The brainchild of Dreamworks executive and former Kenner Toys president Bruce Stein, the deal organized collaborative corporate creativity "on a grander scale," enabling partners on either side of the relationship to develop concepts holistically and from scratch—so that movie, TV, toy, apparel, and all else were "scored from the same sheet."[104] Together, the two companies supplanted the traditional economies of licensing royalties with a joint investment agreement that encouraged toy and screen talent to collaborate from the earliest moments of production and work toward mutual interest. "Dreamworks personnel would be able to propose toys," Miller suggested, "just as Hasbro people would be encouraged to come up with ideas for the screen."[105] Though the relationship did not grant both parties completely equal terms (Hasbro had exclusive rights to Dreamworks toys, but could pursue other studio licenses too), it produced its first significant results with the *Transformers* films of 2007, 2009, and 2011, as well as the 2009 and 2013 *G.I. Joe* films. Although the fruits of this partnership took a decade to ripen, its terms reframed franchising as a shared claim to intellectual property more than a function of singular conglomerate ownership.

By the end of the twentieth century, therefore, managers of the culture industries increasingly rediscovered the practical advantages of licensed partnership over the theoretical promise of synergy—signaling a return to the franchisor-franchisee relationship originally borrowed from retail business formats. Just as retail franchisors found that expansion via partnerships with independent operators could be more efficient than owned-and-operated chains, so too did media managers rediscover the advantages of wider networks of industrial relations over conglomerate structures. As Kline et al. explain in reference to the video game market, despite the dominance of publishers, there remain many smaller development firms who as partners absorb the risks and development costs of production on behalf of the giants.[106] Licenses have also proved more efficient in extending single brands. With its share of the fashion doll market dropping from 90 percent in 2001 to 70 percent in 2004, following the introduction of new competition from brands like *Bratz*, Mattel accelerated its licensing strategy for *Barbie*. Whereas previously Mattel only reacted to licensing requests from licensees, it came to actively pursue them as part of an intensified market saturation strategy for *Barbie*, doubling the number of licenses it granted.[107] Even in an era of continued conglomeration, the reimagining of franchise relations demonstrates the continued importance of licensed independents, as Miège stressed, as a field for the innovation and creativity needed by industry.[108]

The production relations afforded by licensed media, however, remained a network of creative labor to be managed by media capital. The sale of too many licenses could hurt entertainment properties, as Hasbro learned in the 1990s when a market oversaturated by *Barney* videos, toys, and clothes forced it to warehouse 250,000 unsold talking Barney dolls (at least nothing had to be buried).[109] In response to the potential for poorly received licensed products to harm a franchise, Kristin Thompson perceives greater attempts at creative collaboration between corporate partners in media licensing agreements. In the case of *Lord of the Rings*, the film production team intervened in the licensing process when displeased with the official marketing style guide (a tool to unify the look of all products and packaging from dozens of licensed firms). The production team drafted a new guide, illustrated by the production calligrapher, complete with color palettes for each character group and each film.[110] In doing so, the films' producers also took the labor of coordinating licensed creativity out of the hands of licensing departments and situated it within their own managerial practice. Although the producers lacked full control over marketing considerations (they failed to quash a Bobblehead line they found distasteful, for instance), the process of coordination among filmmakers, DVD producers, and video game designers aimed for "a unified style and tone across the entire enterprise."[111] In these new partnerships between discrete media firms, tensions nevertheless persisted, demanding continual negotiation. For one, power inequalities and struggles over territory could be exacerbated by a sense of encroachment and competition between would-be partners. The video game license for *Lord of the Rings*, for example, was divided into two sub-licenses (one based on the 2001–2003 film trilogy, and one based on the original novels) and assigned to two competing game publishers (Electronic Arts and Vivendi Universal). Two games released a week apart from one another in 2002 then found themselves competing for the same market share.[112]

Although the media franchise has been increasingly idealized in terms of collaborative partnerships among media institutions in a step away from consolidated ownership models since the 1990s, not all intellectual property holders have abandoned conglomerate synergy for this model. Yet even in its conglomerate configurations, the pursuit of franchising has required ongoing negotiations of the structures and relations of labor within the hierarchical organization of corporations. In this light, the industrial meaningfulness of franchising as a conglomerate logic waned by the twenty-first century, replaced with a concern for establishing and managing relations across diverse institutional contexts. In the case of Marvel, a renewed commitment to forging relations with licensees not only put them in closer creative and economic relationships with other firms, but also changed how business models, managerial practices, and corporate identities would be envisioned. From the start of its recovery in the late 1990s until its merger with Disney in 2009, Marvel reworked its franchise orientation by seeking to create space within its production operations for partners to invest in their own uses of its licensed comic book properties.

Marvel and Its Franchise Tenants

In bankruptcy, Marvel's comic publishing market share dropped to 25 percent, down by almost two-thirds from their early '90s peak.[113] In a reversal of power, Marvel emerged from bankruptcy in 1998 under the control of Toy Biz, its former subsidiary/licensee. Competition between licensed toy lines had grown intense, however, leaving little room for resurgence there. Logics of conglomeration and synergy had failed Marvel, and the comic book industry it was left with had become, according to one analyst, "the outmoded 'buggy whip' of entertainment."[114] The $425 million in 1997 comic book sales paled in comparison to the $850 million peak of 1993,[115] leaving the industry with an estimated 500,000 North American readers.[116] Neither intra-industrial comics franchising nor a return to inter-industrial conglomerate expansion would save Marvel; it needed a new economic strategy and production logic. Although it could no longer afford to aspire to the same conglomerate structure, Marvel could still emulate the branded content strategies of a company like Disney via licensing. In 2002, Bill Jemas, president of Marvel publishing, described the restructured company's new focus in terms identical to Janet Wasko's description of Disney brands: "Each character is sort of the center of a wheel," Jemas explained "so Spider-Man will show up as a T-shirt, as comic books, as electronic games, as movies, and soon, as a television show. So the heart of Marvel is the characters."[117]

The difference between this and Marvel's previous inter-industrial franchising effects lay in a distinction between scope of corporate structure and scope of production relations. Analysts noted that Marvel's conscious decision to produce intellectual properties, rather than the products derived from them, spared Marvel from having to risk massive capital investments of its own—the very experiments that left Marvel overextended in the 1990s.[118] In a business model based in licensing, profits had to be split, with the producer-distributors that licensed Marvel characters receiving the lion's share. But licensing also gave Marvel a shot at a much greater revenue builder: film. Indirect license fees alone could prove more profitable for Marvel than direct comics revenue. While Marvel sold the rights to make the first *X-Men* film to 20th Century Fox for only a few hundred thousand dollars, Avi Arad (the former Toy Biz executive who took charge of the new Marvel Studios division overseeing media licensing) hoped to leverage the success of Marvel's first films in future negotiations. This strategy paid off, as Sony Pictures subsequently paid Marvel $10 million for the rights to make the first *Spider-Man* film in addition to agreeing to a first-dollar participation deal.[119] Marvel received a percentage of each ticket sold to the licensed film—regardless of how much the studio needed to recoup to turn a profit. By 2002, more than 26 percent of the company's revenue came from licensing agreements in non-print media.[120] While Marvel published four ongoing *X-Men* comic books in 2003 that each sold slightly more than 100,000 issues monthly, typically at $2.99 each, the second *X-Men* film that same year took in $85 million at the box office in its first weekend alone, going on to make in excess of $213 million in its first ten weeks. *Spider-Man*, on the other hand, still friendlier to the mass market, grossed $403.7 million domestically in 2002.[121] In this new era, Marvel Studios played a central role in corporate operations, coordinating the lucrative inter-industrial use of Marvel properties developed by publishing. Effectively, the publishing division became a research and development operation for generating licensable intellectual property.

Recognizing the economic potential of its films, Marvel did flirt with more direct control over the course of the 2000s. In 2003, the company considered purchasing a small film studio, like Artisan, that would have allowed Marvel to take on production responsibilities for some of its smaller properties.[122] Although that proposal fizzled, Marvel Studios acquired a line of financing and in 2005 announced its intentions to fund some of its own film productions, beginning with *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk* in 2008. From the success of those films, Marvel self-produced an *Iron Man* sequel in 2010, followed by *Thor* and *Captain America* in 2011 and *The Avengers* in 2012 (though these later films would be released after a 2009 merger with Disney brought this moment of independent production to an end). Even with targeted investment in the film industry, however, Marvel remained unwilling to take the same risks that led to its 1990s bankruptcy, fully dependent on licensees to make use of its intellectual properties outside of comics and film. Within this revised business model, Marvel maintained firm ownership over intellectual property and targeted key markets for its own use and investment, but capitalization on those assets extended from partnership with licensees authorized to occupy the territory as tenants.

One such tenant was Activision, the video game publisher licensed to produce titles based on *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*. As one of the largest video game publishers, Activision's corporate holdings included a number of subsidiary development studios like Treyarch and Raven Software that operated independently in the day-to-day creation and production of Marvel video game titles. What resulted, therefore, was a complex web of corporate relationships through which the production of *X-Men* artifacts was negotiated—relationships that directly shaped the form games like *X-Men Legends* (2004), *X-Men Legends II* (2005), and *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* (2006) would take. Just as in the retail franchise, contractual relations between corporations sharing trademarks like *X-Men* produced unaligned interests between owners and tenants occupying unequal positions of power. While licensing agreements extended contractually from the licensors' ownership of intellectual property, in practice they loosened licensors' direct control of labor and rendered media franchising a meaningful site of negotiation among the varied corporate interests of licensor, publisher-licensee, and developer.

Based in Los Angeles, Marvel Interactive (a sub-division of Marvel Studios) took responsibility for managing the activities of video game licensees, taking pitches and approving their ongoing work. In 2008, Vice President Justin Lambros and his team coordinated not just with Activision, but with other publishers like Sega who held license to other Marvel properties like *Iron Man*, *Hulk*, and *Thor*. This involved managing production of between seven and ten Marvel games at any one time, but simultaneously projecting strategies for each Marvel property at least five to seven years in the future. Lambros characterized Marvel's style of managing licensees as "production based licensing." Rather than simply leaving licensees to their own devices and then signing off on their work, Lambros framed the labor process as one in which it was crucial for him to take a hand in production, working closely and collaboratively with licensed collaborators. Moreover, Lambros imagined the relationship as one in which licensees could still feel a sense of ownership over their work so as to foster investment and generate as many "cool ideas" as possible. Lambros' production-based licensing thus narrativized franchising as a relationship where contracted partners could retain an affective stake in the cultural ownership of the work, despite the more exclusive economic claims to ownership structuring the relationship. Nevertheless, Lambros did acknowledge consciously managing licensees toward certain goals and away from others. First, Lambros argued that when deployed across a variety of media markets, Marvel products had to "take the lead from the films." Since Marvel's licensed motion pictures were perceived to have the most power to create consumer awareness of characters, Lambros privileged cinematic characterizations and visual styles. Comic styles and continuities, therefore, were subordinated, most utile when they could be "filtered through the film" to flesh out video game stories. Similarly, Lambros discouraged licensees from indulging in what he called "small universe syndrome": an over-reliance on references and callbacks to vast comic book continuities that limit market appeal. In doing so, Lambros' management reinforced hierarchies of industrial influence and power with the relations of the franchise network.[123]

Within this hierarchy, Lambros did promote coordination and interaction between different stakeholders working with Marvel properties. As Raven Software project lead Dan Vondrak explained in 2008, Marvel kept game developers abreast of plans for parallel productions across film, television, toys, and comic books.[124] Marvel made requests, for example, that certain characters be highlighted in their video game incarnations to reflect and reinforce representations in other media. While Marvel also arranged for non-competitive licensees like toymaker Hasbro to coordinate with video game licensees, Lambros saw less potential to coordinate licensees like Sega and Activision competing within the same market. Given these institutional, contractual barriers, as well as the divisions that licensing executives like Lambros preferred to maintain between different parts of the Marvel universe (avoiding "small universe syndrome"), Marvel emphasized the coordinated production of single franchises across media over the coordination of multiple franchises in a single medium. For Marvel, it made more sense for *X-Men* comics, games, and films to support one another than for licensed producers of an *X-Men* game to coordinate with licensed *Hulk* producers. This would change to some degree as the development of *The Avengers* film sought to create a crossover uber-franchise between *Iron Man*, *Captain America*, and *Thor*—and all the licensed products attached to them; but in this case, Marvel signed a 2007 master license agreement across all those properties, anticipating that it would be best for one publisher like Sega to manage the production of all games in this shared franchise.[125] Nevertheless, licenses like *X-Men* outside of the *Avengers* umbrella continued to be managed as separate production concerns.

As publisher and the corporate entity actually signatory to the licensing relationship with Marvel, Activision served to mediate interactions between Marvel and game developers. Activision leased the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* licenses from Marvel and bore responsibility for using that license in a contractually prescribed way. While Marvel maintained indefinite long-term interest in its properties, Activision's interests as a tenant remained temporary. According to Brian Raffel, founder and head of Raven Software (but also a vice president for Activision since it incorporated Raven in 1998), individual studios within Activision could lobby for the acquisition of certain licenses, but just as often the publisher would approach its subsidiary developers with a license already acquired based on market research that justified the investment.[126] For Raffel, the advantages of Raven's incorporation within Activision included this access to expensive media licenses. When Raven was independent, it had license to what Raffel called "B franchises" like *Johnny Quest*, but its relationship with Activision brought new opportunities to work with *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and Marvel. While developers at Raven developed creative investments in such properties, institutional control of the duration and nature of the franchise relationship remained with Activision as they negotiated contract terms and license renewals.

So while Raven itself had creative claims, its position within this network of corporate partnership was not equal to Activision. Officially, all communication between Raven and Marvel during production of games like *X-Men Legends* and *Ultimate Alliance* went through Activision. Moreover, Raven did not directly pitch its game ideas to Marvel; instead, Activision reviewed Raven design documents before presenting them to Marvel on their behalf (though usually asking for changes to make the game bigger and more marketable first). This is not to say developers had no direct contact with Marvel —only that it rarely occurred without Activision's mediation. Dan Vondrak explains that only once a high level of comfort and trust had been established over time did he and Ames Kirscher (Justin Lambros' predecessor) share direct email correspondence. Vondrak attributed this social distance to the legal aspects of the license agreement, requiring lawyers at Marvel and Activision to review everything. Activision's corporate structures should not be seen as a total obstacle to collaboration, however; if Raven wished to collaborate or see current builds of games under development at sister Activision studios like Treyarch, their shared corporate parentage enabled that collaboration. Raven examined Treyarch's in-progress *Spider-Man 2*, for example, both for inspiration and to ensure their playable Spider-Man in *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* would be unique.

However, despite being contracted Activision employees, Raffel and Vondrak consistently used the word "they" in their interviews to describe their corporate parent. In many ways, their perception of Activision's corporate culture and marketing apparatus permitted them a different sense of solidarity with Marvel (despite the indirect communication), defined in large part by a shared creative culture based in common "geekness." Raven developers recognized the hierarchies in play in their dealings with Marvel; Vondrak admitted that Marvel's feedback held significant weight in the creative process, because as licensor, they legally had the right to "be pricks about it if they wanted." Yet they also claimed respect for and meaningful identification with Marvel's creative expertise in managing these characters. As Raffel explained, these licensed properties were Marvel's "bread and butter; they've made it popular, and we're really respectful of that." Feedback from Activision, however, appeared to be received with more skepticism. Vondrak admitted outright resistance to suggestions made by Activision perceived to come from a corporate marketing perspective. For example, neither Activision's desire to foreground Spider-Man in box art for the team-based *Ultimate Alliance* or their suggestion to replace Captain America with Captains Britain and France in international versions of the game sat well with Raven (the former battle lost, the latter won). Simultaneously, developers at Raven acknowledged a felt sense of internal competition when Activision assigned more than one of its studios to make games based on the same license. Effectively, the sense of a shared "geek" factor, while mediated by Activision, allowed developers to feel equal if not stronger alignment and partnership with an external licensor than with the publisher under whose corporate banner they labored. This "geek" factor also motivated Raven's stakeholder interest in licensed production. Both Raffel and Vondrak stressed that licenses allowed them to recapture shared cultural experiences from their past. Raffel and his brother had a *Spider-Man* club as children, and now relished putting Spider-Man into their games. Given these terms in which Raven developers framed licensed work, their interests in licensed properties have been imagined largely by their capacity for helping them to, as Raffel put it, "make cool games that we enjoy." However, while Raven had no more permanent ownership over these properties than Marvel or Activision would allow, this tenancy afforded them a valued flexibility. Raven developers retained the right to pass on Marvel projects that did not interest them, and since license negotiations and payments occurred a level above them, the developers had fewer qualms about moving on if their creative interest in the franchise had been exhausted. When Activision and Marvel greenlit *Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2*, for example, Raven surrendered the project to another Activision studio to pursue alternate interests.

The partnership among Marvel, Activision, and Raven was highly complex—structured as much by social hierarchies and corporate cultures as the structural forces of ownership. Furthermore, these relationships had material effects on both production processes and the licensed content that has resulted. The production of *X-Men Legends 2*, according to Vondrak, offered the most tension among Activision, Marvel, and Raven throughout the history of the partnership. In 2004, late in the development process for the first

X-Men Legends, Activision indicated its desire for a sequel, prompting Vondrak and his team to immediately start brainstorming ideas. They seized on the idea of adapting *Age of Apocalypse*, a 1995 comic book crossover event in which a time traveler assassinates Professor Xavier and creates an alternate universe where eugenics rule, usually villainous Magneto is the hero, and the other X-Men look and behave differently. This skewed perspective on the familiar elements of the franchise created the differentiation necessary to excite Raven to work with *X-Men* again. However, as Vondrak explains, many of the notes he received from Marvel (through Activision) concerned visual style and costume—the markers that would help audiences to identify familiar characters. If the alternate universe characters looked too different from their counterparts in other markets, the potential for cross-promotion would be severely dampened. During development of the first *X-Men Legends*, Marvel had insisted upon costumes from the *Ultimate X-Men* comic book that set the visual standard for its cross-promotional marketing at the time (due to their closer resemblance of those costumes to those in the concurrent mass market films). This obscure alternate universe was a step in the opposite direction, and did not sit well with either Activision or Marvel. To resolve this difference of opinion, the *Age of Apocalypse* sequel concept was focus-tested along with another potential storyline during market research for the first game. When the alternative rated two percentage points higher, the *Age of Apocalypse* was no more.

Prior to this disagreement, however, Raven had proceeded with asset production in earnest—developing character models and game maps appropriate to the *Age of Apocalypse* story. According to Vondrak, the developers clung to the *Age of Apocalypse* premise, and out of a continued desire to capitalize on creative resources already exchanged and developed, they retained as much of these original designs as possible. Thus, the story retained Apocalypse as a villain, made use of many of the same locations, but dropped the alternate timeline angle and retained the default character appearances preferred by Marvel and Activision. However, Raven expanded a design feature of the first *X-Men* game that had allowed users to unlock a small number of alternate character costumes. In the sequel, Raven included for most characters a costume recreating their appearance in *Age of Apocalypse*. Moreover, the developers incentivized the replacement of the mass-market defaults with these alternates by granting players who used those costumes exclusively a 100 percent increase in attack effectiveness.

To those unfamiliar with games or comics, the differences between these visual looks might have seemed inconsequential. Yet even these smallest elements of game design within a franchise like *X-Men* served as meaningful

Unlockable character costumes based on *Age of Apocalypse* from *X-Men Legends 2* (2005).

fields of negotiation among the interests of licensors, publisher-licensees, and developers locked into partnership despite their unaligned interests in that property. Dan Vondrak celebrated the collaboration provided by the Marvel-Raven-Activision relationship, but he maintained that their individual interests were only ever about "70 percent in alignment." Thus, we can expect franchised media artifacts produced by these partnerships to bear traces of these negotiated corporate interests. Franchising has been reconstituted since the pursuit of synergy not in terms of uniform, top-down institutional power, but instead by shifting and reimagined production relations between intellectual property owners and the tenants who make use of those shared resources.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Marvel Entertainment entered a new phase in its industrial imagining and management of franchise practice when purchased by Disney for $4 billion in 2009.[127] For a company that had been insolvent slightly more than a decade earlier, this purchase price spoke to the value of its intellectual properties and the success with which Marvel had reworked franchising logics to extend production across film, video games, and other markets. However, this sale complicated the production relations from which that value was generated, absorbing Marvel into a conglomerated network that would seek to leverage and exchange intellectual property resources in new ways. Even several years later, the consequences of the deal are not completely clear; with the film productions leading up to *The Avengers* all set in motion by a 2005 financial deal predating the merger, we have yet to see (as of this writing) how being part of the Disney conglomerate might truly reshape Marvel's film strategies. Marvel did, however, break its standing distribution agreement with Paramount Pictures for *Iron Man 3* and *The Avengers* so that those films could be absorbed into the Disney fold.[128] Some hint of the future may lie in television and games too, where Marvel ceased production of animated series like *Wolverine and the X-Men* produced for old partner/new competitor Nick Toons, and instead developed series like *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Avengers Assemble!* that it could more fully control on channels like Disney XD. The box office success of *The Avengers* has also lead to the production of a television pilot for Disney-owned ABC in which director Joss Whedon explores the S.H.I.E.L.D. organization featured in the film.[129] Meanwhile, Marvel allowed its master game license with Sega to expire in 2012, begging the question of whether Disney intends to publish Marvel games on its own.[130]

While the marriage thus reconfigured the network of corporate relationships in which Marvel operates and promised to privilege those that exclusively serve the horizontally integrated Disney empire, these new ownership dynamics and synergy revivals developed alongside many other persistent corporate claims to partnered use. Licensed partnerships persisted in markets like video games where a less dominant Disney was unwilling or unable to try to compete with the likes of Activision or Sega. Furthermore, while *The Avengers* received the most attention (internally and in popular discourse), the mass market exploitation in film of properties like *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* remained firmly in the hands of studio licenses like 20th Century Fox and Sony. Meanwhile, media workers ensconced in the new Disney organization negotiated the realities of a marriage in which different corporate cultures would collide, and new partners worried about the possibility of organizational and managerial conflicts upsetting existing franchise operations. Taking solace in Disney President Bob Iger's promise that "[w]e didn't touch Pixar, we're not touching you," Marvel writers like Brian Bendis publically hoped for the best, but the need for hope hinted at continued tensions over ownership and partnership that franchising asked the company to negotiate.[131] Indeed, it may actually be Disney's corporate culture and production strategies disrupted by the merger, with Marvel CEO Isaac Perlmutter reportedly making demands (and enemies) in dealing with the corporate parent.[132]

This latest moment for Marvel therefore offers a continuation of the institutional history of franchising, in which multiplied content production practices have been embraced and institutionalized in conjunction with shifting ownership and partnership strategies. Although many precedents to franchising predated the 1980s, the dominance of post-Fordist economies by that time supported the emergence of new distributional channels in which media franchises could fulfill demand for content. These developments unfolded quite differently across the film, television, video game, comic book, and toy industries, but each shared an intra-industrial need for product lines with the longevity to capture and hold audiences through multiplied consumption. Just as the retail franchise responded to new geographic patterns of consumption in the post–World War II era, the media franchise was institutionalized to respond to new market configurations that upset old patterns of dominance. As structures and relations of franchising evolved, they drove conglomerate expansion as much as they were driven by it, and new industrial discourses emerged by the 1990s to reimagine multiplied production within those ideals. Yet by 2000, franchising had outlasted the broken promise of synergy, reworked once more around strategic partnerships that emphasized exchange between corporate stakeholders over intellectual property monopoly. Individual franchises like Marvel Comics' *X-Men* evinced these evolutionary shifts, mutating from an intra-industrial franchise with limited cross-platform appeal in the 1980s, to an inter-industrial behemoth that drove excessive conglomerate expansion and corporate reorganization in the 1990s, and finally to a license-supporting partnership between economically and culturally distinct corporate entities. In all likelihood, franchising will be reworked again as it continues to reshape and be reshaped by new institutional relations and conditions.

One likely factor in these coming shifts will be the emerging distributional patterns and social relations of production accompanying digital media. What will these new digital economies mean for media franchising as an institutional practice? Modeling online economics around a theory of distributional abundance, Chris Anderson suggests that in "Long Tail" markets, the low- to non-existent costs of digital distribution will make it more profitable for culture industries to circulate niche products that generate fewer sales but more aggregate revenue than mass market hits.[133] Just as media franchising emerged as a means of multiplying content to meet the demand of new distribution models in film, television, toys, and comics, here too it might play a revised role. Moreover, media franchising can speak to both sides of a bifurcated market: while often built around blockbuster product geared toward mass audiences, franchised extension across multiple products/markets supports the content-led consumption patterns of niche audiences. And as Anderson argues, hits are still necessary as grist for the mill and as lubrication to make the Long Tail system work.[134] Thus, franchises have the potential to supply both hit-based and long-tail production. As these digital economies develop, it will be important to consider how this increased demand for content brings an even wider array of partners—corporate or otherwise—into formal production relationships. This connection between franchise networks and the social networks of digital culture will be further explored in chapter 5. For now, chapters 3 and 4 offer deeper exploration of the creative strategies and organizational structures undergirding franchise processes. How have franchise "worlds" been created by this network of stakeholders? How have they been maintained, altered, and reinvented? And most importantly, how have they been shared as cultural resources, and in what ways has the exchange prompted media workers to identify and make meaningful their own creative practice?

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3

Sharing Worlds

Difference, Deference, and the Creative Context of Franchising

In the 2009 made-for-TV animated movie *Turtles Forever*, the villainous Shredder offers a surprisingly cogent theoretical model for understanding the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise. To celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the franchise, the film shows viewers what would happen if the more serious and edgier turtles from the 2003–2009 animated series crossed paths with the cuter and goofier turtles from the 1987–1996 series. Having encountered these turtles from different moments of production, the 2003–2009 Shredder muses that "ours is but a single dimension in a multiverse of dimensions." Seeing this structure as a way to defeat his enemies across multiple universes, he reveals a sinister plot: "Like branches hanging off a single tree, each of these dimensions sprang from a common source. Destroy the source, and you would set off a chain reaction that would destroy Ninja Turtles everywhere . . . forever more!" By scanning the "source DNA" shared by both groups of turtles, Shredder believes he can locate "Turtle Prime" (the world of the original comic, of course), destroy it, and thereby bring an end to the Ninja Turtles—and as implied by the meta-discourse of the telefilm, the *Ninja Turtles* franchise. Despite his cartoonish plot, Shredder theorizes the franchise as a set of common elements shared across multiple, iterative interpretations of the same world. Shredder understands franchising as a balance between sameness and difference, between source DNA and potential elaborations of it. Those potential differences are then emphasized throughout the film, as the two (and eventually three) groups of turtles point out the pleasures and identifications to be taken in divergence. "Check out the initialized belt buckles on these yahoos," one of the 2003 turtles remarks of his 1987 counterparts, thereby calling attention to his own supposedly more refined visual design. "How lame can you get?"

For creative laborers working with franchise properties, too, this potential for difference and variation proves quite important as a means of distinguishing creative interest and negotiating meaningful production identities in the use of intellectual property resources shared across industrial networks. Despite having created the comics that inspired the blockbuster films *Hellboy* and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, Mike Mignola expressed ambivalence about the notion of multiplied production: "One thing I'm not interested in is creating another commercial franchise, much to the alarm of my lawyer."[1] To disavow the franchising of *Hellboy*, Mignola insisted upon differentiation between each node in the production network to keep his own work and creative identity distinct from the rest. He can then claim satisfaction with the *Hellboy* films on the basis that director Guillermo del Toro "put enough spins on it that it's going in a different direction than my comic. . . . The thing I said to Guillermo when I first met him was, 'Change whatever you want.' "[2] Similarly, *Iron Man 2* screenwriter Justin Theroux downplayed the relationships between filmmakers working on the projects marketed by Marvel Studios as part of the coordinated buildup to the 2012 *Avengers* crossover film: "there's no dialogue right now" between filmmakers, Theroux claimed, clarifying it was "in a great way."[3] Franchising, therefore, creates unique circumstances in which to consider the nature of creative identity in industrial contexts, since the territory in which creativity occurs is by definition a shared one, and networked creators must negotiate and give meaning to that sociality in their practice.

What does it mean to create within media franchising? How have franchise producers facilitated and negotiated shared production while rendering their creative labor meaningful as such? As Henry Jenkins suggests of contemporary media, "storytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium."[4] Many other scholars have characterized the practices of industrial creativity in these world-building terms.[5] However, there are some limitations to a theory of franchise creativity based in world-building. Any storyteller arguably builds a world in establishing narrative settings, which suggests that world-building would not be a creative phenomenon exclusive to franchising. Furthermore, not all franchise exchanges occur within the production of fictional narratives, so theories of franchised creativity should not overestimate the significance of these narrative frames. Nevertheless, the definitions of worlds theorized by Jenkins and others lend themselves to franchising less in their narrative qualities, and more in their seemingly inexhaustible capacity to be shared among a multiplicity of production communities. Such an understanding would also recognize that media franchising does not end with the building of a world; instead, worlds are continually used and dynamically altered by creative laborers who may or may not have played any role in their genesis. What distinguishes world-building in media franchising from that in "traditional" media works is the degree to which worlds, once built, become shared among creative stakeholders working in and across multiple production sites. Franchising occurs where creative resources are exchanged across contexts of production, where sequels, spin-offs, and tie-ins ask multiple production communities to work in successive or parallel relation to one another. This makes franchising better conceived in the terms of world-sharing than world-building. The world in play in franchised production offers a shared creative context in which many different individuals and communities can draw resources and contribute in kind.

This chapter explores how creativity has developed within and throughout the history of the media franchise by moving past world-building to conceptualize the franchise in terms of world-sharing among creative workers and communities. My analysis involves an examination of the creative strategies that have constructed worlds to be shared, the practices by which shared creative use has been managed, as well as how media workers have conceived and made meaningful their own creative labors and production identities in relation to these shared structures. This emphasis on shared creativity and collaboration puts franchising at odds with traditional models of authorship that understand creativity solely in relation to individuals. Franchising offers ongoing creative processes through which worlds are developed, maintained, and reiterated across networks of industrial relations. In this context, the subjective identification of individuals and communities with the idea of creativity comes to be constructed through the pleasures, tensions, and frustrations of working with resources over which others can make parallel claims of creative interest and authority. World-sharing asks us to consider claims and discourses of franchise authorship in terms of social relations.

To consider these issues, this chapter will examine the creative management of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Star Trek*, two science fiction franchises (based primarily in television, but with licensed productions in industries like comics and games) that have engaged in world-sharing across multiple historical moments and industrial contexts. First developed by Universal in 1978, the initial incarnation of *Battlestar* aired for one season on ABC before cancellation. The series told the story of the Colonial Fleet, a diasporic caravan of spaceships led by the battlestar *Galactica*, in search of refuge on the mythical planet Earth following the destruction of their home world by the evil Cylons. A reworked continuation set after arrival on Earth, *Galactica 1980*, survived ten episodes. In response to its cult following in syndication, several competing attempts were made to revive the series in the 1990s, culminating in the production of a remake that aired on the Sci-Fi cable network from 2003 to 2009. After the end of this so-called reimagined series, the spin-off *Caprica* followed in 2010, followed by the development of a second would-be spin-off *Battlestar Galactica: Blood and Chrome* (as of this writing, plans for television production have been scrapped, but with talk of an online series continuing).[6] The production surrounding this reimagined series extended to webisodes for the Sci-Fi website, novels by Tor Books, comic books by Dynamite Entertainment, toys manufactured by Hasbro and Diamond Select Toys, and video games by Sierra and BigPoint. Far more culturally ubiquitous, *Star Trek* grew from a 1966–1969 television series produced by Desilu/Paramount into an animated television series, an ongoing series of Paramount feature films, and a succession of spin-off series: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999), *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001), and *Enterprise* (2001–2005). Accompanying all these filmed productions over the past five decades included licensed novels, video games, action figures, and ultimately anything merchandisable by innumerable publishers and manufacturers. By looking at these two science fiction franchises in tandem, this chapter hopes to draw commonalities of franchising more broadly across a historical genre and more roundly consider specific patterns of creative practice and professional identification shared across these two particular series. Together, these franchises offer a nexus of claims to authority and distinction in the use of shared worlds that might reveal how media workers navigate and make claims to creativity within industrial structures.

Points of intersection between these two franchises emerge from the authorial and creative discourses circulated by, around, and through the figure of Ronald D. Moore, and by extension, the other producers with whom he shared worlds. As executive producer, developer, and showrunner, Moore oversaw the reimagining of *Battlestar*, while also playing a supervisory role in the creation of *Caprica*. Throughout, Moore used his status as showrunner to position himself as the voice of creative authority. He explained, for example, that his role was to revise every script, no matter who on his staff wrote it, "to maintain the voice of the show, as it were. The show has a voice. And it's my voice."[7] However, this claim to authorial identity occurred in relation to the use of creative resources originated by, or at least shared with, Glen A. Larson, the creator of the original series. Moreover, Moore's professional identity and the discourses of creativity that gave meaning to his work on *Battlestar* extended from articulation to his previous work in the *Star Trek* franchise. Prior to developing *Battlestar*, Moore co-executive produced *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* from 1994 to 1999, and held staff positions on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* from 1989 to 1994. Moore also co-wrote the feature films *Star Trek: Generations* (1994) and *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996) and consulted on CD-ROM projects like *Star Trek: Klingon* (1996). In crafting a professional identity for himself, Moore activates his work on *Battlestar* within a creative trajectory shared with *Star Trek*. As Moore opined, "there is certainly a lineage to it. A lot of things that I do in *Battlestar* had their birth in discussions in the writer's room in *Deep Space*. Things we said we couldn't do. Character turns that we could never really do."[8] This allows Moore to craft meaning across the different moments of his career and situate that earlier work within his claims to professional and authorial identity. Yet again Moore shared that claim to creative identity and authority in the production of *Star Trek* with series creator Gene Roddenberry as well as later franchise producers with whom Moore directly worked, like Michael Piller, Rick Berman, and Ira Steven Behr. In supporting an authorship discourse spanning both franchises, therefore, a figure like Moore offers a productive entry point into the sharing of worlds, pointing not only to how media workers identify as creative, but also how claims to authorship occur in negotiation of other laborers' claims to industrial identity.

Examined in intersection with the creative acts and claims of producers like Larsen, Roddenberry, or Berman, an authorial figure like Moore paradoxically points to the shared, socially networked dynamics of creativity in franchising. So while Moore lays claim to authorship, his identification with/as creativity authority in the context of franchising offers an instructive opportunity to consider that authorship in tension with a franchising model that decenters creativity across a number of fields. As John Caldwell suggests, television showrunners operate in an increasingly decentralized production environment—one in which the challenges of bringing unity to the ongoing output of television production have been compounded by a multiplication of related productions in comics, video games, and online.[9] In similarly suggesting that this expanding scope of television production has enabled practices of collective authorship, Denise Mann argues that we nevertheless continue to privilege the "singular" voice of authors despite that collaboration because of coordinated industry efforts to construct the "illusion" of absolute showrunner power.[10] Claims of creative identity, therefore, often operate in tension with the actual labor practices of and relations of production described by those discourses. Furthermore, as Matt Stahl argues, the work for hire performed by television producers on behalf of media corporations "allocates authorship and ownership of intellectual property produced in the workplace to employers, alienating employee media workers and also enabling the dispossession of most freelancers."[11] The claims to creativity made by Moore and others in the context of franchising, therefore, sit in tension with these corporate claims to authorship, working to disarticulate the idea of creativity from ownership and rearticulate it to use within the labor relations of industry. Moreover, those corporate claims to authorship may even prop up some forms of creative identification within the industry, underwriting the attempts of one producer or production community to disavow claims to creative authority made by another. In identifying with creative discourses and ascribing meaning to work within franchising structures, media workers have confronted the disjuncture between traditional notions of individualistic, autonomous authorship and the collaborative, shared exchanges of industry.

To examine how cultural claims to authorship and creativity are negotiated through the shared use of franchise worlds, this chapter consults a number of sites where that world-sharing has been rendered meaningful for and in relation to the industrial identities of specific producers and production communities. This includes archival material relevant to the creative labor of producers working within these two franchises. Archived at the University of Southern California, the Ronald D. Moore collection documents the production of the reimagined *Battlestar* as well as Moore's involvement in the *Star Trek* spin-offs from 1987 to 1999. The Gene Roddenberry Collection at the University of California, Los Angeles includes more production documentation from the original *Star Trek* series and provides a broader sense of creative negotiations and identifications in the proto-franchising of the 1960s. This chapter also draws upon popular resources used by producers to deploy "managed self-disclosures" about the production process and thereby construct meaningful discourses of creativity and authorship for public consumption, including audio podcasts that chronicle production of *Battlestar* episodes and document writers' meetings and editing sessions, as well as published series companions and creator interviews.[12] Finally, I conducted interviews with creative personnel currently working in the industry from a variety of perspectives. While this sample includes *Battlestar* composer Bear McCreary, it also includes television drama producers, video game developers, an online webisode creator, a reality television programmer, and cinema screenwriters (with many interviewees working across fields).

Ultimately, this chapter conceptualizes the building and sharing of franchise worlds among creative stakeholders along three axes. After reviewing existing perspectives on world-building, I first examine the strategies and processes through which television worlds have been built to be shared. How have worlds been designed to support the shared elaboration of franchising at the levels of story, image, and sound? Crucial here as a key dimension of world-sharing will be the notion of emergence as a means of understanding the potential for ongoing, iterative, improvisational use of a system of defined resources. Second, this chapter considers how networked creative laborers use these resources and construct meaningful discourses and identities in recognition of their use in other industrial contexts. How do "peer" laborers in similar positions of institutional power (working on parallel television spin-offs, for example) share franchise resources in such a way as to embrace that shared use while also making creative claims to unique professional identities? Producers and production communities in these franchises have developed specific formal and discursive strategies to take pleasure in world-sharing while also claiming territory within them and distinguishing themselves as creatively identified agents. Yet while "peer" communities may work to emphasize difference between uses of worlds extending from similar institutional positions, how do networked media laborers also position themselves as meaningful creative subjects when sharing worlds from positions of institutional inequality? For licensees and others working in less valued, prestigious, or powerful institutional contexts, the use of shared worlds has often required a deferential identification with more privileged sites of production in cultural and industrial hierarchies. This tension between difference and deference in world-sharing demonstrates that franchised production has been neither homogeneous, nor devoid of creativity, nor a site of authorial unity. Instead, media franchising has served as a site of negotiated identification for unequal creative stakeholders that variously navigate distinction, power, and fealty via their interests in shared cultural resources.

Old Media World, New Media Design

Given that franchising works through an intensified episodicity similar to that of television production, television studies offers a productive starting point from which to consider the creative construction of worlds. In his study of fan cultures, Matt Hills situates cult television formations in the coherence and continuity of what he calls "hyperdiegesis": vast, detailed narrative space only partially seen on screen but operating according to an internal logic and ontology.[13] Similarly, Kurt Lancaster examines immersion and performance within the television world of *Babylon 5* across an "imaginary entertainment environment" in which the fantasy world becomes tangible through the systemic interface of card games, CD-ROMs, and other ancillary texts.[14] Janet Murray too argues that the marriage of television and the computer will result in "hyperserial" formats in which artifacts from fictional television worlds migrate to online spaces where audiences can virtually interact with them.[15] Aptly, that hyperseriality makes the hyperdiegetic spaces of television navigable. Yet while these scholars trace the complex relationship between television textuality and interactive reception, Jeffrey Sconce notes the utility of world-building to everyday creative challenges producers face. Beginning in the 1980s, he argues, producers began to focus on "series architectures" that generated "a certain diegetic fringe available for textual elaboration."[16] Crucially, Sconce argues that the central creative dynamic of episodic television writing lay not in innovation, but the generation of difference amid endless repetition of characters, settings, situations, and themes: "the true art is in the algebra of such repetition, . . . not the formula, but the unique integers plugged into the equation."[17] Worlds generate difference amid repetition through their potential for elaboration, spun into "what if?" scenarios and other new improvisations of the core series architecture.[18] Sconce understands why worlds have been built and how they have been used, and that emphasis on creativity amid industrial repetition offers an ideal foundation for thinking about how franchise worlds are socially shared.

Film studies have also paid significant attention to world-building. David Bordwell points to the role of art design in world-building, where settings and mise-en-scène packed with detail generate authenticity and coherence of cinematic space.[19] Beyond Sconce's focus on scripting, Bordwell understands how worlds are built from style as well. Pushing this farther, Kristin Thompson argues that the *Lord of the Rings* films were constructed according to principles of dense visual and aural "overdesign."[20] Prop makers, for example, built deep stocks of swords, arrows, and armor, and 48,000 other objects in far greater quantity, detail, and function than they might ever need to show on screen in a single film. The creators had generated visual resources in excess of what could be contained on screen. Her analysis points to how style renders the world at a level of detail exceeding what might be contained in a single text, incentivizing later exploration of all the potential visually overdesigned into the world.

Television and film scholars are not the only analysts concerned with this sense of design, however. This notion of world-building also recalls the design of virtual spaces discussed by new media practitioners and theorists. Hypertext "lexia," George Landow argued, are constructed, networked, and experienced as shared virtual environments.[21] Tim Berners-Lee, designer of key World Wide Web protocols in the 1990s, connected its success as an interface for social, political, and economic connectivity to its creation of a persistent, shared, but decentralized data space.[22] Successful virtual spaces, William Mitchell adds, are those designed to support claims of property, ownership, and privilege by users over objects within it.[23] Though we might typically associate end users with the consumers of media franchises, these new media theorists help us to envision industrial producers too as users of the cultural resources they share via worlds. Good design of franchise worlds, these theorists might suggest, is that which allows producers to develop feelings of ownership, reputation, and privilege in relation to the creative resources they mobilize.

Video game design theory also provides particular insight into the social operation of franchised worlds as a creative system. Instead of conceptualizing game design in terms of traditional storytelling, Henry Jenkins conceives it as a process of narrative architecture, suggesting that although game designers are not storytellers per se, they craft systems from which narratives can emerge.[24] In considering massively multiplayer online role playing games like *World of Warcraft*, Edward Castronova argues that properly designed worlds can support new forms of economics, politics, and culture that emerge from users' behaviors within those systems.[25] Game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman similarly conceptualize design in terms of systems that perpetuate emergence, arguing that the product of design is not gameplay itself, but the rule-based, systemic contexts in which play can meaningfully unfold. In this view, emergence is free movement within the possibilities afforded by a pre-defined structure; play is the effect, use, and experience of "rules set into motion."[26] Considering franchise worlds similarly as overdesigned systems would mean conceiving creativity in terms of a similarly structured process of emergence. Franchising is not a form of gameplay, but in recognizing similar systemic design principles, we might adapt our conceptual frameworks to ask how franchise worlds are constructed, in their own way, to produce emergent creative behaviors among users of the production resources constituted by and contained within those worlds. What emerges from the professionalized social networks sharing franchise worlds is not play per se, but meaningful, ongoing creative elaboration of shared production resources (narrative or otherwise). The design of the world shapes but does not fully determine emergent creative use of it, especially as users from different creative communities negotiate their own unequal, subjective claims to identity and privilege in relation to those resources. This allows franchising to be understood in terms of its creative structures, but also in terms of the dynamic creative subjectivities and strategies that emerge from shared use of worlds.

Overdesigning a Shared World

Tracing a historical trajectory from the proto-franchising of the original *Star Trek* series in the 1960s to *Battlestar Galactica* in the 2000s, we can see that the design—or in Thompson's terms, overdesign—of sharable worlds depended on specific narrative, visual, and sound design strategies. By establishing a systemic set of principles to govern the look, sound, and behaviors of narrative characters, events, and setting—and introducing increasing complexity over time—these science fiction series constructed their worlds as creative contexts that could support the emergent production and elaboration of further content. As creative structures, these worlds generated content through ongoing use and reuse.

From the start of production in the 1960s, the world of *Star Trek* was designed according to systemic narrative principles governing how subsequent writers could use elements of the world across episodes. "Star Trek: Notes, Questions on Art and Design," written in 1964 by series creator Gene Roddenberry prior to production of the first pilot, laid out in great detail all the fictional technologies and scientific systems to be featured in the series, including basic rules for the exploration of outer space; functional explanations for various stations on the bridge; and descriptions of landing party gear (including uniforms, communicators, laser guns).[27] A similar document later drafted for the series *Writers' Guide* briefed storytellers on the scientific theory behind the practicality of phasers, transporters, deflectors, sensors, shuttles, tractor beams, computers, universal translators, and subspace radio signals.[28] Although few of these technical details would be included in scripts (Roddenberry, in fact, discouraged this), the world was overdesigned in detail beyond what appeared on screen. By the production of the spin-off *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in the 1980s, the rules governing the imagined technologies of the expanding franchise world had become sufficiently complex to support a 51-page publication of their own rivaling the *Writers' Guide*. Authors Rich Sternbach and Michael Okuda realized these rules would not be featured on screen so much as prove useful to writers: "*relatively few of our scripts use more than a tiny amount of this material.* Still, some story points do hinge on this stuff, . . . hence this document."[29] This was overdesign par excellence, in that the detailed functions of warp engines and phasers were imagined well in advance of any on-screen use for them on the chance those rules would aid later use and elaboration. Similarly, the original 1966 *Writer's Guide* presented the institution of the United Federation of Planets (UFP) as both a firmly circumscribed narrative parameter but also a license to freely create:

> That's who we belong to. We assume that the UFP is basically an Earth federation, probably organized by Earth people, but by now including thousands of alien races on thousands of planets throughout the galaxy. It is not a nation of worlds. It is a loose federation, banded together for mutual advancement and advantage with a central but undefined governing body.

> There are other powers in the galaxy, as many as we want, and as hostile or friendly as we want. Feel free to invent.[30]

Story elements like the UFP offered creative users of the *Star Trek* property both a stable creative context and a flexibility to elaborate upon it.

Roddenberry also recognized the significance of art direction and mise-en-scène to world design. In 1964, he wrote production manager James Paisley to stress the unusual importance set design would have to his series: "It is not a case of reproducing something that exists or has existed in history, but rather the more creative task of imagining completely new types and ways of life and social systems. We cannot depend on the writer to give us all of this."[31] Roddenberry pursued visual design as a means of developing worlds systemically beyond what might be accomplished in a single writer's script. In April 1967, Roddenberry wrote costume designer Bill Theiss, requesting "a better and clear-lined version of the Star Trek ensignia [sic]" as well as his "suggestions for coordinating the use of these designs throughout the series, on other Earth Federation vessels, on planet bases, on star bases, etc."[32] To manifest the *Star Trek* universe visually, wardrobe and art directors were expected to play integral roles in building a consistent world. Moreover, as the *Trek* franchise endured, a not just consistent, but also persistent visual design tradition emerged. By 1995, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens could argue that the franchise's art design depended on money and practicality, like any commercial product, but also a third defining factor: "History. This is the filter of all that has gone before in STAR TREK. It is the visual continuity, sometimes strong, sometimes almost subliminal, which links the original television *Enterprise* to the *Enterprise*-D and the *Voyager*, and the Klingons of Kirk's era to those of Picard's."[33] The designed illusion of *Star Trek* was "made all the more believable by the weight of consistent, functional detail."[34] This history produced specific and sometimes intractable rules for design. In pre-production for *Star Trek: Voyager* in 1994, production designer Richard James discovered that no matter how many set design alternatives he explored for the series' main "bridge" set, the farther he went from the familiar captain's chair/helm/viewscreen configuration, the more his designs "just weren't *Star Trek*."[35] In response, he re-embraced the design continuity of the franchise.

Over a 35-year period, therefore, *Trek* producers developed a very specific set of tools and creative strategies with which to build worlds suitable for ongoing extension and elaboration. It is into this context that individual creative laborers like Ronald Moore entered, and in relation to which claims of his professional and creative identity would start to be constructed. Moore soon discovered that shared use of a franchised world meant not just generating content, but taking on subjective positions of identity in relation to a social network of production. Moore entered into this elaborative context in the late 1980s during the production of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, where his first scripts as both a freelancer ("The Bonding") and a staff story editor ("Sins of the Father") elaborated a new feudal culture for the extant Klingons, who had long served as stock villains, but without cultural motivations, rituals, or behaviors. This elaboration allowed Moore to claim a specific privilege and identity within the wider network of the franchise, as other writers began to defer to him for all things Klingon—so much so that he could describe himself as "The Margaret Mead of Klingons."[36] This was an ambivalent position of professional identification that Moore was willing to embrace only partially, perhaps due to it pigeon-holing him within a single creative role. "I may have the *reputation* of being the Klingon guy," he once explained, "but other people have good takes on them, too. And it's good to have more than one writer developing an entire culture. They bring something else to the party, and ultimately, that enriches the whole franchise."[37] Thus, Moore sought to make clear that he had had added to the shared creative context of the franchise a resource that could be further elaborated upon by others in the relations of production.

Following his departure from *Trek* in 1999, Moore would apply many strategies of systemic overdesign to his development of the 2003 *Battlestar Galactica* miniseries, putting the world-building and -sharing practice of the two franchises in relation to one another, but also enabling him to extend and negotiate his creative identity as a world user. In his podcasts and other claims to authorial identity, Moore described his approach to world-building on *Battlestar* in practical terms of "textures": broadly defined as any element of televisuality that provided a deeper flavor or understanding of the *Battlestar* universe as a seemingly coherent, functioning place with a depth beyond the surface levels of narrative plot. For example, while supporting characters like Anastasia Dualla and Felix Gaeta remained on the narrative periphery in the first two seasons, Moore asserted that "they're just part of the fabric of the show and the show would be seriously damaged if they weren't in it because . . . they provide such important texture and humanity into the life aboard the battlestar . . . which really makes the world work."[38] Staff writer Mark Verheiden similarly explained that for Season 2's "Final Cut," Moore and producing partner David Eick pushed for "a stand-alone, day-in-the-life type show that explored some of the less featured characters and gave the world of the ship some additional texture."[39] In this professional discourse on creativity, Moore asserted that the overall effect of such textures was a sense of "a reality of the world. It really makes it feel like a continuing story with familiar faces and the world just keeps expanding."[40]

This idea of an expanding, seemingly self-propelled diegesis also manifested itself through textures that pointed toward what could not be seen on screen. In his podcast for the second season episode "The Captain's Hand," for example, Moore argued:

> This notion that Cottle was performing abortions throughout the Fleet, very quietly and with no questions asked, . . . provided this backstage look at what was happening off-camera during all these episodes. That there was a life to the fleet. . . . People's lives were continuing on. . . . And just because we didn't show them to you up in CIC didn't mean that things weren't happening below decks.[41]

Moore sustained this same discourse in talking about the third season episode "Dirty Hands":

> This episode, I think, opens up the world of the Fleet in a way that none of the episodes really have. How does the Fleet operate? Well, there's a tylium ship out there. There's a refinery ship out there. And they have their own world, their own reality, . . . their own narrative of what's happened in the Fleet that is separate from what has happened aboard Galactica.[42]

Similarly, Moore explained that episodes like "Black Market" emerged from writers' discussion about "[w]hat is really happening out there economically? Where are people getting things?" in order to flesh out exactly how their narrative world functioned as a system.[43] Such story textures, therefore, pointed toward everything *not* regularly captured on the page or screen, but contained as potential in the designed possibilities of that system. This overdesign of the world suggested entire social and economic systems beneath the surface with creative potential waiting to be elaborated upon by any one future episode. Although Moore acknowledged in Season 3 that religious textures established previously had been "not quite fully developed enough in the show,"[44] this dormant, overdesigned detail served as a resource for later systemic elaboration. In the fourth and final season of the series, the producers found themselves able to pay off "the monotheism vs. the polytheism as our religious conflict on the show, 'cause it was built into the series from the very beginning."[45]

In developing the look of the 2003 *Battlestar Galactica* miniseries, Moore also identified style as the means to texture his on-screen world. To achieve what he calls a "naturalistic" visual design, Moore promised in his 2003 proposal:

> The first thing that will leap out at viewers is the dynamic use of the documentary or cinema verite style. Through the extensive use of hand-held cameras, practical lighting, and functional set design, the battlestar Galactica will feel on every level like a real place. . . . A casual viewer should for a moment feel like he or she has accidentally surfed onto a "60 Minutes" documentary piece about life aboard an aircraft carrier until someone starts talking about Cylons and battlestars.[46]

Moore figured the camera as a means of supplying the visual verisimilitude for which more fantastical franchises like *Star Trek* had historically relied upon continuity of mise-en-scène design. In addition, by conceptualizing cinematography in terms of cinema verité, Moore positioned the camera as an object and participant within the story world: "Our ships will be treated like real ships that someone had to go out and film with a real camera. . . . [Q]uestions we will ask before every VFX shot are things like: 'How did we get this shot? Where is the camera? Who's holding it? Is the cameraman in another spacecraft? Is the camera mounted on the wing?' "[47] With cinematography as a tool of world-building, every shot pointed to a dynamic space off-screen. Ethan Thompson argues that sitcoms like *Arrested Development* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* made use of documentary modes of production for their "efficiency, visual complexity, and semiotic clout," resulting in a new "comedy verité [that] can effectively create opportunities for producing laughter that hadn't been there before."[48] Extending this idea, the verité cinematographic styles of *Battlestar* (developed around the same time as these sitcoms) created opportunities for world design unexplored in fiction television traditions.

Sound, too, played a key role in world design. Although composer Bear McCreary did not imagine his ensemble of Scottish bagpipes, Japanese taiko drums, Chinese erhus, or Balinese gamelans sitting alongside Moore's in-world camera, the composer stressed that "the music does draw from the world. The music is not disconnected from the universe they take place in." Recognizing that composers have frequently matched music to the world on the screen—using American folk tunes to score Westerns, for example—McCreary sought to refine this technique with the *Battlestar* score. However, using the culture of a fictional world as inspiration for a non-diegetic score required him to overdesign: he had to first imagine what the popular music genres of that diegetic world sounded like. "I used the world, their culture as my starting point. . . . In the beginning it was a very subtle idea that was basically in my head, but as the series went on, there became places where I could actually implement this."[49] One such opportunity came in the third season finale, "Crossroads," wherein Moore requested a cover version of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" as it would be performed in the *Battlestar* world. Although the Sci-Fi network offered to pay the license fee for the recognizable Jimi Hendrix version, Moore refused, explaining that "the idea was that the lyrics of a song, and the song itself . . . could be passed from culture to culture, or have found its way through the mists of time from one place to another." *Battlestar*'s interpretation of the song needed to sound unique and appropriate to the still unheard but already overdesigned popular music of that world. To create this diegetic music, McCreary asked himself: "What does their rock and roll sound like? And I knew exactly what it sounded like. It sounded like my score, because my score was supposedly drawn from their popular music."[50] Thus, the aural design of the diegetic music cue was elaborated from the non-diegetic score which was itself elaborated from an overdesigned conception of music in the diegetic world. While McCreary essentially drew from his own creative practice here, rather than sharing in an existing cultural tradition (except of course that shared with Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and all those who have produced the song anew), his elaboration on the popular music of the *Battlestar* world became a collaborative resource for the writers to later expound upon themselves. Twelve key notes from McCreary's "All Along the Watchtower" became a story device, corresponding to the spatial coordinates of the planet where the Colonial Fleet settles in the series finale.

Not all world design for television franchises has occurred within the specific confines of television labor, however. Kevin Grazier, a scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, moonlighted as a consultant for the reimagined *Battlestar*, responsible for vetting scripts for scientific and technical inaccuracies. Immediately upon being hired and reading in the series bible that the Twelve Colonies from which the Colonial Fleet originated consisted of a dozen habitable planets in the same star system, Grazier claims to have been "so excited, I went home, . . . then proceeded to hack out a document on the astronomy of the Twelve Colonies." Grazier suggested several detailed scenarios in which the 12 planets could be distributed across a multiple star system like the "famous" double-double star Epsilon Lyrae. He also "made some speculations [about] how the layout of the planets might influence development on each—how astronomy might influence culture," hashing out a social studies of the Colonies as well as an astronomy. Illustrating its status as truly overdesigned, Grazier developed a complex explanation for the astronomical and cultural orientation of planets that the very premise of the series suggested the Colonial Fleet would never be able to return to (having been destroyed by the Cylons in the pilot miniseries). Nevertheless, this "touchstone" sat in wait until the production of *Caprica*, a prequel that would return to the original setting of the Twelve Colonies. At that point, this largely academic document had new purpose as a resource for showrunner Jane Espenson—though even revised it remained background material that "helped the worlds feel real" to the producers, rather than material that ended up on screen itself.[51] As an outside contractor, Grazier played a key role in overdesigning the world of the reimagined series as one that could support further production elaboration years down the road.

While television franchising depends on the systematic design of creative contexts for elaboration, those systmes are not animated by an agency of their own. Quite oppositely, they have been animated by the practices of creative artists whose labor makes use of the resources designed into such systems. Moreover, as constituted across multiple fields of narrative, visual, and aural labor, world design has been significantly collaborative—indicative of the networked, distributed creativity posited by researchers including John Caldwell and Erin Hill.[52] The so-called textures that give worlds depth provide resources creators are encouraged to share, developing more content through the elaboration of unseen but schematized and overdesigned off-screen space.

Sharing Worlds, Sharing Industry

It is this structured yet flexible potential for creative emergence that has enabled such worlds to leave the hands of initial designers and be shared among different production communities in service of the culture industries. To explore how franchise worlds have been shared at this level, we can first look at how discrete production teams and communities within the same industry make negotiated claims to creative identity in relation to the shared use of resources in spin-off production. This kind of multiplied production can be successive, occurring shortly after production of an original ends (like *Joey* following the cancellation of *Friends*) or significantly after (like the two decade gap between the two *Battlestar Galactica* series). Sharing can also occur concurrently, as with the five-year overlap in production between *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek: Voyager*. In both of these potentialities, the multiple production communities involved might be considered discrete "peer" productions, in that each operated from within a roughly similar institutional context (in this case, dramatic studio television production), adjusted for different historical contexts or different configurations of talent and personnel. These peer relations have shaped the shared use of franchise worlds within these intra-industrial contexts—chiefly in the desire of different production communities to both take pleasure in a tradition of creativity and establish their own unique identities and subjective creative viewpoints. What has resulted are practices that acknowledge the use of shared worlds while also pushing for recognition of a difference that allowed production communities to make meaningful claims to creative and professional distinction.

In "Naturalistic Science Fiction," the manifesto written to pitch the reimagined *Battlestar*, Moore played up the creative potential of his concept for the series in stark opposition to the limitations of the world he had previously worked with on *Star Trek*. "Our goal is nothing less than the reinvention of the science fiction television series," Moore grandly wrote: "We take as a given the idea that the traditional space opera, with its stock characters, techno-double-talk, bumpy-headed aliens, thespian histrionics, and empty heroics has run its course and a new approach is required. That approach is to introduce realism into what has heretofore been an aggressively unrealistic genre."[53] Though he does not mention it by name, Moore clearly insinuates that the point of creative departure for his series would be *Star Trek*. Yet in playing up this difference, and claiming a creative identity based in the originality of his naturalistic perspective, Moore also obscures his ambivalent creative relationship with *Battlestar* as a shared, franchised property. He positions his creative work in relation to another franchise and his own personal history within it, deflecting attention from what he's borrowing from Glen A. Larsen and the producers of the original *Battlestar* series and more easily underwriting claims of unique authorial voice and vision. Comparatively, when directly invoking the franchise heritage of *Battlestar*, Moore has sometimes positioned that pre-existing *Battlestar* world more as blank slate or empty brand waiting not for borrowed elaboration but re-genesis. "Because *Battlestar Galactica* was an existing 'name franchise' that had done things for the studio in the past," Moore describes his attraction to the project, "the studio was likely to be willing to give us some room to take some risks with the show and really reinvent the genre."[54] Similarly, in discussing their production as a "reimagining," Moore and his producers constructed a meaningful production identity in relation to the original series that acknowledged world-sharing but reframed that creative use as a complete reformulation of its parameters. The relationship between the reimagined production and its historical predecessor as peer productions, therefore, required negotiation in claims made to creativity and production identity. As much as their creative discourse often suggested that they had built a world in opposition to another franchise, Moore and his production team also had to situate themselves in relation to the creative labor that had preceded them in the *Battlestar* franchise. This negotiation put the pleasures of identification and engagement with other creators' contributions in tension with claims to creativity based in distanciations from previous uses.

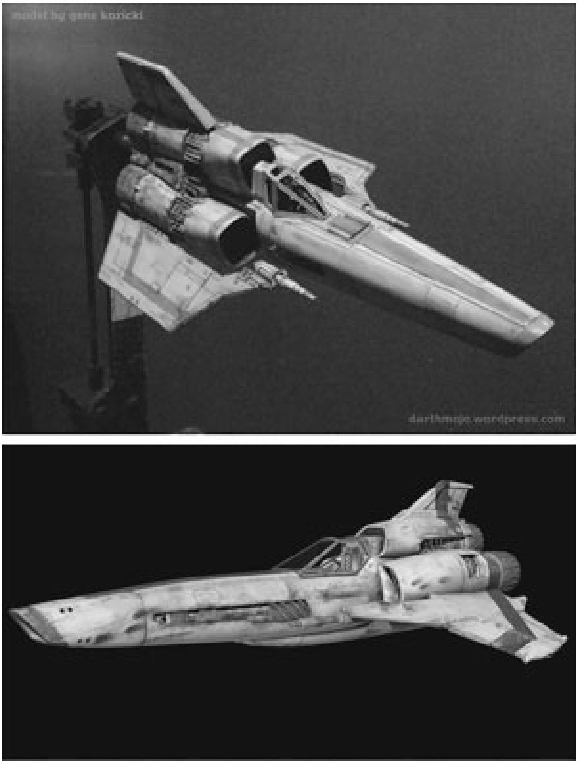
As we will see, these negotiations over creative identity in the shared use of worlds have marked both the wider tradition of science fiction television franchising and the authorial discourses that construct meaningful identities for producers like Moore in relation to that trajectory. For many practitioners, the use of worlds shared with other production communities has promised distinct industrial attractions. With *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* in production at the same time, for example, creative resources could be shared throughout the intra-industrial network, rendering production cheaper and more efficient. As a producer, Moore learned that "we could save a lot of money if we went over and used their existing stuff, rather than building a new ship."[55] These existing resources also simplified script development and bequeathed writers with a valuable inheritance of backstory. As *Voyager* producer Brannon Braga attested: "That's a whole bunch of texturing I don't have to come up with."[56] While many writers initially struggle to find the voice for characters on a new series, those on *Deep Space Nine* found they could import story elements from *The Next Generation* to ease the process.[57] Furthermore, the ability to share characters proved useful in the early development of *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*. In 1990, when the former series was still tentatively titled "Starbase 131," producers considered populating the new series with not just one character spun off from *The Next Generation*, but three.[58] Although that idea would be abandoned, the ongoing production of *The Next Generation* provided further inspiration. After the August 1991 production of "Ensign Ro"[59] introduced the eponymous character and the plight of her alien race at the hands of the totalitarian Cardassians, co-creator Michael Piller wrote to Rick Berman with new inspiration for their spin-off:

> Maybe if we go back to our Ro origins and revisit her race, . . . maybe it is her planet with its Cardassian puppet leader that is the location of the stable wormhole. . . . [W]hat it allows us to do is to take Ro as a potential spin-off character with a personal stake in regaining her homeland. . . . [I]t is in yours and my best creative interests to take existing characters from our show and build them into our development plans.[60]

Though *Deep Space Nine* had been in development nearly a year, the producers found productive ways to revise their plans as *The Next Generation* generated new creative resources. Such appropriations of existing resources from within the story world continued when Piller co-developed *Voyager* with Rick Berman and Jeri Taylor. In August 1993, the producing partners considered writing an episode of *The Next Generation* with the specific purpose of introducing the holographic technologies they planned to feature on the new series.[61] Instead, the producers would seed the backstory for *Voyager*'s Maquis freedom fighter characters across two episodes of *The Next Generation* and three of *Deep Space Nine* in 1994.[62] Thus, the shared world offered a means to coordinate intersecting crossover narratives across multiple television productions.

Beyond these production and storytelling efficiencies, however, the sharing of worlds between *Battlestar* series also demonstrates a creative pleasure taken in identification across production communities, and the construction of shared production identities across those lines. Despite his insistence on a reimagination, Moore made conscious connections between the two series, reaffirming the world shared by both even as their narrative continuities diverged. "I tried to keep as much of the original show as possible. I kept all the essential elements." The reimagined series still posits the *Galactica* as an aircraft carrier in space fleeing the Cylon attack on the Twelve Colonies, with familiar characters Adama, Apollo, Boomer, Starbuck, Tigh, and Baltar once again searching for Earth. Universal had asked them to revive an existing intellectual property and production identity, after all, and "it wouldn't have been *Battlestar Galactica* without them."[63] In the network draft of the 2003 miniseries, Moore describes the Viper fighter craft carried aboard *Galactica* as "virtually identical in design to the 70's TV series."[64] In the miniseries, dialogue like "Life here began out there" and "By your command" also drew from the original, as did the appropriation of "frak" as in-world profanity. In making claims about his creative practice, Moore affirmed his use of a shared world in acknowledging that "[t]he roots of the original show are embedded in our show. . . . Our show's premise is the same as the premise they had in 1978. . . . I've always felt we were trying to really embrace the core that is *Battlestar Galactica*."[65] In addition, with characters spouting prophetic lines like "[A]ll this has happened before and all this will happen again" in episodes like "The Hand of God," Moore and his writers created an opening to read—and write—the reimagined series as part of an eternal tale that included the original.

As he had on *Deep Space Nine*, Moore also frequently claimed fan identity for himself, thrilled to engage with this meaningful part of his personal



Comparison of *Battlestar Galactica* Viper fighter models from 1978 (*top*; physical recasting by Gene Kozicki, photo by Adam Lebowitz) and 2003 (*bottom*; CGI rendering by Zoic Studios).

history by revisiting the themes and plotlines he remembered from the original series. The episode “Pegasus,” for example, allowed Moore to frame in terms of personal nostalgia the 1978 episode “The Living Legend” that introduced the Battlestar *Pegasus* and its tough-as-nails Commander Cain (played by Lloyd Bridges):

> It was the most memorable episode to me. . . . I was in the eighth grade and I watched the show religiously. . . . Lloyd Bridges shows up in that episode with a swagger stick, baby, . . . just like balls to the wall, no holds barred, he’s just going for it. He’s going to grab that scenery and . . . he’s going to chew it until it just can’t be chewed anymore. . . . And it’s very memorable within the canon of the original series. So as we approach this series, I always knew it was one I was going to want to take a crack at.[66]

The franchised reuse of Cain and other elements of that world in the reimagined series, therefore, enabled Moore to publicly identify himself, as a creator, with the vivid childhood memories of a fan.

Fan-identified nostalgia for the detailed world of the original series also served as a source of pleasurable identification for visual designers. Though initially some producers thought design continuity would simply save the time it would take to design from scratch, and thereby provide production efficiency, the original series persisted as both a creative resource and locus of pleasure for below-the-line artists charged with ongoing development of this new series.[67] Lee Stringer, computer graphics supervisor at Zoic (the post-production lab that produced the visual effects for the miniseries) explained that while the overall shape and aesthetic of *Galactica* had been redesigned, he and his team

> actually took a lot of its smaller details from the surface of the original series' ship. . . . I really wanted to put as much of the original *Galactica* into the new ship as possible, and I wanted to keep the style and look of the original. If you put the two ships side-by-side they don't look the same, but there are definitely a lot of hints and similarities.[68]

Similarly, when asked to render the fleet of approximately 40 civilian ships escorted by *Galactica*, Zoic created new digital models based on ships in the classic fleet.[69] In-house *Battlestar* visual effects designer Adam Lebowitz likewise drew these connections to the original in constructing his own below-the-line professional identity, writing on his blog that "you could almost say I'm the ambassador of the 1979 version, always looking for opportunities to include classic *Galactica* material on the current series."[70]Asked to render new establishing shots of the Colonial Fleet for the third season, Lebowitz chose to recreate camera angles, framings, and movements from the original series' opening credits.[71]

Despite these creative appeals to workers within the social networks of science fiction television franchises, the pleasures offered by world-sharing might best be described as ambivalent—especially when shared use occurs concurrently between production communities in potential competition for resources and industrial status, and where nostalgia does not play the same role in making identification with the past pleasurable. Even in the case of two *Battlestar* productions separated by more than two decades, production communities have worked to erect meaningful boundaries between nodes in their collaborative networks.

In fact, the push for continuity across uses of a franchise world often comes from sites of labor external to creative communities in television production proper. Outside consulting firms, for example, have played a role in suggesting and even pressuring sometimes ambivalent television workers to acknowledge franchise histories. Most television productions employ external research firms to vet scripts for legal and proprietary clearances and factual accuracy; consultants for franchise series face the additional task of monitoring previous uses of the world. This often makes the research firm a world management consultant: in notes for the *Star Trek* episode "Assignment: Earth," for example, De Forest Research recommended changing dialogue that sounded "more like Jules Verne than Star Trek."[72] By 1989, De Forest found itself making suggestions about fictional substances and other arcane trivia that *The Next Generation* could reference to build connections to the original series.[73] Writers like Moore, however, often claimed to be overwhelmed by such external suggestions. "You start getting caged in," he argued. It became "frustrating to be in the writers' room . . . and having to call people and check encyclopedias and look up information. You want to have it all in your head and just play. The *Trek* universe [got] to the point where you [couldn't] play anymore."[74] There were too many rules governing use of the world, in Moore's account, and there was no referee in the writers' room. The rationalization of world-sharing sat at odds with the more playful understanding of creativity with which Moore preferred to identify.

On the reimagined *Battlestar*, science consultant Kevin Grazier similarly found himself asking franchise management questions about the series' world. Consistently, Grazier highlighted potential points of coordination between the original and reimagined series. Noting a line about blue, red, and green-designated squadrons in "Resurrection Ship," for example, the consultant suggested: "It would be a nice nod to the original series if Kara said 'Purple and Orange' squadrons. In the original 1978 miniseries, Starbuck (v 1.0) invented Purple and Orange squadrons when he and Apollo were single-handedly attacking a Cylon Base Ship."[75] Grazier's position outside of the space of television production, however, limited his direct impact on the management of internal unity and coherence. His emailed suggestions for the episode "Water," for example, bears the handwritten addendum in Moore's archive, "Note not given to Ron. Too late."[76] There was no guarantee that this kind of external labor would be identified in the television industry as meaningful or integral to the internal workings of the creative process. That said, when television producers have directly sought out the input of consultants like Grazier, the results have been far different. In working out how the spin-off *Caprica* would represent the multiple inhabited planets of the Twelve Colonies, showrunner Jane Espensen reviewed with

Grazier his original, overdesigned suggestions for the planetary physics of *Battlestar* "before they got too deep into writing," then asked him to elaborate and lay those guidelines out more explicitly.[77]

Despite these external suggestions for efficient, coordinated use of franchise resources, setting the creative identities of production communities apart in some meaningful way has typically proved more desirable to creative managers. In spinning off *Deep Space Nine*, for example, executive overseer Rick Berman voiced concern "about giving the audience too much of what we already had been doing for four straight years, as well as giving ourselves new challenges in terms of creating fresh stories."[78] Showrunner Ira Steven Behr echoed this sentiment, stating his desire to "push the envelope regarding what was accepted practice in the *Star Trek* universe."[79] This production philosophy continued with the development of *Voyager* two years later, with the producers pondering, "How can we create something that is new and fresh and unique, yet clearly *Star Trek*?"[80] So at the same time as the established world offered attractive creative resources, it posed a challenge to be overcome, an object from which new ideas would have to be distanced to support claims to creative originality. Thus, while *Star Trek* offered a world of possibility to producers, those possibilities were double-edged swords. Although *Deep Space Nine* borrowed the Thomas Riker character from *The Next Generation* for the third season episode "Defiant"—and precariously left him in an alien prison to be rescued at a future date—the writers never found a satisfying way to re-embrace that shared resource. Tom Riker remained on the list of "Balls in the Air" that writers considered developing throughout Seasons 4 and 5, and was even penciled in for episode 18 of the seventh and final season.[81] But the producers never pulled the trigger. In 1997, a similar episode recalling the character Ensign Sito from the 1994 *Next Generation* episode "Lower Decks" went as far as a fourth draft, but was ultimately listed in production documents as "abandoned."[82] While *Deep Space Nine* often asserted its connections to the larger *Star Trek* world, these instances suggest that the embrace of the larger franchise remained a negotiated process with pressures to establish a unique identity in tension with the advantages of drawing from sibling series.

As a reimagining tied to the authorial identity of figures like Moore, the development of *Battlestar* was rendered industrially meaningful through a similar ambivalence about sharing franchise resources. While Moore claimed to have loved *Battlestar* in his childhood, he nevertheless disavowed fealty to it in construction of his professional and creative identity: "I remember thinking that as a kid, like, 'That doesn't make any sense. What's wrong with these people? . . . Their entire civilization's been wiped out, so 'Let's go to the casino planet'?"[83] Moore's desire to work with the resources of the world sat in tension with a desire to distance himself from and devalue previous uses of it. Even in episodes like "Pegasus" emphasized as part of his fan narrative, Moore hedged that "[t]he only things we really took from the original episodes were the *Galactica* meeting the *Pegasus* and Cain."[84]As a result of this drive for differentiation, creative boundaries emerged between these different iterations of the same world. Lead actor Edward James Olmos admitted that he never saw the original and chose to keep it that way: "it was always made clear to me that our show wasn't going to be the same as their show, and I didn't think I could gain anything from watching it."[85] Furthermore, when producers and executives at Sci-Fi later sought to develop *Caprica* as a prequel spin-off of the reimagined *Battlestar*, that production was once again framed more in terms of divergent use of shared creative resources than in terms of continuity. When asked about the potential for character crossovers, for example, Moore warned that "[i]t might be one of those things you just can't resist, but I think the plan is not to really do that."[86] The development of yet another *Battlestar* series *Blood and Chrome* similarly accrued distinctive identity in early promotional discourse from a generic divergence that promised wartime action in opposition to the cerebral (and low-rated) soap opera of *Caprica*. The decision of the renamed SyFy network to greenlight a *Blood and Chrome* telefilm in October 2010 and cancel *Caprica* one week later signaled the persistent potential for franchise resources to be used in different creative manners than those already in play.[87]

This push for creative differentiation derived in great part from the structures organizing creativity within intra-industrial franchises. Coordination across series had frequently been confounded by institutional boundaries imposed between discrete production communities within the television industry. Although not uncommon for series that share franchise worlds to share production personnel and office spaces as well, this corporate proximity occurred in highly ordered and hierarchical ways. Stephen Poe explains that at its height in 1994, approximately 300 people worked to produce the collective *Star Trek* franchise, dominating production activity on the Paramount lot. In addition to several soundstages, the production offices for both *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* consumed Paramount's Hart Building, with the former occupying the first floor, the latter the second, and floors three and four shared between them. This centralization of the creative process lent to the franchise what Poe calls a feeling of "family."[88] However, a closer look reveals familial division and even dysfunction. While the *Star Trek* family shared office space, strict rules segregated and disciplined the labor of those who worked on different series. Of the 300 Paramount employees working on the franchise in the 1990s, Poe states that only a core of 35 to 40 people—including line producers, accountants, and other non-creative personnel—held responsibilities pertaining to multiple series. Most creative personnel instead found themselves assigned to a specific series, "strictly divided" and specifically forbidden to participate in the other production. While the rule would sometimes be bent, collaboration was typically covert.[89] This cultural insularity impeded unity and reinforced perceptions of distinct production communities and identities despite the resources and franchise brand shared. Even those in a position of executive oversight for multiple productions faced obstacles in constructing identities across community boundaries—or at least in having those identifications recognized across community lines. For example, Moore claimed that executives Rick Berman and Michael Piller increasingly lost influence over *Deep Space Nine* over the course of its run; "as time went on *Voyager* really did start to command more and more of their attention—to the point where Ira [Steven Behr] pretty much just ran *Deep Space*."[90] Moore suggests that Berman and Piller ultimately "gave up" the series to "[t]he mad men running *Deep Space Nine*."[91] In laying claim to this "mad" creative identity, Moore defines his creativity exclusively in terms of one production community in the franchise, and in opposition to the executives who managed and worked across communities.

Perceptions of unequal industrial and cultural status between production communities also fed this insularity by encouraging a sense of us-versus-them conflict between sister series in a franchise. Asked in 1997 whether he considered *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* to be competitors, Moore replied, "You betcha," elaborating that "[i]t's a friendly competition, but we're always eyeing one another to see who's putting out the better show, getting the most attention, doing better in the ratings, etc. We're all very driven and creative people and it's only natural that each of us wants to be on the 'best' show."[92] With creativity isolated across series, popular and critical identification of the franchise as a unified whole exacerbated this desire to differentiate. As Moore lamented, "DS9 is just 'part of the franchise' and is seldom judged in the media on its own merits."[93] Friendly competition veered toward resentment when Moore perceived internal inequalities and positions of value within the franchise itself: "I don't think Paramount ever loved it. . . . I know Rick [Berman] didn't really love it, and it was just the bastard stepchild of the franchise."[94] So strong was this sense of allegiance to a specific series and production community that Moore would himself have difficulties moving between the work cultures of *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* after the latter series wrapped, quitting only a handful of episodes due to creative frustrations.[95]

While the reimagined *Battlestar* did not support multiple production communities simultaneously (except for a few months during the production of the *Caprica* pilot), its revival of the franchise after a prolonged hiatus resulted in similarly competitive tensions between nodes in a creative network. Richard Hatch, star of the 1978 series, lobbied Universal fervently prior to 2001 for the right to revive the original in some form. The reimagined series and its dark tone directly opposed his creative interests as a stakeholder in the original incarnation of the property. As Hatch explained, "I spent a lot of time and money fighting to bring it back, so it was a painful process for me to accept."[96] The reimagining, therefore, was not a direction in which all industrial stakeholders found consensus, and that choice to diverge continued to be second-guessed at the executive level. In audience focus groups conducted by Sci-Fi in 2005 (a full four years after the network had thrown its support behind the reimagining strategy), several questions continued to measure the new *Battlestar* against the old. Fixed responses like "[I am] a fan of the original series and do not like the remake" indicated executive interest in measuring (and thereby affirming and institutionalizing the existence of) differences in identity and hierarchical status between the two productions. Among the conclusions Sci-Fi felt important to convey to the producers was the finding: "Some viewers are resistant to changes from the original series."[97] Through persistent industrial interrogation of the reimagined premise, the work of producing it continued to be framed at an executive, managerial level in opposition to the original.

Ultimately, industrial organization of creative labor in these television franchises generated a sense of meaningful, ambivalent identity that bred competitive—even resentful—desires for differentiation, counter to the potential for unified collaboration and coordination within the poetic system of these worlds. Nor are these kinds of meaningful identifications and creative identities based in difference unique to science fiction franchises. *Private Practice* producer Marti Noxon resisted framing these relationships as competitive, but nevertheless acknowledged respect for parent series *Grey's Anatomy* as "lead dog" (alternately, as the "mothership"), mindful of the spin-off's place in the creative hierarchy as the "little sister." She argued that the best way to avoid these creative conflicts was to try "to keep things from being too similar."[98]

To defuse some of these tensions and allow production communities to claim distinct identities, creative workers have refined specific narrative, visual, and aural strategies to generate industrially meaningful distinctions and identities across productions. As developed in *Battlestar* and *Star Trek*, several different strategies can be identified. Writers have first self-censored and policed their references to competing creative uses of a franchise world. In a primer for prospective writers entitled "The Story—What Doesn't Work," Roddenberry's 1989–1990 *Next Generation Writers' Guide* emphasized that the series was "not buying stories about the original STAR TREK characters. . . . [W]e want our audience's attention centered now on our new characters." So interested was Roddenberry in distancing the new series from the old that he specified that the android Data "is *not* the ship's Science Office; he is not at all Spocklike and never uses the word 'logical.'" Simultaneously, the *Guide* warned against considering "Klingons, Romulans, or the Ferengi as the only villains in space. We are determined not to copy ourselves."[99] Drawing upon the world already built, therefore, became reoriented in this discourse on proper creativity as a potential failing.

Competing peer producers have also formally divided and territorialized the established franchise world. Though production of *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* overlapped, the former found its characters lost in the "Delta Quadrant" at the end of its pilot episode, too far from the setting of the latter to allow interaction. With *Voyager* confined to the Delta Quadrant, *Deep Space Nine* became the sole inheritor of "known" space in the Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Quadrants, giving each series unique pieces of the world to explore.[100] This creative geography allowed Moore and other producers to construct discrete production identities based in the belief that: "the series should remain more or less separate entities and not do too much mixing and matching."[101]

Differences, antipathies, and potential conflicts between production communities have also been worked through in narrative uses of shared resources. The appearance of *Next Generation*'s Captain Picard in the 1993 *Deep Space Nine* pilot, for example, involved not friendly cooperation, but a tense, awkward stand-off in which the new protagonist Commander Sisko blames the more familiar character for his wife's death. Their meeting launched the spin-off by alienating it from its parent series, emphasizing how Sisko neither liked Picard nor was like him, and even asking viewers to question Picard's integrity as a hero. Even when studio demands for a creative shakeup to boost ratings forced the producers to similarly pull *The Next Generation*'s Worf out of retirement for integration into the *Deep Space Nine* cast, producers insisted on using this shared character resource as a point of meta-distinction. Ambivalent about having to rely on another part of the franchise, Moore positioned their creative responsibility as making Worf "evolve into our character. . . . What is going to make our Worf a little different from

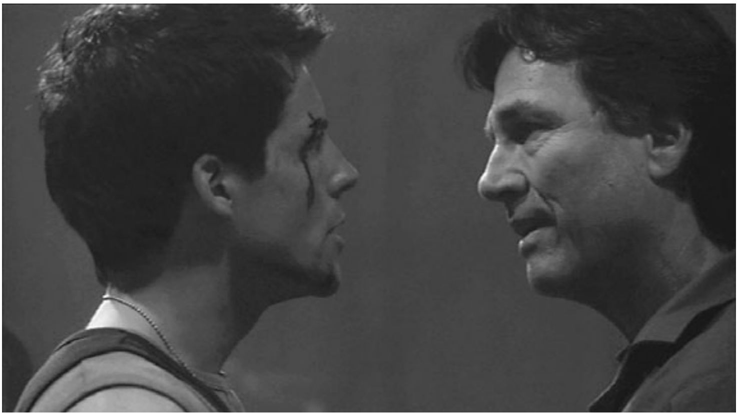
Tension and distance between Captain Picard and the new Commander Sisko in the pilot episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

the other Worf? . . . We wanted to keep emphasizing, 'this is not *TNG*. The station doesn't work like the *Enterprise*. Worf is going to have some troubles fitting in.' "[102] The producers negotiated their own ambivalence, therefore, by making Worf's fit on the new series as awkward as possible (generally making his life on the space station miserable), and thereby calling attention to differences in tone, theme, and attitude between the two productions.

Moore's reimagined *Battlestar* similarly used character design to construct meaningful oppositions to the original series. Changing the gender of the Starbuck character from male to female, for example, afforded Moore one culturally meaningful means of differentiation: "Of all the characters of the original, Dirk Benedict's Starbuck is the most identifiable, . . . and the audience loves him. Now if you redo that role and you cast another man, what's he gonna do?" Moore explains, "If you make it a woman, it's sort of 'all bets are off.'"[103] Much as *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* had done in casting their lead characters as an African American and a woman, respectively, in contrast to the white male leads that had preceded them in *Trek*, social difference could be used on *Battlestar* to communicate distinct production identities within a franchise. To lay even stronger claim to that oppositional identity, David Eick remarks that he initially hoped to cast Dirk Benedict in the role of the Armistice Officer seen in the very first scene of the miniseries—just so that he could be blown up in the first salvo of the Cylon attack, thereby proving "[t]his is not your parents' *Battlestar Galactica*."[104] Instead, Richard

Hatch, who had played the incorruptibly heroic Apollo in the original series, was cast against franchise type as terrorist revolutionary Tom Zarek. As an antagonist, Hatch's Zarek was then frequently put into conflict with Jamie Bamber's "new" Apollo in episodes like "Bastille Day," "Black Market," and "The Oath." In the first of these episodes, Zarek takes Apollo hostage, musing with his prisoner over the meaning and mythology of his name, and questioning his ability to live up to that vaunted identity. By episode's end, Apollo has gained the upper hand over Zarek, and in doing so, affirms his rightful identity, working on a meta-level to defuse criticisms that the new series might not live up to its own franchise identity.

Another means of differentiating production identity relied on critical deconstruction of the shared world. *Deep Space Nine* showrunner Ira Stephen Behr constructed a meaningfully distinct production identity for the series (and himself) by emphasizing in his public disclosures an aim to problematize the utopian design of the existing *Trek* world. "We need to dig deeper and find out what, indeed, life is like in the twenty-fourth century," he argued. "Is this paradise, or are there, as Harold Pinter supposedly said, 'Weasels under the coffee table?' "[105] In the creative discourse of a weasel hunt, Behr and his writers stressed those moments in which they used the resources of the *Star Trek* world to challenge the rules and system through which it cohered in promises of a peaceful, humanistic future. They created a political fringe group called the Maquis seeking to leave the Federation, depicted an attempt at a military coup by Starfleet, and proposed that



Recast in the role of terrorist Tom Zarek, the actor who played the original 1978 Apollo, Richard Hatch, enters into narrative conflict with the reimagined 2003 Apollo played by Jamie Bamber.

the utopian world was underwritten by the sinister, covert activities of the shadowy Section 31.[106] A creative distinction was forged by seizing on those moments when the series challenged the utopian design of the shared world by embracing the possibility of dystopia. Moore deployed a similar strategy on *Battlestar*, deconstructing the premise of the original series through its reimagination. Moore pursued the same narrative question as the original series—what would happen if a civilization was reduced to 50,000 survivors?—but outwardly marked his answers as more "naturalistic" in order to suggest a deconstruction of the greater fantasy of the original.

Visual style has also been used as a point of differential production identification. In developing *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Gene Roddenberry demanded that both costume and visual effects design would diverge from the status quo established by prior series and movies (particularly the military themes of the latter, over which he had lost creative authority).[107] Similarly, instead of embracing the "hyper-real," "larger-than-life," futuristic sets of the original, *Battlestar* production designer Richard Hudolin embraced a retro look that combined "old-style telephones and maps you would see on 1940s battleships with computer screens and other elements from the 1980s and '90s. That [familiarity] constantly reminds viewers that the *Galactica* is an old ship that's out of date and dependent on old technology."[108] The designers embraced discontinuity with the visual history of the franchise, inviting distinction between the two *Battlestars*' alternately futuristic and retro looks. This strategy persisted in the development of *Caprica*, wherein the producers pushed the retro aesthetic even further into the past, costuming its characters in styles from the 1950s.[109]

Even in the moments when *Battlestar*'s visual designers openly embraced continuity of visual design, shared elements of franchising sat in tension with those newly conceived in the course of its reimagining. The 2007 extended episode "Razor," for example, offered an opportunity to reintegrate into the series' computer-generated visual effects the original 1978 designs for the robotic Cylons (as those older designs could stand in for the earlier, less advanced Cylon models featured in the episode's flashback sequences). At the same time as this episode offered the chance for visual effects designers like Adam Lebowitz to revel in identification with the original production, it also offered a point of distinction. As featured on Lebowitz's blog, a side-by-side production rendering of the two Cylon models by fellow effects artist Pierre Drolet puts the modern and retro robots in a confrontational stance, literally placing their designs in tension.[110] As an artifact of production, this test rendering suggested a competitive, creative identification with design distinction even in direct imitation of the original. This design

Comparison of the futuristic, computer-based production design for the original *Battlestar* series (*top*) and the attempt to downplay technology in the reimagined series (*bottom*) by putting grease pencils and acetate transparencies in the characters' hands.

tension moved from production documents to the screen in the final episode of the reimagined series, moreover, when dozens of modern Cylons ally with the human heroes to fight a force comprised mostly of retro models. The all-out robot brawl that follows is not just visual excess, but a meaningful negotiation of distinction amid the visual design continuities of franchising.

Rendering by Battlestar visual effects artist Pierre Drolet that reproduces in computer-generated imagery the design of Cylon robots from the original 1978 series (*left*) and places it alongside its successor in the 2003–2009 series (*right*)—with a confrontational composition that puts those differences in tension.

Sound too has differentiated parallel uses of a shared world. In the case of the 1990s *Trek* franchise, diegetic music distinguished the three contemporaneous spin-off series from one another. While *The Next Generation* characters frequently listened to and performed classical music and contemporary jazz, the producers of *Deep Space Nine* regularly integrated into their sixth and seventh season scripts performances by Vic Fontaine, a holographic lounge singer styled after Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. With these music genres already spoken for, *Voyager* then developed its own musical signatures, presenting its Doctor character as an operatic virtuoso (and only after discussion of whether this would be too similar to Worf's interest in Klingon opera on these other series).[111] In this manner, musical genres served as points of territorialized identity markers. On *Battlestar*, however, the use of music to create distinctive production identities within television franchising became far more sophisticated. The reimagined series consciously used recognizable themes from the original, and yet modulated them in negotiation of that shared history. As composer Bear McCreary explained, "*Battlestar* set out to use the music in a way to differentiate between the original and the new. Essentially coming out and saying this is going to be totally different so if you're expecting to see the old show, you might want to go watch something else instead."[112] McCreary described his work as being "defined by what I cannot use," since he had to consciously resist making his music familiar to that of the original series. With rare exceptions, McCreary bracketed the orchestral styles of the original series in favor of instruments and styles derived from non-Western cultures, and sometimes employed rhythmic patterns outside the recognizable four-beat patterns typical of Western popular music. In order to take pleasure in the musical history of the franchise, McCreary's score would sometimes confront cues from the original soundtrack—but in doing so, he rearranged and re-orchestrated those pieces to make them fit the new series.[113] For use as the Colonial national anthem in "Final Cut," McCreary spent as much time rewriting Stu Phillips' original series theme (working closely with him in the process) as he typically spent scoring entire episodes. Even in collaboration with the original composer, McCreary pushed for differentiation. He replaced Western instruments with Japanese taiko drums, Armenian duduks, South Asian bansuris, Balinese gamelans, and other ethnic instruments alien to the sound of the original series, simultaneously taking "harmonic liberties" with Phillips' theme to vary and invert it.[114] For "Razor," McCreary revisited the original series' theme once more, but also altered the timing of the notes and set part of the theme in a minor mode, again employing the exoticism of ethnic instrumentation. In these instances, musical markers of ethnic and racial difference systemically signaled differences in identity between creative nodes in a shared franchise. Even borrowed from the musical design of the original series, those reused resources were rewritten to be perceptibly distinct—marked as "other" on a formal level.

While the worlds of television franchising have offered contexts for the extension and elaboration of content, the socially networked organization of creativity within those systems has frequently lead to inter-industrial hierarchies, insularity, and a practice of differentiation in distinguishing professional identities and claims to creativity. Given the narrative, visual, and aural strategies developed to provide that creative distinction, the idea of the media franchise as homogeneous reproduction of culture comes into some question. As peer television production communities sharing content resources in parallel and succession have sought to set themselves apart in industrially meaningful ways, we can see the franchise as a social network in which workers at each node negotiate a web of creative relationships marked by distinct subjective identifications.

Sharing Worlds across Industries

Yet, in the instances examined so far, each node sharing the worlds of franchising has negotiated professional identity, status, and power from a position within a shared institutional context. What happens to these creative practices and the production identities surrounding them when resources are shared more widely? Whereas intra-industrial franchises manifest creativity through the injection and construction of difference, in inter-industrial modes of franchising, such distinction has frequently been perceived as creatively undesirable. As franchise worlds have been shared across media boundaries, critics, audiences, and creators alike have privileged notions of continuity, legitimacy, integrality, and especially centralized authorship in assessing use of creative resources. In comparing the online webisodes offered by *Heroes* and *Battlestar*, for example, the *New York Times* pans the former as an effort that "feels half-hearted. . . . [T]he writers and directors of the webisodes are not among the show's A-team."[115] By contrast, the review singles out *Battlestar*'s "Face of the Enemy" webisodes as superior by comparison, making special note of the participation of co-executive producer Jane Espenson. Quality and creativity, in this case, are constructed by proximity to privileged production identities at the center of the franchise. This valuation of creative interdependence has historically informed and been informed by the subordinate, marginal role played by licensees in the creative process, and the disinterest of authorial figures in legitimizing those decentralized uses of the shared world. To negotiate their culturally constructed and industrially disciplined distance from perceived creative centers, users of worlds shared across media have often claimed identity in solidarity with those privileged users, rather than seeking distinct labor identities that would set their work apart. This has resulted in the development of deferential strategies designed to implement a creative continuity that, contradictorily, the social and labor dynamics of decentralized production makes difficult to achieve.

Although media critics often consider it in relation to questions of media ownership and intellectual property management, licensing can also be very productively considered from a creative, production of culture standpoint. Trevor Elkington has discussed licensed video game production, for example, in terms of what he calls "self-defeating co-production," where conflicting market goals and design outlooks force game designers and creative personnel in other industries to work at cross-purposes. More importantly, however, Elkington identifies the social relationships among sites of creative labor—and differentials of power between them—as a major source of conflict in the process of approval for licensed use of intellectual property resources. While some challenges are procedural (based in unaligned development schedules or target audiences), Elkington argues that they all extend from a single social factor: the perceived illegitimacy of licensed game designers in relation to other, more culturally privileged industries.[116] While franchising broadens our concern beyond games, licensing contracts establish similar social hierarchies by formalizing the dominance of the intellectual property owner over the creative process. Licensed creativity must negotiate a position of contractual subordinance to another party within a different set of market orientations and concerns. Though franchised worlds may have been designed as engines for emergent elaboration, licensing subjects elaboration of that world to approval by a higher authority. Having worked both in-house at licensor LucasArts and as licensee at Pandemic Studios, *Star Wars* video game producer Jim Tso attested that new elements that have "never been done in the universe . . . have to go through a whole process of running them through licensing to see if it fits . . . continuity."[117] According to game writer Danny Bilson, "You're always under the licensor's knuckles so you can't do anything they haven't already done. You can't push it too far."[118] Even under the same corporate umbrella, creative use is carefully monitored, policed, and controlled when resources are exchanged across industries. Characterizing properties like *Batman* as resources to be protected from Time Warner's other divisions, former publisher of DC Comics Paul Levitz explained,

> It's always a delicate issue when you give your children over to others. Whenever we do a movie, a TV show, or even a radio program based on our heroes, the DC team watches over the production, fretting, fussing, and worrying. And worrying even more about every step the creative team takes away from the "canonical" path laid out by our history.[119]

Thus, whether through licensing or under shared corporate parentage, the exchange of properties across institutional boundaries has often been managed with an eye toward supervision, control, and continuity.

This subordination of franchise labor to centralized creative authorities points to the growing role of corporate intermediaries in managing creativity across media, and the emergence of that management alongside the industry logic of franchising. Historically, corporate roles in evaluating licensee creativity were not always well-defined. In 1960s television proto-franchising, following the shift away from external management of licensing and merchandising in the broadcast industry traced by Avi Santo, creative personnel like Gene Roddenberry took a direct role in coordinating and enabling the shared use of the *Star Trek* property by licensors on a day-to-day basis.[120] As early as 1964, Roddenberry expressed interest in laying a foundation to support licensed extension, instructing production designer Pato Guzman to "give some thought to a *distinctive emblem* for our ships and the uniforms of our crewmen. You may have been the one who suggested a week or so ago that this would have the side advantage of giving us a merchandising *trademark*."[121] Set and costume design took licensing into consideration, with the interlocking configuration of the hand phaser, phaser pistol, and phaser rifle designed for its attractiveness to the toy market.[122] Perhaps more significantly, Roddenberry pursued licensing as a means of production efficiency and design collaboration. In 1966, Roddenberry intervened in license negotiations between the Desilu studio and the JAC Agency, arguing that no license should be granted until "I've had a chance to talk with them and make sure we have a very firm understanding and commitments about what they can provide for STAR TREK at this time on a *production* level."[123] Keeping an eye on his budget and the cost of special effects required by the series, Roddenberry saw partnerships as a means of "creative and design assistance." In exchange for fabricating the props and models needed to produce the series, Roddenberry would sign away the merchandising rights.[124] Licenses were granted in trade for direct contributions to the production of the television series. For example, with the cost of building a shuttlecraft model and set estimated at a prohibitively expensive $12,000 internally in April 1966, the producers turned to toy model manufacturer AMT. By September, AMT had agreed to produce a $24,000 shuttle (50% recuperable from the studio's royalty) in exchange for the right to market a shuttle model to consumers.[125]

In addition to using licensee creativity as a television production resource, the producers simultaneously managed creators licensed to work in other markets. By August 1967, staff writers D.C. Fontana and John Meredyth Lucas reviewed drafts of proposed *Star Trek* novelizations seeking approval from

Desilu, imposing creative standards and hierarchies of power upon licensed labor. Conformity to the emerging "canon" of the *Star Trek* world proved to be of paramount importance in their assessments of licensed work. Fontana tore into author James Blish for ignoring established institutions like Starfleet and the Federation, but also criticized "too much development of Vulcan backstory" that poached territory the television writers wished to retain for themselves.[126] With power of approval over licensees, creators like Fontana could establish territories, reaffirm contractual hierarchies, insist upon deferential uses of shared resources, and shore up positions of creative authority. While Desilu executives like Ed Perlstein were institutionally and economically responsible for those licensing agreements, creative management of them depended largely on exchange and collaboration between creative personnel in different markets. In November 1967, Roddenberry wrote Perlstein stressing the importance of protecting the *Star Trek* property and having sufficient time to review this licensed work; he proposed formally appointing "someone like Dorothy Fontana who has an excellent and broad grasp of this show" to serve as a permanent and paid licensee liaison who could guide them "away from technical inaccuracy or outright bad taste."[127] Perlstein agreed in part with Roddenberry and continued to seek his team's help in managing licensee creativity, but nonetheless refused to pay for that work, considering it part of their existing responsibilities. "[It] should be their labor of love," Perlstein wrote.[128] The burden of creative coordination with licensees was thus firmly upon television creators in this historical context.

By the time of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the rise of franchising, however, creative liaison with licensees had been institutionalized as a function of studio management. By the mid-1980s, Paramount executive Frank Mancuso had created a *Star Trek* Office to manage and coordinate licensing on behalf of producers. Now subjected to bureaucratic studio management, licensee work became further distanced from spaces and identities of television production privileged as creative. Ideally, assistants working in the Office would summarize each submission for a novel or comic in a memo that would be forwarded to the *Star Trek* producers for comments, which would then be returned to the Office and relayed back to the licensee within ten working days. In practice, however, producers could not weigh in on every submission: according to Richard Arnold, as assistant working in the Office, "there [wasn't] enough time."[129] Thus, only the Office manager's approval was needed to oversee licensed works, especially as the number of licensees increased. With a bureaucratic barrier erected between television and licensed production communities, the sense of meaningful differentiation between those labor sectors only crystalized industrial hierarchies of creativity. Arnold, for one, openly denied the creative legitimacy of licensed novelists within the franchise.[130] Cut off from the privileged site of television creativity, these already subordinate licensed creators became increasingly perceived as entirely illegitimate users of the *Star Trek* world. By 1997, licensed use of the world by companies like Marvel Comics had become so alienated from television production that Ronald Moore claimed: "I haven't read the comics and we on the writing staff have no contact with anyone at Marvel. I assume they have a contact at Paramount in Merchandising and Licensing who tracks the continuity. On the show, we only consider *filmed* material to be canon."[131] From his more privileged creative position, Moore disavowed any insight into or interaction with these other sites of labor in the franchise. Through appeals to a creative canon, writers like Moore constructed authorial identities based in implicit boundaries between more and less legitimate uses of the franchise world.

Often licensees themselves internalized such distinctions and reproduced in practice their own creative illegitimacy. In 2007, for example, Andrew Harris of IDW Comics explained his company's intention as a *Star Trek* licensee to conform only to the on-screen history of the world, but not to any iteration previously created in books, games, or comics. Even as he was willing to conform to a continuity spanning more than 600 television episodes and 10 films, Harris asked fans incredulously: "Are our writers and editors really going to read every ST books [sic] out there, and then meticulously conform our stories to the contents of every single published page?"[132] Though he worked in licensing, Harris reproduced creative hierarchies that framed his work as less legitimate, denying equal creative status to the labor practices and processes at work in licensing structures.

Within this collision of institutional work worlds, the onus placed on licensed work to defer to more legitimized nodes in the franchise network produced several sets of creative and textual strategies to promote conservative, deferential use of shared worlds by licensees. As M. J. Clarke argues, the structures by which for-hire licensed labor must seek "double approval" (from both the immediate supervisor with right to the license, and the licensing department managing use on behalf of the licensor) ultimately produce specific sets of work practices and creative strategies that mark it as a site of ambivalent negotiation of networked industrial relations.[133] In the case of comic book writers working on behalf of licensee Dynamite Entertainment while sharing the *Battlestar* world with television producers, the construction of a professional identity based in affective fandom for the franchise has proven advantageous for attracting attention and securing work. Publishers like Dynamite have sought out writers with a passion for the existing world who come to the project extremely well-versed in the television continuity. Writers who can perform the identity of a fan in deference to privileged author figures present themselves as able to color within the lines established by previous uses of the franchise world. As one of the primary authors of *Battlestar* comic books for Dynamite Entertainment, Brandon Jerwa explained that licensed publishers "don't just randomly recruit writers for their licensed properties; you have to be 'in it to win it' and have that real passion for the subject matter. All of the *Galactica* project writers are knee-deep in the continuity and we all keep very close communication between ourselves."[134] Knowledge and respect of the "canon" was a marketable creative skill for licensed creators, as was the ability to coordinate with other comic book writers. Even if this disclosure misrepresents actual hiring practices, it suggested a need for licensed labor to present itself in these terms of deference to continuity. Nowhere in his description of the job, furthermore, did Jerwa discuss the need to coordinate with television producers as peers. In lieu of that coordination, he promised a self-policing internalization of continuity—of the rules the television producers would likely impose given the chance—in order to identify pockets of the world as being safe for elaboration without preempting their further development on television or challenging the creative authority of that external production community.

To contribute to serialized, always changing worlds like that of *Battlestar*, therefore, the Dynamite writers looked backward in their approach to using and extending the world. Since they could not predict ongoing narrative developments that could change the rules of the franchise world and modulate the creative resources it contained, they found greater safety in exploring the series' diegetic history. While the first Dynamite title for the reimagined series set itself at a specific point in the second season well after the television production had moved past it, later titles looked to time periods even before the start of the television series, resulting in premises like *Battlestar Galactica: Season Zero* (set one year prior to the television miniseries), and an *Origins* title that explored the early adulthood of characters like Baltar and Adama. Writers like Jerwa also elaborated the backstory for supporting characters in miniseries like *Zarek* (2006), which detailed the life of activist Tom Zarek on the downtrodden colony of Sagittaron prior to the Cylon attack on the Colonies. As suggested in the *Comic Shop News* preview of *Zarek*, this strategy courted creative legitimacy by appealing to the flashback-heavy narrative strategy in vogue on television shows like *Lost*, adapting a non-linear storytelling structure for telling television stories in comics. The advantage of the *Lost* flashback, suggested *Comic Shop News*, rested in its ability to revisit established characters and chronologies to reveal "how earlier events helped to bring them to the focal point of the series. In many ways, Jerwa is doing the same thing for Zarek."[135] By revisiting the past in this *Lost* style, comic writers could articulate their professional identities to markers of quality borrowed from television, valorizing their contributions to the franchise as such and making a virtue of industrial restrictions on their creative practice. The value of licensed creativity, in this logic, came through its deference to the familiar. This exploration of the past, referred to as "continuity mining" by some writers, enabled licensees to share a world without upsetting or changing it in the process. As a result, writers like Jerwa could claim "a huge sense of honor and responsibility to know that I'm contributing to this universe,"[136] even as the universe itself remained static. These flashbacks deferred to privileged uses of the shared world in more prestigious media formats, but posed the potential for licensed creators to situate their work and their labor identities in closer relation to that privilege.

Of course, the success of these backward-looking textual strategies depended on the disinterest of more privileged producers in exploring that backstory. Dynamite could adopt a *Lost* model for elaborating the world of *Battlestar* because the *Battlestar* television series did not itself use the same non-linear narrative structure as *Lost*. Ironically, that strategy would likely not have worked for a licensed *Lost* comic, where trading in flashbacks would have tread in the creative territory of its character backstory-focused television producers (indeed, barriers to continuity mining may partially explain the non-existence of *Lost* comics during its run). So the utility of continuity mining came into question for *Battlestar* too as television talent began delving into the backstory of the reimagined series, starting with prequel spinoffs like *Caprica* and later *Blood and Chrome*, but also including telefilms like "Razor" and "The Plan" that revisited earlier moments in the narrative. As creative authorities increasingly looked to the past themselves, they foreclosed upon some of the textual strategies licensed labor relied upon. While the end of the more highly rated reimagined series likely led to a decline in demand for *Battlestar* comics during *Caprica*'s run, the dearth of offerings by Dynamite since can also be explained by the diminished usefulness of continuity mining as a deferential strategy.

Instead of continuity mining, licensed laborers like Jerwa have also sought the conservatism required of double approval by limiting their use of the world—surrendering interest in many of the creative resources to which licensing nevertheless affords access. In doing so, writers can avoid conflicts over shared resources by not making much use of them, hedging against licensor disapproval by courting their indifference. Comic book series like *Battlestar Galactica: Ghosts* used only the setting of the shared world, introducing entirely new casts of characters and situations within them. In projects like *Ghosts*, writers like Jerwa perceived themselves less likely to receive disapproving notes from the licensor: "it's probably pretty easy for them to let me run free with this one, because it doesn't have to tie into a million different things and really isn't subject to the same specific character scrutiny that the regular books are."[137] Novelist and comic writer Peter David similarly created his own parallel *Star Trek* series, *New Frontier*, and as of 2012, the massively multiplayer online game *Star Trek Online* continued to follow a similar pattern in offering players access to the world, but with a narrative focused on the descendants of familiar franchise characters less likely to concern licensing departments. In these cases, licensed workers can rely more heavily upon creative strategies that allow greater differentiation in their uses of franchise resources and to construct more individualistic professional identities. Yet deference persists in these practices of self-regulation through the refusal to fully exploit industrially exchanged franchise rights.

As attested by review of Ronald Moore's *Battlestar* files—an archive that details involvement in all aspects of television production but documents no interaction with licensing—this licensed work often occurred in isolation from more institutionally privileged sites of production, and some producers, such as Moore, have evinced little interest in imposing greater collaboration across the various creative uses of shared worlds. Though *Battlestar* reflects the persistence of an institutional and cultural disconnect between licensed production communities and their television counterparts, parallel efforts have tried to bring more direct, unmediated creative collaboration to the media franchise. Television critic Matt Roush argues that the ideal role of contemporary television showrunners has evolved into that of a "brand manager," overseeing all the "outside-the-box" extension and marketing.[138] The moonlighting of privileged creators as consultants or direct participants in the creation of licensed work is by no means a new strategy, as attested by the historical involvement of Gene Roddenberry and his production staff in supervising licensed work. Dynamite Entertainment sought to renew this historical strategy, therefore, when it recruited Kevin Fahey to write licensed comics on the basis of his experience as a writers' assistant (and later staff writer) on the television series. Touting this "direct connection" to the production of the series, Dynamite gained a much better vantage point with which to identify avenues safe for licensed exploration, while also publically promising creative compliance.[139] Some licensees have been empowered to make major changes to properties like *The Next Generation*, however, putting characters in new narrative settings and situations (with Data replacing Picard as captain of the *Enterprise*, for example, in the *Star Trek: Countdown* comic book). Yet that relative freedom in licensed creation came largely from the diminished value of those characters in film and television amid the creation of a new, younger, and more marketable alternate universe in J. J. Abrams' reimagined 2009 *Star Trek* film. A release from creative deference for licensees came at a moment when more privileged creators like Abrams had deemed the resources in question to be of little value.

Outside these examples, contemporary creators have experimented with alternate means of managing world-sharing across institutional lines. Producers for the transmedia television series *Heroes* proposed that unity across the many media channels in which the property circulated could be managed at a creative level as opposed to a business level. Having formerly worked to extend *Smallville* into webisodes and other platforms beyond television, producer Mark Warshaw proposed to NBC in 2007 a dedicated, three-pronged "transmedia team" that would report to showrunner Tim Kring, managing extensions of the *Heroes* world on his behalf. One arm would manage merchandising, another would coordinate all narrative mobilizations of the property (across comics, the Internet, and so on), and another would liaise with series' talent to secure participation in promotions and content made for non-traditional media. Rather than give that central creative management responsibility to Kring, that burden would be placed upon television producers directly responsible for those creative affairs.[140]

While Warshaw's model integrated subordinate licensed creativity within the institutions of television production, a parallel strategy aimed to enforce unity within heterogeneous creative structures from a position external to any one medium. Companies like the Los Angeles-based Bureau of Film and Games (BFG) and the New York-based Starlight Runner Entertainment offered clients franchise plans that established specific creative roles for each media market to play. As Flint Dille, owner of BFG, explained, "you write a universal bible. You know what the game is. You know what the movie is. You know what the comic book is. . . . And you figure out how you would stack it up so you could pull the trigger on any iteration you want to."[141] Starlight Runner similarly promised ongoing creative management of the worlds owned by its clients. As stated by the company's website, its consultants became "*expert* in all creative aspects of the property by absorbing *everything established* for the property thus far. If the property is brand new, we *establish a foundation* for it that incorporates a *set of visions and goals* created by our partners and ourselves." From that foundation, the company created "canon" or mythology for client properties, designing a world by drafting an updatable, "living document." With such a world in place, Starlight Runner developed "cross-media treatments" detailing strategies for implementing the property across various markets. Of utmost importance, the website explained, was that the plan "*maintains quality* and *prevents continuity breaches* that can *splinter the fan base*." Quality and canonical unity went hand-in-hand. To implement this plan, Starlight Runner promised to serve as an "international clearinghouse," dedicated to guiding licensees through the creative process and use of client worlds.[142] By offering unified management of franchise worlds across media, these consulting firms aimed to do externally what Warshaw's transmedia team hoped to accomplish internally: transform a decentralized process of shared creative use into a centrally controlled one.

By bringing licensees in closer relations with centralized loci of authority, these initiatives promised to combat the sense of creative illegitimacy that prevented licensed labor from being culturally and industrially identifiable as legitimately creative. These coordinated strategies promised to enable the creative communication and coordination across institutional contexts that bureaucratic franchise management had blocked. However, in bringing licensees under centralized control, these strategies could also be considered disciplinary actions that further limited the autonomy of licensees bound to subordinate creative positions by corporate hierarchies and/or licensing contracts. Instead of seeking approval for their decentralized labor, licensees in these plans became subject to the coordinated management of a centralized creative power. As suggested by the creative pleasures and ambivalent distanciations alike taken by producers of the reimagined *Battlestar*, meaningful labor identities and claims to creativity in the multiplied production of the franchise have depended both on the recognition of other sites of creativity and the ability to diverge from them. Creative identities have emerged when the multiplication of production can be made meaningful through difference. Amid greater conformity for licensed labor, those pleasures and meaningful identifications may be denied. Whether ignored by creative authorities or more proactively managed, licensed creativity has continued to be valued in terms of its deference to a more canonical and legitimate original, and its compatibility with someone else's use. Instead, given the immense creative energies poured into multiplied production of worlds from a variety of institutional positions, professional identities, and creative contexts, there might be greater benefit in embracing the oft-suppressed potential for emergent creativity suggested by franchising.

Conclusion

To understand creativity within the entertainment franchise, this chapter has explored a tradition of world-sharing tied to science fiction television in which multiple networked production communities have negotiated tensions and social inequalities surrounding their heterogeneous creative use of shared resources. First, this chapter detailed the evolution of narrative, visual, and aural techniques whereby worlds have been constructed to enable systemic, emergent elaboration. By using story, image, and sound to create an overdesigned, rule-based system, franchise producers created contexts to support continual creative use. Second, this chapter explored the creative tensions that erupted when such worlds became shared industrially, uncovering a spectrum of creative and professional identifications that have produced both differentiation and deference within the socially networked production communities brought into relation through these shared resources. The shared use of worlds by peer producers in comparable institutional contexts led to pleasurable identification with franchising, but also competitiveness and a drive for differentiation supported by textual strategies that rendered labor meaningful through distinction. However, for producers occupying unequal industrial formations, and thus negotiating unequal positions of power, status, and creative authority, strategies enforcing a deferential continuity became more imperative. With such creative relationships governed by licensing agreements, and policed by various institutional forces, inter-industrial world-sharing operated via the imposition of creative hierarchies that rendered some creative uses less legitimate and privileged conformity with established canons. In their transmedia dimensions, therefore, immense energy has been spent to manage decentralized franchise creativity and bring it in line with a singular, centralized vision.

As framed through the authorial identity of Ronald D. Moore, its construction in relation to a host of other producers with whom he shared worlds, and its claims to creative authority across two science fiction worlds he did not himself originate, this chapter has problematized the idea of a franchise as the expression of a single voice, much as the previous chapter problematized the franchise as an expression of a conglomerate totality. As a context designed to support emergent, evolving creation, the franchise system must be understood as a system of resources animated by the social interaction of its users, and not a single, unified form. The reimagined *Battlestar* evidenced this potential for variation, but the licensing of that property across media demonstrated a simultaneous containment of its potential by binding creativity within expectations of unity and univocality.

The critical intervention made here, therefore, lies in challenging the way in which industrial creativity has been understood. On the one hand, the complex identifications, pleasures, and negotiations that media workers engage in during the course of their labor in service of media franchising suggests that we might rethink the idea that this means of reiterated cultural production is anathema to creativity. In developing production identities, producers and communities within media franchising at the very least make claims to creative identity that we should feel obligated to recognize—if only to see that media franchising is a site where creativity is culturally and industrially constructed. In making those claims to creativity, moreover, these producers often pursue textual strategies of difference that make the multiplication of franchising not a replication of sameness, but a more reflexive and iterative process. On the other hand, understanding creativity in new ways means challenging the claims to creativity made in these more privileged industrial sectors and thinking about how and why the labor of media workers in sectors such as licensing must take up subjective positions of deference to others' creativity without making their own equally legible claims to creativity, authority, and autonomy. The economic relations of industrial contracts and hierarchies play a role here, to be sure, but the subordination of licensed labor comes too from the cultural forces that shape how industrial production is made meaningful and creativity is made accessible as an identity category. By calling issues of creativity into question, franchising should remain a key site of inquiry.

Franchising is not the product of creativity, but a context in which the negotiated exchanges and identifications of industrial creativity can play out. Chapter 4 seeks to build on this insight by asking how franchising has enabled exchanges not just across industry, but across boundaries of geography and culture. At the same time, it asks how the potential for difference and iteration in media franchising has supported the reproduction of culture over time. How might the creative contexts of franchising be both transnational and transgenerational phenomena?

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4

"A Complicated Genesis"

Transnational Production and Transgenerational Marketing

In selecting their 2008 "CEO of the Year," the financial experts at *MarketWatch* honored Brian Goldner, chief executive officer of Hasbro Toys, for his global management of toy properties like *G.I. Joe* and *Transformers* across films, television, and games. *MarketWatch* praised Goldner as a visionary with the ability "to turn Hasbro's top nameplates into global power brands that consumers can experience in any way and format at any time they want."[1] Among his cited accomplishments, Goldner strengthened Hasbro-owned brands over outside acquisitions, signed a six-year motion picture deal with Universal Studios, created new executive positions to manage relationships with Hollywood, and hired a team of brand managers to coordinate new overseas offices in Brazil, Poland, Russia, China, South Korea, and the Czech Republic. Chief among Goldner's successes was *Transformers*, a toy line that increased its product sales from $100 million in 2006 to $484 million in 2007 thanks to the release of a blockbuster film of the same name. Those sales held at $424 million in 2008 thanks to a newly launched animated television series and were projected to hit $600 million by 2009 with the release of a film sequel. As Dartmouth management professor Vijay Govindarajan attested, Goldner "really has a sixth sense. . . . *Transformers* could have been a big flop. He knew the market was ready for it."[2] Similar praise came from Needham & Co. analyst Sean McGowan: "They've broken out of the good-year-and bad-year cycle. . . . He's bold enough to envision what Hasbro can be to be more than just a toy company."[3]

While Goldner had indeed made a big score, this journalistic focus on the recent global success of the *Transformers* brand obscured the already transnational processes and practices of networked cultural production that had historically constituted that franchise. While Goldner leveraged that brand through a variety of cultural channels and managed it on a global scale, these accomplishments were not a divergence from the history of the *Transformers* franchise. Instead, they continued a process of transnationally networked production extended over a quarter of a century. In 1984, Hasbro introduced *Transformers* as a line of articulated toy robots that could be reassembled into cars, jets, and other recognizable forms; while some years have been better than others, some new iteration of that product line has been available to consumers nearly every year since. Moreover, that toy brand has continually extended to other arenas of cultural production; in the American market alone, no fewer than nine ongoing animated television series have reproduced the *Transformers*' narrative of warring robot factions (usually, heroic Autobots versus evil Decepticons).[4] Yet perhaps most significantly, the complex creative and economic endeavor of producing this *Transformers* franchise has always been globalized in nature. While Hasbro owned the brand's trademark, Japanese companies like Takara controlled antecedent toy designs and patents, and both served as collaborative partners in the decades-long proliferation of the franchise.[5] *Transformers* is not, therefore, a brand that Goldner made global, but a transmedia brand sustained historically by transnational processes and relationships only now publicly legible as global.

This chapter problematizes the perceived ingenuity of contemporary branding strategy in order to uncover other trajectories along which franchising like *Transformers* has developed—in particular, the global forces undergirding that networked production over time. Instead of conceptualizing franchising in terms of its most successful moments—for example, the celebrated rebirth of *Transformers* under Goldner in 2007—one can consider it in terms of a perpetual production cycle that accounts for moments of reorganization, management, experimentation, and also decline in and across multiple global contexts. Extending from the discussion of creative practice and resource-sharing in chapter 3, this study asks how networked production communities have shared franchise resources in excess of the economic and cultural boundaries of the nation, as well as how these exchanges over time and space have problematized the national discourses deployed to make that production meaningful. As a result, this approach can be said to situate the global dimensions of media franchising within a transnational perspective that recognizes how actors in cultural reproduction are not tied exclusively to institutions organized and bound on a national level. Instead of national production infrastructures, franchising operates from a global network of industries and corporations working across differences of media and culture. However, as Ulf Hannerz adds, the transnational "draws attention to what it negates," problematizing national boundaries while also calling attention to their persistent significance.[6] The production cycles of franchising, therefore, have been tied up in transnational cultural exchanges that ask us to think about the mutually constitutive relationships between global forces of power and nationally situated local practices. Franchising cannot be reduced to homogeneous cultural commodities traveling between nations in an international marketplace, but should instead be conceptualized as a dynamic, flexible, heterogeneous form of cultural reproduction that deploys shared formats in local contexts while also reshaping the global possibilities of that format over time.

So whereas previous scholarship has conceptualized global franchises like James Bond and *Pokémon* as products of specifically national cultures, this alternatively transnational approach enables us to consider franchised production as a spatially complex and temporally dynamic process unable to be contained by or fixed to a strictly national frame. Christine Cornea and Jane Landman have more usefully characterized the production of media franchises like *Doctor Who* and *Farscape*, respectively, in transnational terms. Landman argues against models of one-way global flows by framing the American/Austrialian co-production of *Farscape* as a case of collaborative creativity rather than "piecework production under the tight fiscal and creative control of US interests."[7] Yet thinking in terms of both spatialities and temporalities raises additional concerns about the nature of globalization and the ability to sustain empires of politics and entertainment alike. Communications scholar Harold Innis traced the rise and fall of ancient empires to the institutional ability to sustain complex social relationships via communication media "biased" toward maintaining knowledge and power either over time or across distance in space. The survival of empire, Innis suggested, depended on its ability to expand spatially while also adapting dynamically in time.[8] In a transnational field of entertainment empires, franchising suggests a similar tension between continuity and change, where persistent industrial multiplication and reproduction depends upon the ability to share and extend cultural resources widely over vast distances, but also the capacity to manage power and knowledge in time with a mind toward both history and the future. Thus, franchising can be considered in relation to co-production and program formatting as an exchange of media between localities based in the evolving, historical needs of spatially and temporally constituted global culture industries.

In his analysis of media capitals, Michael Curtin suggests that the complexities of the globalized media environment might best be captured by the study of spatial flows in relation to the historical and temporal dynamics of migration, interaction, and exchange that enable them. Indeed, his theory of media capitals as centers of media activity and concentrations of resources, reputation, and talent suggests that "capital status can be won or lost" based on historical negotiations, contentions, and competitions.[9] I hope to echo this concern for both spatiality and temporality by asking how nodes in global networks of production become at different times significant sources of resources, innovation, and talent, and in doing so, maintain the entertainment empires of media franchising and its reproduction of culture dynamically over time. In this sense, the designation of franchise "capital" would not be applied to specific nations (or even municipalities), but to institutions and industrial sites driving production at any one time based on negotiated conditions in the global network. By thinking about these spatial and temporal flows, and the balance between them that Innis identified as so elusive for empire, we can gain insight into the staying power and indeed the cultural power of media franchising.

This spatial and temporal analysis of the transnational production cycles of franchising will first examine the management practices through which media industries have pursued long-term production goals and sustained production over time toward those ends, despite the inevitability of market saturation and other setbacks within those cycles. From that foundation, an inquiry into the institutional forces that turned *Transformers* into a renewable and portable formula for cultural production evidences how both the franchise's origins and its longevity depended upon creative exchanges and collaborations across a network of global industry spanning the United States, Japan, United Kingdom, and elsewhere. While national markets, tastes, and cultural imaginaries remained influential on this process, the franchise was not merely localized to each of these national contexts in turn, but instead constituted and reproduced across these contexts. In addition to my own interview with Flint Dille, writer for the 1984 *Transformers* series, the 1986 animated film, and the 2007 video game, this analysis draws upon popular press and fan interviews with executives and creators working with the franchise across these nodes of global cultural production. To speak specifically to the question of format origins, this chapter also relies upon patent and trademark registrations in order to trace the regulation, documentation, and authorization of claims to ownership over the *Transformers* intellectual property at the national level while also problematizing the ability of that national frame to capture the network of global relations constituting the franchise.

In crossing these boundaries, the transnational production cycles of the *Transformers* property secondly offers an opportunity to explore the cultural tensions that emerge when national frames persist in making sense of franchised production. In order to speak to the nationalist discourses surrounding the franchised production of *Transformers*, this chapter draws upon a wide sample of popular press articles and reviews in which critics have sought to make sense of this vast system of toys, television, film, comics, and video games in relation to the national cultures of the United States, Japan, United Kingdom, Singapore, Malaysia, China, and Australia. Popular discourse about franchising, it will be shown, related the ongoing production of *Transformers* to nostalgic claims that sought to anchor it in specific times and places in disavowal of the transnational and transformative character of media franchising. Yet even these obscuring discourses could be activated by marketers to generate localized appeal and further reproduce the franchise across time and place on a global scale. As a global production format, *Transformers* underwent local transformation over time amid a plurality of transnationally networked production interests.

Ultimately, this chapter makes sense of a transnational and transgenerational phenomenon that, by virtue of complex historical collaboration across axes of culture and capital, has repeatedly confounded familiar frames —such as nation—for understanding the reproduction of culture over time and space. At each major shift in the history of the *Transformers* franchise—from its explosive launch in 1984, to its perceived disappearance in the 1990s, to its repeated reimaginings at the turn of the century, to its most celebrated rebirth in 2007—critics worldwide have struggled to comprehend a cultural system simultaneously old and new, homegrown and foreign. Writing for Tokyo's *Daily Yomiuri* in August 2007, Julian Saterthwaite captures a sense of this transnational contradiction: "With a complicated genesis in both the United States and Japan, the toys have already inspired an animated TV series and spin-off film—*The Transformers: The Movie* (1986)—and numerous comics on both sides of the Pacific."[10] This chapter interrogates that complicated genesis to understand franchise formats as produced over time and even across generations from transnational cultural exchanges, rather than understanding them as expressions of static global power situated in singular and centralized national contexts.

Globalization, Nation, and Transnational Format Exchange

To make sense of the transnational exchanges and dynamic industrial relations at the heart of franchises like *Transformers*, we have to situate them within theories of globalized cultural flows. Although the process of globalization has long been tied to modernization and the collisions of politics, economy, and culture wrought by exploration and colonialism, the more contemporary patterns of globalization that overlapped with the emergence of media franchising in the second half of the twentieth century have altered relations and exchanges between cultures in several key ways. In shrinking the distance between different groups of people, the time-space compression of globalization has created new transnational organizations of capital that circulate money, technologies, and commodities beyond the borders of the nation-state; it has encouraged new patterns of migration and tourism; it has advanced the speed of communication, allowing for local entertainment, news, and other cultural experiences to be shared globally (and vice versa); and it has reshaped cultural values and identities through exposure to such experiences.[11] In this context, however, the nature of the popular culture exchanged through the relations and flows of globalization comes increasingly into question: is it a commodity ideally subject to free trade, or a powerful agent of socialization and enculturation whose global circulation might require moderation and regulation to protect less powerful cultures from being overrun?

At least three answers have been posed to this question, the first being the response from neoliberal regulators in strongholds of media capital in the United States and elsewhere who affirmed the status of culture as a commodity so that the capacity to dominate economic trade in culture would not be impinged. A more thoughtful and critical response, however, came from intellectuals like Herbert Schiller, Mattelart et al., and others who posited a theory of "cultural imperialism" whereby the ability of one nation to colonize the cultural space of another constituted a new form of empire.[12] From this perspective, centers of media capital, such as the United States, would be in a position of dominance over smaller, less wealthy nations without the ability to monopolize cultural markets, and as a result, those local cultures would be suppressed. Globalization thus promised cultural homogenization —usually Americanization—as more powerful cultures wrote themselves over weaker ones. This perspective, therefore, underwrote calls for importation quotas and other measures meant to protect local cultures. The global flows posited by cultural imperialism are not, however, fully compatible with a transnational approach to media. As David Morley argues, the apprehension about globalization expressed by the idea of cultural imperialism often depended implicitly upon reified notions of cultural fixity, purity, and ahistoricity.[13] The authentic culture in need of protection is statically conceived in denial of how flows among different social groups previously shaped it; the privilege accorded to the national frame in making sense of global cultural flows obscures more complex interactions and collisions on the local, regional, and extra-national levels.

Extending from the work of John Tomlinson and other critics of cultural imperialism, a third, more transnational perspective on these global flows understands culture as always already hybridized and as an exchange that can flow in more than just one way.[14] This approach recognizes that while some cultural flows can cause disruption, they can also produce change in more flexible, interactive ways.[15] Instead of positing homogenization as the end point of globalization, scholars like Marwan Kraidy have oppositely entertained whether these flows instead demand a dynamic model of globalization that can account for the increasing complexity and hybridity of cultures as they come into relation with one another.[16] Mary Louise Pratt posits this complexity as a "transculturalism" where something new is created from the cultural encounters of globalization.[17] In framing these flows as "glocalization," Roland Robertson further suggests that in global circulation, popular culture is adapted and localized to fit within the patterns and structures of new contexts, rather than entirely imposed, giving those local cultures the ability to reshape and experience global flows. Nevertheless, these critical scholars do not characterize globalization as an even cultural playing field devoid of power relations, as hybridity and glocalization have been incorporated into the strategies of global media capital as a means of adapting to market differentials.[18] Stuart Hall thus uses a model of hybridity to nuance the cultural imperialism position when he argues that global cultural flows "recognize and absorb those differences within the larger, over-arching framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world," recognizing that globalization operates not through homogenized sameness, but through difference.[19] As Koichi Iwabuchi seizes on this recognition to suggest, hybridity asks us not to celebrate the mixing of cultures without asking about inequalities of power, but merely to recognize that "[t]he operation of global cultural power can only be found in local practice, whereas cultural reworking and appropriation at the local level necessarily takes place within the matrix of global homogenizing forces."[20] Even Hall's "American conception of the world" is not indigenous to that national context, but a dynamic, heterogeneous aggregate of culture produced out of global exchange.

A transnational approach to the global flows of franchising, therefore, asks how global media institutions generate more complex forms of culture and cultural production than can be contained within a singular national frame. As Robins and Aksoy argue, we must "think about media cultures in a counter-national way" and work "against the grain of the national mentality" that so often dominates our thinking about global cultural flows.[21] Histories of broadcasting, for example, provide a useful model in accounting for cross-cultural collaboration and exchange by exploring the interdependence of national broadcast institutions. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff explain that while the United Kingdom and United States developed mismatched public service and commercial broadcasting systems, respectively, the two systems drew upon one another for programming forms and strategies that could be adapted to their differing needs.[22] In the regulation of early national radio, Michele Hilmes argues similarly that the American and British broadcasters used one another as a prop for defending their own existence and justifying the exclusion of amateurs from radio culture.[23] While it is easy to assume that the economic power of the United States during the twentieth century made its culture immune to influence from less powerful nations, Jeffrey Miller traces the constitutive role of British imports on American television culture. His argument, however, is not one of reverse media imperialism, where American culture is Anglicized; instead, Miller suggests that social, cultural, and economic forces at work in the American context reshaped these imports in return—much as Dick Hebdige argues that subcultural groups in postwar Britain rearticulated pieces of American popular culture to create a uniquely local popular culture.[24] These broadcast historians help us to see the American and British television markets not as nationally defined cultural formations, but as an interconnected and indivisible transnational system. These conclusions echo Richard Pells' claim that the relationship between American and European culture, at least in the second half of the twentieth century, was not one of unequal power so much as a process of cross-fertilization; not even American culture, he argues, could be seen as completely Americanized.[25] In a transnational context, media cultures and institutions prove interdependent.

Within the context of the industrial relations of franchising, this transnational perspective might also draw productive comparisons to more targeted studies of global co-productions and format exchange. In her study of television co-productions, Jeanette Steemers draws from Golding and Harris to problematize the existence of contained, authentic culture, proposing instead that researchers consider the specific industrial practices that produce culture in exchange across national markets.[26] Her study of co-production helps us to see comparable cultural exchanges in franchising as a practice located in the institutions of industry more so than nation. Similarly, global media franchising can be conceptualized in relation to and as an intensification of the format trade. As described by Albert Moran, a television format has both a formal and a legal dimension, in that it is a system for exchanging culture, as well as intellectual property rights to the industrial production of culture. "[A] television format," Moran explains, "is that set of invariable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced," traded by way of "a process of licensing or franchising, whereby the owner of a television program format contracts with another party to allow that party legal access to the format for the purpose of producing an adaptation."[27] On a global scale, this formatting allows programming to be tailored to local audiences through local production, with format originators providing series bibles, consultancy services, and other resources to guide and encourage that localization. These practices thus embody the "formatting of difference" attributed to globalization by Tessa Morris-Suzuki in which "a single underlying common framework or set of rules . . . is used to coordinate local subregimes."[28] Beyond localization, however, these iterative productions also work to reiterate and reproduce the global format framework itself, as Moran explains:

> The original formula does not have to be slavishly imitated but rather serves as a general framework or guide within which it is possible to introduce various changes to the original formula. . . . Significantly, under standard format licensing agreements, the variations to a television format developed through these types of adaptation become a further part of the format with ownership vested in the original owner. Clearly, under this type of permitted variation, there is no veneration of originality; rather, the format is seen as a loose and expanding set of program possibilities.[29]

The underlying format framework is thus not the product of any one national market of origination but the aggregate result of ongoing, emergent re-creation constituted across a nationally decentralized network of production cultures.[30] Considering global media franchising in relation to these formatting practices, we can see it not merely as the reproduction in space of homogenized sameness, but rather as a temporally dynamic incorporation of difference drawn from the multiplication of networked industrial production on a transnational scale.

Despite the implications of transnational globalization, scholars who have sought to understand the cultural production of major media franchises have often done so in nationally defined terms. James Chapman situates the James Bond franchise historically within a British film tradition opposed to dominant Hollywood models. As conceived by British novelist Ian Fleming in the 1950s, and extended into film and television over five decades, the success of James Bond exemplifies for Chapman the exportation of a particularly British cultural identity around the world. Though acknowledging the role of Hollywood financing, Chapman asserts that "[t]he production base of the Bond films is British . . . , most of the technical personnel are British, the generic roots of the films are British, and the ideology of national identity which the films themselves embody is British."[31] Even in the face of evidence that the 1970s Bond films restructured this nationalist ideological framework to be inclusive of American subjectivities, Chapman resists the idea that Bond might be considered a product of a non-British film culture.[32]

Chapman's investment in the nationalism of the Bond franchise makes more sense by his conclusion, in which he makes his rhetorical strategy clear. Arguing against critics who articulated Bond's universal appeal to his compatibility with globally dominant American cultural values, Chapman explains that "[i]f the Britishness of the Bond films were to be emphasized, it would prove an exception to the rule of American cultural imperialism."[33] Chapman acknowledges the global circuits of culture in which the James Bond franchise developed, but to challenge and invert the cultural imperialism thesis (what Rogers and Antola call "reverse media imperialism"), he strategically defends Bond's sense of national identity against evidence of an even more complex production network inclusive of both the United States and United Kingdom.[34]

Focusing on the cultural encounters between the United States and Japan most relevant to a study of *Transformers*, Anne Allison also reverses the logic of cultural imperialism by suggesting that toys and other multimedia franchises from Japan have increasingly dominated the imaginary lives of American children since the early 1990s. With the success of Japanese-originated franchise properties such as *Power Rangers* and *Pokémon*, Allison argues that Japan reversed the grip of American culture over the global imagination, and identifiable markers of Japanese culture came to be valued, rather than obscured, tolerated, or ridiculed as in the case of previous imports *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) and *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Astro Boy*).[35] The author believes that the new "soft power" accorded to Japan derived from the global appeal of the "polymorphous" play offered by transformation narratives as well as culturally specific themes of "techno-animism" enchanting the everyday world.[36] Susan Napier corroborates this claim to an essentially Japanese soft power, identifying cultural exports that possess "certain distinctively Japanese characteristics" (the "cute" of Hello Kitty, for example) imminently distinguishable from those of American culture.[37] Yet Napier allows that essential national culture to be nuanced and problematized in recognizing that part of the attraction of Japanese culture to American audiences beginning in the 1990s came in part from perceptions and fantasies of Japan as different or as "other." "When a non-Japanese enjoys or identifies with a character [in anime], he is identifying within a highly distinctive fantasyscape that combines elements of 'real' Japan with a cartoon imaginary."[38]

Koichi Iwabuchi similarly suggests that Japan has played an active role in the construction of that fantasy through the circulation of "self-orientalizing" discourses that make culturally exclusive, homogeneous, and particularistic claims to Japanese identity in opposition to the West.[39] Yet Iwabuchi complicates this opposition by calling attention to how Japan intermediates the flow of culture between the West and the rest of Asia, indigenizing and providing local camouflage in a process of transculturation that obscures and reconstructs perception of cultural origins. "By appropriating, hybridizing, indigenizing, and consuming images and commodities of 'foreign' origins in multiple unforeseeable ways," Iwabuchi writes, "even American culture is conceived as 'ours' in many places."[40] This indigenizing transculturation also reshapes Japanese exchanges with the West, whereby Japanese cultural exports are reformatted and stripped of markers of difference to become "culturally odorless," particularly insofar as the Japanese animation industry and other national institutions must rely upon the power of transnational partners in Western media to break into those markets.[41] Allison's account, in fact, evinces these complexities, as the global success of Japanese franchising in the 1990s depended upon processes of cultural reformatting by partner producers in the United States and other contexts. As new footage with American actors was added to *Himitsu Sentai Go Renja* by United States–based producer Haim Saban to transform it into *Power Rangers*, and markers of Japanese difference were rotoscoped out of *Pokémon* by 4Kids Entertainment, these franchises offered, according to Allison, "a model of global power different from that associated with Americanization. The property is jointly produced, differentially distributed, and culturally mixed, . . . not localizable to any one place."[42] So despite her claims of soft national power, Allison seems to concur with Iwabuchi that Japanese cultural exports should be read not in terms of Americanization, Westernization, or Japanization, but "as a symptom of the shifting nature of transnational cultural power in a context in which intensified global cultural flows have decentered the power structure *and* vitalized local practices of appropriation and consumption of foreign cultural products and meanings."[43] While the globalized cross-fertilization of culture involves national forces and local cultures, a network of regional, global, and industrial relations has shaped the "Japanese" identity and cultural markers under transnational exchange.

So while we could situate *Transformers* within a trajectory of Japanese soft power, given the centrality of toys designed and often manufactured in Japan to its global franchising footprint, such a national perspective would nevertheless obscure the transnational character of its production. To be clear, there is a shared heritage between the transforming robot franchise and a number of traditions and cultural narratives in Japanese popular culture. Susan Napier identifies *Tetswan Atomu* (*Astro Boy*) in 1963 as the "first of a long line of *anime* involving robots with human souls."[44] Interest in subjectivity and machine evolved into a sub-genre of *mecha* animation and toys focused on human-piloted robot vehicles. Though it pushes Michael Curtin's terms outside their focus on geographic localities, these cultural traditions might make Japanese toymakers like Takara a significant industrial "capital" in the network of production constituting a *Transformers* franchise. Yet if we look beyond the Japanese context to the relations with industries and institutions in the United States and elsewhere, we will discover additional, hybrid layers of understanding usually ignored in accounts of national origins—other media capitals in the historically dynamic transnational production and industrial relations of globalization. Instead of treating transforming robot toys (and their attendant narratives) solely as a broad cultural genre native to a national culture like that of Japan, we can consider *Transformers* as a trademarked, patented franchise that reproduces culture by way of a network of transnational industrial relations.

The Transnational Production Cycles of Franchising

As formats for supporting iterative content production, franchises have been designed to live long lives. Flint Dille, a writer who has worked with properties like *G.I. Joe*, *Batman*, and *Transformers* across television, film, and video games, developed several practical perspectives for understanding and theorizing the temporalities of franchise production. Dille first emphasized the necessity of solidifying franchise formulas by establishing key character types and dramatic dynamics. Having not worked with the *Transformers* property for over a decade prior to writing the video game extension of the 2007 film, Dille admitted being surprised initially by the persistence of characters from the 1984 animated series such as Optimus Prime, Starscream, and Megatron: "I just assumed fifteen years had passed and it would be totally different and I wouldn't recognize any of the characters."[45] Upon reflection, however, Dille posited that these characters had simply solidified as part of the franchise formula, just as, he quipped, "There's 131 things . . . repeated in a James Bond movie."[46] While recognizing this format, Dille stressed the need for variation and difference within its formulaic structure. "Every franchise has a graphic equalizer," Dille suggested. "Bond always had comedy. . . . It was always there. But when you're doing Roger Moore, it's like 'ramp the camp,' 'turn down the toughness.'"[47] Continuing to use the Bond films as a test case, Dille theorized that over the course of a franchise, some elements of the formula, such as campy comedy, would be modulated and emphasized at some times over others. While firmly defined, franchise formulas could simultaneously be modified to incorporate difference and variation across individual productions.

One of the primary reasons to inject that novelty, Dille argued, was to

The "death" of Optimus Prime in *Transformers: The Movie* in 1986 (written into the script to make room for both new characters and new toy products).

extend the appeal of franchised product across generations. For example, Dille praised Hanna Barbera's *Scooby-Doo* (animated several times for television since 1969, and extended to a series of feature films in 2002) for doing "everything a franchise has to do. . . . You can absolutely expect Dad to have grown up watching it, and Grandma and Grandpa probably have some awareness. That's a third generation franchise, and it has never left the scene. It has had all sorts of great and horrible manifestations, but *Scooby-Doo* has always been there."[48] The 40-year persistence of *Scooby-Doo* required that it adapt, generating the wildly divergent and sometimes best-forgotten manifestations that Dille acknowledged. In his view, producers must make "violent changes to your franchise, to make it fresh again," despite the potential for alienating consumers seeking familiarity.[49] "You have to figure out 'how do you reinvent it' every five years."[50] Dille's own attempt to reinvent *Transformers* included killing off Optimus Prime in the 1986 animated film, making way for the new character Hot Rod to become leader of the Autobots (thus creating new creative opportunities within the franchise while presumably supporting sales of the new Hot Rod toy). Moreover, the licensed and decentralized structures of franchise networks have often enabled this kind of change. "There really is a moment in the life of a property where the creator really has to let go of it," Dille mused, citing the transformation of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in the 1980s from a counter-cultural satire of mainstream comics into a children's cartoon series and merchandising bonanza. "Somebody else looked at it and saw something completely different. . . . What you have to have is someone really smart or lucky managing your property who's going to let him do that even if it puts your franchise at risk."[51] Dille argues that the authorial desire to protect the integrity of an original creation has often prevented franchising from thriving via a multiplicity of iterations.

The overall picture of media franchising painted by Dille is a temporally dynamic system animated by structured heterogeneity and stifled by homogeneous singularity. In one way of thinking, Dille likened the franchise to music, where each node in the content network plays a specific role in harmonious time; the goal is not creating a singular event, but keeping a rhythm of production: "you've got the comic book coming out every month. That's your beat. . . . Your crescendos are when the movies come out. Your backbeats are the video games, the DVDs. . . . You have to keep the whole thing going all the time."[52] Alternately, Dille offered a metaphor based in combustion: "You think of it as a fire. You want the high notes, the big flames, the fresh logs you're putting on there. But we have to have the simmering coals—that's your fan base. You have to have the coals on the bottom that are drying out the new logs. You have to be creating at the same time as you're destroying."[53] More recently, Dille has considered whether gardening might be the more apt comparison: where seasons bring cycles of growth, change, and decay; tone shifts from bright "springs" (campy versions of *Batman*, for example) to dark "winters" (Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*); and creators continually plant new seeds while weeding out the husks of the old.[54] Dille mixed his metaphors, but ultimately they all modeled the franchise as a perpetual process of creation based in decentralized diversification and differentiation.

The long-term, cyclical outlook held by Dille has been shared with other creative and economic professionals in the media industries. In the case of *Battlestar Galactica*, discussed at length in the previous chapter, producers like Ronald D. Moore identified in franchising a potential for sustained reworking over different temporal contexts:

> In the same way that Shakespeare's plays can be revisited again and again in new ways and settings . . . there is enough of the core mythology there that you can change and adapt all the things around it for something very new and worthwhile. . . . New generations can make it their own. Strong new interpretations build on the past, they don't repeat it.[55]

Studio and network managers also have embraced the cyclical temporalities of franchising logic. As president of the Sci-Fi network, David Howe considered the end of *Battlestar* in 2009 in terms of a similarly extended production cycle: "'Battlerstar' is such an important landmark show it won't ever die. So it will be kept alive either through ongoing movies, potentially some sort of feature, animated shows."[56] In his role as a network executive, Howe considered the franchise as a living entity kept in health through ongoing production. A month before the series finale of *Battlestar* in 2009, Universal announced that it was considering the relaunch of the property through a new feature film.[57] Moreover, when Sci-Fi (now SyFy) cancelled the spin-off *Caprica* in 2010, it came only a week after greenlighting a new *Battlestar* TV movie, *Blood and Chrome*. Cancellation did not happen without plans for continued production. The network adopted a similar strategy with the cancellation of the *Stargate: Atlantis* series in 2008, promising that franchise production would continue through made-for-television movies. And even when those plans had fallen through by 2011, executive producer Brad Wright envisioned this production stoppage as only temporary: "It's a franchise. *Stargate* is not over."[58]

Despite these strategic ideals, long-term franchise management has presented a number of creative and economic challenges not easily overcome. Franchising requires a careful balance of release patterns, wherein the frequency of production becomes neither so slow as to let a franchise languish, nor so fast that its cycle of production is too quickly completed. 2K Games Global President Christoph Hartmann saw the 2007 hit video game *BioShock* as a potential franchise that could support up to five sequels, for example, but he tempered his enthusiasm for the property with a reminder that other promising franchises had been mismanaged: "Some of the mega-franchises we talk about only lasted ten years because companies took five years to ship a game." At the same time, Hartmann cautioned, "we have to be careful not to cash in. I won't name the company, but there was a great racing game years ago. They brought it back year-on-year. . . . [I]t's hard to believe what they've done to it. It's upsetting, actually."[59] The production cycles of franchising can also be shortened by unexpected obstacles. In late 2008, Disney elected to abandon its partnership with Walden Media and its interest in the once thriving *Narnia* franchise (based on the C. S. Lewis children's novels). Hot on the heels of *Lord of the Rings*, long-term investment in the series seemed surefire, with the first of seven proposed films, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, grossing $745 million worldwide in 2005. Yet the disappointing worldwide gross of $419 million for the second film, *Prince Caspian*, combined with the economic downturn of 2008, led Disney to abandon its stake in the franchise.[60] As a result of such challenges, a relative few of the franchises in which media industries have invested have actually enjoyed decades-long production cycles. Moreover, executives at Paramount like Jon Dulgen and Rick Berman called attention to what they call "franchise fatigue," where the temporal pressures building on multiplied production eventually cause market declines, even for long-running franchises like *Star Trek*. The commercial disappointments of *Enterprise* and *Star Trek: Nemesis*, in this discourse, extended not from poor production management but from market saturation. As Berman argued, "I think it really had to do with a sense of franchise fatigue and the fact that there had been so much *Star Trek*."[61] Even as a self-serving rationalization to present failure as inevitable (and thus blameless), this idea of franchise fatigue speaks to the creative difficulties of sustaining franchised production over time.

The production cycles of franchising, therefore, have been constituted by ongoing processes of creative management that multiply and modulate identifiable formulas to sustain growth over time despite these challenges. These processes have produced not just continuity, consistency, and expansion, but also gradual transformation and retreat as resources depreciated and shifted from one site of production to the next. Returning to Dille's metaphors, the musical theme of franchising must continually change its tune so that the resulting symphony (or perhaps jazz improvisation) does not become a monotonous drone. Alternatively, the fire of the franchise can be considered a potentially destructive force, eating through the fuel thrown at it in order to keep burning. Or, in the gardening model, franchising requires constant tending, feeding, and pruning. Regardless of the metaphor, the production cycles of media franchising have historically unfolded through the injection of difference into formula and the managed, dynamic exchange of production resources.

A danger in internalizing the industrial discourse about injecting this difference, however, arises in internalizing the implicit suggestion that franchises are somehow "alive"—biological entities in need of care and nourishment to persevere. Such metaphors suggest that franchises are self-animated or that they have their own agencies, when it is the agency of institutionally situated producers that animate them. By considering the transnational character of that institutional organization, we can better understand this production and modulated reproduction of media culture.

The Transformations of Franchising

Having surveyed the temporalities structuring franchised production, we can now turn toward their relationship with the spatialities of transnational culture industries as evidenced by an analysis of the *Transformers* franchise.

How did the industrial relations of globalization structure the long-term development and management of this franchise across toys, television, film, games, and comics? What transnational interests were served through its multiplied production? How did that production cycle depend on transnationally organized industrial partnerships and exchanges?

The generation of the *Transformers* franchise formula cannot be traced to one or even several strictly national cultures, but instead a series of interactions, exchanges, and mutual influences between globally networked industries and corporate institutions. The patterns of technological, cultural, and industrial cross-fertilization that first supported the production of transforming robot toys can be traced several decades prior to the official recognition of the *Transformers* brand in 1984. Robot toys and themes came to play a significant role in Japanese popular culture following World War II, particularly as part of the emerging traditions of *mecha* and techno-animism ascribed to that local context by Allison and Napier. However, the production of these national traditions occurred within an already global marketplace defined by economic, technological, and cultural exchanges between institutional actors. In the early 1970s, the Japan-based toy manufacturer Takara entered into license agreements to borrow molds—the physical templates from which plastic figures could be cast—from the U.S.-headquartered Hasbro. In 1971, Takara used Hasbro's 12-inch *G.I. Joe* molds to create a line of figures called *Henshin Cyborg*. As Brisko et al. explain, "these figures traded their American counterpart's military look and 'kung-fu grip' for translucent plastic skin, exchangeable limbs, and gleaming chrome mechanical innards."[62] Through this transnational exchange, *G.I. Joe* became a robot. The production of Japanese robot toys was thus tied to a globalized market of licensed exchange between toy manufacturers, not a purely national frame. By 1974, Takara miniaturized the concept for a new line called *Microman*, envisioned as tiny robots from another world that could disguise themselves as toys. Smaller figures enabled Takara to produce interchangeable vehicles to accompany the robots. From here, the *Microman* toys would be imported to the U.S. market under the name *Micronauts* by a Hasbro competitor, Mego Toys. Thus, in the 1970s, the market for robot toys could be viewed as truly transnational, with neither the Japanese nor American markets working in isolation.

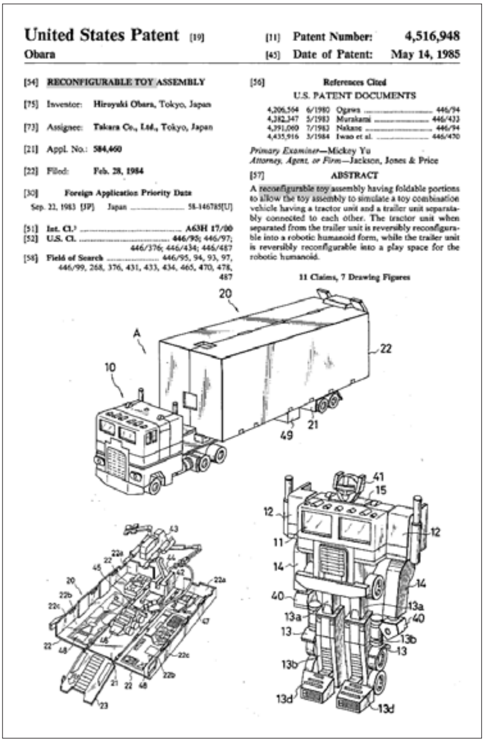
In 1980, Takara pursued the miniaturization angle further with *Diaclone*, another line of small robot figures accompanied by vehicles comprised of small components that could be rearranged to form larger robotic warriors.[63] By 1982, these vehicles replaced the figures as the centerpiece of the line, spun off as *Diaclone Car Robot*. Takara imported the toys into the United

States on a limited basis as *Diakron: Robot/Car of the Future*, while it signed agreements with companies like GiG and Joustra for European distribution. Takara applied this transformation gimmick to other toy lines as well: *New Microman*, for example, gave toy guns, cassette players, and microscopes the same capacity to be transformed into robot avatars. *Microman* continued to be imported into the United States under the *Micronauts* name. Beginning in 1979, the *Micronauts* toy line was also marketed in the United States via a tie-in comic published by Marvel Comics, demonstrating the cultural work being performed to narrativize and give new meaning to these toys in other global contexts. Even after Mego's 1982 bankruptcy, the property remained viable to Marvel, supporting a crossover miniseries with *X-Men* in 1983.

By 1984, the technology and imaginative concepts undergirding the transforming robot toy had already been established through a complex series of industrial dependencies and exchanges, and it was from this transnational context that the *Transformers* brand emerged. As former Vice President of Research and Development George Dunsay recalled, Hasbro initially sought to acquire a license to market a Takara-designed radio control car in 1983, unrelated to these transforming robot products. However, when that initiative faltered, Hasbro proposed to alternatively make good on its previous promises to Takara by helping to increase the profile of *Diakron* in the American marketplace.[64] Takara's limited distribution and marketing power in the United States had prevented *Diakron* from making any significant impact—especially in competition with lines like Mattel's *Masters of the Universe* and Hasbro's own *G.I. Joe* marketed with support from animated television series. In the new partnership, Takara would manufacture the toys, while Hasbro would supply the same marketing power it put behind *G.I. Joe*. In the process, *Diakron* became rebranded as *Transformers*, and as Dunsay explains, "we gave them the license to the Transformer name and use of our marketing and commercials in Japan."[65]

This collaboration involved exchange of at least two kinds of intellectual property. Takara shared with Hasbro patents that would shape the core aspects of the soon-to-be-solidified *Transformers* franchise formula. Their 1984 U.S. Patent #4,516,948, for example, concerns the mechanism for

> [a] reconfigurable toy assembly having foldable portions to allow the toy assembly to simulate a toy combination vehicle having a tractor unit and a trailer unit separatably [sic] connected to each other. The tractor unit when separated from the trailer unit is reversibly reconfigurable into a robotic humanoid form, while the trailer unit is reversibly reconfigurable into a play space for the robotic humanoid.[66]


United States Patent [19]
Obara

[11] Patent Number: 4,516,948
[45] Date of Patent: May 14, 1985

[54] RECONFIGURABLE TOY ASSEMBLY

[75] Inventor: Hiroyuki Obara, Tokyo, Japan

[73] Assignee: Takara Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan

[21] Appl. No.: 584,460

[22] Filed: Feb. 28, 1984

[30] Foreign Application Priority Data

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[51] Int. Cl.³ A63H 17/00
[52] U.S. Cl. 446/95; 446/97; 446/376; 446/434; 446/487
[58] Field of Search 446/95, 94, 93, 97, 446/99, 268, 376, 431, 433, 434, 465, 470, 478, 487

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Primary Examiner—Mickey Yu
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Jackson, Jones & Price

[57] ABSTRACT

A reconfigurable toy assembly having foldable portions to allow the toy assembly to simulate a toy combination vehicle having a tractor unit and a trailer unit separably connected to each other. The tractor unit when separated from the trailer unit is reversibly reconfigurable into a robotic humanoid form, while the trailer unit is reversibly reconfigurable into a play space for the robotic humanoid.

11 Claims, 7 Drawing Figures

U.S. Patent #4,516,948, including a technical schematic for the "reconfigurable toy assembly" that would become Battle Convoy/Optimus Prime.

This patent acknowledged Hiroyuki Obara of Tokyo, Japan as the inventor of this mechanism, and assigned ownership rights to his employer, Takara. The patent application also references several other Takara designs for toy "assemblies" from as early as 1978. As an instrument of national intellectual property infrastructure, this document located the origins of *Transformers* in the industrial design practices of Japanese toy manufacturing in the late 1970s. Nevertheless, the national trademark registry told a different story. Hasbro held the rights to the *Transformers* trademark—a stylized brand logo and the phrase "More Than Meets the Eye"—filed with the U.S. Trademark Office in November 1983 and officially registered the next September. Thus, the intellectual property regimes of the U.S. government recognized the technological basis of the toys in a Japanese industrial context, but alternately figured Hasbro as the site of origins for the narrative and cultural meanings produced in marketing.

This collaboration made *Transformers* a fundamentally different cultural object than *Diaclone*: not just an internationally distributed and reconfigured product, but something whose very constitution depended upon transnational exchanges across industrial contexts. For example, in Japan the mechanisms behind the aforementioned U.S. Patent #4,516,948 had been used to manufacture a toy known as the *Diaclone* "Battle Convoy." Though physically identical to a product later released as part of the *Transformers* line, "Battle Convoy" functioned quite differently in a transnational context of production than in its national or even internationally distributed context. In a 1983 Japanese television commercial for "Battle Convoy," viewers saw how the toy worked: how its arms, legs, and head folded in and out to transform between robot and semi-trailer cab forms; how its trailer could be used to carry other vehicles from the *Diaclone* line; and how smaller robots within the trailer could be used to repair other *Diaclone* robots. Absent, however, was any meaningful characterization. In the first shot of the ad, viewers actually see a convoy of "Battle Convoys"—moving down a desert road, identifiable as a mass produced toy, but not differentiable as a unique or singular character.[67] It was only in transnational industrial exchange with Hasbro's marketing efforts that Takara's Patent #4,516,948 became "Optimus Prime," wise leader of a heroic tribe of Autobots who had come from the alien world of Cybertron to protect the Earth. Meanwhile, U.S. Patent #4,571,201—a design from Takara's *New Microman* line for a "Toy Gun Convertible into Robotic-Humanoid Form" became trademarked as Megatron, leader of the evil Decepticons and Prime's sworn arch nemesis.[68] Hasbro also purchased designs for transformable robots from smaller Japanese toy makers, and worked to incorporate those into a shared narrative system with Takara's patents. In this sense, each patent served as a platform for elaborating character designs. Takara (and other Japanese toy companies) produced an expanding array of technologized play objects, and Hasbro worked to systematize and contextualize that play, not just for the U.S. market, but for markets worldwide.

Nevertheless, Hasbro did not stand alone in inscribing these technologies with marketable meanings. Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter developed the epic backstory of civil war between Autobots and Decepticons, while the Griffin-Bacal advertising agency bore day-to-day responsibility on Hasbro's behalf to oversee packaging and marketing and manage these partners in film and comic books across the transnational production network.[69] The character names and personalities Shooter devised along with Marvel writer Bob Budiansky were then fed into Griffin-Bacal's advertising and packaging strategies. As with television advertising, it was packaging—and the application of decals with the *Transformers* trademark directly to the Takara toys—that constituted *Transformers* as a transnational product

Original *Diaclone* Battle Convoy and its repackaging in the *Transformers* line as Optimus Prime.

culturally differentiable from internationally distributed products like *Diakron*. Each *Transformers* box included a short biographical file detailing the history and personality of each robot, along with a “tech spec” ranking each character’s speed, strength, intelligence, courage, and skill. At the same time, Griffin-Bacal’s production arm, Sunbow, worked with Marvel’s animation division, Marvel Productions, to create a *Transformers* cartoon in the vein of its previous work on *G.I. Joe*. Ultimately, the national terms of patents and trademarks proved insufficient to fully capture the transnational production and marketing of *Transformers*.

While this marketing initiative gave companies based in the United States a wide degree of latitude to culturally recontextualize Takara products, none of this should understate the cultural importance of Takara's initial designs, especially to the production cycle. Marvel or Griffin-Bacal could certainly dream up new characters, but without Takara, there was no way to introduce a character into the toy line. Griffin-Bacal, Marvel Comics, and Marvel Productions all had to confine their narrative work to existing patent resources. "The first two years of cartoon products follow Takara designs," Dunsay explained.[70] Thus, in this particular transnational collaboration, Takara produced the technology, Marvel Comics created the characters, Griffin-Bacal packaged the toys accordingly, Marvel Productions advertised it on television, while Hasbro distributed and sold the toys. From its inception in 1984, *Transformers* constituted a complex, transnational web of creative and economic relationships. There was no *Transformers* outside of this transnational formation to be understood in strictly national terms.

Over the cycle of production, the scope and configuration of those transnational relationships changed, however. To meet the demand for new products to keep the cycle running, Hasbro and Takara invested in co-production infrastructure. George Dunsay describes an "exchange program" whereby he and other American designers worked in Japan to review Takara's work and "bring the best of what they were working on back to [Hasbro's headquarters in] Rhode Island."[71] At the same time, Hideaki Yoke, lead designer and chief research and development executive for Takara's transforming robot lines, moved to Hasbro's U.S. headquarters, where he worked on the *Transformers* line as well as Hasbro's entire range of boys' products. While Hasbro kept a close eye on Takara's product development, Takara's domestic operations were increasingly shaped by the global success of the *Transformers* narrative. Nobuyuki Okude, the Takara executive who had overseen the creation of *Diaclone* and *Microman*, questioned the viability of his original national brands as the marketing system surrounding *Transformers* expanded. It made little sense to continue *Diaclone* and *Microman* domestically when their transnational deployment as *Transformers* held more global and local marketing power. According to Okude, "Takara decided to eliminate those two from the market, and started selling [*Transformers*]."[72] While this eliminated the original Japanese product line, the ongoing transnational production of *Transformers* continued to depend on Takara's research and development energies. As Dunsay explained, "because our production quantities were so large, it was no longer practical for [Takara] to create their own line of robots, it was easier to use ours. Additionally, most of their R&D was taking direction from me with respect to *Transformers,* so they didn't have a lot of other bodies to work on their own robots."[73]

Through control of the marketing apparatus, Dunsay claimed significant institutional power for Hasbro in this particular configuration of transnational relations. Companies like GiG, which continued to market *Diaclone* in Europe through previous arrangements with Takara, quickly discovered the need to submit to the transnational marketing plan coordinated by Hasbro to be competitive. Within two years, *Diaclone*, *Diakron*, *TraSformers*, and all the other local packaging of the original Takara toys came to be replaced by the unified *Transformers* trademark under Hasbro's control. This allowed executives like Dunsay to claim a position of transnational power: "If they wanted our TV shows and commercials they had to fall in line."[74] Thus, this transnational collaboration should not be celebrated for its heterarchy but should be recognized instead as an industrial formation structured by the persistent power relations of globalizing capital. As the marketing apparatus supporting the trademark became increasingly central to economic success, technical development and toy design became less powerful nodes in the production network. This was not automatically a boon for Hasbro, however, given its reliance on other firms to drive the marketing machine. Whereas Marvel Comics and Marvel Productions had once followed Takara's technical designs in narrativizing the property, Takara and Hasbro alike soon found themselves working to turn Marvel-created characters into mechanically functioning toys. During the development of *Transformers: The Movie*, the Sunbow-Marvel-produced animated feature designed to boost the marketing of the franchise in 1986, character designers at Marvel enjoyed input into product development for the first time. From Dunsay's point of view, "That was a product disaster." Character designs did not translate into toys that offered compelling play on a technical level: "We in R&D who controlled everything to that point were told what was going to be made. This was a major departure for the process at Hasbro at that time: R&D always initiated the product, usually with Takara ideas."[75] In this transnational consortium, therefore, power was not shared equally among *all* partners, and those shifting imbalances were more complex and multidimensional than simple notions of "Americanization" would imply.

As the ongoing development of the franchise shifted industrial power dynamics, its long-term viability came into question. Demand for the new *Transformers* exceeded supply during Christmas 1984, leaving many retailer orders unfulfilled; in 1985, sustained consumer interest supported impressive revenues of $300 million.[76] However, in 1984 Hasbro competitor Tonka Toys signed its own similar deals with Japanese toymakers to develop a competing transforming robot franchise—*The Go-Bots*. Given the resulting market saturation, executives at Tonka anticipated a steep decline in the transformable toy market.[77] True to prediction, Tonka's *Go-Bots* were discontinued by 1987. *Transformers* remained one of Hasbro's top selling products in 1986, however, so the company sought to keep it in play. Yet with revenues of only $214 million, the toy line had already entered decline, and the dismal $5.8 million box office gross for *Transformers: The Movie* further clouded the forecast for 1987—hardly the kind of exposure that would drive a surge in toy revenues.[78] The primary advertising arm for the franchise, the *Transformers* television series, subsequently ceased production after a third season in which popular characters like Optimus Prime and Megatron—killed off in the 1986 film—had been replaced by far less popular characters like Rodimus Prime and Galvatron. Further threatening the franchise was an overall skepticism about the health of the toy industry; considering competition from the new electronic playthings offered by Nintendo, *Boston Globe* analysts claimed in 1988 that "[t]here are no hot toys."[79] While *Transformers* still made the *Globe*'s list of popular toys for Christmas 1988, it had fallen to #15, far from its previous status as the hottest toy of 1984.

By 1988, the *New York Times* and *American Heritage* listed *Transformers* among such cultural objects as the Walkman, the Swatch watch, and *Cabbage Patch Kids* whose faddishness would forever link them with the "depressing decade" of the 1980s.[80] Still, Hasbro clung to the brand, despite plummeting sales, preaching to *Advertising Age* in 1989 its "emerging philosophy: strong toy brands can have long-lasting value if nurtured by consistent advertising and marketing."[81] Yet to outside observers like *Business Week*, this reliance on established hits threatened Hasbro's ability to create new ones:

> [T]oy makers have taken the safe route of spinoffs, preferring to imitate an earlier success rather than risk resources on something different. And once a manufacturer has a hit, production costs are far lower for new products in the same line. But companies have stretched this strategy too thin. "You just don't get the public excited over line extensions," complains George A. Colgan, a senior buyer at K mart Corp.[82]

Faced with retailer indifference in the United States, Hasbro eventually discontinued the toy line in 1991, with Marvel following suit in comic production.

The ability of Hasbro and Marvel to walk away from *Transformers* in the American market, however, reaffirmed the transnational character of its ongoing franchised production. As the interest of these U.S.-based corporations in their home market waned, creative and economic power was reorganized within the transnational network, diverted to alternative sites of production and sustained by the capacity of franchising to support a multiplicity of iterations rather than a single "canonical" instance. In decentralized, transnational exchange, *Transformers* could be renewed, reused, and reproduced across a wide range of global contexts even as stakeholders in one national context threw in the towel. Despite the singular trademark, differences in the localized industrial use of that trademark had already pushed the development of the *Transformers* franchise in divergent directions. In the United Kingdom, a parallel comic book continuity has been developed in lieu of that produced by Marvel Comics. Starting in 1984, the independently managed Marvel UK published a weekly *Transformers* series, rather than monthly as in the United States. While some issues were reprints from the United States, the demand for more frequent content required locally produced stories to fill gaps between imported issues. Similarly, when *Transformers: The Movie* introduced new characters, Marvel and Marvel UK diverged in their responses. The former embraced these additions, whereas the latter stuck with the original characters. At that point, Marvel UK became fully independent of its corporate cousin, telling completely different and often contradictory tales.

A third comic continuity had also circulated in Japan since 1984, produced entirely outside of the Sunbow/Marvel consortium. Printed in *Telemaga*, a television-themed publication, these comics were drawn in local *manga* style and diverged narratively from their Western counterparts. So although Takara had discarded the *Diaclone* name in order to gain access to a more substantive global marketing apparatus, it did not leverage that apparatus locally in exactly the same way as Hasbro. In fact, in the long run Takara managed the *Transformers* marketing apparatus with far more longevity. Rather than secure distribution for the 1986 animated film, Takara developed on its own initiative the direct-to-video animated short *Scramble City*.[83] While the video did highlight toys like Ultra Magnus shared with the film (and held in patent by Takara), it ignored other Marvel-created characters like Rodimus Prime in favor of those more directly advantageous for Takara to support in its local market. Takara also used the *Transformers* trademarks in local attempts to explore emerging media markets. In 1986, Takara released the *Transformers*-branded game *Convoy No Nazo* for Nintendo's Famicom video game console, taking advantage of its dual role as a toymaker and video game cartridge manufacturer (in contrast to Hasbro, for whom electronic games represented a more exclusive threat).

Thus, just as Hasbro and its U.S. partners began disengaging from *Transformers* franchising, Takara was poised to reinvest in it. The Sunbow/Marvel series concluded with the three-episode arc "The Rebirth" that narrativized new gimmicks in the toy line such as the Headmasters (smaller pilot robots that transformed into the heads of larger robots) and brought some narrative closure to the series by establishing limited peace between the Autobots and Decepticons. Yet Takara again passed on deploying this bit of the *Transformers* narrative in Japan and invested in parallel animated production of its own. Contracting with Toei Studios, Takara arranged for the production of an alternative fourth season of television to supplant the ending provided by Sunbow and Marvel. Though Hasbro had once rewritten *Diakron* as *Transformers*, Takara now rewrote Habsro's narrative. *Transformers: Headmasters* offered a one-year extension of the Sunbow-Marvel series, rendered in much the same animation style (rather than an embrace of local *anime*), but populated with new toys Takara wished to bring to market. With television production diverging, the 1988 release of the new "PowerMaster" Convoy/Optimus Prime toy functioned quite differently across the American and Japanese markets. In the former, the new toy grasped at recapturing the popularity of Optimus Prime in a dying product line accompanied on television only by reruns of the character's original adventures. In the latter, however, the new PowerMaster Convoy accompanied a fresh start for the narrative, with the new Toei/Takara television series *Transformers: Super-God Masterforce* reimagining the Optimus/Convoy character as Ginrai, a human truck driver who combines with a "transtector" body to become a Transformer himself. Under Takara's direction, the *Transformers* narrative fundamentally shifted from a story about robots to one about cybernetic humans, now rendered in *anime* and more directly embracing its *mecha* traditions. By 1989, Takara's management of the *Transformers* franchise became functionally independent from Hasbro, even as the latter corporation continued to have a shared claim to the franchise. While Takara now produced exclusive product and a succession of different television series locally, it too faced challenges in sustaining production perpetually, and without the sizable U.S. market to justify expense, the manufacturer also slowly reduced its investment in the franchise in the early 1990s.

However, the Japanese market had never become the sole context of production, and once again, the transnational industrial organization of franchising kept *Transformers* in iterative production. Whereas Hasbro had given up on the U.S. market, its own transnational corporate structure allowed it to pursue alternative courses of action in other contexts. Throughout 1991 and 1992, Hasbro's European division distributed several sub-groups of *Transformers* based on Takara designs that had never been used by Hasbro in the United States. Observing the transnational maintenance of *Transformers* was

George Dunsay, now a consultant for both Hasbro Europe and Takara. According to Dunsay, the persistent success of *Transformers* in Europe directly informed Hasbro's decision to reintroduce *Transformers* to the American market in 1993: "At the time it was discontinued in the U.S., it was not a temporary decision. It is only after the success in Europe that the U.S. people decided to reintroduce it."[84] As a consultant with experience in these other global markets, Dunsay helped guide the reintroduction of *Transformers* to the U.S. market. In 1993, "Generation 2" of *Transformers* began, consisting of new product designs, a new logo (based on packaging designs used previously in the UK market), and a new comic book miniseries from Marvel Comics. While not investing in new television production, Griffin-Bacal also created a new *Transformers* bundle for second-run syndication in the United States, which remained in international distribution until at least 1995.[85] Hasbro reinvested in the *Transformers* franchise as a product for the American market, a regeneration only made possible by the transnational persistence of development and production in the interim.

The end of "Generation 2" in 1995, and the reimagining of *Transformers* as *Beast Wars*—robots that turn into animals—cemented a pattern of repeated re-envisioning of the franchise formula through transnational exchange that would continue through the 2007 *Transformers* film. Tim Bradley, a Hasbro product designer from 1998 to 2004, described this period as one of fully shared design collaboration: "The design of the toys is really a joint task between designers at Takara and designers [at] Hasbro."[86] Fellow designer Eric Siebenaler echoed this sense of partnership in 2007: "Takara is very integral to our design process, so it is not unusual to exchange ideas back and forth during the entire design process."[87] Within this collaborative partnership, however, each party retained the power to develop local initiatives and sub-partnerships. In the U.S. market, Hasbro developed a local relationship with video game publisher Activision, and proceeded to develop new toy designs from the models created for the 2007 *Transformers* video game. After reviewing the work that concept artist Ken Christianson did in collaboration with Hasbro executive Aaron Archer to deepen the character pool for the game, Hasbro subsequently made clear its intention to explore producing them as toys for the U.S. market.[88] Similarly, Takara invited local Japanese toy retailer e-Hobby Shop to design new exclusive *Transformers* for that market.[89] This collaborative and flexible relationship between Hasbro and Takara accommodated local variation and local sub-partnerships as much if not more than any global brand consensus.

This transnational but localized production extended across the televisual extensions of franchising as well. Between 1995 and 1997, Hasbro and Takara co-produced the computer-animated *Beast Wars* and *Beast Machines* series. By 1998, Hasbro seemed content to suspend production once more, but Takara elected to produce its own *Beast Wars II* and *Beast Wars Neo.* Having established this independence, Takara endeavored in 2000 to return the franchise to its vehicle-based roots, underwriting the new anime series *Car Robots*, while Hasbro stayed the course with *Beast Wars* toys and television reruns. By 2001, however, Hasbro saw the value in Takara's return to basics, discontinuing its *Beast Wars* product and adopting Takara's alternative approach. Hasbro refocused on vehicle toys, relying upon imports of *Car Robots* (aired on Cartoon Network as *Transformers: Robots in Disguise*) to market the franchise in the United States. Like *Beast Wars* before it, *Car Robots* demonstrated that even in the American market, *Transformers* could be supported by narratives iterated from abroad. Hasbro continued to defer to Takara's narrative lead as co-producing partner for several more anime-influenced series including *Transformers: Armada* in 2003, *Transformers: Energon* in 2004, and *Transformers: Cybertron* in 2005 (all airing in the United States on Cartoon Network). Though Hasbro retained creative input, each of these series was written and produced in Japan—unlike previous Hasbro *Transformers* television series aired in the United States, where Japan had only served as a site of animation work and other below-the-line labor.[90] Indeed, this shift may have been to Hasbro's marketing advantage in the 1990s context of Japanese "cool" described by Susan Napier, where the markers of cultural difference surrounding production would imbue the franchise with additional cultural capital in the American context.[91] Even these local inflections of the *Transformers* narrative reflected their transnational industrial structure, able to be borrowed or drawn upon by any market within the corporate network.

While embracing co-production with Takara to sustain the *Transformers* narrative on television between 2001 and 2005, Hasbro pursued its own local and regional reimaginings in North America, licensing the property to the Canadian comic book publisher Dreamwave Productions in 2002, then IDW Comics in 2006, and entering into a feature film development deal with Dreamworks in 2003. With the commercial success of the 2007 *Transformers* film, Hasbro also found itself empowered to retake a position of greater authority over the direction of transnational production; its relationship with Dreamworks suddenly offered as much marketing advantage as that with Takara—and this new partnership had implications on a global scale. In the United Kingdom, where Titan Publishing had revived localized production of *Transformers* comic books in 2007, writer Steve White acknowledged that the success of the new movie would likely impose a new set of creative priorities to which his own iterative use would likely be beholden: "we'll be hamstrung by the franchise," he lamented.[92] While Takara had sustained it in the first part of the decade, Hasbro reconfigured the format once again in the second half, reorganizing production around the Dreamworks film continuity as the economic and creative anchor of the franchise. In anticipation of the success of the film, Hasbro contracted with Cartoon Network in 2006 to produce an original series, *Transformers Animated*, that would supplant Takara's co-produced anime imports. Meanwhile, Takara began to incorporate products based on Dreamworks' films into its own marketing plans, though it did not pursue any interest in the *Animated* line until 2010, opting instead to use local manga culture to spin off more unique iterations of the franchise such as *Robot Masters* and *Henkei! Henkei! Transformers*. So even with Hasbro's recharged power as a production capital within the relations of the franchise, the service of a global market kept these new branded unities in tension with local variation.

Since 1995, Hasbro, Takara, and their various global partners generated wave after wave of reimaginings of the *Transformers* formula—drawing upon the transnational network of production in which it circulates for new resources with which to freshen and reinvigorate it. Both the American and Japanese markets drew upon each other's innovations to keep the formula in a constant state of evolution—from the renewed collaboration of *Beast Wars* to the anime of *Armada* to the Hollywood gloss of the Dreamworks films. While situated in national contexts, each of these localities of production could be understood in terms of what they contributed to and how they were shaped by an industrial project operated and sustained on a global scale. Within this cycle, no one local take on the franchise formula lasted more than a couple of years, usually supplanted by variations developed from other nodes in the transmedia network. As Larry DiTillio, writer for the *Beast Wars* television series acknowledged, "We always worked on *Beast Wars* with the idea that it was going to be over after each season. . . . The minute Hasbro wanted to sell a new line of TF toys (which they always plan to do, well in advance), *Beast Wars* would be gone. And it was."[93] Despite the criticism tossed his way, Hasbro executive Aaron Archer concurred: "We need to reinvent toys because it's like the fashion business. You can't just see the same thing constantly. . . . Twenty years from now, I hope we're still talking about the next generation of kids getting into *Transformers*."[94] *Transformers* thrived from its introduction in 1984 because its brand managers used globalized production relations to embrace hybridity and multiplicity, willingly setting aside or destroying one iteration of the product in order to reintroduce it as something quite different. Even as Hasbro regained a degree of narrative authority over the franchise with the development of a

Feature in *Daioh* magazine (September 2006) on *Transformers: Kiss Players* and its related products.

major Hollywood blockbuster, local productions in foreign markets continued to spin out wild variations—such as the Japanese manga and radio series *Transformers: Kiss Players* that radically re-envisioned *Transformers* as robots powered by kisses. The differences developed in local markets fed the franchise, turning formula into a dynamic format that could exceed the frame of any one national market to sustain reiterative global production over time.

Franchise Invaders

Despite the evolving transnational exchanges of the franchise, dominant popular discourses have alternately cast *Transformers* within a historically fixed nationalist frame—sometimes in the terms of American culture, sometimes Japanese, but usually one or the other, and most often in a time-bound relationship to the 1980s. The transnational dynamics of its 25-year production cycle, therefore, get reduced to nostalgic meanings that fix it to a single time and a single place. This fixity denied the dynamic dialogue between local cultures and the global forces of franchising, in spite of their transnational production cycles. Moreover, so often framed in the nationalist language of cultural invasion, popular reception of *Transformers* further obscured its transnational character and articulated critiques of franchising to moral panics about the threat to the nation posed by mass-produced foreign otherness. This is not to suggest that franchising is unworthy of popular criticism—merely that the misrecognition of it within national frames made invisible the transnational networks of industry and capital actually driving this reproduction of culture. As a result, these discourses of nation fail to recognize the dynamic production cycles that introduce local innovation into the reproduction of franchising, and therefore ignore the much more slippery nature of the object under critique.

In writing about *Transformers* in the wake of the blockbuster 2007 film, journalists and critics offered a nostalgic narrative in which the history of the franchise could be confined to a few short years in the mid-1980s.[95] In *USA Today*, for example, Anthony Breznican collapsed 20 years of ongoing development and transnational iteration to suggest that through the 2007 film, "Optimus Prime is literally returning from the grave (after being killed off in the 1986 animated film) to entertain a new generation."[96] Misrecognized as death was dynamic exchange of formatted characters like Prime between transnational production contexts. The account of Steve Echevarria in the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* similarly obscured the global production logic of franchising by suggesting that Takara's *Diaclone* was a Japanese "clone" or "knock off" of the success of the *Transformers* formula in the 1980s, rather than a precursor and one of the main ingredients in the creation of the franchise.[97] Even those critics who recognized the ongoing transnational cooperation between Hasbro and Takara, like Douglas Tseng of Singapore's *The Straits Times*, delimited the scope of that collaboration to a time between 1983 and the animated film of 1986, after which point the franchise became "nostalgia kitsch" ripe for profitable reinvention decades later.[98] Yet the revival Tseng identifies in 2007 was only one step in an ongoing process of transnational exchange.

The nostalgic gloss of 2007 did not emerge fully formed at the release of the *Transformers* film, but had instead cohered as a discourse over the course of the decade. In 2001, the UK's *Sunday Mail* also construed *Transformers* as a short-lived fad: "Darth Vader was soon gathering dust as Transformers, above, became the must-have toy by 1984. Remember them? . . . Fascinating —for about 10 minutes."[99] Evidencing the paradox involved in this kind of historical compartmentalization, author Jane Findlay confined *Transformers* to the cultural dustbin along with even more high-profile and long-enduring franchises such as *Star Wars*. In Australia's *The Age*, Emma Quayle invited readers to take a trip back in time to " '80s commercialism" by evoking the imagery of the *Transformers*; her narrative suggested an era bygone where, in the words of one expert, "everything became very commercialized, very mass-produced, and very connected with TV and movies, and other sorts of popular culture."[100] Implied here was a critique of franchising, but one that confined it to an age past.

Thus, this nostalgic discourse fixed in time the marketing of *Transformers*, making it appear in some contexts less culturally threatening in the present day—especially in comparison to contemporary franchises understood as nationally foreign. In the *Times* of London, Damian Whitworth considered the monster collecting and trading of Nintendo's *Pokémon* franchise as an heir to *Transformers*, but one with a Japanese twist:

> The difference is that this success story is driven by a multi-media cross-promotion the like of which children's merchandise has not seen before. . . . Because Pokémon grew slowly but surely in Japan, by the time it reached America, all the elements—game, television, cards and film—were ready to roll out and promote each other.[101]

Ignoring the calculated marketing that historically drove *Transformers* as a toy, television series, and comic, this discourse oppositely framed *Pokémon* as a cutting-edge franchising strategy in which a system perfected in one nation could descend whole cloth upon markets in another. Significantly, Whitworth suggests a sense of double invasion by noting that *Pokémon* had arrived in the British context by way of the American market. In publications like *Brand Strategy*, however, the locus of franchising logics was Japan, and not the networks of transnational media industry: "U.S. film studios have yet to apply the same 'craze model' as the Japanese TV and toy manufacturers."[102] These nationalist discourses elided the transnational history of franchising to comparatively frame *Transformers* as an innocuous local (or at least Western) antecedent to the less organic, more calculated and invasive Japanese threat of *Pokémon*. Similar expressions of cultural nationalism emerged in Australia, where Keith Austin in the *Sydney Morning Herald* described *Pokémon* as a "yellow peril," articulating marketing excesses to foreign and racial difference.[103] For these commentators, the perception of franchising like *Pokémon* as a Japanese threat was constructed in opposition to older models of franchising fixed through nostalgia in both the past and local geographic space.

Ironically, despite this nostalgic juxtaposition to "Japanese" franchising at the millennium, American commentators had similarly framed *Transformers* and *Go-Bots* as a Japanese cultural invasion at their introduction in 1984. "GoBots and Transformers are invading America," wrote Sari Horowitz in the *Washington Post*. "[T]hey're taking over kids' minds, moving into the nation's living rooms and invading the shelves of toy stores across the country."[104] In her invasion narrative, Horowitz did acknowledge the complicity of Hasbro, but suggested that the marketing assistance lent Takara had allowed Japanese products to take over the toy industry. Though the size and market power of the United States made it a determinative force in the global toy industry (much as in the film and television industries), the invasion motif resonated in a period of increasing cultural concern over trade deficits with Japan. In a 1986 *Washington Post* report, *Transformers* was identified by name as evidence of the $134 million toy trade imbalance between the two national toy industries.[105] A 1984 report on the toy market in the *Christian Science Monitor* reduced *Transformers* to the headline "Plastic Robots from Japan," followed by a story in which a Hasbro executive assured readers that the 1985 line "will be more Americanized."[106] The prospect of Americanization, in this case, smoothed over these globalizing tensions by promising cultural resistance at the level of national industry to the perceived invasion of Japanese franchise robots. Cultural anxiety about the foreignness of the *Transformers* franchise also extended beyond the United States in the 1980s. In a political, economic, and social critique of the international toy industry in 1987, London's the *Guardian* articulated *Transformers* to the exotic difference and trivial oddity of Japan, rather than the militaristic themes of U.S. toys like *G.I. Joe* and *Masters of the Universe*.[107] Canada's *Globe and Mail* attributed the questionable consumerist bent of the *Transformers* franchise directly to its perceived Japanese origins. In his review of the 1986 animated film, Salem Alaton wrote, "it's another long afternoon of fast-moving dirty work in a movie designed to sell toys which are made to sell television shows which are made to sell movies. . . . Japan knows an awful lot about your children."[108]

By the 1990s, the Japanese-ness of *Transformers* was often taken for granted, rendering increasingly invisible the transnational processes and practices by which global partners like Hasbro, Marvel (U.S. and UK), and Griffin-Bacal participated in and maintained the franchise, and redirecting critique along particular patterns of nationalist thought. In its report on the growing popularity of anime in the United States in 1995, *Newsweek* suggested that the origins of "the 'transformer' toy mania of the mid-80s" could be located in a Japanese anime series called *Robotech*, downplaying the integral role of toy manufacturers like Hasbro in both the creation of *Transformers* and the wider culture of robot toys popularized in Japan in the 1970s.[109] Some American commentators even recast the Marvel/Sunbow series as Japanese anime, despite having emerged from the same mode of production as the "real American hero" *G.I. Joe* and lacking the generic markers of most anime productions.[110] Similarly, between 1995 and 2001, reporters in the Canadian and Australian contexts came to represent *Transformers* as exemplary of the "bizarre" and the "weird, wild, wonderful, whimsical" character of Japanese culture.[111] The technology press also made frequent comparisons between automobile design and the futurism of *Transformers* when discussing Mazda and Nissan innovations, but not the designs of U.S. automakers. *Transformers* were simply assumed to be Japanese, and the brand a marker of foreign difference—at least until *Pokémon* came along and *Transformers* could be rearticulated to the safe national familiarity of the past in opposition to the new threat of foreign cultural reproduction.

This tendency to fix the transnational character of the *Transformers* franchise within a national frame served different purposes in Asian markets. In Tokyo's *Daily Yomiuri*, Roland Kelts framed *Transformers* as part of "the American movie industry's lust for Japanese anime and manga titles and related styles. . . . Last summer's Transformers movie—whose toys and anime series originated in Japan—was one of the biggest box office draws in an otherwise mixed or dreary 2007."[112] For Kelts and his readers, the *Transformers* franchise could evidence Japanese victory in a global struggle for supremacy of national cultures. Thanks to the role of Japan as cultural intermediary described by Iwabuchi,[113] *Transformers* had been indigenized within an Asian context, and Kelts could disavow the participation of Hasbro and Marvel in the narrativization of a *Transformers* rearticulated as part of the successful history of Japanese anime in the West:

> The overstuffed narratives of the original *Speed Racer*, for example, were an intimate reminder to Western kids like me that storytelling is a messy, wildly original business, an inherently democratic domain. We weren't choosing anime over American shows in the '80s because of soft power or coolness: We watched *Speed Racer*, *Transformers*, *Battle of the Planets* (*Gatchaman*) and *Star Blazers* (*Space Battleship Yamato*) because they made us feel like we were a part of the process.[114]

Transformers, in this account for Kelts' Japanese readers, was a local alternative to American popular culture on offer to children in the 1980s, understood alongside anime titles that had acquired quality status and cultural capital thanks to the global rise of Japanese "cool." In the *South China Morning Post*, commentator Andrew Sun participated in this reframing as well, nostalgically presenting the 2007 Hollywood feature film as an "Americanized version . . . of the original cartoon."[115] Trying to fix the transnational product within a nationalized origin story, Sun's essay is full of contradiction: he claims at once that "[t]he Transformers idea isn't Japanese in origin," but also confesses to "growing up on the Japanese series."[116] For these critics, the national difference ascribed nostalgically to *Transformers*—despite its lack of a strictly national origin in a transnational industrial nexus—accorded a cultural privilege and taste to its franchised marketing techniques and storytelling strategies. As "Japanese," *Transformers* was a regional success story in opposition to the media barrage of American and Western cultural imperialism.

The cultural panic surrounding the global explosion of *Pokémon* in the late 1990s, therefore, might be best contextualized within a longer discourse inclusive of *Transformers* wherein concerns about franchising intersect with fears of globalization as invasive cultural difference (ironic as it may be that these fears emanated from sites of media power like the United States). As questions of content, marketing, and corporate colonization of the cultural realm collided with questions of authenticity and national identity, *Transformers* and *Pokémon* became discursively linked as part of a "Japanese-entertainment invasion."[117] So in 2003, the *New York Times* could present the consumption of franchises as a danger framed in nationalist terms:

> Takara, for instance, is releasing special-edition Transformer robot vehicles to commemorate their 20th anniversary. . . . The staying power of these toys is a sign of how established Japanese toys have become in the eyes of some American consumers. . . . [T]he Japanese are considered masters of the multimedia blitz that projects animated action figures onto just about everything from toys to video games to television shows. . . . Like most Japanese action figures, Transformers also appear in animated television shows and movies that American children now know well. . . . Now that these properties have been around long enough, the Japanese companies—many times through American partners—can reissue their bestsellers, often at higher prices.[118]

Questions and perceptions of *how* culture was being consumed (via a multimedia blitz), *who* was consuming it (children), and *when* it was being consumed (over an extended period of time) became tied up in concerns about *where* franchising originated (extra-nationally). In popular reception, the franchising of *Transformers* has been constructed not as a transnational process of collaborative production evolving over time, but more often as a temporally fixed, nationally specific product. With the transnational network of industrial relations underpinning cultural reproduction blurred by nostalgia, *Transformers* was alternately framed as a tool of cultural invasion, a point of national or regional pride, a portent of new marketing strategies, and an artifact of a time past. Rarely, however, was franchising understood as a site of collaboration between industries where the production of both formulaic sameness and cultural divergence was organized across time and space.

From Transnational to Transgenerational

Contributing to this nostalgic discourse about *Transformers*, Gary Cross lamented in the *Washington Post* in 1997 that "the world of toys didn't always seem so foreign to grown-ups."[119] In this construction, the "foreign" differences ascribed to franchising were thus also understood as generational differences. The differences in time and space fixed by nostalgic popular discourse nevertheless proved useful to corporate marketers seeking to distinguish and manage localized audience segments by both age and national culture. Sustaining a production cycle over decades may have been possible through a transnational industrial network, but sustaining a global market for the resulting product demanded simultaneous attention to producing a transgenerational audience. In Japan and other Asian markets, for example, the nostalgic discourses surrounding *Transformers* served marketers seeking to harness and sustain an ongoing adult interest in the property beyond children's toys. In the American market, on the other hand, nostalgia supported mass marketing efforts aimed at reproducing interest in the franchise across successive generations of children. In this transnational production network, the capacity of the franchise format to sustain localized difference allowed it to support transgenerational markets, transforming in order to negotiate nostalgia across different places and age cohorts.

In the transnational management of media franchising, content has often, per formatting logic, been tailored specifically to nationally defined market segments. According to their press release, Marvel Entertainment partnered with Japanese animation studio Madhouse in 2008 in order to "create brand new characters inspired by the Marvel Universe for the Japanese market. . . . The characters will be adapted visually, using the unique style of Japanese anime, and their back stories and histories will interweave the local culture and history of Japan, with an eye toward making their mythology more relevant to the Japanese audience."[120] Similarly, as this chapter has shown, the franchising of *Transformers* supported parallel, localized iterations keyed to national identities and the meanings attached to them. As the *New York Times* reported in 1989, toy manufacturers recognized the difficulties in selling transnational toys, with Hasbro CEO Alan Hassenfeld explaining that in different national contexts "certain colors, for example, might be unacceptable because of cultural differences."[121]As Takara's Nobuyuki Okude explained, the partnership with Hasbro often led to disagreements about decisions as seemingly simple as paint schemes: "Every time we [had] to decide which color we should use for toys, we had a big argument with the American side."[122] Thus, such details were often culturally customized for each market. Moreover, the markets for *Transformers* videos, card games, and other third-party licensed collectibles have also been contractually divided along national and regional lines, building local difference into the infrastructure of the franchise.[123] In the U.S. market in 2003, Rhino video served as Hasbro's North American video licensee for the 1984 animated series, while the local Metrodome managed the European territory. Metrodome's Jane Lawson explained that her goal in managing the parallel video property was "to differentiate ours in some way for the U.K."[124] Though this territorialization protected privileged licensees in the most valuable markets from global competitors, the limited reach of locally licensed iterations of the franchise preserved a space for local differences.

To make generational appeals, these nationalized market orientations required the activation and negotiation of the nostalgic differences that made meaning of the temporalities and spatialities of franchised production within those contexts. In the United States, for example, new twenty-first century marketing appeals attuned to the specific generational and social reproduction patterns of contemporary American culture, focusing on relationships between parents and children as a nexus of affective exchange and franchising nostalgia. Those who had grown up with *Transformers* in the 1980s had begun starting families of their own within the first few years of the millennium, and by this time the nostalgic articulation of *Transformers* to their sense of childhood could serve as a means of reproducing consumer preferences from one generation to the next. Leading to the release of the 2007 film, Hasbro embarked on a coordinated campaign to increase kids' awareness of the *Transformers* brand via the reintroduction of iterations with which their parents may have been familiar. With the assistance of licensees like Activision video games, HarperCollins publishing, and French Connection apparel, Hasbro had, according to *Variety*, "spent the last 18 months [prior to the film's release] seeding the marketplace with products based on first-generation designs to familiarize kids with 'classic' characters like Optimus Prime and Megatron."[125] Some 20 years later, children were being strategically exposed to the same popular culture their parents had consumed. As Hasbro Senior Vice President Bryony Bouyer explained in 2003: "We're bringing it back in a way that dads can relive their childhoods with their children." The recent nostalgic revitalization of *Transformers* in the American market drew upon the specific patterns of social reproduction in that context to manage the franchise as an ongoing, generational (and gendered) process of cultural reproduction. In this "throwback marketing,"[126] social patterns of sexual reproduction regenerated a transgenerational audience for a franchise that was itself produced in transnational exchange.

More significant in this regard than the 2007 feature film was the 2008 television series *Transformers: Animated*, co-produced by Hasbro and Cartoon Network. While the feature film carried a PG-13 rating, the new animated series featured rounder, softer, and stylized character designs in support of more kid-friendly narratives. Promoting the series in *Variety*, Hasbro executive Samantha Lomow explained that "[w]e want to make the show a lot more fun for a younger audience."[127] And as *Variety* reported, development of *Animated* preceded release of the feature, indicating the strategic priority of fostering this younger audience appeal. In a toy market plagued by the prospect of KGOY—Kids Getting Older Younger—Hasbro conceived this softer iteration of the franchise as a way to reduce the age of the target *Transformers* consumer. *Animated* executive producer Sam Register explained that "[t]he movie is for a completely different audience. . . . [T]he animated series is the one thing that keeps the consumer products moving. So from Hasbro's point of view, the movie is a huge kick-off, but the animated series keeps the wheels turning."[128] To extend the production of the franchise in the United States, Hasbro and its partners thought generationally, working through parental nostalgia to create waves of fan offspring who might sustain interest in *Transformers* products for another quarter-century.

While the American market could sustain the franchising of *Transformers* by creating a new generation of consumers, distinct patterns of social reproduction in Japan required that nostalgia for the franchise be activated through a different form of generational marketing that targeted *Transformers* first and foremost at adults. Just as for Hasbro, toy sales continued to anchor Takara's franchise revenues, but the declining birthrate in Japan had decreased the number of children in the population, and thereby decimated its traditional toy market. According to Japan's Statistics Bureau, children under age 14 accounted for 35.4 percent of the population in 1950, but had

Softer, rounded character designs for the *Transformers: Animated* series aimed at young children in the United States.

diminished to only 13.5 percent in 2007, and were projected to hit 8.6 percent by 2050.[129] In considering long-term production cycles, Takara could not count on children as a means of sustaining a consumer base as Hasbro might. As executive vice president Keita Sato explained in 2007, "The declining birth rate is a serious problem for us," pressuring the company to reorient its toys toward older consumers: "the definition of a toy is likely to gradually change, so the market will not necessarily shrink."[130] Instead of something like *Transformers: Animated* or new toys aimed at younger audiences, Takara drew upon adult nostalgia for *Transformers* to support increasingly upscale, high-end products. In March 2008, for example, Takara reincarnated Optimus Prime/Convoy for the Japanese market once more with the *Transformers* Music Label. Built to look almost identical to the original Optimus Prime/Convoy from 1984, and sold for approximately $150, this new Transformer could take on a third form: reconfigurable to become a set of functional iPod speakers.[131] Similarly, Takara introduced to the Japanese market its *Transformers* Sports Label including products like a Nike sports shoe that could actually transform.[132] Rather than skew younger, Takara used nostalgia for the brand to move out of the toy market and into other adult lifestyle and market spheres like music and sports. These developments evolved uniquely in response to the local economic needs of the Japanese market, much to the disappointment of many consumers outside the country; as one Nike spokesperson explained to interested fans in the Southwest Pacific, "No, the Nike Transformer shoes will not be coming to Australia."[133]

Throughout Asia, regional entrepreneurialism also generated new markets out of this adult nostalgia for toy franchising. In Singapore in 2003, the Toyzbar Café began offering its customers—described as "grown men in crisp office shirts and sober ties"—the ability to play with *Transformers* toys while they enjoyed their coffee. Customers could even pay to take the toys home with them.[134] Similarly, in Beijing, local entrepreneur Wei Wei sought to capitalize on the adult market for long-running toy franchises, opening a toy store in 2001 called Toys Golden Age in which vintage *Transformers* sold as luxury items priced between $53 and $2,120. Wei figured that "as the 70s and 80s generation grow up and have stable incomes, they may want to renew their old dreams."[135] However, one adult collector remarked that his continued interest in *Transformers* reflected a felt sense of spatial and temporal distance with his childhood in 1980s China—when the average cost of a Transformer toy rivaled his family's monthly income.[136] *Transformers*' status as a luxury item desired by adults thus derived from a complex recollection of a national past amid recognition of regional and global flows, changing economic conditions, and cultural differences.

Despite this emphasis in Asia, the adult market for *Transformers* exists elsewhere too. *The Globe and Mail*, for example, reported in 2007 that "a growing number of Canadians . . . view Spiderman and Transformer toys as acceptable accents to their home decor."[137] The North American and Asian markets did, however, develop two distinct market emphases in sustaining

Nike-brand tennis shoes and iPod speaker dock released in Japan as part of the *Transformers: Sports* and *Transformers: Music* labels targeting adult consumers.

the *Transformers* franchise between 2000 and 2007 through which nostalgia was differentially managed within the transnational production network of franchising. These differentiations speak to the meaningful persistence of the national imaginary and nationalized markets, even in a global system of cultural reproduction constituted by transnational exchange. For the American market, the decreasing age of toy consumers required that Hasbro and its media network harness adult nostalgia to create a new generation of *Transformers* fans. In Japan, however, Takara tackled the increasing age of its consumer base by working to sustain its connection with the first generation.

In this sense, the heterogeneous network of production surrounding *Transformers* put franchise production cycles and local markets into a relationship that was not just transnational, but also transgenerational.

Conclusion

Created in 1984 out of exchange between the Hasbro and Takara toy companies as well as a number of partners including *Telemaga*, Marvel Comics, and Marvel UK, the *Transformers* franchise has developed for more than three decades through a transnational process that generated ongoing reiterations across a range of local markets and production cultures. As a confluence of trademarked and patented intellectual properties, *Transformers* can be considered a format, in that its core technological forms and cultural identity supported a perpetual process of reproduction. Yet despite the national frameworks shaping trademark and patent claims, this history complicated assumptions about essentially national cultures of origin, as the franchise was born instead out of exchanges and collaborations between industries and corporations organized on a transnational scale. Deployed as a global format subsequent to that transnational origination, customized and tailored to local markets, the reiteration of the original formula introduced changes over time that perennially enabled the franchising of *Transformers* to adapt to new conditions and contexts in a global market.

Though purportedly a transmedia marketing system designed to sell toys to children, the *Transformers* franchise is not merely "kids' stuff," in that its ongoing evolution has been constituted in space across a variety of global markets as well as across a number of generations. As popular nostalgia for toys of the 1980s has shown, the persistence of *Transformers* as a marketable commodity depended upon its ongoing appeal to adults: those willing to integrate the brand into their changing lives or excited to reproduce that interest in the media experiences of their offspring. Instead of viewing franchises as childish, we might think instead about how much more they tell us about adult relationships to the media—our perceptions of global cultural flows and our incorporation of those flows into social and cultural production cycles.

Furthermore, this meaningful nostalgia for *Transformers* speaks to the persistence of the national in our imagination of cultural reproduction, despite the increasingly extra-national structures, institutions, and relationships shaping and shaped by that reproduction. The problem with this nostalgia, therefore, is not that adults take continuing interest in what was children's culture, but that the misrecognition of franchising as nationally and historically fixed in time and space obscures its operation with and across a more complex array of global forces. If there is a critique to be made of global franchising like *Transformers*, it should be at this transnational and transgenerational level that it is first formulated, not at the level of cultural panics about foreign invasion and susceptible children.

Admittedly, not every franchise formula has become a truly globalized format, and the evolution of *Transformers* is directly tied to the specificities of the toy market—making it very different from franchising based in comics, video games, television, or film. The target audience of boys (and, crucially, men) also makes it very different from other throwback marketed toy-based franchises such as *My Little Pony* or *Rainbow Brite*—and in that sense, franchising might be further explored as a means of reproducing and reiterating fixed gender norms as well as these fixed notions of national difference. As a case study, however, *Transformers* does point to some of the core cultural questions surrounding the media franchise, and provides an instructive means of interrogating the assumptions we might otherwise make about marketing, branding, and cultural production within global capital. *Transformers* demonstrates, on a global scale, the crucial role that difference plays within franchise culture. Produced through a network of creative and economic partners, *Transformers* has been designed not as a homogeneous media experience, but as a system of ongoing productivity—and reproductivity—that depends upon the differences of local cultures as a means of reiterating products and consumption opportunities in a global marketplace. As a thriving media "empire" in a sense similar to the historical communication regimes examined by Harold Innis, the franchising of *Transformers* reproduced industrial power as much through its temporal dynamism as its imposition of homogeneity across global spaces. Without the tensions and differences built into the system, decades-long cycles of leveraged product revivals would have been replaced by products with short, perishable shelf lives. The "complicated genesis" of the *Transformers* franchise, therefore, speaks not only to the potential transnational character of content networks and their production, but most fundamentally to the role of difference and cultural exchange in animating media franchising. Without bringing a complex web of partners, markets, audiences, and cultures into tension, the franchise would not survive. The question that we must continue to explore is whether, on balance, that capacity for difference makes franchising worthy of survival as a means of transnational creative collaboration, or whether its service of a network of global capital should attract our continued suspicion.

To extend this concern for the potential of franchising to support difference—and indeed, the political potential of it—the next chapter turns lastly to the consumer subjectivities offered by franchising. In doing so, we can consider how participation in the production networks of franchising puts consumers into both economically material and culturally meaningful relationships with the media industries, asking what insights and contradictions that participation reveals of collaborative creativity. What are the politics of franchised collaboration?

5

Occupying Industries

The Collaborative Labor of Enfranchised Consumers

In 2008, I was fired from a job for the first time. According to the email I received from a regional manager on behalf of my employer, my termination resulted from a persistent failure to show up for work. And all that required was that I occasionally logged onto the online interface that permitted me to telecommute from home. This seeming irresponsibility derived, in my opinion, less from a poor work ethic and more from insufficient material motivation to compel my continued labor. My employer, after all, was the entirely fictional paper company Dunder Mifflin, familiar to fans of NBC's television comedy *The Office*; the labor asked of me was meant to occur in the imaginary space of DunderMifflinInfinity.com, part of the socially networked promotional environment constructed around the series; and the compensation offered for my work came not in portable currency, but in the form of "Schrutebucks" redeemable for the purchase of virtual items within that environment. While I had taken the time to apply to work for one of the virtual branches of Dunder Mifflin, presumably out of my affection for the series, my difficulty in taking those worker responsibilities seriously stemmed from the contradictory status of my labor as play. As much as I had been "fired," I had also lost a game in which meaningful dynamics of play put me in competition with others for possession of symbolic Schrutebuck tokens. At the end of the day, my participation in the economy of paper sales was only a fantasy. Far less fantastic, however, remained the role of that labor in media economies, as tasks performed at the behest of Dunder Mifflin generated more *Office*-branded content for rightsholders at NBC-Universal. This role-play asked players to take up subject positions within the institutions of media production in addition to those of fantasy. In my worker absenteeism, therefore, I had not only failed in fantasy role-play, but also in contributing to the ongoing and socially networked production of the *Office* franchise.

By exploring these contradictions and slippages between consumer work and play, this chapter considers media franchising in relation to social networks and other digital environments that have reorganized and reshaped the contemporary production of culture. Franchising comes into question when faced with new media technologies that purportedly put the tools of production in consumer hands, rather than maintaining industrial monopolies. Furthermore, the move of industries like television to embrace the production opportunities afforded by the Internet and other digital technologies has arguably exploded any specificity the term "franchise" once may have had. As Jennifer Gillan argues, nearly every contemporary television series is produced with an eye toward franchising due to its compatibility with the "brand circulation imperative."[1] Through extension in new media environments, Gillan writes, "The key is to keep the TV franchise always in circulation and the audience always interacting with the show before and after its initial and subsequent broadcast airings."[2] Once more closely associated with cult formations, the logics of franchised production have become fully genre-inclusive, applied as a matter of course via new media to *The Office* and other contemporary primetime comedies and dramas. By 2006, the average "television" series spanned production across 4.7 media (including the Web, mobile phones, video games, and DVDs as well as analog forms like comics and licensed fiction)—up from 3.3 in 2005.[3] While the *Office* format developed in the United Kingdom produced iterations in France, Germany, Chile, Quebec, and Israel in addition to NBC's American version, this multiplication also produced in the digital realm experiences of play where audiences could interact as workers in their own localized contexts. Yet even exploded as a cultural category, franchising bears persistent utility as a way of theorizing and critiquing these emerging forms of audience engagement. The industrial exchanges and relations that have historically constituted media franchising extended in this context beyond decentralized industrial productivity to sites of consumer practice.

In its concern for consumer play in relation to industrial labor, this chapter ultimately explores a host of tensions, contradictions, and double meanings surrounding franchising in the contemporary moment, engaging with the complexities of collaboration as a means of conceptualizing audience participation in industrial structures. In discussions of creativity and digital media cultures especially, collaboration bears a utopian connotation, suggesting a social and even egalitarian co-creation of culture. However, in a political sense, collaboration can be understood in much different and more problematic terms: as the cooperation of social subjects with the occupational forces of ruling regimes—the collaborators of Vichy France in World War II, for example. As a political subject position, the collaboration of franchising can be refigured to account for this tension between empowering cooperation and disempowering compliance. The play of consumers within media franchising structures could be described as industrial occupation—both in the sense that consumers take up productive subject positions within the institutions of media industries, and in the sense that as an institutional force those industries increasingly occupy the spaces of collaborative user creation in emerging media environments. From this perspective, this chapter also teases out what it means for consumers to become "enfranchised" as participants in the industrial production of culture. As discussed in chapter 1, the notion of a franchise connoted an affirmative and sovereign right to agency prior to the economic meanings accrued in industrialization. Consumer enfranchisement in contemporary media industries embodies the contradictions of its historically shifting terms—both the possibility of agented, creative subjectivity for socially networked audiences and the continuity of industrial models of cultural production despite the emerging possibilities of new media. "Enfranchisement," in this case, does not imply the utopian aura of empowerment or emancipation, but instead a more ambivalent recognition of the contradictory positions offered to and taken up by consumers within the institutions of media franchising. By creating consumer-franchisee subjectivities based in overlapping identities of work and play, this enfranchisement has adapted the industrial multiplication and reproduction of culture to the relations and exchanges of emerging social media.

These reflections on collaboration, occupation, and enfranchisement mean to directly reframe media franchising as a site of political and not just industrial inquiry. Given its highly industrialized, devalued cultural status, media franchising has rarely sustained interest as a site for the analysis of political subjectivity. Some, like Henry Jenkins, have pushed against cultural assumptions of franchise frivolity in examining phenomena like "The Harry Potter Alliance," where the affective bonds of participatory fandom support organization and collective actions against injustices such as the genocide in Darfur.[4] A wider body of work—much of it drawing from feminist theory—has more broadly aimed at understanding citizenship in relation to consumption.[5] Rather than investigating media franchising in terms of this citizenship, however, this chapter explores the politics of its cultural reproduction and the subjectivities necessary to support that reproduction. If chapters 3 and 4 explored commercial production cultures brought into collision through franchising, this chapter examines the political contradictions that follow from consumer participation in networked cultural production. In exploring relations between creativity and capitalism, Matt Stahl argues that any mode of cultural production depends on the generation of meaningful subjectivities to sustain and affirm its organization while containing challenges to it.[6] In this sense, the subject positions consumers adopt in relation to media franchising become significant as means of understanding the politics of its industrial reproduction of culture. Similarly, Erica Rand has inspired not just my exploration of the contradictions suggested by terms like "collaboration" and "enfranchisement," but also my theorization of the interplay between consumers and media industries in terms of a politics of hegemony. In positing consumers of Barbie as "accessories" who aid and abet queer readings of the doll while also serving as unwitting, unlikely allies in the reinforcement of its fixed straightness in marketing by Mattel, Rand characterizes the "infinite possibility" of hegemony as "freedom in ways that benefit rather than challenge people in power."[7] Understanding how consumers take up positions in relation to the institutions of franchising grants insight into the politics of franchising as a hegemonic form of cultural production.

Toward this examination of the hegemony of consumer enfranchisement, this chapter engages with a number of different sites at the intersection of contemporary television and digital media production where consumers have been invited to adopt player and worker subjectivities in service of industrial franchising. To build a theoretical foundation with which to understand this consumer participation, it will first be necessary to square theories of socially networked cultural collaboration with autonomist criticisms of free labor and neoliberalism, particularly those drawn from video game studies that theorize political interchanges between play and industrial work and conceive interactivity and participation as a means through which power and dominance can operate. From there, an analysis of the collision of labor and fantasy play in television franchising though "gamification" can illustrate how media industries have converted to labor and extracted value from consumers' playful engagement with institutional subjectivities—even those interactions that reject the authority of industry over the multiplied cultural production of franchising. On the one hand, fantasy television programs like *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica* have enfranchised consumers by asking them to adopt subjectivities based in networked, online play while simultaneously licensing that engagement as productive labor (sometimes informally, but often through click-through contracts). On the other hand, both fantasy series like *Lost* and more quotidian series like *The Office* have pushed this overlapping worker-player subjectivity further by prompting consumers to more overtly identify as institutionally situated laborers. Here, venues like DunderMifflinInfinity.com offer evidence of a "gamified" consumer collaboration defined by playful identification and collaboration with institutional structures of work, not opposition to them. To test the extent of this identification with media institutions (rather than simply with institutions of fantasy), this chapter finally looks to how consumer collaborators enfranchised by new media technologies adopt laborer identities subject to the creative authority of media industries, even when participating in production from outside or even in rejection of those hierarchies. By looking at *Diaspora*, an amateur game modification (or "mod") that rejects licensing logics to create an unauthorized *Battlestar Galactica* game, we can see how refusal of industrial structures of franchising does not necessarily preclude acceptance of its institutional subjectivities and authorities. Returning to *Battlestar* after examination of it in chapter 3 furthermore allows for productive comparisons between the subjective identifications of enfranchised consumers and those of professional industrial licensees.

Applying theories of hegemony, this chapter illuminates how and why franchising has persevered as an industrial (and thereby restricted) means of cultural reproduction while also offering opportunities for meaningful engagement, subjective identification, and challenge to its hierarchical organization. By offering a sense of meaningful participation in the institutional relations and industrial exchanges whereby the reproduction of culture has been franchised, the collaboration of franchising has generated meaningful and playful experiences of autonomy, freedom, and difference while also supporting established structures of power. While the enfranchisement of consumers as users of franchise resources brings these dynamics into greatest relief, the conclusions made here draw attention to the power dynamics of collaborative cultural use whether organized as franchising across the social networks of new media or along its more traditionally industrialized dimensions.

Networked Collaboration, Playbor, and Neoliberalism

With the emergence of digital media and social networking, a growing body of scholarly research has called attention to new forms of cultural production driven by media users rather than by the institutional forces of culture industries. In this perspective, the lines between consumption and production have converged, as culture has been increasingly circulated and generated at the bottom-up, grassroots level of what Henry Jenkins calls collective intelligence.[8] For Nick Couldry, the World Wide Web did not just generate new kinds of public interaction constitutive of "dispersed citizens," but also new forms of collective creativity constituting "productive consumers." Consumer-citizens in these new publics enjoy greater access to one another, but also greater access to the tools and resources of production; once defined by choice, consumption is now based in a collective creativity that produces the texts of the Internet.[9] These socially networked models of creativity offer in opposition to industrial hierarchy an alternative model of cultural production supported through consumptive use. As Tapscott and Williams argue, digital technology enabled media users to produce cultural works outside of corporate control through the open, collaborative, self-organized, and peer-based creative processes of "wikinomics."[10] Similarly, Axel Bruns challenges the distinction between production and consumptive use by proposing the neologism "produsage" to describe the ongoing generation of digital culture in spaces like Wikipedia that depend upon the distributed productive activities of heterarchal users. Bruns characterizes produsage as the participatory use of common property within ongoing, communal processes of creation —a model he contrasts to traditional industrial hierarchies.[11] In this formulation, industrial modes of production geared to generate discrete products give way to collaborative ventures based in open participation and ongoing revision of shared cultural properties by users.

Rather than a strict opposition, however, Bruns conceives industrial production and grassroots produsage as poles on a continuum where market-based and non-proprietary forms of production interweave and recombine.[12] While Bruns envisions a disruption of proprietary culture at points in this continuum, he simultaneously tempers that potential utopianism with the recognition that the most successful corporations going forward will be those that turn the collaborative and open qualities of produsage to their advantage. This allows produsage to be read as something opposed to media franchising, but also as something that industrial relations and exchanges could incorporate. Indeed, as examined throughout this book, the status of professional producers as "users" of franchised cultural resources denotes compatibility between franchising and the new media production networks of produsage. For many scholars, therefore, the cultural production enabled by new media networks has not occurred in external opposition to industry, but has increasingly forced media institutions to confront and accommodate the enhanced cultural agency of media users. Referring to media users as "the people formerly known as the audience" now sharing the creative spotlight with industry professionals, Mark Deuze suggests "media work is something that is increasingly shared with those who one used to work for."[13] As David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker note, contemporary professional media workers increasingly negotiate their creative identities in relation to their understandings and perceptions of the audience.[14] In this sense, the new participatory status of consumers has arguably refigured industrial perceptions of creativity and creative identity as much it has grassroots production. According to Pam Wilson, the collaborativity of convergence has endowed audiences the ability to impose themselves on the industrial production process. Her account of audience intervention in *Big Brother* demonstrates how the dual web/broadcasting format of reality television franchising enabled new forms of guerrilla activism based in "culture jamming" and the critique of homogenized corporate production of popular culture. By appropriating new media technology, cultural activists influenced the outcome of the game while consciously disrupting the corporate institutions supporting it. For Wilson, such "audience activism" constituted an intervention into the creative and narrative sphere of industrial production.[15]

Yet Wilson also recognizes, as many other scholars have, that the productive interventions of consumers into the industrial production of culture can also be managed and incorporated by capital as productive labor. Audience intervention into *Big Brother*, for example, provided new narrative threads that could be used to generate additional content for the series' website. Moreover, with the networked collaboration of media users in convergence culture operating through fandom as much as the political activism of culture jamming, there remains good reason to consider the "contested utility" of these supposed disruptions to the industrial production of culture.[16] As Sara Gwenllian-Jones suggests, fandom is often "an effect of the culture industry; it is commercial culture's adoring and irreverent offspring, not its nemesis."[17] The collaborative cultural production of convergence, therefore, offers opportunities for corporate exploitation—an argument forwarded by autonomist critics like Tiziana Terranova, who argue that the corporate administrators of digital networks turned the productive labor of networked users into capital. Instead of hiring professional producers to fill virtual spaces with content, the culture industries colonizing the Internet depended on the "free labor" of consumers to produce content for corporately owned portals, constantly regenerating those spaces by posting, updating, uploading, and otherwise using them. In this turn toward user-generated content, the open, participatory, and processual qualities of digital networks put would-be produsage in service to industry. As Terranova explains, media industries exploited the productive use of culture in order to create "monetary value of knowledge/culture/affect."[18] The potential of emerging digital technologies and social media to disrupt and offer alternatives to industrial models of cultural production (like franchising) thus sat in tension with the ability of media capital to turn that collaborative networked creativity to its own advantage.

Nowhere has this tension been better explored than in studies of video games, where the social interactions of play have simultaneously functioned as labor on behalf of industry. Ludic scholars like Johan Huizinga once positioned play in direct contrast to notions of work and productivity as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it."[19] In approaching the industrialization of meaningful play within the digital gaming industry, however, scholars have more recently reconsidered this proposition. Thomas Malaby argues that understanding games solely in terms of play obscures the wider social and cultural formations in which play unfolds.[20] Economist Edward Castronova similarly identifies the playgrounds of massively multiplayer online role-playing games like *World of Warcraft* as fully functional, shared spaces that while fantastical, support real social, political, and economic dynamics. Players' investment of time and money in their virtual identities constituted in Castronova's view a genuine stake in the operation of these worlds, compelling users to form communities of interest, express grievances to the coding authorities running the game, and exert political pressure upon them.[21] Situating gameplay as labor within industrial formations, rather than a force in opposition to those structures, John Banks and Sal Humphreys have characterized socially networked players as "co-creators" whom software developers rely upon as sources of feedback, brainstorming, and even low-level content design through their use of market-grade toolkits. For them, the co-creativity of gaming constituted a fundamental shift in the organization of labor within the culture industries.[22] Considering this co-creativity, Hector Postigo has attempted to calculate the industrial value of player-produced game "mods" that generate new levels, scenarios, graphics packages, and other variations on gameplay to deepen the "content pool" that sustains market interest in professionally produced game titles. Based on the thousands of hours of labor put into collectively produced modding projects, Postigo estimates that game developers would have had to pay millions in professional game designer salaries.[23]

In seeking to understand the political subjectivities produced by this collaborative production, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter similarly refuse to understand gamers solely by reference to play. Proposing instead that their contributions be conceived as "playbor," the authors situate analysis of the game industry within a wider critique of neoliberalism and the subjectivities upon which it depends as a means of organizing politics, economies, and social relations.[24] Drawing upon Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of "Empire," they situate gamer subjectivities within a neoliberal framework defined by

> the global capitalist ascendancy of the early twenty-first century, a system administered and policed by a consortium of competitively collaborative

> neoliberal states. . . . This is a regime of biopower based on corporate exploitation of myriad types of labor, paid and unpaid, for the continuous enrichment of a planetary plutocracy. Among these many toils, immaterial labor in information and communication systems, such as the media . . . occupies a strategic position because of its role in intellectually and affectively shaping subjectivities throughout other parts of the system.[25]

The authors configure play as a part of a wider neoliberal system of institutional subjectivity whereby affect and emotional investment in cultural products can be translated into immaterial labor for the dominant cultural and political institutions of capitalism.[26] As such, the authors define the digital culture offered by Empire to be a paradox—highly regulated and controlled by capitalism at the same time as it offers tools for new forms of tactical cultural expression and political activism on the part of its multitudinous users. “The conditions are, in short, those of highly socialized production, a de facto commons that is incompatible with stringent de jure intellectual property rights . . . even though it continues to be governed by conventional intellectual property regulations. It is a practical reality of multitude ruled by the old law of Empire.”[27] While the authors limit their consideration to game culture, their paradoxical description of decentralized industrial labor could equally apply to media franchising, where, as we have seen, the hierarchical industrial reproduction of culture has depended upon meaningful relationships, exchanges, and subjective identification among socialized users of creative resources. In this neoliberal context, however, gaming calls attention to the de facto participation of end users, not just professionals, in the labor patterns of media capital. Participatory culture drags consumers deeper into capitalist industrial structures, asking them to take up affectively meaningful subjectivities within institutions of media production, at the same time as it points to alternatives outside of that system.

Other scholars have critiqued these neoliberal patterns of collaborative participation in media beyond digital gaming. Examining reality television, for example, James Hay and Laurie Ouellette suggest that cultural power has come to depend less on ideology and more on participatory lifestyles in which television programs become only one entry point into a much wider menu of customizable experiences self-driven by media users so as to ease private and public institutions of social responsibility.[28] Offering his own critique of neoliberal participation, Mark Andrejevic dismisses cyber-celebrants who suggest that new media technology enables “power sharing” between industry and consumers, arguing that interactive contributions to the production process do not constitute power over that process.[29]

Andrejevic characterizes the shared resources of participatory media environments as digital enclosures in which those who control resources lay claim to the value generated through their socialized use. These enclosures offer neoliberal forms of interactivity, he argues, because they allow for collective action only within an industrially circumscribed set of parameters, where users remain private, atomized individuals without the collective ability to change those parameters.[30] While invited to become a part of the production process and take satisfaction in their own contributions, consumers are prompted to "identify with the imperatives of producers."[31] Andrejevic argues that the interactivity and participation of emerging social networks has asked consumers to substitute the vested interests of powerful institutions as their own. Critiques of neoliberal cultural production such as these paint an ominous picture in which consumer participation underwrites institutional power and dominance. In the context of consumer enfranchisement and collaboration in industrial networks of production, these perspectives recognize both freedom of participatory use and the institutional power relations that freedom supports.

Yet this critical perspective should not grimly reject consumers' productive agency or dismiss their meaningful identities and subjectivities, but instead recognize how those cultural factors have paradoxically affirmed the institutional power of industry over cultural production at the same time as disrupting it. The intellectual danger here lies in misreading the persistence of institutional power as indicative of the total elimination of tools to disrupt it; as Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter suggest, we need to remain conscious of the potential for tactical cultural expression and political activism within gaming and other digital cultures. Understanding why that potential is so infrequently actualized, however, is not only an economic consideration, but also a cultural one for which Erica Rand's theorization of hegemony and queer accessories proves well suited. For Rand, hegemony is the process by which people are encouraged to act on behalf of an institution "in ways that they may not initially or ever believe will benefit themselves."[32] Operating through culture, meaning, and affect rather than through direct economic or political coercion, hegemony renders some options perceptible as more attractive out of a wider "world of possibilities."[33] Rand characterizes "resistance" as politically insufficient to effect redistribution of power and resources, arguing that "[w]e are less likely to threaten the social order if we can be guided to channel anti-establishment anger into actions that only signal breaking the rules."[34] At least one shade more compliant than "resistance" (indeed, often directly opposed to it), the consumer collaboration of franchising therefore implies cooperation with an institutional regime, rather than even temporary subversion. Such consent to industrial authority would be not merely a top-down form of oppression, in Rand's formulation, but the hegemonic adoption by consumer-producers of culturally meaningful subjectivities. Through this model, Rand understands the queering of Barbie by "accessory" consumers not as a singular phenomenon—evidence of either industrial control or consumer agency—but as a contradiction where institutional power and cultural subjectivities collided to help Barbie escape heteronormativity, while also reinforcing that fixity in presenting heteronormativity as a norm to be playfully subverted.

Recognizing these tensions and contradictions surrounding resistance, we can better explore the complexities of consumer collaboration within the industrial structures of franchising. What affective relationships and fantasies have supported consumer consent to participation in the networked labor relations of franchised production? How have media industries extended licenses for consumers to participate, and how have consumers identified with their role as laborers? Why, even when attempting to work outside of those labor relations, have consumer collaborators identified with industrial imperatives and authority? In seeking answers to those kinds of questions, we can problematize the notion that enfranchised consumers are empowered consumers while also acknowledging their creative participation and productive status within the contemporary media industries.

Working as Players

The growth of digital technology at the turn of the millennium allowed the development of new cultural forms that supported greater audience participation and agency. More crucially, emerging economic logics in this digital landscape increasingly problematized the perceived binaries between the spheres of production and consumption and offered audiences entry into the industrial relations and exchanges of media franchising. Frequently, consumers became de facto franchisees contributing to production. Curiously, however, the subjectivities on offer to media consumers to make meaningful that participation in industrialized cultural production did not always invite them to identify directly with the institutions of production. Instead, as in the case of ABC-Disney's *Lost*, consumer participation in franchising was often framed through playful subjectivities in which socialized gamers took up identities in relation to the institutions of role-play and fantasy. Nevertheless, as NBC-Universal's online social game for *Battlestar Galactica* evinced, play was at other times equally subject to licensing contracts that translated the imaginative fantasy work of gamers into the labor of industrially situated franchisees. This enfranchisement of consumers, therefore, extended not just a de facto franchisee status within the network of industrial production relations, but often the role of de jure licensees.

Linking consumers across shared virtual spaces, digital technology refigured the materiality of consumption through its networking capacities. In the persistent, shared spaces of the Internet in the 2000s, for example, consumption took on a productive quality of its own through the critical discussions of television viewers on message boards and blogs. Such discussions, as Caldwell claims, increasingly extended the production of the text through the addition of commentary.[35] Yet this criticality also underscored the growing proximity between consumption and industrial spheres of production. With so many television viewers gravitating to the Internet to add their critical perspective, the *New York Times Magazine* claimed that popular websites like *Television Without Pity* provided a means for zealous television viewers to make themselves publicly visible to television producers. As more producers recognized "the value of these feverish Web discussions" as a feedback mechanism, consumers were increasingly perceived to influence industry decisions. As the *Magazine* claimed: "In TV's perpetual, rolling incompleteness, anyone with the right equipment . . . can actually bend and shade its content."[36] In this celebratory narrative, the Internet enabled consumers to develop collective consensus and legitimize the culture-producing power of corporate institutions. "Spare the Snark, Spoil the Networks," the *Television Without Pity* motto advised, inverting assumed power relations between production and consumption by suggesting the latter's power of oversight. As the *Village Voice* noted, consumption was "no longer just a complacent pastime but an activity with the potential to become an uprising at any moment."[37]

While popular perceptions of increased consumer power may have been just that—perceptions—they nevertheless imagined a contraction of distance between the spheres of consumption and production. This perceived proximity had utility to media industries seeking to reorganize economic relations with the audience. Reeves et al. have described the previous introduction of niche marketing logic to television in the 1980s and 1990s as a shift in logic from the mass market consumer culture of "TVI" to a new "TVII" based in stimulating consumer overconsumption.[38] The key to attracting audiences in the TVII environment was no longer based in least objectionable programming that maximized audience size, but in developing content that could support ancillary markets and fuel the multiplied consumption of fewer dedicated viewers. Franchised media production proved an able strategy under those circumstances. Yet with the rise of digital and social media, Matt Hills and Glen Creeber have suggested the emergence of a "TVIII" defined by "increased fragmentation, consumer interactivity, and global market economies."[39] In this more competitive and participatory environment, the role of consumers in economic relation to television content would be reconceived once more.

In this new economy, audiences increasingly offered a problem to be managed. Thanks to the proliferation of digital video recorder (DVR) technologies, television advertisers and networks in the United States worried about viewers skipping through commercials. Combined with the reluctance of media conglomerates to invest in expensive programming after racking up merger debts in the 1990s and expanding their production output to take advantage of the repeal of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (see chapter 2), this challenge led programmers to the "cost-cutting solution" of reality television formats.[40] Ted Magder identifies the reality genre as a response to new economic imperatives driven by the changing engagement patterns of audiences: "what reality TV and formats reveal most of all is that the traditional revenue model used to produce commercial television is becoming anachronistic. We are entering a new era of product placement and integration, merchandising, pay-per-view, and multiplatform content."[41] Connecting with audiences in this new media environment meant a host of new strategies that called into question the definition of "television" content. On the ratings behemoth *American Idol*, for example, judges drank from Coca-Cola glasses, sets featured Coke iconography, and finalists produced music videos promoting Ford automobiles. To become the focus of television content, Coke, Ford, as well as AT&T each paid the Fox network over $20 million per year.[42] As Jim Edwards argued in *Brandweek*, however, scripted television proved too contested a terrain for the same product placement strategies to be implemented: "writers, producers, networks, directors, and talent all have to be taken into account before a brand can appear."[43]

Yet the narrative worlds of scripted series did support their own industrial adaptations to the audience fragmentation and interactivity of TVIII. As *Advertising Age* put it, "Video is Killing TV. . . . [T]he ad industry is undergoing a semantic shift that's ousting broadcast TV as its central organizing principle. In its place, a more flexible notion of video is emerging . . . where every ad agency is trying to structure itself to produce more digital content and escape the box of the 30-second-spot."[44]Advertisers sought not just new product placement strategies, but means to escape the broadcasting context altogether, and that is where scripted television offered its own inroads.[45] As Janet Murray notes, narrative television supported "hyperserial" extension into digital environments, where interactive online content afforded audiences the ability to role-play within the space of the series.[46] Websites for eries like *24* and *Dawson's Creek* in the early 2000s offered consumers the ability to interact with the world of the series by browsing through character desktops and email accounts.[47] By the end of the decade, these out-of-the-box television content strategies grew to encompass webisodes, online gaming, and Twitter feeds. To amplify the multiplied consumption of TVII, many of the new narrative strategies of TVIII aimed to provide audiences with spaces outside of television for interactive play.

Despite creating challenges to be managed through new production strategies, the interactivities of fragmented audiences also offered new opportunties to media industries. The rise of social media transformed audiences into a decentralized mechanism for attracting attention back to the television property and reaching out to new consumer groups. Some analysts, for example, described online fans' cross-platform and collective engagement with *Lost* as a form of "evangelism," where hardcore audience engagement created buzz to interest greater numbers of general viewers.[48] While in the late 1990s analysts in trade publications like *Marketing News* saw online content as a "magnet" for attracting fans and exposing them to ancillary merchandise,[49] the emerging logic of TVIII envisioned online consumers as the magnets for building bigger markets. In addition to this marketing utility, as Simone Murray argues, media industries became increasingly amenable to extending their "self-constituting target market" the informal right to distribute and even create with corporately owned intellectual property in the spaces of the Internet if it could help drive circulation of the property in other markets.[50] In this context, consumer activities were increasingly drawn into proximity with industrial modes of franchised production.

In early 2006, for example, executives in the new media division at premium cable network Showtime contracted with the *Fanlib* website to organize a script-writing contest for its drama series *The L Word*. While the contest solicited fan creation in highly controlled ways (fans wrote scenes based on an outline penned by a staff writer), it nevertheless accorded fan-writers limited legitimacy within and recognition by professional institutions of production. While some finalists attempted to leverage the exposure to acquire professional status and representation, one winning writer was promised an audience with the executive producer of the series—though *Variety* carefully described it as a "mentoring session via e-mail on the topic of writing," thereby maintaining a sense of hierarchy and physical distance between amateurs and professionals. This contest also afforded distribution to fan labor, ultimately packaging these fan-written scenes alongside the professionally produced series in the DVD release.[51] Similar stunts in the 2000s invited consumers to produce industrially exploitable content; fan commentaries on the DVD releases of series like *Alias* and *Moonlighting* allowed consumer discourse to sit adjacent to that of producers as a separate audio track on the disc. Neither *The L Word*, *Moonlighting*, nor *Alias* were based in fantastic world-building schemes, but these DVD features did authorize consumers to speak within and about the series, extending them a de facto franchisee identity to share in the production of content.

More established franchises like *Star Trek* also sought to translate the productive practices of fans into free labor. In summer 2006, the franchise's official website carried lengthy news items celebrating digital fan-made *Star Trek* films, pointing visitors to fan-produced series like *New Voyages* and *Hidden Frontier*. These articles celebrated the power of consumers at a time prior to the 2009 blockbuster film in which the ailing franchise had not yet resumed professional film or television production. De facto consumer franchisees were, at least during this moment of professional retreat, the only game in town. As a familiar, celebratory refrain framed fan productivity: "in the absence of any new *Star Trek* productions out of Hollywood . . . fans are taking advantage of cheaper and more accessible digital technology to breathe new life into the universe and characters that we all crave more of. And they're sharing their work with the world through the miracle of the World Wide Web."[52] Intellectual property holder CBS-Paramount, therefore, enlisted consumers as franchise stewards who could generate the differentiated content needed to sustain franchise production during a period of institutional regrouping and reorganization. While fans adopted the roles of Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock in these films, they also played industrial roles as unofficial yet formally promoted, endorsed, and enfranchised producers. By 2010, the official website at StarTrek.com had also been relaunched—not as a means of disseminating "official" news and commentary prepared by industry publicists, but as an aggregator of fan-produced content gathered from across the Internet. As CBS Consumer Products executive Liz Kalodner explained, "The new StarTrek.com will embrace the incredible fan activity across the web and bring together the many different voices that celebrate Star Trek."[53] The industrial production of interactive spaces that fans could visit had been rendered self-sustaining by drawing upon the productive energies of those same fans.

Similar enfranchisement of the audience as collaborative industrial labor occurred in summer 2007 when NBC-Universal's Sci-Fi Network sought to sustain viewers' interest in *Battlestar Galactica* in the off-season through the "BSG VideoMaker Toolkit." This kit contained a collection of establishing shots, visual effects, sound effects, and stock cutaway images, inviting fans to combine these professional materials with their own original footage to

Screenshot from NBC-Universal's *Battlestar Galactica* Videomaker Toolkit, 2007.

generate new *Battlestar* content. The resulting four-minute episodes could then be uploaded for public viewing on the official Sci-Fi website, with the promise that a few lucky contributors would see their work aired on television during the upcoming season. In aggregate, hundreds of these videos helped animate and refresh the series' online content offerings despite the production hiatus in television. The consumer base transformed overnight into a virtual employee base willing to work without pay to sustain and promote the franchise in the off season. As Suzanne Scott and Julie Levin Russo have argued in their own analyses of the Videomaker Toolkit, these industrial strategies drew upon existing, grassroots traditions of video making (or "vidding") within television fandom, seeking to incorporate those practices within a capitalist framework. Scott suggests that instead of policing fan use, NBC-Universal sought to authorize the potential resistance of fan production, while Russo similarly argues that the goal was to incorporate fan production into "one big happy capitalist family" by containing previously unruly practices within the contradictory interfaces and conditions of a proprietary commercial space.[54]

Despite the industrial incorporation of fan practices as proprietary labor, however, interactive consumer participation in the media franchising of the 2000s was simultaneously framed in terms of role-play, wherein consumers identified and took up subject positions in relation to institutions of fantasy rather than institutions of industrial production. "Alternate reality games" that positioned audience interactivity as participation in the fantasy worlds of media narratives directed significant attention from the productivity of consumers as labor. One of the first significant entries in this emerging form of gaming was "The Beast," released in conjunction with the marketing of the Steven Spielberg film *A.I.* Consumers who scoured the film's trailers and posters discovered cryptic declarations that "Evan Chan was murdered. Jeanine is the key." Similarly, those who paid careful attention to the film's credits saw a crew listing for Jeanine Salla as "Sentient Machine Therapist." Each of these small details offered a "rabbit hole" through which consumers could enter the alternate world of *A.I.* as players, investigating the murder of Evan by searching for Jeanine Salla in spaces outside the text. In a digital age, the Internet proved a fertile ground for hiding game clues, where players who searched for information about Jeanine found themselves visiting not branded *A.I.* pages, but in-game websites that presented themselves as independent spaces one might otherwise encounter in everyday browsing. Cleverly, the space of the story and of playful participation dissolved to encompass the entirety of the World Wide Web. Since 2001, numerous entertainment franchises have developed alternate reality games, including the television series *Push, Nevada*; *Kyle XY*; and *Heroes* as well as feature films like *The Dark Knight*. The play of alternate reality games pushed franchise consumers to pretend both that fictional websites were part of the real world and that real-world spaces were part of the fiction, and in the process, to identify as a participatory role-player across all those spaces.

In the case of "The Lost Experience," a 2006 alternate reality game meant to engage viewers between the second and third seasons of ABC-Disney's *Lost*, the playful subject position offered to consumers prompted them to identify with corporate institutions—both real and fictional—as the site of participatory gameplay. While the first season of *Lost* had focused largely on the plight of the survivors of Oceanic Flight 815 and their attempts to establish a new social order on a seemingly deserted tropical island, the producers had devoted a significant amount of creative energy over the course of the second season to develop an institutional mythology surrounding their predicament. This mythology revealed the island as the focus of scientific experimentations by fictional institutions like the DHARMA Initiative and Hanso Foundation. Meanwhile, joining the fictional airline Oceanic Air onscreen were an increasing number of fantasy corporations and brands in flashbacks to the characters' lives off the island—from the Apollo Candy Bar to Mr. Cluck's Chicken Shack. While the introduction of the research "hatch" in season two afforded the characters with a source of beer, mayonnaise, and other provisions that potentially could have offered product placement opportunities, the producers instead marked these goods with the distinctive logo of the DHARMA Initiative as a constant reminder of its institutional significance to the narrative.[55]

Building on this framework, "The Lost Experience" asked players to take up subject positions in relation to those fictional institutions, and to reframe their everyday relationships with real corporations as one of role-play rather than one based in power, labor, or economics. The objective of the game, it seemed, was to gain a deeper understanding of the *Lost* story by uncovering the institutional secrets of DHARMA and Hanso. Pooling their knowledge through online social networks, players acted as investigators, scouring television commercials, public appearances, websites, and other mediated spaces of everyday life for clues. Advertisements supposedly paid for by Hanso aired during ABC programs, encouraging viewers to visit the Hanso website to learn about its supposedly philanthropic projects. Similarly, print advertisements in national newspapers positioned Hanso as a real world corporation seeking to disprove disparaging accusations made of it in the *Lost* tie-in novel *Bad Twin*. As the game unfolded, online podcasts and guerrilla videos purported to reveal the truth of Hanso's corporate machinations. Meanwhile, at the San Diego Comic Con, the game positioned ABC and the institutions of production as similar sites of investigative play. An actress portraying fictional blogger Rachel Blake noisily interrupted the *Lost* panel and attacked the writers for their complicity in promoting the DHARMA-Hanso agenda by publicizing it on the series. The producers played along with the fantasy, not denying the real-life existence of such fictional institutions, but treating them as real entities with which they had taken dramatic license. The late night ABC talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live* similarly brought these fictional institutions into everyday experience by giving airtime to Hugh McIntyre, the supposed Hanso communications director. Framing his appearance on ABC's late night talk show as a public relations intervention, McIntyre claimed, "the writers and producers of *Lost* have decided to attach themselves to our foundation." So while the fiction of *Lost* was acknowledged, the play of alternate reality gaming positioned the series' fictional institutions as meaningful, structuring forces in the players' subjectivity reality.

In prompting consumers to role-play in relation to this network of real and fictional institutions, this game reframed as participatory play the audience labor performed by consumers on behalf of ABC and its advertisers. Playful participation in the institutional fantasy meant performing work to enable new exchanges within the television production and advertising economy.

Through the game, Coca-Cola and three other sponsors had partnered with ABC to develop a viral marketing campaign that would transform *Lost* from a single television narrative into a dispersed set of media experiences. The idea was to integrate brands like Coca-Cola's Sprite into an expanded *Lost* narrative.[56] If Sprite could be put into relations with the institutional fantasy of Hanso and DHARMA, consumers could take up an economic relation with that brand in the course of their play. In partnership with ABC, therefore, sponsors could claim to have a relationship to the fantasy that would make consumer participation in their online spaces of corporate marketing into a meaningful part of the game. Moreover, this relationship gave advertisers their own entry into the networked production of *Lost*. As *Marketing News* reported, "It was up to the brands and their agencies to flesh out the storyline and plot twists with their own ideas."[57] Sprite's "Sub-lymonal" television spots and web content ceased to be advertisement and became potential sources of revelation to be interacted with by role-players investigating their relation to Hanso. Similarly, Jeep.com became a site of player participation where careful attention revealed a hidden page filled with corporate documents detailing the supposed business dealings between Hanso and Jeep-parent Daimler Chysler. To uncover the automaker's role in supplying Hanso with custom Jeep Compass vehicles, players had to engage with the marketing apparatus for the Compass line. While this marketing work was distinct from the labor of producing television or web content, Dallas Smythe and Vincent Mosco remind us that the attention consumers pay to advertisements in the television economy is an unrecognized form of audience labor, performed freely on behalf of networks who sell that attention to advertisers.[58] Here, with the subjectivities of role-play linked to corporate institutions, that labor was further obscured in the context of a fantasy game. These enfranchised consumers took up subject positions of participation within advertising economies made meaningful through the relations of play rather than labor.

Yet the effectiveness of corporately produced alternate reality games as a means of harnessing consumer labor in response to audience fragmentation remained in some question. On the one hand, publications like *Advertising Age* saw this complex, alternate reality play as a means of reaching evangelist "super-fans"—particularly those that skewed male and were perceived to be at least a decade younger that "the general couch-potato population."[59] These socially networked online experiences offered a way to capture the interest of this elusive audience and make them passionate laborers within the advertising economy. On the other hand, *Variety* doubted the viability of investing so many industrial resources to reach such a small, cultish audience. Rather than adopting the "super-fan" appellation, this trade publication denigrated participatory audiences as "'net nuts" whose interest in online content constituted only a negligible 5 percent of the total viewing audience. Moreover, as networks and studios continued to insist that online content remained promotional, rather than a source of revenue in and of itself, production of these playful participatory experiences remained "a zero-billion-dollar-business."[60] Noting as well that professional producers could not compete with the thrill of bottom-up fan movements and practices, this analysis suggested that audiences themselves were best suited to the labor of building participatory cultures around television franchising. Nevertheless, the television industry continued to defy the implicit recommendations of that analysis, endeavoring to give official sanction to participatory culture. This sanction increasingly reached beyond audience viewing labor in search of a productive consumer labor that could also generate content (in instances like the *Battlestar* Videomaker Toolkit, for example). In that way, the labor costs of producing online content could be shared with consumers.

Even in contexts where consumers were invited to collaborate in franchising as producers of user-generated content, subjectivities of play often continued to mask the labor demands placed upon them as de facto franchisees. One of the major strategies to impel that labor and make it meaningful as play was a push for "gamification" of online content starting around 2005. Upstart agencies like Bunchball declared themselves experts in the gamification of promotional web content that would enable clients to "directly influence behavior and optimize how users interact with your site." By providing users with specific motivating rewards and gameplay incentives, this firm suggested, the productive participation of users could be rationalized. Indeed, Bunchball's website suggested that the management of consumer users and of laborers could be closely linked through gaming, promising that "[g]amification improves user engagement, employee productivity, and customer loyalty."[61] This marketing claimed that the strategies used to build participatory audiences could equally manage the labor of workers, and vice versa. To see that promise fulfilled, clients proved willing to pay companies like Bunchball $10,000 per month to gamify their websites.[62] So as industries like television looked to consumers to take on roles of productive labor within the multiplication of content across digital environments, the playful role-playing subjectivities that supported audience labor in alternate reality games remained central to industrial models of consumer collaboration. Gaming offered a way to make labor for the media industries into meaningful play for the enfranchised consumer.

The tension between gamified participation and its status as labor within the decentralized production relations of television franchising was perhaps most formalized in end user licensing contracts—often of the click-through variety that consumers had no choice but to consent to if they wanted to participate in the playful social interactions of convergence culture. Although *Battlestar* rights holder NBC-Universal has relied upon the labor of audiences as de facto franchisees through devices like the Videomaker Toolkit, it sought one year later to both gamify its social network of production and to formalize its labor status though contractual relations in which playful consumers became officially licensed to use franchise resources. "Join the Fight," the *Battlestar* social networking game introduced in 2008, prompted players in team-based competition to swear allegiance to either the human Colonials or their cybernetic Cylon antagonists. In that competition, players earned "cubits" (the standard monetary unit in the *Battlestar* universe) to pay for ongoing upgrades to the engines and armaments in their personal fleets of space fighters. To earn cubits, players completed "tasks" that simultaneously recoded their play within an industrial framework of labor. Tasks such as weekly quizzes, team logo design, and team motto writing figured attentive viewership and creative participation not just as a pleasurable act, but as a behavior to be rewarded by cubits. Other tasks required players to recruit new players to the game, becoming marketing representatives on behalf of the *Battlestar* franchise. Within the playful context of gaming, consumers performed ongoing, highly structured creative and promotional labors that expanded both the content pool and the scope of the industrial production network.

In addition to swearing allegiance of play to the Colonials or Cylons, it seemed, fealty of labor also had to be sworn to industry. To be enfranchised to this use of the Battlestar property, NBC-Universal asked users to enter into a click-through contract which stipulated: "such Material is licensed to you by Join the Fight and Join the Fight does not transfer title to any such Material to you."[63] These Terms of Service demanded that amateur produsers submit to producerly positions within the industrial licensing model in two additional respects. First, produsers had to possess "all the rights, licenses, permissions and consents necessary to submit the Content" before they could use this social network to add to the *Battlestar* content pool.[64] In other words, no user-generated creation could be recognized outside the boundaries of the licensing agreements made in the professional, industrialized world. Users were licensed to play with the *Battlestar* license, but not the *Star Trek* license. Their franchised creativity had to extend from the proprietary logic of industrial cultural production. Second, this contract informed would-be producers "that you are granting Join the Fight including without limitation NBC Universal, Inc., its licensees, successors and assigns, the perpetual and irrevocable, non-exclusive right" to anything which their labors might produce in the context of the game.[65] Like any licensee or for-hire worker entering into contractually prescribed labor relations, these amateur produsers forfeited claims of authorship or ownership over their labor and the resources shared in the course of it. Terms of Service reoriented the threat of produsage and networked informational economies to serve permission-based modes of decentralized creative collaboration based in hierarchy and authority. Yet, although the licensing Terms of Service made consumer labor industrially meaningful and leveragable as an economic relation, subjectivities of fantasy play continued to obscure the industrial character of those economic and creative exchanges—after all, who would take the time to read through an end user licensing agreement?

While "Join the Fight" and "The Lost Experience" each worked to transform participatory audience practices into industrial labor, their success in doing so might best be attributed to their presentation of those institutionalized worker subjectivities in the context of play. Framed as a game, consumers' labor for the franchise presumably did not take on the meanings of work within institutional networks of media franchising so much as the perception of meaningful, socially networked relationships to institutions of fantasy enclosed within what has long been called the "magic circle" of gameplay.[66]

Playing as Workers

Nevertheless, other consumers did adopt positions of pleasurable identification with and within hierarchies of institutionalized labor that alternatively made their franchised participation and collaboration meaningful and pleasurably identifiable as work. Even in these cases, however, notions of gameplay persisted to frame laborer subjectivities in terms of the "fun" of fantasy rather than the material basis of industrial production. Yet these playful fantasies of labor deserve special consideration because they offered participatory consumers the opportunity to identify with the idea of working for corporations and other institutional forces, rather than imagining socially networked collaboration as an oppositional practice.

While *Lost* sustained its emphasis on role-play and social gaming in a subsequent 2008 alternate reality game called "The DHARMA Initiative Recruiting Project," it also modulated its appeals to players by asking them not just to engage with the institutions of fantasy, but also to work for them. To some extent, this emphasis on players as potential laborers extended themes from the 2006 "Lost Experience," in which employment websites like

Monster.com became part of the network of real corporations pretending to be involved with Hanso and DHARMA. In that case, Monster.com hosted a number of ads for available positions at Hanso that offered some clue into the company's activities. With consumers visiting Monster.com potentially in a dual capacity—both as *Lost* fans and as jobseekers—subjectivities of play and work overlapped to some degree. The 2008 follow-up game, however, made this logic more explicit, asking players to take on the role of a Dharma Initiative employee recruit and conduct research tests on its behalf. During a *Lost* ad break, consumers were first made aware of their ability to play the game via a commercial for "Octagon Global Recruiting," a company claiming to seek "volunteers to assist in a range of unpaid positions." Willing viewers who followed the advertised URL to www.octagonglobalrecruiting.com could officially volunteer as a participant. The experiences offered by that webspace evidenced the marks of gamification, with the aptitude tests that player-workers labored to complete scored and competitively ranked on leaderboards. Based on their scores, participants were "hired" by DHARMA and received Volunteer Assessment Dossiers that contained specific DHARMA job titles ranging from brick layer and mini-bus driver to cinematographer and psychologist. The differing values and statuses accorded to these positions established a system of social ranking to motivate player engagement and performance in the game. Play, here, meant being the best unpaid worker one could be in DHARMA's competitive labor market.

At the same time, merchandising produced in conjunction with the commercial franchising of the television series encouraged players to imagine their *Lost* fandom through identification as an institutional labor subject of the DHARMA Initiative. Alongside more traditional tie-in merchandise stamped with the *Lost* logo, in 2006 ABC began marketing a supplementary line of DHARMA-branded products that perpetuated the illusion of the institution's reality. This included T-shirts and hats that could be worn about in quotidian spaces, but also composition books (just like those seen in DHARMA research experiments in Season 3) that consumers could buy to express identification with the idea of performing labor (scientific or otherwise) for this fictional institution. This blurring of consumer and labor subjectivities through merchandising was not unique to *Lost*, however. NBC-Universal's *The Office*, for one, offered similarly branded Dunder Mifflin T-shirts and office products that allowed consumers to express affective identification with the idea of working for such a corporate entity. By 2007, industry analysts had increasingly recognized this strategy as "reverse product placement," in which marketers "create a fictional brand in a fictional environment and then release it into the real world."[67] Not quite expressed in such analyses was the degree to which these products were often as much about the meaningful identification with institutions of labor as they were new markets of consumption. Of course, it is difficult to measure from the existence of such products precisely how consumers identified with them. Certainly some may have worn DHARMA or Dunder Mifflin T-shirts out of a sense of detached irony, although the premium prices made it significantly more likely that engaged fans would see value in them. Even then, purchases that signal pleasurable identification with Dunder Mifflin did not necessarily suggest a desire to work for Dunder Mifflin. Much of the satiric humor of *The Office*, in fact, came from recognizing the ridiculous in corporate organizations and labor patterns. Meaningful identification with Dunder Mifflin could be a recognition that one participates in similarly ridiculous labor structures in the real world.

It is in the gamification of *The Office*, however, that consumers were asked to identify with corporate labor not as something "funny," but as something "fun." As in the case of the "DHARMA Initiative Recruiting Project," consumers were invited to enter the aforementioned "Dunder Mifflin Infinity" game by adopting worker subject positions. At the conclusion of an October 2007 television episode that narratively introduced Dunder Mifflin's website, an advertisement hailed consumers as would-be employees: "Do you like paper? Well, we like you! Dunder Mifflin is looking for bright, energetic paper people to open their own branch and become part of the Dunder Mifflin family. Interested in your own future? Go to DunderMifflinInfinity.com to find out more!" By promising consumers the ability to open their own branch, this ad situated its appeals in the language of retail franchising. Upon visiting the Dunder Mifflin Infinity website, however, participation in the franchising of Dunder Mifflin extended to the network of industrial relations constituting the media franchising of *The Office* as well. After applying to work for a regional branch of the paper company and simultaneously signing a Terms of Service licensing agreement with NBC-Universal, players could begin performing office productivity tasks assigned to them within the context of the game. Many of these assigned tasks were similar to those later assigned "Join the Fight" players, asking them to playfully participate in the creation of material that could add to the proprietary pool of content resources surrounding the franchise. In the first year of the Dunder Mifflin Infinity game, players were asked to design corporate logos, produce videos advertising their local branch, create posters that demonstrated Dunder Mifflin's environmental consciousness, design employee uniforms, and compose original Dunder Mifflin theme songs. This consumer productivity, rewarded with virtual Schrutebucks currency, generated materials that NBC-Universal

Screenshot from NBC-Universal's Dunder Mifflin Infinity website, including a series of tasks posed to branch employees, 2010.

could draw upon in turn for the continued online production and promotion of *The Office*. The videos produced by players often became promotional content on the official *Office* website, while the user-generated production of Dunder Mifflin as a brand, however fictional, added meaningfulness both to the series and to NBC-Universal (with the Dunder Mifflin's pro-environmental status supporting NBC-Universal's own "green" branding initiatives). Unlike "Join the Fight," however, consumer collaboration in the production relations of franchising extended from fantasy play directly identified as labor.

In making "fun" the simultaneity of labor for fantasy corporations and labor for media institutions, the Dunder Mifflin Infinity game was actually the first major gamification project for Internet startup Bunchball, celebrated as a result for both its economic and creative innovations. In tracing the ways in which digital media practitioners have transformed storytelling practices in the media industries, technology writer Frank Rose marveled at how the game "enable[d] NBC to outsource the expensive and time-consuming process of creating extra stuff for fans to find on the Internet. Who knows where this could go?"[68] Bunchball founder Rajar Paharia too acknowledged the conversion of fantasy into creative industrial labor at the heart of his gamification strategies: "NBC is paying people fake money to do real work," he mused.[69] In a keynote address at the Worlds in Motion Summit, Paharia and

NBC's Stephen Andrade emphasized the effectiveness of gameplay, rewards, and competition in motivating consumers "pretending to be members of a corporation" to participate in "Creative Social Networks."[70] Bunchball further vowed that in incentivizing users "to create the core site content," this consumer-employee labor would help corporate websites to "run themselves."[71] The promise of gamification made to the media industries by companies like Bunchball and NBC, therefore, lied not only in generating playful audience engagement, but also in making socially networked creative labor on behalf of media institutions pleasurable, desirable, and meaningful. Though that labor was compensated with nothing more than virtual goods, Paharia understood that intangible tokens could still serve as a means of "signaling intent" that "reflects your identity," making them just as culturally powerful as real-world goods.[72] Paharia also described gamification as straddling "that intersection of behavioral economics and loyalty and game design," suggesting that pracitioners deploy it after asking "what I am trying to get people to do?"[73] So as much as gamification empowered consumers to interact with franchised media in new, meaningful ways, it also impelled and managed that social interaction and brought its productivity under corporate direction.

At the end of the third annual iteration of Dunder Mifflin Infinity in 2010, some 93,869 users had come to work for NBC that year and had been compensated with over 107 million Schrutebucks (for whatever that was worth). Of course, the vast majority of these users held "Temp" status, meaning that they had not spent enough time playing the game to earn a permanent position at one of the virtual branches. This left a mere 8,880 users who had ascended to ranks such as Warehouse Employee, Receptionist, Accountant, and Saleperson, collectively generating Dunder Mifflin content in social networks of 16 people on average.[74] In its 2010–2011 "Dunder Mifflin Sabre" iteration (reflecting a corporate merger on the series), the game eliminated barriers to virtual branch affiliation and gave players the ability to move freely between participation and identification with any social network (whereas previously tranfers had to be approved by players empowered as Regional Managers to make such decisions on behalf of branches). Nor did players have to belong to any specific branch to participate. These changes—along with ongoing adjustments to the role of Regional Managers, who had become "purely symbolic" social organizers and motivators by 2010—suggested that gamification of user participation was a work in progress, not a perfected system delivering throngs of willing Dunder Mifflin/NBC-Universal laborers.[75] Nevertheless, for those few active participants, the game had offered a narratively and culturally meaningful way to take up labor relations within production networks of television franchising. Moreover, NBC had sought to use similar strategies to create "creative communities" of users for its other programs, with the fictional Buy More store on *Chuck* offering its own possibilities for consumer employment.[76] By encouraging players to experience gameplay through corporate subjectivity—explaining the rules of the game in "Employee Manuals" that prompted players to "climb the corporate ladder"—gamification had produced for NBC social networks of users whose participation was made meaningful by hegemonic consent to corporate authority.[77] The "fun" of enfranchised consumer participation in franchising became imagined as a form of corporate labor.

Refusing Institutional Structures, Accepting Institutional Creativity

While the industrial franchising of *The Office* and *Battlestar* alike depended upon both licensing agreements and meaningful player subjectivities to incorporate amateur sites of creativity into the relations of collaborative production, certainly not all produser creativity in relation to media franchising has been so formally incorporated. *Diaspora*, a freeware *Battlestar* game made by fans of the television series (http://diaspora.hard-light.net), offers a unique opportunity to uncover not only the processes and practices by which open source produsage can work, but also persistent tensions in relation to industrial modes of production. Through interviews with the makers of the game, we can see how the new collaborative enfranchisement supported by wikinomics and produsage nevertheless sustains industrial claims to proprietary ownership and ideologies of centralized creative authority over collectively used cultural resources. Even as the decentralized creative labor of produsage challenges industrial licensing models, corporate authority persists as a contested battleground where ownership of and right to use culture are negotiated. While engaged in socially networked creativity from outside industrial structures and labor fantasies, produsers of projects like *Diaspora* nevertheless continued to imagine and make sense of their labor in terms of identification with institutions they would have otherwise challenged.

Unlike "Join the Fight," the amateur, fan-produced *Battlestar* game *Diaspora* operated (and continues to operate, as of this writing) in direct opposition to the legal structures, hierarchical industrial relations, and creative limitations imposed by licensing contracts and Terms of Service. As an unauthorized game mod or "total conversion," *Diaspora* aimed to modify the 1999 flight simulator *FreeSpace 2*, using its code as a basis for an entirely new, freeware *Battlestar* game. The origins of *Diaspora* can be traced to another unauthorized *Battlestar* game called *Beyond the Red Line*, the production of which began in 2007. Though incomplete, the *Beyond the Red Line* demo offered a fully playable version of *FreeSpace 2* modified to reflect the look and feel of piloting one of *Battlestar*'s Viper fighter craft. While *FreeSpace* developer Volition released the game's source code for consumer modification in 2002, the collaborative alteration of that code to produce a *Battlestar* game defied the licensing arrangements at the heart of industrial television/game franchising. Corporate game publisher Sierra Entertainment paid for the right to make a casual space shooter game based on the *Battlestar* property in 2007, for example, and Bigpoint similarly launched a licensed massively multiplayer online game commercially in 2011. *Beyond the Red Line* and *Diaspora* therefore violated the rights reserved by NBC-Universal to govern how, when, and by whom *Battlestar* video games would be produced.

The original *Beyond the Red Line* demo attracted significant attention not just from the gaming press, but also from publications like *Popular Science*.[78] The game was later voted 2007's "Mod of the Year" by users of Mod Database.[79] In garnering that attention, however, tensions between industrial licensing and produsers' freeware use of the *Battlestar* property boiled to the surface. In his review for Sierra Entertainment's officially licensed *Battlestar* game, AtomicGamer.com reviewer Jeff Buckland recommended that players try the unofficial *Beyond the Red Line* instead:

> With almost no character or charm and none of the elements that make the show's space battles so exciting, this sad effort will do nothing but alienate and anger fans. . . . If you're really itching for something a little more authentic, then take a look at Beyond the Red Line. . . . Even the demo is better than the full version of this game.[80]

By suggesting that players embrace the freeware mod and dismissing the value of its licensed counterpart, this review showed how modding might undermine professional industrial economies. Recognizing the potential for their work to pose this challenge to industrial franchising, the team responsible for *Beyond the Red Line* began to reframe their labor as commensurate with licensing logic, rather than in opposition to it. To preempt efforts by NBC-Universal to shut down the project, team member Chris Hager stated publicly in 2007:

> Copyright infringement is a very thin line, and we have done our best to stay on the legal side of that line as much as possible. We use originally-built

> models and textures, our own writing, our own music compositions and audio effects; aside from model likenesses, theme, and core plot points, we have taken nothing directly from the show. You may notice that the name of our game is absent the name of the TV Show; this was done for legal reasons, as well as aesthetic.[81]

Engaging with the licensing logics preferred by NBC-Universal, this statement danced perilously around its terms: trademarked model likenesses, themes, and core plot points would hardly be deemed "nothing" by a litigious licensor. Nevertheless, the team's aim was to position itself as a part of the promotional apparatus for *Battlestar*, rather than a creative force outside it, by presenting their modding project as a non-competing entity that on an industrial level provided "free publicity for the show."[82] These amateur developers aimed to extend the legal and cultural line in the sand put forward by NBC-Universal when it granted non-professionals the right to certain trademarked elements of the franchise in contracts like the "Join the Fight" Terms of Service agreement.

This would not be the only moment, however, in which these produsers of the game situated their work within proprietary and industrial ideologies for understanding cultural reproduction. In October 2008, a schism within the *Beyond the Red Line* team produced a second, competing *Battlestar/FreeSpace 2* mod, and *Diaspora* was born. By 2009, *Beyond the Red Line* appeared to have effectively halted production, or at least suffered serious setbacks, due to the loss of talent and resources to *Diaspora*. Former *Beyond the Red Line* team member Hassan "Karajorma" Kazmi, who left to become *Diaspora*'s project lead, only explained that "a mixture of creative differences and disagreements about release schedules" drove the split. Yet even without details about its cause, the consequences of the divorce spoke to the persistence of industrial conceptions of proprietary creativity underpinning its otherwise grassroots production relations. In one particularly detailed blog entry, Kazmi explains how custody of *Beyond the Red Line* assets were determined after the split; modelers on both sides claimed ownership of the files they had created, demanding exclusive access to the use of them. As Kazmi explains, "Diaspora was originally founded on the idea that we wouldn't be using anything from BtRL that wasn't made 100% by members of Diaspora or which we weren't given permission for by the creator."[83] Despite both mods rejecting corporate proprietary control of cultural resources, they paradoxically insisted upon maintaining ownership and creative monopoly over their own production resources. Thus, a de facto system of authorship, ownership, and licensing emerged to limit open collaboration in the produsage networks of freeware *Battlestar* games, where single owners could govern the use of discrete 3D models, textures, and music.

While supporting proprietary claims at a micro level, *Diaspora* nevertheless suggested greater openness, collaboration, and shared authorship on the macro level of the whole project. According to the project website, the *Diaspora* team was comprised of more than two dozen volunteers, each with specialized talents including but not limited to: 3D modeling and texturing; coding and scripting to modify the capabilities of *FreeSpace2*; music composition; and “fredding” (the design of mission scenarios with the *FreeSpace 2* Editor, or “FRED”).[84] Despite these vast skill sets and backgrounds, production operated according to a relatively democratic process. Even as project lead, Kazmi claimed he was “not interested in setting up any kind of complex management structure for the team.”[85] Creative decisions for *Diaspora* circa 2009 were made largely by collective vote, quite unlike the authority-driven industrial production of *Battlestar* in the televisual and officially licensed incarnations discussed in chapter 3, but also unlike *Star Trek: Dominion War*, a similar total conversion of *StarCraft* from 1998 that had organized amateur labor along far more hierarchical lines.[86] Moreover, since choice of storyline would drive production at all levels (determining what models, sounds, and gameplay mechanics were needed), Kazmi and the other developers decided against leaving story decision to a dedicated and authoritative writing staff. Instead, modelers, coders, and fredders alike would be invited to develop the narrative collectively: “we were allowed to pick apart each others ideas and say what we liked and didn’t like about them as well as what would and wouldn’t work.”[87] After such collective deliberation, the group decided to craft a new storyline called “Shattered Armistice” that would take place concurrently with the events seen in the 2003 television miniseries, but reframing those events from the perspective of the Battlestar *Theseus*—newly imagined by the *Diaspora* team—rather than the familiar Battlestar *Galactica*.

In this desire to steer clear of *Galactica*, however, the *Diaspora* team again embraced industrial models of collaborative but proprietary cultural production. In negotiating the narrative history of the franchise, *Diaspora* developers deferred to the privilege and authority of television producers in a manner strikingly similar to industrially subordinated licensed producers. As Kazmi related his social network’s creativity to the wider structures of franchising:

> Our general philosophy is to try to follow the show’s universe as closely as possible while still making a game that is fun to play. That means that while we aren’t only to show what has already been seen in the show,

> everything we make should hopefully feel like something you could have seen in the show.[88]

In this light, the collective decision to avoid using the familiar *Galactica* in "Shattered Armistice" can be seen less as an attempt to diverge creatively from industrial uses of the property and more as a strategic move to stake out less contested ground in respect of industrial creative monopolies. With the fourth and final *Battlestar* television season still unaired in 2009, Kazmi further explained that the first release of *Diaspora* would be "set during the fall of the Colonies precisely because it made it harder for Season 4 to make the entire thing contradict canon. In addition it is a great setting with a lot going on to make stories about but very little actually seen or even talked about on camera."[89] So despite the production of the game depending on internal rejection of NBC-Universal's centralized, industrial monopoly over use of creative and narrative resources, *Diaspora* respected the proprietary claims of industry that could be framed in the creative terms of authorship, behaving much as any official licensee in their creative practice. This deference did not, however, extend to all industrial productions sharing *Battlestar* resources or to other de facto consumer-licensees. Kazmi explained that "when it comes to everyone else, well we have enough trouble not falling down [our] own plot holes without dumping everyone else's on us." Kazmi added that disregard for other industrial and amateur licensees alike "doesn't mean we don't respect the other BSG games and mods out there. They're trying to do the same thing we are after all."[90] In recognizing this parallelism, the developers' deference to centralized authorship need not be seen as a blind loyalty to

Rendering of the Battlestar *Theseus* as imagined and designed by the *Diaspora* team.

corporate authorship, but perhaps more significantly as negotiated recognition of competing claims to creativity within the wider network of collaborative relations constituting the *Battlestar* franchise. With the creative labor of these decentralized production cultures offering competing narrative possibilities in a context that privileges canonicity, the embrace of a more centralized creative authority shored up satellite claims to creative legitimacy.

The compatibility between the claims to creative identity made by *Diaspora* and industrial models of franchising therefore allowed for a reintegration of their production practices within institutional labor exchanges, despite prior rejection of corporate licensing structures. By 2010, members of the *Diaspora* team had become sub-contractors in the production of the officially licensed *Battlestar Galactica Online* produced by Bigpoint. In a post to the *Diaspora* blog following Bigpoint beta release in February 2011, *Diaspora* team member "Lt.Cannonfodder" positioned the professional and amateur projects as non-competitive, affirming that "[t]he Diaspora team have never considered Bigpoint's game a rival to ours. Both games have very different styles and therefore are aimed at fairly different markets." That sense of non-enmity and market territoriality, he added, had supported a new spirit of collaboration. Lt.Cannonfodder confessed that Bigpoint had approached the *Diaspora* team several months earlier with a proposition: "they were interested in hiring freelance 3D artists to make models for them. And where might you go if you were looking for 3D artists familiar with making game models for a Battlestar Galactica based game?"[91] As Hector Postigo explains, in addition to offering a creative outlet and means of social belonging, gamers have often considered modding as an entry into future industry work.[92] In this case, unauthorized participation and use of franchise resources similarly created a pathway into licensed spheres of production within the franchising of *Battlestar*. Yet the disjuncture between this officially sanctioned collaboration and *Diaspora*'s basic challenge to the industrial monopolies of franchising necessitated further identification with proprietary models of production and industrial authority over them. Team member "Shade" explained that they had signed non-disclosure agreements and relinquished any claim over that for-hire work, meaning that the 3D models created for Bigpoint were "theirs and theirs alone."[93] When this admission created perception among forum readers that this for-hire work may have further delayed production of *Diaspora*, team member "Newman" managed the situation by explaining that differences in polygon count would have made the Bigpoint models unusable in any event, but that the mod artists might be able to create separate versions inspired by this for-hire work. "Who said we were giving up on *Diaspora*?" he asked incredulously, as the collaboration between produsage and industry had clearly called into question the persistence of producsed opposition to proprietary cultural production.[94]

So, despite initial rejection of the licensing structures governing proprietary corporate claims to cultural reproduction, unauthorized projects like *Diaspora* engaged unpaid produsers in the work of creative production by offering decentralized creative subject positions nevertheless subordinated to industrial authority and uneasily incorporated into commercial labor structures. Though *Diaspora* appropriated and used *Battlestar* without license, the produsage-based labor processes animating it could become a contested part of industrial franchising, not a radical or revolutionary mode of production in opposition to it. Thus, the creative subjectivities and identifications of these socially networked team members had to be formed in respectful negotiation of industrial power relations. Projects like *Diaspora* call attention to the continuous relationship between industrial production of culture and the networked organization of cultural production emerging in the context of convergence. Both the labor of play and the labor of producing play need to be conceptualized in terms of a subjective consent to and meaningful participation in industrial hegemonies.

Conclusion

To call consumers enfranchised collaborators in the context of digital and social media production, therefore, becomes a far more contradictory and ambivalent proposition than it might first appear. The open, collaborative production networks made possible in the digital economy do not always stand in opposition to traditional industrial models, but have frequently been incorporated within corporate strategy—not just as free labor, but through the ideological persistence of proprietary ownership and centralized authority over culture within socially networked labor patterns. Produsage and wikinomics are not complete breaks from earlier models of production, instead often recombined extensions of them. Of course, one could certainly argue that in compatibility with franchising, projects like *Diaspora* are not, strictly speaking, true evidence of produsage, too far down Bruns' continuum toward industry and existing more as a vehicle for publicity much like "Join the Fight," "The Lost Experience," or "Dunder Mifflin Infinity." If that is the case, however, we might want to consider the degree to which the possibilities of true produsage are utopian chimera difficult to realize in a cultural economy still driven by capital, ownership, and authority. As we have seen here, the participation of end users in the production relations of franchising encourages consumers to adopt pleasurable subjectivities of play that obscure the economics and power relations underpinning that collaboration. At the same, this gamification of participation has also asked consumer collaborators to pleasurably identify with their status as laborers and consent to corporate authority in a hegemonic context of play. Even collaborative consumer labor organized outside of industrial parameters has involved internalization of proprietary logics and creative identities that frame cultural production as labor on behalf of the media institutions (whose hold on the cultural reproduction of media franchising that collaborative use might otherwise challenge).

In embodying contradictions between participatory agency and hegemonic corporatized labor, digitally enabled consumer enfranchisement might also reveal similarly dynamic tensions throughout the professionalized contexts of production traced elsewhere in this book. While franchising has depended on conventional intellectual property regulations and corporate ownership, it has simultaneously offered a de facto commons in which producers enter into relations of production as users of shared resources, making meaning of their positions within those social networks, and using those shared resources to produce differentiated content in negotiation of these creative and economic conditions. Professional producers, just like de facto consumer franchisees, are equally industrial users, and thinking about consumer collaboration helps us to see the tensions in professional collaboration as well. Franchising must be at once understood through the subjectivities and meaningful use of production culture at the same time as it is understood through the industrial structures of ownership and corporate control. In extending this paradox of socially networked production to the playful labor of consumers (and perhaps calling it into greater relief), digital culture sustains the industrial subjectivities, relations, and structures that have historically defined media franchising as a struggle over creative use across wide networks of cultural production. These factors make franchising a particularly valuable tool for making sense of digital and social media in the years to come, calling attention to the relationship between networked production of culture and industry cultures of production. Franchising, ultimately, might be defined as that which industrially structures, organizes, and imagines shared, networked use of culture, not in opposition to but inclusive of produsage and other new creative patterns.

In the end, we have to ask not just how end users might occupy the spaces of cultural production once controlled by media industry, but also how those media industries might occupy the spaces of play and creative labor in which users participate. Enfranchisement, collaboration, and gamification raise important questions about the possibility of subversion in environments where active and interactive participation have been codified. In asking these questions, we can return to critical studies of collaboration in its political dimensions, or even just those suggested by popular narratives of cultural struggle. For characters like Felix Gaeta of *Battlestar Galactica*, or looking back further, Louis Renault of *Casablanca*, status as a "collaborator" means they have an adopted consensual subject position within an oppressive power structure. Whether for Renault's seeming selfishness, or Gaeta's idealism, both decide to materially participate in the rule of the dominant political regime. And while collaboration is perceived in opposition to "the resistance," both characters reveal the negotiated nature of collaboration, in that both, once disillusioned, open up spaces and provide tools for others to challenge the rules of an occupied social order. There *is* something to be said for the cultural collaboration of media franchising, in that end user consumers and other participants in the networked relations of production bend and shape the reproduction of culture in heterogeneous ways in spite of the corporatized control of cultural resources. But as collaboration, the creative relations of media franchising typically work in service of an undemocratic cultural regime in which power is hoarded. It is at the point where collaboration stops, however, that new alternatives might emerge.

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Conclusion

Future Exchanges and Iterations

No longer just a soda company, but a massive corporate conglomerate, soft drink giant PepsiCo sought to reinvigorate its restaurant franchising in 1995. PepsiCo owned the Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and Kentucky Fried Chicken brands, yet their combined $18.5 billion annual share of the global fast food market left the company in second position behind the $26 billion McDonald's.[1] In a bid to cut into that market share, PepsiCo Vice Chairman Roger Enrico developed a new strategy to leverage the power of his multiple franchise brands: instead of continuing to invest in single franchises, why not combine them into one shared mega-franchise? By May of that year, Enrico promised to open 50 new co-branded outlets that could offer products from across all three franchises (a number eventually increased to four with Long John Silver's added to the franchise network). Whereas PepsiCo had previously overseen a multiplicity of franchises that put independent operators in local markets into relationships with their trademarks, Enrico proposed a new arrangement in which those networks were to be further combined, with trademarks shared, commingled, and exchanged on an even greater scale.

As this book has argued, media franchising extended this logic of industrial connectivity, not merely offering iconic brands across multiple markets, but also formalizing collaborative production across boundaries of market, production culture, and institutional identity to reproduce culture over time and across media sectors. Just as retail industries sought to consolidate their franchising—to further network their commercial networks—media firms too have recently turned to co-branding strategies to push the logic of franchising forward. During the *Beast Wars* iteration of *Transformers* in 1998, for example, Hasbro Toys acquired the license to Scholastic Entertainment's series of science fiction novels, *Animorphs*, incorporating its shape-changing animal characters into the existing *Transformers* line to bring the production of two franchises together.[2] A decade later, this co-branding logic extended to several of the most high-profile intellectual properties in the entertainment industries. Hasbro introduced a new *Transformers: Crossovers* sub-brand that reimagined characters from both Marvel Comics and the *Star Wars* franchise as shape-changing robots. Furthermore, *Hobby Japan* magazine hinted in September 2008 at a similar partnership in development with Disney, teasing readers with the silhouette of a Transformer with the unmistakable ears of Mickey Mouse.[3] As a master of franchising in its own right, Disney had previously embraced such co-franchising with other partners as a means of generating further iterations of its cultural products. In video game series like *Kingdom Hearts*, characters like Mickey interacted with those from Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* franchise, similarly demonstrating that the future of franchising could lay in collisions and exchanges between previously distinct sets of branded cultural resources.

One of the biggest success stories for co-franchising may be the network of industrial partnerships surrounding Lego building blocks in both the toy and video game markets. The Lego Company began developing a network of franchised production around its toys with video game titles like *Lego Island* in 1997 and *Lego Racers* in 1999. Starting in 1999, Lego also pursued media licensing arrangements that allowed it to participate in the production of culture from media brands in film and comics. The success of Lego building toys produced in conjunction with *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* led to similar production arrangements for *Batman*, *Harry Potter*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Though Lego was the licensee for each of these Hollywood properties, the company used its limited claim to those resources to build a separate video game franchise defined as much by the Lego name and aesthetic as by the media license. Partnering with TT Games, Lego had by 2011 developed sub-licensed video games including *Lego Star Wars*, *Lego Batman*, *Lego Indiana Jones*, *Lego Harry Potter*, and *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean*. In 2009, the franchising of Lego extended to other video game franchises as well, as its partnership with TT Games grew to include Harmonix, the developer responsible for the *Rock Band* game series (and an MTV Games subsidiary at the time). *Lego Rock Band* did more than unite two franchises; it situated four or more production entities within a much wider network of cultural reproduction and exchange across toys, games, and music.

Harmonix's management of its own *Rock Band* franchise, too, suggested an acceleration of industrial collisions and exchanges in the 2000s, through which the cultural production of franchising was increasingly reimagined in the language of "platforms." *Rock Band* was framed in industrial discourse not as a product or even series of products (witness *Rock Band 2* and *3* in addition to the *Lego* iteration), but instead as a platform for producing, extending, and experiencing an ever-widening range of content. While gaming hardware like the Xbox 360, Wii, and Playstation 3 have previously been considered technological platforms with which to experience content, the developers of *Rock Band* sought to transform its software content into "a new platform for fans to experience their music."[4] Though *Rock Band* discs sold at retail offered a finite list of songs for gamers to play, a growing library of downloadable songs continually renewed, refreshed, and reproduced the game (with each song supporting a microtransaction). While based in software, *Rock Band* became a platform upon which popular songs and musical acts would be reproduced as game culture. Subsequent iterations like *Rock Band: The Beatles* and *Green Day: Rock Band* created both new channels of distribution for music and new sites of production in which those tunes were reproduced as digital-rights-managed content only playable in this branded game form. This production network extended beyond Harmonix producers and professional musicians, moreover, to include amateur musicians. By joining the *Rock Band* Network, amateurs gained access to the tools needed to produce *Rock Band* content themselves and add it to the download library.

If both Lego and *Rock Band* spoke to a future of co-franchising, they suggested merely an acceleration of the same logic by which franchising had long been structured and imagined: collaborative partnerships that put creative users situated across different production cultures into relations of exchange. Media franchising did not develop through the homogeneous, unified reproduction of brands so much as through negotiated processes of production in which a host of industrial actors and their meaningful social identities have collided on a dynamic, global scale. Through these complex collisions and interactions, media franchising helps us to understand commercial culture as dynamic, not static; collaborative, not univocal; innovative as much as repetitive. These qualities do not stand in opposition to capitalist economies, however: it is precisely because of the desire to sustain and leverage production from intellectual property resources over time that strict institutional ownership controls have come to be matched by a competing cultural imperative to share resources creatively in support of open elaboration, collaboration, and localization. The real significance of this collaborative production of culture by the media industries is not that it supersedes or allows us to ignore the structures of corporate ownership and control underpinning these exchanges. Instead, by remaining attuned to the persistence of creative relations, exchanges, and identifications within franchising, we can see how this industrial means of producing and reproducing culture gets its power from the consensual and meaningful participation of producers, laborers, and other users in the system. Franchising has generated difference and heterogeneity in cultural production because that is how hegemonic reproduction of culture works most effectively.

While this book began from a desire to problematize surface-level critiques of media franchising that would dismiss it as too highly homogenized and reflective of monolithic corporate power to be worthy of complex analysis at the level of production, its conclusion could appear to resurrect that critique by reflecting on the cultural hegemony of franchising. Indeed, I should admit that my own perspectives have shifted since this project began years ago. In the midst of an economic downturn in which the inequalities of the distribution of wealth in the United States grow frighteningly starker, economic control of resources and considerations of labor should become increasingly paramount to any cultural studies work. With ownership of economic capital in the hands of so few, it seems more than prudent to show concern about their control over the relations and exchange of cultural production as well.[5] The difference between my perspective, and those that have previously critiqued and dismissed franchising, is that I have taken the phenomenon seriously in its creative dimensions as well as its economic power. It is the creative culture of franchising—meaningful relations, identifications, and differences—that are so important both to uncovering the greater complexities of this industrial production logic and to critiquing that system properly. Franchising is a way of life within the media industry that shapes and makes sense of creativity, and that makes it far more powerful and complex than structural accounts of corporate dominance of culture allow. By understanding franchising in terms of its cultures of production, we can understand how and why producers, licensees, and users would want to share in and identify as creative through the industrial production of culture rather than imagine other possibilities outside the monopolies of media capital.

In examining the history of media franchising over the second half of the twentieth century until the contemporary moment, and uncovering the economic and creative tensions that have made it meaningful as industrial practice, this book has made five crucial claims. Altogether, these claims allow us to understand franchising as a collaborative logic that—while messy, contested, and always shifting—has supported industrial relations, generated meaningful creative identities, and produced heterogeneous cultural forms amid rationalized repetition in service of industrial hegemonies of cultural reproduction.

First, we can better understand iterative industrial production if we consider the cultural imaginary that has framed it in the terms, metaphors, and meaningful logics of franchising. As chapter 1 suggested, retail industries—which refigured the franchise imaginary from roots in political suffrage into a business relationship between trademark owners and independent operators authorized to use that intellectual property in localized markets—offers conceptual toolkits with which to understand both media partnerships and the discourses by which those relations and exchanges have come to be understood. Simply put, it matters that we imagine media production in the rationalized terms with which we understand McDonald's hamburgers, because that discourse shapes the values and assumptions with which we comprehend cultural production in the media industries, setting (among other things) a cultural context in which producers might negotiate their practice.

Second, this book has understood media franchising as historically reliant on industrial networks of production based in partnerships within and across media sectors and sites of labor. Franchising has depended on the sharing of cultural resources outside the restrictions of ownership or vertical integration. As the examination of *X-Men* demonstrated in chapter 2, content innovators like Marvel Comics functioned more effectively as independent operators in relations with both larger media conglomerates and smaller licenses than when it tried to extend its ownership claims over the whole of production operations. In chapter 4, we saw franchising in instances like *Transformers* as a product of global partnerships managed in accordance with the temporal and spatial specificities of local production contexts. Moreover, as chapters 3 and 5 showed, these production relationships have extended beyond institutionally privileged sites of professional labor. Franchising has drawn relations of production and creative labor between multiple production communities working in diverse, heterogeneous spaces defined equally by conglomeration, licensing, and amateur consumption.

Franchising has thirdly supported and been supported by meaningful creative identities in negotiation of these relations of industrial production. As privileged producers, licensees, and consumers alike have collaborated in the production of culture and shared common resources, they have had to make sense of that socialized creativity in relation to their industrial identities and production communities. The claims to authorial identity made by producers like Ronald D. Moore (and those other producers and communities surrounding him in the production of *Battlestar Galactica*), for example, demonstrated in chapter 3 the positions of meaningful subjectivities within industrial networks that shade how professionals participate in that network as collaborators. Significantly, these meaningful tensions between social production and creative identification align the study of franchising squarely within the study of production cultures laid out by John Caldwell and others—but with a twist.[6] If production studies aim to understand how specific cultures, practices, texts, and discourses create imagined communities of above-the-line and below-the-line labor, franchising adds another dimension by directing our attention to willed affinities (and oppositions of identity) across industrial divisions. Media producers must negotiate shared interests in franchise resources and contested identities as creators in relation to their counterparts in parallel nodes of the network, imagining themselves and their creative communities in relation to one another (if only in opposition). The significance of identity also came to the surface in chapter 5, where consumers, not industry professionals, participated in the collaborative production of franchised culture by adopting the dual subjectivities of players and workers, taking up similarly meaningful positions within the industrial labor patterns of convergence.

Fourth, this project has argued that the repetitive production cycles of media franchising must be understood less in the terms of homogeneity, and more through the generation of difference within that repetition. As *Battlestar* demonstrated, the expression of privileged industrial identities of creativity within franchise networks often required producers to mark their labor as distinct from that of fellow collaborators. Though hired to work with a set of resources for which he had once embraced a fan identity, the professional identity cultivated by Ronald D. Moore depended on imagining his creative work on *Battlestar* as a "reimagining" and making those differences legible. Claim to creative identity, therefore, made distinction paramount over conformity. On the level of marketing and economic interest in such intellectual properties, too, difference has served another key function. In chapter 4, we saw that the transnationally collaborative process of exchange surrounding the management of *Transformers* extended from local variations that fed back into a larger system of shared cultural resources and afforded a dynamic adaptability across localities and changing markets. The extension of production relations to audiences discussed in chapter 5 could be similarly framed as an attempt to outsource that reiteration of difference to external sites of labor in moments of industrial uncertainty tied to emerging technology, shifting markets, and new social relationships with media. Without discrete and decentralized markets to produce variations, the generative power of franchising as a means of cultural production and reproduction would remain limited across each of these instances.

Fifth, despite the partnerships, meaningful identities, and the heterogeneous cultural productions they have supported, the collaborative networks constituting media franchising have been persistently structured by hegemonies of cultural power. To be clear, the collaborative partnerships implied by the franchise system were not democratic collectivities, and my attempt here to identify heterogeneity and difference within these networked relationships should not be considered evidence of utopian forms of cultural production hidden within the machinations of industry. Even when dispersed through a collaborative network in ways that complicate top-down industrial hierarchies, power still matters. In chapter 3, for example, the institutional positions and privileges from which producers entered into the collaborative networks of production surrounding *Battlestar Galactica* and *Star Trek* shaped and often limited how creators could use those resources. The status accorded to creators in one industry over another impacted the degree to which different creators and production communities could imagine themselves through and lay claim to creative identity in relation to authorship discourses within franchised media production. Creative collaboration required the negotiation of both institutional and cultural imbalances of power within the production network. Similarly, chapter 5 argued that while consumers invited into franchising relations as co-creative participants gained agency, autonomy, and even recognition as de facto producers, their creative labor operated through meaningful play and other subjectivities that subordinated their work to the needs and authority of industry. Chapter 4, furthermore, suggested that it is by incorporating difference from across these diverse localities and temporalities of production that media franchising has proven able to build empires of sustained media production. As a result, media franchising is nothing if not a site for the operation of industrial power. The intervention of this book has thus been to point out the complex, cultural means by which that power operates—quite opposite from the more simplistic claims of branded homogeneity that usually accompany discussions of franchising.

From these conclusions, I have offered here a theoretical and historical intervention that redefines franchising as a model for making sense of collaborative production in media culture, problematizing the tendency to consider this socially networked media production solely in terms of contemporary convergence culture and challenging the assumption that socialized creative collaboration necessarily defies the labor hierarchies and power structures of industry. By directing attention to the history of media franchising as the meaningful organization of production relations across a multiplicity of creative contexts, we can instead situate today's emerging social media within a wider tradition of collaborative and socially networked culture. Yochai Benkler and others have identified in contemporary media the emergence of a networked information economy (NIE), where users connected to one another through digital networks enjoy democratic, participatory roles in the decentralized production of culture. The promise of social networks, Benkler argues, derives at least from the decentered possibilities for authoring and consuming culture. The networked information economy both enables and requires the production of multiplicity from shared systems and resources:

> To flourish, a NIE rich in social production practices requires a core common infrastructure, a set of resources necessary for information production and exchange that are open for all to use. This requires physical, logical, and content resources from which to make new statements, encode them for communication, and then render and receive them. At present, those resources are available through a mixture of legal and illegal, planned and unplanned sources.[7]

By no means do I imply that the social networking of the networked information economy described by Benkler can be directly mapped onto the historical and industrial franchising networks of *X-Men*, *Transformers*, or *Battlestar Galactica*—or vice versa. Benkler identifies a bottom-up, non-market mode of decentralized social organization and cultural production opposed to the top-down industrial economy that dominated until the end of the twentieth century. Franchising, no doubt, arose out of the latter. Nevertheless, this project has demonstrated franchising to be a market-based form of socially networked creative collaboration in which content resources have been historically shared—both through formal licensing contracts between commercial partners and more informal relations and exchanges inclusive of consumer labor. Historically, franchising evinced a different kind of collaborative network, but still one in which relations and exchanges of common production resources sat in tension with industrial structures and the hegemony of capital. The social networks of franchising were and continue to be sites of exchange across media platforms, entertainment industries, creative labor, and localized cultures in a global context. As a nexus for the collision of business, creativity, work, play, and cultural imagination, we can expect that this continued exchange will multiply both the resources with which to reproduce culture and cultural negotiation and struggle over that process of reproduction.

Furthermore, the study of media franchising encourages us to broaden the scope of analysis for the socialized production and consumption of culture beyond digital formations. To limit our understanding of networked cultural production to that made possible by contemporary social networking media like the Internet is to succumb to a fetish for new technology that ignores a wider history of creative collaboration. Instead, in recognizing the kinds of cultural collaborations and networks of production media franchising has sustained over time, it is possible to situate the current age of convergence within an industrial tradition of reproducing culture out of commons exchange (rather than conceiving convergence as something that introduces commons creativity in opposition to industry). From its licensed iterations to its current incorporation of consumers into production relations as de facto franchisees, media franchising can be used to trace a history of networked collaboration and negotiation of shared resources. As a result, rather than celebrating these new media experiences as emancipatory, we can consider this enfranchisement in a more ambivalent and critical light.

Ultimately, this book has pondered a topic usually considered too culturally frivolous for examination in the terms of creativity and too obviously industrialized to warrant more than a structural critique. In opposition to both these assumptions, it has argued that the power of franchising over the industrialized reproduction of popular culture has hinged on creative collaboration as a means of imagining media production, organizing labor relations, generating heterogeneity, and making participation in industrial production culturally meaningful. However, this perspective should not be considered the definitive word on media franchising. Much more work will be necessary to understand a formation of business and culture that has shaped the media industries for decades and appears poised to continue reinventing culture through creative collaboration for some time to come. The franchise is a historical issue, a contemporary concern, and a question for the future. In continuing to make franchising a subject of scholarly inquiry, there remains fertile ground to explore where this has only scratched the surface. The global formatting of television franchises such as *Law & Order*—sustained for more than two decades not just through spin-offs like *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* in the United States, but also transnationally through original productions such as *Law & Order: UK*—begs for far more attention, for example, than it has been afforded here.

In addition, while franchising has been made culturally meaningful and industrially valuable through the terms of gender and sexuality explored in chapter 1, there is still much ground to cover in examining how the hegemonic cultural production of media franchising simultaneously reproduces and is reproduced by hierarchies of social identity. Considered as a franchise, Oprah Winfrey's media empire might suggest not just an array of different lifestyle products and personalities aimed at specific audience niches, but a nexus of cultural production marked by and made meaningful through gender and race. In the case of *Rainbow Brite*, a property targeted at young girls in the 1980s and recently reimagined for the twenty-first century, media franchising appears tied to the reproduction but also reiteration of age and gender norms, as the once rounded, cherub-faced character became

The reiteration of gender in the 2009 reproduction of *Rainbow Brite*.

reformulated as a slender and sexualized tween.[8] Such intriguing possibilities mark the regulation and reproduction of identity as a productive angle from which to sustain the examination of franchising. Furthermore, as the connections between age, sexuality, and gender suggest in the *Rainbow Brite* example, intersectional interrogations of how media franchising is raced, classed, sexed, and otherwise situated within social hierarchies would prove even more fruitful. Any such study, however, would be well supported by a strong theoretical model that captures the cultural and industrial complexities of franchising as a meaningfully collaborative formation of production relations and creative exchanges.

My hope is that this intervention into the study of media franchising can facilitate these kinds of understandings in the future. Given the multiple creative and economic territories that franchising has brought into contested collision over the past several decades, the careful study of it suggests a possibility for similarly sustained, generative collisions of theoretical perspectives and research questions. Just as the platforms of media franchising put multiple media workers into productive relations with one another, media studies might do well to use the study of franchising as a platform for productive, iterative exchange of ideas. Together, this work can offer insight into how creativity, power, and identity shape the collaborative production of culture within the media industries.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 2

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CONCLUSION

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