MEDIA FRANCHISING

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.