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Television's new engines

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization is a key to the success of television formats. In order to understand format trade it is necessary to draw out distinctions between formats and genre. Engines—innovations in programming engineered by format devisors—allow formats to regenerate and hybridize across genres. The core principle of formats, however, is the practice of franchising. Causal relations can be established between formats, engines and the tradability of television culture. The article shows how formats have impacted upon platforms, markets, labor, audiences and distribution of TV content.

Introduction

Television is more imitative and more derivative than ever before. However, is this bad or good? Does it erase cultural diversity or does it stimulate new forms of production? From a distance program formats look similar from country to country and this similarity perpetuates suspicions of homogeneity. News and current affairs programs adopt comparable presentational styles. Television soap operas and sit-coms recycle narratives of everyday life while global and domestic celebrities are spliced into chat shows. Quality dramas feature crime and punishment (police and villains) and decay, disaster and death (hospitals and life-saving operations). Sports programs service predominantly male constituencies. Programming genres follow conventions that have been successful since the formative years of television. Ted Magder writes that 'The day to day business of TV runs on habit not on hits, making shows that are marginally better than other offerings at the same time' (2004, 143). However, beyond obvious similarities program ideas are now more diverse across nations.

A deepening of international trade in television programs has contributed positively to diversity. In many countries in Asia the televisual landscape is more multi-cultural and cross-cultural than a decade ago. Trade has increased due to political and industrial factors—including lowering of national protectionism and expansion of networks of production (including joint ventures and co-productions). Several accounts have recently described receptiveness within Asia to regional flows of culture (Iwabuchi et al 2004; Moran and Keane 2004; Erni and Chua 2005). However, there is another important factor that has contributed to change. This is the role played by television formats and particularly television formats' new *engines*. By the latter term we refer to innovations that have added value to the television's bottom line at a time when conventional 'finished production' genres have lost audience support due to strong competition from personalized media technologies. These innovations in programming are by now familiar to most viewers. Winners carry off million dollar prizes in quiz shows; productions are situated in exotic locations, contestants use game theory to eliminate opponents; audience votes transform would-be pop stars into celebrities; and ordinary people renovate their bodies, their living spaces and their attitudes.

Internationalization is a key to the success of television formats. Conversely formats have stimulated trade in cultural products across national borders. In the first section we discuss the franchising of culture and draw out some necessary distinctions between format and genre. We then introduce the engines. This leads to establishing causal connections between formats, engines and the tradability of television culture. Finally, we will show how formats have impacted upon platforms, markets, labor, audiences and distribution.

Franchise culture

Travelling from country to country we see familiar products, images and brands. For some déjà-vu comes as a culture shock—it devalues the exotic nature of travel; for others it brings a sense of recognition—Starbucks might appear like a welcoming oasis for many tired travelers. Franchise capitalism reproduces Disneyworld, KFC, Shangri-

la Hotels, Subways, Burger King, and the Body Shop in the U.K, in Europe and in Asian cities. Franchising is ostensibly about licensing and is usually associated with sporting teams, fast food, and service industries. However, it is also a strategy that is increasingly adopted by television producers who are looking to sell concepts, as well as programs across national borders.

The idea of business franchising is predicated on an arrangement between the owner of a concept (franchisor) who enters into a contract with an independent actor (franchisee) to use a specific model to sell goods of services under the former's trademark. As Karin Fladmoe-Lindquist notes. 'This approach to franchising involves a set of procedures, designs, management approaches, and services that are to be delivered exactly as specified by the franchisor' (2000, 198). In cases where the franchise is taken up in new markets, the challenge is to retain the original image and service of the franchise. Another key ingredient in global franchising is membership of franchisee associations, which act as intermediaries between franchisors and franchisees (203).

Franchising is observed in the international transfer of TV program formats, which is now formalized by international agreements on protocols, even if some of these protocols and processes are from time to time glossed over in the rush to market. Processes include a deliberate generation of value-adding elements (such as the format Bible), format marketing arrangements (industry festivals and markets), licensing protocols, and a form of self-regulation within the industry administered by an industry association—the Formats Recognition and Protection Agency (FRAPA). A program can be reformatted in different territories and the local producer or broadcaster can access a template that has already withstood two rounds of R&D—first to survive development and trialing before broadcasting executives; and secondly further testing before viewing audiences. Recycling successful TV program ideas has taken much of the guesswork out of local television production in many lower cost genres.

The prototype of contemporary TV formats is the 'publishing model', in which production is sub-contracted out to the 'independent sector'. Beginning in the U.S. network television during the 1950s, the in-house (studio) system was re-organized to allow the farming out of production to independent producers whose task it was to provide programming. The independent production momentum occurred much later in Europe but its advent was perhaps more noteworthy. The establishment of channel 4 in the U.K in the early 1980s was the catalyst for change. In Western Europe the privatization of public channels and the licensing of new commercial channels during the 1990s promoted the role of independent producers. It is not altogether co-incident that independent television format production emerged from this region. In East Asia independent production came into its own during the late-1990s. In the previous decade markets in Taiwan, China, and Korea were nationally self-contained and accordingly regulated such that policy-makers maintained control of content. In Hong Kong, domestic programming was produced within TVB and ATV. It has really only been in the past few years that the outsourcing model has come into practice and one of the catalysts for change was the licensing by ATV (Hong Kong) of the TV format *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* In Mainland China independent production companies are a recent occurrence and have moved quickly into making television formats (Keane et al 2006).

The question of why many writers have missed the global significance of formats is puzzling. The practice of framing the audio-visual world through the optic of finished programming fails to take account of the post-Fordist format economy. Hoskins *et al* (2003) have noted that international joint ventures take advantage of 'joint consumption characteristics'. In this model film and TV projects are developed that contain 'attributes' that render—or at least endeavor to render the finished creative product accessible to audiences in more than one national market. Of course, we understand co-production as an important element of international film production. Hoskins *et al* compare co-productions with the alternative model—'go-it-alone domestic production', targeting foreign markets as well as local audiences.

Research premised on the production and export of finished programs, whether 'go-it-alone' or JV productions, usually misses the importance of the franchising mechanism. Hoskins *et al* argue that licensing new versions, including re-making 'reality television' in different countries, loses the dual benefits associated with joint ventures. This is misleading. In fact, formatting is a distinctive form of joint venture and rather than losing cost benefits due to the need to produce a new version, the franchise facilitates production networks, cost savings, transfer of knowledge and the exchange of license fees. Des Freedman (2003) is one of a few writers, apart from Moran (1998) and Moran and Keane (2004), who has acknowledged cost benefits and national advantages accruing from formats. Freedman writes about how the demise of serious British drama in international markets during the late 1990s was offset by a sudden demand for its innovative formats, programs such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and *The Weakest Link*.

Formats, genres and engines

The format is a stage of development in the evolution of television, anticipating and responding to the media post-broadcasting environment of increased market uncertainty. Television formats are a sign of unprecedented change in television—both broadcast and narrowcast. The television industry worldwide has been forced to re-examine what it does, how its audience has drifted, and how it can generate income. One major change has been a shift from thinking of genre production to the practice of formatting. *Genre* and *format* are usually conflated in academic critique. Formats function differently than genres. Genre—an idea drawn from literary theory—is associated with narrative structure; that is, it deals with enclosure of narrative forms within standardized and agreed upon conventions. However, it does not make much sense to talk of trade in television genres. In television today we see an unprecedented degree of change in modes of production, business models, the planning of product life cycles, work flows, and advertising and marketing strategies. These changes are occurring as consumers migrate away from broadcasting to interactive and themed choices. In the past when ‘finished’ genres such as sit-coms or soaps were in need of some refreshing it was more often done by creating a spike—by introducing cameo guest appearances into sit-coms or manufacturing soap opera must-see events such as character weddings or murders.

Of course, audience dispositions have aided and abetted this process of change. Viewers with diminishing loyalty to channels and brand programs regularly cull weaker programs and formats. In the evolutionary struggle for ascendancy in the new media era, the television industry has developed new engines. New formats have allowed a convergence of formerly discreet genres—sporting challenges, celebrity revelations, lifestyle improvement, and drama and detection into new forms. Even, the documentary is made-over, genres such as wildlife and animal shows that were predominantly ‘female’ have crossed into reality, injecting adventure, novelty and the element of surprise

The most prominent format engine is the maximum pay-load ‘*millionaire dollar prize*’. While quiz shows with large prize pools such as the \$64,000 question (CBS) have been around since the 1950s, the sudden arrival of the international format *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (Celador UK) created a new benchmark for quiz show makers. Quiz shows suddenly became intense experiences. The challenge factor was accentuated to embrace a fantasy: anyone could become a millionaire. *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* was first broadcast in the UK in 1998. It has been licensed in seventy countries and captured the imagination of Japanese audiences in 2000 (Fuji TV). Two versions followed in Singapore in 2001, first in English then in Chinese Mandarin (Media Corp). A Cantonese version was unveiled on Hong Kong’s ATV in May 2001 while other versions followed in India (Star TV), The Philippines (IBC), and Indonesia (RCTI). This global success led to an unlicensed version appearing in China in 2000, entitled *The Dictionary of Happiness (kaixin cidian)* (CCTV) (see Keane et al 2006). Until the arrival of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* large payouts were not permitted on television in China, Japan or South Korea. In Japan the maximum prize for a single contestant remains 2 million yen (USD 17,300) and in China the prize limit is generally set at RMB 20,000 (USD 2,500) per family—although there are variations on this with material prizes offered of greater value. While these amounts might appear insubstantial in comparison other international payouts, there is the proviso in Japan that a maximum prize of 10 million yen can be shared among five team members—the person answering questions and nominated ‘phone-a friend’ team members. In Hong Kong, where there is no limit on prizes, the success of the Celador ‘franchise’ was partly attributed to a yearning for material success in a time where the Asian economic crisis had hit hard. With people losing their hard-earned savings in the crisis the idea of instant wealth created a *Millionaire fever* (see Keane et al 2006).

Within the *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* format we find several additional creative concepts. A format producer we spoke with said, ‘(*Millionaire*) has various engines. One is that they’re giving away a million dollars, a prize we’ve never seen before. Secondly, they’re giving away the answers. Thirdly, you’ve got three lifelines: phone a friend; 50/50; ask the audience. These engines . . . we haven’t seen before in a game show’ (Overett, cited in Adair and Moran 2004, 23). *Giving the answers away* is a key element of *Millionaire*. It allows to audience to play the game from home. It recognizes and exploits the advantages of giving the audience something for free—that is, information. *Gladiatorial elements* are another *Millionaire* concept. Shows such as *The Fear Factor* and *The Weakest Link* have added suspense and excitement. Formats like *The Chair* (CBS) and *The Chamber* (Fox) increased the gladiatorial element of these information challenges to a peak by incorporating shocks, heat and blast of cold air and other devices that were meant to increase the heart rates of contestants. In *The Weakest Link* there is a parallel with lived experience. We see people lose out to contestants who are not necessarily more intelligent or stronger, but who have the just found a way to use the rules of the game to garner votes, whether from fellow contestants or the viewers in their living rooms. Elimination, winner-take-all and the million dollar prize scenario evoke a sense of ultimate contest. The use of pounding heartbeats and the design of flashy sets that reflect computer video games further add to a sense of heightened tension.

Lifelines and second chances, again not a new concept in game shows, were built into *Millionaire* as ‘Phone-a-friend’, ‘50/50’ elimination and ‘ask the audience’. The lifeline engine received further attention in the *Survivor* format in the form of immunity challenges, competitions in which the winner avoids the ballot for elimination. Indeed, the lifeline engine is linked to the *elimination* engine. The most high-profile international models are *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and *The Weakest Link*. While these programs have drawn criticism for being too individualistic and materialistic for Asian and Islamic audiences, they have in turn led to numerous shows utilising the fundamental premise of elimination and dog-eat-dog scenarios. This is the *prisoner’s dilemma*, a gambit that necessitates contestants forming strategic alliances with other players in order to progress in the game. A choice is offered within game theory—to eliminate or keep strong players in the game. In the marketing slogans of *Survivor*, this is outwitting, outplaying and outlasting.

Immunity from being voted out by contestants (*Survivor*) and audience voting (*Idol*, *Big Brother*) are engines that create uncertainty and build tension. These ‘get out of jail’ cards provide options for popular justice and work to best effect where the contestant has developed some kind of empathy with the audience. *Voting off* or popular elimination is probably the mega-engine of reality formats and became the central ingredient of *The Weakest Link*. In their book *Shooting People* Benton and Cohen relate how the voting-off engine originated. The deviser of the *Survive!* concept, Charley Parsons, had experienced considerable difficulty convincing network executives of the benefits of spending large amounts of money developing his idea. It was during a brainstorming meeting in the U.S. that the idea of linking challenges to a process of contestant votes emerged (Brenton and Cohen 2003, 47-48). Voting off also allows television stations to maximize advertising revenue as viewers are kept waiting until the end of the show, or between shows, to find out who bows out and who stays. In addition, the voting engine captures a range of cross platform publicity, including television news, magazines, radio and Internet.

The voting off engine in turn plays off *in-built conflict*, which is often carefully manipulated in the contestant selection stage. The best example of in-built conflict, apart from *Survivor*, is *Wife Swap* (RDF Media), where there are two families, sometimes with different racial or class backgrounds and the aim is to simulate a change in partners. One producer comments on the cross-over of genres in this way: ‘You hybridize by taking something that’s familiar—say, in a straight information show—like renovation, then you add a challenge, then you put a bunch of people together to create conflict. That way you move beyond information, beyond information challenge, into a new form’ (Franken, cited in Adair and Moran 2004, 25).

Exotic or familiar locations are a central ingredient of *Survivor*, which was also the first successful format to utilize the prisoner’s dilemma. *Survivor* has achieved positive branding from its strategy of locating its contestants in ‘hostile’ oriental settings such as Borneo, Thailand, the Pearl Islands and Guatemala, supported by *Survivor*’s own transferable simulated exotic centerpiece, the Tribal Council. However, attempts to localize the format in Asia met with disapproval by audiences. Japanese *Survivor* commenced in April 2002 (Tokyo Broadcasting System) with a great deal of promotional activity, only to struggle with its own survival. In China a copycat version called *Into Shangri-La* was produced in 2002 in the foothills of the Himalayas in Sichuan province. Reality game shows that feature contestants ‘racing around the world’ and performing challenges within financial and time deadlines further develop the engine of exotic and dangerous locations. Celebrity weight loss challenges filmed in places such as Thailand combine the engine of giving away information (about weight loss and holiday locations) with renovation.

The *renovation* engine is a tried and trusted formula. The kinds of programs amenable to formatting differ according to what we might call social environmental factors. For instance, in UK, Europe, US, Australia, and New Zealand viewers are exposed to find a glut of house and garden makeover and rescue programs, even hybrids such as *The Block* (Fremantle Media Australia, 2003) that see elements of reality television combined with ‘do-it-yourself’ advice for renovation. The social landscape of these countries, along with extensive home ownership and promotion of home improvement as a metaphor for success undoubtedly promotes the relative abundance of DIY. An examination of schedules in Australia and New Zealand in any given week during the past few years would find programs with names such as such as *Dream Home*, *Changing Rooms*, *Hot Property*, *Better Homes and Gardens* occupying prominent positions.

By way of contrast, house or apartment makeover programs are less conspicuous in Asia. That is not to say, however, that home or self-improvement doesn’t rate. The fact that many people live in apartment blocks in Asian cities precludes to some extent major makeovers. On the other hand, the ethos of self-improvement is evident in shows such as China Central Television’s *Human Resources*, a program that brings together a group of contestants to compete for an ultimate prize. ‘Borrowed’ from an Argentinean program of the same name, the concept of improvement revolves around the contestants learning the rules of the marketplace so that they can aspire to a better, higher-paying and more satisfying career (Interview with author June 2004). Unlike improvement/ cooking hybrids such as *Jamie’s Kitchen* (Channel 4 U.K.) that attempt to professionalize a short-listed group of long-term unemployed by offering them instructions in how to provide service within a particular industry (the restaurant

industry), *Human Resource*'s participants are all tertiary educated and employed. The winner of the competition walks away with a better job. The ethos of the show, which was broadcast on CCTV's Economic Channel (channel 2), is to provide information about China's changing economic environment in an entertainment format. Likewise, licensed weight-loss contests such as *The Biggest Loser* (NBC) and the copycat *Slim flight* (TVB Hong Kong) engender a sense of striving to achieve socially acceptable norms, while allowing for cosmetic and make-over product placement and advertising.

Engine failure and imitation

Television's new engines generate interest and interactivity. The traditional quiz show has passed away or has been refreshed with interactivity. In the Philippines the mundane quiz show was embellished by a choreographed troupe, the Sex Bomb Dancers, adding a bizarre new dimension to the knowledge acquisition game (Santos 2004). In China the sour demeanor of the Anne Robinson quiz-mistress of *The Weakest Link* was transformed into a smiling and witty MC while still retaining a cutthroat element in the game. Information shows and documentaries—formerly targeted at the 40—55 year audience—have become 'information challenges' through the injection of stronger challenge experiences. In the process, these shows shed their older viewers and tap into the 25—39 demographic. Information challenges have adapted faster and even incorporate renovation. 'Professional only' variety shows blend wild card complexity and amateurism. More than just renovating the look of television, these new species provide a stock of low-cost programming options for networks seeking to reduce the cost per hour of programming. In regions peripheral to the centers of audio-visual production such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines, India, the Middle East, and Korea they are dominant.

However, the format movement brings with it the risk of engine failure, either through getting the ingredients wrong—or through too much or too little imitation. An example of getting the ingredients wrong, while at the same time imitating too closely, occurred in Australia when the Seven Network's *Million Dollar Chance of a Lifetime* was promoted to challenge the Nine Network's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* Eddie Maguire, a Melbourne businessman, president of the Collingwood Football Club, and host of the high-rating *Footy Show*, was chosen to be host of *Millionaire*. McGuire had established a reputation in a short time as a celebrity, both through his high-profile presidency of the most popular football club and through the network's promotion. Almost a month before the launch on 18 April 1999, Nine began a saturation on-air promotion campaign. However, in the week before *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* began its initial two-week nightly season, the Seven Network announced its own launch of a new game show. The program was called *Million Dollar Chance of a Lifetime*. It was licensed from a British producer, Action Time and was hosted by Frank Warwick—a gray-haired schoolmaster-like newsreader. It incidentally began on Wednesday, 14 April, four days before the Celador format. Within four weeks, Seven was forced to pull its million-dollar game show off the air as it was being trounced in the ratings.

However, this ratings competition ensued along with claims of format plagiarism. Depending on your point of view, the two programs were either very like each other or else distinctly different. As their names imply, both offered a total prize of a million dollars. Similarly, contestants on both *Million Dollar* and *Millionaire* were given several 'lifelines' to help answer their questions correctly. Additionally, both groups of contestants were selected by means of similar systems based on telephone registries. Finally, too, the visual styles of the two were generally alike. In point of fact, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and *Million Dollar Chance of a Lifetime* were marked by important engine differences. For example, despite the telephone registry system, the programs selected their contestants in quite different ways. Initially, too, there was disparity between the two in terms of the number of questions that a contestant faced to win the total prize of \$1 million—10 in the case of *Million Dollar* and 15 in the case of *Millionaire*. (This was later reduced to 11.) The 'lifelines' also functioned differently in the two programs. Most importantly, though, the cash value of each question was set in advance with *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, while contestants on *Million Dollar Chance of a Lifetime* had a 'bank' and could wager on each question.

Million Dollar Chance of a Lifetime inevitably suffered the same fate as many local variations on the *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* format. A dominant brand, *Millionaire* has swept the world. Weak local versions appeared in Hong Kong, India and Singapore (Fung 2004; Lim 2004, Thomas and Kumar 2004). In India the sudden popularity of the licensed version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*) spawned copies including Zee TV's *Sawal Dus Crore Ka* and Sony ET's *Chapar Phadke*. However, the only copy of *Millionaire* that managed to compete with the original was one produced in the Tamil language by Sun TV, a South Indian channel (Thomas and Kumar 2004). In Thailand a localized version of *The Weakest Link* (*Kamchad Jud Orn*) was dumped after almost a

year. The Thai version, launched in February 2002, resulted in controversy over its impact on Thai culture and values. The Philippines, however, presents an exceptional case—where the foreign format encountered a strategic opponent. The Filipino *Who Wants to be Millionaire?* was a cheaper version of the original with money saved on sets. Nevertheless, it was effective in winning ratings for the government sequestered Channel 13. ABS-CBN, the dominant network, having felt the tide turn, moved to up the ante with a counter program, *Are You Ready for the Game? (Game Ka Na Ba)*, which drew on many of the key elements of Celador's original such as a modernistic set with visual aids. In addition, the added lure of prizes and jackpots exceeding those of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* allowed the local version to trump the foreign format. The comparative advantage here was that by avoiding paying the significant license fee ABS-CBN was able to shift its production expenses into providing big prizes, a tactic that won the day.

What these examples demonstrate is a tendency to imitate the success of global programs. Formats in particular are 'ready-made' for the insertion of local content. As mentioned in the introduction, innovation in television production has tended to be incremental, while imitation is opportunistic, often adopted as a means to shorten or avoid the costly development stage. Because of a need to keep advertisers happy conservative practices have been the norm in television program development—in comparison with cinema—which is able to take calculated risks and recoups costs through various distribution windows (first release, video rental, cable, and DVD sales). Imitation is common within international franchising as businesses look to piggy-back on the success of market leaders. However, imitation may vary in its intention and effect. Four different meanings can be associated with the practice of imitation in television. The first two have to do with imitation that seeks to reproduce an original as closely as possible. We can refer to this action as one of copying, simulating, reproducing or duplicating. Of course, when such activity is designed to trick or obscure its origins, then we refer to it as counterfeiting. More recently, copyright bodies call it piracy. The point is that such action is designed to follow the original as closely as possible and seem to all intents and purposes as though it is the same. Law courts treat such 'passing off' very seriously. And of course, this kind of imitation is never as perfect as is hoped because multiple elements such as raw materials, technology and human activity inevitably introduce degrees of difference. The other two meanings concern activity that recognizes the inescapability of variation and difference. One form of this 'repetition-with-difference' can be thought of as parody, aping, burlesquing or mimicking the original. However, when a comic or satirical purpose is not present we think of this repetition-with-difference as emulating, following, paralleling, or modeling of the original. This latter idea is the most useful to understand TV formats and the particular business of engines.

Changes in the landscape

New formats have provided producers with a license to experiment with ideas that may be inimical to the legacy of the national culture or the brand of the network. In China for instance, new television formats began to be introduced in 1998 and have subsequently expanded the grammar and the vocabulary of Chinese television, as well as changing the visual appearance. A television industry that was dominated in the 1980s by staid propaganda documentaries and stern newsmagazines is now abundantly provided with reality game shows featuring flashy set designs and hosts that freely ad lib and interact with audiences. Likewise Japanese game and variety formats were localized in South Korea and Taiwan during the 1990s, providing new creative inputs into indigenous production practices.

Multi-channel platforms are providing new outlets for a new generation of producers, hopeful to make their ideas accessible to different audiences, and this in turn creates more scope for formats. Cross-platform delivery has become a means of survival for commercial broadcasters. In contemporary media industries it makes economic sense to re-purpose content across platforms, increasing opportunities to accrue intellectual property rents. DVD and downloads of video from fast broadband connections, already a widespread practice in South Korea and Japan, reinvigorate programming schedules while increasing opportunities for audiences to respond to content. Accessing through broadband allows almost simultaneous qualitative feedback, as opposed to the ratings model of quantifying popularity. The feedback is registered on unofficial, as well as on official program websites. These developments are indicative of a shift in how we understand television.

This institutional shift is matched by another structural change that formatting has brought in its wake. Now, instead of independent producer being the principal source of new programming, the international production industry has been reorganized in such a way as to centralize much of the devising and development work associated with programming. Of course, program ideas and innovations have always been capable of moving beyond their original circumstances. Programs have been imitated, remade, translated and so on since the beginning of broadcasting. However, what is new in the present era is the systematic attention now given to the development and pre-production phase to increase the adaptability of programs in other industries and territories. Indeed, the very idea of production has been

redefined in such a way as to suggest a more elongated series of steps that now not only takes in the actual making of a program but can also involve further trialling including broadcast itself.

The other important element of the franchise movement as it applies to global television production is the relationship of the primary work to its ancillary elements. The global television program is not that difficult to make or emulate—or even improve. However, the value of formats will often reside in ancillaries, more so than pre-formed content like drama and sit-coms. These include CDs, concert revenue, T-shirts, board games, trivia games, and revenue from SMS. The key to maintaining profitably is maintaining control of name, logos, set designs, and catch phrases—the distinctive look and feel of the product. While global media corporations such as Disney and Fox (News Corporation) have been keen to build synergy in their movie business through tie-ins and product placement, they have yet to adopt the television format and its ancillaries as core globalizing strategies, possibly because their business models to date have successfully revolved around selling ancillary merchandise through association with pre-formed content – the Harry Potter model for instance.

Yet another part of the shift associated with the institutional advent of the format trade is the centralization of creativity associated with the devising and development phase of the operation. The development of formats is a form of industrial research and development equivalent in its own way to the work undertaken in concentrated settings by scientists, engineers and others. Production companies' offices and auxiliary settings, most especially the production floor of a television station, become the scientific laboratory or workshop in which systematic aesthetic labor is taking place. Large television companies have been quick to recognize this analogy so that particular labels such as 'the greenhouse' have been set aside as a way of designating these. However, creativity is by no means confined to these settings and there is an obvious opportunity to make cultural contributions to formats throughout the full cycle of their gestation and development.

Added to this, there has been a shift in labor relations implied in the advent of the format business. Earlier, we noted in passing that reality programs do not employ professional actors. As television competes with new interactive 'lean forward' technologies such as video gaming, Internet, SMS etc, many people are less willing to just relax and be entertained: they want to influence television and they want to appear on television. Instead, the form puts ordinary unpaid people in front of the cameras where their behavior is recorded. This represents a major cost-saving benefit in an age of continuously rising above-the-line talent costs. Similarly, format programs based on scripts mostly dispense with the local screenwriter in favor (if at all) of a translator. Equally, too, other labor is also redefined. In reality programs the role of editors is greatly enhanced in scope and importance.

Distribution has also taken on new shades of meaning. Once, the term referred to the organized dispersal of programs licensed for broadcasting. Formatting changes this cycle; now, the process is both reinforced and extended, as in the complex gears of a mountain bike, whereby each broadcast of a format adaptation in another territory or another time becomes part of a snowballing package that is the continuing object of distribution. Hence, the distribution history of a format is likely to be a more complicated and on-going process than that of a finished program available for broadcast. Every broadcast of the latter does nothing to change or alter its physical or aesthetic dimensions. With a format, on the other hand, re-adaptation and rebroadcast adds markedly to its industrial and cultural richness, as well as to its complexity. In the distribution of formats internationally there are categories of value. The most valued market—the 'super A' market is the USA where payment for each episode are highest (as they are for pre-formed programming). A level territories include Germany, Spain and France; B level Portugal, Australia and Scandinavian countries; while C territories are Russia, Poland, and many countries in Asia such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Mainland China remains a D territory, simply because of the low return and high probability of cloning.

Concluding remarks

In this article we have drawn parallels with the practice of franchising and formatting. We have argued that the TV format industry is a calculated response to the challenge of globalization and a consequence of fractured demand for finished programming. It is also a response to technological developments. In this age of (interactive) access and shortened product life-cycles distinctions between producer and audience has muddied. New television formats are instrumental in giving a motley crew of non-professionals a greater role in determining what is ultimately presented for popular viewing consumption. However, as more and more people contribute to the making of content, there is a concomitant increase in the amount of appropriation of existing content through sampling, synthesizing, mixing, cloning and formatting. Notwithstanding continuing debates about a perceived reduction in the quality of programming on offer, new program formats have been instrumental in changing the way that television networks imagine their audience, as well as influencing how audiences use media technologies to participate in shaping outcome. Reality formats such as *Big Brother* (Netherlands/ Endemol) and *Survivor* (Castaway Productions)

challenged the core assumption of professionals that creative ideas are confined to writers, ideas people, and producers.

If we look at the evolution of TV formats during the past two decades we can draw a parallel with *Survivor*. The early formats were mostly game shows that offered a few lucky people a chance to be on television and win prizes—programs such as *Wheel of Fortune* and *The Price is Right*. The arrival of the Celador format *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*—incidentally devised by a medical practitioner in the UK—changed the landscape. By introducing the element of audience participation into a quiz it killed off weaker species, that is they were voted off by viewers. Likewise, information shows about making better gardens, renovating homes, or ideas for vacations became popular because they gave viewers something to take away—tips about how to solve a problem or advice about an inexpensive holiday. The next wave was information challenge shows, including challenge makeovers where a renovation occurs under restrictions of time and budget. While these kinds of shows distanced the traditional audience of documentary and information genres, they attracted the 25 – 39 audiences. Unscripted drama (reality shows) in turn regenerated information challenge shows, introducing the engine of ‘built-in conflict’, and forcing the more conservative makeover genres off mainstream free to air and on to public channels or specialist lifestyle pay TV. In the process the program idea becomes more complex and creative by allowing in more elements. One format producer told us: ‘You hybridize by taking something that’s familiar, say, in an information show like renovation, then you add a challenge, and then you get a bunch of people together to create conflict. That way you move beyond information, beyond information challenge, into a new form’ (Franken cited in Adair and Moran 2003, 25)

The predominance of franchising as a business model, and as a production strategy, is therefore important to understand, and a great deal of speculation is occurring within the television industry as to the ethics of format adaptation, in particular the question of creative ownership of ideas. The television format has come to be viewed as a solution to a creativity deficit. In short, it is easier to copy someone else’s success than to take a risk on a new untested idea. The mindset of copying has become more entrenched in the new era of television as channels proliferate, in turn creating demand for content that can be packaged and re-packaged in themed channels e.g. reality, lifestyle, and drama. The significant dynamic of the present era in television therefore is adaptation, transfer and recycling of content. This tendency is not limited to television but instead is characteristic across many media and related creative or cultural industries.

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