Locally Everywhere
Production Cultures of Localization

Theodor Stojanov

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_____ External to Program
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Dr. Masha Salazkina

_____ Examiner
Dr. Joshua Neves

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Marc Steinberg

Approved by _____
Dr. Masha Salazkina (Graduate Program Director)

_____
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Abstract

Locally Everywhere: Production Cultures of Localization

Theodor Stojanov

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Into the second decade of the 21st century, global media distribution is increasingly defined by platforms. This dissertation examines media localization by looking at three distinct production contexts, and analyses the social role that localizers play in promoting global media content. The localization of global media involves interactions among three key social actors: media companies, exemplified by platforms; governments, represented by policymakers; and finally, the focus of this dissertation, localizers, who function as conduits for channeling content to the general public. Employing a blend of ethnography, interviews, and cultural policy analysis, this study seeks to provide a thicker description of how localizers create a sense of locality, and how they perceive their own roles within broader systems of media circulation.

Each of the three case studies presented in this dissertation represents a distinct subculture within media production. The Quebec dubbing industry and its politics of nation and dialect provides a starting point, as a traditional example of localization. Here, dubbers not only provide translation services but also position themselves as uniquely attuned to the sensitivities of local populations. I then follow with an examination of Indigenous mainstream media producers, and their attempts to broaden their reach to global viewers by "internationalizing" their content. This process is similar to the idea of localization because it also requires careful adaptation of content for its desired audience. The third case study is of fan translators and anime commentators, whose work facilitates the adoption of global anime into local contexts by providing customized promotion. The towering presences of platforms and cultural policies are never too far from the discussion, modulating in powerful ways the work and professional aims of each of these groups.

Through these snapshots, the aim of the dissertation is to highlight the role of localization and its practitioners in creating a sense of the "local" in mediascapes defined by free and unrestricted flows of information.

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It's the credits! Yeah, that's the best part
When the writing ends, and the reading starts (Woohoo!)
You can keep your research, and all that citation
The acknowledgments right here are the main sensation (Woohoo!)
And don't even think about trying to stall,
Or you might miss a name, like Benny, Laura, or Paul!
All incredible names, so let's stay in our seats
And read a credible list of their incredible feats:

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And we're back, and still lovin' the "thanks"
Can't wait to see the one about the person who banks
A project like this, no banking = no thanks
And even better than that is who lends to the banks,
But that's a different conversation, so let's stop shooting blanks.
This thesis right here, I bet you'll never forget it,
Cause once you *read* it then you read it!
Now if you're gonna be featured in my diss'rtation,
The acknowledgements is where you wanna get mention.

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Prologue

Off-script

A condensed vignette of localization at work

Paris, a studio in the Dubbing Brothers post-production complex. The red "recording in progress" light is on. The hallway is lined with French-language posters from recent projects: *Les Banshees d'Inisherin* (*The Banshees of Inisherin*), *Tout partout tout à la fois* (*Everything Everywhere All at Once*), *Alerte Rouge* (*Turning Red*), and *Pinocchio par Guillermo del Toro* (*Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*). The last one is hand-autographed by the director. In the darkness of the recording studio, the audio engineer's face is illuminated by computer screens, her fingers moving over a mixing desk studded with red, yellow, and green lights. "Can we do another take?" she pushes a 'talk-back' button to speak to the actor standing on the other side of the soundproof glass. The control room leads to a heavy, foot-thick door beyond which lies the dubbing stage: a small cinema theatre with one single row of seats at the very back, a microphone in the middle. Next to the microphone is a small desk for the artistic director. The place smells like new furniture, electronics, and coffee. Actress Laura Préjean is recording her lines for the French version of *Ur spår* (*Off Track*, 2022) a Swedish dramedy about a down-and-out single mother who regains control of her life by signing up for a strenuous cross-country skiing event. In this particular scene, the romantic connection between the characters Lisa and Anders reaches heightened intensity, and after a deep conversation, they make out. The dubbing actress Laura, however, is alone in the studio, and will not be sharing the microphone with voice actor Ludovic Baugin, her fictional suitor, for this session. She laughs when the artistic director asks her to recreate the kissing sounds by herself using her own hand. The result is surprisingly intimate and effective.

In Los Angeles that same week, Merritt Hicks as Lisa and Jeffery Lorch as Anders are going through a similar process. At the VSI dubbing studio, *Ur spår* is projected onto a large screen with the English translation streaming across a "rhythmoband" below the action. The text scrolls left to right, letters stretching and contracting in perfect sync with the original speech. The director wants Anders to sound sensitive, but a little macho at the same time. Actors train to read their lines as they scroll across the "sync bar," a line which provides reference for how to time their delivery, but even seasoned professionals need several takes before they get the emotion, timing, and voice just right. An older woman enters the control room a little early for her session. She is dubbing the character Elvira, Lisa's eleven year-old daughter. When she greets the recording engineer in a surprisingly high-pitched, narrow-throated voice, it becomes obvious why she was cast: she specializes in dubbing children. Children rarely dub themselves because most of them lack the skills to read quickly, deliver lines on cue, and control their intonation all at the same time.

Over the next week or so, much the same scene plays out in Germany, Italy, Poland, and Brazil, territories expected to generate the most interest in this "inspiring – bittersweet – Scandinavian – independent – understated – hidden gem" scheduled to release globally on Netflix next month. This is the global machine of localization at work. The potential audience for *Ur spår* is spread around the world, but very little of it speaks Swedish. Localization is necessary. The film is

subtitled in a dozen additional languages which should cover a large portion of global viewers. Languages from Africa, the Indigenous world, most of Asia and Eastern Europe are absent, with the calculated presumption that these populations would be familiar with at least one of the "dominant" languages already available. Hundreds of similar projects are underway on major streaming platforms. Disney, HBO, and Paramount are dusting off their extensive catalogues and re-editing old dubs for contemporary audiences. Prime, Hulu, and Apple are producing and feverishly dubbing fresh new content. Smaller streamers like Crunchyroll and Shudder focus on aggregating and translating genre content, anime and horror respectively. In the streaming platform era, the business of localization has drawn renewed interest in a scramble to reach and hold global audiences.

Vincent Pilon,[1] localization producer based in Quebec, has a theory about the global localization industry that he shares with me while waiting for the voice actors and director to take a break. He informs me that in the 2010s Netflix ran an experiment in Canada. The geographical proximity of Quebec afforded an easy and relatively inexpensive way to test localization strategies on the country's francophone population and talent pool, before expanding their operations worldwide in subsequent years. Initially, the company sought to control all aspects of localization, but this task proved too much to handle even for a tech behemoth like Netflix. Local language policies had interfered, and there had been too many logistics concerns. This is where localization marketers like Pilon intercede to take on a critical role as cultural intermediaries. Our conversation about his professional life is part speculations about the industry, part self-promotion. Having detected my foreign accent, he speaks with deliberate emphasis, perhaps unsure whether my French is good enough to understand him. My presence is somewhat of an oddity, it is unusual to meet a linguistic outsider in the French language localization biz.

Pilon is visiting the Cinélume dubbing studio in Montreal on behalf of the international distributor of *Ur spår*. He is here to make sure that the Canadian French localization is well suited to the sensitivities of audiences everywhere. "Let's give it a local flavour," suggests artistic director Béatrice Duval.[2] She is aware that another French dub of this film is already underway in Paris and wants the Quebec-made one to stand out. "I would like Lisa and Anders to sound more *Montréalais*, while everyone else in the village speaks like they're from the countryside, from Saguenay, what do you think?" Pilon, a French expat living and working in Quebec, is uncomfortable with the idea and reminds the director that the goal of this dub is to have "wide global appeal" for francophones everywhere, not just in Quebec. "Apart from the winter scenes this is a story that can happen anywhere in the world," he advises. The two argue back and forth, but eventually Duval gives in. The production has already been cast with actors proficient in International French, and Quebec's relationship with Netflix is still too tender. Now is not the time to push limits by over-localizing.

A young actress arrives, precisely on time, elegantly dressed for an audition in a white pantsuit. The director was one of her instructors at the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Montréal. She walks right in, past the recording engineer, through the soundproof door, into the dubbing theatre where artistic director, localization producer, and actress embrace and exchange pleasantries. She

[1] *Pseudonym*
[2] Ibid.

is Mireille Poitras,[3] daughter of a renowned Quebec-city theatre owner. Acting is "in her blood," she jokes, as introductions are made. She is here to try for the role of Klara, Lisa's sister-in-law. If all goes well, this will be her first official dubbing credit. As words stream across the screen, she reads the text precisely, but quietly. Getting the tone right takes a while. The director suggests a more mature, darker intonation. After a dozen more takes, no doubt keen to flatter the well-connected newcomer, the director declares the audition a success. Following her departure, there is a scramble to catch up to the original recording schedule and to avoid paying the other actors overtime.

There are several acting schools in Montreal, and all of them include classes on voice acting. Some studios offer their own training sessions for aspiring dubbers. A new fluidity of professional barriers is enthusiastically advertised by the actors' union, the Union des artistes (UDA), which proudly opens its doors to all in the name of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Classes can be taken by anyone and anyone can secure a government loan together with a union membership. Getting a part in what some describe as a "survival" industry is a different matter. In response to the claims of openness, a voice actor of North-African origins tells me privately, "I am constantly told that I won't get an audition without a recommendation, and I won't get a recommendation without some experience, but I need the experience to get the recommendation." A dubbing director clarifies, defensively, that it is not the desire for new voices that is lacking, but proper grooming: "Dubbing is a small but expensive business. We need seasoned actors who can do the work quickly, and it takes time to train a new generation. Some months ago there was a major lawsuit and we have to step carefully. A major distributor accused a local studio of poor quality dubbing, and we have to be very cautious. We don't want to lose friends." The size of the dubbing industry in Quebec shrinks and grows arbitrarily depending on the commentator. This is the classic discrepancy between cultural policy and cultural practice: schools and studios are bankrolled by substantial government grants and celebrate openness and flexibility, but the private industrial sector largely shuts out newcomers unless they are already legitimized by kinship or professional courtesy networks.

On the following day, after the main characters have been dubbed, it is time to add the finishing touches. Patrice Labbé[4] is part of a small troupe of "ambiance" actors called in at the end of dubbing projects to fill in missing lines of dialogue, secondary characters, passers-by, walla, and anything else that might have been left out during the principal recording. Labbé is an actor, language activist, and founder of an informal and currently inactive dubbing actors' guild in Montreal. During its heyday, this association had hosted a dubbing awards ceremony for local actors, but the event attracted undue public attention to what is de facto a restricted industry, and it quickly faded from view. Between takes, he seizes the opportunity to discuss a sensitive issue that has recently touched Quebec's small artistic community. "Did you read in Le Devoir today, all the talk about cultural appropriation in Quebec?" asks Labbé. He is referring to two incidents involving Robert Lepage in which the celebrated director had failed to adequately cast for and represent African-American and Indigenous cultures. "What a controversial time, surrounding two works by Lepage, don't you think? So to respect alterity, what is needed is to call actors from the portrayed community? If that were to be applied to the letter, all of us would have to be fired... 'Go home! Bring in the French-speaking Swedes!' Doesn't our work consists of

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

translating for our community, on behalf of our community, something appropriated from a foreign work? And yet, it is like such blasphemy to say it out loud!" The others laugh nervously, unsure how to react. They are clearly uncomfortable with the comment, but Labbé touches on a very particular, local understanding of the function of dubbing. Local dubbers see *Ur spår* as a "national" film made for Swedish viewers. Their role, consequently, is to modify the foreign work's national character to align with their own cultural sensitivities. In Quebec, dubbers consider themselves cultural insiders who have an authentic relationship with the local public because they belong to it, and are in a unique position to speak on its behalf. Though, ironically, the dubbing accent they choose to speak with is frequently not the local one.

The ambience session offers a front-row seat to a private improv performance. Actors take turns making jokes about the film, inventing alternative storylines, "queering" the soundtrack by dubbing men's voices on women's roles and vice-versa, and generally socializing. The artistic director is good natured, but eventually demands more discipline. Everyone is getting paid union scale, not a small amount for a few hours of work. It is in each actor's interest to cooperate if they wish to be called back. At the end of the session, Labbé passes around a petition he intends to send to the Quebec government, demanding that major streaming platforms who wish to profit from Quebec audiences must localize their content in Quebec.

A week after the project wraps, the Quebec dub of *Ur spår* is summarily shelved by the distributor without explanation. For all of the localization producer's efforts to generate "wide global appeal," the Parisian dub has prevailed as the official French version favoured by Netflix. This state of affairs shrinks opportunities at the local level and forces dubbers to mark their professional territory more aggressively. The same practice is commonplace globally with languages shared by large groups of territorially dispersed populations, such as Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French. It causes a large-scale race to the bottom as studios compete, globally, to gain the favour of platform reps tasked with procuring localization services. Given that the two French dubs of *Ur spår* sound nearly identical even to a francophone viewer, why one is declared "official" and the other not, seems entirely arbitrary. Before long, localization marketers in Quebec learn that damning tales about poor quality and "improper" accents have been planted by parties with vested interests in dominating the industry. Strategic gossip from across continents has real consequences for local professional worlds.

One year earlier, in France, *Ur spår*'s international journey had begun thanks to a chance encounter between a Quebec localization marketer and the film's Swedish distributor. For decades, Yordan "Bai Dano" Nicolov had been a regular visitor to the Cannes film market, where he sold the services of his small Montreal-based French and English dubbing *boîte*[5] Cinélume to international clients. When he stumbled upon *Ur spår*'s producer, he used his connections with Netflix to broker a distribution deal. Each year at Cannes, in Bai Dano's telling, securing new dubbing contracts for films and television shows is akin to a fishing expedition, and every year the fish get smaller. Competition had become more aggressive as an emerging trend of localizing films and television shows in unexpected locations had become more wide-spread. By 2015, French-language content had been successfully dubbed in Israel and Mexico, English content in Singapore and Sweden. This phenomenon could be attributed to the increasing

[5] The French word "boîte," literally, a box, is a colloquial way of referring to a recording studio, or more generally, a small business.

number of educated nomadic expats from post-industrial western countries who sought exotic cultural experiences at a discount, by migrating and settling across continents. There, they would set up temporary shop and act as global media liaisons using their connections, economic resources, and inexpensive local labour. More recently, diasporic residents of western countries had begun returning home with similar intent. Unable to gain entry into established cultural hierarchies in the west, they seek to engage in the global circulation of media products from more advantageous locations that offer better economic opportunities. At Cannes, this is demonstrated by a small but persistent presence of content localized in English originating from Nigeria and Singapore, or French localizations made in Morocco or Algeria. At the smaller kiosks of the Marché du film, Bai Dano recalls, new dubbing competitors usually promote films originally shot in their home countries. A French dub of a Moroccan film produced in Morocco, for instance.[6] As such, they represent no direct threat to the established localization and dubbing industries of France or of Canada, whose main clients are global US distributors, but these smaller players certainly signal that potential.

The localization industries in Canada and France are protected, to a degree, by national cultural policies, which set quotas and recommendations for what percentage of imported content ought to be localized locally. They further ensure their relevance by recruiting celebrity talent, acquiring blockbuster content, and positioning themselves as protectors of the interests of local publics whom they also represent. To seal their dominance, established industry players indulge in various kinds of informal gatekeeping. From deliberately denigrating the competition as substandard, to portraying the work of their rivals as culturally impure, major players in the localization industries regularly enforce notions of "respectability" and "professionalism" which they accuse newcomers of ignoring. As the sites of circulation and exhibition have changed from national broadcasting networks to platforms, a new geography of distribution has emerged, one that opens access to global publics and shuns the provincial concerns of local cultural actors who continue to retain some illusion of a special "local" place in the global mediascape, because of an assumed authentic relationship with local audiences.

[6] Yordan "Bai Dano" Nicolov, founder of Cinélume dubbing studio, interview with the author, 2016, Montreal.

Introduction

This is a thesis about what localization means, where it happens, and who is involved. I employ a diverse range of methodologies including policy analysis, interviews, ethnographic observations, media and cultural analysis, and social theory. Through this interdisciplinary approach, I critically examine the realm of localization work and explore its workworlds. More particularly, the thesis examines cultures and subcultures of localization, where localization is an abstraction establishing of a sense of place. This can be a concrete place, such as Quebec in Chapter 1; or it can be a conceptual, idealized place, such as the Indigenous reserve in Chapter 2; or it can be a projection of a place, such as Japan in the imaginations of western anime fans, the subject of Chapter 3. My project is situated within an expanding body of scholarship emanating from the fields of film and media studies, which employs the tools of ethnography and cultural anthropology to examine the media industries. In recent years, several important authors have applied such methodologies to consider the personal narratives of Hollywood media workers (Curtin & Sanson, 2017), the material realities of global VFX labour (Hye Jean Chung, 2017; Jordie Gowanlock, 2021), or the experiences of creative women professionals involved in the gig economy (Duffy, 2017). In more geographically situated contexts, the work of Vicky Mayer examines the local film economy of New Orleans (2017), while Tejaswini Ganti traces the globalization of the Hindi Film industry into "Bollywood" (2012). The confrontation between local media work and global media distribution has also been productively examined in the context of Indigenous and Māori cultures (Raheja 2013; Hokowhitu & Devadas 2013). These authors suggest that the anxieties surrounding representation and misrepresentation, nation and territory, participation and exclusion from global media flows, are staged anew in the context of the platform economies. My work borrows from their approaches to explore issues of circulation, cultural policy, localism, platformization, and the meaning of locality and localism in global media production.

My analytical task is to make sense of local / localization workers who *work within* the platform economy and make the platform economy *work*, in industries defined by precarious knowledge work, "niche" cultural competencies, social and professional capital, and a self-avowed closeness to audiences. The platform economy, following Marc Steinberg (2022), can be defined as the merger of traditional markets with digital technologies, resulting in digitally mediated transactions that are the principal force shaping contemporary society and culture. The platforms I focus on deal with video streaming, a pivotal facet of media consumption. Streaming platforms are digital services that deliver multimedia content, such as movies, TV shows, music, and live broadcasts, over the internet to users' devices in real-time or on-demand. My work is in conversation with scholars like Amanda Lotz (2021), whose writings explore the transformation of online television in the digital era, Anne Helmond (2015), who traces how the concept of platfromization has emerged from the sea of loosely structured information known as "the Web," and Jean Burgess (2024, in preprint), who investigates media, communications, and audience cultures in the context of platforms. Here, Eli Pariser (2011) and Fenwick McKelvey (2018) contribute valuable insights with their investigations of algorithmic curation of online content. José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal offer a critical addition to the study of platforms by considering their role in shaping social life (2018), and Dal Yong Jin (2019) extends the discussion by pointing out the asymmetrical realities of global media environments, which continue to operate largely under American influence in spite of claims of universal

connectivity. Conversely, Marc Steinberg suggests that the platform is a transnational phenomenon with its own logics and objectives that transcend the national origins of any specific technological implementation (2019). In the case studies I present below, US dominance of the global platform-scape, and particularly its transnational video streaming distribution channels, is indeed a considerable feature in localization work.

Streaming platforms challenge traditional distribution models and have reshaped consumer behaviors and expectations regarding entertainment consumption. Within the seemingly boundless ocean of content available online, I address narrow varieties of "local" cultural production following John T. Caldwell (2008), Vicky Mayer (Mayer et al., 2009), and Miranda Banks (Banks et al., 2016), whose work on production studies is foundational in contemporary research on the media industries. Production studies investigates the cultural practices and belief systems of media workers, sometimes referred to as production culture. With a focus on the workworlds of localization professionals, this thesis contributes to a growing body of work that seeks to demystify the platform economy by going beyond the screen and the interface, to identify the diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts of localization and cultural influence.

Themes

This thesis concerns Canadian audiences, or more accurately, audiences located on Canadian soil, because "Canadians" is only one of the designations local viewers today may use to describe themselves by. The prospective of gaining their attention is what unites the interests of the rather disparate social actors I follow: dubbers, Indigenous creatives, and anime influencers. There are important connections between these three sets of social actors that this thesis brings into focus. In each case, there occurs a cultural conversion about how to domesticate content created for global distribution for a specific subset of local viewership. During the legacy media era, content from across the globe inevitably arrived somewhere "near you," a location physically proximate to the viewer: a local theatre, a neighborhood video store, the TV screen next-door. With platforms, content arrives from a much broader range of places - physically, ideologically, socially, politically, in terms of identity. Yet, in the minds of most locally-based creative producers, as well as in the minds of policymakers, the understanding of belonging is still tied to earlier conceptualizations of land and nation, identity and territory, flag and folklore, native, diasporic, Indigenous. As Athique observes, the idea of community continues to sustain a "long-term obsession with the role of media in maintaining bonds within groups of similar individuals" (2016:9). Chapters one and three discuss dubbing and anime translation as traditional examples of localization and cultural adaptation. In this context, Indigenous content (the focus of chapter two) intended for global viewers can, at a first glance, seem somewhat of an outlier. I argue that Indigenous creatives nonetheless practice a distinct, more subtle form of localization: they use mainstream aesthetics to adapt narratives that are specific to Indigenous context for the "local," non-Indigenous Canadian, or global viewer. If the purpose of localization is to adapt from one context to another on behalf of the audience, then Indigenous content adapted for world audiences ultimately meets that definition. The global consumer can be seen as a situated subject within a specific distribution context defined by the platform economy. Users of streaming platforms worldwide share viewing experiences and a sense of interconnectedness similar to viewers of national networks in previous decades.

Localization generally concerns content intended for international distribution, and the process has been studied from perspectives including translations studies and communications studies. Beneath those lies a less-explored dimension revolving around the concept of locality and local labour, and a culture of localization. This includes not only formal tasks such as translation, subtitling and dubbing, but also extends to functions not immediately thought of as localization, such as the cultural commentary, adaptation, and criticism of foreign works. These additional elements play a crucial role in tailoring content for local audiences and contributing to the overall process of localization. “Locally Everywhere” critically examines the contemporary media experience, exploring the roles of local participants in the production of global media. It challenges the assumption that localization is inherently tied to locality. The thesis explores the desires of local cultural actors to reach global audiences, to participate in the creation of global media experiences, to be cultural translators, while also considering the implications of such aspirations. A small and, by definition, limited-access professional domain, localization professionals, be they dubbers, small local media producers, or online cultural commentators, endeavour to score big on the global stage. By juxtaposing the notions of “local” as “restricted” and “everywhere” as “mass” cultural production, the thesis unravels the complexities of a restricted cultural production that is mass-produced for the platform economy.

The thesis explores two principal theme clusters that emerged as throughlines across the chapters. The first one is related to localization culture and includes questions about where and who produces it, and how locality and localism relate to traditional media distribution paradigms and transnational online platforms. The distribution theme, in turn, explores the complex interplay between the economic and cultural realms of online spaces. It looks into the policies that govern this interplay, wherein are revealed new power imbalances. The distribution section discusses the pivotal role played by industry insiders and influencers in shaping and sustaining the localization trade.

Locally made

In an era where most media experiences occur predominantly online, how can we distinguish a cultural product as local? And how is the localization of a foreign product approached? Is the idea to adapt it to local audiences as if it had been made specifically for them? Or is it an operation that results in a global product of which the locals simply partake? It is more important for that product to be locally produced, or to be circulated within local territory? If we associate the concept of “localization” with linguistic translation, the dubbing industry provides a good entry point to answering these questions. As the opening vignette illustrates, dubbing is an artistic practice that allows local publics to access and understand foreign works. As one of the interlocutors explains, dubbers see themselves as members of the local population, and that cultural belonging is their most valuable economic characteristic. In spite of their claims to the contrary, however, I contend that dubbers and other cultural producers involved in the business of localisation remain a privileged class of cultural producers. To build a genuine relationship with national audiences, imported media offerings are filtered through a number of local cultural intermediaries, where they are assimilated and adapted. A key point I make throughout this dissertation is about the game of belonging, or not, to the targeted audience. The game, or

formula emerging from the social interactions examined in the following pages, is that content distribution wields maximum influence over a population when distribution agents successfully demonstrate an intimate affiliation with their clientele. A notion contested throughout the subsequent chapters is that producing for a specific population implies belonging to it.

The classic aim of localization aesthetics is to adapt original foreign contexts to local ones, *seamlessly*, as if translation or adaptation hadn't taken place at all. The dubbing industry positions itself as the cultural insider who facilitates that seamless connection to local audiences. Chapter one complicates this account by suggesting that localization is not necessarily local. Increasingly, localized content originates across the globe and from a variety of sources. In chapter two, I offer an unorthodox view on localization. I review how Indigenous Canadian media producers adapt specific Indigenous contexts and stories for global audiences. A counterpoint to localization is provided here through the use of familiar storytelling techniques that are recognized, thanks to a long history of global mainstream media circulation, by audiences everywhere. Indigenous creators employ a distinct approach to localization by utilizing mainstream aesthetics to adapt narratives rooted in Indigenous contexts, thus making them accessible to a global audience. The process of localization in the third chapter is accomplished by cultural intermediaries who, like dubbers, position themselves as members of the group they are addressing. In contrast to dubbers, however, the fan localizers in chapter three operate entirely online, where locality is an algorithmic abstraction. Using the idea of localization, this thesis explores the limits of localism. When global telecommunications collapsed geographical distances, as 20th century communications sociologists Armand Mattelart (2000) and Harold Innis (2004) have described, it became inevitable to ponder, "What defines locality?" and "Why does it matter?" Online, the localization industry's objective to render the unfamiliar comprehensible or to adapt the foreign as domestic further confuses our sense of locality. The critical place of locality is central, but frequently muted in discussions of platforms. In its stead, we find social spaces that are linked to symbolic geographies which allow us to navigate multidirectional flows of media artefacts without losing our way. However, a sense of place and a relative identification with physical, geographical locality is where global media meets its human hosts, and nowhere is this more apparent than in places where media is localized.

Meet the locals

While this dissertation's main focus is on *platforms, policies,* and the *people* who localize content, there is an ongoing emphasis on the *publics* whose attention is the ultimate target of the systems I am describing. The market is an important, but not the only consideration in the contemporary mediascape. Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) stress the importance of economic values and corporate interests in their discussion of platform systems. They see influence and attention as means to an end, a transaction which begins with attracting attention and concludes with the purchase of a commodity or a service. In contrast, I suggest that the chain of events describing an economic transaction does not have to be complete. The economies of influence and attention exist independently of the commodities and services market. Luxury brands, for instance, are hugely influential with the majority of the population even if most people can rarely afford to buy them. Name recognition, and the associations that it triggers,

seem to be enough to engage the observer's attention mechanism. I am much more interested in economies of affect, engagement, and influence, than I am in accounting for phenomena solely based on commercial logics. Here, I join scholars like Christian Marazzi (2008) and Jonathan Beller (2003) who suggest that the accumulation of monetary value fades by comparison with the processes of attention capture through screen media. Specifically, I am interested in how publics are imagined, represented, and discussed by cultural producers, policymakers, and platform marketers. This thesis analyzes the mechanisms through which "local" audiences are imagined and produced by the global localization industry.[7]

Chapter one begins by setting up the relationship between the nation state and its public prior to the rise of digital media, when the state wielded sole cultural influence through its traditional channels of mass communication within national space such as print, broadcast, and film. By the end of chapter one, and throughout chapter two, the role of the Canadian State in dictating and enforcing cultural policy appears to transition into an uneasy partnership with the global platform economy. Finally, chapter three outlines a case where cultural influence has passed entirely to the platform, tracing in no uncertain terms the ulterior trajectory of the transition of management authority over the public. To suggest that each of the chapters deals with separate producer and audience segments is to miss the bigger picture that audiences switch freely between different modes of media consumption, from content that aligns with "domestic" concerns, to content that provides "cosmopolitan" novelty. Here, the overriding element is attention. In each case, I describe how attention-management mechanisms, and their human overseers, employ a variety of techniques to "produce" audiences—statistics, segmentation, and regulation—and to coral publics into manageable communities of taste.

Inspired by national cinemas and cultures, there had been a long scholarly tradition that examined reception from the point of view of "resident" or "domestic" audiences, whose paramount interest was reportedly to see and hear themselves represented in the media consumed. In chapter one, a question I use to introduce the discussion of audiences is why dubbing professionals in Quebec do not use the Quebecois accent when localizing content, but choose instead a standardized form of French that is recognized internationally. One of the claims of my thesis is that this refusal of dubbing professionals to replicate their cultural identities in the media that they produce represents a break with expectations. Similarly, in chapter two, Indigenous media producers refuse to perform a direct correspondence between their ethnocultural identities and common expectations. I suggest that in both cases, albeit for

[7] How local audiences are imagined by the mechanisms of global media distribution is a recurring leitmotif in Canadian film and communications scholarship. In the 1980s, Peter Harcourt theorized that Canadian audiences were "absent" from Canadian films, in a way that they are not from imported, or localized ones. The "absent audience" thesis refers to the idea that Canadian films frequently target an audience that is either physically or symbolically not really there; a domestic audience that is difficult to fully define. Conversely, in this thesis I advance the idea that the importers of global media seem to know quite well how to define local audiences, with assistance from the localization industry. For a more thorough discussion about the absent audience thesis and the politics of imagining a local, "national" audience in Canada see Charles Acland's influential chapter, "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience," in *A Passion for Identity: Canadian Studies for the 21st Century*, ed. David Taras and Beverly Rasporich (Toronto, ON, Canada: ITP Nelson, 1997). An excellent introduction to Harcourt's ideas can be found in Harcourt, P., & Dorland, M. (1997). "A Canadian journey: Conversations with time," in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 31(4), 178-194.

different reasons, this refusal is an assertion of sovereignty and cultural autonomy in a global mediascape.

The correspondence between "resident" and "represented" is highly contested. The two signifiers do not overlap along a number of domains: cultural, social, geographical, administrative. In an abstract sense, global viewers can be seen as "resident" as long as they perceive what is seen on-screen, even if representationally extrinsic, as somehow related to their lived experiences. This is the angle Indigenous creators take when they address world publics. Comparable histories associated with imperial colonialism and resource extraction capitalism bring dispersed audiences closer together.[8] The last category of viewer I deal with is the "non-local" or the "nonresident" audience category, most adapted to platform consumption. Viewers in this category are not directly concerned with "resident" representations related to hearing or seeing themselves replicated in the media they consume. Athique points out that nonresident media experiences are in fact the most common outside of the English-speaking world, and consist mostly of imported and localized content (2016). As chapter three shows, the platform economy requires that these media experiences undergo a substantial amount of cultural translation and contextualization, performed by a specialized cadre of freelance influencers who use their positions as both industry and cultural insiders to generate local interest.

In contrast with Athique's situated perspective, which sees audiences in terms of their proximity to a location, cultural anthropologists such as Appadurai (1996, 2013) and Taylor (2004) have theorized that the globalization of media consumption would lead to the emergence of a "global imagination" which would provide viewers with a cultural compass to adequately comprehend their position, and the positions of others, in a global whole. Global media industries, however, do not share this perspective. The way audiences are imagined by the architects of global media circulation is as siloed, hyper-categorized sets of niche viewers. In contemporary multicultural societies, this type of social micromanagement has been the way to manage the "risks" associated with racial, ethnic, and cultural difference. While the "global imagination" may not be an effective way of describing the public at large, it is certainly a way of thinking about how local cultural producers perceive their social relationships, cultural responsibilities, and economic potentials in relation to their place within a global totality. It is these local cultural actors who furnish global media abstractions with the essence of the domestic everyday. It is their versions of the "global imagination" that local audiences ultimately experience. How, then, is local identity performed through dubbing (chapter 1) mainstream Indigenous storytelling (chapter 2) or professionalized fandom (chapter 3)? If the global is imagined, the local is no less contrived. This production of locality is one of the central themes of this dissertation.

Local audiences provide the background context for how production is envisioned by cultural producers and policymakers whose prevailing concern is, ostensibly, to serve the public interest. The objective of policies is to drive specific segments of viewers to specific channels. The next section suggests that policies are sites of struggle where the state confronts the transnational

[8] For a similar argument comparing the media policy contexts of Indigenous cultures in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, see Meadows (1996:253). Meadows questions cultural uniformity within nation-states, and suggests that groups residing within national borders often share more similarities with groups in other countries than they do with other groups within their own country's borders.

corporation, where local creative talent confronts cultural management, and where global marketers confront domestic audiences.

Supranational deglobalization

Over the past thirty years, media theorists have shifted their attention away from the nation state towards transnational circuits of exhibition, multicultural audience formations, and international co-productions (Ďurovičová & Newman 2010, Shohat & Stam 2006, Salazkina 2020). The transnational cinema scholarship these scholars engage with aims to transcend national boundaries, to challenge traditional notions of cinema, and media more generally, as strictly tied to a specific country or culture. This field of study investigates how films circulate globally, reflecting the interconnected nature of our contemporary world. National space, which had dominated media scholarship at the beginning of the 21st century, appeared for a time to have lost its relevance to political, economic, and social models as those readapted to planetary communication systems. The command and control enabled by these systems was part of a longer process which Armand Mattelart described as the collapse of time and space that characterized modernity. He suggested that the "eternal promise" of communications networks was a "better world," because it would be a world united and informed (2000). Yet the certainty of this promised networked world would always be the struggle for its control among the geopolitical powers of the day.

In his significant study of media reception, Adrian Athique observes a similar departure of audiences from national to transnational networks (2016). He outlines how the emergence of mass broadcasting led to the development of new audience formations that no longer relied on the physical proximity of the crowd, as had been the case during the era of print capitalism of the early industrial age, or the religious congregation before that. Beginning with the radio and, in due course, television and cable, the focus of national mass media networks had been the household, categorized by key demographics and timetables. My work follows the continuation of this trajectory by exploring how audiences continue to be segmented into subcategories and ever-narrowing segments of individual viewers in the era of platforms, big data, mobile screens, and on-demand content. As Julie Yujie Chen and Ping Sun persuasively demonstrate, a key feature of platform capitalism is the dynamic assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of people into various configurations, at will (2020). Online, contemporary audiences are entirely made up of fragmented assortments of identity traits and individual tastes. In pre-platform analogue democracies, the building of social connections in the physical world required considerable time, effort, and resources. Modern communication technologies short circuit the process. Platforms, in particular, accelerate and simplify the forming of social groups, the elementary building blocks of society. Whomsoever controls those blocks individually, can reshape society as a whole. That, at least, is how the global economy of attention might imagine its own position.

At the turn of the 21st century, Bloom and Rhodes describe how the economic balance tips from national economies to transnational corporations (2018). If today the nation remains the main reference for most of us to be able to understand geography and politics, it is an inaccurate perception of reality from an economic perspective. This finds most of us living in an illusion about where global power resides. National taxation and regulation models are not sufficient

tools for controlling transnational players, whose interests transcend national interests. In terms of their influence over publics, this reality puts the logos of these companies alongside national flags and coats of arms.

To appreciate how nations and corporations draw their borders differently, consider how media distributors parcel out the world map to account for linguistic zones, distribution zones, and demographic differences. Streaming platforms compete for dominance not only with each-other, but with the nationally-based television broadcasters predating them. The following maps clearly illustrate how platforms have succeeded in consolidating audiences in ways that national broadcasters could never do.[9]

Figure 1: World map of major national TV channels (2023)

Source: public domain

[9] These two maps are intended to give a general idea of global mediascapes at the national and international levels, a fleeting snapshot of a word in continuous flux. In reality, the mediascapes within those territories are much more diverse and offer a vast multitude of sources available besides the main ones pictured here. The way to view these images is to imagine that they depict an idealized form of attention conquest, from the perspectives of national (fig. 1) and global (fig. 2) media corporations.

Figure 2: World map of major transnational streaming services (by number of subscribers, 2023)

Source: visualcapitalist.com, based on data by flixpatrol.com

However, as we can see from the dire wars that continue to rage between nations, flags hanging from windows and flags burned in protest, flags on soldier's uniforms and on social media profiles, the nation-state's demise has been prematurely announced by the transnational interests seeking to replace it, and by idealized projections of an egalitarian and free, better world. The growing collusion between governments and corporations in their renewed efforts to manage populations in the last decades of the 20th and into the 21st centuries had pushed the discourse of nation and border out of view. As Pohle and Thiel suggest, this momentum, which seemed to defy local governance and control, "made the disappearance of the state an immediately plausible scenario" in the 1990s (2020:2). Today, however, as Adrian Athique observes, the only entity that can stand up to the transnational corporation is arguably still the nation (2016:15), and so the question to ask is whether the imagined community of the nation needs to be exposed as imagined and therefore deconstructed, or recognized as imagined, but necessary.[10] Regardless of how we choose to answer the question, the reality of the nation state persists, and within it exists

[10] A recent TED interview entitled "Nationalism vs. globalism: the new political divide" presents a pop-philosophy caricature of this debate, presenting the question in false opposition. The opposite of nationalism can also be described as federalism or multiculturalism, and globalism is best compared to localism rather than nationalism. While it is common to portray globalism as the antidote to nationalism, it is essential to remember that today's globalism more closely resembles extra-legal and antidemocratic corporate totalitarianism. However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of global human rights, women's rights, environmental justice movements, and other transnational efforts that defy this characterization. I highlight the more dire definition because it represents the primary focus and energy in the majority of today's debates.

a myriad of lived experiences ranging from local to translocal ways of being. In this thesis, transnational media scholarship informs my discussion of how various factors such as migration, globalization, and distribution technologies influence the production of locality and the local reception of global media, emphasizing the interplay between global forces and localism.

Directing social traffic

In the 2010s, scholars of transnational media and reception were laying the groundwork for a research framework that would help them understand diverse audiences and global media producers online. Their work would eventually converge into what is referred to as platform studies, offering a productive way of understanding the mechanics and policies guiding how audiences are organized and managed online. The management of diverse populations had become important not only because of the proliferation of transnational media circuits and platforms, but also because of a rapidly changing demographic and cultural terrain, especially in the affluent West. For traditional governing bodies, whose dominion over (what they often imagined to be) predominantly homogenous resident publics during the network broadcasting era had been absolute, the confusion accompanying the management of diverse audiences in a platform economy is experienced as a menace to various forms of heritage: cultural, social, economic. This situation allows anxieties about the perceived declining political and cultural influence of local governments over the public to surface. Cultural policies are a mechanism for responding these anxieties, and will be one focus of this dissertation.

Cultural policies refer to government or institutional actions and measures designed to support, regulate, or shape various aspects of cultural expression in the arts, media, and creative industries. These policies serve as regulatory frameworks that coordinate, among others, interdependencies between the private domain of platforms and broadcasting networks, and the public domain of cultural institutions and heritage organizations, shaping the local dynamics of cultural expression and engagement. I am most interested in what impact cultural policies have on everyday cultural production within the context of platforms. Throughout the thesis, cultural policies are discussed from three perspectives: as social traffic controls, as precursors to algorithms, and in the conclusion of this dissertation, as narratives about future identities.

Economic stand-ins for cultural policies

Cultural policies act as mediators for social relations. Speaking for “the people,” on whose behalf they are appointed, cultural policymakers position themselves between audiences and producers. They attempt to govern media producers’ access to audiences by prescribing what content reaches which consumers. They also engage in regulating the same dynamics between social actors participating in the global circulation of media. In the context of globalization and neoliberalism, cultural policies have both bolstered and compromised various aspects of cultural dynamics. As policies expand from traditional regulatory structures made for the broadcast era to digital platforms, they are no longer concerned solely with local culture. The neoliberal dismantling of extant governance structures necessary to facilitate global movements of capital,

images, and people (Thussu 2007), necessitates a rethinking of local cultural policies as well. How should existing broadcast regulations adapt to platform distribution?

In Canada, cultural policies that motion in the direction of protecting localism within a global economy are known as CanCon, short for "Canadian Content." CanCon policies began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) formally introducing regulations in response to the growing influence of foreign, primarily American, content available to Canadians. Such policies began as instruments aimed at safeguarding and promoting a Canadian cultural identity distinct from competing influences, and key crown corporations carefully defined it in their mandates. However, throughout the chapters in this dissertation, we can detect a long-range narrative shift from cultural identity towards an economic one. When contemporary CanCon regulations require proof that content meets the necessary criteria to quality as local, they look at employment records to ensure that money has changed hands locally. The regulations designed to support and promote Canadian artists, creators, and cultural industries, fall short of describing what the "content" portion of CanCon refers to, allowing an organic and flexible expression of popular desires without traditional forms of governmental top-down supervision. As I discuss in chapter one, this economistic definition is discomforting for political actors with a strong tradition of identity politics such as cultural producers in the province of Quebec.

The major difference between traditional broadcast regulations and regulations that govern platform distribution, however, is not about the regulation of content, but about who gets to control and enforce regulation. For Tusikov and Haggart, the question isn't *whether* CanCon is an effective strategy, it is *who* should be responsible for its implementation: platforms or governments (2021). Which of these would-be enforcers can better reflect the purported desires of the Canadian public: the one who collects all manner of data and has an intimate insight into people's viewing habits and private appetites, or the one who claims to reflect and defend national values and perceived public interests, a somewhat older but still functional paradigm? In the contest between the two, the present moment sees a rolling back of the "global movements of capital, images, and people" I mentioned earlier, in a process that some describe as "deglobalization." Marie Lamensch suggests that deglobalization represents a trend aimed at reasserting state sovereignty and control in a world where the global economy and institutions—which often prioritize American interests despite claiming openness, freedom, accessibility, and universality—are viewed as a threat to local communities and traditional societies, wherever they may be located (2021). However, the contest between legacy media (represented by both public and private national broadcasting networks and their own "mini" platforms) and the "big" platforms owned and operated by transnational media corporations, suggests yet another interpretation. Borrowing from Bulgarian sociologist Ivo Hristov, whose commentary from outside the anglo-american academic sphere gives us an interesting alternative perspective, instead of *nation* against *globalization*, or *local* against *global*, or *globalization* / *deglobalization*, we can also talk about different kinds of globalization.[11] One is the global domination of a single

[11] Ivo Hristov, sociologist at Plovdiv University, Bulgaria, is one those thinkers whose perspectives can productively nuance and de-westernise anglo-american scholarship. However, Bulgarian academics have not fully embraced the academic publishing economy, and publishing in English is not a popular practice. Beyond the borders of the country, their perspectives are accessible only to Bulgarian speakers through recorded interviews and lectures,

national interest, the case with the USA or China, as Samir Saran and Shashank Mattoo discuss in their article "Big Tech vs. Red Tech" (Mattoo and Saran 2022). These authors present two competing telecommunications models and their ideological underpinnings, one located in North America, and the other in China. The kind of globalization they describe is similar to traditional imperialism, in which one country's national values and cultural identity attempt to impose themselves as the norm within its sphere of influence. The other kind globalization, which Hristov refers to as ultra-globalization, reflects the transnational nature of finance capital, for which national borders do not exist. The latter attempts to erode previous forms of group identity formation (based on religion, ethnicity, economic class, or shared histories, for instance) and replace them with fragmented identities that are politically malleable and infinitely reprogrammable. For Hristov, while these two forms of globalization exist in contest with one another, they represent completely incompatible dimensions.

In the context of television broadcasting, chapters one and two show that the Canadian state's initial response to globalization and neoliberalism has been to lean in the direction of economic outcomes, such as safeguarding local employment and attempting to promote local cultural products on the global marketplace. The regulatory and legislative actions that support the local production industries are less frequently motivated by cultural factors. The accent on the *economy* of cultural production is deliberate. It displaces the designation 'national' from the cultural industries in favor of 'domestic' or 'local' because, as Moran's analysis suggests (1996), the underlying assumption policymakers make is that the presence of a production sector in local culture industries is a necessary and sufficient condition for the cultural expression of a population.

Chapter two offers a highly detailed account of the birth of policy. Different stakeholders' concerns are summarized in a general policy proposal that aims to recognize these concerns without making specific commitments. The role of policies as narratives became ever more apparent during my work on this chapter, and influenced my thinking about algorithms throughout the dissertation. Policies aren't just about prescribing future actions; they can also serve as future justifications for actions already taken. One of these is the doctrine of *Continuous Emergence*.

Continuous emergence

Local regulatory frameworks attempt to govern platform technologies, but the two do not evolve at the same pace. Cultural policies systemically lag behind, benefitting private interests. I refer to this as "continuous emergence," a governance perspective suggesting that individuals, organizations, and entire societies find themselves in a perpetual state of trying to keep up with new developments, trends, or advancements instead of anticipating future changes or shaping them. The public's role is, *a priori*, to keep up with the pace of change and innovation that is set in private halls of power. The *continuous emergence* perspective is related to the idea of *regulatory capture* developed by scholars such as Wu (2017) and Nechushtai (2018), as well as to the *just-in-time logics* discussed by Srnicek (2016) and Steinberg (2022). Stenberg challenges

including the source I have used here: pogled.info | Alternative Views with host Simeon Milanov, 2024. *A conversation with Prof. Ivo Hristov*. https://pogled.info/tv/alternativen-pogled/.

assumptions that platforms are an altogether new phenomenon which policymakers are unequipped to understand, and traces deep and ongoing patterns of organisational practices that are technology-agnostic. Continuous emergence is an example of one such organizational practice, and is a perspective consistently adopted by policymakers with respect to current and emerging technologies. Continuous emergence is also related to what McKelvey and Neves refer to as the ongoing optimization of platform users "into recursive systems that operate on the logic of the demo or prototype" (2021:102), finding themselves caught in a perpetual cycle of personal and professional self-improvement, the subject of chapter three in this dissertation.

As critics of the Canadian Streaming Act (Bill C-11) argue, Canadian cultural policies are already inadequately equipped to deal with current social and technological realities, they will be even more vulnerable in the future. In a similarly weak attempt to regulate platforms, European policymakers declared that "It is still too early to to make any qualified judgements regarding how these frameworks will work together in practice, and how concretely they will affect the politics of the platforms" (Valtysson 2022:794-5). Chapter two provides a closer look at the crafting of cultural policies and reveals that, in fact, the older Canadian Broadcasting Act (which the Streaming Act supersedes) had better provisions to defend local interests from the transnational streaming giants than what is currently on the table. Inconvenient and forward-looking regulatory structures are eroded, rolled back, and stunted into compliance with the doctrine of continuous emergence.

In this thesis, continuous emergence makes an appearance in various configurations. It affects individuals as well as entities. In chapter one, aspiring dubbers are expected to catch up with the latest advancements and trends which are ongoing and never-ending. Similarly, policies intended to regulate the dubbing industry and its global products apply constant pressure on local businesses to "keep up" instead of taking strategic actions to alleviate the top-down pressures of the global market – by regulating local markets, for instance, rather than politely suggesting local participation in global markets. In chapter two, Indigenous creatives find themselves in a perpetual state of having to keep up with the policies dictating national production funding and distribution. Recognizing this predicament, they struggle to adapt and remain competitive by anticipating future changes and taking strategic actions to defend their interests. Indigenous media leaders are among the most outspoken critics of the Streaming Bill's lightweight protections for Canadian creators. Chapter three looks at the continuous emergence of professional fans within the influence economy. Their personal-professional narratives are steeped in self-doubt and precarity doom. In the platform economy, they have limited agency and are constrained to responding and adjusting to policy changes that have been implemented without their input or awareness.

Outsourcing cultural policies

Cultural policies and algorithms are related concepts, as they shape the rules, values, and priorities that impact cultural production, distribution, and consumption in the platform economy. They share much of the same vocabulary: data traffic, privacy, transparency, individual and democratic control over data, quality and accessibility, equality, curation, inclusiveness and affordability, fair treatment, cultural rights, individual rights, data subjects,

digital labour, working conditions, data discrimination. Examining the underlying processes, outcomes, and procedural aspects of policymaking sheds light on how algorithms come to be. Likewise, the concealed nature of algorithms serves as a reminder of the once concealed (and still mostly concealed) mechanisms of policymaking. As chapters one and two suggest, looking at the objectives of successive cultural policies in federal Canada reveals something about the current operations of global algorithms. Throughout this thesis, I observe a gradual outsourcing of the implementation and enforcement of cultural policies from the public to the private domain, and especially policies of place aimed at a "national" constituency.

If cultural policies set the terms for traditional media outlets such as television, radio, and the printed press, algorithms play that role in the transnational platform economy. Algorithms play a crucial role in enabling and facilitating the process of *mass customization*, particularly for planetary platforms like Netflix (Lobato 2019), although the same is true at the regional scale. Unlike policies, which are unidirectional and attached to analogue democracy, digital platforms centralize the analysis of vast amounts of data such as user preferences, behaviors, and demographic information, to generate personalized recommendations, product configurations, or tailored experiences for individual users or consumer segments. Scholars such as Gillespie (2010), Van Dijk (2018), and Poell & Nieborg (2018) describe platforms as techno-cultural constructs which use algorithmic logics to privilege certain types of cultural production and consumption.

Platforms do not aim to replace traditional, or legacy media distribution mechanisms outright. However, they do play an increasingly critical role in the application of cultural policy. With streaming, for instance, platforms are expected to set and enforce cultural norms and to act as content curators and gatekeepers. Local cultural production moves in the direction of becoming a part of a that total system, under the control of platform corporations with some political supervision. Complicating the creation and implementation of policies is the centralization of multiple functions enabled by global media platforms. According to Lev Manovich's formulation of "info-aesthetics," the platform can be articulated as a system where all functions converge into one place, where production, post-production, marketing, distribution, discoverability, reception, commentary, criticism, and piracy are in perpetual interplay (2009). This technological convergence is accompanied by regulatory convergence (Valtysson 2022), which sheds light on the limits of policymaking. The various and separate policies that direct telecommunications, production services, broadcasting, streaming, data protection, and intellectual property law are expected to merge together in response to the convergence of their corresponding technologies into platform systems. Policymakers expect this job to be done by the platforms themselves, harmonizing between their proprietary terms of service and business practices, on the one hand, and the policies and regulations of the state on the other. When this is not possible, global streaming companies frequently dismiss cultural matters, thereby undermining local cultural hierarchies, defying state policies, and rechanneling audience expectations. Canadian streamers, for instance, are beholden to the major US-based platforms and global distributors for the overwhelming majority of what they screen. As a result, the bulk of streamed content is also produced in the US. Even content not made in the US is funneled largely through US-dominated infrastructures. In what Dal Yong Jin terms "platform imperialism" (2019), distribution channels remain key, and distributors have a keen interest in accessing local audiences independently of the state. An overarching theme in this thesis is the receding role of the State in the regulation of

platform life, in the Canadian context. By contrast, Marie Lamensch (2021) describes the assertion of state sovereignty in other parts of the world, in a push to deglobalize, frequently reverting to brutal nationalistic authoritarianism, effectively fracturing the global reach of platforms in order to accommodate local expressions of power. Platform imperialism differs from the more outmoded concept of media imperialism, because it moves the focus away from the traditional instruments of media influence such as films, television networks and print, and redirects it towards technological infrastructures, channels of communication, and the algorithms that guide them. Specifically, platforms establish systems of control and standardization, often displacing local players, cultural practices, and consumer behaviors. And while there are countless other options along independent, publicly funded, and even illicit channels of media distribution, platform imperialism remains an important concept because it is not just about market competition but about a structural and systemic shift subordinating local economies, cultures, and ways to the goals and business models of dominant global players.

The algorithms governing global digital communications can be seen as an amalgamation of national cultural policies and private interests on a global scale. While this is a critical aspect of platforms, my interest is in the social engineering side of platform operations, as I will elaborate shortly in connection with influencers and their personal-professional narratives. At the same time as platforms assume a more prominent role in cultural policy, their influence on local audiences intensifies. This results in what Gillespie refers to as "the production of calculated publics" (Gillespie 2014:188), but also, I propose, the production of calculated producers and the 'fine-tuning' of knowledge work. Algorithms depend on more than just data collection of personal preferences, viewing histories, and consumption patterns to inform management decisions. Here, I look at influencers as the human counterparts to algorithms. The grand ruse of the platform economy is the alleged minimal role of humans in the imaginarily impartial, objective, and scientific operations of the system. As Gillespie suggests, "the seemingly solid algorithm is in fact a fragile accomplishment" dependent on individual and collective human (i.e., institutional) interventions (2014:169).

The trajectory of policymaking described in this thesis passes from the visible rituals of democracy to the private domains managed by global corporations. Chapters one and two emphasize policymakers' tendency to concentrate on the shift of regulation from traditional media structures to platforms (Valtysson 2022), while overlooking substantial distinctions in the fundamental mechanisms and rationales behind these two modes of communication. The chapters also emphasize the role of human mediators in the production and mediation of global cultures. One of the main contributions of this thesis is a rare look into the roles played by the "unsung foot soldiers" of globalization, as Ramon Lobato describes workers in the GILT sector (globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation) (2019:118). Here, I offer a granular look at some of these localization brokers who make globalization possible.

Cultural policies in the traditional network era operated within the public sphere, bound by national territories and visible to all within the nation. In contrast, algorithmic cultural policies are highly proprietary, transcend borders, and are not visible to the public. Here, also, we see continuous emergence at work: the transition from policies to algorithms has a temporal dimension characterized by continuously shrinking decision-making windows. If cultural policies took years to develop and to propagate, as dictated by the analogue mechanisms of

democracy, thanks to its proprietary nature, algorithmic regulation can become actionable in real time. With algorithms, cultural policies are made behind closed doors. Chapters two and three detail how cultural producers have to "feel their way," to reconstruct and reverse engineer algorithms in an attempt to figure out governance intent. Ultimately, in keeping with the doctrine of continuous emergence, they are always a step behind. The obscurity of the platform prompts its constituents to continuously question their positions within it, and to formulate specific personal-professional narratives in an attempt to understand the system. The dissertation offers ample examples of conversations and interviews with cultural producers that reveal their struggles with navigating locality and localization in a platform economy.

In the conclusion of this dissertation I continue the discussion of policies and algorithms as a form of political futurism, whereby the regulations and guard-rails established today are intended to echo into the future, just as the invisible hands of bygone administrations guide cultural production today. As I suggest in chapter two, the Canadian Broadcasting Act of 1990 and other cultural policies dating back to the 1970s, such as CanCon, continue to resonate into the present, seemingly oblivious to technological and societal paradigm shifts. The extent to which past complexities have been addressed or neglected during the policymaking process significantly impacts the present and future workworlds of cultural producers. In that sense, I present policymaking as a form of futurological narratives aiming to convince the public of the likely emergence of worlds yet to come, what in policyspeak is referred to as "shaping" the future.

Insiders & influencers

One of the other central themes of this thesis is the ritualized intimacy between cultural producers and "their" audiences. As the focus shifts from traditional media structures to platforms, we find that technological convergence has brought creators and consumers increasingly closer together. As Scott points out, they become "mutually visible to each other" (Scott 2019:151) in previously inconceivable ways, and this perceived proximity produces new desires, and eventually expectations, for social connection.

In the early days of the internet, digital evangelists praised the new technology for its potential to disintermediate social relations by bringing content producers in direct contact with their audiences. There would no longer be a "middle man," or intermediaries to increase the social distance between commodity and consumer. While this may have been what the future looked like in the 2000s (see Terranova 2000:34), by 2020 the proliferation of platforms has brought about an entire ecosystem of intermediaries in the form of influence workers whose purpose is, paradoxically, to shorten social distance. Influencers exist to assuage the fears of alienation that communication technologies bring to interpersonal relations and social spaces. Instead of disintermediation, we find ourselves in a state of hypermediation, in the sense of a multiplication of media and intermediaries. By furnishing the missing link between social actors, cultural influencers perform a shamanistic transference of value that is commodity fetishism in action: "neither the producer nor the consumer of a commodity has a necessary or full relation with the other. The fetishization of the commodity shields us from alienation" (Oxford Reference, A Dictionary of Critical Theory). In other words, influence work offers a mythology of closeness and familiarity between product and consumer that lubricates otherwise impersonal transactions.

As I analyze how local attention and engagement are driven in platform economies, I take a careful look at how affective tactics are deployed via figures of influence, together with policies and algorithms, to connect audiences with content. Hesmondhalgh and Baker suggest that "the cultural industries are oriented towards consumption in particular ways, for they are *centered on acts of communication* […] more often than not *intended to produce some kind of emotional or affective relationship*" (2011: 200, added emphasis). What is more, it is an affective relationship not just with the fictional characters from within the narrative, or with the narrative world itself, but also with its creators and stars, and even with the medium responsible for supplying beloved content. Affective connections are achieved by saturating the global cultural commodity with a local "aura" through direct and intimate connections to the very lives of cultural producers. Their personal-professional narratives play a crucial role in establishing social relations between the commodity and the public. I dedicate a large portion of this dissertation to the self-positioning of creative professionals within the global media economy, because this paratextual activity is a major part of localization culture.

The trick of the influencer is to take the mainstream and to bring it into the world of restricted cultural production and thus re-invest it with the "aura" lost during the process of mass distribution. The production of aura requires a performative gesture away from the mainstream, perhaps even a performative condemnation of it. The cultural influencers I track in my work—dubbers, Indigenous creators, and anime localizers—all engage in cognitive and immaterial forms of production, illustrating Tiziana Terranova's argument that privileged access to knowledge, information, and intellectual abilities have become crucial actors in value creation in what she refers to as "cognitive" capitalism (2012), a capitalism in which capital itself has shifted from material to symbolic domains. Here, human attention is the essential currency. In chapters one and three, dubbers and anime localizers attempt to harness and benefit from the attention economy by appealing to cultural proximity with their viewers. In contrast, the Indigenous creators in chapter two demonstrate the potential for resistance and alternative forms of immaterial value creation through communal practices that challenge prevailing economic logics. They do so by establishing new cultural connections with distant viewers, a risk that goes against conventional production lore and economic logics.

Methods

In what follows I adopt a kind of loose form of ethnography. My methodological approach was inspired by the work of Denielle Elliott and Dara Culhane in *A Different Kind of Ethnography* (2017), and by Catherine Russell's volume *Experimental Ethnography* (1999). Elliott and Culhane open up the possibility of extending traditional methods like interviewing, participant observation, and documentary research, with more open-ended and creative approaches to anthropological inquiry. My vignettes and theoretical speculations are directly influenced by this work. In the spirit of James Clifford and George Marcus (2010), my approach recognizes that the study of culture and society benefits from engagement with various external fields such as, in this case, media history, communications, and cultural policy. The policy documents that I examine are essential pieces that contribute to the ethnographic character of the work. They act as catalysts from which the experience of practitioners can be understood more intimately. The

dissolution of disciplinary boundaries is in itself an ethnographic moment: each one of my interlocutors is a media theorist after a fashion. As Katie Russell contends, ethnography is an expansive term in which culture is represented from many different and fragmented perspectives (1999:xvii). She alludes to Walter Benjamin's term "anthropological materialism" to emphasize the interconnectedness of material conditions and human experiences, particularly in the context of historical and social analysis. Benjamin sought to understand how material conditions (media technologies, that is) shape human culture, social structures, and individual experiences. While Russell focuses on a more abstract version of ethnography as a study of cultures of representation, this thesis employs traditional ethnographic methods looking at people and the cultural policies that govern them.

My search for the individual experiences of media practitioners was prompted by the surprising scarcity of grounded empirical studies of the knowledge practices of contemporary media workers. With notable exceptions (Caldwell, 2008; Ganti, 2012; Banks et al. 2017; Duffy 2018), this lack is especially noticeable amidst the extensive body of research on the media industries and globalization developed in the last thirty years. *In situ* empirical work offers a significantly improved understanding of how the cultures, professional practices, and infrastructures of platform economies intersect. Inconveniently, it also throws many established theories into question. Chapters one and two feature several examples of the disconnect between accepted frameworks about cultural identity and production practices, such as the cultural discount thesis. Inquiring about the experience of practitioners can help us identify more concretely the mechanisms of the platform economy and their frailties, as they guide our day-to-day passage in the world. We have so much faith in these sociotechnical abstractions of which we, the overwhelming majority of end-users, know so little.

The personal-professional narrative

The monomyth of media industries research is the deliberate and orchestrated reveal of what happens "behind the curtain." It is the recursive story of decisions made by powerful actors behind closed doors, their influence on what is seen on screen, and how that, in turn, influences future decisions. Important work on the media industries has been done by scholars such as Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (2009), Timothy Havens and Amanda Lotz (2017), and David Hesmondhalgh (2013), who draw attention to the social and cultural costs of ongoing technological changes, media convergence, industry conglomeration, and global concentration of ownership. Focusing more particularly on the sociology of the global workplace, Hesmondhalgh questions how "creative industry" policies and work conditions shape the identities of cultural workers (2013). Even though the case studies and theories these authors discuss originate in the west, they often lean towards a global perspective, given the borderless technologies that define media work. My work retains similar theoretical underpinning but acknowledges a *localized and geographically situated perspective*. This allows me to identify the various actors "behind the curtain" with greater accuracy and relevance to my case studies, recognizing at the same time the plurality of perspectives that exist elsewhere.

What I term *personal-professional narratives* refer to stories and accounts that cultural workers construct to integrate and make sense of their personal experiences and professional roles. These

narratives incorporate aspects of individuals' identities, the context played by their physical locations, and their professional endeavors. For my interlocutors, constructing personal-professional narratives was a sense-making exercise intended to highlight their unique (and yet, commonplace) trajectories within the workworlds of global media production. I propose the concept of *workworld* as a nuanced exploration of the contemporary professional landscape, transcending the mere physicality of the workplace and its cultures of production, already well defined and developed by Mayer (2017), Banks (2009), and other Production Cultures scholars. Within the workworld, the crafting of identity and the cultivation of aspirational desires unfold. The workworld suggests dimensions beyond the socio-professional rituals and routine interactions of production culture, where the subtle choreography of ambitions and the orchestration of personal narratives seamlessly intertwine.

On the ground, the vagaries of global media work are experienced as a narrowing of opportunities and a raising of barriers to entry into the profession. I was interested in how accounts about creative work are shaped by the structures in play. In chapter one, I feature interviews and discussions I have had with dubbing professionals I met while working in the industry as a sound engineer and dialogue editor. In chapter two, I introduce interviews and media appearances by Indigenous Canadian creators interested in reaching global audiences. Chapter three is about fandom and fan influencers whose work localizes global anime contents. Collectively, their personal-professional narratives are intended to account for the irrationalities and quirks of the global systems within which they operate. For this reason, I depart from a focus on labour, amply covered by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) and others,[12] and turn my attention to thicker ethnographic portraits that are at once very local and specific and yet fit within global systems of information, attention, and influence, placing my work somewhere between the political economy of culture and cultural anthropology.

Multi-sited research

I began this project based on my experience in media production and localization as a sound engineer. Truly remarkable artistic performances take place in the private spaces of dubbing studios, with an audience of one or two other actors, a voice director, and a technician. A dubbing project is a complete creative undertaking in its own right, and follows the same production processes as the films and television shows it complements. The recording studio offered a privileged look into a world seldom seen by outsiders, but it was insufficient to explain the greater mechanics in motion. I needed to expand my research site beyond the dubbing production microcosm, to where the decisions about what happens in the studio were being made.

What does media localization look like as a research site? At first glance, it may seem impossibly abstract to outline an alternative outside of traditionally established perspectives such

[12] In Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work (2013) Matt Stahl provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which recording artists navigate the complexities of the music industry within broader social, economic, and cultural forces that influence labor conditions and practices within creative industries. Similarly, Angela McRobbie analyses the impact of neoliberal economic policies, digital technologies, and changing labor practices on the experiences of cultural workers in Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries (2018).

as translation studies or communications. I chose to center my work on the people producing localized content: dubbers, producers, influencers, policymakers, and cultural commentators. These are the groups possessing the cultural clout to shape the public's attention and to create a sense of locality, or community, under platform rule. These social actors are especially powerful when that sense of locality does not align with the borders of nation-states or other, more traditional geographical divisions. My fieldwork work was carried out in Montreal between 2013 and 2020 and involved a combination of participant-observation and interviews for chapter one (from 2013 to 2019), digital ethnography and email interviews for chapters two and three (from 2016 to 2020), which I widened by also attending professional localization events and by taking a careful look at the cultural policies directing localization practices.

Successful access to various research sites was mixed. While my Bulgarian origins place me in a Balkan cultural orbit, which shares little common ground with Quebec and its cultural preoccupations, my outward appearance as a commonplace white male afforded me rather unproblematic access to become a fly on the wall at various dubbing studios. On the other hand, my thick accent in French and my foreign name prevented me from gaining access to the more exclusive cultural parlors frequented by Québecois creatives. Xavier Dolan, for instance, who would talk to me nonstop at the studio while waiting for his session time to come up, coldly directed me to his agent when I attempted to approach him for an interview as a researcher. The agent never responded to my requests. With Indigenous creators like Jeff Barnaby, on the other hand, third-party introductions were necessary, but once a connection was secured, he was candid about his work and generous with his time. The last group, fan translators and localization influencers, were the easiest to access because they already produce a vast amount of content about themselves online. They are also eager to talk in person, but conversations were always a performance (Gill 2010).

I conducted a number of follow-up interviews to clarify and further explore issues that had come up at our initial conversations. Given the relatively small and insular worlds of localization professionals, Indigenous creators, and fan localizers, I have assigned pseudonyms in cases where my informants have chosen to remain unnamed, although I have identified them by their professional roles. In most cases, however, I use real names when interactions have been public and officially documented. Although I aimed to "look over the shoulders" of my interlocutors, in the Geertzian sense (Geertz 2017), and to seek my evidence in places where the everyday professional lives of localizers were lived, I was keenly aware that most of our interactions were carefully curated. Given the guarded and self-promotional nature of the creative industries, the interviews and self-disclosures I managed to obtain are important not for their authenticity, but for their ethnographic value, as they encapsulate persisting attitudes that continue to shape industry discourses today.

The greatest difficulty of my task was to write about localization without writing about language, or making language the principal topic of discussion. My interest in localization as a mechanism drove the inherently experimental and exploratory nature of my work. It is therefore important to acknowledge certain limitations. For instance, I did not always find localization where I sought it. My initial plan for chapter two had been to explore the world of Indigenous localization through distributors such as the Aboriginal People's Television Network and its streaming platform Lumi. This task proved impossible due to the dearth of information about Indigenous

dubbing and lack of access to Indigenous localizers. In many ways, I approached the selection of my interlocutors in a "wild" manner, as chance would have it. I imagined that this would provide a more spontaneous and authentic portrait of the industry, although I quickly learned that authenticity in self-disclosures by creative professionals is in short supply. A better methodological approach would have been to carefully preselect specific groups, and to remain consistent throughout my fieldwork.

One of the methodological specificities of my project was to examine industry discourses from multiple angles, and to cross-reference interviews with trade press and "chatter" from the internet. I was able to identify that I had reached a key issue or phenomenon when information began repeating itself across a variety of channels. This moment, referred to as *data saturation* in qualitative research, was my cue that collecting additional information no longer yielded new or relevant findings, indicating that the information already obtained was comprehensive and the study's objectives had been sufficiently addressed.

Structure of the dissertation

Translation, dubbing, and cultural commentary fulfill a similar function in creating a local "identity" for the transnational cultural product. Concerned with how global media meets and enlists local viewers, this thesis looks at cultural workers who facilitate and intermediate in this process. We begin at a transitional moment, when a shift in media delivery paradigms is underway. Transnational streaming platforms wield enormous power over national spaces, and present a growing complication for local policymakers and legacy media corporations alike. By superimposing a discussion of policy documents and platform operations against the personal-professional narratives of various types of localization workers, this thesis argues that the very notion of what is to be considered "local" unravels, as it becomes unbundled from its traditional associations with nation, land, and language. In the process, the management of what is local passes from the public political sphere to proprietary platform space.

I introduce the dubbing industry in Quebec as a site where local dubbers pursue cultural legitimacy within the global platform economy. The chapter charts the transition of *dubbing* as an artistic expression of local identity, to *localization* as a service, by examining three different perspectives: intellectuals and culture leaders, policymakers, and the dubbers themselves. The first group's attitudes about language and culture reveal the complicated politics of national prestige and nation-building amidst full-scale economic globalization. Steadfast supporters of the local cultural industries, this group sees dubbing as an instrument enabling Quebecers to "recognize themselves" and to celebrate their identity. They are perplexed by the reality that audiences are much more demographically and culturally heterogenous today, than had been the case when the dubbing industry was initially establishing itself. Here I examine the role media distribution mechanisms and cultural policies play in the changing nature of local identification. As it turns out, there is an ongoing contest of influence between legacy media corporations which, thanks to cultural policies had enjoyed unfettered access to viewers, and streaming plaftforms, which play an increasingly important role in local cultural life but eschew direct policy regulation, at least for the time-being. (Of course, some legacy media corporations have also diversified into the streaming game, most notably Quebecor and Bell Media, with QUB and

Crave respectively.) Whereas governments had been able to control legacy media corporations via policy, this does not appear to be the case with platforms. I argue that, because of how culture is funded in Canada, and particularly in the province of Quebec, there is ongoing tension in policymaking between satisfying "national" cultural imperatives and generating favourable economic outcomes. Platforms present somewhat of a problem for policymakers. They offer unprecedented access to global audiences and unrivalled economic potential, assimilate local viewers along the way, and resist attempts to be governed in the same way as their legacy media counterparts. In the third section of the chapter I describe how, through their choices of language and dialect, studios maintain a careful balance between the expectation to perform a local identity in support of "self-recognition" for the local viewer, and suspending that local identity in favour of reaching audiences everywhere. By examining the shifting role of language, from an ethnocultural marker of identity to a transactional token, in this chapter I expose the power of platforms to disassemble social elements long held as inseparable, such as land, culture, people, and language, thus reconfiguring the meaning of "local" in cultural work.

The second chapter presents a less conventional perspective on localization. Here, I look at contemporary Indigenous filmmakers and showrunners who endeavor to "translate" local contexts for global viewers. This chapter hence offers a reverse view of the localization process, where media products are adapted from specific, local storytelling traditions to include audiences worldwide. From the margins, Indigenous creators make a move towards the mainstream. Their production landscape, however, is beset by systemic complications that challenge Indigenous creators and obstruct their access to audiences. Part 1 of the chapter outlines the Canadian cultural policy framework, and the intense struggles that go on behind the policymaking curtain. Here I look at institutional records and examine the forces competing to shape Canada's cultural agenda in the second quarter of the 21st century. During the heyday of national legacy media networks, cultural policies played a major role in deciding who was granted access to production resources and to audiences. Currently, with streaming platforms, this matter resurfaces with renewed intensity. Studying the policymaking *process*, rather than simply looking at official policies, reveals the vacillating and fragmented nature of the system. Longstanding anxieties about the control and sorting of populations are laid bare in the themes that emerge. The second part of the chapter looks at how such policies bear upon the production workworlds and the professional narratives of creators. Here, as in the previous chapter, the platform economy reconfigures longstanding power dynamics while introducing new ones. On the one hand, platforms afford Indigenous creators unprecedented access to funding and viewers. On the other, platforms threaten to absorb and exploit cultural differences and nuances, potentially transforming them beyond recognition. By foregrounding its ability to provide direct connections to Indigenous creators, the platform economy hopes to attract new viewers and to secure its market ascendancy. I argue that the problem lies not with the market's promotion of Indigenous difference, but rather with its inclination to impose templates for cultural promotion.

In chapter three, the focus is on the mechanisms employed by the global anime distribution industry to connect with its audience, as part of a wider discussion about platforms and localization work. Chapter two examined how a personal connection to creators is necessary to offset the impersonal nature of platforms. Chapter three explores the theme further to examine how, within platform economies, influencers and fans play a crucial role in producing niche consumers on a mass scale. More particularly, I look at how professionalized fandom facilitates

cultural transactions between the global anime distribution industry and its local viewers. "Local," in platform space, does not refer to a geophysical reality, but to what we may provisionally dub "algorithmic communities," communities of taste united by personal preference data and influence work. The chapter compares two ideal-typical professional trajectories that lead to this intermediary space. The concept of "ideal type" was introduced by Max Weber in the early 20th century to indicate a constructed model or conceptual framework that highlights the essential characteristics of a social phenomenon, even though no real-world examples may perfectly embody all those characteristics. Ideal types are important in the construction of narratives because they provide a structured lens through which complex social phenomena can be depicted and understood. I term members of the first type *fulltime fans*. They are anime commentators who exist in parallel with the anime industry, which they aspire towards, but are limited by their status as fans foremost. By analyzing their personal-professional narratives, I explore how behind-the-scenes disclosures about precarious work conditions frequently omit to address the underlying causes of these conditions created by the corporate decision-makers who drive anime distribution online. The other group is made up of fan translators whose personal-professional narratives teeter within the grey zone between legal and illegal translation. The industry uses this ambiguous space to test for popularity, measure traction for an intellectual property, and possibly source translations for free by enforcing copyright. For this second group, which I refer to as *pastime fans*, the continuity between fan and professional is essential. As the circulation of global anime moves from informal to platform-managed, the industry endeavors to maintain control over localization influencers and fan translators by stage-managing the history of its own fandom. From fan-centered, it shifts to industry-centered narratives. The precarity that cultural commentators and fan translators reveal about themselves online stops at generating sympathy for the industry's offerings.

The thesis concludes with a closer examination of the role of narrative in cultural policies, alongside a contemplation of the forthcoming integration of artificial intelligence and its anticipated impact on the activities of cultural workers within the localization sector. In summary, this study contributes a thicker portrait of those whom Ramon Lobato refers to as the "unsung foot soldiers of digital media globalization," workers involved in the GILT industries (globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation) (2019:188), by offering an in-depth exploration of three distinct localization cultures, and shedding light on the workworlds and workplace narratives of the people involved.

1. Hearing Themselves: the culture and industry of dubbing in Quebec

With every new media distribution paradigm, the question about how local identity makes itself seen and heard returns with a new set of complications. The platformization of distribution has prompted renewed efforts to define, within and through the use of platforms, an identity specific to Quebec. The notion that self-recognition ought to be a distinguishing feature of local cultural production had been well established in Quebec through intellectual work, the popular press, and the media since the 1960s (Oakes and Warren 2009). Framed as a counter-hegemonic discourse of cultural resistance to the North American Anglophone majority (Lacasse 1999, 2000), a posture of subalternity and postcolonial struggle had become a part of the intellectual *habitus* of Quebecers, the manner after which their cultural dispositions were organized (Bourdieu 1990). A principal component of this cultural habitus was the idea that adjacency to a large and powerful neighbouring Anglophone monoculture necessitated continuous nation-building (de la Garde 1993). Legacy media, namely the radio, television, and film industries, had been dependable partners in Quebec's self-recognition project since the mid-20th century by participating in the creation of an entire cultural eco-system from which to draw content and to cultivate a francophone audience. In the 21st century however, anxieties about self-recognition resurface as changes in populations, media production and distribution schemes, individual preferences, and technologies recast local identity and subjectivity according to how media consumption is organized. Roberge and Grenon observe that this situation causes a deal of discomfort for québécois thinkers, who hesitate when confronted with the "liquidity"[13] of contemporary subjectivity (2017). On the one hand stand the pressures (and oppressions) of maintaining an identity anchored in collective representation, community, official history and the State, culminating with the expectation to "recognize themselves" in the media consumed. On the other, the fraught attachment to a self-same national culture begins to crumble with the demographic and technological transformations of the 21st century, making self-recognition anything but guaranteed. In this chapter, I introduce the Quebec dubbing industry as one arena where these tensions and anxieties are worked out.

Legacy media conglomerates, which in Canada are inextricably linked with the telecommunications infrastructure, have a history of collaboration with the State in exchange for broadcasting licenses and access to viewers. Among their chief obligations in Quebec is a commitment to the production and supply of francophone content. With changes to the ways media is experienced in the 21st century however, transnational media corporations and their powerful streaming platforms stake a claim over the same publics (Lobato 2019). Platforms have positioned themselves as mediators of significant portions of our social and political lives (Steinberg 2019; Bannerman et al. 2020). As the "dominant infrastructural and economic model" of the 21s century (Helmond 2015:1), they have moved to disrupt existing local hierarchies of cultural production. The platformization of cultural production "can be defined as the penetration of *economic*, *governmental*, and *infrastructural extensions* of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries" (Poell and Nieborg 2018, original emphasis), different from the legacy media model, which consists of

[13] I borrow the concept of "liquidity" from Zygmunt Bauman (2000), who saw modern subjectivity as increasingly fragmented by competing and contrasting identities and lifestyles, fluid social relations, and reflexive, multiple selves.

continuously renegotiated affiliations between discreet social actors. To their advantage, the conditions under which transnational platform technologies are adopted in Canada currently spare them from the same obligations as their national counterparts. In fact, the insistence of global streaming corporations to refer to themselves as "platforms" is intended to set them apart from traditional national broadcasters (Gillespie 2010). If at one end legacy media was an instrument of governmentality on behalf of the State, platforms propose a different form of governmentality, one that is not burdened by traditional semiotic connotations of flag and nation, tradition and border, land and language, but dominates with no lesser degree of ambition. This new governmentality, often referred to as "platform imperialism" (Dal Yong Jin 2013; Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees 2020), fittingly invites a review of the old concerns about media imperialism at a level that no longer relates to content, but to the container itself.

Quebec's traditional desire for media control is related to a strong sense of independence inspired by the sovereigntist movement, which at various times during the second half of the 20th century advocated for a separate and sovereign status from the rest of Canada. However, with local souverainism waning, and ambiguity about the cultural obligations of transnational platforms to the territories in which they operate, platforms work hard to undermine legacy media and to capture a greater portion of the market, while legacy media corporations use their longstanding ties with policy-makers to push back by insisting on regulation for their adversaries, and rush to launch streaming platforms of their own.

This conflict plays out in a significant manner in the processes, structures, and institutions responsible for localizing global content. The import of foreign media goods and their adaptation for local publics is commonplace in non-Anglophone settings. As media goods negotiate cultural border zones, their translation and cultural adaptation from one language into another forge our contemporary cultural mythologies and organize our subjectivities in accordance with the worlds we are shown from the screen as well as the words accompanying them. The cultural intermediary responsible for this traversal is the localization industry, which trades in lore about languages, audiences, and offers cross-cultural expertise. International distributors, localization producers, and translators mediate knowledge about the world, shape and channel the circulation of stories, images, and sounds. Examining the case of the Quebec dubbing industry, this chapter focusses on how such expertise is produced and performed, in what forms, by and for whom.

The dubbing industry in Quebec has been studied from a variety of angles including translation (von Flotow 2010; Reinke and Ostiguy 2012; 2019), communications (Deslandes 1999; Lacasse et al. 2013), film and media studies (Abecassis 2008; Poliquin 2012), and much of this work has focused on the relationship between American media and Quebec reception, underscoring asymmetrical power relations and cultural survival. A separate body of work in sociolinguistics examines the phenomenon of local dubbing in International French and attempts to decipher why, with some notable exceptions, local audiences prefer it to their own spoken vernacular (Plourde 2003). Few of these studies include informants from the industry. The focus is rather on the front end, on texts, screens, and reception. In this chapter I suggest that a shift away from the product towards the processes of production can offer a missing alternative perspective on the highly symbolic acts of self-recognition needed to satisfy border and nation, *langue* and *peuple*, revealing more subtle contemporary forms of pragmatic self-recognition needed to retain the potentiality for cultural work on local soil in post-industrial economies. Here, I am interested in

examining how local cultural policies enable the various global hegemonies competing for the public's attention, and how these policies endeavor to guide production. This is a perspective shift which I myself participate in, as a situated observer, by redirecting my analysis away from the production of culture and towards cultures of production, and foregrounding the professional narratives and self-reflexive rituals through which media workers make sense of their labour and the content they create.

In the first part I review how the highly symbolic act of self-recognition through language was framed by québécois intellectuals and academics, laying the foundations of cultural policies to come. What begins as a struggle against the coercive flow of anglophone content into francophone spaces becomes a push for "le français sur nos écrans" motivated by what is framed as a subaltern[14] desire to feature local voices onscreen and to participate in the production process. By looking at the work of Quebec thinkers and cultural theorists, I outline the emergence of a particular intellectual *habitus* that positions cultural production as a combative instrument of collective emancipation. Self-recognition has a very specific meaning in Quebec, though it is a meaning that is continuously contested and in the process of change. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the object of self-recognition on screen, or in the case of dubbing, self-audition, had been the rural franco-catholic viewer, or more precisely, how that viewer was imagined by the architects of the Quebec independence project. Confronted with losing its grip on a society in transition, Quebec political nationalism eventually moved away from its ethnocultural focus and towards a supposedly deracialized, language-based identification, reflected in a discursive shift from "cultural nationalism" or "national souverainism" to "cultural souverainism," as a more suitable term for these global times (Oakes and Warren 2009). In the 21st century, following decades of demographic shifts, policy documents no longer describe the province as a homogenous ethnocultural entity but as an *intercultural* state held together by one language and a legislated charter of values. This shift parallels the competition for the public's attention between legacy media and transnational platforms.

The State plays an important critical part in the creation of an intellectual posture fixated on national consciousness, and its political will is inscribed in policy documents and statistics, revealing how national culture is imagined by government administrators. Accordingly, the second part of the chapter looks at federal and provincial cultural policy documents published between 2014 and 2020, to examine what role self-recognition continues to play in audience formation, and how various local and global media hegemonies endeavor to guide media consumption. Those texts refer to two distinct opponents vying for control of the local mediascape: legacy media and transnational platforms. From the perspective of the latter, viewers are not "stationary subjects" but are continuously transformed by freely circulating texts, which can be accessed without oversight from the State, although which texts are available is ultimately left up to the platform (Carlson and Corliss 2011). For local media corporations, on the other hand, viewers are a familiar collective of culturally and historically situated subjects

[14] The concept of subalternity originates with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and encompasses marginalized and silenced groups, particularly within postcolonial contexts, shedding light on their experiences and perspectives that are often overlooked or misrepresented in dominant discourses of power (see Spivak in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313, 1988). Quebecois intellectuals, notably Germain Lacasse, have frequently borrowed the notion of the "subaltern" to describe the predicament of their own nations, as they see it (see Lacasse's *Le Bonimenteur de Vues Animées: Le Cinéma Muet Entre Tradition et Modernité*, 2000).

whose appetites and preferences are known in advance. The Quebec state occupies a significant role in the management of popular culture, in which the press, and frequently the academic establishment, play supporting roles. These nation-level institutions interact in the formation of a habitus which deeply informs cultural production and consumption. The media policy texts that they collectively produce modulate the social imagination of the Quebec public, particularly when they dip in and out of discourses surrounding nation and language.

Figure 3: "The author's gaze." View from the control room during a dubbing session.

Source: Image by the author.

Through a series of in-depth interviews and conversations conducted between 2013 and 2019, parts three and four examine how ideas of self-recognition through language play out at the localization studio. During my fieldwork, I practiced what Loïc Wacquant calls "enactive ethnography" (2015:2), immersing myself into the industry as a sound engineer and dialogue editor, which granted me access to the self-reflexive perspectives and 'insider' media theorizing of dubbers missing from existing scholarship on localization. This kind of theorizing, or what Caldwell refers to as "industrial self-reflexivity," can be described as "a social and economic problem-solving operation" (2014:150), a way of making sense of the political and economic conditions in which cultural producers do their work. Here I draw attention to the culture of production by examining the unique cultural practices of media production workers. Contributing to work that critically examines the workplace dynamics, ethos, and views that go into the production of cultural goods (Banks et al. 2016; Caldwell 2008; Mayer et al. 2009), this chapter draws on methodologies from production ethnographies (Atkinson 2018, Strandvad 2013), cultural policy studies (Beauregard and Paquette 2021, Crane et al. 2016, Moran 1996) and the sociology of communications (Peterson and Anand 2004, Wang et al. 2000, Wasko et al. 2011). My research on workplace media theories provides a way of understanding the decisions local cultural producers make within the global media market and its economies of attention

(Corgan and Kinsley 2012). This approach reveals how cultural norms seen as traditional and enduring can be flexibly adjusted in rapid response to the logics of the global market. A shift in market logic is swiftly followed by a shift in cultural norms. Von Flotow is one scholar whose fieldwork on the sociology of translation has made good use of interviews and participant observation behind the scenes of dubbing studios in Montreal (2010). The focus on studio-level phenomena allows an insight into how media production systems shape publics and place their cultural contours. In Quebec, an environment self-described as under perennial cultural threat, my research explores how cultural producers see and relate to themselves, their communities, the *state* and the *market*, as the distribution of media and information moves away from legacy systems and onto transnational platforms.

Frequently maligned as the bastard by-product of media imperialism (Shohat and Stam 2006), dubbing enjoys a small but important place in Quebec's cultural hierarchy. Success is not measured in revenue (estimated at about $30 millon CAD per year) or size of the workforce (about 600 full and part-time jobs in the Montreal region),[15] but in viewing hours (Quebecers watch upwards of 34 hours per week, of which up to 70% is estimated imported content according to the Institut de la statistique du Québec). The dubbing studio predominantly channels popular culture, and popular culture is the site where local identity is negotiated most fiercely (Hurley 2009). This gives weight to industrial self-theorizations, which become a critical component for understanding how audiences are imagined by the parties competing for their attention, and which frequently diverge from commonly accepted theories about spectatorship and reception. The self-theorizations of dubbers challenge the ideas proposed by québécois intellectuals and policy-makers about self-recognition through language. The Quebec dubbing industry remains ambivalent towards traditional displays of national selfhood, but in the tug-of-war between local and global distribution schemes, it must parley between legacy media, with which it shares a long history of nation-building, and the transnational streamers who are set to become its biggest clients.

Quebec dubbers negotiate a cultural terrain in which they want to be seen as champions of the local cultural industries, especially since they rely on government support in times of economic downturn, but also to remain competitive in a global market. Their use of *français international* instead of *québécois* for the vast majority of projects is frequently questioned and critiqued by intellectuals, who maintain that "recognizing themselves" is a cultural obligation.[16] In return, industry professionals explain that the choice is aesthetic and sought after by Quebec audiences themselves. Emblematic of what Taeyoung Kim describes as the "instrumentalization" of the

[15] In point of fact, these numbers are deliberately fuzzy. A Quebec source from 2021 reports over 800 workers of whom 300 are voice actors (Lévesque, François. 2021. "Doublage: ce besoin de «s'entendre»." Le Devoir. April 2, 2021. https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/598067/serie-devoirs-de-francais-doublage-ce-besoin-de-s-entendre.), while a similar French source reports a workforce of between 400 and 500 voice actors (Weill, Thomas. 2016. "Une Profession En Danger: Qui Veut La Peau Des Doubleurs Français?" May 5, 2016. https://www.20minutes.fr/culture/1821263-20160505-profession-danger-veut-peau-doubleurs-francais.). As I discuss throughout the chapter, the Quebec industry is much smaller than the French one, while its number of workers seems quite high. The reason is that the Quebec industry needs to convince the government that the large subsidies it solicits are justified by the number of people it employs. In practice, the pool is much smaller, but the gig economy allows these numbers to be inflated as needed.

[16] *Français international* is a form of French that has been standardized across the *francophonie*, the French-speaking world. In contrast, *Français québécois* is a regional accent specific to Quebec.

Canadian cultural economies (2021), dubbers' self-reflexive discourse maintains that a more accurate form of self-recognition is accomplished through participation in the global market where identity is a matter of consumer choice.

"Le français sur leurs écrans"
French on their screens

Historically unstable, the presence of the French language on Quebec screens has been examined from multiple angles including postcolonialism and film (Lacasse 1999), media imperialism and television (de la Garde 1993), communications and translation studies (Mezei et al. 2014). One of the tools necessary to balance out the asymmetry between a mediascape saturated with anglophone content and Quebec's desires for independence, distinction, and self-recognition, has been dubbing. Consequently, an industry emerged through which local voices could cast themselves into foreign works and thus appropriate them. This new undertaking, however, was not alone in the competition for francophone ears. France has historically had a much larger dubbing industry, and decades of experience in localizing content for the francophone market worldwide. Dubbing in Quebec had to become something more than a mere audiovisual translation workflow.

Recognizing and hearing themselves on screen has been a cornerstone precept of Quebecers' national consciousness. Anxieties about self-recognition resurface whenever there are changes in media circulation systems, and questions about how local identity and subjectivity are represented in the media consumed by the masses inevitably arise. Initially, "recognizing oneself" on or through the screen began as a campaign inviting francophone filmgoers to spend their leisure money in support of their language. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, writes film critic and historian Yves Lever, Quebec movie theatre owners began importing original as well as dubbed films from France in an effort to counter what was termed at the time cultural "denationalization" (1990:151), that is to say, the loss of national identity as deleterious American ways insinuated themselves upon the French-Canadian public through English-only Hollywood movies. For the mostly rural, francophone, and catholic viewers across the province, the act of hearing their mother tongue from the screen was as an essential element of identity affirmation even if it came in the unfamiliar European inflections imported from France.[17]

[17] Throughout the 1930s local distributor France-Film imported both original and dubbed films from France to Quebec. The company's publicity used the language of nationalist propaganda to call forth a sense of civic responsibility:

> DÉFENDRE LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE PAR LE FILM … PERSÉVÉRANCE … ENCOURAGER LE FILM PARLANT FRANÇAIS, C'EST AIDER À LA SURVIVANCE DE NOTRE RACE. Une fois par semaine, plus souvent si vous le pouvez, fréquentez le CINÉMA FRANÇAIS ! … France-Film est une firme canadienne-française, au capital canadien-français et qui combat pour que les nôtres aient leur part dans l'industrie du film (Véronneau, Pierre. 1979. *Les dossiers de la cinémathèque | № 3, Le succès est au film parlant français (Histoire du cinéma au Québec I)*" April 1979. http://collections.cinematheque.qc.ca/articles/la-diffusion-du-film-en-francais-au-quebec-2/1936-le-courrier-du-cinema-3/, original emphasis)

Attendance of “les films parlant français” declined appreciably with the second World War, as the supply disappeared along with the French motion picture industry, which had briefly held the international *francophonie* all to itself. A steady diet of American films took its place, in English only. Things changed significantly, however, with the arrival of television in the 1950s. The decade was marked by a feverish expansion of the local production sector, and original francophone programming was insufficient to “feed the monster” (Poliquin 2011), as the new medium required many more hours of content than could be generated locally. Private broadcasters grew in number to meet new demand, but their offerings were not subject to

The inevitability of ever-increasing inflows of unregulated imported content reignited the conversations surrounding identity and self-recognition (de la Garde 1993, Desaulniers 1996, Poliquin 2012). Francophone intellectuals feared that new private broadcasters would simply resort to filling the airwaves with uncontrolled content. Figures like André Laurendeau, a prominent journalist and political activist, was incensed by the prospect of “lowbrow” American culture gushing out of Quebec television screens with its “platitude insolente, de la vulgarité sans drôlerie, des hurlements et des détractions sans imagination, avec deux ou trois réussites pour en faire pardonner le reste” [insolent platitudes, vulgarity without humor, howls and uninspired

In this example, as is the theme of the chapter, France-Film considers itself local not because it produces locally, but simply because it operates on local soil. The stern cultural climate of the times was influenced by Quebec Catholicism, which played an important role in steering media policies. France-Film’s ads convey something of the spirit of the era by invoking nationalist and cultural urgency with catchwords like “defense,” “perseverance,” and “survival” of this “small Gallic enclave,” surrounded and vastly outnumbered by anglophone Protestants. Throughout the 1930s and 40s the French-Canadian business gentry maintained a convivial relationship with the clergy because both groups belonged to the very same ethnic and socioeconomic elite. Lever describes how Quebec media tycoon, film producer and distributor Joseph-Alexandre DeSève, owner of France-Film, had appointed the abbot Aloysius Vachet, a public relations and propaganda authority, to help him conceive a “Hollywood francophone en Amérique … d’inspiration Chrétienne.” Until the 1940s, cinema was not permitted on Sundays, and was referred to as “une école du soir tenue par le diable” (Lever 1990). Through the Bureau de surveillance du cinéma, media policy was steered by the relationship between distributors of imported films and the clergy (there was little local production to speak of yet), and the Bureau’s censorship policies resembled in spirit what was happening in the United States with the Motion Picture Production Code around the same time. All of that was about the change with the arrival of television in the early 1950s. Future work based on this doctoral thesis can further examine the role of the Church in the history of attention management, which was by no means invented by the media industries. Rather, attention was redirected from the altar towards the mediascape. As Foucault brilliantly suggests in “Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978,” since the industrial revolution, popular attention in Western cities has been flanked by the church on one side and by the marketplace on the other, fundamentally shaping and continuing to affect modern subjectivity to this day. In this long game of influence and control between landed and transnational entities, beginning with the Church and its territorial assets of lands, powerful social intermediaries, real (and spiritual) estate, passing through the Nation State with its regulation over public lands, "national consciousness,” and airwave transmission, to the contemporary moment of transnational platforms with their server farms and “cloud-enabled” landless bids to influence the very same publics, we find many of the same mechanisms at play. As Sadowski convincingly argues in “The Internet of Landlords: Digital Platforms and New Mechanisms of Rentier Capitalism” (2020), the techniques of classical rentier capitalism finds easy analogues in contemporary versions of the platform economy. The difference is that these processes involve a gradual etherealization of signifiers, a shedding of semiotic markers of landed identity, passing from concrete physical reality to cybernetic domains. The reality of the physical infrastructure remains hidden from public attention thanks to sustained environmental metaphors of virtuality. See Tung-Hui Hu, “A Prehistory of the Cloud” (2016), and Patrick Brodie, “Hosting Cultures: Placing the Global Data Centre ‘Industry’” (2021).

distractions, with two or three successes to excuse the rest of it"] (Poliquin 2011:91).[18] Laurendeau is credited with popularizing the word "joual" to describe the sociolect of the francophone working class, which he saw as equally substandard and in need of correction by means of a carefully curated media regimen. He applauded the federal government's efforts, via the Massey Commission, to support a "high" French language by incentivizing the import and localization of "quality" content.

National self-realisation via self-recognition and self-audition was a concerted effort shared by francophone intellectuals, academics, filmmakers, and the local media. Political critique in Quebec, only slightly more daring in academic writing than in the cultural mainstream, remains cautious of any topic that touches on linguistic or cultural identity particularly when popular audiences are concerned. Since the 1960s, these discourses have crystalized into a prevailing intellectual habitus centered on subalternity, the celebration of continuous nation building, and a push against all sides described as imperialist: Britain, Canada, the United States, and France. My interest here is less with media imperialism as such, but with its use by Quebec scholars, policy makers, and practitioners to explain a particular posture prevalent in local cultural policies. The imperialism thesis has had a resurgence in the age of online media distribution platforms (Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees 2020) and provides an important framework shaping Quebec's cultural policies, self-theorizations, and production practices. Television and communications scholar Roger de la Garde was one of the first academics in Quebec to spend considerable energy analysing media imperialism and local reception (de la Garde et al. 1993, de la Garde 2009). Together with Germain Lacasse and André Gaudreault, these scholars imagined the many ways in which Quebec audiences might have resisted *l'américanisation* of cultural experiences going all the way back to the early days of vaudeville and the silent screen. Lacasse often refers to "subaltern," "creolized" forms of local cultural production (2000). He describes early motion picture projections of American film in Quebec theatres as a kind of humorous subversion, a mockery of invading cultural power. Francophone film lecturers, *bonimenteurs*, whose popularity across Quebec continued well into the sound era, would appropriate mainstream foreign films and interpret them for local audiences, a "critical form of appropriation" argues Lacasse. In the influence of American cinema on Quebec filmgoers he describes a longstanding anxiety over a "national identity that has become alienated by the endorsement and appropriation of foreign narratives" (Lacasse 1999:106). An anxiety that can only be assuaged by "appropriating" foreign narratives into the language of the people.

Transforming and localizing imported culture implied an appropriation of meanings and the production of interpretations immune to extrinsic influence. In their focus on the localization of imported content, Quebecois cultural thinkers endeavoured to recast populist nationalism as a kind of resistance to more dominant, external forces. They examined the many ways cultural appropriation defined popular reception in Quebec. Viewers at the peripheries of media production, they suggested, were invariably resistant to external influences because the local

[18] Laurendeau wrote these words around the same time as Adorno and Horkheimer had published their classic essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception". Cultural elites at the time expressed similar views about American popular culture. However, Laurendeau had more faith in the Canadian federal government than Adorno and Horkheimer did in the American one about how popular culture could be "elevated." His coinage of the term "joual" was meant to label the language of the people as a "low" vernacular, rather than to elevate it as symbol of national identity, which it has come to signify.

cultural tapestry took precedence, organically. Their principal claim was that cultures are expressive of local, national, and regional dispositions, and are essentially determined by language. Any imported culture, therefore, would have to be filtered through those layers and imbued with a local character before reaching québécois' living rooms.

During the 1960s and 1970s the films of Claude Jutras, Denis Arcand, Gilles Carle, and others contributed to the emergence of an elaborate cultural hierarchy and a star system where works were produced in the local vernacular.[19] These filmmakers scored high with local audiences and foreign critics alike. Their films featured local accents and local themes which were of great sociological interest to journalists, critics, and *universitaires* both within and outside Quebec. A small number of those films were even commercially successful (Lever 1990). Television and radio broadcasting also grew considerably, ensuring the presence of local voices throughout the Quebec mediascape. Nonetheless, if original local productions were conceived with the intention of offering Quebec viewers something familiar which reinforced their sense of national identity, they continued to be in fierce competition for theatrical screens, television broadcaster's airtime and the public's attention with American, and to a lesser extent British and Anglo-Canadian content. Even as the political atmosphere anticipated a distinct, and who knows, possibly independent Quebec, most of the theatre screens across the province at that time were owned by or franchised to American and Anglo-Canadian companies which had no qualms about offering English-only fare since there were few legal requirements forcing them to do otherwise.

Though there had been some efforts to get a local dubbing industry underway, production into the language of the people began in earnest only with the introduction of television in the 1950s. The cultural hierarchies that developed at that time became strategically important identity-forming social structures. Television broadcasting allowed Quebecers to both see and hear themselves on-screen, to produce content relatively cheaply, and crucially, to reach out into the vast rural terrain whence the quintessential Quebec identity originates (Bouchard 2002). When examining the flows of Quebec cultural and political power, it is possible to observe a bidirectional motion: political power in Québec flows inwards, toward urban centres, and is in turn reinforced by cultural power emanating outwards, towards political supporters province-wide. Television was hailed enthusiastically by prominent intellectuals as an indispensable technology of nation-building (de la Garde 1993). The prodigious output of television series and films made by Quebecers for Quebecers became the focus of generations of scholars, deriving from the conviction that they are important "parce que c'est nous, parce que ça nous ressemble" [because that's us, because that's what we look like] (Desaulniers et al. 1996:88).

It was also necessary to sound the part. In the years following the Révolution Tranquille[20] and the sweeping political changes of the 1960s, local fare produced in the vernacular dialect

[19] Local presence in the media was so aggressively promoted that between the 1950s and 2000s, an oversupply of television series was being produced in Quebec by comparison to other locations with similar demographics. In 1974 the Swedish sociologist Tapio Varis was tasked by UNESCO to collect data on television production and viewership worldwide. His report included a special note indicating that the number of hours of original French-language programming in Québec was indeed exceptionally high, and was not an error.

[20] The Révolution tranquille was a period of intense social, political, and cultural transformation in Quebec. Starting in the 1960s this was a time marked by secularization, modernization, and a strong push for societal reforms and independence from religious and traditional influences. It was also a prelude to Quebec's subsequent moves for independence.

garnered much critical acclaim. However, in the competition for viewers' attention it represented a fraction of the overall media offerings. Francophone intellectuals feared that new private television broadcasters and American-owned theatre chains would simply revert to filling the mediascape with cheap American fare: considered cheap not only in terms of licensing costs but also as intellectually impoverished (Poliquin 2011). With cultural sovereignty, nationalist liberation, and worldwide anti-imperialist sentiments in the air, some found the television situation troubling:

> "Le Québec est-il encore le Québec quand il est loisible à chacun, sans même franchir sa porte, de communier au même spectacle que le citoyen d'Ottawa ou de Toronto ? Le Canada n'est plus le Canada lorsqu'un village de Beauce, muni d'une antenne communale, se trouve relié à neuf postes de télévision dont sept situés en territoire américain." [Is Quebec still Quebec when it is available to anyone, without even crossing the entrance, to enjoy the same performances as the citizen of Ottawa or Toronto? Canada is no longer Canada when a village in Beauce, equipped with a communal antenna, can connect to nine television channels, seven of which are located on American territory.] (Gérard Pelletier, quoted in Poliquin 2011:48)

Quebec intellectuals would express similar anxieties several decades later with the arrival of the internet, and again with 21st century platforms and social media (Roberge and Grenon 2017). Media imperialism discourse (or variants thereof) largely defined the Quebec mediascape of the 1960s and 70s, and offered a suitable description of the "coercive unidirectional flow of western—and especially American—media into developing nations" (Holt and Perren 2009:7). It was perfectly suited to the way many independentist intellectuals saw themselves. A challenge to global imperialism was plain to see in the works of writers whose affinity with the struggles of the Global South signaled a shared fear of cultural, economic, and political *other*ization. Except, of course, the province was in a much different economic category than the Third World nations it sought to align itself with culturally and politically. Quebec's bid to become *maîtres chez nous* is described by television and communications scholar de la Garde as an effort "to build an Indigenous model" for the socio-economic reinvention of this "small Nordic, non-anglophone North American nation" (de la Garde et al. 1993:25). In an important edited collection about television communications entitled *Small Nations, Big Neighbour*, de la Garde establishes a comprehensive inventory of power asymmetries between Quebec and the anglophone world enveloping it. He specifically takes up representation and self-recognition as central research question: "to what extent do the multi-layered dominant representations niched within U.S. media products 'interfere' with [national] self-perception and world view (vision du monde)," he queries (de la Garde et al. 1993:26). From his perspective, any means of communicating identity with the target audience is justified, including through dubbing, a practice presented as defiant of media imperialism, rather than supportive of it, as Shohat and Stam would have it (2006). If television emerged in the 1950s as a technology of nation-building *par excellence*, then dubbing, in turn, was the technology needed to keep the growing volume of foreign content under local cultural control.

The idea of dubbing as a way of "hearing themselves" emerged in response to American media as well as to the cultural influence of France. A home-grown dubbing industry appealed to the public and conformed to the Quebec national project. The ability of local publics to recognize

themselves in the media that they consume is a fundamental characteristic of the cultural discount thesis and is part of active audience theories that have informed much media scholarship since the 1990s (Straubhaar 2007). The cultural discount thesis posits that media products developed with one audience in mind will not "have legs" abroad. Audiences, therefore, are expected to find imported products less appealing than those made domestically. Active audience theory complements this by suggesting that even when media is imported, it is imbued with local meanings because viewers are not just passive receivers but are actively involved in making sense of the information they receive within their own social and personal contexts. According to those theories, resistance is at work not only in the act of reception, where it is expressed as a cultural-linguistic preference and a craving for cultural proximity, but also in the very processes that serve the dominant cultural industries, which include dubbing. For example, Caroline-Isabelle Caron describes the many ways in which *Patrouille du Cosmos*, the Montreal dub of the classic *Star Trek* (1966-1969) series, was not quite the same show as the original (2003). From the get-go, French-language episodes were deliberately translated to be even "sillier" and to take the original's campiness to a new level. Broadcast across Quebec and francophone Canada in the early 1970s, *Patrouille* left a lasting legacy which could be seen—and heard—in locally produced sci-fi spinoffs such as *Dans une galaxie près de chez vous* (1999-2001). For Caron, this form of cultural reappropriation illustrated the ability of Quebec popular culture to "punch up," and to claim its own "independent" place next to the iconic global phenomenon of *Trek*.

In spite of some successes, throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s the struggle for self-recognition and the tension created by the presence of American media urged resolution. French-language dubs imported from overseas continued to trickle in as they were cheaper for distributors to acquire, but by the time they arrived, up to a year too late, Quebecers had typically already seen the films in English. The persistent presence of untranslated American content spurred efforts to lobby for "le français sur nos écrans" [French on our screens] under local stewardship (von Flotow 2010:32). At last, in 1975, a fledgling dubbing industry obtained some legal protection. Not quite as protectionist as its French counterpart for reasons that will become apparent below (Paquin 2000), the new *Loi sur le cinéma* finally acknowledged the Quebec government's commitment to the dubbing industry as a component in its national project. l'Association nationale des doubleurs professionnels (ANDP) was founded a year later, a major industry player connecting actors, directors, studios, and corporate clients. Symbolically named in service of the "national" good, this private enterprise promises its global clients access to audiences across "toute la planète francophone."[21]

Reception determinism: you are what you hear

The previous section traced how some ideas about self-recognition through dubbing were cultivated and promoted across the intellectual spheres in Quebec. Here, I look at how these ideas are transposed into policy. Recognizing and hearing themselves on screen matters to

[21] The original name at the time of founding, 1976, was l'Association québécoise des industries techniques du cinéma et de la télévision (AQITCT), becoming l'Association nationale des doubleurs professionnels (ANDP) in 2005. The "planète francophone" quotation is from the most recent version of the website as of this writing, and would have appeared no earlier than 2010.

policy-makers as a nation-building tool. Scholars like de la Garde, Desaulniers, Lacasse, Sabino-Brunette, and others have dedicated a considerable portion of their work pointing out the unique ways in which Quebec audiences interpret, shape, and are shaped by the media they consume (de la Garde 1993; Desaulniers 1996; Lacasse 1993; Sabino-Brunette 2018). Modelled after social identity theory, their observations are governed by the principle "you are what you see" (or hear), which suggests that patterns of media reception are reflected in the identity management strategies adopted by viewers (Littlejohn and Foss 2009: 897). The sense of self-recognition that Quebecois intellectuals called for was indeed one of the driving ideas behind the conception of the Quebec nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006), an idea that has been continuously reinforced through cultural production and the media. Correspondingly, a lack of self-recognition, together with real or imagined threats to social cohesion, is fiercely resisted though cultural policy.

The balance established by traditional media systems in which the State, cultural workers, and the telecommunications establishment reinforced each-other into imagining united publics is disturbed by transnational platforms, which aggregate fragmented publics. The objective of cultural policies is to set the parameters for what, within the bounds of the nation, is legitimate national culture and what constitutes commitment to national progress for the benefit of the citizen-consumer. The documents *L'État des lieux du cinéma et de la télévision au Québec* (2014, 2015), *Partout, la culture: politique culturelle du Québec* (2018), and *Profil de l'industrie audiovisuelle au Québec* (2018, 2019) (hereafter *L'État des lieux*, *Partout la culture* and *Profil*) attempt to describe the state of play of the screen industries in the province in the first quarter of the 21st century. They paint a statistical portrait of a system in which the public increasingly spends more money for access to content than on content itself, via a variety of online platforms. What the statisticians and sociologists who compiled the report find problematic is that, unlike legacy media corporations, the transnational platforms so profoundly invested in informing, entertaining, and influencing populations make it virtually impossible to acquire any insight about their own operations or viewership. These entities remain occluded from sight even as they attract an ever-growing number of eyeballs. Streaming platforms are especially egregious in this regard, offering very little viewing data, even to the production companies whose work they license.

Cinema and television had served well to create a unified audience and to set a certain rhythm of production, these policy documents say, only to be inadvertently disrupted by digital technologies, the Internet, and the pervasive fragmentation of interests and populations throughout the first decades of the 21st century. As the following quotes indicate, the reduced importance of Quebec's market share online is a major concern:

> Les Québécois aiment regarder des séries produites au Québec. Ils aiment se reconnaître dans les séries télévisées ou les émissions de divertissement. En divisant l'offre locale entre plusieurs diffuseurs, les spectateurs sont sûrement hésitants entre lequel choisir [Quebecers like to watch series produced in Quebec. They like to recognize themselves in television series or entertainment shows. By dividing the local offerings between several broadcasters, spectators will surely be hesitant between which to choose] (Lebel, *Impératif Français*, personal communication).[22]

[22] Y. Lebel (2015), written communication with the author.

> … qui dit abondance, dit concurrence … Si les établissements culturels et les lieux traditionnels de diffusion sont moins fréquentés par les jeunes, ceux-ci ne consomment pas moins de produits culturels que leurs aînés : ils les consomment différemment. … La population a désormais accès à une énorme masse de contenus en ligne–majoritairement en anglais–issue d'un marché transnational où les produits d'ici occupent généralement une place marginale. … compte tenu de la taille de son marché, le Québec a tout intérêt à se tourner vers l'extérieur [... plenty of offerings means competition... If cultural establishments and traditional means of distribution are less popular with young people, it does not mean that they consume fewer cultural products: they just consume differently. … The population now has access to an enormous amount of online content – mostly in English – from a transnational market where local products generally occupy a marginal place. …given the size of its market, Quebec has every interest in expanding outwards] (*Partout, la culture* 47).

As these quotes pulled from policy documents about Quebec culture and language in the contemporary mediascape suggest, technology has undeniably contributed to a fragmentation of attention, scattering French-language viewers across various platforms in search of culturally proximate content. But another kind of fragmentation has had an equally unbalancing effect on national self-recognition. Over the course of the 20th century there was an influx of rural Quebecers to larger cities in search of work, as well as to provide the physical presence necessary to administer the province on behalf of the Quebec nation. At the same time, waves of immigration issuing from Europe, North Africa, Haiti, Latin America, Asia, as well as from other Canadian provinces and the U.S., have fundamentally transformed the national constituency, according to documents like "Partout, la culture: politique culturelle du Québec." As I discuss later on, policies are narrative forms that often reflect the views of their authors, and put spins on data that might otherwise contradict desired outcomes. The political response to this perceived transformation has been to perform a rhetorical shift from ethnocultural nationalism towards identification through language, and immigration policies were designed to favour francophone applicants. Language laws introduced in the 1970s required schools and businesses to communicate exclusively in French and to meet specific proficiency standards. Specifically, it became a mission of the Office québécois de la langue française, the organization charged with overseeing linguistic compliance, to promote a specifically local flavour. The inpouring of rural accents from francophone Quebecers, accented French from allophones, and myriad francophone variants brought along by immigrants from overseas created a large catalogue of inflections and vocabularies that made the exercise of recognizing themselves on-screen as a cohesive society increasingly difficult (Millette et al. 2012). With the French Language Charter (Bill 101), children of newcomers to the province were required to be schooled in French, and television programming reflected that new reality: the volume of dubbed children's and youth programming in the late 1970s and throughout the '80s quadrupled, and was accompanied by a boom in locally made original content (Yordan Nikolov, personal interview).[23]

[23] Yordan Nicolov (2015), founder of Cinélume dubbing studio, interview with the author.

The *téléroman*, a dyed-in-the-wool staple of Quebecois media culture as it were,[24] had played a major role as the vehicle of a shared national identity since the 1950s (Desaulniers 1996). *Les Plouffes* was a kitchen sink (melo)drama that followed the trials and tribulations of a typical Quebecois family through which the Quebecois community of viewers was to imagine itself into existence. It was one of the first representations of a distinct Quebecois identity within Canada and the world. In point of fact, *Le Plouffes* was a localized version of *The Goldbergs* (1949-1957, US),[25] and had a comparable mission to *Coronation Street* (1960–, UK), a series that has spawned countless similar formats worldwide. Throughout its first five decades of programming, the Quebec television industry made an effort to reflect an imagined citizenry through the téléroman by staging historical events and social debates with desired response templates for Quebecers to follow, but by the year 2000 the influence of this strategy had waned. It became obvious to sociologists and media scholars that the demographic shifts of the 21st century had outpaced the local imagination, and local media culture was inadequately prepared for updates to its cultural diversity commitments. Could those who were not visually / aurally represented as a part of the imagined community fit into that community? Were 'belonging' and 'identification' contingent on direct representation? If the problem of "screen presence," representation, and immigration could be solved in terms of self-recognition, why did that still not explain the general fragmentation of the audience and traditional media's loss of unifying power? Millette et al. confirm the observations made by policy documents referenced earlier, namely, that with digital technologies, at present, it is nearly impossible to know what people are watching with reasonable confidence, and therefore to inquire whether consumption habits have any bearing on social integration. Despite all efforts, a majority of "allophone" groups continues to consume content from their places of origin (Millette et al. 2012). The cultural attachments of immigrants and non-francophone Quebecers remain ambiguous, and are not committed to their State of residence.

The movements of people and information that have defined globalization for the past thirty years required states to rethink their immigration and integration policies for newly forming ethnocultural minorities. In nation-states such as Canada, whose immigration policies were centred around the principle of multiculturalism, there was concern that the pervasiveness of communication technologies and abundant ways of accessing information would enable diasporic groups to maintain a closer connection to their countries of origin, which would reduce their loyalties and sense of belonging to their adoptive state.[26] This "double attachment" can also be seen in the fears over how younger generations use media (Millette et al. 2012:335). Access to so much choice produces the figure Millette et al. term the "connected migrant," a hybrid identity which emerges as a result of dynamic processes of selective and idiosyncratic identity negotiations between the community of origin, the adoptive community, and the community of global audiences, all of whom connect with each-other via a shrinking selection of increasingly

[24] *Pure laine*, or "dyed-in-the-wool," is an expression of soft-nationalism intended to set apart "true" old stock francophone Quebecers from everyone else, although it is sometimes argued that with the *révolution tranquille* it became an "a-religious and ethnically pluralistic" notion intended embrace all Quebecers.

[25] Roger Lemelin, the writer of the novel on which the *Les Plouffe* series was based, was directly inspired by *The Goldbergs* radio drama.

[26] In recent years this has manifested itself as an obsession with information hygiene and censorship of foreign perspectives that can be particularly problematic when local narratives about vaccinations, cultural politics, geopolitics, large-scale corruption, and accountability are challenged by other nation-states competing for influence on the global arena.

centralized communication tools. If "self-recognition" (and later on, "telling one's own story"—see chapter two on Indigenous media for global screens) is foundational for the health of groups with shared histories and cultures, a particular model of the contemporary nation state embraced in Quebec, Millette et al. investigate whether there is sufficient evidence that representation and media coverage of ethnocultural minorities increases their sense of belonging to a majority. They find that, indeed, the search for representation, together with the tendency to avoid local political indoctrination, does push diasporic or under-represented viewers to look for alternative sources of media offerings, which the global platform economy is ready to provide.

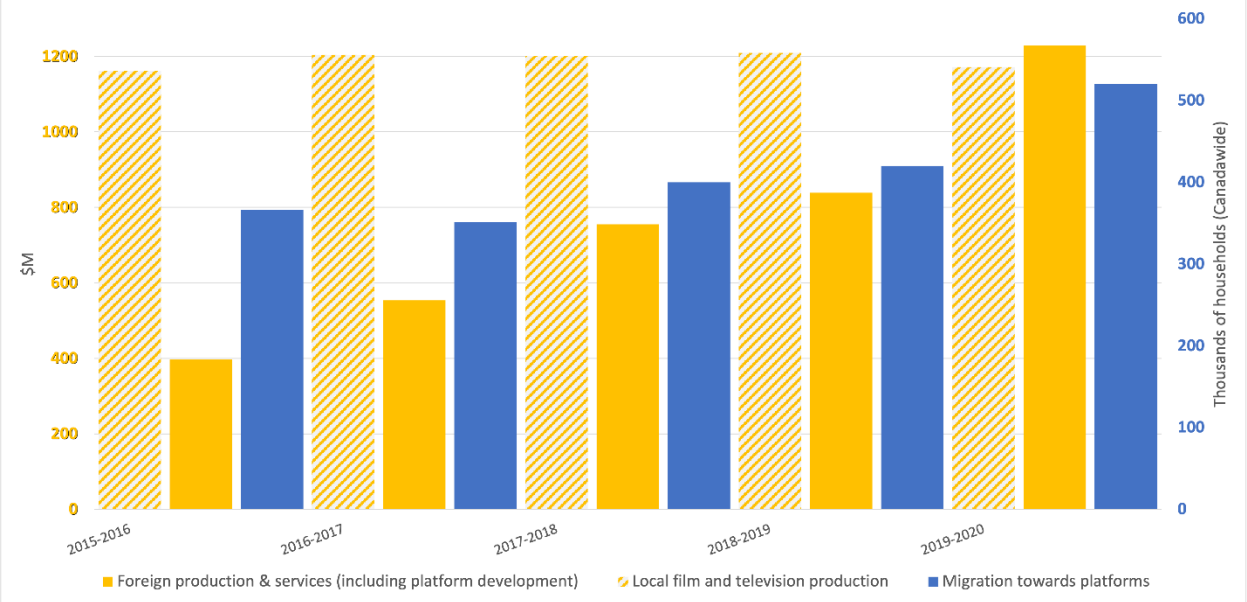
The *L'État des lieux* study explains that the existing film, radio, and television industries in Quebec are part of a legacy media model centred around national culture, which is losing its relevance and grip on the public under the influence of globalization and the Internet:

> Le cinéma et la télévision sont souvent considérés comme étant essentiels, tant au plan de la formation des identités et du rayonnement de la culture nationale qu'à celui de leurs effets économiques… [Le but ici étant de] répondre à plusieurs interrogations soulevées par les institutions préoccupées par les bouleversements occasionnés par la pénétration des technologies numériques dans les processus de création, de production et de diffusion… sous l'influence d'importantes sociétés nationales et étrangères [Cinema and television are often considered essential, both in terms of forming identities under the influence of national culture and in terms of their economic effects… [The aim here being to respond to questions raised by the institutions concerned by the upheavals caused by the penetration of digital technologies in the processes of creation, production and distribution… under the influence of large national and foreign companies] (*L'État des lieux*, Cahier 1:23).

Contemporary publics, the authors comment, have altered their behaviour and developed new consumption habits. The increase in viewing and sharing of videos online, social networks, peer-to-peer downloading, platform hopping, and consuming copious amounts of user-generated content constitute an important part of the transformations in 21st century media consumption diets, which in turn has consequences for the relevance of cinema and television networks as curators of national culture. The potential for active consumer engagement in the platform economies is seen as detrimental to legacy models of media consumption. Attuned to the offerings provided by the internet and online distribution platforms, viewers are gradually abandoning existing systems of distribution within national space. In exchange for helping the state constitute the "imagined community" of the nation, legacy media corporations had benefitted from relatively unchallenged access to publics. With the growing neoliberalization of western nation-states over the past thirty years however, and in conjunction with a growing dependency on global digital communications, the mediascape has shifted. *L'État des lieux* concludes that as traditional distribution models have ceded ground, foreign entities now play a major role in how national culture is produced and circulated. It is noteworthy that these government-produced studies offer a carefully guided interpretation, one that has been sustained across multiple administrations. Throughout the pages of *L'État des lieux*, a contest comes into view between the nation with its traditional instruments of cultural persuasion, and the rising hegemony of global entities whose content and economic operations the nation does not control. The commentary accompanying the figures and statistics in this document clearly suggests that

purpose of such policy documents is not only to set the stage for regulation and taxation of transnational media platforms, but to nudge public interest back in favour of the legacy media and telecommunications conglomerates who consider themselves the original and legitimate custodians of national culture and its audience. After all, the work of Roger de le Garde plainly positions television as a centerpiece of Quebec national culture (de la Garde et al. 1993). Put another way, what is at stake is not national culture itself, but which technology and corporation will ultimately wield influence over the public.

Figure 4: Foreign investment in Quebec screen industries vs migration towards transnational streaming platforms (2015-2020)



National production has remained steady, but foreign productions and production services, including dubbing, as well as investments into local production by transnational platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video show a significant increase (yellow bar) that by 2020 becomes just as important as national outputs (striped yellow bar), at least in economic terms. At the same time, audiences are migrating (blue bar) towards platforms and abandoning local telecommunications giants BCE Inc. (Bell), Rogers, Shaw, and Vidéotron, in favour of global streaming services. Taken together, these sets of data illustrate unprecedented global influence in the local screen economies. The next stage of this process has been the creation of streaming alternatives by the local telecommunications giants. Compiled by the author based on sources from Institut de la statistique du Québec.

The deeper one peers into the details and narrative explanations in State-produced cultural policy documents, the more one realizes how ambivalent the meaning of consumption statistics can be in spaces that are not under state supervision. These official documents make an effort to bring out the political importance of language and, where possible, back it up with statistical figures. In fact, to fortify statistical realities, some sources bundle together original francophone offerings with dubbed content under the general heading of "productions en français." This is done with the specific aim of underscoring local distributors' commitments to the nation (See *Profil*).[27] The commentary accompanying the data invites a greater appreciation for the concerted efforts

[27] In *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (2003), Charles Acland describes how U.S. distributors have always considered Canada as a part of the US domestic market. In a curious reversal of roles, dubbed U.S. content in Quebec is considered a part of the total of francophone offerings (L'État des lieux du cinéma et de la télévision au Québec, Cahier 3 : La diffusion et la consummation, 2014).

mounted by policymakers and intellectuals to preserve the place local cultural industries have carved for themselves in global hierarchies of cultural production through language advocacy. The ritualized style of this genre of writing, a state-produced cultural policy narrative, reads dull and formulaic, but this is how theories about culture, and processes of cultural change are set to become legitimized and widely accepted. Such reports and cultural policy documents are part statistical analysis and part political storytelling that uses data only as a way of stimulating existing official narratives about local culture and cultural risk, while audiences are described as a chaotic vector that needs to be shaped back to conform with traditional expectations and established media models.[28]

A consistent theme running across contemporary cultural policy documents and creative industries reports is the unknowableness of data behind platforms, even trivial details such as viewership statistics and demographics.[29] In Booklet 1 of *L'État des lieux* for instance, we learn that in previous years, the "legacy" models of national distribution had allowed some insight into audience demographics and production details, because producers and distributors were directly regulated by the government and the State held the strings to the subsidies purse. On the other hand, in Booklet 2, on the Quebec legislative framework regarding cultural policy, we discover that NDAs and other binding agreements intended to protect author's and producer's creative rights, serve also to screen distribution platforms from scrutiny, contributing to the overall dearth of comprehensive information about production labour, audience demographics, and content consumption. When the national Institut de la statistique du Québec itself discloses the challenges of putting together a picture of citizens' viewing habits and demographics, the State's cultural fantasies and fears are laid bare throughout the texts accompanying the empirical findings. The logistics of control over cultural offerings in a platform economy appear far too complex for the regular viewer to navigate, reason policy-makers, hence Quebecers need assistance to reach cultural offerings for which they are said to hold a special affinity. This affinity extends to localized content as well, although, as we shall see in the third part of this chapter, it is a contested form of localization, one that is not necessarily local, and is intended to be consumed worldwide.

Post-structuralist theories of identity such as those articulated by Appadurai and Thussu find all manner of disjuncture and transformation in the flows of media and migrations of people, and suggest that in the 21st century ideas of selfhood and self-recognition are translocal, hybrid, and ambivalent about cultural boundaries (Appadurai 1996; Thussu 2007). By contrast, local culture and identity have been theorised in Quebec by circumscribing culture according to language and tradition, justified by a post-colonial posture of subalternity. De la Garde et al. claim that the transnationalisation of distribution does not necessarily result in transnationalisation of reception

[28] Luka and Middleton comment how a careful look at policy documents frequently exposes "contradictions between [audience] feedback, with its emphasis on media content, and the decisions made by the CRTC … which address industry structure rather than audience needs." (2017)

[29] Outside of company analysts themselves, as film data researcher Stephen Follows explains in his independent data collection project VOD Clickstream, it has proven difficult for external observers to obtain any figures that might help them to identify trends based on consumption of content and viewership demographics on various platforms. Based on publicly available data, it is currently nearly impossible to ascertain that the highly anticipated material benefits for creators, producers, broadcasters and other intermediaries resulting from financing pledges to national economies by multinational distribution platforms would compensate for the losses brought on by the decline of the legacy model of national screen media.

(de la Garde et al. 1993:11-12), meaning that a group sharing a common language, collective experiences, and values would exhibit a kind of reception determinism in which the receiving party is always already defiant and eager to superimpose its own interpretations of the cultural intruder's offerings. Those interpretations are expected to be collective and culturally harmonious. Inspired by the work by scholars like de la Garde, Sabino-Brunette, Lacasse, and others (Boisvert 2012; de la Garde 1993; Lacasse et al. 2013; Sabino-Brunette 2018), one policy document alleges that local reception is uniquely bound to a cultural-linguistic habitus, a template that all Quebecois share: "Bien plus qu'un simple moyen de communication, la langue française est un système de pensée qui traduit une vision du monde, qui ouvre l'accès à la culture québécoise et qui permet à cette culture de s'exprimer" [Much more than a simple means of communication, the French language is a system of thought which translates a vision of the world, opening access to Quebec culture and allowing this culture to express itself.] (*Partout, la culture* 2018).

The policy documents surveyed here express a concern that this may no longer be the case. The unknowability of data about audience demographics and viewing patterns that characterizes platform distribution exposes the fears of governance and legacy media's loss of unifying power. Already historically complex and politically charged, national cultural expression in Quebec feels threatened by online spaces where supra-national content distribution platforms reign supreme. As illustrated in figure 2, when global bids for audience attention reach into local spaces, they find a public starved for options of carrier, content, and cost, having been held captive for decades by national broadcasting and monopolistic national telecommunications models. In spite of the preferences that national audiences ought to have about recognising themselves, according to québécois intellectuals and policy-makers, media from across the globe compete for francophone eyes (and ears) with renewed ferocity online. It is in part due to an overabundance of content offerings (Luka & Middleton 2017), but also due to major demographic shifts in the ethnocultural and racial composition of Quebec society.[30]

Online, it is the platform that exercises ultimate control over the politics of discoverability that assemble and fragment audiences according to identities and content preferences (Hunt & McKelvey 2019), in contrast with legacy media's economy-of-scale strategy of organizing local markets according to the broadest shared characteristics of a population. The assertion by scholars and statisticians that audiences unequivocally prefer local, or at least localized media, is offset by their concern that francophones, especially younger ones, appear to consume content directly in English. They worry that unguided access might drive viewers to lose touch with their roots and language, that immigrants might reject local offerings in favour of content that brings

[30] In this chapter I am interested in tracing how existing discourses about self-recognition play out in the platform economy, and what systemic complications they (re)produce. A critical perspective that goes beyond the scope of my current work is a closer examination of the race and identity politics that dictate self-recognition in 21st century Quebec. Significant work in that diection has been done by Justine Huet "Les super-pouvoirs du doublage français de "Luke Cage" ou l'art de desservir la communauté afro-américaine" (2020), Millette et al. "Consommation médiatique et hybridation identitaire: le cas de trois groupes montréalais issus de l'immigration" (2012), Gada Mahrouse "'Reasonable accommodation' in Québec: the limits of participation and dialogue" (2010), Gina Thésée in Ibrahim et al. "Nuances of Blackness in the Canadian Academy: Teaching, Learning, and Researching while Black" (2022), and cultural theorist Bruno Cornellier "The Struggle of Others: Pierre Vallières, Quebecois Settler Nationalism, and the N-Word Today" (2017) among others.

them closer to their own cultural origins (Millette et al. 2012),[31] and ultimately, that the francophone population will cease to recognize itself. The competition between legacy media and transnational platforms is presented with pathos in québécois cultural commentary. The older technology, television, is fondly called to mind for content tailored to the rhythms and experiences of pre-platform viewership. It is nostalgically idealized as the champion of national authenticity (Nguyên-Duy 1999), while its replacement, online streaming, is presented as a marauding nationless intruder (*L'État des lieux*, *Profil*). This narrative ignores the fact that legacy media national corporations are investing heavily into their own streaming platforms and seek, through policy lobbying among other tactics, to reclaim lost viewership. Just as with the arrival of television, global media distribution platforms appear to put the State once more in danger of being supplanted by external actors in its role as the principal cultural influencer of a population.

Transactional characteristics of language

> Il ne faut pas se leurrer, nous les Québécois—ainsi que tout le monde sauf les parisiens—nous n'aimons pas entendre des mots argotiques spécifiques à la France mais qui n'ont pas de résonances chez nous, comme matos pour du haschisch ou de la beuh pour du cannabis, tels qu'entendu dans la série *Narcos*; ou bien d'autres termes comme frangin (frère), caisse (automobile), blé (argent), clope (cigarette), kiffer (aimer), meuf (femme), etc. [Make no mistake, we Quebecers—as well as everyone except Parisians—we don't like to hear slang words specific to France which don't resonate with us, like *matos* for hashish or *de la beuh* for cannabis, as heard in the *Narcos* series; or other terms like *frangin* (brother), *caisse* (car), *blé* (money), *clope* (cigarette), *kiffer* (to love), *meuf* (woman), etc.] (Lebel, personal interview)

In part one I described the efforts made by québécois intellectuals to highlight the significant role that media culture, and television in particular, had played in the creation of national identity as they saw it. Initial fears of domination by way of imported media and foreign languages were refashioned into a discourse about appropriation of the televisual medium as an essential nation-building instrument, to ensure the presence of local voices into francophone living rooms. Dubbing was a big part of that strategy. Part two followed the discourse surrounding identity and self-recognition into the domain of policy reports and viewership statistics, which today echo similar fears of domination from the currently reigning media distribution paradigm, the transnational platform. Yet, even as U.S. culture continues to besiege Quebec screens online via platformization, the greatest existential threat to the dubbing industry itself has always come from France. The French dubbing industry, by far the larger of the two, is ambitious, combative,

[31] Von Flotow and Lacasse both mention the role the dubbing industry imagined for itself as a pedagogical tool. Beginning with an affirmation of independence through self-representation, there is a gradual transition towards a pedagogical impetus, an affirmation through self-imposition: from "this is what we who live here sound like" to "this is what you ought to sound like if you live here." See Germain Lacasse "Le doublage cinématographique et vidéoludique au Québec : théorie et histoire" (2013) p. 38. This view is based on statements published in the popular press and on the doublage.qc.ca website in the early 2000s, which have since been deleted. Today, members of the dubbing industry vehemently deny ever having entertained such notions.

and controls the francophone market. From this perspective, the cultural affinities which unite the global *francophonie* against U.S. media imperialism dissolve into claims over legitimacy, status, and cultural distinction. “Peut-on parler d’acculturation du Canada par les États-Unis sans parler d’acculturation du Canada francophone par la France?” [Can we speak of cultural assimilation of Canada by the United States without speaking of cultural assimilation of French-speaking Canada by France?] asks translator Robert Paquin in his turn of the century assessment of the Canadian audio-visual translation scene (Paquin 2000:127). At a Quebec city cultural think tank,[32] socio-linguists, dubbing actors, producers, film scholars and graduate students have been probing the issue further to examine what, if anything, makes Quebec dubbing uniquely different from elsewhere across the French-speaking linguiverse (Reinke et al. 2019; Reinke and Ostiguy 2019). Could one tell if a dub was made in Quebec? *Should* one be able to distinguish between projects dubbed locally and those that come from France? And, most pressingly, how is identity performed through dubbing? In what follows, I will look at the interplay between members of the industry on the one hand, and québécois intellectuals and policy-makers (introduced in the previous two parts) on the other, to examine how cultural concerns are enacted (or not) at the studio.

Perhaps the most frequent question occupying those who study the industry is why Quebec viewers tend to favour dubbing in *français international*, a standardized form of French used worldwide, rather than the québécois French used in regular local programming. Following the theories and theorists reviewed earlier, shouldn’t local viewers want to hear themselves in their own familiar accents? Shohat and Stam write that any seemingly uniform linguistic community carries within it multiple intra-linguistic variants “in which the idioms of different generations, classes, races, genders and locales compete for ascendancy” (Shohat and Stam 2006:35). With each project, dubbers are confronted with the decision whether to use the local vernacular, affectionately referred to by dubbing professionals as “parler en kéb,” the more formal français international (also referred to as *normatif*), or very occasionally, français de Paris. Quebec viewers can indeed “hear themselves” in dubbed classics such as *Slap Shot* (1977), the first ever dub in Quebecois (joual), the 1980s *Cheech and Chong* stoner comedies, *The Simpsons* (1989-), *Family Guy* (1999-), *American Dad!* (2005-), *Goon* (2011), *Rick et Morty* (2013-) and many other titles performed with an unapologetically recognisable local inflection and a good deal of profanity. Sabino-Brunette describes dubbing as a form of humorous resistance and, channeling de Certeau, a tactical way to modify power relations between the foreign and the domestic: “le doublage … permet, à l’intérieur même des contraintes qui lui sont imposées par une oeuvre étrangère, de modifier la relation de pouvoir entre culture étrangère et culture d’accueil” [dubbing … allows, even within the constraints imposed upon it by a foreign work, to modify the power relationship between foreign culture and host culture] (Sabino-Brunette 2018:1). This is a longstanding view in Quebec theorizations of the practice: identity is rehearsed in and through observable cues in cultural production, be those visual, aural, or narratological.[33] With dubbing however, Quebec French seems reserved mostly for comedies, and even then it applies to a

[32] Housed at Laval and Sherbrooke Universities respectively, the common mission of Chaire pour le développement de la recherche sur la culture d'expression française en Amérique du Nord (CEFAN) and Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur le français en usage au Québec (CRIFUQ) is to support cultural exchanges and research about French culture in North America.

[33] The same can be said more generally of national cinemas, an almost deliberate self-othering that rebrands local cultural specificity as intellectual property.

limited number of titles. The Quebecois version of *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) was booed off the air by Quebecers who preferred the more formal tenor of the Parisian *doublage*, which the TVA cable network eventually acquired. Von Flotow comments that local viewers seem to like hearing themselves in the news, popular talk shows, politics, reality TV, local film and television productions, but when it comes to mainstream global culture they do not object listening to other French variants. Subsequently, distributors readjusted their strategy for their next romcom-drama localization project, *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), dubbed locally but in *français international* (von Flotow 2010). As a localization producer from Seville explains,

> Once we have decided that we need a dub for a given show or film, contacting a studio and deciding on who will direct, who will perform the main roles, then when we receive the texts, I look them over and make corrections. A large part of our work, what makes it so interesting, is to erase all trace of Quebecois from the language we hear on the screen, so it's not surprizing that we don't hear the same kind of language … it is all of our job to eliminate it. And this is to produce a dub that goes a little beyond simply the representation of who we are, and to enter the magic of cinema, to forget that it has been translated and, ideally, to focus on the images and to absorb the story. (Martin B. Landry, dubbing producer)[34]

The theoretical issue faced by localization marketers is whether dubbing is meant to make the film appear as if it were never imported in the first place, or whether to retain its foreign essence for the sake of narrative immersion. Von Flotow suggests that the use of Quebec French is "in fact, internal: it establishes and maintains community, a sense of belonging, a certain clannishness in a hostile world" (Mezei et al. 2014:71). This is what Derrida connects to the purity of the idiom, an expression that can only truly be shared by one community of speakers and cannot be translated without a deal of additional clarifications (Lawlor 2019). For Derrida, the idiom is a kind of a private joke, the peak of linguistic insiderism, usually reserved for folksy wisdoms, slang, and innovative foul language. It is what sets apart those who belong (those who "get it") from outsiders. The "hostile world" threatening to overwhelm the local francophonie is fiercely opposed through political narratives of cultural resistance, but it is also the world of the global market within which the local francophonie desires to participate.

What Quebecers hear from the dubbed screen, as opposed to what they *ought* to hear according to politicians and thought leaders, is complicated by the industry's allegiance to nation-building (owing to its traditional partnership with legacy media) concurrent with its desire for participation in the global marketplace (through new partnerships with platforms). There is little place here for self-referential expressions of locality. In fact, it goes quite in the opposite direction. When industry professionals talk about using the local vernacular, they refer to that as "salir la langue," or "dirtying the language." The crasser the content, the more authentic the local accent chosen for dubbing, which triggers apprehensions about negative stereotyping. In popular examples such as *Les Simpsons*, we hear the educated inhabitants of Springfield express themselves in proper international French, while the working classes and the yokels carry on in québécois (Plourde 2000). In the industry, this is referred to as "the doctor and the farmer problem," regarding the choice of speech register and accent based on a character's identity

[34] Martin B. Landry (dubbing producer at Les Films Séville) panel discussion. *Doubler les films et les séries au Québec : Pour qui? Pourquoi? Comment?* 13 Oct. 2018, Maison de la littérature, Québec

attributes. Film scholar Germain Lacasse objects to this kind of linguistic typecasting because for him it contributes to a devalorization of the Quebec dialect. Von Flotow, Plourde, Reinke and others point to a certain sensitivity in that regard, an "embarrassment" that can be traced back to the early days of industrialization when the elites spoke a high-register French resembling the accent spoken in France, while the working class communicated in local dialects that have come to be associated with the sounds of contemporary Quebec (Lacasse et al. 2013; Plourde 2003, Reinke et al 2019; Reinke and Ostiguy 2019, von Flotow 2010). These scholars address the power dynamics embedded in sociolects and question whether the limited number of titles dubbed in Quebecois is related to the "complex of the colonized" (Fanon 2008:64). Lacasse therefore promotes the idea of "militant dubbing," by means of which Quebec screens can be "decolonized" through language as the expression of a national character. In fact, in an open confrontation with a producer, he questions the very business model of the industry as a predominantly American cultural agent:

> You must be ultra-specialists, because you translate nothing other than American films from American English … from the homogenous, hegemonic world of Hollywood, which you then translate into a kind of French that hints of the hegemonic Parisian French. Not true? I would like to know if in dubbing schools you discuss these political aspects, because if you did, it might make each *doubleur* more "militant" in the defence of français québécois. (Germain Lacasse, film scholar)[35]

In an effort to account for popular tastes, film historians assume the existence of reception determinism, as I detailed in the previous section: "people seem to prefer whatever method they were originally exposed to and have resultantly grown accustomed to" (Danan, quoted in Sabino-Brunette 2018:2). Quebec cultural critics see the presence of international French as a vestigial reminder of French cultural imperialism, and reason that an increased exposure to a more authentic *québécois* will result in habituating audiences to that accent, thereby legitimizing it. Dubbers, on the other hand, claim that there is little evidence this is the case in practice. Though infrequently written about, the dubbing industry periodically investigates new possibilities to increase popular reception:

> Well, there have been a number of dubs done in vernacular québécois … Sometimes with standard [international] French we just don't have the linguistic latitude. For example, *Bad Words* starring and directed by Jason Bateman, features a lot of crude humour. Bateman is a *petit-bourgeois* man who has great colourful exchanges with the children he's competing against in a spelling contest. We tried it in québécois, and it was a financial near-failure, but an excellent experiment. Another one, Jacob Tierney's *The Trotsky* with Jay Baruchel, takes place in NDG. Marie Cadieux plays Baruchel's mother. We dubbed it in standard québécois because we said to ourselves that, well, the family comes from Outermont (instead of NDG), he goes to Bréboeuf instead of a private college, we matched up the corresponding local codes fairly respectably. Geneviève Bujold was in it also, and you suddenly find yourself with plenty of local talent to bait and convince my bosses that québécois was the way to go. Not doing it would've been wrong. From the same director we did *Good Neighbours* with a Xavier Dolan cameo.

[35] Germain Lacasse (film scholar, Université de Montréal) panel discussion. *Doubler les films et les séries au Québec : Pour qui? Pourquoi? Comment?* 13 Oct. 2018, Maison de la littérature, Québec

> Dolan had dubbed Baruchel in *The Trotsky*, but since he was already in *Good Neighbours* he couldn't do the voice of the main character also. That one we also did in québécois. But those are all exceptions more than anything. (Martin Landry, dubbing producer)[36]

The dubbed version of Jacob Tierney's *The Trotsky* (2009) had also been a box-office disappointment according to the film's producer (and father of the director) Kevin Tierney. The decision to dub the film in québécois was initially intended to boost ticked sales by attracting the local film-goer, but ultimately worked against the film both locally and on the international circuit. He suspected it was because of the association viewers have between international French and international stars like Baruchel:

> If you watch a film featuring Jennifer Lawrence in Quebec, the dubbing might have been done here or it might have been done in France. But you might reasonably expect that the actress will sound more or less the same. It's often the same distributor who handles both locations anyway, and it's in their interest to maintain continuity even if they used different voice doubles. Otherwise it would be destabilising for the viewer. (Kevin Tierney, producer)[37]

The suspension of linguistic disbelief, the attempt to convey the authenticity of the source rather than to reflect an idealized audience is at the heart of this mismatch between the scholarly understanding of self-recognition through reception, and practitioners' self-recognition through creative practice. Rather than an instrument of identity, the neutral language used in the majority of Quebec-made dubs serves an altogether different purpose. It addresses an imagined linguistic unity that at once encompasses all of the accented varieties within the province as well as dialects found across the francophonie. Like American Cinema's mid-Atlantic English, to which it is frequently compared, *le français international* serves to give francophone viewers a common cultural anchor that, as Chion puts it, transcends cultural divisions (1999). More importantly, it becomes linguistic currency that opens up potential avenues for cultural export beyond Quebec's borders.

In its desire to neutralize language, to erase regional idiosyncrasies and traces of dialect, Plourde sees dubbing as a governance tool, "un outil à la fois d'uniformisation de la langue et de protection contre la ou les langues étrangères," [at once a tool for language standardization and for defense against foreign languages] (Plourde 2003), as well as one that obscures important social and cultural asymmetries. Quebec dubbing professionals enact this double movement at once protective against the foreign and levelling of the domestic. While they remain ambiguous about performative expressions of local identity as the ultimate aim of their cultural mission, they contest any doubts about their loyalties. "Yes, people like to hear themselves and we just don't speak like that [in dubbing]…" confirms actress and dubbing coach Hélène Mondoux in reference to *français international*, but she offers an alternative theory:

> … but for a dub to be well received, we have to forget that it's taking place; it shouldn't draw attention to itself. If it is too *québécois* or too *parigot*, we lose our ability to suspend disbelief because we are no longer in the universe where the action is taking place. It

[36] Martin B. Landry (dubbing producer at Les Films Séville) in discussion with the author, 24 Oct. 2018.
[37] Kevin Tierney (producer, Park Ex Pictures) in discussion with the author, 2 July 2011.

> breaks the fourth wall when George Clooney sounds like your next-door neighbour, so a good dub must be discreet. You have to give a voice to the original work itself, to what the director wanted to express, and as a viewer you are already aware that it's not a local film, so why push in that direction? (Hélène Mondoux, dubbing actress and director)[38]

Film historian Antje Ascheid explains that "The different translation practices adopted by various language communities … not only suggest a divergence between different cultural or national groups in respect to the status of film as a cultural object, but they also indicate their various positions within the international economic order" (Ascheid 1997:32). Film is a linguistically and aesthetically coded object that is produced in a specific time and place but may be intended to be consumed beyond its origins. Hence, imported film, or any other cultural good for that matter, hopes for uninhibited transnational and cross-cultural reception. Identity is certainly performed when and where a more localized version can enjoy a favourable audience response, but the vast majority of industry professionals and dubbing producers share Mondoux's views and continue to use a kind of French, le français international, that not only lacks in specific identity cues but, for Sabino-Brunette, functions in competition with local forms of the language. He contends that this "neutral" tongue dominates dubbing and blocks Quebec culture from inserting itself into foreign works (Sabino-Brunette 2018:3). It reduces regional expressions and smooths out local accents, resulting in an artificial way of speaking referred to in the dubbing world as synchronien, or "synchronese," based on the notion that fidelity to the on-screen actor's lip movements overrules all else.

Professional *doubleurs* are interested in reaching the widest possible viewership. In the process of conducting their experiments, they have discovered how marketing shapes the public's linguistic and cultural identification, which vastly differs from the perspectives of cultural policymakers. Rather than discreet, insular viewers in need of guidance, local dubbers emphasize their audience's membership in a larger linguistic community. All accents, inflections, and dialects are permitted so long as the voices belong to local actors working at local studios. Culturally and linguistically agnostic, professional *doubleurs* refuse to be cast as unsupportive of the national project. Instead, the popular preference for *français international* for dubs consumed in Quebec suggests a mismatch between how audiences are imagined by intellectuals and policymakers on the one hand, and by practitioners and industry on the other. As cultural intermediaries, they aim to attract the attention of transnational platforms by offering a gateway to local publics, and simultaneously reaching for audiences beyond Quebec's borders. What seems to slip by existing analysis is the idea that self-recognition is not, or is no longer, a zero-sum game where land and language coalesce.

Dubbing as currency

[38] Hélène Mondoux (dubbing actress and director) in discussion with the author, Feb. 2018. The kind of French she is referring to is reminiscent of the mid-Atlantic English of classical Hollywood, or its northern version, the "Canadian dainty," epitomized by actor Christopher Plummer. With every language in which dubbing is practiced and consumed—Arabic, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Hindi, and so on—there exists a highly formalized form of screen speech that has no analogue in the real world. Frequently referred to as "dubbese" or "*synchronien*" in the francophone world this language form is also referred to as "beaumarchais" after the eponymous playwright's linguistic theatricality, the rigid formality of which haunted francophone stages and early sound Cinema.

De-territorialised 21st century streaming platforms appear to brush cultural hierarchies aside, and to treat existing cultural industries as upstart candidates among many others. When, in 2018, Netflix announced its much-celebrated in the press (upon closer inspection, unremarkable) 5-year financial commitment to Canadian production, francophone creators were embittered to learn that original French-language content was not guaranteed as part of the deal. Larry Tanz, Netflix vice president of content acquisition, had just "discovered" a local creative potential: "As we are developing francophone talent, I'm optimistic that the supply of great ideas … will increase."[39] As a matter of fact, the streamer's snub of Quebec's language rules and traditions, as well as its unclear taxation status, had been a hot topic of discussion from the day it launched on Canadian territory in 2010. "On peut dire qu'il y a un clair avant et un après Netflick [sic] et la diffusion en continu" [Arguably, there is a clear before and after Netflick and streaming] comments language activist Yves Lebel.[40] Language is a centrepiece of cultural policies and has concrete consequences the media production in Quebec, where the numbers in *L'État des lieux* assert a preference for French-language content. While continuing to favour home-grown entertainment, however, Quebec viewers were getting curious about streaming, which features limited content in French.[41] In an angry letter to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Board, Lebel lists several bungled efforts to localize content: frequently it is only the trailers and teasers that are available in French; distribution rights for the dubbed version of *The Crown* (2016-) have not been secured for Canada; only the initial seasons of *This Is Us* (2016-) and *The Good Wife* (2009-2016) have been dubbed, forcing—and habituating—viewers to accept subsequent seasons in English. "This is how cultural homogenization takes hold," he fears. Most crushingly, production of the Quebec-made French dub of *House of Cards* (2013-2018), which augured the potential for a lucrative future partnership with Netflix, was abruptly terminated two episodes into the third season as the streaming platform opened its headquarters in Paris. Two seasons Quebec-made dubs were shelved, never again to be heard by francophone ears. "I felt like a labourer learning that his shop is moving to China, but instead of China it's France," recalls *doubleur* Jacques Lavallée, the French voice of Frank Underwood.[42] It is only on rare occasions that cultural commentators in the popular press acknowledge the underappreciated artform-cum-service that is dubbing, but when they do it is with remarkable pathos: "Les doubleurs québécois souvent oubliés" laments one journalist, "Séduits et abandonnés par Netflix" regrets another.[43] The decision-makers at Netflix, comments Lebel, wrongly assume that Canadian francophones would not object watching in English because, after all, "ce charmant pays est officiellement bilingue, n'est pas?"[44] For language activists like him, dubbing has a very real consequence for local culture. This small but vocal group exerts

[39] Daniel Leblanc, "Netflix 'on Track to Exceed' Its $500-Million Commitment for Productions in Canada." *Globe and Mail*, September 27, 2018. The trope of "developing local talent" is common among multinational media corporations who routinely overstate their role in the development process. For a similar argument regarding the video game industry, see my articles "Headhunters and Funmakers: Game Industry Recruiting à Montréal" and "Lofts, Eats, and Montréal's Game Industry" in *Mediapolis Journal*, March 2018.

[40] Yves Lebel, written communication with the author.

[41] In contrast with Anglophone Canadians, Quebecers spend more time consuming traditional television and other legacy media such as radio, and less time online. This has an effect on Netflix penetration into the Quebec market, as well as on advertising dollars. Bree Rody, "Traditional TV Thrives and Netflix Lags in French Canada: Study," *Media In Canada* (blog), May 23, 2017. mediaincanada.com.

[42] Allan Woods, "The French Frank Underwood," *Toronto Star*, December 13, 2014;

[43] Judith Lachapelle, "Les doubleurs québécois souvent oubliés," *La Presse*, January 6, 2012, sec. Télévision; Natalie Petrowski, "Séduits et abandonnés par Netflix," *La Presse*, November 27, 2014, sec. Débats.

[44] Yves Lebel, personal interview.

continuous political pressure on cultural policymakers. Whether spontaneous or politically orchestrated, its purpose is to signal to the public at large a certain "common sense" about language that presumably reflects a silent majority. Dubbing may be sparsely covered in the press, but language influencers regularly participate in mainstream discourse on the topic. From their perspective, streaming platforms are dismissing the wishes of viewers, disparaging local celebrities, and ignoring existing language policies, while local politicians and the press neglect "national" priorities by failing to condemn these actions outright.

The desire to compete globally exceeds the desire to hear themselves, expressed each time Quebec dubbers use international French on the dubbing stage. As the previous sections details, the expectation to see local culture reflected in its media products is unsatisfied in the case of dubbing, which subverts the main tenets of the cultural discount thesis and active audience theories. Francophone Scholars in the areas of sociolinguistics, translation, and communication studies periodically return to this phenomenon and seek answers in theories of accumulation, which propose that consistent and persistent exposure to a language stimulus eventually produces a normalization of attitudes towards that language, even when it is a language variant that is not local (see more about accumulation and limited effects theory in Littlejohn and Foss 2009:624). If the goal is merely to satisfy local consumption, why then maintain *français international* when it does not reflect Quebec culture? Further, they question the coexistence of multiple versions localized in the same language. They consider the "double dubbing" operation of multiple, virtually indistinguishable versions, to be an impractical exercise from an economic standpoint. The question begins to shift in the direction of a kind of economic nationalism, where cultural cues are no longer the overriding markers of identity, but production location matters. Absent from these analytical angles is a deeper discussion of the economic rationale behind this cultural practice. Analysis largely confines itself to cultural preferences, but does not consider the possibility that the use of international French aims to maintain pressure on the international market and to participate in a long game of cultural influence. Thinking of language as currency, rather than as a semiotic signifier of identity, offers an alternative perspective. Language as currency explains why it is impossible to determine whether the *français international* spoken in dubbed content has originated in Quebec or in France. Safe for a few localization tendencies such as using Parisian slang in French productions and more neutral and formal language in Quebec ones, dubs intended for the international market are virtually indistinguishable to francophone viewers. International French allows the Quebec industry to maintain its presence on a global scale and signals to global distributors that its localizations can compete everywhere.

Lexicographer Lionel Meney makes a case that multiple registers of French and other languages, dialects, and accents, coexist as discreet systems because they fulfill different functions (2011). This heteroglossia draws attention to the elasticity of the concept of language as both a medium of communication and of exchange. In that sense, the linguistic construct of *français international*, only spoken on the dubbing stage, is part of a greater influence campaign over the global francophonie, a game that comprises all of the former colonies and protectorates where French is still an official language or a strong second language. While France is the principle actor in this exercise of soft power, and hopes to control potential future markets in Africa and Southeast Asia through cultural affinity with the global francophonie, Quebec itself expresses similar ambitions softened by its own subaltern posture. Borrowing from Spivak, Quebecois intellectuals such as Germain Lacasse make liberal use of the concept of subalternity to describe

their own cultural positionality. Read in economic terms, this is the positionality of a subaltern cultural producer. Subalternity, however, refers to the potential of the subject to shift from marginal to dominant. To illustrate with an example, we turn to the Montreal videogames industry. While in many contexts Quebec may describe itself as cultural subaltern to French cultural power, it is nonetheless a major global provider of French (and other) language localizations and voice acting for AAA titles (Gaelle Leysour De Rohello, game translation workshop 2016).

Streaming platforms use the transactional property of language to stimulate interest and to create competition among their client states. They also invest in local production in return for which they obtain advantageous distribution conditions, frequently eschew taxation, and become an important competitor to legacy media networks for household budgets and advertising revenue.

The friction between cultural policies and the global media economy have led the dubbing industry to de-politicize itself, to the chagrin of cultural thought leaders and language activists. In the late 1970s, provincial prime minister René Lévesque had attempted to promote Quebec dubbing to European markets. However, what began as a cultural mission of solidarity with the international *francophonie* was met with hostility from French dubbing professionals. According to the recollections of one contemporary of the events, angry protesters blocked Lévesque from disembarking on the tarmac at Charles DeGaule airport (Yordan Nikolov, personal interview). The mission was a failure, and the budding Quebec dubbing business became keenly aware of the cost of direct political involvement. By politicizing the industry, Lévesque had inadvertently interfered in cultural exchanges that had already been established between Quebec dubbing producers and French distributors under the political radar. Quebec-made dubbing "could have had a shot in France," Nikolov comments, until Lévesque added it as an item on his diplomatic agenda. With the French domestic market being roughly ten times that of Quebec in terms of revenue and viewership, translator Robert Paquin observes a curious reversal of power dynamics, where it is the culturally dominant France who raises protectionist barriers against the "subaltern" Canadian province (Paquin 2000). This strategy aims to control not only what is distributed on French soil, but what can eventually reach the wider *francophonie*, where future markets await.

The legal history of localization following the Lévesque incident may provide a clue about the current posture of the industry as de-politicized, while remaining politically and financially connected to the State. The political economy of dubbing in Quebec was transformed in 1975, when the provincial government voted a law similar to the one already in place in France, "Loi sur le cinéma," which made the translation of a film obligatory, whether subtitled or dubbed. The translation was to be done in Quebec in order to allow the distributor to obtain an exploitation visa for the intellectual property. This law, however, has almost never been enforced. Following France's vehement response to Lévesque's visit, policymakers in Quebec adopted softer tactics. Rather than banning the import of French dubbing outright and forcing media importers to dub locally, as urged at the time by vocal advocates of Quebec culture, a new series of bills shortened the window within which American producers were expected to provide translated versions. The dubbing industry in France operated at a slower tempo and was unable to supply their versions quickly enough, pushing distributors to rely increasingly on localization services in Quebec.

Eventually the French studios caught up, and the Majors once again turned their gaze towards France. To keep the local industry going, the UDA encouraged a protest:

> We wanted to keep the work local, on voulait garder du travail chez nous. So we did a campaign to try and get heard, we went to strike in front of cinemas, we attempted to chip away a little at the corporate image of these companies [the Majors], we accused them of being bad corporate citizens. They came back en masse, it worked really well (Joey Galimi, dubbing director, personal interview)

Part of the reason the Majors "came back" was also due to a special study commissioned to examine how best to retain dubbing contracts, which led to the introduction of a tax credit in the 1990s (Deslandes 1999). At the same time, the Quebec dubbing industry began a more deliberate campaign to render itself visible to its public by establishing an online presence, guest appearances at popular talk shows, public demonstrations, and the use of star talent. As global distribution paradigms were increasingly leaning in the direction of the simultaneous worldwide release (Davis 2006; Lobato 2019:53), French studios continued to increase their own rhythms of work and to compete with Quebec, which revived cultural anxieties. The 2007 strike by the Writers Guild of America had caused delays and cancellations of dubbing projects. The 2008 financial crisis rekindled a turf war over international versioning contracts, and the Quebec dubbing industry renewed its demands for legislative protections. The Ministère de la Culture et des Communications responded not by applying existing laws but by commissioning more studies (See *Doublage et renouvellement* whitepaper). On display in these reports are the multidirectional levers of cultural power. Investment in the local service and production economies via the so-called "runaway productions" from the U.S. allow the Majors the privilege to dictate the terms of distribution and monetization. Policymakers urged the government not to concede to "coersive and negative" pressures from members of the Quebec intellectual and creative elites who were offended by the Majors' apparent preference for French dubbing, as well as France's own rejection of dubbed cultural products from Quebec. The government-produced report *Doublage et renouvellement* suggested a softer approach:

> Ce n'est donc pas une question de courage politique, encore moins de manque de sensibilité envers la création artistique ou une manifestation d'indifférence devant l'importance des industries culturelles. Il ne serait tout simplement pas responsable d'adopter une loi en la sachant au départ entachée de nullité et génératrice d'effets désastreux tant pour la santé de notre industrie que pour la qualité de nos relations avec nos partenaires américains. [It is not a question of political courage, and even less of insensitivity towards artistic expression, or a display of indifference towards the cultural industries. It would simply not be prudent to introduce a bill, knowing in advance that it will not amount to much and might produce disastrous results for our industry for our relations with our American partners.] (*Doublage et renouvellement*)

Instead of political or legal consequences, additional incentives were recommended to keep American productions coming. Local distributors could keep the option of circulating dubbing acquired in France, should they choose to do so. As part of the report, a delegation was sent to Los Angeles to meet directly with representatives of Major studios, who assuaged the cultural

fears of their Quebecois guests by reassuring them that any decisions about dubbing were motivated solely by the bottom line, not by cultural value:

> When we say that there are no openings for Quebec dubbing in France, it's not like there are none. ... But things become subjective, we often hear "it sounds too Quebecois" when in fact it doesn't sound Quebecois at all, it just doesn't sound "French Parisian". The French feel weird about not hearing what is familiar. Interestingly, when we lower the price, all of a sudden, it's like "Wow, your dubbing is great!" (Martin Watier, dubbing actor, UDA workshop)

The cultural currency of *français international* may be accepted worldwide, but the value of dubbing is continuously contested and fluctuates because of various overt as well as oblique cultural influence manoeuvres. In the cultural contest between Quebec and France, rumours and backdoor influence peddling from strategically placed localization experts play a major role. A number of practitioners and localization producers I spoke to describe their clashes with representatives of the opponent's industry, who attempt to sway potential clients with cultural expertise. Cultural critic Nathalie Petrowski chronicles the *Primary Colours* affair, following the release of Mike Nichols' 1998 film of the same title. It was one of many dubbing projects that were completed in Quebec and then summarily shelved in favour of a French import. Reported widely in the press, trade magazines, and discussed at union meetings was a "poison pill" rumour come all the way to Hollywood, alleging that "les doubleurs québécois parlaient mal et qu'ils faisaient un travail de cochon [Quebec dubbers spoke poorly and did a botch job]."[45] In response to a letter from the Quebec artists' union UDA, Nichols explained that he never even heard this rumour, and had no notion how the imported Euro-French version ended up on Quebec screens. He had delegated such decisions to a long-time associate in Italy who handled European dubbing. Whether or not these events took place as recounted, practitioners' responses to global cultural transactions are as real and as emotional as if they did. The distribution industry capitalizes on this to encourage a large-scale race to the bottom between nations that takes on the guise of a legitimacy challenge, a struggle for cultural status, and distinction. From this perspective, the Quebec government's hesitancy to apply legislated protections for the dubbing industry can be seen as a part of a greater neoliberal strategy for involving the nation into a quasi-nation-building exercise via international competition over language. Practitioners view *français international* as necessary to maintain pressure on their "cousins" across the Atlantic, although, since Quebec is not officially permitted to export to France, this is a performative kind of competition. It is motivated and maintained by the market but remains limited to the cultural domain. As the dubbing industries of France and Quebec contend for international attention, a number of soft tactics come into play. Made in France versions, for instance, are sometimes labelled "TrueFrench," to suggest a higher status and, clearly, to pass a value judgement on the quality and authenticity of the competition. At the same time, industries on the periphery that alleged cultural centre, such as Quebec dubbing, are best served by a kind of strategic invisibility, by remaining in the public eye only long enough to drum up political and financial support from the state, but to keep politics away from business. Quebec's subalternity here is defined not by its cultural differences with France but by the size of its domestic market. France equally fears Quebec, whose proximity to Los Angeles and New York gives it a geo-economic proximity advantage. After all, there is a very large number of Quebec filmmakers, actors, and

[45] La presse, 1 octobre 1998, D. Sortir, https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2186744

technical crew who work in the American film industry on both sides of the border (Coulombe 2014; Gasher 2002). Likewise, thanks to the demographic shifts outlined earlier, a number of French ex-pats are employed in the Quebec dubbing and voice acting industries, which means that projects can sound exactly alike on either side of the Atlantic. Online platforms participate in this race between countries by exploiting longstanding cultural rivalries. The very nature of their distribution model pressures nations to compete with each other according to rules set at a higher, transnational stage. The fact that nations spar in cultural terms to conditions set by multinational economic entities is not something new (Mattelart 2000), but it is something that has intensified with each subsequent media delivery paradigm. In addition, the terrain of cultural production formerly "national" and today termed "local" is rapidly shifting. If localization was, for a time, one of the few grounded industries that could not be separated from its land and people in the same way as other sectors of local production eventually became outsourced, there are whispers in corporate hallways about transnational outsourcing across and beyond the *francophonie*, with International French dubs trickling in from Mexico, Israel, and Thailand, where large numbers of francophone expats reside. Looming on the horizon, advances in AI with deepfake-like audiovisual processing and generative voice cloning indicate that we are on the verge of reshaping the linguistic-cultural puzzle of global media production even further.

Conclusions

What is the legitimacy and status of Quebec dubbing in the context of global media flows? The emergence of French-Canadian nationalism in the 1960s and the Quebec independence project that inspired thinking about culture and politics for decades afterwards also left its imprint on media theory and practice. As I have shown, this imprint is observable as a specific cultural habitus adopted by generations of scholars and made manifest in policy documents that steer cultural practices and funding. One fragment of this picture is the dubbing industry. The various positions I have outlined above, those of cultural critics, policymakers, and localizers, can all be read as reactions to the threat posed by opening up situated social and cultural practices to global competition. Though these groups frequently adopt opposing positions regarding which dialect to use, or how to approach "national" culture, they express common fears of a borderless political climate. The freeing of trade worldwide in the 21st century and the benefits that it brings to transnational streaming platforms and local media corporations are paid for by cultural and media workers on the ground. International competition puts a tremendous and immediate stress on local systems of production, and the power asymmetries that local workers confront from above are replicated down the line, carrying over to ever more precarious levels below, where we find the cultural newcomers and industry outsiders ushered in by globalization itself. If legislation is reluctant to put pressure on platforms in defense of these precarious workers in the lower tiers, it is because platforms clearly demonstrate economic benefits, as illustrated in Figure 4. Cultural policy administrators play a game of *strategic (in)visibility* by encouraging policies that celebrate the local culturally even as they undermine it economically.

Quebec dubbing can mean several things at once: it can refer to elevating a vernacular language and culture that for many is symbolic of anticolonial and postcolonial struggles; or it can refer to a carefully constructed and formal language that does not reflect popular speech at all, but is preferred by viewers. It is important to note that this preference is confined to the practice of

dubbing and not to cultural production as a whole. Without question, Quebecers are partial to hearing their own films and television shows in Québécois, but for reasons that scholars regularly debate, they take exception to dubbed content. From early efforts to bring French talkies to anglo-dominated Quebec theatres, to the francization of the local mediascape, we also note a transition from sovereigntist efforts to marshal national unity and build an imagined community to an accelerated cosmopolitanism and a fragmentation of viewership.

In *La fatigue politique du Québec français* philosopher Daniel Jacques argues that Quebecers are experiencing the end of an era where collective emancipation is abandoned in favour of individual freedoms (Jacques 2008), a period which parallels the neoliberalisation of culture. In terms of media use, this means a cooling of the "obsession with language" (Bouchard 2002), a greater tolerance for linguistic variety, and even consumption of content in multiple languages that critics frame as a new colonialism of global and deterritorialized mass culture.[46] The rapidly transforming demographic composition of Quebec society demands a revision of what self-recognition means in the 21st century. This moment is accompanied by an increased diversity in the film and television production workworlds and among dubbing professionals, which the dubbing industry is only just beginning to address, particularly following criticisms about representation expressed by actors voicing characters of colour. Anglophone viewers would be familiar with white voice-actors stepping down from portraying non-white characters in shows such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *Big Mouth*. The dubbing world has equally been challenged to introduce greater diversity among *doubleurs*. In France, Justine Huet describes how the black / white casting divide in shows featuring predominantly African-American actors, such as *The Wire* (2002-2008) and *Luke Cage* (2016-2018), exposes a certain "malaise" of the dubbing studios to produce a cultural product that does not fit its traditional modes of operation and understanding of cultural difference (2020:119). If, until recently, cultural appropriation as a form of resistance was the prerogative of the dubbing professional in a media environment dominated by imported content, the realization that structures of cultural domination exist also within the industry has come somewhat as a surprise to those working in it. Upon some self-reflection about self-recognition, and at the behest of global clients that include platforms, dubbers hasten to widen their talent pools and to account for diversity.[47] This move has been strongly motivated by the tension between legacy media and transnational platforms, whose arrival challenges the insular local cultural hierarchies and threatens to replace them with competitors from the global market.

Legacy media entities have unique and long histories as the sole exhibitors and sponsors of local culture, and for a time they held a monopoly over attention within the borders where they operated. With the incursion of transnational streaming platforms, québécois intellectuals and policy-makers fear that pressure from the outside would redesign their "imagined community" in its own fragmented and nation-less image. The struggle over market dominance between the old

[46] Germain Lacasse (film scholar, Université de Montréal) panel discussion. Doubler les films et les séries au Québec : Pour qui? Pourquoi? Comment? 13 Oct. 2018, Maison de la littérature, Québec.

[47] Beginning with a Conférence sur le doublage pour les artistes de la diversité et les artistes autochtones in May 2017, the Union des Artistes (UDA) invited a panel of artists from diverse backgrounds to recount their professional trajectories and to present their views about what self-recognition sounds like on the dubbing stage for black, Indigenous, and artists of colour. "La diversité est importante pour nos clients, et elle l'est donc aussi pour nous" [diversity is important for our clients, and therefore for us also] comments dubbing studio coordinator Francine Martel, illustrating how cultural change is directly enacted by the market (in discussion with the author, April 2018).

mechanisms bound to the physical infrastructure of the land, and the new virtual ones, is articulated through intellectual work and cultural policy documents as a competition between nation and globalism, between *québécois*, a local accent seen as a marker of national character (Meney 2011) and the linguistic construct of *français international*, spoken only on the dubbing stage. The reports of dubbing industry workers reveal an acute mismatch between the aesthetic preferences of popular viewers and the aspirations of the political classes whose narratives of subalternity, cultural distinction, and self-recognition hide the many ways in which Quebec is, in fact, completely integrated into North American society and its global ambitions. As this chapter has shown, the negotiations around language and dubbing practices show continuities rather than sharp divides between legacy media and the platforms occupying center discursive space today. The viewer's attention is the principal asset solicited by both sides in their bid to influence not only popular definitions of local culture and cultural sovereignty, but also of the forces that regulate them.

2. Indigenous Stories, World Screens: adapting Indigenous content for a global public

This chapter is dedicated to Jeff Barnaby (1976-2022), whose film Rhymes for Young Ghouls (2013) *first introduced me to the rich world of Indigenous film in Canada.*

In exploring localization through the interplay between local media work and global media distribution, this thesis work investigates issues of circulation, cultural policy, localism, and platform economies. The production and distribution of Indigenous content may initially appear as an outlier in this framing. This chapter proposes a more nuanced view of localization, in which narratives specific to Indigenous contexts are adapted (localized, in a sense) for broader viewership. This localization process involves utilizing mainstream aesthetics to make Indigenous stories more widely accessible, and relies in no small part to the global interconnectedness facilitated by streaming platforms. This chapter focuses on Canada and Indigenous cultural producers located in this country, but I also give examples of Indigenous media production south of the border. While all examples feature Canadian Indigenous participation, the disregard for strict adherence to borders and nation-states comes from the recognition that the Indigenous peoples of North America delineate their territorial, cultural, and economic boundaries differently. What may be considered "local" to them does not neatly align with the conventional understanding of locality within a nation-state framework.

Introduction

To understand how systemic conditions materialize to direct local and global media flows, to control access to audiences, or to manage content, it is necessary to take a closer look at how the policies guiding Canada's cultural industries have emerged. To accomplish this, we need to take a dive into the genealogies of ideas and attitudes about what is "local" in cultural production, and how attitudes about locality and localism have been formulated across various official documents and cultural policies. The overarching motif of this dissertation is the place of local production within transnational media platforms, but what is considered local in Canada, and who are the local producers of media? In this chapter I move away from a tendency to center on Anglo or Franco cultures when discussing Canadian media production, and I shift my focus to Indigenous production. The endeavor to challenge existing narratives about the nation, such as the notion of "two founding peoples," as the only narrative, also represents an effort to recognize the complicated history of the present-day cultural landscape, and to envision renewed forms of cultural identities going forward. Through an examination of cultural policies that steer production and distribution in Canada, this chapter focuses on Indigenous productions designed and adapted for global audiences. I lean on policy documents related to broadcasting and streaming Indigenous content in Canada, as well as on industry narratives and interviews with Indigenous content producers. Indigenous culture is the critical terrain whereupon the current and future identity of federal Canada is currently being worked out. A non-Indigenous scholar and an immigrant, my perspective on Indigenous culture is continuously developing as I learn about the works of Jeff Barnaby, Elle-Maijà Tailfeathers, Jennifer Podemsky, Ron E. Scott, Gail Maurice and many other contemporary creators who seek to bring Indigenous culture to mainstream viewers. My personal journey behind the scenes of the Indigenous mainstream began in 2014 when I produced the soundtrack for Jeff Barnaby's director's commentary

accompanying the DVD release of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013). At that time Indigenous media was beginning to claim the mainstream's long overdue attention, particularly following the success of Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001). Nonetheless, in the 2010s, wider circulation and access to the general Canadian viewer continued to be elusive goals. I look at some of the historical reasons for this, following which I discuss Indigenous mainstream storytelling and its strategic importance as a political tool. This chapter describes how the policies that attempt to circumscribe certain forms of local culture into specific categories, also tend to assign those cultures to specialty channels. By contrast, through mainstream content directed at global audiences, Indigenous media producers are undoing colonial prescriptions that seek to divide and control publics both on-screen and off, and to designate what counts as Indigenous, Canadian, or "mainstream." Mainstream here refers specifically to genre filmmaking and a Campbellian (Jungian) understanding of archetypes and storytelling arcs (Bassil-Morozow and Hockley 2016). As director Jeff Barnaby explained to me, Indigenous creators use mainstream genres and archetypes as building blocks that are reimagined and adapted to Indigenous perspectives.[48] This chapter also focuses attention on the extraordinary adaptability of the platform economy to absorb and assume indigeneity in its pursuit of publics.

Policy, Indigeneity, Platform

One of the first global studies looking specifically at policy and screen media published in the last 30 years was the collection *Film Policy: International, National, and Regional Perspectives* edited by Albert Moran in 1996,[49] which attempted to examine the inner-workings of international film distribution dominated by the U.S. By taking a closer look at various local policies, this work brings to light patterns of media circulation, regulation, protectionism, and censorship that influence global film markets. More recently, Crane, Kawashima, and Kawasaki's *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy, and Globalization* (2016) and Mingant and Tirtaine's edited collection *Reconceptualising Film Policies* (2017) propose methodologically updated approaches to the subject by including a greater diversity of examples, and provide an important overview of how governments and industries respond to recent transformations in production, distribution, and consumption of screen media. These volumes analyze key political and economic mechanisms, and bring cultural globalization from a theoretical abstraction to grounded reality thanks to interviews with practitioners and policy-makers. Abounding with case studies, these collections also show the limitations to global approaches to the study of policies, which are as diverse as the specific contexts from which they originated. Frequently, the examples they provide are in sparse conversation with each-other. The value of these works lies in identifying common patterns set by globalization, but the study of policy appears to be meaningful only at local levels.

In Canada, screen media production and distribution depends considerably on cultural policies and public funding. The study of policies has informed communications and media research in relation to documentaries (Druick 2007), film festivals (Burgess 2012), feature films (Tepperman 2017), or the Canadian cultural industries more broadly (Wagman and Urquhart 2012). With the growing importance of platform distribution, scholars began investigating how transnational

[48] JB, personal interview
[49] See also the collection edited by Colins et al. 1986.

flows of media and capital influence local cultural policies. Gattinger and Saint-Pierre (2010), and Bourcheix-Laporte (2019) explore shifts in the language of policies that have accompanied the cultural economies of the 21st century (2010). Particularly, these scholars examine the ways policies promise to "remix" how culture shapes Canadian identity while turning a profit on the global stage. Cultural policies such as "Creative Canada" (Canadian Heritage 2017) have direct consequences for production and distribution, and have been greatly affected by the platformization of distribution that currently characterizes the global mediascape. Hesmondhalgh and others have discussed how "digital optimism" finds its way into policy, instrumentalizing the cultural industries in service of neoliberal media economies (Hesmondhalgh 2013; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). In Canada, this takes the form of "cultural industrialism." As Taeyoung Kim (2021) and Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte (2019) convincingly argue, since the 2000s the objective of cultural policies in Canada has shifted from the valorization of culture as a social good to an economic one. Both scholars trace the shift to the introduction of the Creative Canada policy framework in 2017, when the online discoverability of locally financed productions emerged as the primary factor determining cultural value within Canada's "creative economy." The definition of what counts as Canadian content has shifted accordingly, and that has had the greatest impact for creators whose participation in the cultural industries depends largely on their cultural identities. The analysis of policy shifts can be compared to interpreting arcane lore, because the direct manifestations of these shifts are not immediately obvious. Reading policy as narrative is key to understanding how the meanings embedded in cultural policies play out time. As DeVerraux and Griffin suggest (2013), cultural policies are best read as narrative frameworks which influence identities and trends in the present, with deep roots in policies past. I return to this notion in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Canadian scholarship that touches on Indigenous culture and policy includes work by sociolinguists Haque and Patrick, who offer a thorough historical overview of the racialized hierarchization of Indigenous languages and cultures inscribed in 20th century federal policies (2915; see also Haque 2012). In work that examines digital distribution, communications scholars McMahon et al. discuss how northern Indigenous communities have responded to unequal power relations with the State through policy lobbying, activism, and the practice of "tribal capitalism" described later on in this chapter (2017). Similar to the global surveys mentioned above, Erikson and Baltruschat's volume *Independent Filmmaking around the Globe* features chapters on how policies and new digital technologies have empowered Indigenous creators (2015). Although Baltruschat's work deservedly celebrates successes in Indigenous filmmaking (2004), it also joins the chorus of 21st century digital optimism critiqued by Bourcheix-Laporte and Kim. Furthermore, it refers to Indigenous film as a genre in valiant opposition to a Hollywoodian mainstream, relying on binaries inherited from national cinema discourses which, Audra Simpson (2014) suggests, present the Indigenous or national subject as "culturally 'pure'" and "traditional" rather than one beset by messy and contradictory notions of selfhood. Such discourses have limited relevance for Indigenous media today, which can range from the traditional to the experimental to the mainstream. For Indigenous perspectives, I turn to scholars such as Hokowithu and Devadas (2013) (writing in a Aotearoa New Zealand context), and Michelle Raheja (2013), who are reluctant to discount the complicated partnerships between Indigenous creators and the nation-state, or global capital. These partnerships bring clear socioeconomic benefits even as they highlight the ongoing challenges of colonialism, media (or

platform) imperialism, and sovereign identity. My work in the present chapter contributes to that conversation.

As I was researching materials for this chapter, Beauregard and Paquette were completing work on an edited collection entitled *Canadian Cultural Policy in Transition* (2021). This work explores the debates underpinning cultural policies in local contexts. Chief among the topics discussed is the powerful expansion of transnational digital distribution. The timely appearance of their volume indicates the importance of cultural policy in media scholarship, particularly concerning the place of Indigenous creators in the global mediascape.

Over the course of my research I found that a significant part of the discourse about policy and Indigenous media production continues outside of the academy. In large part, this cluster of work is written communally and does not reference a specific author (Crosscurrent Associates 1999). As Griffin-Pierce proposes, "like business corporations, [Indigenous groups] exist in perpetuity despite the death of individual members, and they own property, consisting of ritual knowledge, ceremonial paraphernalia, land, and economic goods, which they hold in trust for future generations" (Griffin-Pierce 2000:43). Knowledge here refers to treaties, ententes, contracts, and also policies. Indigenous media activists practice actionable politics, politics of refusal, and many of their written records appear in ephemeral formats such as manifestos, policy recommendations, petitions, band council reports, and other memoranda. Actionable politics refers to the idea that interventions into shaping cultural policies must yield direct results, not simply encouraging promises. Politics of refusal, on the other hand, is the rejection of authority (particularly the sovereignty claims of nations like Canada and the US) rather than opposition to it. Audra Simpson's fieldwork with the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks contrasts resistance, which can be linked to open confrontation, with refusal, a more politically effective means of navigating hybrid assemblages of sovereign and governmental authority (Simpson 2014; see also Prasse-Freeman 2022). Refusal also stands in contrast to politics of cultural recognition. Indigenous alterity refuses to be "recognized" by the colonial powers from which it wants to distance itself. For Coulthard (2014), Canadian politics of cultural recognition actually facilitate the assimilation process into the formerly colonial, presently neoliberal, and soon to become neo-colonial state where subjectivities are continuously refashioned away from local concerns and social practices. As I put forward in this chapter, Indigenous media production equally refuses to be named and defined in traditional terms by Canadian policies, because recognition by the State also implies control or subjugation. Recognition by the State bestows legitimacy upon the State, a stance not accepted by Indigenous activists and communities who question State authority.

To relate policy analysis to Indigenous scholarship of visual culture, Michelle Raheja's concept of visual sovereignty is essential for understanding "the space between resistance and compliance wherein Indigenous filmmakers and actors revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure … film conventions, while at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created by these conventions" (2013:193). Raheja's work bridges several areas that I also engage with throughout this dissertation: industry studies, media production culture, and the transnational circulation of symbolic goods. In the second part of this chapter I draw on methodologies from production cultures and industry self-theorizing (Caldwell 2008, Meyer et al. 2009, Banks et al. 2016) in my discussion of the cultural practices and self-presentation strategies of Indigenous creators. Based on interviews and various public events that

took place between 2014 and 2020, I examine the narratives through which they make sense of their labor, as well as the ways they critique or tolerate the industry within which they operate. In a continuously transforming media circulation environment defined by platforms, both foreign and domestic, production culture methodologies developed by Banks et al. (2016), Holt and Perren (2009), and others (Havens and Lotz 2017) help examine struggles over authorship and authenticity within collective creative endeavors such as film and television production, as well as the ways that personal and group identity "branding" is used to motivate viewers to engage more fully with the platform economy. Finally, though not central to this chapter, the discussion inevitably returns to platforms, the ultimate destinations towards which Indigenous mainstream projects are bound because they offer unprecedented access to audiences and worldwide distribution (Poell and Nieborg 2018; Srnicek 2016).

Contributions

Although Indigenous filmmakers and media creators have been striving for decades to access wider audiences within Canada and abroad, the literature on Indigenous production has only recently began to pay closer attention to Indigenous-made content intended for outsider eyes. The accent had been on discussing the various ways that the colonial gaze, "from the ship's deck," has ingrained itself into Indigenous narratives and public perceptions. The opposing view, "from the shore," is influentially explored by media scholars Hokowithu and Devadas (2013), but has already been present in the work of Indigenous media creators for some time.[50] My work contributes to that conversation, except with a catch: I am not Indigenous, and can therefore only address those aspects of Indigenous media production that Indigenous creators themselves care to divulge to outsiders. Within that terrain, my interest was to follow a subgroup of highly credentialed and experienced contemporary Indigenous media creators as they navigate platform distribution, and to analyze the public policy narratives that circumscribe that process.

Another area where my work makes a contribution is through an in-depth exploration of the submissions (Government of Canada 2020)[51] related to updating Canada's Broadcasting Act to include digital platforms. These submissions constitute a large volume of ephemeral and transient documentation intended to sway policymakers, as they make pivotal decisions about the future of the Canadian culture industries behind closed doors. Policies are important in most contexts where local and global media flows intersect, and are particularly consequential in places where local industries rely heavily on public funding, such as Canada. Unlike the work of U.S.-based scholars Caldwell, Meyer, Holt, and others who operate in, and therefore analyze more traditional capitalist frameworks, my research takes a deep dive into the inner-workings of public institutions where different kinds of capital and power struggles are at play.

[50] The reference to on-shore and off-shore perspectives is borrowed from Māori "Fourth Cinema" theorist Barry Barclay, who compared the colonial gaze to a camera placed on a ship's deck, while Indigenous points of view were akin to the camera located on the shore, looking at the ship (see Hokowithu and Devadas, 2013). This powerful image comes up frequently in interviews with Indigenous creators.

[51] All references to "submissions" in this chapter refer to records collected by the Government of Canada as part of a public consultation process in preparation for a significant review of Broadcasting and Telecommunications policies intended to take into account digital platforms and online distribution. Where possible, I reference specific authors or organizations individually, and the complete records can be found at https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en/broadcasting-and-telecommunications-legislative-review-submissions.

Structure

The first part of this chapter centers on Canadian cultural policy and its relationship to the Indigenous mainstream. Specifically, I look at the birth of policy by examining the documents that informed what was to become the Online Streaming Act (Bill C-11), bringing Canadian cultural policy up to date in the 21st century. The history of these otherwise invisible documents is an important part of the history of Canadian media. As Michael Dorland once observed, the history of Canadian media is best understood as a history of the documents steering media production and distribution (1991). Dorland's work points to important continuities in how media production and distribution are viewed by policymakers across technological transformations. DeVereaux and Griffin suggest that policy documents are "stories that reveal why policy is never merely a response to a set of precise data but most often an attempt to both work within, and influence, a particular unfolding of events" (2013). As a cultural group that relies heavily on production grants and other specially appointed funds to further, through media, Indigenous ways of life, Indigenous creators are uniquely affected by cultural policies. As Hokowithu comments, the "existential material reality" of Indigenous producers "is seldom accounted for in culturalist *re*visioning" (Hokowithu and Devadas 2013:106). That is, how policies frame the material basis for the production of culture matters greatly. This applies as much to the on-screen narratives that offer visual representation, as to narratives that describe how Indigenous cultural production comes into being. The key to the relationship between media policy actions and media production outputs is understanding the narratives embedded in policy, particularly where culture or language are concerned. In this chapter, I look at what knowledge about Indigenous production and distribution is supplied to the Canadian government by various stakeholders seeking to influence decisions about the Broadcasting Acts. As I discuss below, these submissions reveal a highly contested terrain that, in the end, remains unresolved in spite of the highly performative nature of the public consultation, because policymakers were unable to arrive at a coherent official narrative.

What is the evidence that cultural policy contains governing narratives and isn't simply a question of subjective interpretation, as a critic might propose? Here I propose the notion of the *anthropological gaze* to suggest that historical and intellectual antecedents to current policies have had a strong effect on how Indigenous culture continues to be approached in policy, to this day. The anthropological gaze is an epistemological device that constructs and justifies knowledge about Indigenous culture (or the culture of "Others" more broadly construed), codified into policy. The concept describes a lens through which culture is perceived to perpetually clash with modernity. In cultural policy, the anthropological gaze is employed to evaluate the perceived value of cultural artifacts. While it can be useful in questions of cultural preservation, the anthropological gaze can also relegate trauma to the past, obscuring its ongoing impact. Ultimately, the anthropological gaze perpetuates an anachronistic view of Indigenous cultures, rooted in colonial ethnography and cultural developmentalism, with lasting implications for cultural policy.

The cultural policies guiding much of the media produced in Canada in the 20th and into the 21st centuries frequently reference a fossilised version of the Indigenous past, with barely a mention of its present, much less its futures. Why did these policies choose to focus exclusively on

cultural loss and language preservation, rather than on revitalization and growth? Why did they not consider urban Indigenous populations and Indigenous modernity? Canadian politics of media representation are inextricably intertwined with the anthropological gaze. Brendan Hokowithu refers to this phenomenon as a "re-orientalisation" which, following Spivak and Bhabha, encourages "the production of certain Indigenous subjectivities while others are left to die" (2013:109). Whatever does not fit the expected cultural template is considered inauthentic, untraditional, and not a part of the culture. The anthropological gaze makes a case for enhanced protections of Indigenous cultures, but also presents obstacles for Indigenous creators who wish to expand beyond current definitions. Implicitly, it prescribes which productions are "Indigenous enough" to warrant funding or distribution, and in the same vein, which are "too Indigenous" for mainstream publics.[52] On the surface it is assumed to be merely observational and informative, impartial to power and control, but as Haque and Patrick point out (2015), it offers a distinctly Canadian type of ethnocultural ranking of exclusion and belonging through cultural policy. Concerned with ethnographic observation and the classification of identities, it acts as a template of containment that sorts producers into legitimate and illegitimate, in addition to designating audiences as suitable and unsuitable for a given content classification. Anything but impartial, it brings to mind Michel Foucault's insights about the connection between disciplinary knowledge and power, where a hegemonic gaze isolates and divides subjects into groups through policy discourses and social structures. "To govern," he wrote, "is to structure the possible field of action of others … [to influence] the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed" (Foucault 2016:44). Similarly, policies that recognize specific cultural traits also tend to consign Indigeneity to specific channels of distribution, away from the mainstream.

How the narrative frameworks embedded in policies influence the work of Indigenous creators is examined in part two of the chapter. The one element common to both policy and production worlds is the platformization of distribution, which prompts renewed efforts to define, within and through platforms, what Indigenous means and for whom. The place of Indigenous creators in the streaming platform landscape is of principal interest. Here, I turn to Indigenous content intended for world screens, which in turn requires an analysis of the cultural translations and adaptations that take place during production. Through a series of discussion panels, interviews, and other forms of para-textual self-disclosures, I trace what effects policy narratives have on contemporary Indigenous creators' workworlds. I am sensitive that I am writing this as a non-Indigenous scholar, and so I restrict my discussion to issues that Indigenous creators themselves want non-Indigenous publics to be aware of. Indigenous filmmakers have long wanted to control their own images on-screen, but a growing number of them today are equally concerned with representation behind the camera (Raheja 2013). No longer interested in merely carrying the semiotic load of indigeneity, they are keen to participate in decision-making at the executive levels of power. Jesse Wente, an outspoken advocate for contemporary and well-financed Indigenous media distribution, suggests that Indigenous creators reject the idea of Indigenous media as a genre.[53] The mainstream is the principal discursive battleground where Indigenous creators contest the expectations placed upon them by policymakers and distribution execs.

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[52] Hokowithu and Devadas pose a similar question in the context of state funding in of Aotearoa / New Zealand, quite applicable also to the present context: "To what extent can a culture change beyond the juridical construction of 'Indigenous' before it loses its rights to indigeneity?" (Hokowithu and Devadas 2013:109).

[53] *Influential Filmmakers React to State of Indigenous Film in Canada.* CBC News: The National, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peRTgZbuE0s.

Indigenous producers and showrunners use uniquely specific Indigenous contexts as basis for their stories, which they translate for wide viewership using mainstream tropes. The mainstream offers a way to move beyond the anthropological gaze, to find new audiences, but it is a territory jealously guarded by supranational corporate interests, and particularly those of platform-based digital distributors.

Part I: Policy

Formulating cultural policies and framing new regulations is a long and arduous process, beset by various interests that work very hard to resist change and even attempt to roll back policies and regulations already in place. McMahon et al. comment that very frequently Canadian grassroots and community advocacy groups' policy proposals are subjected to pressures from both economic and political elites, frequently for economic reasons (even if, in a roundabout way, those reasons may be wrapped up in cultural terms) (McMahon et al. 2017). In Canada, before a bill is enacted into law, it is sometimes preceded by a public consultation, a bill draft, and hearings during which amendments are deliberated. Knowing that by the time their requests are shaped into the language of public policy they will be thoroughly edited, smoothed over and declawed, the submissions I look at tactically express opinions in direct and unadorned ways. The protracted and circuitous mechanism of policymaking strips the raw energy out of initial recommendations, therefore the language of many of the submissions tends to be deliberately pointed and polemical, intended to persuade and to provoke action. These submissions, or position papers, express great frustration with successive administrations' failures to address and stay abreast with the sweeping technological changes that have been taking place over the past three decades, as well as failures to defend and to promote Indigenous interests. Contrary to the submissions supplied by local and transnational corporate players, the ones by Indigenous stakeholders remind the reviewing committee that it is high time to address the disruptions brought about by foreign broadband platform distribution, with Indigenous creators in mind. As was the case with Quebec dubbers in Chapter 1, Indigenous media producers similarly felt that transnational streaming platforms were making a move to become the main venue where cultural and political opinions are forged, to bypass local governance and authority, and they wanted a seat at the table.

When the public consultation process is complete, a great levelling occurs at the other end in the form of a sustained and methodical sanitization of the original submissions (Government of Canada 2020). Corporate threats, activist opposition, and stakeholder demands are shaped into a holistic narrative that attempts to please all and to eschew conflict. The "What We Heard Report" (Government of Canada 2019) is the result of that levelling, a synthesis of the main arguments brought up by the submissions, reorganized to highlight future "growth forecasts" and "potentials for development" without detailing the problems, uncertainty, resentment, and contests bubbling beneath the surface, which the initial submissions were expressly meant to bring into view. It is a practical illustration of the "digital optimism" (Hesmondhalgh 2013) characteristic of the cultural industries' subordination to the neoliberal creative economy. There is a remarkable, but not unexpected, contrast between the polemic character of the original arguments in the submissions and the disciplined tenor of the final executive summary, as passionate pleas for action, or corporate rage, are tempered with positivist effervescence.

In what follows, I draw attention to just the kinds of details that are lost or omitted from the final reports, because they offer an unadorned vista over the war of position that takes place between those groups who maintain hegemony and those who struggle to establish counter-hegemonies in media production and distribution. I combine a Gramscian perspective (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012) with the Indigenous scholarship of Coulthard (2014), Simpson (2014), and others (Raheja 2013; Hokowithu and Devadas 2013), to illustrate how, in cultural policymaking, norms and values are challenged by competing interests in a push for an ideological shift. In their edited collection *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, Srivastava and Bhattacharya (2012) point out that Gramsci's work has been highly relevant for scholars working diverse geopolitical contexts all over the map, in spite of warnings (from western scholars) that doing so might result in "decontextualizing" the Italian intellectual's historical significance. Their response is that there is no single reading of Gramsci, and his ideas about modern empires and their legacies, war of position, and organic intellectuals, are important political perspectives that can be productively developed in a postcolonial context. In a war of position, selecting an appropriate battlefield is critical. It must be easily accessible to allow the counter-hegemonic forces to reach a wide public and gain legitimacy and recognition. As competition dips in and out of the purview of mass viewers, visibility of the competition process is key to success. My use Gramscian concepts recognizes the existence of specific, historical readings and interpretations, but opts for the more open-ended reading and application implied in Srivastava and Bhattacharya's work (2012).

In the second half of the chapter I continue with behind-the-scenes interviews and other documented examples of public self-disclosures that become important instruments of persuasion for cultural workers and producers, the organic intellectuals in Gramscian terms, intended to sway policy and publics in their favor. Access to wide publics, and hence participation in the mainstream, is a critical component of the hegemonic challenge. Both the submissions from various cultural organizations, examined in part one, and the direct voices of cultural workers, in part two, construct the media production world through a critical narrative framework. Narratives and stories impose a value structure, which is a mechanism for prioritizing attention. Discoverability, attention's algorithmic counterpart, is the degree to which content supported by these policies can be found online. In media and cultural policy, attention and discoverability are complementary subjects of intense discussion (Lobato 2019; McKelvey & Hunt 2019) because they are finite resources that require renewed emphasis in the platform economy. Being in control of the media production narratives that influence policymakers and the public, critical or otherwise, is the objective in this war of position between corporate players (such as Netflix, Rogers, Telus, Bell Canada, Shaw), Indigenous organizations (Indigenous Screen Office, First Mile Connectivity Consortium, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival), and non-governmental actors (CBC, University of Alberta and University of Regina Communications Departments, Telefilm Canada, The Canadian Media Producers Association, the Association québécoise de la production médiatique, actors' unions ACTRA and UDA).

Indigenous Critical Theories

Critical theory is an important instrument of persuasion. It offers a way of formulating ideas about power that exist outside of conventional power formations such as the judiciary, the economy, or mainstream politics. As Buddle suggests in the context of radio broadcasting, critical approaches are very frequently deployed as much for the sake of their analytical value as for the benefit of outsiders such as journalists and academics who would already be familiar with critical discourse and its political purpose. The combination between the Western critical theory cannon and Indigenous perspectives, however, requires adjustments. As Emma Kowal suggests, there is something about postcolonial applications of critical theory that necessitates "interrogative reinscriptions" and "wanderings" away from a putative point of origin (Kowal 2013). In her discussion of *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, she points out that Indigenous critical theory differs from its classical counterpart by asking how it can be used in the here and the now. An academic argument can certainly point out epistemological and ontological mismatches between the specific historical contexts motivating Gramsci's work and postcolonial theory, but Kowal suggests that what is important for the postcolonial scholars who embrace Gramscian thought is his practical, activist politics and not merely the process of intellectualizing his theories. His notion of the *organic intellectual*, or the *national popular*, have been hugely successful in contexts where the more situated and historical aspects of his ideas may have limited bearing. The organic intellectual has become shorthand for describing a figure of enormous meaning for groups who share similar fates, especially in response to the historical constants of colonialism and capitalism.

In their discussion of Chicano cultural representations, for instance, Fregoso and Chabram (1990) lean on Hall and Gramsci to explain the connection between postcolonial politics of identity and a war of position. Indigenous intellectuals and creative practitioners, they suggest, find themselves in a "double positioning" as progressive intellectuals tasked to defend their specific community's interests, but who are expected to do so under the rather loose category of "difference" assigned by mainstream critical discourse, which "subsumes ethnic identity into a universal category of difference without attention to our specific historical internal differences" (Fregoso and Chabram 1990:207). As recently as 2014, writes Aurélie Lacassagne, the Canada Council for the Arts used to list "Indigenous" impassively, alongside other groups with histories of marginalization (Lacassagne in Beauregard and Paquette 2021:91). Indigenous critical theorists seek to recenter critical theory on historical experience. Audra Simpson approaches critical theory against the grain, proposing that the Indigenous is all too often merely a stand-in for oppressed, marginalized, "different" communities, all of whom can be interchangeably theorized against the greater constants of colonialism and capitalism in "a near-constant deferral of the actuality of Indigenous frameworks, liveliness, lands, and waters" (Simpson 2020:694). Glen Coulthard extends this argument to explain that colonial dispossession is an essential distinction that requires an altogether separate approach.[54] Granted that in its classical form critical theory is a useful tool for understanding settler colonialism, he finds that it does not allow

[54] Extending this argument even further, into the economic domain, On Turtle Island (an Indigenous concept describing North America) critical theory is different in Indigenous contexts because of different interpretations of value. Robert Nichols and Marcel Mauss, whose work is separated by over half a century, discuss the economic anthropology of value. Nichols does so based on the concept of dispossession and theft (see Nichols, "Theft is property! dispossession & critical theory," 2020), while Mauss focused on gifting and exchange (see Mauss, "The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies," 2002). Both scholars find that Indigenous understanding of land ownership, alternative forms of capital, social structures, and compensation, though intuitive, do not find easy equivalents in Western social criticism.

insight into “culturally grounded” contexts (Coulthard 2014:148). The politics of place, personal narratives, and postcolonial ethnographies are important aspects of Indigenous critical theories. For Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin et al. 2008), writing about global Indigeneity, the focus remains on “localized critical theory” which is grounded in community, tradition, and custom rather than universals independent of agency and history.

And yet, following Buddle (following Bourdieu), the metaphysics these thinkers engage with are themselves in many ways a performance (2005), since they continue to operate in dominant systems of value where little changes. It is the submissions themselves, prepared largely by activists or media producers with “grounded experience,” that effectively promote policy change, and possibly, policy actualisation. Across the submissions by Indigenous players surveyed for this chapter (Government of Canada 2020), Indigenous critical theories are generally deployed in search of emancipation in the face of domination and oppression. Some of these are in response to the submissions made by corporate actors, whose messaging about “simply connecting people” (Telus) or “giving audiences what they want” (Netflix) employ a highly coded and ritualized language of policy and law that betrays a thinly concealed entitlement to dictate policy. Several submissions from Indigenous organizations critique existing policy mechanisms for being too “formal, legalistic, and dauntingly complex” (McMahon et al. 2017:272), as well as “filled with legal and technical terminology and concepts requiring extensive knowledge of both Canadian law and the various technologies being used to produce and distribute information” (The First Mile Connectivity Consortium 2018:14). Technocratic rule is embedded through convoluted and inaccessible policyspeak. “Cognitive imperialism,” as Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste calls it (2017), has held Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications in its grip for decades. Corporate privilege and accumulated economic advantage, Battiste explains, are grounded in settler legislation and policies that demonstrate no real intention to relinquish control. The First Mile Connectivity Consortium is a grass-roots, Indigenous-led initiative aimed improving internet connectivity and access in rural or remote areas. This organization’s submission openly calls out the existing telecommunications system in Canada as a technocratic “conspiracy” standing in the way of Indigenous progress (2018:17). The key function of critical theory in the documents submitted for review of the broadcasting act is rhetorical. It does the slow and steady work of challenging hegemonic structures in environments where capitalist accumulation has taken hold, ultimately steering towards Coulthard’s radical position that “For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die” (2014:173). The postcolonial moment is unique in that sense because resistance to colonialism and to capitalism amounts to the same thing: opposing economic expansion is integral to the anticolonial struggle.

The purpose of critical theory in relation to media production is to unsettle embedded perspectives such as the anthropological gaze and continuous emergence. The critical tradition is a means of resignifying and taking control of the traffic in images which portray Indigenous modernity. A part of that conversation concerns definitions of what is Indigenous and what is Canadian content. “Indigenous stories remain a defining feature of Canadian culture,” declares the submission by the Indigenous Screen Office / Bureau de l’écran autochtone (ISO-BEA submission). Not only are Indigenous stories necessary for healing the nation as a whole, this source suggests, but Indigenous cultures also hold the promise to provide a focal point for countrywide cultural cohesion not experienced since the nationalist movements of the 1960s. The new version of the Broadcasting Act, ISO insists, “must compel support for Indigenous

languages and cultures, and recognize them for their essential importance to Canadian culture and our shared sense of national identity" (ISO-BEA submission). In the global media economy, Indigenous identities offer the semiotic anchors necessary to establish a specific cultural sovereignty, which policies strive to make marketable on the world stage:

> In a globalized content marketplace and distribution ecosystem, the need for national identity is not diminished but rather strengthened, and indeed, becomes a marketable commodity on the global stage (ISO-BEA 2019)

> We must see ourselves as more than "just making television." We must see ourselves as the inheritors of a great cultural wealth – cultural wealth that must be nurtured, respected and enhanced. High standards, innovation and unique forms of expression and storytelling should inform our work and "brand" – if you like – our form of media as unique in the world. (Bear 2004:32)

Indigenous organizations lean on critical theories of decolonization and deconstruction because such discourses offer a way of structuring the relationship between Indigenous activists and the political establishment: "Critical theories … challenge colonial legal and political approaches to consider and include others who live and survive outside of the comforts of urban, corporate environments created and sustained from the resources extracted from remote and rural regions of Canada" (The First Mile Connectivity Consortium 2018:2). Whereas the past 100 years were defined by exoticization, cataloguing and commodification of Indigeneity, today Indigenous cultures are proposed as a new form of national identity for Canada, echoing Junka-Aikio's observation that the west's postmodern ennui is "undoubtedly driven by a complex set of different desires … the decreasing appeal of earlier, nationally defined identities and a general sense of rootlessness and disconnect that is associated with neoliberal late-modernity" (Junka-Aikio 2016:223). However, positioning Indigenous culture as a marker of Canadian national identity is not a straightforward matter. "Culture" in this context does not refer to a specific "niche product" that can confer identity. This is a motion to move away from the expectation for Indigenous creators to perform a specific function for an audience, but rather to become fundamentally a part of production and decision-making mechanisms, "to move beyond the role of subjects to being agents of their creation, the storytellers behind the story" (Nickerson 2016:17, part of the submission by the Indigenous Screen Office).[55] Rather than an anthropological restitution, cultural revitalization is described as a practice, the process of creating cultural expressions which inspire an "Indigenous renaissance" (Battiste 2017).

Buddle stresses that perspectives which see Indigenous cultural production as either resistance or surrender to dominant forces are out of date. "[A]nalytic models in which resistance and accommodation are invoked as conceptually distinct *either/or* responses … do not adequately account for the complex processes through which Aboriginal subjects *negotiate* or culturally configure technologies of cultural production" (Buddle 2005:8-9). Deliberate ambiguity is an important strategy in contemporary applications of critical theory. A common tactic is to contemplate opposing points of view simultaneously, within one and the same text. Following

[55] A role model admired by Canadian Indigenous filmmakers in that respect is Taika Waititi, one of a few Māori to gain global mainstream recognition. Waititi's work with international productions and talent tackles a diverse array of topics that go well beyond those "reserved" for Indigenous creators.

Coulthard, The Indigenous Screen Office submission openly entertains the possibility of nationalizing media infrastructures as a way to beat back both colonialism and capitalism, while at the same time the organization applauds the commercial successes of Indigenous creators (ISO-BEA 2019). This kind of dialectical argumentation is not paradoxical if one considers that the goal is to grab attention and to sway the policy review board by all available means. If submissions from Indigenous organizations alternate between celebrating private successes at the international marketplace and nationalization of the means of production and distribution, or propose Indigeneity as a focal point of Canadian culture but stop short of defining what that means, the ultimate declaration is that "To Indigenous creators, an Indigenous production is determined by whether the people in the 'above-the-line positions' are Indigenous" (Nickerson 2016:17). Ultimately, for Indigenous creators, domestic ownership and controlling stakes in production are the ultimate expressions of cultural sovereignty, much more so than visual or aural displays of diversity.

Submissions

Between 2018 and 2020, the government of Canada conducted a public consultation with broadcasters, telecommunications companies, and citizen groups, with the intention of bringing the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act of 1991 up to date. A public consultation is a quintessential democratic ritual that is performed very publicly and protracted as long as necessary to underscore the consequential and carefully considered nature of its findings. Among the aims of this process was to solicit advice from various players and stakeholders in the creative industries about how to modernize existing legislation to reflect the contemporary technoscape, as well as to harmonize it with current cultural concerns. Last time the Act had been updated, now archaic dial-up connections had been all the rage, and the Internet's eventual future as the default global communications network occupied very little public attention. Many of the contributors to this public consultation felt that the Canadian mediascape was being altered and seriously disrupted by platform distribution, particularly by large foreign-owned private corporations. The situation was especially dire for smaller players within Canada's media ecosystem, who had painstakingly worked for decades to build connections and to earn a certain recognition, only to find themselves devoid of these hard-won advantages as they faced an entirely new challenge. A principal challenge posed by transnational "online broadcasters" was that they were not explicitly included in Canada's regulatory framework, circumventing tariffs and failing to support local creators while benefitting from access to local publics. The proposed modernization of the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act, aimed to rectify this oversight. Today, the modernization process has come to a close with the creation, in 2023, of the Online Streaming Act (also known as Bill C-11). The events and discourses discussed in this chapter predate that development, and are intended to draw attention to the frictions and complex interactions that led to the Act's creation. As we shall see, what matters here is not so much the specific outcomes of the policy itself, but the conversations, conflicts, and debates that have emerged throughout the process. Our focus is on the dynamics of these discussions and the competing perspectives at play—the "war of position"—rather than on determining whether the resulting policies and laws have been successful, as only time will tell.

Nonetheless, it would be remiss to suggest that no progress had been made in the interest of Indigenous creators, in fact, quite the contrary. Indigenous culture was high on the agenda by

comparison with previous amendments to the Act. In the 1990s, many of the systemic issues faced by Indigenous creators had only just begun to surface in public awareness. The modernization of the Act thirty years later was presented as a chance to correct past omissions and to increase the presence of Indigenous media producers and creators on Canadian and world screens. From several thousand submissions received, the review board retained just over 320 documents detailing the concerns and recommendations of various parties, of which only a handful (sixteen submissions, totaling the interests of twenty separate organizations) addressed Indigenous media production and distribution in any detail. These documents make up the corpus of primary sources for this portion of the chapter.[56]

The submissions are divided into three categories: corporate players, Indigenous organizations, and non-governmental actors. Although "war of position" offers an apt description of the social psychology of the consultation process, it needs to be adapted to the subtleties of the present context where occasionally the interests of traditionally opposing players coincide. For instance, when Indigenous advocacy groups urge the Canadian government to regulate content and to demand greater concessions for local creators from transnational platforms like Netflix or Amazon Prime, they also point out that it is important to do so in a diplomatic manner, to avoid jeopardizing the potential for worldwide distribution that those same platforms make possible (De Rosa and Burgess 2018, part of imagineNative and ISO-BEA's submission). Access to large publics is governed by large-scale economic interests that rarely spur into action against their corporate nature. In their own submissions to the consultation, Netflix, Prime, Bell, Telus, Rogers, and others use the language of progress and equity, and proclaim ultimate fealty to the citizen-consumer, but at the same time they are prepared to put up enormous resistance and marshal in powerful legal counsel before making even minimal concessions, as a matter of course. It is also noteworthy that while Canada is host to all of the major global streaming platforms, Netflix was the only global player who felt compelled to participate in the Broadcasting Act's legislative review consultation. The other major transnational streaming platforms had chosen to adopt "wait and see" tactics.

If some of the submissions by Indigenous organizations like the Indigenous Screen Office and the First Mile Connectivity Consortium can be framed as activist interventions couched in the tenets of Indigenous critical theory, others like the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) adopt a more pragmatic tone that reflect their role as cultural intermediaries whose daily interactions with diverse social actors necessitate softer political positions. (In chapter one I presented a comparable situation where Quebecois intellectuals adopted militant positions in defense of local dubbing, while industry practitioners preferred using standard international French, insisting that it is no less "patriotic" to do so as long as production is kept local.)

One of the demands most frequently brought up by Indigenous groups is to obtain controlling stakes in ownership and decision-making power over broadcasting, streaming, and telecommunications infrastructures, even if, as some commercial interests dispute, such a move would go against the logic of the market. The public consultation seemed to offer a stage upon

[56] It is worthwhile noting that nearly every one of hundreds of submissions contained a standard statement in support of Indigenous languages and cultures as well as a pledge "do more." The sixteen documents which I am referring to here go further, and discuss the current situations of Indigenous creators in much greater detail.

which, fleetingly, the market of symbolic goods receded as a guiding influence and in its place appeared a different exchange token: the unique relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state, a history entangled with politics of location, cultural control, and resource extraction. Canadian governments of every stripe have always needed Indigenous presence across the country's vast territory in order to legitimize access to natural resources and reserves.

When it comes to cultural guidelines in Canada, opportunities are scarce for non-profit organization and citizen groups to participate in the shaping of broadcasting and telecommunications policies. Even when public consultations do bring about strategic interventions into the process of policymaking, McMahon et al. argue that these processes are routinely challenged by interests guided by the "invisible hand of the market" and "constrained by power imbalances and other inequalities" (McMahon et al. 2017:273). Yet, as they explain in the context of telecommunications connectivity in the Canadian North, every once in a while, it is in the interest of governments in power to offer formal opportunities for open participation in policymaking. In this way, governments write the narrative of their own benevolence into the annals of history.

Major themes

The channeling of publics is a considerable concern for participants in the consultation process. As the submissions make clear, neither legacy media outlets nor online distribution platforms are genuinely interested in changing current policies and legislation. Their goal is to maintain positions, and they do so thanks to a variety of tactics which can include delaying legislative interventions and lobbying to reduce standing regulations. In practical terms, maintaining positions, or market share, means that media distributors strive to create an environment where the attention of viewers can be predictably sustained, and ideally, controlled. For instance, this can take the form of strategically apportioning viewers by demographic markers. Similarly, on the production side, creators are directed towards producing content that aligns with whatever segment of the market distributors have decided to assign them to.

For Indigenous creators, this channeling of production consists of various strategies. In one set of cases, it involves competing definitions of what counts as Canadian and Indigenous content, and how production resources and opportunities are to be allocated based on these definitions. Another is the doctrine of *continuous emergence*. The "forever emerging" status of Indigenous filmmaking has done much to keep the workforce unbalanced and preoccupied with internal controversy. This is as much the result of rugged production conditions and limited funding, as it is a sign of contested interpretations about what Indigenous production means. Yet another strategy for channeling the public into segments is to eliminate the "middlemen," that is, local cultural intermediaries such as smaller broadcasters and distributors, as well as regional government influence, in an attempt to expediate a direct connection from transnational platforms straight to the eyeballs of the viewer. Here corporate talking points focus on freedom of choice, democracy, and claims to insider knowledge about "what audiences really want," with a heavy accent on the importance and inevitability of foreign investments. As Kim observes (2021), Canadian cultural policies in the first quarter of the 21st century make discordant

attempts to satisfy commercial marching orders in an era of reconciliation with Indigenous culture.

Regulating Audiences

Institutional cultural policies legitimize how the market is to be apportioned, while Indigenous creators express a desire to define their own cultural parameters and to choose their audiences.

Television viewership streams

The Canadian mediascape[57] offers abundant choices of content, but circulation is carefully supervised along a few controlled channels. Media policies ensure that players stay within their lanes, attend to their own publics, and crossovers are kept to a minimum. For public broadcasting enthusiasts interested in Indigenous content, there is APTN and its streaming service Lumi. Matters of national interest are handled by the national broadcaster CBC/Radio-Canada, and Canadian content (CanCon) is promoted in the public sector through local, frequently publicly funded mini-streamers such as GEM, Tou.tv, and the NFB. The private sector of media distribution includes highly conglomerated legacy media networks and telecommunications providers such as Bell, Rogers, Telus, Quebecor, and Shaw, who handle local news, sports and entertainment. Most of these legacy media, "local media giants," now offer their own on-demand streaming services to rival "global media giants" like Prime, AppleTV, Netflix, and Disney+. Operating in national space for decades, legacy media corporations consider themselves the traditional purveyors of entertainment such as series, movies, and sports, leaving everything else to "specialty" channels. In their submissions to the Broadcasting Act review panel however, local corporations view transnational players as unfair competition and demand greater regulation for others even as they request more relaxed rules for themselves. The "local giants" are equally suspicious of publicly funded enterprises that encroach on the production and distribution of entertainment content. In response to the CBC's recent line-up of award-winning shows such as *Schitt's Creek* (2015-2020), *Kim's Convenience* (2016-2021), *Trickster* (2020), and *Coroner* (2019-), one corporate submission advises that public funds are far better used for "the creation, production and exhibition of programming that is underrepresented in the Canadian broadcasting system or that is otherwise culturally significant and is unlikely to be produced by the private sector" (submission by Rogers Communications). In other words, public-funded entities ought to stick to items of "specialty" interest, and keep away from the mainstream. Meanwhile, the submission from the Indigenous Screen Office (ISO-BEA 2019) reminds the review panel that private corporations have an obligation to promote Indigenous culture as much as public broadcasters do, an obligation from which they are "in full retreat" (Nickerson 2016). All broadcasters in Canada have a responsibility under the Broadcasting Act to recognize the "special place of aboriginal peoples" (Broadcasting Act, section 3(1)(d)(iii)).

[57] In Canada, the contexts of production and distribution differ from those discussed by U.S. scholars Caldwell, Banks, and others, because of a much more present publicly funded production sector and the role of government in regulating distribution policies. The contexts are much closer to what is described by Hesmondhalgh in the U.K. ("The Cultural Industries," 2013), or Szczepanik and Vonderau in Germany ("Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures," 2013). At the same time, media ownership is concentrated in far fewer hands than in the rest of the global North according to Caleton University's communications watchdog, the Canadian Media Concentration Research Project (CMCRP).

The safeguarding and promotion of cultural sovereignty, Nickerson explains, is shared by all who benefit from access to Canadian publics. The response from the corporate sector is that, while the will to offer support is there, Indigenous storytellers are simply not commonplace, not readily accessible, and belong to a talent pool that is only just emerging. The trope of continuous emergence is liberally employed in existing policy and corporate discourse, as I will elaborate shortly. Private corporations interpret the "special place of Aboriginal peoples within society" (Government of Canada, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2008) as a recommendation leave Indigenous content to publicly funded broadcasters like APTN or the CBC.[58] What might initially seem like a respectful effort to prevent cultural infringement is, in reality, a tactic of control: commercial entities require policies to uphold communities of taste rooted in cultural "preferences," thereby allowing them to dominate mainstream entertainment. Meanwhile, responsibility for Indigenous creators' needs is delegated to someone else, such as the public broadcaster.

The apportioning of publics into communities of taste cannot be accomplished without an assist from State administrators. A frequent criticism levelled at the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) from various non-government organizations is that it already had the powers to regulate transnational players and to protect Canadian producers online, but has chosen not to do so in corporate favour (submission by Friends of Canadian Broadcasting). According to the submission by the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the premise for the entire consultation ritual is superfluous because, in fact, the legislation necessary to regulate the current media environment already exists (an opinion echoed across several other submissions). The public consultation becomes a performative formality exonerating the CRTC from lack of action. The situation is similar to what I describe in chapter one, about the attempts to legislate dubbing in Quebec. There, cultural protectionist laws were created but never enforced out of economic considerations.

The CRTC's "gentle" handling of local and foreign commercial interests at the expense of Canadian and Indigenous content creators has provoked questions from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian media producers. Given the CRTC's stated commitments to ensure that the "Needs and Interests of Canadians" are met (Government of Canada, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2007), several submissions rightly question whose interests the commission is actually defending, and to what end. When APTN applied to the Commission for minor alterations to its licensed programming percentages to allow the network to bring to its viewers more sports coverage (with Indigenous language commentary) and mainstream entertainment (specifically highlighting Indigenous participation, and occasionally dubbed in Indigenous languages), the request was met with stubborn opposition. CRTC's response reminded the network of its cultural obligations to focus on Indigenous issues and to stay away from mainstream sports and entertainment.[59] Justifying its ruling as a defense of

[58] CBC is seen as both a major and specialty broadcaster. From the perspective of commercial broadcasters its role as a publicly funded crown corporation is to focus on specialty content that is not likely to be produced by the private sector. At the same time, because it collects ad revenue, produces mainstream entertainment, and brands itself as the only national network, the public broadcaster is seen as a rival by private corporations.

[59] Interview with Monika Ille, CEO of APTN. Ille relates that a fresh slate imported Indigenous-themed mainstream programming such as *Wentworth* (2013-2021) could have been a good way to both revitalize Indigenous languages, and attract more viewers. This had already been successfully tried during the Vancouver Olympics. APTN had hired linguists and elders in order to develop a modernized vocabulary that would give Indigenous languages currency.

consumer choice, CRTC explained that consumers of sports and entertainment already had access to such content in the commercial sphere, and that it would be unfair for state-funded entities like APTN to compete in that arena. As Marcie Nickerson details in her contribution to the submission by the Indigenous Screen Office, the manner after which audiences are regulated has

> had the unintended consequence of making it more difficult for Indigenous producers to access mainstream markets, as mainstream broadcasters see APTN as the exclusive place for Indigenous produced content … This "ghettoization" also means that other broadcasters are not reflecting the actual diversity of this country. (Nickerson 2016:18)

APTN's in-house statistics estimate a total audience reach greater than the Indigenous population in Canada. With the network's on-demand service Lumi these numbers grow, offering a significant opportunity for Indigenous creators to capture a corner of the mainstream market with shows such as *Tribal* (2020-2022), *Trickster* (2020), and *Unsettled* (2020) which are designed to "speak to the world" (Telefilm Canada 2020).[60]

> We have very strict license conditions concerning Canadian content, so our foreign content is very limited, but for sure we're going to try and show some Hollywood blockbusters because those get ratings that are good. … We also get a lot of international Indigenous-produced content, cause that's who we are, right? APTN is there to share our stories. Indigenous stories from Canada, but also from other countries. That's very important for us, because if we don't, who else is going to show them? (Monika Ille, personal interview)

Licensing is a way to control the mediascape, and while it is granted or withheld based on content criteria, its ultimate aim is to regulate communications channels. Indigenous concerns about regulation are compounded by the weak role of government, and creators worry there is little to prevent commercial players from "dumping Indigenous content in off-hours or little traveled digital spaces" just to satisfy CanCon regulations (ISO-BEA 2019), despite commitments loudly made in public.[61] For APTN, as content discoverability moves away from

[60] Telefilm Canada, 2020. *Indigenous Content That Speaks to the World: Panel with Ron E. Scott, Janet Hamley, Gail Maurice, Elise Cousineau, and Jennifer Podemski, moderated by Adam Garnet Jones.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nM0Qd4oLvI.

[61] Not only have most of the critical points raised by the submissions been sanitized or altogether omitted from the final reports, but the recommendations based on these submissions attempted to regress on regulations that had, until recently, benefitted Indigenous viewers and producers. Without the mechanism that enabled the CRTC to license APTN, as the network's CEO Monika Ille observes, Indigenous people would still be invisible on Canadian screens (Monika Ille, interview with the author). The proposed "modernization" threatened to take away this power in the digital domain and leave Indigenous, as well as more broadly Canadian creators without the protections that existing regulation already guaranteed. For all its shortcomings, the Broadcasting Act of 1991 was technologically agnostic and offered the possibility for competent regulation of distribution over both traditional broadcasting channels and the internet. These powers of oversight were never truly put to use thanks to powerful lobbying and a domination of the CRTC institution by members of the legal profession rather than cultural scholars, communications experts, and members of stakeholder communities. Following decades of dispassionate attitude towards cultural sovereignty encouraged by the neoliberalisation of the mediascape, the tendency to concede ever greater capacity for oversight does not come as a surprise. The Broadcasting Act's modernization (bill C-10), was eventually rejected as

legacy distribution channels, and as online platforms become central sites of media circulation, the need to support creators who are not backed by powerful corporations becomes ever more urgent: "broadcasting increasingly moves on-line, the need for net neutrality will only deepen, as consumers and creators increasingly rely on the internet as their primary distribution and exhibition venue" (ISO-BEA 2019). For the Indigenous Screen Office, the extent of foreign control in Canada's telecommunications and production sector, alongside vertical integration and the high concentration of media industry ownership already present in the country, raises concerns about the integrity of the country's democratic framework. From this point onwards, they fear that the very structures of the media and communications industries begin to stand in the way of, rather than to enable, local cultural expression. As I discuss in the second part of this chapter, these conditions have pressed Indigenous creators to develop a sharp awareness of the political economy of production, their positions in it, and how it shapes the texts they produce.

Film festivals

The report titled "Pathways to the International Market for Indigenous Screen Content: Success Stories, Lessons Learned From Selected Jurisdictions and a Strategy For Growth" is a supporting document in the submissions on behalf of imagineNative, the world's largest Indigenous film festival based in Toronto. As this report shows, festivals are the leading promoters and exhibitors of Indigenous screen productions, with programming streams dedicated to Indigenous filmmakers. While this is great news for content creators, there emerges a paradox. Because festivals readily provide audiences, critical acclaim, and cultural capital, commercial channels of distribution do not feel compelled to provide additional support. The festival becomes just another exhibition circuit and frees up commercial actors from the responsibility to share audiences. As Diana Burgess argues, the "overarching cultural policy goal of fostering national cinema" has always conflicted with distribution (2012:3). Burgess sees the Canadian State's refusal to adopt a more protectionist, or culturally sovereign stance, as the major impediment keeping Canadian creators from being able to access mainstream Canadian viewers, so much so that it has become a distinguishing feature of Canadian cinema. The problem is both fiscal and cultural, Burgess writes:

> In the Canadian context, the value of national cinema is both a vexatious economic issue in that Indigenous films consistently earn less than a five percent domestic box office share and a symbolic one to the extent that lacklustre theatrical performance is seen as an indication of the chronic absence of a popular national cinema.[62] (Burgess 2012:3)

Here we can detect a familiar theme: the national—or the Indigenous—is under threat because unprofitable. While on the one hand the film festival is a platform that can distance itself economically and culturally from the mainstream, De Valck suggests that its function as an alternative exhibition site effectively institutionalizes a distribution stream apart from commercial circulation, which may not be its intended purpose (Valck et al. 2016). The intended

inadequate in addressing the realities of transnational digital distribution. Instead, a new bill (C-11) was proposed for the creation of an Online Streaming Act, specifically intended to address how Canadians create and consume media today.

[62] In the context of Burgess' essay, the reference to "Indigenous films" applies to films made in Canada, not specifically to those by Indigenous filmmakers.

purpose of most film festivals is to popularize niche content and open a way to wider distribution. The problem that both De Valck and Burgess point to is that the film festival alone does not constitute mainstream distribution, but allows an "excuse" for policymakers to pretend that the interests of creators have been served. In fact, Burgess shows how a national feature film industry has developed in Canada alongside film festivals precisely to give this industry a chance to exhibit its products to Canadian audiences, who would otherwise not have been able to view content by local creators. For a period of time, between the rise of film festivals as platforms for cultural expression in the 1980s, and the rise of digital distribution through online platforms in the 2010s, the festival was the closest Indigenous creators got to accessing the public at large. But defining what made Canadian or Indigenous culture qualify for exhibition remains ambiguous in national film festival documentation. In her analysis of festival-related policies from the first decade of the millennium, Burgess hesitates with the concept of national culture and its proximity to cultural nationalism. The mainstream popularity of films made in Canada, she suggests, need not a "nationalist articulation" in order to reach their "goals of industrial development" (Burgess 2012:6).

In this production environment, then, content is to be understood in economistic terms. Canadian or Indigenous films need not be plentifully bestrewn with specific iconographies to identify themselves as such. Film festivals are to be seen as commercial as well as cultural intermediaries. By boosting the symbolic capital of projects, festival exposure is seen as a way towards success in the commercial arena. This potentiality from prestige to profit seems, for policymakers, to be sufficient proof that local creators do not need additional support. In the end, the analysis of scholars like Burgess and De Valck, as well as the testimonies of organizations like imagineNative and the Indigenous Screen Office, suggest that existing status quo of channeling access to the general public is maintained and festivals effectively become alternatives to mainstream distribution.

Transnational exceptionalism, CanCon, and the audience market

Netflix is one of those corporations whose submission to the review board declares strong admiration for Indigenous culture early on, but makes no further mention of it. In contrast, the streamer features frequently in discussions by Indigenous creators and organizations as the epitome of media globalization, as well as a desired destination for their works. In the words of its Canadian communications team, Netflix is but "one of many" similar services across the Canadian mediascape, and the company believes that it gets unfairly singled out in media discourse. However, its sheer size and market dominance position it as an emissary of global media interests that deserves special notice. With purchasing power and persuasive cultural diplomacy comparable to that of a small post-industrial nation, the company's submission to the consultation process effectively speaks for the interests of all transnational digital distributors in Canada, even if its share of the market has ceded some ground to other competitors.

Netflix's submission is unique in many respects, chief among which is the carefully scripted nature of its legal prose, simultaneously meant to persuade and to threaten. It begins with a "cold open" executive summary, which lays out a simple thesis: viewers who use the service do so entirely of their own choice. For those concerned about local or Indigenous representation, there

are competing "specialty" services which satisfy the traditional requirements of land and language, as any healthy marketplace should, in Netflix's view. Besides, being a good corporate citizen by its own admission, the company does take interest in local content even if pesky CanCon regulations are not flexible enough to acknowledge that. Far from harming the Indigenous cultural landscape, this streamer takes care to publicize its support for local talent and the opportunities for worldwide exposure it can facilitate. It offers professional connections and economic opportunities few can compete with, certainly not the national broadcaster or any other state-supported distribution channel, which Netflix believes ought to put the company in a position to bargain against regulation. This is Netflix media theory:

> The emergence of on demand, online audiovisual services over the last decade has enriched Canada's production sector, without government intervention. We do not subscribe to the theory that a 'regulated investment' is more valuable than a consumer and market-driven one (Neflix 2019:13, submission to the public consultation)

The streamer puts into question accepted theories of desire for local / national / linguistic / cultural proximity, and suggests that in the name of Democracy viewers should be free to choose, away from government oversight, control, and censorship. However, behind this narrative of "freedom," it is the platform itself that that determines what viewers can ultimately access, curatorial functions formerly performed by governments through cultural policies. As I argue throughout this dissertation, it is thanks to the slow and steady neoliberalization of media production and distribution that updated versions of cultural policies have effectively outsourced cultural decision-making to the platform.

Free consumer choice is said to be the "organic" response of the market, and any attempt to stand in the way, argues Netflix, would "hurt" the market. In response to Telus, Quebecor, and other local players who lobby to impose greater regulations on global competitors, Netflix insists that regulation exposes government mechanisms as oppressive, socially engineered, manipulative, and undemocratic. The legal team that authored Netflix's submission makes a wry effort to "school" policymakers with their own brand of media theory:

> The reflexive assumption that new technologies and business models create challenges, rather than opportunities, is unsupported. Indeed, the data show audiovisual market-driven growth—not contraction—as new media gain popularity and viewership. To this end, it is imperative that the Panel clearly identify what problems it is trying to solve and ensure that proposed "solutions" address them without undermining the natural investments and growth that new media are already delivering in Canada. (Neflix 2019:13, submission to the public consultation)

Transnational streamers staunchly refuse to be labelled as broadcasters, given their "niche" status as an on-demand entertainment libraries. Therefore, they object to accusations of creating an "uneven playing field," a mere "talking point" which inaccurately, in their opinion, represents the place streaming occupies in local households. Without access to proprietary user data, it is difficult for policymakers to know if Canadians are exposed to enough local content, or whether local artists are getting their fair share of the local market. Transnational streaming giants dismiss CanCon requirements as a trivial technicality which they formally meet anyway (by

employing Canadian talent and crew for example). It is easy to make this argument because CanCon has been formulated in economistic terms for since the 1990s (Stursberg 2019), a trend that reaches full momentum with the Creative Canada policies in 2017 (Bourcheix-Laporte 2019; Kim 2021). Because CanCon cannot be define as a specific cultural recipe, both transnational corporations and local commercial players regularly dispute attempts to expand CanCon regulations. In Netflix's view, decades of regulation and a "lazy" reliance on public funding have not brought about better Canadian content, and consumers are making their voices heard by subscribing to alternative sources.

Transnational platforms are well aware that government subsidies cannot compete with the global exposure that they can offer. Using a carrot and stick approach, Netflix's submission cleverly exploits the various contradictions present in the Canadian creative industries and the policies that guide them. A case in point is the paradoxical situation where concern over the diminishing presence of Canadian content on local screens is superimposed against a celebration of record-breaking industry revenue figures (Canadian Media Producers Association 2022). Indeed, submissions from producers and media production organizations indicate a strong concern with shrinking support for local creators, while submissions from distributors and broadcasters report a healthy media industry sector on the rise. This contrast is mirrored in submissions by Indigenous organizations and production companies: the positive tone of the report filed by imagineNative sits in stark contrast against ISO's sobering commentary about limited production resources, and even more limited exposure opportunities. One celebrates Indigenous achievements, while the other offers a strong critique of the systemic barriers preventing Indigenous achievements. This ambiguous, contradictory, and paradoxical scenario presents challenges for Indigenous creators in reaching broader audiences, prompting a growing number of them to strategically position themselves in new ways in an effort to entice distributors. The second part of this chapter will focus on the self-reflexive accounts of several Indigenous creators, revealing behind-the-scenes strategies that aim to translate Indigenous contexts for broader audiences. But first, I will offer a thicker context for understanding why, in their efforts to reach audiences and to escape the predicament of continuous emergence, these Indigenous creators gravitate towards traditional mainstream storytelling tropes.

Continuous emergence

Emergent audiences, emergent talent.

In 2019 the Montreal chapter of UDA held its second dubbing workshop for BIPOC voice actors following strong remarks that Quebec's cultural production scene was far too insular and held high barriers to entry.[63] When I interviewed dubbing director Joey Galimi, one of the organizers, I learned that a talent pool of BIPOC actors simply does not yet exist. It would need to be created. "Indigenous and minority talent in dubbing? They are very difficult to find, and if found, they would have to be trained and will require a lengthy process of development, of 'levelling up'."[64] Continuous emergence is a governance strategy employed across a whole spectrum of

[63] Lussier, Marc-André. 2010. "Jacob Tierney persiste et signe." *La Presse*, July 8, 2010, sec. Cinéma. https://www.lapresse.ca/cinema/nouvelles/201207/17/01-4548722-jacob-tierney-persiste-et-signe.php.
[64] Joey "Joyish" Galimi, dubbing director and president of the Association nationale des doubleurs professionnels (ANDP), written communication with the author, October 2019.

macro and micro domains, from access to work at granular levels of everyday human interaction to access to finance and economic prestige at the levels of nations. It is a term I use to describe a contemporary version of developmentalist cultural evolution theories. Continuous emergence is related to what Korf describes as the "development industry," self-perpetuating bureaucracies involved in offering aid to populations deemed to require assistance. In the submissions outlined above, the Indigenous Screen Office and the First Mile Connectivity Consortium openly question the developmentalist narratives that place Indigenous media creators on an ever-emerging trajectory, always already in training and on standby for a more central role at some future moment. As the ISO submission relates, Indigenous filmmakers have observed for nearly three decades that, in spite of new policies, the same issues related to production and distribution systematically reoccur. The document concludes that, apart from more obvious cultural and racial factors, systemic discrimination might equally be the banal by-product of bureaucratic inertia, corporate greed, and feeble political will.[65] Fragmented and ultimately insufficient funding through "multiple sources, multiple programs, and multiple policies, multiple guidelines - only serves to feed the bureaucracy rather than the Indigenous screen-based industry" (Nickerson 2016:13). The proposed solution is to consolidate resources by tapping into the interests of more diverse audiences, but that is risky business, caution industry experts (submission by the Canadian Media Producers Association). Industry lore continuously asserts its aversion to risk. Risk mitigation theories such as the cultural discount thesis, state that audiences find it challenging to understand alterity because what they most desire is "seeing themselves reflected" in the media they consume. However, "Diversity is such a hot topic at the moment," ISO's submission declares, "industry and media are actively seeking it out, even where it may not exist" (ISO-BEA submission). As I discuss above, not only are today's viewers far more diverse than the imagined cultural homogeneity of the network broadcast era, but they are also interested in content that does not necessarily reflect them or their imagined mainstream community.

In the early days of Indigenous media production, "capacity building" had been the preferred term to describe the process whereby skills and knowledge about systems and institutions were imported from the outside. This had been the principal motivation behind the creation of Wapikoni mobile and NFB's shifting focus towards Indigenous creators starting in the 2010s, as well as countless undertakings by independent Indigenous and non-Indigenous producers to empower Indigenous filmmakers to "tell their stories." At the same time as they empowered, however, these efforts continued to place Indigenous media along a "forever emerging" track. For instance, the Indigenous Screen Office submission recalls when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation hired Indigenous consultants and actors for the series *Canada: A People's History* (2000-2001), but no Indigenous person was present at the production level.

[65] Much less frequently talked about, and beyond the scope of my present work, is the role that kinship plays in the systemic barriers discussed here. Kinship connections abound in the creative industries for a variety of reasons, and it is a topic well worth investigating particularly in the West. Unlike the Bollywood family networks discussed by Ganti, it is considered bad form to involve the family into discussions about western professional workworlds. Here, the preference is to evaluate individuals on their own merits without acknowledging any assistance received along the way that steps outside of rehearsed official narratives about "making it" in the biz. Kinship narratives strike western spectators as undemocratic, reveal too much about the mechanisms behind the scenes, and are therefore avoided.

> This is reflective of a prevalent industry practice - using Indigenous storytellers as consultants on productions written, directed and produced by non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people are asked to make non-Indigenous stories more culturally appropriate, rather than putting or crediting these "consultants" as writers, directors and/or producers. [This becomes] a "development loop" that never completes itself … Indigenous storytellers are in a state of perpetual training … without the ability to make connections with production houses, broadcasters and other distributors, any further training will make little difference in the "endless vortex" (Nickerson 2016:19, 29)

At the distribution end, the "perpetual apprenticeship" experienced for decades by Indigenous media producers has contributed to channeling their content into niche circulation. The biggest challenge Indigenous creators face today is how to expand beyond these proscribed distribution channels

The operational template of Canadian media policy is to overpromise solutions on the cultural front and maintain the infrastructural status quo. This is largely due to a history of short-term fixes that react to changing political or economic environments rather than decisions based on careful and deliberate longitudinal studies designed to promote future-proof public policy. The "unambitious policy and cost-ineffective investments in incremental change" (submission by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) 2008:3) that has led to this situation is described by Indigenous critics as a form of embedded colonialism (Battiste 2017). The solution they propose is a transition from the current commercial broadcast and distribution model to an Indigenous one, a "Whole Community" approach to long-term social and economic opportunities where Indigenous ownership, management, and production reflect "local priorities and desires" (submission by the First Nations Technical Services Advisory Group 2019:6), a form of "tribal capitalism," as I elaborate shortly.

Jason Ryle, artistic and managing director of the imagineNative film festival, proposes countering the continuous emergence phenomenon by providing a platform where "Indigenous stories are being told in ways that resonate with audiences everywhere" (De Rosa and Burgess 2018:3). This pursuit of broader viewership brings us closer to the central theme of this dissertation, which explores the diverse strategies producers and content creators employ to engage with and establish connections with their viewers. While film festivals may offer both opportunities and limitations, as discussed above, imagineNative's submission to the public consultation emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing a hub for Indigenous production, rather than one-off projects and short-lived start-up production studios that had been the norm. Reiterating many of the points raised by other Indigenous media organizations, the imagineNative team adopts a conciliatory public relations tone for the benefit of its intended audience: potential international co-producers and partners who can promote the Canadian Indigenous screen-based industry to "Indigenous, mainstream Canadian and international audiences alike, to enhance Canada's reputation at home and abroad" (Nickerson 2016:4). Today, virtually all major film festivals have dedicated a portion of their programming to Indigenous works. The document celebrates Indigenous filmmaking worldwide, and gives many examples of successful cultural policies and funding mechanisms that have enabled an "explosion" of Indigenous content over the past two decades. New Zealand, Northern Europe, the Russian North, Australia, Afrika, Latin America and the Pacific Islands are some of the many

locations producing Indigenous content, and notably, places where an audience for such content can readily be found. The move beyond continuous emergence passes through a wider exposure to global publics.

Within this global system, Canadian policymaking systemically lags behind. The system is inert and reactive. In the greater scheme of global media circulation, it is the Canadian media system itself that experiences continuous emergence. The ritual of the public consultation provided a necessary cover for lack of action on behalf of Canadian policymakers. Technologically agnostic, the original Broadcasting Act already had had the ability to regulate platforms, but it was studiously ignored by regulators, namely the CRTC, in favor of uninterrupted trade and an economistic view of culture. At a meeting with policymakers, APTN's CEO Monika Ille remarks on the glaring duplicity of this state of affairs:

> Right now, the Broadcasting Act is technologically neutral. The CRTC *does* have the power to oversee online distribution – although it has exercised this power lightly. To be honest, we don't understand why this authority would be taken away. You are well aware of the impact "web giants" have on newspapers – and how difficult it is to bring the giants into the fold. Why, then, would we take them out of the Broadcasting Act when it comes to online distribution of Canadian programming services and apps? … for a service like APTN and other Indigenous and Canadian services, Bill C-10 - as it stands - does not see us playing a role in the future. I'm concerned that it is actually excluding us from the online world.[66]

Indigenous producers, corporate players, and governments are entangled in a complicated web of interests, which I earlier compared to a Gramscian *war of position*.[67] In a war of position, those wishing to assert their own hegemonies—which includes subaltern parties struggling for ascent—will frequently engage in unlikely alliances in their struggles against already established hegemonic actors (Ramos Jr. 1982). For instance, legacy media's claim over national publics is challenged both from below, by Indigenous activists, and from the outside, by transnational corporations. In a paradoxical way, this brings the interests of Indigenous creators and transnational platforms closer together. From another perspective, both Indigenous producers and legacy media corporations share similar views about national and cultural sovereignty, and similar fears about the incursions of transnational players into local cultural spaces (and economies), although their respective reasons differ. Further still, Indigenous media advocates feel that their access to national publics is limited by distribution policies which favor legacy

[66] Monika Ille, APTN Speaking Notes - Heritage Committee - Feb 5 2021, original emphasis.

[67] The Gramscian understanding of classes and the media they consume requires an update in the 21st century, as well as in how it applies to Indigenous culture. In Gramsci's day, publishing and (radio) broadcasting were small, localised entities that operated independently and with limited means. Each was oriented to suit the tastes, ideologies, and pocketbooks of a different segment of the population. It was possible to associate level of education, taste, socioeconomic ranking and political leaning with specific sources of information and cultural proclivities. Today publishing and broadcasting entities have conglomerated into global behemoths and target a multitude of demographics simultaneously, via centrally-controlled branches. From below, higher levels of education and more developed tastes have produced a wide variety of individuals who may consume "low-brow" media at one moment, and "elite" the next. It is no longer possible to draw a straightforward association between taste, socioeconomic circumstance, and politics, as today's (urban educated cosmopolitan) viewer routinely adopts different class perspectives depending on social context.

media, while transnational corporations consider these same policies as obstacles to reaching local viewers. In essence, policies are instruments of local governance through which policymakers position themselves as intermediaries in control of local cultural terrains.

Healing and reconciliation with the past are some of the goals of urban Indigenous film and television creators, already addressed in existing cultural policies. Being in control of the present and shaping the future is an even more important element of Indigenous political and economic empowerment, and a way to access global as well as local non-Indigenous audiences. Indigenous creators place particular importance on who is permitted to tell their stories. They are wary of misrepresentations both on-screen and behind the scenes, not least because past practices of cultural and historical distortions have had the effect of unfavourably influencing cultural policies and public opinion. These concerns come from a desire to support tribal well-being as well as to preserve Indigenous cultural integrity. Occasionally, there surface issues involving non-Indigenous participants, or ones with contested Indigenous backgrounds who stand to benefit economically at the expense of Indigenous creators. Legitimacy challenges are thorny issues that occur now and again. Participation in decision-making, Indigenous excellence, local belonging and global modernity are central themes critical for understanding Indigenous cultures and cultural practices in Canada, and are further discussed in the following section. The Indigenous creators I look at offer self-reflexive theories about the production culture behind several recent Indigenous films and series made with international audiences in mind.

The submissions from Indigenous stakeholders collectively critique policymakers for practicing the doctrine of continuous emergence. From an Indigenous perspective, rather than advocating for the interests of local creators, policymakers have consistently opted to delay action, citing various inadequacies of the existing policy framework that prevents them from operating in the "new" digital landscape. Interestingly, such arguments persist even today (Canadian Media Producers Association 2022). Even though the digital landscape is no longer new, other novelties, technological advances or fresh economic models regularly get in the way. As policy itself is continuously emerging, the grey space between policy and practice has been very profitable for the global streaming economy. The online world is important for Indigenous media producers because it potentially allows them unprecedented access to audiences from whom they have been systemically disconnected. However, in a continuously transforming marketplace, continuous emergence suggests that the terms of engagement are ultimately not decided by policy.

Part II: Production

Media production culture can be described as "a social and economic problem-solving operation" (Caldwell 2008:331), a way of making sense of the social and economic conditions in which media producers find themselves. I propose that these examples of Indigenous storytelling *about* production and about the difficulties in reaching a wider viewership, also highlight the political importance of producing mainstream content for wider audiences. Or in this case, mainstream-adjacent production by historically subaltern social actors. In the previous section I discussed how the policies that steer languages and cultures also serve to keep publics in their places. For instance, APTN's broadcasting license was in momentary jeopardy when the network

proposed increasing some of its mainstream offerings to feature more "Indigenous actors or ones with Indigenous ancestry; titles produced or directed by Indigenous key creatives, or Indigenous-owned companied" (APTN public relations, follow-up interview) "because, let's face it, those kinds of shows and movies get views, and we're putting an Indigenous perspective, by translating them or dubbing them in our languages, that is not available elsewhere" (Monika Ille, interview). According to APTN's CEO Monika Ille, mainstream content with an Indigenous connection has had a marked success with Indigenous viewers and the network was interested in expanding such offerings (Monika Ille, personal interview). Promptly, the CRTC review board reminded APTN that its cultural commitments do not include acting in competition with mainstream players. According to a CRTC communication with APTN from 2018, which Ille graciously shared with me, the fees levied by the Canadian government on local commercial entities such as Shaw, Cogeco, and Quebecor in support of local artists (from which transnational platforms have largely been exempt until the introduction of the Online Streaming Act, Bill C-11) had served to sponsor the production and broadcasting Indigenous content, but at the same time hindered APTN from competing with mainstream offerings in sports and entertainment. The network was encouraged to focus on content "consistent with the spirit of the criterion" that was not likely to be produced by the private sector ("APTN – Licence renewal and renewal of mandatory distribution order," Government of Canada, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2018). What this meant was that, safe for occasional special dispensation, APTN was prevented from broadcasting popular sporting events with Indigenous language commentary, or mainstream films featuring indigenous participation, both of which are very popular with APTN viewers.

Mainstream and popular entertainment provides a fertile ground for political influence, which has led a growing number of Indigenous creators to engage with it as a way to challenge colonial prescriptions that seek to control them and their publics. Indigenous producers contest the notion that their work should be consigned to so-called "specialty" channels reserved only for other Indigenous viewers. They want to take their content to global audiences.

Cultural policies about Indigenous culture in Canada have traditionally focused on representation and media texts. While authentic representations of the Indigenous experience are important to Indigenous creators, mainstream media production intended for wider audiences is an emerging cultural practice that is of major interest to a new generation of filmmakers, television producers, and others involved in the Indigenous creative industry. In this second part of the chapter, I continue with a look "behind the scenes" of the Indigenous mainstream by examining discourses that emerged from conversations, discussion panels, and Q&As with Indigenous producers, writers, and filmmakers between 2019 and 2021. The source materials for this section were scattered across social media sites, behind paywalls, and were complemented with personal interviews whenever access and introductions were possible. Primary sources were gathered following Caldwell (2008), Meyers et al. (2009), and Banks et al.'s (2016) concept of "deep texts," which refers to textual ephemera generated by creative communities *about* their work, and intended for external audiences. Deep texts are ways in which an industry describes itself, its social rituals, and politics, for the benefit of outsiders. Such documents offer contextual ethnographic evidence about how media production happens, what obstacles stand in the way, in informal, polemic, and frequently crude ways that directly reflect the emotional states and professional preoccupations of their authors. Some are candid self-disclosures about what

Canadian and Indigenous content signifies for creators. In other instances, producers and practitioners discuss working conditions and systemic obstacles. A third type focuses on self-promotion and media production myth-building. These texts are fundamentally intended for a general public and offer the outsider a rich array of self-reflexive performances that have become an expected and fundamental part of today's catalogue of popular media practices. Any attempt to understand media production culture in Canada without diving into these textual practices can only offer a partial impression of the workworlds of Indigenous creators on the one hand, and the struggle to define "Canadian," "local," or "Indigenous" on the other.

Deep texts

Self-reflexive accounts by industry practitioners about Indigenous screen culture and about media production, and the processes and challenges of producing Indigeneity for the global screen, involve film and media industry insiders who are also cultural insiders. These roles regularly intertwine in the work of Indigenous producers both on- and off-screen. The first part of this chapter presented a detailed look at how cultural policies attempt to define content creation and to sort publics. Here, I offer a reverse view, that of the media producer and content creator, although it remains difficult to locate precisely just where individual agency ends, and institutional or commercial influence take over.

The majority of interactions, conversations, and events presented here occurred during the pandemic lockdown of 2019-2021, when Indigenous filmmakers and producers had time and opportunity to indulge in extended interviews and to participate in lengthy online discussion panels about current and forthcoming projects. The Canadian fiction film and television industry is much smaller than its counterpart south of the border, and has produced far fewer self-reflexive texts compared to those studied by leading Media Production Culture scholars based in the United States (Mayer et al. 2009; Banks et al. 2016). There are important distinctions that set the Canadian media financing and production model apart. For instance, in Canada, Indigenous media production is heavily subsidized and relies on public policies much more than its counterpart south of the border. This is evident in the kinds of disclosures that Indigenous creators make about their work. The forced pandemic pause in production for the screen provided an opportunity for more behind-the-screen texts to emerge, and enabled the potential for greater personal access to Indigenous creators. The upsurge of additional content uploaded online draws attention to how deliberate and integral self-disclosures and self-theorizations can be for the perception of a robust and healthy industry. The more of them there are, the healthier the industry is perceived to be, confirming what actor-producer Michael Greyeyes describes as a momentum of Indigenous-led productions with some "real money behind them" at the outset of the second decade of the 21st century (APTN News | F2F interview, 2021).

The present moment is also important for another reason: the dissemination of these deep texts, as well as the movies and series they reference, is made possible exclusively by the intermediation of the same few corporate players and converging technologies. In the highly controlled traffic of contents online, there is an appreciable cultural distancing between "local" producers and their "global" audiences in which "new understandings, commonalities and frames of meaning are elaborated without direct contact between people" (Held and McGrew 2003:18). Contemporary publics, Tomlinson suggests, dispose of an entire "*portfolio* of identity positions,

which they draw upon in different contexts and which they routinely juggle and negotiate—and sometimes have to reconcile" (Tomlinson 2009:226, original emphasis). For him, the increased connectivity of globalization leads to an increase in the possibilities for identification and encourages a cosmopolitan curiosity. As contact between creator and viewer is facilitated by platforms and regulated by public policy, "cultural cosmopolitanism" begins to impact the self-presentations and creative content of Indigenous producers. Political scientist David Held, who has extensively researched and attempted to define globalization, describes cultural cosmopolitanism as a necessary process of recognition of the interconnectedness of communities across disparate domains, where the "fortunes" of everyone are collectively entangled (Held 2013:111). This observation, however, sits awkwardly against another tendency present in the deep texts produced by Indigenous producers, namely, an emphasis on grounded belonging and local authenticity.

Given the ad-hoc production conditions and funding challenges, frequently austere working conditions, and sparse distribution opportunities characterized by highly controlled access to publics, and given the diverse backgrounds and unique professional trajectories of Indigenous filmmakers, it might seem a tricky feat to attempt to discern general principles about Indigenous production in Canada. Yet, several observable trends emerge from the policy negotiations and self-presentations I have surveyed, which I explore here in more detail. The first trend involves competing notions of identity caused by limited economic opportunities. A related concept is the mobilization of producer self-disclosures as distribution assets, which platforms successfully deploy to recruit new audiences. Finally, I look at mainstream media production as a critical instrument that pushes against the prescriptive cultural policies attempting to circumscribe and keep Indigenous creators to Indigenous viewership zones.

Competing notions of identity

Policies about the identity of media producers create competition for scarce resources and opportunities. Meanwhile, producer identities are mobilized in pursuit of new publics online.

Publicly funded institutions in Canada such as the National Film Board (NFB) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) have a very specific idea of what Indigenous media means. According Katherine Baulu, a (non-Indigenous) producer with the NFB who specializes in producing Indigenous topics, "we go for repeatability. If a filmmaker does well on the international festival circuit, we are very likely to work with them again" (Katherine Baulu, personal interview). The repeatability doctrine is pertinent as much in the world of private corporations as in that of publicly funded crown corporations, although the kind of capital sought after differs in each case. Even as Indigenous production enjoys an unprecedented momentum in the third decade of the 21st century, with new talent and new opportunities, an old guard of executive producers, policymakers, and other non-Indigenous "allies" continues to steer access to funds and publics. The resilience of this system is in part due to the purported lack of experienced Indigenous players at the executive branches of power, carried over from the assumptions of continuous emergence outlined earlier. It is also in no small part due to tensions within the Indigenous labour pool itself. *Rutherford Falls* (2021-) writer and producer Sierra Teller Ornelas related that "When I came up in diversity programs there was a sort of feeling of 'there can only be one' and it was like Hunger Games" (Vincent Schilling, 2021, roundtable).

This description is echoed in the FirstMile submission, which describes how "government programs often forced communities to compete with one another for scarce, short-term funding" (McMahon 2017:278). This competitive economic environment produces conflicts and antagonisms in the cultural domains of identity and belonging.

The industry's self-reflexive texts offer a key for outsider understanding of competing notions of belonging in Indigenous contexts. The topics they address attempt to resolve audience misconceptions about indigeneity that arise from decades of exposure to non-Indigenous perspectives. Filmmakers such as Neil Diamond (*Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian*, 2009), Drew Hayden Taylor (*Searching for Winnetou*, 2018), and John Murray (*Cowboys & Pretendians*, 2018) have closely examined how Indigenous identity has been portrayed and mimicked on-screen, frequently by non-Indigenous actors.[68] These documentaries aim to decode issues that are confusing for outsiders, such as the question of Indigenous ancestry, belonging, and lived experience. Such matters also pop up regularly behind the scenes. When non-Indigenous writers use "native informants" to validate Indigenous perspectives, or when claims to Indigenous identity are made in pursuit of grants and other advantages set aside for Indigenous creators, a highly contested cultural terrain is revealed.[69] "Ethnic mimicry," as Navajo author Jacqueline Keeler puts it (2018), "cultural cosplay" as Blackfoot actor and activist Gitz Deranger describes the phenomenon,[70] or to use Michelle Raheja's term, "redfacing" (Raheja 2013) is good for ratings because controversy sells. Raheja (of Seneca descent) describes performative redfacing as "the process and politics of playing Indian … where self-representation and stereotype collide and are continually negotiated" both on and off the screen (Raheja 2013:vii, 3). In writers' rooms, personal lived experiences regularly find their ways into fictional narratives. *Rutherford Falls* (2021-2022), *Tribal* (2020-2022), and *Trickster* (2020) play with the cultural imposter archetype within their narratives, and contrast it with the culturally authentic. Through texts that account for the production process itself, we learn that many of the trials and tribulations experienced by fictional characters, such as cultural misunderstandings, professional anxiety, and discrimination, also chronicle writers' own experiences with "the Biz."

Indigenous cultures and languages are gaining a higher priority in cultural policy, but in the old Broadcasting Act of 1991, they were earmarked for support only "as resources become available" (Government of Canada, Broadcasting Act 2023). A peripheral matter to be accommodated after other, more dominant interests had been satisfied. This attitude has changed with the times to offer more substantive commitments to Indigenous media initiatives. As many

[68] *Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian* (2009) was the first well-known film example of Indigenous film industry/cultural insider commentary. Directed by Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond, the film offers a self-reflexive analysis of American Indianness through the Hollywood screen. Leaving his homestead in the arctic circle, Diamond sets out to track the "Indian" that he and his friends grew up watching on television. This is not a quest about his own identity, but rather about the identity of the tanned figure daubed with war paints and circulated throughout the American mainstream in over four thousand films and television shows since Edison's *Buffalo Dance* of 1894. Scene upon scene, the mainstream has commodified an effigy of a widely diverse people into a single, *faux* Indian, recognizable by everyone across the planet except by Indigenous viewers themselves. Upon returning home, the filmmaker realizes that the rebirth of modern Indigenous representations must focus on the human and not the mask.

[69] Stanton, Kylie. 2021. "Indigenous Filmmaker Is Calling for Fines and Jail Time for Those Falsely Claiming to Be Indigenous." *Global News*, January 19, 2021. https://globalnews.ca/news/7586102/Indigenous-identity-act/.

[70] APTN News, 2020. *Gitz Deranger Reacts to the Doubt Surrounding Michelle Latimer's Indigeneity.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYrfYRlq_SY.

of the Indigenous submissions presented earlier observed, today Indigenous languages and cultures are expected to take a central place in new versions of this and future national policies. Today, policymakers see Indigenous identity not as provisional, but as an essential feature, a major expression of Canadianness with dedicated "resources and mechanisms to support the funding, distribution and discoverability of programming created by Indigenous peoples" (Government of Canada 2019). The kinds of access to production resources and audiences that an Indigenous identity opens up is a coveted and highly contested affair among media producers, one that has been attracting controversy since the 1970s.[71] The conversations surrounding the case of *Trickster* (2020) showrunner Michelle Latimer reach deep into that social history. Latimer's Indigenous self-identification was challenged despite her claim to Indigenous family lore and a DNA test confirming Algonquin Métis heritage, because she hadn't the lived experience to allow her to speak from these perspectives.[72] Following the controversy, the CBC suspended development of the *Trickster* series indefinitely, and Latimer's award-winning documentary *Inconvenient Indian* (2020) was pulled from circulation by the NFB. This crisis management strategy, for Indigenous scholars like Veldon Coburn, was a heavy-handed and unhelpful way to handle a "social sin." [73] The knee-jerk reactions of various public relations teams effectively robbed other Indigenous participants, partners, talent, and crew who had worked on the suspended projects from the exposure they had rightfully earned.

In spite of newly introduced policy proposals in support of Indigenous culture and creators, access to opportunities and resources remains limited. This has the unintended consequence of casting Indigenous identity itself as a tangible resource, activating a kind of race to the bottom where competitors vie for opportunities based on identities. The competition for scarce opportunities and resources, combined with the institutional inertia that perpetuates doctrines such as "repeatability" and "continuous emergence," invites controversy: "it's an industry that's ripe for imposters because there's a need for native stories out there but there's not a lot of people that can tell them from behind the camera" explains director Jeff Barnaby (interview with

[71] APTN News, InFocus, 2021. *A Growing Number of "Pretendian" Artists and the Potential Repercussions*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nzt7XecLzI. This discussion features interviews with Indigenous scholars

[72] Canadian author Joseph Boyden provides another controversial example. As Boyden's and Latimer's stories suggest, DNA investigations into one's bloodline are frequently insufficient to prove belonging, which is an earned position of social privilege. When an individual presents themselves as a representative of a community and a prominent spokesperson on behalf of that community, belonging becomes a critical element that DNA alone cannot replace. Counterintuitively perhaps, to western understandings of nationhood and ethnic belonging, what truly counts is not the "blood quantum," an American notion expressed as a percentage on one's ancestry, but lived experience. Indigenous commentators are far from united these controversies. At TIFF, Latimer's documentary *Inconvenient Indian* (2020) was highly praised and awarded the People's Choice Documentary Award as well as one of three Amplify Voices Awards for Best Canadian Feature Film for BIPOC filmmakers. Prior to being pulled due to the controversy, the feature-length documentary was poised to be a top contender at Sundance that same year. *Trickster* (2020) had also enjoyed wide distribution and approval from audiences worldwide. After the scandal surrounding the showrunner's ancestry, APTN News reported that viewers had in fact expressed sympathy with Latimer's predicament and accepted her self-identification as evidence of belonging. After all, her claims are common among those with partial Indigenous ancestry, many of whom live away from ancestral communities and have lost direct cultural connections to them. It is important to note here that, while Indigenous audiences have been sympathetic, Latimer's most ardent challengers have come exclusively from the field of cultural production: other producers and aspiring producers who felt that she had taken something that was not hers to claim.

[73] APTN News. 2023. Identity Check | APTN Investigates. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sixcgn4iIh0.

Chelsea Vowell).[74] Describing the casting process for *Blood Quantum* (2019), a film about the very topic of belonging and acceptance into the community (staged as a zombie survival thriller), he describes the challenges in finding the right talent:

> …there's a ton of young actresses, young native actresses. But when you start looking for native elders or middle-aged Indians, those are harder to come by because there's not that many people that survived that long into the business. … The weird thing about [casting], you're always going to run into a fake Indian or somebody that you cannot verify. And we did on this film too. And then people were like, why do you have such high standards? They're not high standards! Just find me a native actor, they're out there![75]

With greater representation, overall presence, and wider exposure, professional anxieties and inter-group competition may give way to an expanded terrain of possibilities that includes Indigeneity in all of its forms, suggest members of the cast and crew of *Blood Quantum* (2019) at a watch party organized by native journalist and producer Vincent Schilling for horror streamer Shudder.[76] Currently, however, the doctrine of continuous emergence and disputes over group membership continue to be reflected in the production of texts and the social rituals required to establish "Indigenous" legitimacy through production histories. The stories that Indigenous producers, writers, and actors tell about their work are not just fan-pleasing tasty tidbits about what happened behind the scenes, but also legitimize their careers in the industry. The collection of personal narratives I looked at for this chapter can be consumed by all, but are most frequently produced for the benefit of teaching institutions, as incoming cohorts of anxious aspirants—Indigenous and otherwise—anticipate their professional futures. Individual careers and institutional logics produce specific trade narratives of backstage drama that are frequently as provocative as the fictional dramas we see on-screen. There is no shortage of documentary as well as fictionalized accounts from "behind the scenes" to relate the wonderful/horrible nature of creative work in the media industries. Narratives about personal journeys beset by hardships and occasional successes describe typical trajectories in screen industry work. For aspiring Indigenous youth, however, they serve to reveal specific realities about the Indigenous experience in the industry.

Watch parties, Q&As, online lectures, and discussions with fans are socio-professional forums that both invite in-group creative contributions and limit out-group professional interventions. This kind of "boundary-work," the effort to separate legitimate from illegitimate members of a profession (Ganti 2012:7), is particularly pronounced in the creative industries because, as Jacqueline Keeler explains, identity performance has often been co-opted as an imperial tactic of control. Identity is made purposefully "fuzzy" and attenuated by the presiding hegemon, and it requires a bright spotlight to remain politically relevant:

> Our political reality that is the most threatening reality we possess, and this is why our identity is so assumable. [With] any colonized people everything is up for grabs: their

[74] University of California Television (UCTV). 2020. Subversives: Blood Quantum (Interview with Chelsea Vowell). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPZli9S9N8w.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Vincent Schilling. 2020. Blood Quantum "The Aftershow" with Jeff Barnaby, Michael Greyeyes, Kiowa Gordon and More! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b86yo8iCn-U.

> language, their children, everything can be taken from them, this is just part of the colonial process.[77]

Buddle suggests that globalization, itself a continuation of the colonial project, provokes heightened clashes between cultures. Throwing migration, settlement, immigration and *métissage* into a dense web of connections more often results in drawing boundaries between outsiders and insiders than in greater hybridity and openness (Thompson 2013). Buddle explains that it was precisely "the self-reflexive attempts to rediscover particularity, localism, and difference" (2005:17) that resulted in the creation of the various Indigenous broadcasting initiatives such as the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and Television Northern Canada (TVNC), which eventually became the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). Junka-Aikio points out that notions of liquid identities that align with western liberal political dispositions towards flexibility, openness, inclusion, and border-crossing sit uncomfortably against Indigenous (Sámi in her example) efforts to preserve essentialist identities, inter-ethnic distinction, and borders (2016).[78] These tensions are also linked to neoliberal production practices, which encourage competition through flexibility, migration, and border-crossing. The struggle over control of representation in professional workworlds takes place ultimately for two reasons. At the outset, it is the social relations between Indigenous creators that determine whether a production is considered Indigenous or not, as opposed to the dominant cultural template, which, as American anthropologist Faye Ginsburg has suggested, favours the text (1993). This, in turn, frees the text from the obligation to provide an explicit, recognizably Indigenous semiotic illustration. For Jesse Wente (Ojibwe), director of Canada's Indigenous Screen Office, "Making Indigenous screen-based media is about more than creating a unique cultural, or niche, product, but is part of the process of cultural expression and revitalization. Indigenous storytellers contest the understanding of Indigenous film as a genre."[79] The decolonization of Indigenous media work requires a more sophisticated understanding of identity "performance," and mounts a challenge to the authority of non-Indigenous perspectives by governments, policymakers, and institutions attempting to narrow and to define, from the outside, what Indigenous is or is not.

The trend to be at once open and protectionist is a response to a broader history of institutional and industrial challenges. Effective control over who gets to participate in production is crucial for the emergence, survival, and continuation of an Indigenous screen-industry workforce. However, the reality of Canadian multiculturalism and, more widely, the global production landscape, necessarily involves diverse connections with non-Indigenous partners resulting in heterogenous coalitions that continuously redefine themselves. Ongoing definitions and debates about producer identities are implicitly also debates about audiences. Reaching the mainstream is a delicate dance between asserting one's own identity as an Indigenous producer and maintaining a mass viewership. It is a process of guiding tastes and creating desire for Indigenous content.

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[77] APTN News, 2021. *A Growing Number of "Pretendian" Artists and the Potential Repercussions | InFocus, Hosted by Melissa Ridgen*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nzt7XecLzI.

[78] Although Sámi history and culture are very different from those of Indigenous peoples across North America, they were subjected by Swedish and Finnish settler governments to comparable policies of forced cultural assimilation, race segregation, dislocation, land grabs, and prohibitive language control.

[79] CBC News: The National, 2018. *Influential Filmmakers React to State of Indigenous Film in Canada*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peRTgZbuE0s.

Audiences must be won over. In the next section, I look at how distribution tactics have shifted to mobilize producer identities in the pursuit of new publics.

Self-disclosure as distribution asset

Outwardly, distribution tactics often express a posture of concern on behalf of audiences. In chapter 1, I discussed that knowledge about viewership habits is "sacred" proprietary information, a frustrating reality of platform distribution. Viewership statistics are frequently given as the reason specific decisions are made behind closed doors. However, the industry is not yet at the point where data itself, aided by the AI fantasy of 'the singularity,' can confidently guide and even create content production based on viewership stats. Production and distribution execs still manage the industry the old-fashioned way, by inserting themselves into the cultural calculus of decision-making. "Speaking for the audience" is a common way for producers to justify their decisions (Caldwell 2014:153). With authoritative voices, occasionally backed up by statistics, audience-makers use their intuition about "culturally sensitive projects" to steer decisions based on imagined audience desires. They anticipate risk by assuming a cultural affinity with viewers, a speculation that pays off about 35% of the time.[80] In practice, data analytics reveal a mismatch between corporate guesswork and audience preferences, as Indigenous media producers have suspected for some time.[81] Regretful declarations like "there's no mainstream audience for Indigenous content" and "we're already doing a native story this year"[82] are reflections not of audience desires but of funders and distributors who wish to cloak internal decisions and avoid scrutiny. Public and private entities both have, until recently, been awkwardly positioned in the way of Indigenous success:

> …it's not just an issue for Indigenous filmmakers, we have an issue with all Canadian films and how Canadians view them … bums in seats may not be the measure by which to judge the success of films going forward. There's many different ways for people to view movies and all sorts of screen content. Nowadays I would suggest that some of the more impactful shows in recent years haven't been about putting bums in seats, but about getting eyeballs on screens *wherever they may be*. We have to look at how we're judging success of these shows but I think it also becomes a circular argument, one that the industry has relied on for years, which says Indigenous stories don't draw audiences so we don't make Indigenous stories. Well why not try making some on the scale that we make the other stories, try that for a while, and then come back and tell us if that doesn't

[80] Ocasio, Anthony. 2012. "TV Success Rate: 65% Of New Shows Will Be Canceled (& Why It Matters)." *ScreenRant*. May 17, 2012. https://screenrant.com/tv-success-rate-canceled-shows/. While data analytics are important for distribution platforms to guide content acquisition, such information is limited in what it can contribute towards future projects (*House of Cards* and *Orange is the New Black* notwithstanding), as data is still fragmentary and data mining for content is far from perfect. Furthermore, even if data analytics collected at the delivery end of the pipeline offer unprecedented insights about audiences and content, this information does not trickle down efficiently to other parts of the system which are still very much controlled by older mechanisms of production and distribution.

[81] APTN News, 2021. *Indigenous Helmed Shows Mark 'Significant Moment' in Television History Says Cree Actor | F2F with Dennis Ward*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owPRP2EF9c0.

[82] CBC News: The National, 2018. *Influential Filmmakers React to State of Indigenous Film in Canada*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peRTgZbuE0s.

> actually work, because my suspicion is it will work just fine. (Jesse Wente interview, emphasis added)[83]

Journalist and writer Jesse Wente, director of Canada's Indigenous Screen Office at the time this interview was recorded, was responding to the increasingly inadequate ways of evaluating success and risk using outdated metrics such as "bums in seats" in an era of online consumption. In Canada, ideas about content and audiences, success and risk, had been guided by theories of habituation (accumulation theory of minimal effects) and theories of cultural discount, which instruct that, in general, media products tend to perform poorly with audiences who are unfamiliar with the social and cultural specificities of the original. The "nobody knows" truism deployed as an excuse for misfired projects and other abortive efforts to develop content, as well as the slogan "content is king" intended to signal the primacy of Intellectual Property, are in fact discursive deceptions. "There are passengers for every train," states David Reckziegel, a one-time film producer and management lecturer at McGill University. At a recent management seminar discussing the virtues of "audience sorting," Reckziegel suggested that even the most obscure content has its fans out there, somewhere. The platform economy has turned that 'somewhere' into a concrete location, and the content-centric paradigm has been reversed: the game is no longer about creating content that audiences might like, but about driving audiences to content they are most likely to consume.

This shift from choice of content to choice of channel may also have resulted from better media education, greater openness to alterity, and a cosmopolitan curiosity attributable to globalization. It is equally reflective of changing perspectives along the distribution chains of command, the ultimate authority on what content gets greenlit for circulation and makes it to viewer's screens. As theatrical distribution and traditional network television recede further away, narrowcasting and the development of on-demand niche audiences helps elevate certain kinds of content above the noise of the market. When content and audiences find themselves on a variety of platforms searching for each-other in a disjointed free-for-all, the establishment of a personal connection is critical. This is where influencers become significant cultural intermediaries, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, Fulltime Pastime. The direct-to-consumer approach, or what Ďurovičová and Newman refer to as the phenomenological "for-me-ness" of the mainstream (2010:94), brings marketing advantages that rely on self-referencing and self-promotion. This sets up a bipolar opposition between the war of position described earlier, where Indigenous media professionals produce self-reflexive texts to increase their visibility and industry presence, and the commodification of these texts by distributors to attract viewers. Amassing viewership online, particularly in an environment where an increasing number of powerful new platforms—the offspring of powerful old conglomerates—compete for attention, requires crafty metatextual approaches that highlight the likeable figure of the creator to point audiences in specific directions, towards specific channels of distribution.

In the current paradigm, Audience-making strategies have shifted from "speaking for the audience" to allowing creators to "tell their own stories." Using this approach, marketers were quick to pick up on the unique opportunities for enlisting new viewers during the pandemic. Quarantined fans of *Trickster* (2020), for example, were encouraged to show their enthusiasm for

[83] Ibid.

"Indigenous *Stanger Things*"[84] by engaging with the show on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, spreading custom invitations to Zoom watch parties, and participating in exclusive Q&As with the cast. This top-down fan-powered "viral" approach worked because it pointed a spotlight behind the scenes and promised a direct and personal connection with creators, expertly targeted at viewers watching in isolation. The *Rutherford Falls* (2021-2022) publicity team took a similar approach. At an online promotion event preceding a panel with the show's writers, in what might be described as an "industrial media theory" session, one participant enthusiastically explained how fans can "beat the algorithm" to show their support and appreciation for the show:

> …please watch! We premiere Thursday, April 22nd on Peacock. There's a free seven-day trial. In network TV you're always waiting for the Nielsen ratings—like, it's still 1950, right?—but with streaming it's very much all about new subscribers, so much of it is the algorithm. Did you watch? How fast did you binge? Like, they know if you watch two [episodes] and walk away and then come back. So much of it is about the rate at what you watch, and if you subscribed, and if skipped any parts, and if you tweet about it or who you talk to about it… Anything actually helps. There's so much TV now that to make your mark is very difficult. You gotta subscribe [to Peacock] to support Native American television![85]

Personal encounters with media producers, panels, interviews, and solo discussions on their personal social media accounts create high visibility in an industry that, until recently, systematically ignored Indigenous perspectives. Today, these perspectives are not only allowed to surface, but they are instrumental in channelling traffic towards proprietary platforms where "the *real* story continues" for a modest subscription fee. After years of cultural *faux pas* and other scandals related to Indigenous representation (Kim & Gregory 2023), the Walt Disney Company now positions itself at the forefront of an American Indigenous mainstream revival with Sterlin Harjo's *Reservation Dogs* (2021-2023), a comedy about four Indigenous teenagers in rural Oklahoma who alternate between getting into trouble and fighting crime. Marvel's *Echo* miniseries (announced 2023-2024) follows the story of eponymous Native-American superheroine (both scheduled to stream on Disney+), while MSNBC distributes *Rutherford Falls* (2021-2022), a sitcom about relocating a controversial settler's statue, and recently picked up CBC's award-winning series *Mohawk Girls* (2010-2017). In an interview, Canadian actor Michael Greyeyes, co-starring in the sitcom, weighs in on the political significance of the series (as "*Rutherford Falls* is Streaming Now on Peacock" scrolls at the bottom of the screen):

> …the response from non-Indigenous viewers has confirmed something that we've been saying for a long time … when given the opportunity to write shows in which we're the center of the narrative, which bring all the complexity of the way we live our lives and how we exist is brought to the screen, non-Indigenous audiences have said "this feels so new and important, I feel like I learned something with every episode." … this is a political shift, a social change in the way audiences see us, and what we're doing is a

[84] The Canadian series *Trickster* is frequently compared to the Duffer Brothers' *Stanger Things* on Netflix, because of common themes such as the encounters between the supernatural and real life, with all of Existence hanging in the balance, as the main characters come of age during their final years of high school.
[85] Peacock, 2021. *Rutherford Falls, Private Watch Party with | Beading with the Writers' Room—Michael Schur, Ed Helms, Sierra Teller Ornelas*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewPm9KBX6OI.

> 'deprogramming' of our absence from their media (Michael Greyeyes, APTN interview hosted by Dennis Ward)[86]

Since the 1990s, film and media scholars have hailed an emergent Indigenous production sector empowered by affordable new technologies and free of institutional control thanks to social media and the internet (Baltruschat 2004). Less frequently examined remains the reality that media conglomerates use grassroots production, cultural emergence, and empowered connectivity to build audiences. Throughout most of their careers, the Indigenous creators mentioned here have worked under production conditions that relied on direct relations with their communities, self-promotion and self-reliance. Within global distribution networks, their work continues to be framed in these ways, but for a global public. The promise of an unprecedented (and exclusive) personal access to key creatives and cast through specific platforms is an important device in marketing campaigns and success relies on generating an aura of intimacy and authentic producer narratives. Frequently, those narratives are highly critical of the industry and the very mechanisms that enable such self-disclosures to circulate, which is precisely where their value lies. Through these deep texts, Indigenous media producers discuss their personal philosophies and political beliefs as well as the difficulties and systemic obstacles of their profession. The systems responsible for these obstacles, in turn, use these very self-disclosures to generate interest. The direct connections and affinities that are forged with audiences along the way reward the commercial efforts to gain direct access to spectators. Aided by self-reflexive texts, corporate audience-makers are rendered transparent by foregrounding the creator, who speaks directly to the viewer. It would be inaccurate, however, to frame these off-script appearances as mere exploitation, because Indigenous creators are keenly aware of the conditions within which they operate. Their critical theorizations about the industry reveal a sophisticated understanding of the political economy of the Canadian mediascape, its games and principal players, precisely because of the historical barriers to access that Indigenous producers have had to overcome.

[86] APTN News, 2021. *Indigenous Helmed Shows Mark 'Significant Moment' in Television History Says Cree Actor | F2F with Dennis Ward*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owPRP2EF9c0.

Figure 5: Discussion Panel: Indigenous Content that Speaks to the World

During the forced pandemic pause in production, Indigenous creators had an opportunity to engage more directly with viewers, with each-other, and to present their behind-the-scenes narratives to a global public. Screenshot used with permission by Telefilm Canada.

The mainstream as discursive battleground

Discussions of political economy, capitalism, and colonialism are frequent in writer's rooms and at discussion panels involving Indigenous creators. These topics are observable both as they relate to on-screen storytelling and to the processes of production behind the scenes. In season 1, episode 4 of *Rutherford Falls*, the character of ambitious entrepreneur Terry Thomas, played by Canadian Indigenous actor Michael Greyeyes, introduces the concept of *tribal capitalism* to his white interlocutor, rookie journalist Josh Carter (played by another Canadian actor, Dustin Milligan). Tribal capitalism is associated with movements to model contemporary Indigenous social structures after traditional tribal structures, adapted for global times. The recognition of tribes, bands, nations, and communities as the legal stakeholders in commodifiable natural resources such as lands, waters, and lore, allows them to participate in economic systems of production and extraction from which they had been, until recently, excluded. In these systems, tribe members act as one, rather than a muster of individuals. The Tribe, as Terry explains to Josh, will play the capitalist game as necessary, to ensure its long-term survival for "seven generations." However, rather than acting out of traditional capitalist self-interest, accumulated capital by one member is shared by all in the community. It is the entire tribal body that acts out of self-interest. Writers of the show Jana Schmieding, Tai Leclaire, Tazbah Chavez and Bobby Wilson parallel this description with their own accounts of making their way through the

industry by "pulling each-other up," assuming a collectivistic approach to work, and resisting a culture of adversarial competition among peers (something particularly challenging when working on projects backed by "big money"). They believe that this is the attitude behind the momentum the Indigenous mainstream currently enjoys.[87] Tribal capitalism can be seen as a form of indigenization of capitalism. As Elizabeth Rata suggests (in the context of the Maori people of Aotearoa / New Zealand), contemporary retribalization movements are a form of resistance to the global neoliberalisation of resource extraction and industrial production (Rata 1999). Where one champions flexible borders and identities that favour transnational capital accumulation, the other embraces traditional tribal identities, which privilege the social well-being of members and local distribution of wealth. In the context of mainstream media production, this resistance to global economic models takes the form of local cultural distinction intended to set the product apart, rather than diluting it to conform to a vague global mainstream. This approach contradicts commonplace marketing logic that subscribes to the cultural discount thesis, but in a way, it also foreshadows how marketing logic will shift to embrace myriad cultural distinctions in an effort to capture viewership online, as I elaborate in Chapter 3.

The characteristics of tribal capitalism—collectivism in management and ownership, prioritising social and cultural life, and a strong attachment to land and language—are shared by many other groups worldwide, and are not particular to Indigenous cultures (Vakkayil 2017). This is why Indigenous creators *articulate* their identities in specific ways. *Articulation* is a concept I borrow from Gramsci to describe how cultural and political practices operate in tandem to further class struggle, which I have earlier referred to as a war of position (Gramsci & Forgacs 2000). Members of the same group or tribe can belong to different classes within the group, but they can nonetheless be united in their opposition to a third party. A war of position unites different classes towards common aspirations. One principle of *articulation* posits that a community needs semiotic signs around which to rally its energies: a shared mythology and symbology to perform the work of organizing the group ideologically, culturally, and economically. The nuance that Gramsci brings to this description is that not everyone in the group has the means or abilities to articulate these shared goals in symbolic terms. This task falls to the "organic intellectuals," that is, the media producers in this chapter. In the context of tribal capitalism, it falls on them to accumulate the cultural capital that is to be shared by the entire community.

Indigenous media practices provide a distinct vantage onto the mainstream as a political tool. The mainstream is perhaps one of the most studied areas of media production, particularly concerning debates about cultural imperialism and political economy, but the perspectives of cultural workers are infrequently used as principal sources because, as Mayer or Hesmondhalgh observe, they are ambivalent about their politics or motivations (Mayer et al. 2009; Hesmondhalgh 2013). This makes it difficult for scholars to assign an analytic—and political—direction. The struggle for Indigenous cultural survival in a global economy is characteristic of almost any small production economy worldwide, where culture is manifestly appraised in terms of economic successes and failures. Instead of discussing cultural production "as an adjunct to the market" (Polanyi 2001:60), however, Fred Block offers the more nuanced observation that, following economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi, cultural production oscillates between an economy embedded in social relations and social relations embedded in the economic system (Polanyi 2001:xxiv, Introduction). In other words, simply reading the market as the dominant

[87] IllumiNative, 2021. *Rutherford Falls Watch Party*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS3_5IbVbF4.

monolythic structure imposed by global capitalism and imperialism on Indigenous creators offers but a partial understanding of the dynamics at play. Some scholars grapple with the dichotomous nature of global Indigenous productions in an effort to keep the market and culture in separate categories, which they express as the opposition between "entertainment" and "real culture". For Baltruschat, in the context of Indigenous media production, "Diversity, balance, and critical perspectives are crucial in a media landscape saturated with infotainment, commercial productions, and sensationalized reality-TV programs" (Baltruschat 2004:57). Early theoretical work on Indigenous film is reminiscent, if not a direct transposition of the discourses surrounding national cinemas from the turn of the millennium. Such work focuses on casting local cinemas as counter-hegemonic, politically critical, marginal, and attuned to the "complex, multidimensional and multidirectional tensions that characterise and shape a social formation's cultural configurations" (Crofts 2000:329) against a Hollywoodian "mainstream," the very antithesis of Culture. The mainstream is capital-intensive, requires large markets to amortize its costs, and resorts to homogenized content to ensure sales (thus perpetuating repeatability). It is unable to attend to specific local cultural needs or to promote local cultural producers (thus perpetuating continuous emergence). While perspectives that oppose the mainstream to culture are common in popular cultural commentary, they also miss the idea that the mainstream has the political potential to be critical of the very systems it uses for its own production and distribution, and of hegemonic formations more generally. Perspectives that neglect the mainstream in favor of "specialty" or "niche," locally specific content, are essentially variations of the *anthropological gaze* introduced earlier. They further the unfounded suspicion that a focus on mainstream content and viewership comes at the expense of more serious engagements with specific economic, political, and social struggles that make up everyday life in Indigenous communities.

A straightforward association between commerce and popular appeal may be doing a disservice to Indigenous creators. At one instance Wapikoni, a mobile production studio dedicated to helping Indigenous youth tell their stories through film, turned down a zombie film project because it was "not quite native enough," something that occurred frequently in the early years of operation as the Wapikoni initiative was establishing its own brand.[88] Facilitating production, in that situation, called for stringent editorial oversight and a deal of tutelage to shape narratives into a genre of Indigenous self-expression that was not always in tune with the creative ideas of the young filmmakers whose participation was the centerpiece of the enterprise. "They were asked to tell their own stories, but you know, not too far off the rez." (LM, personal interview).[89] The anthropological gaze introduced at the beginning of the chapter described an understanding of Indigenous content as something caught in a repeating cycle of documenting and portraying traditional lifestyles, or romanticised social realism intended for outsider eyes. For Deranger, the slew of documentaries or docu-dramas centered on "stark realities" have accomplished little for Indigenous culture or media production:

[88] Founded in 2003 and beginning active operations in 2004, the senior management of Wapikoni initially consisted of a core team of non-Indigenous members in consultation with the Atikamekw Nation Youth Council. It was at that time that the "brand" of the initiative was forged. Today, in step with the times, Wapikoni's personnel and editorial priorities reflects much more closely the Indigenous communities they serve.

[89] LM, a pseudonym, is a media production instructor in Canadian university whose early professional experience includes working for Wapikoni. LM, whose background is South-American, reports being the first non-Caucasian staff member of an organization created to promote Indigenous media creation.

> …you look at something like Pine Ridge and it's like every few years there's a new poverty porn piece that comes out from some non-Indigenous person who wins awards and then never goes back … if poverty porn could save Indigenous peoples it would already happen decades ago. They like retelling that same story and I believe it's because they don't know any other story about us.[90]

Such stories are certainly important, but evidently they are not the only ones Indigenous producers today want to tell. Mainstream tropes and archetypes have been used to consolidate dominant stereotypes that have earned deserved disapproval. Global mainstream entertainment empires are embroiled in systems of political and financial power that are the object of intense critical interrogation. Yet, the themes and situations portrayed in the Indigenous mainstream come from a different place. The production of cultural commodities is a perplexing interplay of artistic freedom and circumscribed agency. Practitioner theorizing reveals the processes of putting together, assembling, transmitting, standardizing, and developing production lore about future projects, allowing for transfer of local experiences and contexts to audiences everywhere. Blurring some of the demarcations between political activism and mainstream storytelling, the self-theorizations that accompany Indigenous media production reveal complex narrative structures that weave in political principles, history, social commentary, and fiction. The use of the mainstream as political activism suggests, adopting a Gramscian perspective, that consequential politics is not to be conducted from the margins. Film and media scholars frequently, and for good reason, critique the commercial motivations behind mainstream entertainment, but its critical potential or the economic and political advantages for marginalized groups that come with operating in the mainstream, cannot be understated.

In a Telefilm Canada-sponsored panel entitled "Indigenous Content that Speaks to the World" showrunner Ron Scott, actor Gail Maurice, and filmmaker Jennifer Podemski contemplate the current Indigenous production environment in Canada.[91] While promoting recent projects, the panelists express a desire to expand their audience worldwide. Similar to the submissions discussed in the first part of this chapter, they also make a case for greater access to domestic non-Indigenous viewers. Such panels are intended specifically for an audience of students and aspiring storytellers. Engaging with young Indigenous creators in discussions that focus on mainstream practice and process helps in the struggle to "deprogram," as actor Michael Greyeyes puts it, popular misconceptions about indigeneity. Indigenous creators learn to "de-localize" stories for outsider audiences using mainstream narrative conventions to address specific cultural and historical issues. This strategy helps in reaching wider spectatorship and establishing cultural connections with groups that have historically been hindered by disadvantageous media policies and siloed by corporate distribution schemes. Wapikoni's catalogue, for instance, has changed with the times and has become much more open to narratives that exceed the semiotic dressing sought after in the early days, reflecting updated expectations about what Indigenous media can

[90] APTN News, 2020. *Gitz Deranger Reacts to the Doubt Surrounding Michelle Latimer's Indigeneity*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYrfYRlq_SY.
[91] Telefilm Canada, 2020. *Indigenous Content That Speaks to the World*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nM0Qd4oLvI.

be. For Jesse Wente, director of Canada's Indigenous Screen Office, “authorship in cinema is dictated by who the creators are, not who is on screen” (interview with Duncan McCue).[92]

Authenticity of representation is not the principal aim of the global Indigenous mainstream, which is sometimes deliberately culturally and contextually ambiguous. Shows such as *Tribal* (2020-2022), *Trickster* (2020), *Unsettled* (2020) and films like *Blood Quantum* (2019) are adapted for non-Indigenous publics possessing but a cursory familiarity with Indigenous ways. All the same, and perhaps counterintuitively, the creators of these shows do not offer flattened, ahistorical, and easily digestible “pan-Indigenous” aesthetic encounters. Quite the contrary, their work leads back to very specific, complicated, sometimes absurd, and sometimes traumatic experiences “without it seeming performative for all the white liberals up there”, quips director Jeff Barnaby before a mostly white audience of film students at a University of California Television event.[93] *Tribal*, an edgy police procedural, follows a globally recognizable aesthetic and narrative structure to challenge audiences with complex issues such as land and treaty rights, hereditary and elected chiefs, off-grid violence, underage prostitution, missing persons, but also to offer a side not conventionally associated with Indigenous life, such as healthy families, ambition for excellence, and full participation in modern life. Showrunner and creator Ron Scott explains that *Tribal* is set in an unspecified western metropolis and its neighboring reservation because it is a recognizable backdrop not just in Canada, but also throughout the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, the European North, anywhere Indigenous and modern “ways” intertwine. He comments that whenever *Tribal*’s narrative threatened to become too local and culturally specific, his producers were quick to suggest a course correction:

> As a content creator, it's kind of like, I wouldn’t say racehorse, but you get pulled back on the reins, which happened when we wanted to introduce more complex issues within the community like how the government sometimes deals with people. But it's still with a very entertaining gloss to it, so that it didn't come off as, you know, that we were trying to make a statement or to be controversial. We always tried to ground it in some form of authenticity within the engagement within a scene so that it wasn’t just one side of the story.[94]

Indigenous media made for global publics gives the outsider an opportunity to develop the aesthetic dispositions necessary for understanding Indigenous frames of meaning. Our perception of imported or unfamiliar content relies on sociologically embedded dispositions that guide our interpretations. Aesthetic dispositions are codes and schemas, or templates, inherited from society.[95] If *articulation* is a way of formulating specific perspectives, *aesthetic disposition* is the

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[92] CBC News: The National, 2018. *Influential Filmmakers React to State of Indigenous Film in Canada, hosted by Duncan McCue*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peRTgZbuE0s.
[93] University of California Television (UCTV), 2020. *Subversives: Blood Quantum, Jeff Barnaby interview with Chelsea Vowel, discussion moderated by Tyler Morgenstern*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPZli9S9N8w.
[94] Telefilm Canada, dir. 2020. *Indigenous Content That Speaks to the World: panel with Ron E. Scott, Janet Hamley, Gail Maurice, Elise Cousineau, and Jennifer Podemski, moderated by Adam Garnet Jones*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nM0Qd4oLvI.
[95] The presence of socially conditioned “aesthetic dispositions” is one of the ideas driving the cultural discount thesis. What makes cultural discount inapplicable in practice is that it presupposes a culturally monolithic subject. Instead, multimembership, or intersectionality, produce entire catalogues of aesthetic dispositions in any one individual, which are mutable and interchangeable.

capacity for understanding these perspectives with "cultural competence" (Bourdieu 1984:4). Certain genres, character archetypes, and timing "beats" seem to retain a sticky hold over mainstream filmmakers perhaps because, following more than a century of global circulation, they have become shared aesthetic dispositions easily recognizable across cultures. Director Jeff Barnaby's creative process reflects a strategic selection of such mainstream elements:

> So imagine having a familiar guide leading you through the native film landscape. For me, that guide is western cinema. I call it the "white guide." In zombie flicks like [*Blood*] *Quantum,* or in *Rhymes* [*for young Ghouls*], a heist thriller, there are recognizable patterns that can serve as a roadmap for navigating Indigenous narratives. It's about presenting a different viewpoint within a familiar framework. The mainstream archetype… The philosophy was not to alter the story structure but to replace familiar faces within roles typically occupied by others in these films. This shift in perspective is crucial (Jeff Barnaby, in discussion with the author).

These aesthetic dispositions have created a common cultural template, or "patterned relationships within larger historical configurations of power" (Buddle 2005:8) that can, in turn, be effectively adapted and redeployed to reflect locally specific realities. Brendan Hokowithu describes Māori television, for instance, as a "hybrid televisual text, which departs from the discursive regiments that govern mainstream commercial television" but importantly, at the same time, "employs genres and formats borrowed from mainstream commercial television" (Hokowithu and Devadas 2013:105). As cultural insiders, Indigenous producers use these templates as shortcuts to establish meaningful connections with their global audiences. *Trickster*'s director of marketing development praises Indigenous audiences worldwide for their enthusiastic reception of the show, and expresses hope that recently-made policy commitments to support Indigenous culture in Canada will help "grow audiences," particularly among groups with common histories such as Indigenous populations worldwide.

In the practical, grounded theory of Indigenous scholars, the hard-earned socioeconomic benefits of the Indigenous mainstream are not to be casually dismissed. Brendan Hokowithu terms this "Indigenous existentialism" (2013:106), literally meaning economic survival, a kindred notion to tribal capitalism. He suggests that although academics may oppose the "infiltration" of non-Indigenous media into Indigenous communities—whether media intended for consumption or media produced in, but not by, these communities—there is a significant socio-economic benefit from these interactions that should not be overlooked or hastily condemned. Hinzo and Clark propose the related notion of "digital survivance," drawing on the work of Angela Haas and Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor (Hinzo and Clark 2019). The term "survivance," a combination of *survival* and *resistance*, implies that Indigenous storytelling traditions persist in the digital realm despite the inundation of media from elsewhere on Indigenous screens. This form of survival does not concern itself with recognition by the state, or a continued existence by the grace of cultural policies, but aims for self-determination through independent cultural expression. If cultural policies assist global media trade by channeling publics, then the Indigenous mainstream is a way of declaring Independence from that system, a refusal to restrict Indigeneity by acknowledging it as a marketable category.

Figure 6: SciFi geek, "Blood Quantum" interview with Jeff Barnaby, Maija Tailfeathers, and Michael Greyeyes

Featured on the Slice of SciFi geek influencer blog, this interview with the director and two of the lead actors of *Blood Quantum* reveals to fans of science fiction, fantasy and horror how to "get the right eyes" for watching the film, how to navigate the "current social and political climates wrapped in a zombie conflict," and promotes exclusive access to the film on the Shudder over-the-top subscription video on demand service. Image used with permission by Slice of SciFi.[96]

Hokowithu suggests that Indigenous expression is fulfilled not when it begins to see the world in different ways, a proposition fraught with cultural determinism, but when it sees the same world from a different perspective. Inspired by the imagery of "the camera ashore," a point of view that has come to symbolize Indigenous ways of seeing, director Jeff Barnaby has proposed reimagining well known mainstream narratives from "native perspectives." One such idea is a remake of Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Coocoo's Nest* (1975) as seen through the eyes of "Chief" Bromden (played by Will Sampson in the 1975 version), who narrates the story in Ken Kesey's original novel. Barnaby's was inspired by reimagined versions of mainstream blockbusters. In 2014, when we met, he was contemplating a remake of the 1987 sci-fi action thriller *Predator*, that shifting the viewer's perspective from the familiar all-American paramilitary hero, Vietnam vet Major Alan "Dutch" Schaefer (Arnold Schwarzenegger) to that of native tracker and scout Billy Sole (played by Sonny Landham). 2022, the year Barnaby passed away, saw the release of just such a film directed by non-indigenous Hollywood director Dan Trachtenberg starring an all-Native American cast. "Oh to get the budgets and the praise these white men get for doing native content," commented Barnaby the week the movie came out. *Prey* (2022) is set three centuries before Arnold Schwarzenegger faces the deadly alien, and

[96] Summer, Brooks. 2020. *"Blood Quantum": On Zombies, Marginalization and Compassion. Talking with Jeff Barnaby, Michael Greyeyes and Máijá Tailfeathers*. Sci-Fi Film Festival 2020 | Slice of SciFi. https://www.sliceofscifi.com/2020/08/29/slice-of-scifi-948/.

tells the story of a young Comanche woman in 1719 who yearns to become a hunter herself, only to discover that she is being hunted by an otherworldly force.

When done with the full Indigenous participation, as Barnaby had envisaged, the switching of perspectives can disrupt Indigenous / non-Indigenous binaries that our visual culture has come to take for granted. As Hokowithu and Devadas suggest, the Indigenous mainstream can be described as a "re-righting (writing) the erasure of indigeneity from the mediated public sphere and, in doing so, reshaping the vision of the postcolonial nation" (2013:114). Here, on the visual front, Indigenous creators establish a form of sovereignty that extends beyond merely being "included." They also assert their right to exercise rhetorical—or storytelling—sovereignty within these spaces, enabling them to freely represent themselves in pursuit of larger audiences.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I began by describing the birth of cultural policy, the democratic ritual that sets the stage, and outlines the constraints, of future media production. Existing cultural policies have significantly influenced the landscape of present-day Indigenous media production. Given their incomplete nature, the process of updating these policies has therefore become a focal point of conflict, with various interests converging: those of policymakers, corporate stakeholders (both national and transnational), and Indigenous media producers themselves. This discussion of how cultural policies are formed is analyzed through the lens of interpretive anthropology. My aim is to explore the meanings these policies and surrounding debates carry for those directly affected—specifically in this chapter, Indigenous mainstream content creators— rather than prioritizing the intended objectives of policy, as might be the case in a more communications-focused analysis.

To content creators, cultural policies primarily seem to prioritize economic outcomes, which complicates discussions about the Indigenous or Canadian identity of content produced in Canada. When the definition of content is ambiguous, the emphasis on the "creative economy" in Canada sends a clear signal regarding the direction of future cultural policies. In such an environment, delineating the role of Indigenous creators becomes more complex, as opportunities diminish rather than expand due to the narrowing and economically overdetermined definitions of Indigenous identity. To put it another way, the key to understanding this chapter is distinguishing the perspectives of those affected by cultural policies from those policies' stated intent. While we acknowledge the significant progressive strides made by Canadian cultural policies in recent years, there is also a parallel perspective held by those whose work is directly impacted by these policies. On the ground, this can be observed as conflicts over identity and belonging that ultimately limit, rather than reward Indigenous creators, as I have shown.

Some Indigenous media producers reject such proscriptions outright. Others, the ones this chapter is concerned with, employ alternative strategies to assert their presence in the modern media landscape. Their ultimate objective transcends mere on-screen representation in an anthropologically accurate fashion. Rather, it involves taking control of their own media production endeavors and possessing the rhetorical sovereignty to tell stories as they see fit.

Their pursuit for wider audiences, particularly online, given the importance of streaming platforms, is central to the struggle for influence over the policymaking process.

The Indigenous mainstream is one strategy of mobilization that both appropriates from and works against the logic of the market. Yet, even as they "tell their own stories," Indigenous mainstream media creators are expected by the industry to remain flexible and responsive to continuously shifting commercial imperatives. This is a transitionary moment, marking an attempt to force a political shift from politics of refusal, resistance, and protest to a more formalized Indigenous participation in building the future of Canada as a post- (or multi-?) nation state. Prentice refers to this process as "expansion through diversity" where the war of position is replaced by an invitation to merge with the entities formerly opposed (in Hokowithu and Devadas 2013:184). Put differently, the effort to gain representation and autonomy in media production within national space is now replaced by the effort to maintain these gains in the global mediascape. Vine Deloria Jr. of the Standing Rock Sioux, a scholar who has closely studied the cultural gulfs between Aboriginal and settler, immigrant and Indigenous, the global and the local, saw "Indian country" as the inevitable destination of North American society writ large. In the process of moving away from colonialism and establishing a new kind of American or Canadian identity, he suggests, a moment will occur when Indigenous heritage can exert a positive influence on larger society, a process that will be accompanied by a recalibration of cultural values. This process, however, holds an insidious potential: values might be reshaped not for reasons of cultural reconciliation, but as the logical next stage of colonialism where, as Deloria Jr. declared, when everyone and everything is Indigenized, there will no longer be Indigenous people (Deloria et al. 1999).

When culture is considered transactionally, one dominant characteristic sought after is scarcity. The market sets out to promote and protect a newly acquired scarce resource, all the more valuable because "different." Prentice argues that in the neoliberal cultural calculus there is but a negligeable distinction between "marginalized" and "exotic" among dominant groups. Indeed, as illustrated above, media platforms like Peacock and Shudder capitalize on such difference. However, Prentice notes that the problem is not with the market's involvement in the promotion of Indigenous difference, but with the market's tendency to encourage and even create templates for the culture to be promoted. The politics of recognition, as Coulthard argues, move to transform those being represented as actors within the system that carries out the recognizing. These actors are expected to agree to its terms (policies) and to ensure that, henceforth, the terms will extend to the entire group. Yet, the system itself remains featureless, its own identity unknown. "There is no single all-encompassing definition of culture in Canada" states the most up-to-date Canadian cultural policy document at the time of writing this chapter (Foote 2003). By foregrounding content and creators, the mechanisms behind media production and distribution render themselves invisible. The "doctrine of creativity" in the platform economy draws attention to creator personalities and "revelations" from behind-the-scenes. For instance, revelations of wrongdoings, abuse, and gossip in the media industries become stand-ins for the lack of transparency about funding decisions or policymaking. The pre-eminence of visual culture gives the impression that the ultimate arena where historical tensions and reconciliations are worked out is in the media industries. Hence, presenting images of Indigenous success and empowerment becomes evidence of a healthy system that is sensitive and responsive to critique.

This conceals the reality that the system resists challenges in other areas of life such as physical infrastructure, healthcare, and other social support mechanisms.

Although platforms are not central to either policymaking or to Indigenous media production, they modulate these activities in powerful ways. Taken together, the stories told by the submissions and deep texts examined here reveal that legal and cultural policy frameworks are preoccupied with content and its definitions, but the mechanisms underlying platform architectures avoid scrutiny except for the occasional mention of the need to grapple with the "algorithms," the platforms' own sets of policy instructions. The distribution mechanisms whereby Canadians tell and hear each-other's stories have gradually been outsourced by governments to private companies whose understanding of nation and culture are thoroughly transformed by the priorities of global media trade and transnational corporate power. Whether under foreign or local control, platforms currently offer the most direct connection to audiences. They continuously refine their models by tailoring myriad cultural micro-habitats for ever narrower segments of society until, ultimately, as the next chapter examines, platforms seek audience directly with individual viewers.

3. Fulltime Pastime: localizing fandom

At Palais des congrès, Montreal's convention centre, groups of teens wearing branded face masks—a fashionable take on air pollution and airborne contagion popularized by Asian pop culture enthusiasts in the 2010s, also known as "smog couture"—are milling about in front of the main hall. It's the annual Otakuthon, and visitors dressed for cosplay are eagerly anticipating the morning's highlight event, "The Embarrassing Origins of Voice Actors," featuring star voice-over talent all the way from Los Angeles, here to reveal carefully curated tales about accidentally stumbling into the profession. Erika Lindbeck, known for voicing Kaori Miyazono in *Shigatsu wa Kimi no Uso* (Your Lie in April, 2014), Futaba Sakura in *Persona 5* (2016), Celica in *Fire Emblem Warriors* (2017), as well as one of the vocal incarnations of Barbie, is a guest of honour. She is accompanied by Patrick Seitz, one of the hottest voice directors in LA for production houses like Funimation and Bang Zoom! Entertainment, and Derek Stephen Prince, a voice actor whose long list of credits includes *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), *Kill La Kill* (2013-2014) and an impressive amount of *Naruto*-related content.

A few doors down the hall, the reason I am here, is a much less glamorous panel on translation and adaptation of anime and novels led by Sam Pinansky, managing director of J-Novel Club. This panel is to be followed by several sessions on how to succeed as an anituber (an influencer who promotes anime and manga on youtube), which is sponsored by streaming gear manufacturers. These panels feature appearances by local micro-celebrities such as Misty Chronexia, aka Mathieu Brunelle, Quebec's top youtube anime influencer whose subscription-base ranks him among the top five anitubers worldwide. The day will close with a presentation on translating manga, RPG games, and managing cultural differences with French linguist and translator Cyril Coppini, who is also a *rakugo* performer. Rakugo is a traditional form of Japanese verbal entertainment where a lone storyteller, dressed in a kimono, dazzles the audience with humorous tales by masterfully switching voices and demeanor. Coppini performs in French, relating anecdotes about cross-cultural perturbations, drawing on his deep immersion into Japanese culture as a Frenchman living in Tokyo. Such professionalization lineups have become an expected part of the ensemble of offerings at fan events, which also increasingly feature *aca-fan* participation. In fact, academics who identify as fans (aca-fans) have gradually secured for themselves a spotlight at fan gatherings, and play a subtle but increasingly important role in shaping fandom itself.

The industry section is sparsely attended and seldom in costume. Yet, by their own admission, those who do attend are among the "truest" of fans one could possibly meet. Many have certainly been fans for decades longer than the teenagers chanting "we all scream for mainstream" nextdoor. I have been coming to these events for the past several years, and the patterned relationship between deep fandom and industry was starting to reveal nuances not immediately obvious to a first-time visitor. While the rumble of adoring fans continued to echo down the hall, an entirely different kind of fandom gathering was taking place here, at the industry panels.

Part I: Localization and influence work

The Montreal Comiccon, Otakuthon, Geek-It, Québec's Nadeshicon, The Festival BD de Montréal, Festival Québec BD, MEGA (Montreal Expo Gaming Arcade) and MIGS (Montreal

International Game Summit) are only some of the events across the province of Quebec that promote and reinforce local anime fandom and geek culture. Smaller urban centres such as Gatineau, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières and Chicoutimi also maintain an interest in Asian popular culture via university and youth clubs, comic book events, and friendly gaming competitions. The enthusiasm for anime, graphic novels, and games across the province announces an underlying economic impetus: euphoria is high that Quebec will assert itself as a frontrunner in the world knowledge economy. This is exemplified by the province's participation in cutting-edge game productions, state-of-the-art 3D animation software development, propelled globally through companies such as Autodesk (formerly Softimage), Rodeo FX, and Ubisoft among notable others. Organizations such as Bureau du cinéma et de la télévision du Québec or La Guilde du jeu vidéo du Québec conduct regular impact assessments about future expansion in the multimedia and software sectors, which imagine Quebec as a production hub for all manner of cutting edge knowledge work.[97]

In the current context, I take the term "knowledge work" to include the creation and dissemination of symbolic goods through the use of computers and telecommunication technologies. This definition includes the educational domain, because the generation, transmission, and acquisition of knowledge about media production play a crucial role in the generation of symbolic goods discussed in this chapter, namely, cultural commentary and fan translations. The tax incentives granted to transnational big game developers and foreign media productions participating in Quebec's knowledge work economy have generated a large infrastructure, a trained local workforce, and offer ample learning opportunities. Conventions and fan gatherings promote industry presence as a chance for local visitors to signal their talent potential, and for local youth to explore future education and career options. The message that such events ultimately send to the industry, however, is that Quebecers are above all else eager consumers. "You *have* to play videogames and watch anime if you want to work in the industry," proclaims Simon Priestley, veteran localization producer.[98] Hosted by industry insiders (both local and otherwise), fan events feature discussion panels aimed at reinforcing fan affinities, allowing guests to bask in the presence of celebrities, offering audiences a privileged glimpse of goings-on behind the scenes, or at least the impression of one. For those interested in being more than mere spectators, however, these events fulfil another function: they lay down the current rules about how the global anime distribution industry wishes to be perceived by fans, aspirants, and industry peers alike. As I demonstrate below, these industry narratives tend to shift along with new distribution schemes.

The localization industry is a staple feature at these events, not only as a service to non-anglophone fans, but also to showcase potential vocational opportunities and to ignite the imaginations of those aspiring to participate in the production of their favourite content.

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[97] When Hesmondhalgh and Baker refer to knowledge work in the context of creative industry workers "involv[ed] in the direct manipulation of symbols" ("Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries" 2011), they are specifically writing about content creators. Alan Liu ("The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information" 2004), on the other hand, points to Information and Telecommunications professionals such as programmers and data analysts, while Mosco and McKercher ("The Laboring of Communication: Will Knowledge Workers of the World Unite?" 2008) approach the concept more loosely to include anyone involved in the exchange of information.

[98] Priestley, Simon (2019, March 15). Localization for Games. Presentation at the Montreal chapter of the Audio Engineering Society, Montreal, QC.

Traditional localization, the process whereby an imported media commodity is adapted for local reception, is celebrated via sing-along competitions, dubbing try-outs, translation panels, as well as numerous sessions addressing cultural differences. Amidst the activities dedicated to localization there are voice acting demonstrations and competitions, anecdote sessions about professional life, advice about "how to get one's foot in the door." At these events, self-disclosures offer a critical starting point from which to examine the internal distinctions that structure global anime fandom in specific ways. They draw attention to how the global anime industry positions itself before its local clientele.

In a series of conversations conducted face-to-face between 2016 and 2019 at fan conventions, industry discussion panels, and related events, followed up by exchanges online, I conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve localization influencers, fan translators, publishers, and micro-celebrity online content creators who sought the attention of anime fans located in Quebec. A few of the conversations were carried out in French, but generally, communications were mostly in English, the *lingua franca* of the influence industry even with francophone creators. I was specifically interested in the culture of localization practiced by cultural commentators and fan translators. The themes that emerged from these conversations represent only a phase at a particular moment in their professional and personal lives, and the preoccupations of my interlocutors may be very different today. They had plenty to say, and over time our conversations diverged in many directions. In narrowing down the volume of information I collected, I used thematic analysis, a qualitative method that helps identify and group key takeaways to gain a better understanding of the underlying meanings and experiences of professional fandom. My research design such as interview questions, or the selection of key themes, may certainly have been touched by researcher bias, that is, a subjective preference for topics that I myself am interested in, or that I feel more comfortable discussing, which I attempt to minimize through reflexively examining the data and trying to contain it to the topics most pertinent to the present discussion, namely, the culture of localization.

Localization culture refers to the unique set of practices, norms, and shared understandings that emerge in the process of adapting foreign content and explaining its meanings to local audiences. It extends beyond mere linguistic translation and encompasses the nuanced ways in which imported media is interpreted and recontextualized to resonate with the cultural sensibilities of specific audiences. Within localization culture, fandom itself becomes a product as much as it is a standalone phenomenon. Meanwhile, within fandom, localization culture becomes a dynamic interplay between global and local influences which are acted out by unique subcultures that define, each for itself, how fandom is presented, created, and consumed.

This chapter offers a fresh look at localization and fandom, research topics that have been rather lightly covered in the literature. While the mythology of western fandom abounds with tales of outstanding fan translations and subtitling ventures (Lee 2011), few researchers have examined the subject closely enough to identify the rather specific dynamics that dictate fan media production and the formal/informal markets that comprise it. Notable exceptions are media scholar Matt Hills (2020) and cultural anthropologist Ian Condry (2010), who explore the dual role of the professional fan as both a liminal figure within fandom and a central one as a cultural intermediary. Thinking about how fan production reshapes the boundary between amateur and professional domains, and how the professional fan acts as an interpreter who speaks the

languages of both industry and fandom, I propose a reevaluation of prevailing theories of fandom in the era of influencers. This reassessment should recognize the performativity exhibited in informal cultural production when influencers position themselves as "just one of the fans." Here, I join scholars like Suzanne Scott, who explore the vocational identity of the professional fan, one who "speak fans' 'language' [and] is an ideal interpreter between text and audience" (2019:161). In that sense, this chapter explores several intertwining boundaries: between the professional and the amateur, between global anime distribution and local fans, between imported culture and local appetites, between industry insiders and aspiring outsiders. While my focus on the continuity between the fan and the professional has afforded me a greater understanding of media production in informal online communities, I must equally acknowledge that my focus has been fixed onto a narrow subset of fan producers within anime fandom. Missing from this account are social actors who engage in cultural production from the bottom-up, for motivations that lie outside of the market, and who wish to preserve their full independence as fans.

The field of fan studies offers perspectives that effectively spill into many branches of media scholarship, particularly ones relying on ethnographic fieldwork. One such, which may be considered fan scholarship's industry counterpart, is production-side cultural studies (referred to as production studies in earlier chapters). The transition from fan to producer as object of study becomes an exercise in epistemic repurposing in fan scholarship, and is the focus of the rest of this chapter. "There may be much to gain from exploring fan theory as a kind of template," writes Mark Duffett (2013:52), proposing fan studies as an approach for thinking about other forms of social interactions, hierarchies, group behavior and the ethics of work in economies of attention. Adapting media production studies methods to fan production cultures, I used a combination of interviews, observations of lived experiences (digital ethnography), participation in the rituals of production (fan-industry conventions and gatherings), and para-industrial texts (online self-disclosures about life as a professional fan), to analyze the transition from fan to producer in the platform economy. The spaces where professional-grade fan production takes place are specific and distinct research sites that warrant closer examination, a task I aim to accomplish in the following discussion in the context of anime localization.

Some of my interlocutors were just starting out, while others boasted online followings in the tens of thousands. What brought them together was a common interest in anime, and its local reception. Via the rituals of the convention and the fan-industry gathering, my interlocutors swapped origin stories about how they got into translation or cultural commentary. They tended to switch freely between manga, anime, light novels and games as their objects of interest, or what media scholars of Japan refer to as the "media mix" (Steinberg 2012), but it was their performances of self-presentation that were of principal interest to me. In person, and online, these outwardly informal but self-consciously crafted personal accounts are how "the industry" constitutes itself in the popular imagination. I gradually became aware of two types of intermediaries interwoven within the social fabric of fandom, who navigate North American fanscapes on behalf of global anime distribution. One is a group of cultural producers economically comfortable enough to pursue unprofitable jobs for fun, while the other is an aspiring lower faction willing to put up with adverse conditions for a chance that those fun jobs might eventually lead to economic advantage, if only for a spell. Throughout my encounters with panelists, guests, and anime industry reps, I repeatedly heard that most of them have, in fact,

parallel professional lives, that is to say they have other main occupations or training in fields that could potentially offer stable, "real" work, compared to which fan translation or cultural commentary were merely a refreshing second shift of what I term *fulltime pastime*. These two types of hyper-qualified fan-producers, the knowledge economy's "accidental professionals," are the main actors in this chapter.

Figure 7: The "Embarrassing Origins of Voiceactors" discussion panel, Otakuthon 2019

Excited fans at Otakuthon Montreal presentation about dubbing and voice acting errors, and other monstrosities of localization at the "Embarrassing Origins of Voiceactors" panel. 2019, image by the author.

What's 'local' again?
(Not) Made in Japan: The geocultural branding of global anime

Global media distribution depends in large measure on demonstrating a cultural understanding of the territories it wishes to reach. More than that, what is required in an age of social media and targeted marketing is a personal connection to publics, an affective bond to offset the otherwise impersonal nature of the platforms that currently serve as principal distribution mechanisms. This chapter takes as its case study *global anime's local forums*. Over the years, global anime distribution has developed particular methods for capturing local viewers' attention by creating the necessary affective bonds to ensure its long-term economic survival. One unique

characteristic is the central role attributed to fans as localizers and proselytizers. This comprises amateur translators, cultural commentators, and other patrons of the anime commodity.

Fan production culture shares a long history with anime fandom. An iconic text is the mocumentary *Otaku no Video* (Otaku's Video, 1991), which could be thought of as one of the first behind-the-scenes of anime fan production. It reflects how the anime industry saw itself in the 1990s, at the onset of a new era of Japanese anime influence. It saw itself as a free, informal, passion-driven enterprise *of* fans and *for* fans. At that time, the most dedicated of fans had begun referring to themselves as "otaku," a term now well familiar to anime lovers worldwide. Originally denoting social seclusion and obsession, "otaku" has evolved into a label of distinction within western geek culture, and is equally celebrated by fans worldwide. While some see otakuism as a form of resistance to traditional societal structures and norms, otakus enjoy an open relationship with material culture. Otaku capitalism, therefore, refers to the intersection of anime fan culture with economic activities such as collecting various anime-inspired commodities, producing content, and maintaining niche communities of taste. However, to fully account for the phenomenon, I propose that anime and otaku culture became successful worldwide exports because globalization and neoliberalism had already created the conditions for a thriving geek culture defined by precarity, media work, and alternative forms of capital. All that was needed was a catchy name for a phenomenon already present.

But, as Hiroki Azuma asked in the early 2000s "if the rise of otaku … culture is part of a global trend, why are we focused on Japanese things?" (2009:11). Indeed, many have pointed out that, at a glance, anime appears to resist direct or reductive cultural connections to Japan. From its earliest incursions onto western screens, it was designed to be "as culturally neutral as possible … to anticipate the feelings of foreigners and to avoid any imagery they might regard as too 'Oriental' or 'exotic'" as reported by Frederik Schodt, one of the first official translators and chroniclers of anime culture in the west (1983:86). Iwabuchi explains that the production of culturally "odourless" narratives was necessary to quickly acclimatize the anime commodity wherever it set foot, in a decentralized manner, a tactic that differed from the American model of unidirectional flow of cultural power (2002:39-40). Such "denationalized" or "transcultural" narratives are stripped of any strong cultural identifiers such as references to local customs and imagery, historical events, particular nationalist attitudes, politics, mores and so on. He suggests that the cultural economy of the 21st century is bent on "overcoming a nation-centric view of global cultural power" (Iwabuchi 2002:41) and re-centering it on multinational corporations and their platforms. "Postnational" modes of media globalization, suggests Annett, are "based on promoting the flow of images, technologies, and capital across national borders perceived to be porous or vanishing" (2014:79). However, this flow is not a smooth and uninterrupted transaction in a borderless world. It is an uneasy flow, unevenly distributed across the globe and in continuous negotiation with local audiences. Although anime today continues to be produced by Japanese companies, the style of animation is in danger becoming dissociated from the country whence it originated, which may prove disadvantageous for the global anime industry in spite of its "transcultural" dispositions. Anime produced in Japan is highly outsourced, as has been the case since the 1980s. What is more, production companies from elsewhere are also targeting the anime market by retaining much of its original aesthetics and paying homage to its roots, which calls attention to the significance of geocultural branding.

In a culturally amorphous global space, *geocultural branding* is a communication strategy that serves to anchor the perception of where something comes from, as a kind of product placement. In Charles Acland's (2003) or John Caldwell's work (2008), Hollywood's geocultural branding is established via its own self-reflexive industrial narratives. A transnational industry *par excellence*, Hollywood's product is frequently a combination of "runaway" pieces assembled together from across the globe, which insist on tracing the finished commodity back to the U.S. Whether a film has been shot entirely abroad by a foreign crew and with foreign talent seems inconsequential when, ultimately, key elements like stars, subject matter, or production resources enable marketers to sell it as an "American" product. Similarly in this chapter, I refer to geocultural branding strategies that create an implicit connection between anime and Japan even if, in recent years, the anime commodity has been losing its direct connections to the Japanese culture industry.[99] I propose that even when anime narratives are "deodorized" for a cleaner cultural transition abroad thereby producing a global commodity that is removed from its origins, as Iwabuchi reports (2002:24), it must at the same time remain sufficiently removed from its target culture to preserve its foreign appeal. If we disconnect "anime" from its cultural connection to Japan, does it then become just "animation," or even still, simply "cartoons"? In the 1980s, western productions outsourced work to Japanese artists who left recognizable cultural and aesthetic traits onto their work,[100] yet the final products are not known today as anime because their production histories place their origins elsewhere. As Consalvo comments, what is "Japanese" in relation to global popular culture is an ongoing and open-ended question (2016). To preserve the geocultural branding of anime, therefore, the distribution industry generates a discourse loosely centered around a projection of Japan, or to use a fitting older concept, a simulacrum,[101] "because," as a Quebec-based animation producer Pat Beaulieu explained to me, "keeping up the appearance of these cultural connections [to Japan], it's good for the fans *and* for the industry."[102] The object of simulation has switched from representations, images, and on-screen narratives to what happens behind the scenes in the economic and marketing realms. Whether mostly outsourced or entirely completed abroad, anime qualifies as "anime" only when it can demonstrate a relationship with Japan, or when Japanese creatives are involved. Stevie Suan's concept of "anime's performativity" explores the moment when anime's identity is constructed (2017:66). In his theoretical abstraction, anime productions must initially

[99] Examples of such anime productions include the French-Chinese co-production of *Arcane* (2021-), a collaboration between the Chinese company Riot Games and the French-based Fortiche, which liberally borrows its steampunk Euro-fantasy aesthetics from Studio Ghibli's catalogue. *Arcane* pulls iconic images from the traditional anime database such as dystopic worlds divided by class, explosions, strong female characters, biotech humans, betrayed loyalties, martial arts, "fin de 19^{e} siècle" aesthetics of modernism, loss of childhood, powerful youth, the melodramatic, the demonic, and the occult.

[100] In the 1980s, the French-based production company Diffusion, Information et Communication (known to chuckling immature fans by its tagline "the incredible world of DiC"), outsourced a large part of its projects to Tokyo Movie Shinsha and other Japanese animation service providers. The resulting titles, which include series such as *Inspector Gadget*, *M.A.S.K.*, *Heathcliff & the Catillac Cats*, *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Rainbow Brite*, and *Dinosaucers* among many others, feature an unmistakable "animesque" visual aesthetic and tropes, although they are not considered part of the anime canon proper.

[101] Iwabuchi is equally as critical of a "virtual Japan" that remains a "monological illusion since it is little concerned with the complexity of 'real' culture" (Iwabuchi 2002:268) as he is of Japanese "narcissism" about perceived cultural successes abroad. In his view, western viewers never see or understand the "real" Japan, while Japanese cultural commentators are too quick to celebrate the success of their native culture which, it turns out, is not even being accurately portrayed. Yet, there is another, equally legitimate perspective which escapes him: the spontaneous creation of an altogether new culture as global media makes local contact.

[102] Pat Beaulieu, cofounder of Quebec city's animation studio "Squeeze," interview with the author.

exhibit aesthetic characteristics rooted in anime traditions, which deviate only slightly from the canon and evolve but gradually. Subsequently, the act of consuming anime becomes a form of performance: anyone can consume anime, but only a few can do it the proper way. For Suan, this anime consumption "know-how" is what shapes the local experience of anime, influencing how diversity and dynamic change become integral aspects of an otherwise rather conventional set of aesthetic elements.

Fan translators and anime commentators, who can be described as localization influencers, play a crucial role in formulating the dynamic relationship between anime and its local viewers. Whether for the purpose of praise or criticism, their efforts make the transition of global anime to local screens possible. What I mean by "local" here is very different from the traditional meaning of the word as it appears in the first chapter, in the context of dubbing. The "local" viewer of global anime is anyone who is watching, located anywhere. The transnational platform's idea of "locality" is not a geographical location but an algorithmic match between viewer and content. Merlyna Lim comments that geographical locality is no longer the principle uniting viewers, who increasingly gather in communities shaped by technology into "algorithmic enclaves" (2020:194).[103] Enabled by platform-mediated communications, individuals interact with other individuals and access content thanks to personalized *discoverability* policies derived from past behavior online. Past behavior guides future consumption, and people "interact with each other and collectivize based on a perceived shared identity online" in an exercise of "mutual shaping of technology and people" (Lim 2020:194). They spontaneously form taste clusters where participants engage in a high degree of reciprocal, communal, and cooperative interactions. Media localization, then, requires a social net of influence to promote its products, and anime's history of formal and informal (or piratical) worldwide circulation and grassroots adoption offers a successful example. Ian Condry uses the concept of "dark social energy" to describe the less visible and unofficial channels of influence that shape the development and public perception of visible and official cultural phenomena, such as anime fandom (2010). He suggests that the negative economic consequences of informal anime sharing are negligible compared to the promotional mission carried out in the murky waters of unlicensed distribution on behalf of the official global anime distribution industry. Contemporary models of promotion via fandom and influence culture unquestionably foreground the single most critical component for the success of global anime trade: the production of "enclaves" of local fans. From this angle, "localization" pertains not to the adaptation of the media commodity for a given target population, but to the creation and molding of local fan bases.

In platform economies, producing niche consumers in a mass way is accomplished through intermediaries who can speak to different clusters within a population. Extending postmodern discussions of the fragmentation of tastes, the mass produced commodity shifts to the micro-mass commodity, adapted for niche audiences. Marilyn Ivy notes that as early as the 1980s, thanks to the early adoption of telecommunications technologies in Japan, mass media consumption was already giving way to "micromass" marketing, announcing the advent of a new "age of feeling" designed to resonate with consumers on a more intimate level (Ivy 1993:252).

[103] In "Towards a Theory of Transcultural Fandom" Bertha Chin and Lori Hitchcock-Morimoto further develop this idea by suggesting that cultural practices are dissolving around national specificity and recombining along alternative lines of transcultural distinction (2013, *Participations*, Vol. 10, No. 1 page 93).

As myriad intermediaries put their own spin on a commodity, or in more formal terms, call attention to the "heterogeneity of texts" (Crimp in Foster 1983:xi), they act as niche "conduits" towards the subgroups they represent. The ultimate aim is to reorient the subject from "mass" to "me."

Work-play production cultures

Professionalized fandom: fulltime fans, pastime fans, and platform life. Localization as a field of restricted cultural production for global media commodities

In this section, I explore the emergence of the professional fan in both scholarly discourse and in practice. I highlight distinct characteristics that differentiate professional fans the broader fan community. Subsequently, I introduce the two categories of professional fans—cultural commentators and translators—that will be examined in more detail later on in the chapter. The section concludes with a discussion of the significance of these two categories, particularly in light of streaming service platforms, where human intermediaries become a necessary component to recruit and direct viewer attention.

Fans and fandom are the entry points from which I examine global anime localization. More particularly, in this chapter I look at the intermediaries who facilitate the cultural transactions between global anime and its local North American fans. The industry possesses a thorough understanding of western geek culture and its politics, based on detailed longitudinal observations of western expectations and appetites for imported goods that Annett refers to as "cosmopolitan affect" (Annett 2018:106). As noted earlier, a fundamental element of transnational anime trade is a healthy culture of localization and audience involvement. Localization in this case pertains not only to translation or cultural adaptation, but also to the entire ecosystem that assists in making foreign media "feel at home" through organized events, competitions, geekfests, live shows, sustained online presence, immersive experiences, and personalized access to creators. The physical venues and events supporting the anime cultural economy enable a fluid sector of independent local cultural producers such as cosplay entertainers, custom model builders, boutique clothing and costume designers, indie game developers, zine illustrators, artists and weapons artisans, comic-book micro-publishers, fashion stylists, tabletop gaming gurus, and suchlike. Their activities reinforce the original anime texts that inspired them. During live events, these cultural entrepreneurs are a vital part of the appeal of global anime culture and its related media products. The rest of the time, when the eyes of target demographics are fixated on their screens, the fiercest competition for attention takes place online. This is the domain of fan translators, fan critics, localization influencers, and cultural commentators.

The professional online influencer emerged as an object of scholarly interest in the latter half of the 2010s.[104] Prior to that time, academic commentary had focused on the "prosumer economy,"

[104] It's only after 2016 that we begin to see more regular media-related scholarly work on the professional youtuber as a scioeconomic archetype. The articles "In The Time of the Microcelebrity: Celebrification and the youtuber Zoella" by Anne Jerslev in *International Journal of Communication* and "Charismatic authority and the youtuber: Unpacking the new cults of personality" by Hayley L. Cocker and James Cronin in *Marketing Theory* begin to

which examined how the increasing density of techno-social networks affected the production and consumption of media in the new millennium. In the early 2000s, when fan initiatives were first making their way onto the platform economy, their activities were invariably seen as "free" marketing by the purveyors of commercial content (van Dijk 2009). A significant amount of off-brand fan-driven content was produced and traded, but virtually all of it escaped monetization. This system of exchange was referred to as a "gift economy." The gift economy's terms and conditions were certainly seen as highly exploitative, but the products of that economy were on the whole considered to be little more than the dabbling of excited "prosumers" testing out the possibilities of knowledge work. In scholarship, media platforms offered sandbox environments of self-expression that were useful research subjects for their ethnographic significance, as sites of social or political experimentation, but had yet to be recognized as legitimate forms of cultural production.

While in the early 2000s fan production generally fell under the rubric of user-generated content, by 2005, Mark Deuze begins to trace the rapid dissolution of the distinction between media producer and consumer as people began "pursuing amateur activities with professional standards, using their leisure-time to enthusiastically engage in commercially viable activities in fields as diverse as computer programming, astronomy, technical research, and now, increasingly, cultural production" (2007:77). Suzanne Scott traces the politics of fan professionalization to this period, when select fans first began transitioning from amateur to professional status, while continuing to refer to themselves as fans even as they were converting their own peers into followers. This phenomenon, which Scott terms "produceorial immersion," necessitated the inception of a particular genre of origin stories to assist the two sides of one's fan/pro public persona to cohere (2019:157). I provide a more comprehensive examination of these origin stories, or workplace narratives, in the subsequent section; however, at this juncture, I want to demonstrate that there is a separation between localization influencers and fan translators, and fandom at large. This is necessary, because both of these groups maintain that they are, in fact, fans first, and can therefore speak for fan communities and intermediate on their behalf, as fans, with the global anime industry.

There have been numerous case studies of various groups of fans—Henry Jenkins on participatory culture (2008), Matt Hills on cult fandom (2002), Nancy Baym on internet fandom (2015), Suzanne Scott on gender and fan activism (2019), Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse on fan fiction (2014), and Constance Penley on science fiction fandom (1997)—but those are frequently read as examples of independent fandom forces that exist outside of the corporate distribution system. I call into question that independence. Some scholars of fandom, like Jenkins or Annett, maintain that the offerings of the "culture industry" are independent of their reception – with a clear focus on reception as the site of fandom and fan analysis. Audiences, they argue, are "semi-autonomous," their interpretations are separate from produceorial intent; they are a lot more playful and free of the ideologies of the market than Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002), and later Fred Jameson had feared (1979). As Slavoj Žižek might say, audiences "know very well" what is going on and are aware of how the powers-that-be attempt

describe the self-presentation of youtubers as a professional category, and Alain Chouinard's doctoral dissertation *From Fan Videos to Crowdsourcing: The Political Economy of User-Driven Online Media Platforms and Practices* (2017) offers a valuable netnography of the commercial ethics and political economy of gameplay commentators. See also "Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online" (2018) by Crystal Abidin.

to nudge, influence, persuade, and engage them (2008). Fandom scholars like Leonard or Jenkins celebrate the independence of fans and push against theories of cultural imperialism, which they trace to the "ivory tower" of academia while presenting their own views as a reflection of the actuality of popular consumption (Leonard 2005:282; Jenkins 2009). A focus on consumption is a celebration of the cultural over the economic, suggests Arif Dirlik, but it also conceals the influence and significance of the production, technical, and management mechanisms, resulting in a "mystification of contemporary configurations of power" (Dirlik 2018:188) rather than a critical assessment of it. As work and leisure flow into each-other for a growing number of people, Alan Liu comments that the object of interest in a knowledge economy is not the media "text," nor the "message," but the "semi-autonomous *cultures* of production" in combination with channels of communication (Liu 2004:417, original emphasis). To put it briefly, in a knowledge economy there is always producing happening somewhere, never just pure "leisuring" and consuming. Thomas Lamarre also motions in that direction:

> everyone is producing these days … Anime tend to unfurl anime worlds or anime cultures that blur the boundary between production and reception, with fans participating enthusiastically in the dissemination of products and in the transformation of media and narrative worlds (Lamarre 2013:xiv)

For Bertha Chin, as well, all fan activities, even meta-textual ones like tweeting and commenting, are a form of production (Chin in Booth 2018). Such observations correctly identify the importance of fan-side production, but they are not precise about who those fans really are, nor what counts as production.[105]

Fan scholars frequently concentrate on the bottom-up strategies of fans to subvert dominant texts, to inscribe their own readings, to re-create and reimagine, to transgress and borrow, to appropriate, and so on. This narrative exoticizes fandom and props it up as a spontaneous popular political practice. However, it is not given to just anyone to take a text and profoundly rework it, to re-edit and remix media in engaging ways, nor to offer compelling editorial critique of genres, creators, or studios. At this point "fandom" shrinks to a much smaller subgroup of candidates who meet specific criteria, who position themselves as members of the group they seek to influence, and who compete for the attention of both platforms and audiences. Tiziana Terranova aptly notes that "The Internet does not automatically turn every user into an active producer, and every worker into a creative subject" (2000:35). Surely not *everyone* has the ability, access, or opportunity to be enterprising, vocal, and independent. The content that influential fans create can produces ripple effects that resonate back with the original creators, which is rarely the case with more common types of fannish activities such as "liking" or commenting. In this chapter, I aim to separate this stratum of professionalized fandom from the rest, and to analyze its internal dynamics and role in the production of localized experiences on behalf of global anime.

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[105] Thomas Lamarre also addresses this issue in his extended study of the Otaku Movement, capitalism, and fan media ("An Introduction to Otaku Movement," 2004). His perspective allows the western reader unique insight into discourses surrounding otakuism in Japan, yet at the same time he consistently favours identity to questions of class, perpetuating what Dirlik refers to as a "mystification of contemporary configurations of power" rather than addressing the political economy of otaku capitalism in a more direct way (Dirlik 2018:188). Lamarre's work is important because it provides a cultural bridge to understanding Japanese culture and society *in situ*, but the global otaku phenomenon reaches far beyond its country of origins, and arguably has little to do with the original context.

The Players

What interests me is a "species" of geek culture intermediaries who adopt the self-presentation of regular fans but maintain close relationships with the global anime industry. Related to self-declared "aca-fans", fans who operate in the academic sphere like Henry Jenkins or Paul Booth, or to what Suzanne Scott terms *fantrepreneurs* (2019:5), these are "'petty producers' who combine fandom with related industry work, perhaps in 'paratextual industries'" (Hills in Sexton and Mathijs 2020:285). They strategically embrace a fan identity as a means of advancing a professional career. I compare two ideal-typical fan/professional trajectories that lead into this cultural intermediary space.[106] Together, they play a crucial role in cultural and linguistic localization by supplying regular fans with the information necessary to understand cultural differences, peculiarities, and to establish transcultural equivalences. Translation and cultural commentary are two complementary activities that have aided global anime to recruit an audience in some of the toughest, most insular foreign markets. From the point of view of anime distribution, their function is to stage-manage the industry in the eyes of the public.

The first type, which I refer to as *fulltime fans*, engage in cultural commentary. While they are not members of the formal localization industry, they are localization influencers whose explainers, reviews, criticisms, cultural interpretations, narrative theories, historical factoids and analyses fulfill a crucial role in enhancing global anime's reach and humanizing the distribution platform's presence. They are fully committed to fandom as a professional identity. *Fulltime fans* operate almost exclusively online except for the occasional in-person appearance at conventions, which is how I met some of them. Sometimes referred to as "anitubers" (youtubers who specialize in anime) they also maintain a strong presence on other social media platforms. Using their vast knowledge gained from hundreds of hours of professional anime consumption and some liberal arts college education, they produce a wide variety of content for their followers including Q&As about the industry, descriptions of cultural "oddities," otaku-inspired nerd-outs about collectibles and merch, various "top ten" lists, the basics of Japanese customs and language, rants about anime where the host gets to gush about, or to bash on recent episodes, or to offer thoughtful cultural studies-inspired discussions that include close readings, criticism, and formal analysis. Recurring favorites are "reveals" about dubbing and translation mistakes, censorship and cultural adaptation trivia. Presenting themselves as economically precarious, *fulltime fans* rely heavily on corporate sponsorships and private donations, as well as video monetization. They operate alongside the anime industry, which many of them aspire to join in some capacity, but are isolated from it by their predicament as fans first.

The second type of cultural intermediaries are professional and semi-professional translators who also happen to identify as fans. I refer to those as *pastime fans*, because fandom is an essential part of their professional identities, but it is not everything. This group consists of individuals who began their fannish careers as casual translators, subtitlers (known as subbers), and dialogue

[106] The concept of "ideal-typical" is borrowed from Max Weber ("Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology," 1978). In Weberian terms, "ideal-typical" refers to a conceptual model that represents the ideal characteristics of a social phenomenon, in this case professionalized fandom. I use it here to conjure a theoretical construct that represents the essential features of two types of influence worker.

editors, some eventually moving on to occupy mid-level project management positions in the anime localization industry to continue doing fulltime what was formerly a hobby. They are older, racially diverse, but enjoy a similar socioeconomic status. *Pastime fans* are college-educated, many of them highly credentialed, mostly male, and keep close to the industry. Having started their careers in the grey zone of fan translation, most have gone on to operate within the limits of legitimacy which they also police. Their most important public function is to participate in conventions and online fan gatherings in order to advance ideas about how "the global anime industry" is to be seen by the public, including by the *fulltime fans*. Both *fulltime* and *pastime* fans express the ideal professional fan identity, that is, someone with the freedom and ability to completely dedicate oneself to beloved texts and media consumption. Having turned their hobbies into professions, *fulltime* and *pastime* fans demonstrate, at least outwardly, a kind of playful indifference or even disdain towards mundane notions such as remuneration and professionalization, in favour of an idealized dedication to their passions.

Aggregating Attention

Both *fulltime* and *pastime fans* are essential for the success of global anime distribution in its platform incarnation. The outputs they collectively generate in the form of videos, blog posts, articles, and in-person guest appearances are what production studies scholars term industrial self-reflexivity, that is, the management and dissemination of authorized narratives about what happens behind the production curtain. Charles Acland comments that backstage disclosures, gossip, and viewership statistics are highly valued para-industrial texts which complement the traditional objects of interest, the actual texts themselves (Acland 2003:6, 22). In media industry and production cultures research, para-industrial discourse refers to a whole ensemble of communication strategies, "a cultural–industrial *interface* woven together by socio-professional media communities, through trade narratives, ritualized interactions and conventionalized self-representations" (Caldwell 2014:721, emphasis added). Here, I am interested in the "interface" generated by geek culture intermediaries operating within a platform-mediated engagement economy. Unlike the economy of attention, which sought to engineer behaviors by incentivizing sensationalism and to recruit acolytes at scale through persuasion campaigns, the current marketing paradigm favors personal engagement. The engagement economy relies on individual influencers to establish direct relationships and affective connections with specific segments of local publics by generating trust and authenticity (Duffy 2016).[107] It is revealing that even as they speak for, and to, very diverse audiences, the ensemble of influencers I followed, without exception, always referred back to the very same set of anime titles streaming over the same platforms. These cultural producers create copious amounts of para-industrial and self-reflexive content that can be seen as the *local interface* necessary to recast anime from a mass commodity

[107] Director of Games Research & Development at the Institute for the Future, a California-based transhumanist think tank, technocratic futurologist Jane McGonigal sees the engagement economy as a competition for attention *bandwidth*. "How do you convert a member of the crowd into a member of your team?" she postulates. Her solution: through the gamification of experience. In that scenario, a person's attention is already torn to shreds from competing sides, both online and off, as well as possibly form within thanks to wearables and implants. The trick she proposes is to make an appeal on an emotional level and thus stand a better chance of acquiring "the target" (McGonigal, Jane. 2008. "Engagement Economy: The Future of Massively Scaled Collaboration and Participation." *Technology Horizons Program. Institute For The Future*. https://legacy.iftf.org/uploads/media/Engagement_Economy_sm_0.pdf.).

to something more closely resembling the result of restricted cultural production. Mass products with an aura of exclusivity, tailored to individual tastes by expert cultural interpreters. A niche market, but for any and all who may be interested.

As Alan Tomlinson noted back in 1990, when the technologies that shape our present mediascapes were the mere prognosis of futurologists, "the problem for the productive process is how to meet the new demand for fragmentation. … any adequate political economy of capitalist culture must recognize the centrality of the aura of the commodity, and the process whereby this is both produced and consumed" (Tomlinson 1990:15). In the right hands, the commodity is re-invested with the aura lost during the mass production process. In Walter Benajmin's description, "aura" is that ethereal quality of a symbolic good, such as a painting or a live performance, which cannot be captured and communicated through mass reproduction (Benjamin 2008). It is a measure of value, a sign of restricted cultural production (in the sense that it is boutique rather than mass-produced), and accounts for why, in terms of both monetary and cultural value, a painting is commonly valued higher than a photograph. The logics of platform mediation require influencers to imbue a commodity with an aura, as a way of making its presence familiar and valuable to various subgroups. By facilitating interaction and engagement on a personal level, the sociotechnical abstraction that we label "platform" attempts to appear accessible and relatable.

Platforms are entities that consist of a physical infrastructure, offer specific content or service, and act as intermediaries between users/viewers/citizens and corporations, with (allegedly, minimal) government oversight. Steinberg describes them as structures of mediation or enablers of transactions characterized by "a platform logic that carefully manages the relationship between contents and users, to the benefit of its particular ecosystem" (2019:236) where, quoting Chris Bilton, "Attention has shifted from the *what* of content to the *how* of delivery, branding, and customer relationships—in other words, towards management" (Steinberg 2019:11). My aim in this chapter is to contribute to this definition by providing a thicker description of how influence work contributes to the algorithmic management of attention and desire. Though not a main actor in this chapter, the platform is never far away, and modulates in important ways the actions and experiences of its users. As Ross Abbinnett persuasively asserts, "The media systems that have emerged since the turn of the millennium are such that the social milieux in which we live are constantly staged and re-staged, formed and re-formed, through a digital aesthetic whose coordinates derive from algorithmic models of attention and desire" (2020:16). Together, attention and desire are referred to as "engagement," the keyword describing the attention economy's current phase.

Amidst a wealth of information, an overabundance of content, the attention economy sees attention as a scarce commodity. In the 1970s, when ideas about "information societies" were entering popular discourse, Herbert Simon declared that "[T]he wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention" (Simon in Greenberger 1971:40). Acquiring attention came to be regarded as acquiring a form of immaterial wealth which, for Goldhaber, is related to the rise of immaterial labour (Goldhaber in Crogan & Kinsey 2012). The transactions of attention, however, were not entirely immaterial. Rather, they began to replace material

wealth with other forms of capital within systems of networked attention, the precursors to what we now refer to as "platforms". In these spaces, attention merchants, as Tim Wu terms them, seek to create desires that otherwise might not exist, and to engineer loyalties in specifically targeted segments of the public (Wu 2017). Human attention is finite and requires mental focus best solicited and sustained through affective connections and emotional narratives, which will be the focus of the next section. As Sara Ahmed notes in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, understanding the role of emotion and affect[108] as forms of currency requires a focus not on what affect *is*, but on what it *does* (2014). And what affect does is it hacks the observer's attention mechanism, making it amenable and steerable.

Let's talk about work

In this section, I introduce the concept of workplace narratives, with specific examples provided in the second part of this chapter. These narratives were selected from fieldwork interviews, online testimonials, and follow-up communications with members of the professional fan groups identified above. I discuss the conditions that cause such narratives to emerge, how they relate to the content produced by professional fans, and how they are shaped by the platform-based attention economy. In general, personal stories are intended to help us make sense of the world to ourselves. They can be classified by genre and they aim to entertain, to instruct, to guide, and to inform (Thornborrow and Coates 2006). From the perspective of production cultures, however, workplace narratives serve a more instrumental function. As Vicky Meyer relates through various cringeworthy anecdotes from her fieldwork (2008)—an experience familiar to those whose research tools include ethnographic observation and interviewing, such as Tejaswini Ganti (2012)—these personal accounts are meant not so much to express a personal worldview as to persuade others. They allow their narrators to craft versions of themselves that serve an instrumental purpose. Stories of the workplace can deal with accusations or complaints, power struggles, provide justifications for (in)action, or re-align social roles. They may also revolve around aspirations and desires of becoming something or someone else, particularly in a professional context. As Hans Ladegaard suggests, they fulfill "an explorative function, allowing us to delve into two facets of human experience: the real and the possible" (2017:244). Not least, they contain a heavy degree of prefabrication and self-promotion, especially in the context of the media industries. The workplace stories I collected (also referred to here as personal-professional narratives) incorporate several typical elements. They navigate the line between the commonplace and the extraordinary, precarity and professional hardships are highlighted, and they serve to assert and negotiate group affiliations. Because of their self-identification as fans first, the personal-professional narratives of my interlocutors become the storefronts through which their expertise in cultural competence or translation is to be viewed. Their content creations are not mere cultural commentary or localization projects, but are accompanied by generous paratextual details that display their personal involvement, dedication, and sacrifices made along the way. These professional fans sell themselves as much as they sell the anime they are fans of. To demonstrate how personal-professional narratives came into being, I first go over how contemporary knowledge work has become synonymous with identity, especially for those working online. I extend this further, by touching on the longer history of behind-the-scenes

[108] There is a distinction between affect and emotion, insightfully explained by Brian Massumi in Gregg and Seigworth (2010).

"reveals," a genre closely associated with work in the creative industries. Finally, I connect workplace narratives with localization, and particularly localizations produced for the benefit of anime fans.

Identity and Work in the Media Industries

In the late 1990s the media industries underwent a cycle of technological transformations that coincided with the mainstreaming of the Internet. Media work was pushed to the forefront of that change, leaving many media-related professionals vulnerable about their position and status. At that time, comments journalist Derek Thompson, the "conception of work shifted from *jobs* to *careers* to *callings*—from necessity to status to meaning" (2019, original emphasis). His observation, drawn from reporting on white collar occupations in the knowledge economy in the U.S., is that the growing presence of technology and technology-mediated employment displaced other methods of identity formation in people's lives. Drawing on Weberian sociology, Thompson calls it *workism*: "the belief that work is not only necessary to economic production, but also the centerpiece of one's identity and life's purpose; and the belief that any policy to promote human welfare must *always* encourage more work" (2019, original emphasis; see also Weber 2002). The workist ethic requires lifelong hustle where leisure time and work time flow into each other, a phenomenon studied at length by scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Tiziana Terranova (2000), Toby Miller (2016), Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (2017), and Jonathan Crary (2014). These authors make plain the transformation of perspectives about work that has occurred over the last several decades.

The establishment of identity through work has also been accompanied by a marked shift in expectations, as younger generations expect emotional fulfillment and meaning from their work, perhaps in exchange for increased precarity and lower pay. In an environment that David Graeber terms "managerial feudalism" characterized by a decline of productivity, younger people no longer have the career opportunities or academic acumen enjoyed by earlier generations. Instead, they prefer to focus on their emotional connections to their occupations, aiming to define themselves *through* work in a process he refers to as "bullshitization" of the economy (Graeber 2018). What these authors are trying to describe is a process whereby fetishization moves away from the physical commodity object towards producing the potential for production, that is, commodifying work itself. In keeping with the law of scarcity, the most limited resource in industries of media production today is not content, talent, access to technology, or ideas, but work. As the *workist* ethic suggests, meaning derived from consuming is nothing compared to meaning derived from doing. In *Work's Intimacy*, Melissa Gregg further proposes that the significance placed on work and professional life displaces other areas of interest in social and personal life (2013), and takes centre-stage.

For decades, the glamorization of media work had been performed by the media industries themselves through making-ofs, behind-the-scenes, interviews and promotional materials intended to make the industry appear sympathetic and welcoming in the popular imagination, but also vulnerable, fragile, and in need of assistance from both the State and the viewer. In the twenty first century, media work began to be vigorously promoted by state actors through various cultural policies, as one of the remaining areas of economic growth available to the broad

middle class of post-industrial urban dwellers. "Creative industries initiatives are in many respects versions of employment and education policies that have long aimed to replace the steadily declining role of manufacturing in national economies, under names such as 'the information society' and 'the knowledge economy'"[109] write Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011, see also Du Gay and Pryke 2002, Doyle 2013). Storey (2009) and Deuze (2010) have reflected on the instability introduced onto the scene, as creative industry workers transitioned to working online. At the same time, Richard Florida (2003), Pierre Lévi (1997) and other "digital optimists" have been hugely successful in influencing cultural policies by imbuing the creative industries with an aura of prestige and economic comfort that seems to be within the grasp of anyone who follows their passion and proves themselves resourceful and resilient. As a result, in larger urban centers worldwide, everybody knows somebody who is, has been, or looks forward to being involved in the creative industries.

Typical media industry worksites, such as recording studios and traditional office environments, began to receive low-level competition from home-offices and personal recording studios with outputs approaching "professional" standards. Meanwhile, production within the confines of the media industries became more informal, casual, and temporary. What does "making it" look like in a business where "nobody knows anything?" Moreover, what does work look like for precariously employed online knowledge workers whose professional and social interactions remain almost entirely within the confines of the platform economy? For the managerial and established talent classes of the creative industries, success takes on familiar forms rooted in tradition: peer recognition, the awards ceremony, the industry gathering. However, things are less obvious for those in the lower tiers, whose career journeys become a lifelong coming-of-ager in which a knowledge worker's professional arc is reset with each technological or managerial disruption.

A shift in self-presentation strategies is one of the coping mechanisms adopted by lower-tier workers to maintain status, and therefore employability, in work environments defined by ongoing updates, upgrades, limited social safety nets and a culture of "levelling up". The use of narrative devices is essential for establishing one's professional worth. For instance, in a related context, Katherine Quanz outlines how in the 2000s Canadian sound engineers insisted on being referred to as artisans rather than mere technicians (Quanz 2015), a strategy that remains popular today, in the 2020s, in both the craft and talent professions. To put it briefly, those suspended at the fan / professional boundary must consistently emphasize the uniqueness and significance of their expertise amidst ongoing tech updates, heightened competition, and opaque production paradigms.

In exchange for their investments of time and labour, professional fan influencers harvest attention capital. "[O]btaining attention is obtaining a kind of enduring wealth, a form of wealth that puts you in a preferred position to get anything this new economy offers" writes Michael Goldhaber. Though he no longer lives in his mother's basement, Canadian anituber Geoff Thew's moniker "Mother's Basement" concisely epitomizes the *fulltime fan* aesthetic. Relying

[109] Ibid, 4. See also Nicholas Garnham's "From cultural to creative industries: An analysis of the implications of the creative industries approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom" (2005) and David Hesmondhalgh's "The Cultural Industries" (2013) for a more detailed analysis of 'creativity' discourse surrounding media work.

on economic support from "mother," the devout fan toils and trolls into the wee hours of night, a devotional *travail* to bring a global "you" the joy of anime. Whether or not this is an accurate reflection of Thew's lived reality is not as important as evoking the image of the precariously employed, adult, predominantly male, anime-consuming basement-dweller who still lives at home, an image that might easily describe his target audience. As Stuart Hall reminds us, albeit in a slightly different context, such mediated narratives are not intended to reflect the daily experiences of the group under study as much as to convey its values and moral orientations in an accessible way (1973). In this case, as long as they contain elements of authenticity, the narratives created by professional fans are purposefully simple and accessible, intended to create a quick bond with their audiences.

Authenticity is perhaps the most valuable asset an influencer can offer to both the companies that sponsor them and to the audiences who follow them. Its performance is carefully managed. Authenticity in this case means "native advertising," a genre in which influencers adopt the style of self-presentation of regular fans. They must continue to be perceived as members of the same social set as their audience, even if their position as taste makers and opinion shapers sets them apart. For audiences they symbolize the geek ideal: a relatable and knowable someone whose editorial opinions can be trusted. A regular fan with just a little extra time on their hands. Self-presentation remains necessarily lofi and operates within a DIY aesthetic essential to elicit authenticity. There exists an entire economy around managing and curating influencer content in just this manner.[110]

Localization and Discoverability

So far, I've traced the personal-professional narrative at the intersection of identity and work. I have also drawn a connection between workplace narratives and the more common genre of behind-the-scenes "reveals" typically produced by creative industry workers. In the remainder of this section, I explain how this connects with localization work and its platform counterpart, discoverability. To briefly recall, the definition of localization in this dissertation goes beyond the traditional understanding of localization as audiovisual translation. Here I tap into various cultures of localization, which provide extra-textual context for local viewers and create local appetites. Localization and discoverability are interconnected in platforms space, and the workplace narratives that professional fans share are directly related to the discoverability of the content they are trying to promote. With changing discoverability patterns, set by platform administrators via algorithms, there has been a shift from focusing solely on texts and content to what occurs behind the scenes. To a large extent, algorithm shifts responded to the reality that content creators were learning how to game the system and to obtain greater reach. An intriguing observation is that as discoverability mechanisms became more obscure, creators began

[110] Third party talent management agencies seek out prominent local influencers and recruit them as spokespersons on behalf of global distributors. Media marketers such as GeeX+, "a geeky Tokyo-based influencer agency representing global talent," bank on the idea that their contents are "organically" promoted by "real people" (https://www.geexplus.co.jp). Their reps include major anime influencers from across the anglophone world: Geoff Thew aka Mother's Basement and Mathieu Brunelle aka Misty Chronexia (Canada), Agnes Yulo Diego aka akidearest (U.S.) and Joey Bazinger aka The Anime Man (Australia). Of course, online these influencers are all accessible and interchangeable regardless of their physical location.

integrating more of themselves into their outputs. They no longer functioned as mere guides commenting on what anime to watch, which light novel to read, or which *waifu* character they would rather take out to dinner, but began squarely positioning themselves as "insiders" by setting up interviews with anime creators, becoming official spokespersons for distributors, and being more candid with their followers about the realities of online influence work. In an online environment characterised by discoverability, affective tactics play a significant role in positioning professional fans closer to their viewers.

Affective engagement is inseparable from content discovery, which I will briefly address as it is essential to understanding how platforms work. The algorithmic discoverability of content is the machine-side of the attention economy, where content is personalized via automated sets of instructions and conditions—the algorithms—to ensure that a visitor can circumvent the abundance of information and quickly arrive at desired, or more likely, at promoted content, before attention has been distracted and re-captured elsewhere. The algorithms coordinating discoverability, which McKelvey and Hunt liken to cultural policies, give platforms enormous power over attention (McKelvey & Hunt 2019). The human side of discoverability is the work of influencers, governed by Content Strategy and Management personnel in the typical platform human architecture, who make the executive decisions about how platforms ought to function, and what algorithms to tweak. Discoverability algorithms particularly—computational methods that analyze user preferences, viewing habits, and interactions to recommend relevant and personalized content—are not only determined by the logics of big data and large-scale computation, as is sometimes suggested (Striphas, 2015), but also by the activities of influencers, the professional fans in this context, whose insight into the "realities of the market" are fundamental in shaping user experience. Guided by behavioral science and social psychology, platform managers pay enormous attention to the outputs and reception statistics generated by influencers. Their goal is to isolate key players from among the backdrop of fan content producers, and to convert them into attention merchants. Although integral to the process, influencers are several degrees removed from the decision-making process.

Proprietary and black-boxed, algorithms present a puzzle for content producers whose lives they regulate in covert and irresolute ways. Unlike the cultural policies that guide the legacy media industries which I describe in chapters one and two, algorithms are informed by much more mercurial and concealed mechanisms which include but are not limited to proprietary marketing data. In their studies of user-producers (Chouinard 2017), American alt-right influencer networks (Lewis 2018) and gig workers (Chen and Sun 2020), scholars note that those who depend on the platform economies for their livelihoods become efficient at intuiting the inner-workings of algorithms. Reverse-engineering the processes involved in discoverability is a part of professional platform work, including the examples I discuss in this chapter. The ability of influencers to amass considerable followings of their own gives them significant power which needs to be regulated. They provide the human interface of discoverability that complements algorithmic regulation. Thus, influencers are a part of what McKelvey and Hunt refer to as the "surrounds" of content discovery (2019:2), the aesthetic strategies that guide subjects through platform space and time. As viewers dip in and out of various sources of content online, the role of the influencer (from the perspective of platforms) is not to become a focal point of attention but simply to remain on the visitor's radar as a permanent feature, a signpost indicating where attention ought to be directed. Because they are caught in elaborate regimes of affect and

engagement, the agency of influencers is constrained by the logics of discoverability, as well as by the reward mechanisms associated with discoverability. As Lobato comments, discoverability schemes "delimit—without determining—the likely range of textual experiences available to audiences" (2018:243). The reverse view, from a production perspective, suggests that certain types of cultural experiences are more likely to be reproduced if they are tagged as "discoverable," and rewarded accordingly. Influencers, therefore, tend to follow specific production patterns because discoverability algorithms encourage certain user experiences more than others.

Whereas Lobato or McKelvey and Hunt analyze the screen and its attendant mechanisms, I suggest that social rituals and para-industrial narratives cultivated by participants in the platform economies play an equally important role in harvesting attention. Discoverability is not unique to platforms, and both Steinberg (2019) and Wu (2010) suggest a number of continuities with older systems of influence, but the conditions for platform discoverability necessitate renewed attention. In research on contemporary media systems it is important to emphasize human to human connections, because it is easy to overstate the power of the nonhuman agent in shaping content, recommendations, and experiences. In reality, at least as of the present moment, besides algorithms and AI, platforms continue to employ invisible armies of humans agents to monitor, categorize, sensor content, and to guide consumers.[111] According to a 2016 Canadian Media Fund report, online "friends" can hold an even greater sway over their connections than advertising or algorithms alone, emphasizing the significance of word-of-mouth recommendations for discoverability. Friends and fans perform a major role in the distribution chain by extending its reach into niche social enclaves and growing the visibility of its offerings. Duffy (2016), O'Meara (2019), and Chen & Sun (2020) provide much needed thickness to what have so far been largely macro-level observations about platform influence. My work in this chapter adds further to these examples by looking at the specific sociotechnical relationships between platforms, anime fandom, and fan intermediaries who provide the "social lube" necessary to facilitate the symbiosis between human and screen. The influencers I followed are organic components of platform life. They are instrumental in creating the narratives of the system within which they operate, influencing in turn the operations of that system. As I have suggested, personal narratives and algorithmic shifts are closely intertwined. Personal narratives literalize the abstractions of algorithms by reflecting the lived consequences of ongoing tech updates, whose principal objective is to anticipate and direct social traffic. Though never in direct contact with each-other, influencers and platform administrators co-create the *algopolitics* that establish alternative and new forms of value including, but not limited to the material realm.

Depends who you talk to

What a narrative may reveal about a workplace depends on who you talk to. Accounts are carefully curated, especially when provided by workers in the creative industries, for whom self-

[111] Going behind the scenes of Big Tech, in *Cash Investigation: Ghost Workers* (2019) director Sandrine Rigaud uncovers one of digital economy's best kept secrets, the invisible labour force that trains artificial intelligence bots and cleans up social media content following strangely arbitrary rules about what, on a given day, is construed as violence, porn, and disinformation. The documentary reveals that, to ensure deniability, Big Tech firms routinely source this work to remotely located agencies, several degrees of subcontracts away from the actual client.

presentation is essential. Further on, in part two of this chapter, I provide examples of such narratives drawing on interviews and other public disclosures. Perhaps unsurprisingly, depending on the where the speaker is positioned along the fan-professional continuum, accounts tend to differ in their definitions the boundaries between the fan and the pro. To set the stage, I present two opposing perspectives. The "fan-side view" offers a beloved and familiar perspective of fandom, where anime was organically adopted without industry intervention. It recalls a time when fan producers were celebrated for "sharing the love" and providing free promotion for the anime industry. In contrast, the industry perspective, "pro-side view," is an attempt to offer a new, updated version of events in which fans are passionate but misguided actors whose uncontrolled actions interfere with the industry's efforts to bring them the best content. It is an evolving paradigm that aims to engage fans on an emotional level by soliciting empathy with the personal-professional adversities of beloved creators, and clearly distinguishes between the roles of consumer and producer, insider and outsider, legitimate and illegitimate.

Fan-side view

The bottom-up, fan-side view maintains that anime was organically adopted without interest or intervention from the anime industry, unlike similar media products from the U.S. which were aggressively marketed at a large scale. Informal fan subbing, fan translations, and tape trading are associated with an older generation of fans, who were far fewer in number. Their small conventions and anime clubs were geeky, unpopular affairs (or exclusive only to the initiated, depending on your perspective). Early efforts at grassroots localization and informal distribution filled a marketing void. Japanese media companies at the time exported only major titles such as *Shin Tetsuwan Atom* (1980-2004), *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-1996) or the offerings of Studio Ghibli, but the majority of anime series, manga, light novels, and games remained within the confines of the Japanese domestic market, safe for titles that were "smuggled" into other territories by devoted fans, or so we are told with romantic nostalgia. Western anime patrons, too few to matter in terms of profit, were little more than an oddity for Japanese publishers and distributors who hadn't the financial motivation to risk exporting at scale. According to industry insiders, the uptake for global anime was slow well into the first decade of the 21st century (Sevakis 2012). Contrary to the immediacy of Hollywood's simutaneous global blockbuster releases, whose promotional campaigns ran into millions of dollars, and frequently took up about half of the overall budget, global anime distributors played a long game of influence that could span several years per title. Once released "into the wild," a title's global circulation was commonly beyond the control of producers, who by that time would have already recouped their expenses in the Japanese domestic market and did not feel pressure to pursue further profit.

With little or no distribution oversight, fan interventions into production might have been described by digital optimists like Pierre Lévy as the "collective intelligence" manifestation of "knowledge communities" (Lévy 1997) whose nascent contra-capitalist tendencies would set the stage for new social structures online. Participants in those communities would freely and spontaneously combine their efforts and expertise to generate new forms of production and circulation of knowledge within a networked society that would rival and compete with the established structures of the market. However, Terranova warns against the uncritical celebration of free labour within a "gift" economy, often associated with online fandom, suggesting that the supposedly spontaneous and communal nature of online interactions is in fact being co-opted by

the market. Fans' labours of love were being commodified by digital platforms for profit. Somewhere halfway between these two perspectives we find, after the manner of economic anthropologist Marcel Mauss, scholars like Pierre-Michel Menger (2014) and Mark Deuze (2007) who describe gifting as an alternative form of capital, a strategy of converting one's time spent online into opportunities, not necessarily of an immediate monetary nature. It is this transactional nature of fan production that tickled the anime industry's interest *en route* to global distribution.

The mass adoption of the internet in the 2000s as well as the increasing of bandwidth in certain countries opened a temporary window during which the fan producer/distributor of localized content became a figure celebrated by other fans and industry marketers alike – especially the type of fan producer who performed tasks as useful as localization and proselytization. The anime industry welcomed the free promotion, while fan translations revealed a wealth of interest in some of the most impenetrable foreign markets such as the US and France. Robert McChesney's work suggests that the growing concentration of media ownership in the early 2000s was too obsessed with "bigness" and turf wars to bother with fan activities and niche viewer interests (2002:216). Internet file sharing was much easier than tape trading, and anime fans rapidly sprouted worldwide. Fan subbers provided language localization, cultural explainers, and aggregator sites hosted unlicensed content, usually free of charge. It is this brief period of early popularization that presents a problem for the industry's self-image. Professional and fan translators contend over who merits recognition for turning the industry from an unprofitable "wild west," as localization scout Dan Ritter describes it, to global ascendancy.[112] Eventually publishers and distributors scrambled to capitalize on the newly found popularity of Japanese content, and internet sites that had become famous as illegal file sharing or streaming hubs for unlicensed anime and fan localizations began to "go legit" and to offer streaming by subscription.

Petit et al. chronicle the emergence of today's *animescape*, noting that most of the established streaming platforms share a similar origin story: they all began as unlicensed small-time operations (Petit 2021). Crunchyroll, one of the top global anime streaming platforms, owed much of its initial underground popularity to fansubbers (Ristola 2016). After Crunchyroll became a legal distributor in 2009, veteran translator Sam Pinanski tells me, fansubs that had accumulated during the platform's stint as a clandestine operation were used as basis for official dubbing scripts.[113] The legitimization of sites was timed so well to coincide with the accumulation of a critical mass of global viewers, it seemed almost deliberate. Following Ian Condry (2010), the incursion of corporate interests into informal spaces can be thought of as a low-intensity psychological operation intended to take maximum advantage of fan contributions before moving in to appropriate them under the aegis of copyright. This process of legalization changed the fandom experience. No longer a casual pastime experience for "enthusiastic fans," the platformization of distribution began to adhere to strict release schedules, referred to as

[112] Dan Ritter, External Vendor Relations (localization talent management), Amazon Canada. Interview with the author at Comiccon Montreal, Palais des Congrès, 2019.
[113] Sam Pinanski, founder of J-Novel Club. Interview with the author at Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.

simulcasting,[114] in order to meet and reinforce market demand. The industry resists any suggestion that "going legit" was always the plan, and that the presence of "free" anime aggregator sites was never anything other than purely an organic form of appreciation instead of shrewd experiment of business tactics advancing towards commercial methods of delivery. Anime's advance towards platform distribution is invariably presented in terms of naïve discovery and honest mistakes followed by legally-informed course correction.

Pro-side view

The pro-side of events offers a different account, with the same actors involved: fans, anime creators, and "the industry," but arranged in a different configuration. In the 2010s, before any of the professional fans discussed in this chapter—anitubers, bloggers, translators, and cultural commentators—ever began producing content online, the global anime industry already had a blueprint for how the following decade of fandom would unfold. In a pivotal explainer entitled "The Anime Economy," anime journalist, industry insider, marketing facilitator, self-professed fan Justin Sevakis summarizes insider thinking about the relationship between anime, fans, and the global public going forward.[115] The piece captures the mutual attraction between fandom and creativity, and proceeds to gently inform readers about how they can practice fannish creativity and "gifting" without infringing copyright (spoiler alert: by leaving creativity to the professionals and re-channeling their enthusiasm into paying for subscriptions, or some other form of patronage). Sevakis sets out to define a new ethos for commercial interactions online. Celebrations of clandestine distribution are revised as concerns over legitimacy, the triumph of fans over corporations is replaced by the struggles of artists against an unregulated and chaotic global public:

> Every anime fan, at one time or another, daydreams about making an anime. It's not an uncommon sight to see younger fans toiling over their own original manga, fantasizing that one day it might get an animated TV show. And yet few of us really has any idea what it takes … [Illegal sites] allow unsuspecting and uneducated fans to consume anime outside the system, never engaging, never seeing an opportunity to give back. It's a loss of something even less tangible than a potential sale: it's the loss of mindshare. … Not everyone will want to contribute to the shows they love, but many people have that sense of goodwill. That goodwill is very fragile. It's based on a sense of trust that, if they do contribute, their money will be well used. Which is to say, the future of the anime market, and the entertainment market in general, is in building a relationship with fans, an emotional connection that they get something out of. That relationship gives them every opportunity to be a part of the shows they love. Increasingly, anime companies are bending over backwards to engage fans on this level. (Sevakis 2012)

[114] Simulcasting is simultaneous broadcasting across multiple platforms. It allowed fans worldwide to access content at the same time as it was originally broadcast in Japan. Unlike "windowing," which staggers distribution, simulcasting discourages piracy by offering legal and immediate access to broad audiences. It calls for accelerates workflows by eliminating the staggered release schedules of the windowing era, and, by narrowing the production timeframe, minimizes the time for fan interventions or modifications.

[115] Sevakis' post was published on the Anime News Network (ANN, animenewsnetwork.com), an entity which he also co-founded. In the late 1990s, ANN had been one of the first global anime influencer blogs. Today, it is an industry-sponsored leading authority on all things anime, manga, and games, and Japanese pop-culture for Western fans.

In this lengthy quote, drawn from an extended piece of agitprop blogging, Sevakis aims to educate the general public about a new paradigm of fandom. The wording combines the technological positivism of the early millennium with the anticipated shift toward a platform economy, encapsulating the key components of the industry's updated self-reflexive narrative. We can easily detect echoes of Lévy's "collective intelligence" and digital optimism via the appeal to "mindsharing,""giving back," and "goodwill," followed by an introduction of the then-nascent paradigm of influence over fans thanks to "emotional connections," "love," and relationship-building. The replacement of the physical medium with a virtual one forced marketers to engage philosophically with the alchemical transmutation of the immaterial back into material value. In its original paradigm, Steinberg notes that the exclusivity of the anime commodity was determined by its physical scarcity, making it an object both sought-after and precious (2012:53). Contents, meanwhile, were seen as a conceptual packaging for virtual and infinitely reproducible goods. Online fans short-circuited this process with what Jonathan Sterne terms "promiscuous" sharing of virtual goods (2012), and corrupted the aura of exclusivity that the anime economy wished to preserve. The creation of scarcity and exclusivity is complicated by digital copying, sharing, and unsanctioned fan activities such as translations and subbing. These activities de-center the role that the global anime distribution industry imagines for itself, and place it as only one source among many. To recover a central position, the industry needs to maintain "a common, symbolic identity that keeps the largely imaginary concept of a unitary industry intact" (Caldwell 2008:70). In other words, what is needed for the global anime distribution industry to recenter itself as the main source for all things anime is a shared narrative. With that in mind, official narratives begin to focus on creating value via emotional connections with creators, and on drawing clear boundaries between the anime industry and fannish attempts at production.

Between the "fan-side" and "pro-side" perspectives, the roles of the professional fan and the fan-producer emerge as unstable categories. As I discuss later on, this instability is in fact a useful feature that the anime distribution industry uses to freely tap into and exploit the social dynamics and internal contradictions of fandom. Shifting focus to the localization role of fans, the next section of this chapter digs deeper into the workplace narratives of anime influencers and translators. Their status as fans is integral to their professional identities and will be explored in detail.

Part II: How Anime Localizes *You!*

Fandom and fan labour are inextricably linked to the story of global anime. This story usually begins during the years of videotape trading, the 1980s, shortly before the mainstream adoption of the internet. Fandom chroniclers and aca-fans conjure images of "networks of Japanese animation fans who imported and distributed videos across a vast underground international network" spreading "knowledge of and enthusiasm for" anime (Leonard 2005:282). This is a story in which the power of the commons spontaneously resists the dominion of private media corporations and offers an alternative form of circulation. Bypassing the middleman, it advances a vision of creators connecting directly with viewers, floating atop a raft made up of sheer enthusiasm, while corporate sharks snap menacingly from the sides. Fandom scholars who write

about this period frequently present it in manichaean terms, as an opposition between imperialist media and an underground resistance. As fandom bursts into myriad intersecting subcultures over the next three decades, its analyses has become much more nuanced thanks to the work of scholars like Hills, Condry, Duffett, Annett, and Lamarre. Contributing to this granularization of fandom scholarship, in this section I look at two specific groups of fan producers who teeter on the edge of official recognition, as well as on the edge of legality. The first group is *fulltime* fans, professional cultural commentators and anime influencers. The second is *pastime* fans, translators of anime, manga, and light novels. In what follows, I rely on interviews, digital ethnography, and follow-up conversations that focus on the culture of production in fan communities, the fan/professional divide, and work in platform-based creative economies. I examine these sources using thematic analysis, a qualitative approach that involves identifying and isolating the narrative patterns that produce a clearer picture of the concerns and experiences of fan producers. The theme clusters that emerged from these conversations are examined next.

Fulltime Fandom

Fulltime fans trade in cultural competence about anime. They are a part of what was earlier referred to as the "surrounds" of content discovery (McKelvey and Hunt 2019). I also described them as discoverability's local "interface" because they fulfill an important localization function. In this context, localization refers not to language but to culture: *fulltime fans* decode and explain the meanings and culture of anime to newcomers and acolytes alike, not unlike the *benshis* of Japan, the *bonimenteurs* of the francophone world, or the silent film lecturers of bygone days. The global anime distribution industry relies on such localization intermediaries to maximize its reach and humanize its presence. They are "fulltime" fans, because they dedicate all of their time to fandom, and to the performance of *being* fans, which for them is a fulltime job. A thematic analysis of interviews with members of this group revealed several major themes of concern to the professional fan. The first theme revolves around the notion that, in their capacity as localization influencers, *fulltime* fans must showcase profound knowledge not only of anime texts but also of the broader economic context that shapes these texts. Many of them have acquired, to some extent, formal college-level education, which they leverage to establish themselves as popular educators and authorities on cultural issues. From this point of departure however, their content reflects a notable shift in focus from topics designed to entertain and to provide information about anime texts and culture, to content increasingly featuring details about behind-the-scenes of the anime industry, as well as behind-the-scenes of their own lives. Their backstage disclosures are meant to better position them as insiders even though they operate in parallel to the anime distribution industry, as outsiders (i.e. as "fans" first). For some, this shift can be attributed to changes in the conditions of online work, particularly to algorithmic transformations, while for others it coincides with the moment when they decided to become "fulltime" fans. In either case, the monetization and reward mechanisms of streaming platforms play a major part in their narratives. Another theme that strongly regulates the life of the professional fan is the performance of authenticity required of influencers. Authenticity, Crystal Abidin suggests, is a staged dance around the presumption that online is "fake" while offline is somehow more "authentic" (2021). As a matter of fact, influencers are aware that their followers expect a certain amount of *in*authenticity, a commercial angle, and a deal of self-curation. For this reason, *fulltimers* self-consciously stage the artifice of their "fannish" predicaments and

readily reveal its constructedness. “I have to advertise products to support myself, so I can keep bringing you more of the great content we both love” is the typical rationalization. They confirm their truthfulness by exposing the imperfections, failures, mistakes, and instabilities of the system within which they operate. The cluster of ideas that forms the last theme is precisely this moment, a moment of performative precarity.

As the interview excerpts below reveal, these themes freely flow into each-other along the grey continuum between formal and informal “gift” economies. The work-play nature of immaterial labour turns personal narratives into steadfast elements of professional fandom, as self-presentation strategies are constantly at work in the media that *fulltime fans* produce even when the ostensible focus of their content is to educate and to inform their followers about anime, manga, games, and geek culture in general.

Actionable Education

Fulltime fans create vast amounts of content based on materials learned in the classroom, putting the educational capital acquired in college to actionable use. Following several generations of mass access to higher education in the west, one of the principle objectives of liberal arts colleges has been attained: the mass production of knowledgeable subjects, entering the market as micro-entrepreneurs whose merchandize consists of cultural expertise. While there are those who ride headlong into cultural commentary on the wings of passion, without any prior schooling, they also eventually level up with their peers thanks to information sharing and aggressive competition, and arrive at similar levels of basic expertise. Formerly, the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge about niche cultural topics and foreign cultures was left to academics and specialist writers, but this task is rapidly taken up by online intermediaries with some academic background, who work outside the confines of formal knowledge production.[116] Now that the possession of knowledge has become part of the ideology of the market, Alan Liu comments, the corporate academy needs to adapt its product to an environment where “education occurs across a whole lifetime in an unprecedented variety of social sectors, institutions, and media” (Liu 2004:22). Learning has become decentralized, dispersed, and unbundled from its formal disciplinary packaging in higher education, facilitating the deployment of learning as a commercial good. Sensing an impending metamorphoses of what we might term, inspired by Appadurai, the *eduscape*, fandom scholar Paul Booth advises other aca-fans to build closer ties with fan communities by making their research more accessible both in terms of presentation (through simplified, more accessible language) and availability (via

[116] In her 2010 futurist nonfiction *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, American education guru and neoliberal policy influencer Anya Kamenetz speculates about what forms learning might take in the coming years. With the full democratization of the internet, Kamenetz asserts (and concurrent with its full marketization dominated by U.S.-controlled Big Tech), information would be available to all. Technology-facilitated learning and ideals of global empowerment would then enable young people from Mexico or Rwanda to earn Princeton degrees, Kamenetz states, but that is of little importance because what really counts is knowledge itself. When knowledge is presumed as a business ideology, as Alan Liu suggests,

> … how will the academy adapt to its diminished role as one among many providers in a potentially rich and diverse—but also potentially impoverished and culturally uniform—ecology of knowledge? … Education, in other words, is now a decentralized field where no one institution individually corners the market and where we encounter a dizzying dispersion of the kinds and scales of learning—all the way from educational programs leading to degrees to CNN “factoids” leading only to the next commercial. (Liu 2004:22)

popular forums such as social media instead of peer-reviewed publications, and even in-person appearances at conventions and other fan gatherings) (Booth 2015). Alas, his advice arrives too late. Professional fans, most of them recent grads or currently enrolled in fine arts, humanities, and other culture and communications-related programs, have already cornered the online influence market. I spoke to one aspiring *fulltime* fan who was interested in starting her own manga production venture, using youtube as a promotional vehicle:

> I have less than 1000 subscribers right now so I can't make money from it. I'm not doing this fulltime, I am still at school [in Media Studies] and it's really helping me get a sense for what's going on [in the industry] … I prefer to call myself an artist, or content creator, not specifically a youtuber, tictoker or whatever. Some people still think of youtubers as just immature geeks who can't get real jobs. … Some youtubers get paid quite well actually, but that comes with lots of strings, and I find it funny how when you meet "professional" youtubers, they always introduce themselves like "Hi, I'm so-and-so and I have 2.5 million subscribers!" And they're only interested in growing their followers by hooking up with other famous youtubers and doing collabs. It's all rather disappointing. … For newcomers it can be very tough because anything related to anime and manga has become very competitive and saturated, even for niche stuff. You'd have to average tens of millions of views per month in order to make a living, and this is after putting in more than 50 hours of work per video to do research, to write up the script, to edit, to promote. You can burn out real fast. Besides, the career lifespan of a youtuber can be very short… Me? I want to go ultra-niche, local. There aren't many female content creators out there who do anime, especially in Quebec, in fact I can't think of anyone specifically right now. I'd like to eventually do my own thing, to publish my own manga and light novels and things like that instead of just passively consuming what comes from the big publishers. (Gen Andrews, interview with the author)[117]

As intermediaries for global anime distribution *fulltime* fans interpret imported cultural goods for local audiences and comment on the inner-workings of the anime industry. Indifferent to formal epistemological boundaries, these para-academic commentators frequently address prevalent issues of scholastic value such as representation, gender, diversity, social justice, economic precarity, and other topics that are typical academic turf, while at the same time they promote third-party sponsors and books or series that perpetuate some of the very issues they critique. If they lack formal institutional affiliations or advanced degrees, they nonetheless speak with authority on topics such as anime aesthetics, production histories, media analysis and east-Asian culture in condensed 10-minute chunks, complete with product placement and layers of intertextual references exquisitely targeted at their followers, which potentially number in the tens of thousands.[118]

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[117] Gen Andrews (pseudonym), is an aspiring manga publisher, anime commentator, and social media influencer. When I asked why she didn't want to use her real name or channel in this interview, perhaps to help promote herself, she said that she was afraid of having committed copyright infringement by posting scalations (manga translations) made by a local group of fan-translators. Interview with the author at Otakuthon 2018, Montreal.

[118] Some online influencers who position themselves as popular educators boast numbers of followers that overshadow class enrollment in some of the largest universities. This has motivated Teaching and Learning Centres at various institutions to experiment with hybrid learning and transitioning classes into formats that might be more familiar to younger publics, especially given the steady drop in enrollment numbers in the second decade of the 21st century and the move to asynchronous teaching via pre-recorded lectures.

The Pedantic Romantic (or "PedRo"), an anituber whose channel was extremely popular until hacked in 2020, has produced over 100 videos of anime criticism and close analysis. At its peak, the channel boasted a following of over 80 thousand viewers, many of whom were paying patrons. I was pointed in her direction by another aspiring anituber from Montreal, I/O (pronounced "eye-oh") who hoped to follow in her footsteps and to produce content in a similar style, addressing the same segment of fans. PedRo, a transgender anime fan, describes how dire economic circumstances compelled her to use what she had already learned in her first years in college to help reach for the widest possible viewership, at the expense of producing content she really cared about.

> … that summer where I started making videos, it became clear that my family was really gonna need my help around the house (I had three younger siblings and a single dad was taking care of all of us). Between that, the fact that I was gonna need to take out a little bit of a loan to cover my tuition, and some other factors, I pitched my dad the idea of taking a gap year, and trying to get this youtube thing to work out. So, there were very real stakes riding on it. … taking time to put together well-made, thoughtful videos had resulted in infrequent uploads that tanked my channel's algorithmic standing … I've got a lot of reservations about the platform, disillusionment with the things it requires of those working on it, and I don't like being constrained by that. Straddling this line between corporate and creative as you have to do at the youtube lower-midtier is really rough. It's very possible that I find a breakthrough of some sort, either creatively in a way that puts me at peace with the content I'm making, or in terms of success, getting me big enough to not have to care as much about the whims and demands of the platform. But it's also possible that I can't resolve my creative crises, my frustrations with the ways I'm forced to play to the culture of the website and the kind of things it wants out of its creators, and that I step away. I'd say that, even if that did happen, it'd be very likely that I still make content of some sort. It'd just be that youtube would become a hobby, a creative pursuit, and I only make videos I'm interested in, in the way I'm interested in making them, with no concern about their performance because I'm doing something else in life and don't need to get anything specific out of my work on here. (PedRo interview with JakCooperThePlumber for Wikitubia)[119]

Student debt, precarious employment, and social constraints (lack of access and opportunity) are faithful adjuncts to the *fulltime* fan's work. Inter-group competition encouraged by the ideology of neoliberal creative economies is another. I/0 is a regular visitor to fan-related events in Montreal. A moderately successful game streamer, he had travelled to fan conventions in the U.S. where he claims to have met PedRo and her entourage. He was skeptical about the veracity of publicly disclosed origin stories, believing them to be conceived with the intention of accumulating clicks. He accused Pedantic Romantic of hiding her "true" voice in order to attract "normies," adding that he wouldn't encourage anyone to contribute (monetarily) to her channel because she lacked authenticity. If her videos are compelling and get views, he ranted, that ought to be reward enough:

[119] JakCooperThePlumber. *Interviews/The Pedantic Romantic*. Wikitubia. 2019. https://youtube.fandom.com/wiki/Wikitubia:Interviews/The_Pedantic_Romantic.

> Pedantic Romantic has an artistic voice, it's just that it is rarely shown. She sees herself as being forced to water down that voice in order to attract normies that will eventually see her true self. It is a game that never ends, one dilutes themselves into believing they can eventually show how they are, but by not putting it up front from the beginning we only alienate the normies we've accrued after they see our true face. We tell ourselves "once I get big enough I'll do what I want," but the point at which we're big enough never comes because you can't invite someone into your own true self unless that self is at the forefront. Instead, what we receive is half-hearted clickbait that is kind of pedantic but not really; and videos promising that she'll be better when youtube starts acting right. … People who do what their niche wants are rewarded with a lot of money from that niche, unlike someone who shows exactly who they are in every video they make, who don't pigeonhole themselves into what the algorithm wants. … Hey, audiences love honest videos because you as a consumer are committing bad consumer practices by letting Lachlan adhere to the algorithm. It's always the same: "I have no money and I need patrons so I make the most clickbaity content, gee whiz, I'm so sorry guys." Lachlan is in a position in which she has to apologize to her viewers because enough complaints come in from shilling and begging for pity even though her Patreon support seems pretty solid. (I/0, interview with the author)[120]

To play a part, one's online identity must perform a fine balancing act between various kinds of capital, educational capital in this case. Professional influencers engage in public displays of precarity to solicit empathy and create affective bonds with their audience by exposing the inequalities of the system, but also to justify aggressive and competitive maneuvering made against peers. The above examples are of cultural commentators who have instrumentalized their college backgrounds in media and cultural studies, in combination with a passion for anime, to launch professional ventures in the micro-economies of taste. At the same, their testimonies reflect the pragmatics of professionalized fandom, where the streaming platform imposes implicit content guidelines through its reward mechanisms. Some types of content fare better than others, and these cultural producers produce accordingly. The austerity of the system at work drives grave and lengthy inter-group conflicts where professional fans spend considerable efforts engaging each-other in sometimes brutal and protracted feuds, with frequent accusations of insincerity, "selling out" in exchange for corporate sponsorships, or plagiarizing each-other's content. These allegations are taken very seriously, because *fulltime fans* are only valuable to the system of global anime distribution as long as they continue to be perceived as being independent of it, as authentic members of the target audience.

[120] I/0, interview with the author at Otakuthon "At Home Edition," 2021.

Controlled Authenticity

When professional fans insist on being perceived as "just fans," they camouflage their own positions in the social hierarchy of anime fandom. If they are to maintain a bond with fans, their work cannot appear too sophisticated, too over-produced, or it would ruin the desired effect of informality and authenticity, of being produced by "just another regular enthusiast." Sponsorships from major publishers remain understated because they risk reducing the intimacy of the connection with audiences. When corporate ties are "revealed," fans are disappointed:

> It's kind of beyond just sponsored content. There's this video by [microcelebrity anituber] Gigguk where J.C. Staff [Japan Creative, a major animation studio] members tell him they don't care about overseas when it was actually a video created as a part of the show's overseas marketing push, and he's totally in on it. Have you seen it? Honestly its super sad that the biggest faces of the anime community sell themselves like this. Like, it happens with gaming too, and is much less subtle, but still I don't know why it feels so sad when it happens to the anime community specifically. (Gen Andrews, interview with the author)[121]

What happens when professional fans decide to put the accent on "professional"? After all, it is expected that at some points in their careers as *fulltime* fans, members of this group would move to secure at least partial control over their vocational lives. The rise of anime influencers was observed with increasing anxiety by streaming platform managers who anticipated that the social capital wielded by influencers would eventually need to be reined in. When I asked about how much agency someone in this line of work could expect to exercise, especially given the opaque nature of streaming platforms operations and management, I learned about a now legendary effort by prominent anitubers to gain control over their professional fan predicaments. One of the greatest attempts by fan influencers to break away from the systems that control them, and to scrape together more power than these systems would tolerate, came in 2017 in the form of a non-profit organization named the Flying Colors Foundation.

> Does anyone even remember when popular youtubers like Gigguk and The Anime Man tried to shill a scam organization about some kind of independent anime production, that was gathering data from fans illegally? Pretty serious lapse of judgment for youtubers of their size, if you ask me. And if you dig deeper you realize how super shady everyone of them is, but I personally think they did it so they wouldn't have to sell out. It's amazing how big anime youtubers can shift so much the balance. But yeah, not a fan of "you should watch this anime because I need my sponsorships." (Ivy Gao, interview with the author)[122]

Founded by some of the most influential anime youtubers of the day, the proclaimed purpose of the Flying Colors Foundation was to introduce a new model for anime production that cut out the middleman and put creators directly in contact with fans (the "death" of the middleman had been

[121] Gen Andrews (pseudonym), aspiring anime commentator and social media influencer. Interview with the author at Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.
[122] Ivy Gao, translation student at Concordia at a panel on localization. Interview with the author at Comiccon 2019, Montreal.

the ideal anime sharing model of earlier days, as noted earlier). Having primed the fanscape with horror stories about the working conditions of Japanese animators, some of the major anitubers proceeded to collect a wealth of data from fans in the form of exhaustive questionnaires. The operation's organizers had declared that their highly detailed market study would pave the way for a possible "democratization" of global anime production. The purported rationale for the study was to improve "the industry," but its real motive was later revealed to have been less virtuous. It was an attempt to leverage collective influencer power to reconfigure the nature of the relationship between influencers and the global anime industry, but it was quickly quashed by a legal team armed with dire threats and tantalizing offers. Victoria O'Meara describes a similar initiative by Instagram influencers, who had begun organizing into "engagement pods" to mutually support each other's work in an attempt to game the algorithm (2019). She sees this as an organic form of collective resistance that responds to the specific working conditions of platform-enabled cultural production. In both cases, influencers' attempts to escape their confinement within the platform are quickly put down, as all attempts to organize and collectivize. Such "parasitic" formations are aggressively dispersed before they take hold of the fan community's imagination.

Global anime distributors need influencers to carry on performing their fan identities, because the industry wants to continue to be seen as fan-driven. Nonetheless, if influencers convey a sense of crisis about the industry or expose each-other's connections to corporate funding, even revelations that present the industry in a negative light are encouraged because they generate and stimulate engagement. The superimposition of critical commentary and promotion that influencers generate is an integral part of global anime's branding. As mentioned, the pleasures of "insiderism" that audiences experience from staged reveals and gossip are in themselves a considerable part of the appeal of media consumption culture (Acland 2003). However, influencer commentary exposing behind-the-scenes tidbits about the plight of anime industry workers, or sacrifices made by heroic creators at the altar of sleepless nights and inadequate compensation, frequently omit to address the underlying causes of these conditions created by corporate decision-makers. The precarity that influencers reveal about themselves and the anime industry stops at generating sympathy for the industry's offerings, its "labours of love" (Duffett 2013:57), rather stirring disapproval of a system of production that thrives on precarity. Instead, viewers are encouraged to express their disapproval through paid subscriptions and donations, as well as through their pledges to "follow," "share," and "like."

While my primary focus is on localization, the implications of these dynamics are well known worldwide. Precarity in the media industries is a feature of neoliberalism that is experienced across continents. Audiences and cultural producers worldwide can relate, no matter their diverse backgrounds. In the next segment, I detail how professional fans use the posture of precarity and stress to marshal sympathy and to recruit viewers' good will. They appeal to audiences to continue watching as a form of charity, so that channel producers can continue to "keep bringing you great content." If influencer labour is the immaterial labour of precarious cultural production (Gill and Pratt 2008), pleas to "keep watching, subscribe, and hit the 'notifications' bell so you don't miss anything" enlist viewers into the labour of watching required by the engagement economy to accumulate the necessary income-yielding hit ratios.

Performative precarity

Precarity is "performative" because it indicates a ritual truth rather than a factual one. Even popular anime influencers with tens of thousands of followers do it, but the highest form of performativity occurs when the industry proper assumes the precarious intonation of the *fulltime* fan. In a 2019 video detailing the pains localizer 4K!ds went through to avoid broaching the subject of "death" in their North American version of the anime series *YuGiOh!* (2001-2006), Tim Lyu, a host from Crunchyroll's own stable of professional anime influencers, slips in a casual remark about his own presumably uncertain position. After explaining to viewers that instead of simply dying, as they do in the Japanese original, characters who meet their ultimate demise in the North American version are sent to "the Shadow Realm," he concludes the video with a quip: "Make sure to subscribe to our channel [effort sounds] so you can see more videos [more effort sounds] So I don't get sent to the Shadow Realm! Which is unemployment! That's what it means! Whoa!"[123]

Figure 8: Crunchyroll host Tim Lyu in the "Shadow Realm"

Crunchyroll host Tim Lyu, 2019, image courtesy of Crunchyroll's official YouTube channel.

I use the term *precarity capital* to denote the will and means to take personal risks on behalf of the industry, which, in combination with actionable education, is what separates professional fans from the rest of fandom. As I have suggested, displays of precarity can be mapped onto the relationship between professional fans and streaming platform reward mechanisms. In the 2010s, conversations about changes to monetization began appearing on various anime-related backchannels and subforums. Some youtubers had noticed a drop in revenue, and were

[123] *Remember When YuGiOh Was About Murder? | The History of YuGiOh | Anime Explained*. Crunchyroll, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9ig6tbuHT4.

attempting to understand what was going on based on available performance metrics. By sharing and analyzing their collective experiences, they attempted to reverse-engineer the algorithmic modifications being implemented, and had temporarily figured out how to game the system. Taking youtube as an example, from 2005 to the present algorithmic strategies have changed from rewarding creators based on clicks and views (2005-2011), to watch time (2011-2012), to numbers of subscribers and likes (2012-2016) to prioritizing engagement (2016-present) (Arthurs et al. 2018). Engagement is a complex metric that considers multiple factors related to interaction, historical activity, location, and as early as 2016, leverages AI to generate discoverability recommendations for future viewing. Each algorithmic iteration urged updated approaches to content creation. In its latest phase, engagement is achieved best with content that aniticipates strong emotional triggers. Consequently many professional fans began to stage revelations about the personal costs of their fannish predicaments. For some, this has taken the form of exposing the ugly underbelly of the anime industry as evidence of their own precarity, while others use threats of precarity as a means of discouraging potential newcomers to professionalized fandom. Professional fans engage in "precarity porn," in a variation of what Caldwell refers to as the "stress aesthetics" of intensive and accelerated workflows of production (Caldwell 2013). The aestheticization of stress is a posture used by producers to justify the mental and physiological duress to which they subject their workers. The practitioners of stress aesthetics believe that when production conditions are austere, people come up with more creative solutions for less money. In its platform variant, the practice becomes a promotional tool from which all actors can draw some benefit: the animation studios and low-level animators benefit because their precarity and invisible labour are finally exposed to viewers worldwide; professional fans benefit by revealing their own precarity within a system of unstable platform "gift" work; and finally, the global anime industry benefits by adding more subscribers to their platforms thanks to the public's sympathy for the workforce behind beloved content. In this entire process the distribution system renders itself transparent.

In a way similar to Hollywood's antipiracy campaigns circa 2000 (Gillespie 2009), global anime uses various strategies to create connections and elicit viewer sympathy for a dedicated, passionate, and overworked workforce. Those include interviews with creators, docuvertisements such as Netflix's *Enter the Anime* (2019), and influencer campaigns. A common trope among these self-reflexive narratives is to exhibit the deprivation and hardships experienced by overworked Tokyo animators, so committed to bringing anime to the world that they find themselves on the verge of self-harm. Canadian influencer Geoff Thew, aka "Mother's Basement," was one of many who began encouraging their youtube subscribers to donate to the Animator Dormitory Project, a fundraising campaign pledging to protect the artistic ambitions of tormented and underpaid rookie animators in Tokyo. In global worker solidarity thanks to a shared love for anime, he positions himself as a voice on behalf of the voiceless who suffer objectionable working conditions in silence, and find themselves on the losing end thanks to frivolous piracy by an unruly, ungrateful public. Piracy includes illegal streaming and downloading, but also activities that were initially valuable to the industry such as fan subbing and dubbing. Ironically, Thew's own channel is sponsored by Crunchyroll (subsidiary of Sony) whose pay rates for translators, voice actors, and localizers are notoriously exploitative. Professional fans produce lengthy rants condemning "untrue" fans who engage in consuming "outside the system." Inditements of "theft" or "loss" resulting from piracy, or campaigns intended to raise awareness of the adverse "realities" of anime production, deliberately ignore

extensive practices of theft, exploitation, and appropriation within the global anime industry itself. By externalizing the blame and intimating that injustice has been caused by fans, albeit unintentionally, global anime—via its influencers—masks its own duplicitous contribution to a precarious state of affairs. Anime industry workers experience far greater hardships due to outsourcing, low wages, high production demands, and freelance contractual models than they do from para-industrial fan activities (Matsunaga 2022). Ultimately, narratives that blame wayward fans for "hurting" the industry aim to generate empathy and support for legal streaming platforms, where the role of fans as strictly consumers is much clearer.

Under perennial threat of precarious employment, professionalizing in the microeconomies of taste and knowledge is nonetheless a desired occupation in knowledge economies. However, it also requires an ethos of "doing what you love" to offset the darker prospects of "slow and certain ruin" that accompany the online influencer lifestyle (Michael Scott 2017). As Duffy argues, much of the "do what you love" discourse functions as a lure. "As Western society shifts further into a digital, tertiary, service economy," Mark Duffet writes, "its analysis can help to explain why individuals are increasingly constructing their personal identities around the media products that they enjoy" (2013:24). To that I would add that the *knowledge* service economy is also the place where a growing number of people from so-called post-industrial societies are looking for work, producing work, and therefore meaning. The situation applies across the globe, as much to urban-dwellers in the west as to certain classes of workers across the Global South, who increasingly seek to construct their individual identities through participation in the creation of media products they also enjoy consuming (Mohan and Punathambekar 2019). Sharmishtha Singh Rawat describes very similar dynamics with anime fandom in India (in Pellitteri and Heung-wah 2021).

What is the role of "locality" and localism in all of this? The creation of a sense of the local comes thanks to the work of the localization intermediaries, the cultural commentators (or "anime journalists") discussed in the *fulltime fandom* section. Their very existence is evidence of a culture of localization which aims to shape, personalize, and deliver information to the viewer. Their function is to localize fandom in ways that are most advantageous to the global anime distribution industry, meaning that fandom is expected to become synonymous with consumption. As the end nodes of a vast delivery system, professional fans fulfill a dual function: they transmit to their followers advertisements on behalf of global anime marketing, and they instruct those followers about the ways of the market. This implies communicating official narratives, mocking alternative ones, and commodifying backstage disclosures in a way that conceals or ignores the actual causes of exploitation and workplace stress. In contrast to those whose job it is to be fulltime fans, the next section introduces another group whose engagement with global anime distribution does allow them to cross the fan/pro threshold. Although not entirely confined to their fan identities, analogous dynamics about who is to be considered consumer or producer, insider or outsider, legitimate or illegitimate persist.

Pastime Fandom

The fan translator is a mythical figure among anime fans. The dedicated enthusiast, labourer of passion, makes beloved rare content accessible to fellow fans and receives the adoration of the

community. Likewise, the official anime translation industry has its own lore about its beginnings and the role of fans. In this section, I examine key elements of the narrative shift in the official story of anime translation told to fans at fan gatherings by individuals navigating the fan/professional boundary. The mention of "pastime" implies that, for this group, adopting a fannish identity is not mandatory, but is strongly encouraged. Members of this group prioritize professionalism, but at the same time cultivate a close second identity as fans.

The story of English translation of anime, manga, novels and games inevitably includes Frederik Schodt, an American translator and writer who was introduced to 1960's Japanese pop culture as a teenager whilst living in Tokyo with his diplomat parents. A little over a decade later, he became one of the first professional translators to approach producer Osamu Tezuka for permission to present titles such as *Phoenix* (manga) and *Astro Boy* (anime) to English-speaking audiences in the U.S. (Schodt 2007). The professional community of anglophone translators recognizes Schodt as a key figure in introducing manga, and eventually anime to the English-speaking world.[124] Besides its historical merit, Schodt's story is important for another reason. It is intended to set the record straight about the origins of the popularity of manga, anime, novels, and games in the West, as the professional translation community sees it. In this rendition, Japanese popular culture was not brought into the awareness the Western public thanks to the resolute efforts of anonymous fan-translators who pored over texts and anime dialogue with the sole apparent purpose of sharing the love with fellow fans. In the account of industry professionals, Schodt's story is meant as a reminder that Japanese popular media was already known in the West well before fans crashed the party thanks to cheaper technologies that allowed easy copying and unauthorised distribution.

> Back then [circa 1960], just the concept of having Japanese books translated in English and distributed around the world was new. By going directly to the artists and the creators, [Schodt] broke that open. He started by translating some pages and publishing them in magazines to say, "look at this cool stuff that's happening in Japan," and that eventually turned into full books, publishers started to publish translated versions of their early manga, and it really started the entire industry. When it comes to the translators of this early period, the translators *were* the business people that broke through, that got the manga licensed … they were the bilingual people *in* Japan, so when it comes to the translators, there was no separation between the industry and the translators at all. (Sam Pinansky, panel discussion, Montreal Otakuthon 2019)[125]

When there is no separation between the industry and translators, there is no room for fan translators. For professional translators, Schodt's story is an idealized trajectory of the fan-professional who possesses verifiable credentials and operates with full legitimacy. As far as the official anime translation industry is concerned, grassroots distribution of unlicensed content, and the fan labour that goes into localizing and circulating that content, are viewed as criminal acts rather than crucial elements of the international success of Japanese popular media today.

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[124] Frederik L. Schodt's 1983 book *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* and its sequel *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* published a little over a decade later, are considered the first substantial efforts to introduce the industry side of Japanese popular culture to readers in the English-speaking world.

[125] Panel discussion "J-Novel Club Industry Panel" on localization and translation, moderated by Sam Pinansky, Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.

For industry insiders, the fan was never the important figure it had been made out to be in popular culture. According to one anime marketing manager who began his ascent up the career ladder as a fan subber while pursuing a degree in translation in the 1990s, histories that put fandom first are pure PR. In his version, the popularity of anime was always the result of efforts by a relatively small group of professional translators who also happened to be fans—hence the importance of pointing out Schodt's role as the progenitor of anime appreciation in the west. Abe Sherman sees the present paradigm of translation as a way to redeem the profession back into its rightful, dominant place:

> And if there's a bit more organization and, you know, cooperation among the translators and editors, and outside companies, you can really get a nice community going. And I see the seeds of that, especially online, and I think we're finally starting to see the translators that always used to be in the shadows come out into the light and organize, in a way, both for their own betterment, but also for the betterment of the translations themselves, for the people that are consuming the translations. (Abe Sherman, panel discussion, Montreal Otakuthon 2019)[126]

The appeal to community here may be misleading. Sherman is interested in challenging the myth of the fan translator's predominant role firmly embedded in fandom mythology, suggesting that translators should collectively step out of the shadows and into the light to signify this shift of perspectives. Translators on the "legit" side use various tactics to undermine competition from fans, or, falling short, to narrow the field to a much smaller pool of contenders, of "worthy" fans who verge on professionalism. Invariably, even as they highlight their own qualifications or irreplaceable experience and disparage competition from outsiders, legitimate anime translators present themselves as fans above all else. What differentiates them from aspiring fan translators, as well as from the *fulltime fans* described in the previous section, is that, like Schodt, they have access and opportunities that reach beyond the confines of platform-mediated interactions, and position them very differently in the economy of global anime distribution.

Below are four major themes intended to establish, for the benefit of the general public, the current official narrative about fan translation. The first theme suggests that fan translation is, or should be, considered a thing of the past. The second theme reveals mixed sentiments regarding the significance of credentials. While the anime translation industry indirectly acknowledges their importance, credentials can complicate matters when their holders attempt to leverage them for higher pay. This is where fandom approaches a professional requirement: a professional must also be a fan to be able to tolerate adverse work conditions, simply out of love for the game. The subsequent theme of accidental beginnings follows a similar logic. To address its own systemic instability, the anime translation industry emphasizes professional chance and adventure. Industry lore plays up the potential for anime translation to be, if not a stable job, at least a rewarding pastime. Lastly, the anime translation industry reinforces an ethical positioning for

[126] Panel discussion "Game Workers, Unite!" on the multitude of professions necessary to create an RPG game. Given the origins of the phrase "Workers of the world, unite!," the name of this panel an ironic twist of the original meaning. Instead of advocating for solidarity and cooperation among the working class across national and ideological boundaries in a common struggle against exploitation, it is used here to suggest a unification of a select few individuals set apart from the rest by professional status and experience. Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.

professional and fan translators. Those who may have transgressed in the past by producing unauthorized translations (and distributing them) are mandated to perform apology rituals and offer themselves to the industry's mercy if they hope for an opportunity to continue pursuing their passion on the "legitimate" side. As I will show, this resolute stance against outsider interference is in fact a rhetorical posture concealing the fact that the ongoing grey trade of unlicensed fan translations is an integral element of the global anime translation paradigm.

A thing of the past

One lighthearted way to dismiss fan localizations as a serious threat is to point out errors, non sequiturs, and other humorous examples of amateurish dabbling. Early anime offers plenty of examples. On his Legends of Localization blog, translator Clyde "Tomato" Mandelin offers a "nostalgic ride" into the early days of fan translations for games. He reports that many official localizations from the 1980s were based on appropriated fan labour, featuring beloved gems of transcultural confusion gracing seemingly innocuous adventure RPGs, such as "I have no idea who you are, but I thank you for arousing me" or "I'll jack in to your squirrel if that's what it takes."[127] The anime influencers discussed in the previous section also regularly cover this topic. Catalogues of subbing and dubbing disasters have achieved cult status. The peculiar, unidiomatic expressions, and unfamiliar cultural references found in early amateur translations are presented as relics of anime history, a thing of the past. The implication is that this is no longer the case with today's translations, which are the work of legitimate professionals. It is worth considering the reasons why the discussion surrounding older dubs and fansubs persists, given that the illegitimate fansub economy no longer poses a real threat. This may be attributed to the fact that certain fan translations continue to be regarded as superior to their official counterparts, and remain memorable and cherished among audiences. This historical reality demands ongoing attacks of fan-generated content, despite waning illegitimate distribution practices.

One of the justifications given for the poor quality of some early professional translations is not language but a lack of understanding of anime culture. Localization producer Alexa Hill suggests that anime translators from the 1990s translators were either simply professional translators hired by the production companies directly, or through agencies. Either way,

> a very impersonal process. Farming out of translations to anonymous agencies, like the terrible type-written early Toei animation scripts, those professional translations from the early days are *quite* bad, to be frank. They couldn't get the proper context and there was no feedback loop … no one from the Japan side or the company side even to check the translation and make sure it was properly done. (Alexa Hill, interview)[128]

[127] Mandelin, Clyde. 2018. *Legends of Localization: Bad Game Translation Hall of Fame.* Legends of Localization. March 28, 2018. https://legendsoflocalization.com/bad-game-translation-hall-of-fame/. Many official early localizations are equally crude, notably the intertitles from *Zero Wing*'s cutscenes which include the popular meme "All your base are belong to us" and "You have no chance to survive make your time."

[128] Alexa Hill, localization producer, written interview with the author following Hill's presentation on the anime translation scene at the "Hanging Out With The Translators Panel," Otakuthon 2018, Montreal.

She does not blame the translators themselves, because they may have only had access to the texts without video to guide them, for instance, but her point is that the translations were contextually bad because the translators, even if certified professionals, were not fans and did not "get it." They had no awareness of anime narrative worlds, or the expectations of English-speaking anime viewers. Their translations were too literal and too close to the original language.

When distribution companies like Funimation began to localize in-house, in the early 2000s, localization coordinator Gabriella Yu comments that the texts were slightly better, but localizers did a lot of re-writing which took away from the original flavour: "They [Funimation] were getting rough versions from Japanese translators whose second language is English, and re-writing them in a more localized style by native English speakers. The quality of the language improved, but a lot of the original meanings and contexts were completely lost. Compared to today, translations from the early 2000s were a little too liberal in their choices, which you can see in the dubbing by 4Kids."[129] 4Kids Entertainment, a now defunct licensing and anime distribution company, re-edited content to better adapt it for the North-American viewer. They turned cigarettes into lollypops, firearms into cork guns, and rice balls into chocolate chip cookies. They recut episodes to eliminate entire story arcs, relied excessively on puns, and featured uncharacteristic voice acting that experimented too much with regional accents. For instance, the suave and articulate character Sanji from *One Piece* (1999-) was given a hackneyed Brooklyn accent. "Not even nostalgia can make it watchable" declares Yu. Here the balance tips in the opposite direction: translations are too distant from the original language and context, to the point of being unrecognizable, and the geocultural branding of the source material begins to wither. Excessive localization creates significant and undesirable distance from the point of origin. Once again, the reason given is that the localizers who worked for 4Kids were not anime fans and could not strike the right balance between acculturation and preservation of the original context.

Credentials (not) required

If being a fan is considered essential for anime translators, having the right credentials is a more elusive affair. At the beginning of the 2000s, the international market for anime was saturated and there was no mainstream appetite for little-known and culturally cryptic series from Japan. This was due to a variety of factors such as inflexible broadcasting norms and licensing regulations, but also, at least in part due to audience fatigue with overzealous localizations from the likes of 4Kids. Stefan Kato recalls that many translators who had hoped anime would become a steady fixture in North American media diets found themselves out of work. Some of them had tried to remain relevant by supplying fan translations during Crunchyroll's unlicensed era. According to Kato, a select few eventually succeeded in reclaiming their positions, but at much reduced rates: "When the anime bubble popped there was a glut of translators … then there were about 20 or 30 of us doing simulcasts for Crunchyroll at the beginning, and that was the first time that I know of, when a large number of translators went pro."[130] Straddling the line between a formal and informal economy, Crunchyroll had been busy experimenting. "Farming out"

[129] Gabriella Yu, localization coordinator [company name withheld by request], interview with the author, 2020.
[130] Stefan Kato, veteran translator, panel discussion "Hanging Out With The Translators Panel" Otakuthon 2018, Montreal.

Japanese to English dubbing to Singapore did not yield the expected results, and so the company attempted other methods of reducing its localization expenses. “They were trying to push us down as far as possible … then again in the 2000s rates got killed because of the influx of new blood.”[131] Between outsourcing, fierce competition among unemployed translators, and the growing popularity of anime, Crunchyroll had recognized that fandom was critical to its operations. It began employing translators who were fans, but maintained a tight control of rates. The trade-off for being allowed to turn a hobby into a job was precarious employment, and the industry made sure that anyone considering this career path knew, and accepted it. In her tell-all chronicle behind the scenes of the anime translation profession in France, Marie-Françoise Cachin relates a common bit of lore that takes on the form of master-and-apprentice tough advice intended to separate those who are committed from those who are politely interested. “Il est vrai qu’être traducteur est un emploi impossible. Un anonymat quasi garanti, un talent mésestimé, des rétributions piètres et des commandes imprévisibles, il faut avoir une sacrée vocation pour pratiquer à plein temps cet artisanat-là. [It is true that being a translator is an impossible job. An almost guaranteed anonymity, undervalued talent, few rewards and unpredictable jobs, you’d better be damn dedicated to the vocation if you want to practice this craft full time” (Cachin 2007). Such narratives about the difficulties of entry into the profession, typically served up at fan conventions or popular online fora, pre-emptively weed out those potential rivals who do not have the material security or knowledge acumen to remain in play simply out of love for the game.

Translation and localization industry insiders are abstruse about the qualifications required to cross the line between fan and pro. They frequently discount the value of formal education. At some point, aspiring professional translators, the question “should I go to school for this?” inevitably arises. Pro-side discourse offers conflicting ideas about the role of education in professional fandom. Some localization producers see degree-granting institutions in professional translation as somehow beside the point; academic baggage laden with theoretical abstractions unfit for the “real world,” and certainly not for anime. In fact, those who take the straight and narrow to becoming professional translators are perceived by some industry insiders as being at a disadvantage.

> When you start doing translations, either as fan or professionally, you can translate almost as fast as you want. You can just like ‘bip-bop,’ you know, work real fast [pretends to type at a keyboard], and… it’s gonna be terrible. Or you can sit there and think about each sentence for ten minutes, and you’ll finish a page an hour. And maybe it’ll be great because you studied translation, but you’re only doing a page an hour. And all of a sudden you have 40 pages to do that week, right, and you also have a full time job. (Samuel Pinansky, Industry Panel)[132]

Speaking at a translation panel at Comiccon Montreal, marketing consultant Deven Henzler describes that the ideal candidate’s qualifications are not necessarily determined by credentials. Aspirants “just like you, sitting in the audience,” are expected to have the passion of fans, thorough knowledge of the content, and be “self-sufficient,” that is, translators who do not rely on degrees to make a name for themselves:

[131] Ibid.
[132] Sam Pinanski, founder of J-Novel Club, panel discussion “The Translation Industry”, Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.

> Being a fan … is important if you are to become self-sufficient translators. Just because you went on an exchange program for six months and then got your masters in translation doesn't mean you're a better translator than someone who translated a 1,000,000 character game. Just doesn't. Probably, but probably not. What matters is each individual and your own skills and your own writing ability. (Deven Henzler, discussion panel, Comiccon Montreal 2017)[133]

Here "self-sufficiency" can be read as both a linguistic and an economic attribute. Henzler's presentation is packed with examples of intrepid fans finding innovative ways to learn Japanese. Some had taken out large student loans to go to Japan, while others had joined online language exchange communities. Either way, their trajectories followed an exciting and non-conventional journey to learning the language in their spare time, as a part of a greater adventure. Similarly, Samir Partjiani, manager for a localization startup based in Toronto, describes that "everybody, especially the translators that work with me, their paths have been incredibly diverse." He goes on to recount the story of one translator from the rural U.S. who allegedly learned Japanese from a Skype language exchange group. "In only two or three years, his Japanese was really, really, *really* good… it was actually quite an impressive background: he worked nights, so he had time during the day to study."[134] Another translator, with no prior knowledge of the language, had taken an entire year to go through a 1000-character visual novel. By the end of that feat, her fan work was deemed so good that Samir was able to broker a deal on her behalf with an official publisher. A third story involves a Canadian student who had picked up some conversational Japanese from interacting with customers at a specialty Asian store. An avid anime fan, he eventually moved to Japan to learn the language on a Working Holiday Visa, a program which allows casual employment for 18 to 30 year-olds possessing "reasonable funds to support themselves."[135] Though these stories are likely based in reality (their protagonists were members of the panel and nodded enthusiastically as they were being introduced), their function is to reinforce the fantasy of a porous border between translator and fan which can be crossed, and the ease of crossing grows proportionately to one's consecration to fandom. "If you want to work in translation, you have to watch a lot of anime and read a lot of manga" is a familiar mantra repeated to industry hopefuls, culminating with the open-ended suggestion that immersing oneself into consumption is key to producing a successful portfolio. Duffy describes such forward-looking and entrepreneurial attitudes in another context as "aspirational work" where individuals give themselves to creative pursuits that hold plenty of promise, yet rewards are few and unevenly distributed (Duffy 2016).

Considerable pressure for control over fan translation spaces also comes from professional translators *with* formal degrees, as well as from agencies attempting to centralize localization activities at scale. Both of these emphasize the importance of credentials, breadth of experience,

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[133] Deven Henzler, founder and project manager at Henzler Entertainment Marketing and Communications, panel discussion "Join the Manga Industry!" at Montreal Comiccon, 2018.
[134] Samir Partijani, panel discussion "Join the Manga Industry!" at Montreal Comiccon, 2018.
[135] The Japanese Working Holiday Visa is a document that allows citizens of certain countries (Canada is one, but the USA is not) to visit Japan and "engage in employment as an incidental aspect of their trip in order to supplement their travel funds." The character of this travel document succinctly defines the conditions necessary for global cultural work, which Miller describes as the transnational capitalist class (Miller, Toby. 2008. *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age*. Temple University Press.).

and contrast their specialist competence with what they characterize as the mere dabbling of neophytes. Cyril Coppini is one such translation professional. A formally educated linguist, his foray into manga, anime, and games translation came "rather by chance" and does not consist of the totality of his career. Coppini's main gig as an interpreter for the French embassy in Tokyo allows him the creative lifestyle he enjoys as a manga and anime translator. Like Schodt and Pinansky, he uses his position of physical and cultural proximity to approach Japanese publishers and to negotiate licensing deals with French vendors, although the element of chance figures highly in his personal narrative. The trope of "chance beginnings," as we will see shortly, frequently hides the access and opportunity that localization brokers enjoy, but it is necessary for establishing a connection to the audience and maintaining the mythology of access for everyone. It is important to point out that whenever rhetorical postures conceal or promote a certain spin, it is not necessarily a deliberate move to deceive. If the narratives reproduced here share a number of common elements, it is not because they are the result of far-reaching designs by a cabal of social actors bent on manipulating the industry, but because they construct satisfactory, positive, and coherent personal backstories that audiences can easily understand and relate to. Basing her analysis on the work of Anthony Giddens, Rebecca Williams describes the connection between professional fans and their followers as "pure relationships" where "'a pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver' and these rewards are: (1) the reflection of a desirable and appropriate self-identity and self-narrative; (2) a sense of ontological security or 'trust'" (Rebecca Williams 2015:20-21). "Security" in this case implies the confidence that one's self-narrative is authentic. Coppini insists before a crowd of aspiring translators that he fell into manga and anime translation quite by accident, becoming captivated with their fictional worlds along the way. An accidental fan.

> One must be able to do a bit of everything. Even if there are only a few publishing houses, there are a lot of translators, or people that call themselves such, so obviously when you are offered you a gig, you take it. And how do you become a manga translator? By chance. I was helping a friend mangaka with her translation… ça reste quand même un milieu extrêmement fermé, je peux même dire extrêmement parisien (même si c'est pas que des boites parisiennes). Les gens travaillent avec les gens qu'ils connaissent… [it remains an extremely closed environment, I would even say extremely Parisian (if not *only* Parisian). People work with people they know...] Even if you've worked on well-known titles, if they don't know you they won't care for you. Publishers you've worked with, they work with plenty of other translators and it takes time before they call you with another title. It's not like a new manga each week. (Cyril Coppini, personal interview)[136]

Setting themselves apart from the rest, members of this group leverage their credentialed expertise and social capital, highlighting the boutique personal touch of an enthusiast. For the benefit of potential industry clients, they point out that thanks to their extensive (and expensive) education, their work is expected to pass fewer editorial and quality control checkpoints, avoiding the extra time "wasted" by more "industrial and impersonal" approaches. In turn, the reader, viewer, or gamer receives a localised product as a personal offering from a dedicated

[136] Cyril Coppini, personal interview following his presentation "Ce qui se cache dans les images" (That which hides within the images), Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.

fellow fan combined with the privileged perspective of a cultural insider, rather than that of a faceless uncredentialed translator, or worse, an illegitimate fan-translator.

Cécile Sakai, director of Institut français de recherche sur le Japon at université Paris-Diderot explains that, by contrast with anime, popular manga titles still continue to be translated and re-translated in a "wild" manner without any "official" oversight. A professor of contemporary Japanese literature, she also emphasizes having "accidentally" become taken with manga fandom as a consequence of her work. The second largest national market for manga in the world (after Japan), France is described as "saturated" with offerings from an industry in need of guidance and regulation:

> Il existe aujourd'hui une offre numérique "officielle," qui complète le catalogue de certains éditeurs, et une offre "officieuse," qui correspond plus ou moins au piratage: certains individus – passionnés d'ailleurs – s'approprient certains titres, les traduisent et les prééditent sous forme numérique, de façon "sauvage." C'est un mouvement mondial de traduction libre, individuelle, virtuelle. [Today there are "official" digital offering listed in the catalogs of certain publishers, and "unofficial" offerings which more or less correspond to piracy: certain individuals – while passionate about it – appropriate certain titles, translate and re-edit them digitally, in a "wild" manner. It is a worldwide movement of free, individual, virtual translation.] (Cécile Sakai, interview with Jean-Yves Katelan)[137]

Notwithstanding her self-identification as an aca-fan, she does not consider fandom production anything more than misdirected enthusiasm. Annett reports that, for ordinary fans, the encroachment of academics and professionals into fandom spaces results in a real sense of loss of community: "I did feel a strong sense of community back when anime was hard to get and when there was a point to going to conventions with no famous guests" discloses one of her interviewees, but now "anime is all over TV, you can steal just about anything on the internet, and people go to cons to meet voice actors, not fellow fans. I feel a bit alienated." (quoted in Annett 2014:170). Barely noticeable at conventions some ten years ago, today's aca-fans and pro-fans are invited to speak at panels and to lend prestige via insightful cultural competence and insider perspectives. This produces hierarchies within fandom that immediately exclude those whose fandom is expressed in more modest ways.

Translation is an unregulated field and, in principle, it does not require credentials to work professionally. One additional way to reinforce inclusion and exclusion hierarchies is via the awards ceremony. This offers the global anime distribution industry a way to amplify the legitimate side of the market, and to further marginalize spontaneous, unregulated fan translations. In 2018, the largest French comics festival at Angoulême, third largest in the world, created a prize for manga translation. Coppini doubts that a prize for manga would have been set up if manga distribution were as efficiently regulated as is anime. Thanks to streaming platforms, global anime localization obeys different rules, closer to those that govern the dubbing industry discussed in the first chapter. A major reason for the creation of this award was to curb the

[137] Katelan, Jean-Yves. 2018. « La culture manga change d'ère » – interview avec Cécile Sakai. *CNRS Le journal*. January 24, 2018. https://lejournal.cnrs.fr/articles/la-culture-manga-change-dere.

proliferation of fan manga translations, commonly referred to "scanlations,"[138] and to diminish the influence of translations undertaken by non-credentialed enthusiasts. At formal events, prizes and awards serve to spotlight the accomplishments of individual "specialists," directing the audiences' attention toward particular intellectual properties while shaping the discourse around the significance of accredited translation efforts.

Accidental pros

The vocational mythology of the fan translator-turning-pro envisions a fortuitous and unexpected entry into the profession, in contrast to the seemingly unremarkable trajectory of traditionally credentialed translators. Instinct and intuition are key guiding elements that give "accidental professionals" an edge over the competition. Dereck Ho, a software broker by day who goes by the alias "Hikoki," got into translation "for no particular reason as a way to kill time while traveling." Because he had done a lot of his early translation work during his spare time, he claims having to rely on his linguistic intuition compared to someone with a scholastic approach to translation. An "instinctive feel" for the language is something, in his view, that that no formal degree in translation can guarantee.

> I had [translated] something like 20,000,000 characters of visual novels, edited just for fun in my spare time before I went official. I became a professional translator and editor because people ended up reading stuff I done in my spare time for fun. If I'd earned 1 yen a character… 1 cent a character for editing those 20,000,000, I must've done like 200,000 dollars' worth of free work. Translation would be the wrong choice of profession if you wanted to make money.[139]

The real rewards, industry insiders assert to eager would-be translators, are not of a material nature. In the days of illegitimate sharing, fan translators described a sense of gratification and fulfillment simply from interacting with readers of their work. Hills suggests that outside of various forms of immaterial capital, the true pleasure of fandom is a chance to be a part of beloved narrative worlds, to participate in their creation, and to remain connected to them for as long as possible (Hills 2002). Fan translators who turned pro compare the predictability, dullness, and limited social recognition of their regular jobs with the adoration of audiences all their own. Their ability to attract attention, to go beyond consumption, and to produce commodities desired by others sets them apart from regular fans as well as from the parallel realities of their humdrum "ordinary" occupations. English localization editor Maneesh "DxS"

[138] A *scanlation* refers to the process of scanning manga pages, often from physical copies, into a digital format and then translating the text into another language. Scanlations are then typically shared online with other fans. Like with anime fan subtitling and the occasional amateur dub, scanlations are considered by some fan historians to have been a significant factor in the popularity of manga outside of Japan.

[139] Derek "Hikoki" Ho, panel on light novel and anime translation, Otakuthon 2019, Montreal. On his personal blog https://hikokitranslations.wordpress.com/, no longer maintained but very popular during his stint as a fan translator, Hikoki had posted free English versions of several volumes of Gamei Hitsui's manga series "The Magic in this Other World is Too Far Behind!" and other now well-known titles. A localization scout eventually discovered this collection of fan translations and issued a cease and desist letter, but not before inviting the misguided fan translator to join the world of professional light novel publishing in exchange for relinquishing his authorship claims over existing fan translations. This is a common story.

Maganti, a former accountant, recalls how readers of his unauthorized work would reach out to offer feedback, comments, critique, and gratitude. In contrast, once admitted to the "legit" side of the industry, his connection to other fans vanishes behind a corporate storefront.

Sam "Quarkboy" Pinansky, a fan translator turned major publisher, explained to me that it is not unusual for casual translators to spend enormous amounts of time on low-paid translation gigs as a form of fun. As "illegitimates," they had been doing it anyway:

> Everyone who started as fan translators and are keeping a regular schedule [at another job] are probably masochists, but once they get in [to the professional side], they feel very rewarded. This industry is a thankless endeavor. But in terms of a job, it's actually one of the most rewarding jobs you could do … when I translated my first 110 episodes or so for Crunchyroll (actually it was for TV Tokyo, and then aired on Crunchyroll just as it was going legit), and you know, it was a fun job, easy show, shōnen action, gotta love that, only have about 200 lines an episode … what I especially liked, personally, is that people who are fans of the show, you can take some pride that they experienced the anime through you, as it's really your words that they are reading. And maybe your name isn't on the credits, but it's still rewarding to know that you are helping people to enjoy entertainment and have fun. It's great for getting experience… but it's pretty thankless. (Sam Pinansky, interview with the author)[140]

Despite the rewards stemming from the pursuit of passionate endeavors, a reckoning eventually arrives, when fan translators must atone before the industry they've operated alongside, but without permission. The ensuing moment of accountability, which resembles a ritualistic apology for fandom, is detailed next.

Fan-translator reformatory [141]

There are several key aspects to the apology ritual. Fan-produced work is appropriated as a form of reparation in acknowledgment of the harm caused to the industry. In lieu of more formal legal proceedings, this public ritual acts both as a deterrent against future unauthorized activities and as an invitation to continue contributing in a legitimate manner.

Fan translators are invited by their industry counterparts to clear their conscience by converting themselves into legal, modestly paid, and frequently uncredited professional translators.[142] The transition from fan to pro corrupts the relationship between fan translators and fan communities. As the line between gift work and gig work is crossed, former fan translators are confronted with a need to reconfigure both their personal-professional narratives and their fan identities. When he recalls the unintentional nature of his own stumbling into the legal side of things, Maganti admits

[140] Sam Pinansky, interview with the author, Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.
[141] A reformatory is an institution designed to rehabilitate and educate individuals, usually juveniles, who have been involved in delinquent behavior or criminal activities. The aim is to provide re-education, discipline, and counseling to help them reintegrate into society and to prevent further recidivism.
[142] Getting a credit for translation work depends on the medium, and individual contracts vary. Manga and novels are more likely to feature the name of the translator, while anime series generally do not.

that: "…in general people like me are bad examples because I just did it for fun, for free, and somehow got into the industry. I didn't even submit a resume. I just randomly got an email one day."[143] The email in question was, in fact, a cease-and-desist order to stop distributing copyrighted content for free, but also, it generously extended an offer of "legitimate collaboration" in the future provided the fan translator gives up all claims to their work. With the shrinking of fan-publishing due to direct threats from licensing departments, and the simultaneous channeling of fan-produced content onto legal platforms, the boutique work of the fan translator becomes increasingly more rare and acquires a kind of folkloric quality.

The rapid transition from free-for-all piracy to full legitimacy, epitomized by Crunchyroll's self re-invention from an anime piracy site to a paragon of licensed distribution,[144] necessitated an equally rapid revision of the anime industry's official stance about its relationship with fans. However, accusatory rhetoric aimed at fans has the potential to damage the industry's image. Instead, past fandom is cast as enthusiastic but misguided, and future fandom is instructed to enjoy anime the "proper" way, by buying a subscription. An entertainment lawyer who specializes in copyright infringement points out,

> …the world of the fan is beset by the potential for copyright infringement. Although the average cosplayer is probably not making a living off of dressing up, it's not good PR to sue fans, it might give the wrong optics to crack down on your primary consumer base over something more or less harmless. It is also uneconomical to sue for minor infringements because it would cost a lot more to file a lawsuit and pay an attorney over something someone is doing in their spare time for nothing… The problem is with things like fansubs or dubs or comics translations which imply illegal copying and distribution, but also which are the intellectual properties of the translators themselves, but this is less and less of a problem which subscription services are effectively in the process of resolving. (Richard Fortin, written communication with the author)[145]

As we saw above, Instead of the heavy hand of the law, fan production is discouraged by other, "softer" means: gentle reminders from industry insiders about the "ethics of the marketplace," insider stories about the difficulty of the professional's life, and finally, awards and distinctions for legitimate translators that set limits to fan involvement. The atonement rituals, in turn, are driven by a sense of empathy for the underpaid animators, voice actors, and other talented craftspeople, who are purportedly the most hurt economically by the illegal distribution carried out by fans. The narratives of deprivation and theft associated with the grey economies of informal circulation are promoted by professional translators, influencers, and representatives of anime licensing and distribution companies alike. Such narratives deeply disturb the self-image of fan translators, who struggle with the intimation that they may be complicit in the suffering of their favorite creators. Those who stand on the border of the profession, in-between formal and informal production, are expected to perform a ritual apology about their transgressions as fans. At fan conventions and other gatherings where the industry meets its public, stories of former fans asking forgiveness from "the industry" abound. The bio of a major light novel localizer

[143] Maneesh "DxS" Maganti, panel on light novel and anime translation, Otakuthon 2019, Montreal.
[144] Hentai supplier Fakku followed an identical pattern in 2015.
[145] Richard Fortin, legal advisor, entertainment industry rights and intellectual property. Written communication with the author 2020.

reads: “Samuel started out by fan-translating anime, including the *Pretty Cure* series. He moved to Japan to translate professionally, and stopped the fan stuff. He later apologized to Toei directly for fan translating and was hired to officially translate *Pretty Cure*. He now runs a company of freelance localizers and doesn’t care where their experience comes from.”[146] Not all potential employers are as merciful. If a candidate includes fan experience in their resume, they are taking a significant risk. Ben Applegate, director of publishing at Penguin Random House, handles graphic novels and applies austere work ethic principles: “I got an *amazing* application today. Good scores, great sample, but she’s a filthy scanlator. I can't believe a criminal like this would apply for us. Into the trash it goes” reads the now-deleted tweet from Applegate, who had also retweeted the translator’s full name in an effort to further “punish” her fannish folly.[147]

Even if done “illegally,” the fan translator retains full rights of their work and it cannot be commandeered by licensed distributors without permission. When fan translations become popular, even with smaller groups of readers (in the lower hundreds), localization scouts are quick to make an offer. Their job is to scour the internet for unlicensed translations with commercial potential, and negotiate ways to legitimize them. However, crowd translations, or translations involving multiple individuals, very common with light novels and anime, are difficult to “legitimize.” To meet the requirements of international copyright law, a publisher looking to legalize (that is, appropriate) collective fan translations would need to obtain permission from every single individual who worked on a given project, however small their contribution. All participants have an uncontestable copyright claim to their work even if produced and distributed illegally. In contrast, a single translator can be convinced more easily. All that is required is for them to sign over their rights for no compensation. Enacting an imaginary conversation with just such a fan translator, localization scout and IP enforcer Dan Ritter explains the game to a classroom of literary translation students:

> You don’t get paid for doing a fan translation, it’s illegal, and you only give it for free. But hey, you know, in exchange you can do the next volumes professionally, is the idea. The second part of that is to go to the Japanese publisher and convince them that, hey, there’s this guy [for context, the classroom was mostly full of young women], he did a fan translation of your book but he’s willing to give us the rights to it for free, and he’s gonna take it down [offline] and then we can sell it properly… so it’s sort of like a conversion from the fan to the professional. (Dan Ritter, workshop on IP management)[148]

Across the vast online anime fandom terrain, bounty hunter Dan Ritter chases down IP violators and dispenses IP justice in keeping with the “wild west” analogy peppered generously throughout his presentation. Heroic tales of IP law enforcement replace those of heroic “textual poaching” characteristic of earlier official versions of fandom.

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[146] Archived by Clyde Mandelin at https://legendsoflocalization.com/professional-translators-discuss-fan-translation-experience/#the-fan-translators-dream

[147] Katarina Leonodakis, freelance localization producer, shares her experience with aspiring fan translators on twitter https://twitter.com/katrinaltrnsl8r/ and on Clyde Mandelin’s site Legends of Localization https://legendsoflocalization.com/professional-translators-discuss-fan-translation-experience/

[148] Dan Ritter, workshop on Intellectual Property management, McGill Univeristy, 2017, Montreal.

In their discussion of fansubbing, Rayna Denison (2011) and Hye-Kyung Lee (2011) have commented how IP violations result in severe fractures within fansubbing communities. Formally outlined on the Anime News Network, a "New Ethical Code for Digital Subtitling" (Denison 2011:459), prescriptively emphasizes that the nature of fansubbing is now not-for-profit and not even for recognition, but only for self-improvement and for building community. Fansubbers are instructed to stop working on a title once an official translation is available commercially, but until that point they are obliquely encouraged to continue sharpening their translation skills. Hills points out that fansubbing groups have increasingly been modelling their structures, processes, and branding after formal economies, unable to "entirely exceed or evade market forces" (2017:85). Condry further suggests that it is increasingly more difficult to separate the market of fan productions from "the market" (2013). For Hills, "Fandom and industry interact in an ongoing dialectic" (2017:85) in which the subcultural status of fan-produced work lends the official commercial product additional value. Discouraged as it is at one level, the subculture of fan translation is simultaneously promoted as a means of engaging and recruiting a larger segment of the public. As mentioned, professional fans often emphasize the significance of consumption for those aspiring to participate in production. Fan-translators who "go legit," evolve into transitional influencers and salespeople, contributing to the conditions that create and sustain formal markets. But, going beyond markets, the concept of an "ongoing dialectic" suggests that contradictory narratives can and do coexist for a specific purpose. In the examples presented here, one narrative celebrates fandom and its achievements while the other seeks to restrain fandom and its actions. This serviceable contradiction tells us something about the logics of behavior management in wide application today, which require a wide variety of frequently dissonant approaches to facilitate flexible access to diverse populations.

Having reviewed the principal themes that emerged from my conversations with cultural commentators and fan translators, I return to the discussion of what professional fandom means for fandom at large, and the role that professional fans play in the creation and stimulation of local desires.

The fine-tuning of the professional fan

The contradictions that emerge throughout the discussions of *fulltime* and *pastime* fandom—such as the dual recognition of influencer authenticity as both a performance and a genuine expression, the precarious nature of work for even successful influencers, the ongoing discouragement of fan translations despite their presumed obsolescence, the ambiguous role of credentials, the perception of passion work as a fulltime calling and of professional work as an accidental occurrence, and the alternating view of fan translators as intrepid heroes or misguided criminals—may initially seem erratic. However, these contradictions also serve a distinct purpose: they delineate the boundaries within which the professional fan operates.

In concrete terms, the continuity between fan and professional is structurally essential. The fan's work, offered freely or in exchange for micro-patronage, takes risks on titles that anime distributors strategically avoid, but are content to appropriate once interest has been generated across fandom networks. Setite Zero is now a professional translator whose past as a fan

provides a perceptive summary of the political economy at play. Commenting on how fan translations eventually end up in licensed hands, they note that

> It has to start for free somewhere. … but in general copyright holders have all the cards. They tear down the communities that are built up and "seed" foreign interest in a given work but also happily reap the "benefits" of the community by exploiting the homespun interest in their work. If copyright holders were more forthcoming and honest, if they simply approached the fangroup and hired those hobbyists on, and if they gave the community incentive to contribute $$ instead of expecting free stuff, you would have a winning formula. It comes down to whether you actually believe capitalism can create "positive sum games" where two parties can both benefit from cooperation. But largely in Japan or I guess in the publishing/entertainment world in general, people have a zero-sum game point of view, where "pirates" must be destroyed. (Setite 0 on publisher J-Novel Club's discussion forum)[149]

Put another way, the industry uses the grey in-between formal and informal economies to test for popularity, to measure traction for an intellectual property, and possibly to source translations for free by enforcing copyright. The activities of fan translators and anime influencers are comparable to those of traditional focus groups, except that the logistics of running them are left to the social inertia already in place, facilitated by platform-enabled communications. Disbanding – but not eliminating – fan-translator communities or influencer collectives, as previously discussed, becomes a crucial strategy for maintaining control over the anime distribution industry. This industry, already marked by its own internal conflicts, relies on such tactics to reduce what it perceives to be external threats when fans work collectively, and to facilitate the capture of fans' work when they operate independently.

Echoing the earlier discussion about the separation between the fan and the professional, Bertha Chin proposes that fan labour, although exploited, can still exist independently from formal production (in Booth 2018). Suzanne Scott pushes this argument further by suggesting that industries see "fannish" participation as autonomous even if it is frequently co-opted for promotional purposes (2019). Here, I propose an alternative view: far from independent or autonomous, fan labour is an integral part of the industry equation. It is simply impossible to speak of anime culture without speaking about fan production. Fan production culture is part of anime's branding, and the fan convention scenes described at the opening of this chapter report on that reality. Without fan production, fandom can still exist, as Alissa Butler illustrates in her discussion of Disney fans (2021), but its expressions resemble more closely the formality of demand and supply. Rather than take the opposition between fandom and industry for granted, or attempt to define what separates them, I contend that the interval between formal and informal economies is an extralegal bridge that is not an accidental source of surplus value but very much a deliberate part of the industry's processes of operations. It is not "subcultural surplus" but a cultural "natural resource," which takes advantage of the knowledge and abilities of translators

[149] Setite 0, a fan translator turned pro, posts on professional light novel publisher J-Novel Club's discussion board. The conversation topic is "How much do you think fan translations hurt the industry," and opinions are heated. The publication's founder Sam Pinansky (also a former fan translator) jumps into the fray, with strong opinions about the inefficiency, inferior quality, and dubious purpose of fan translation compared to work done by real professionals. https://forums.j-novel.club/topic/2456/how-much-do-you-think-fan-translations-hurt-the-industry/

and cultural influencers, useful only as long as they maintain an operational distance from each-other and from fandom at large. Indeed, practitioners of fan translation or cultural commentary inadvertently comply with this condition of their own accord, as they paradoxically advocate for collectivity while fostering an exclusive atmosphere with high barriers to entry for newcomers, akin to traditional labor systems in the media industries described by Meyer (2011), or Holt & Perren (2009). As Terranova has argued, the simultaneous promotion of collectivity and individualism reflects neoliberalism's (and more generally capitalism's) need for "structural unemployment," which aims to maintain a large pool of trained workers—what Marx called the "reserve army of the unemployed"—competing for few opportunities: "The potentialities of work must be kept alive, the unemployed must undergo continuous training in order both to be monitored and kept alive as some kind of postindustrial reserve force" (Terranova 2004:83).[150]

In Hollywood, Caldwell finds such a reserve force amidst the "illegitimate creatives" who are non-union non-status individual aspirants that "will likely be kept on as cheaper, alternative, creative development teams (which prevents them from certain job and seniority protections and from earning standard payments for what is essentially episodic work)" (Caldwell 2010). Importantly, this reserve force is made up of individuals, and is not a coherent group. It is not "class conscious" in Marxian terms. Even the fansubbers that Hills describes (2017), who imitate the market with their quasi-neoliberal enterprises and branding strategies, are not neoliberal enough, because they still function as a group, as yet unbroken into the individual aspirants that localization scouts seek. One translation professional who initiated his career as a fansubber shares an anecdote wherein representatives of a prominent anime streaming distribution platform deliberately singled out influential fan translators and subbers, aiming to instill in them a new perspective on their singular roles in relation to the broader context of fandom.

> I think the big thing is that they were actually willing to talk to the subbers face to face rather than through a lawyer's DMCA. Back at Otakon 2008, I was lucky enough to hang out with some of the guys from [fansubbing forums] AniDB and Live-eviL. Crunchyroll took us all out for a nice dinner and they spent the entire time talking about the state of fansubs, the reasons people made them, and what Crunchyroll could do to fill that need. I'm not a regular Crunchyroll user, but it's still been neat to see a lot of the things that were discussed at that dinner come into effect (Bizmatech, online discussion board)[151]

And what came into effect was the deconstruction of the myth celebrating fan translators, and their subsequent recasting as chaotic and misguided actors. The revised origin story of global anime from the perspective of industry insiders maintains that what many today still believe to have been the work of enthusiastic fans was, in fact, the work of unacknowledged professional translators who had lost their jobs following the "anime bubble" of the 2000s. After a period of heightened popularity and market growth for anime outside of Japan, the 2000s were marked by inflated licensing costs, overproduction, and a rapid decline in demand. According to this new

[150] In chapter 2, "Indigenous Content, World Screens," I address a very similar issue. What here is referred to as "the potentialities of work" is an identical concept to *continuous emergence*.
[151] Bizmatech, an anime translation insider, shares his thoughts on a subreddit entitled "How in the world did CrunchyRoll go from being one of the biggest sites for sailing the high seas to being one of the biggest media giants in the medium?"
https://www.reddit.com/r/anime/comments/7gnisg/eli30_how_in_the_world_did_crunchyroll_go_from/

draft of anime fandom history, it was these unemployed translators who contributed to the spread of informally localized anime across Europe and North America, which they did in a wild and unorganized manner in the aftermath of economic fallout. Their efforts were co-opted by other fans (and misreported by cultural scholars) to create the mythology that the global popularity of anime was a fan-powered, bottom-up affair. But ultimately, this version of history alleges that the industry is healing and readjusting itself in a direction where translation has a specific designated place along the production chain, and anyone interested in participating can politely get in line.

The "specificity of neoliberalism," writes Jeremy Gilbert, is "the tendency to potentiate individuals *qua* individuals" in a world where the global market is the dominant institution (2013:21). The tendency to separate the individual from the collective is consistent with the neoliberal work ethos venerating not the worker, but work itself. Analogous to the *workist* ethic introduced earlier, the neoliberal work ethic positions subjects as individual clients and insists on exalting the advantages of self-entrepreneurship within highly competitive multilayered hierarchies (McRobbie 2018). Together with its attendant narrative tropes and origin stories, the neoliberal ethic construct is reminiscent of what Raymond Williams described as a "structure of feeling," a way of absorbing official narratives into everyday culture that are not fully articulated but rather deduced between the lines, and accepted as common sense, such as narratives that revise, update, and course-correct the respective roles of the fan and the pro. What is more, these narratives strive to address and reconcile irrational elements within the system that defy common sense, encompassing contradictory notions regarding the value and legitimacy of fan production, as well as the simultaneous ease of access and barriers to entry confronting aspiring fan producers.

Taken together, the ensemble of workplace narratives presented in this section do not identify a consistent list of desirable qualities that a fan translator or an anime influencer ought to manifest, but rather, they describe a set of ranges within which the professional fan exists. These stories describe a very particular kind of figure finetuned to operate between formal and informal workworlds. This figure must have professional qualities such as mastery over languages or a thorough knowledge of source and destination cultures. Yet it cannot be professional to the point of expecting to make a living out of it, and a side-hustle in another domain is frequently assumed. The finetuned professional fan is expected to be educated, but not to the point where degrees can be leveraged into a career. The ability to burn off *precarity capital*—a term I defined earlier to denote the will and means to take personal risks on behalf of the industry—is often presented as "adventuring," where the non-traditional and occasionally providential path of the fan translator or anime influencer trumps more "mundane" vocational trajectories. The limits of these ranges are set by a dedication to fandom, a personal touch that only a "true" fan can bring. Further desirable traits include a self-declared instinctive feel for texts and cultural vogue, a keen sense of neoliberal work ethic, personal accountability, corporate citizenship, and pious respect for IP ownership. At length, what these narratives suggest is that during the period reviewed, 2016 to 2019, the professional fan operates in conditions where the roadmap of the future indicates an ongoing motion towards professional individuation (the *continuous emergence* thesis discussed in the previous chapter) and away from professional collectivization, the prospects of which grow ever more distant. When Lobato refers to "the unsung foot soldiers of digital media globalization," he is speaking of the specialized cadre of experts responsible for

localizing Netflix content "for an international user base" (2019:188-119). But this description seems equally befitting of the professional fans discussed in this chapter, whose expertise in smoothing out the frictions between cultures and audience segments, while remaining at an arms' length from the industry they support, truly makes them the "unsung foot soldiers" of anime localization.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed two kinds of fans positioned at different points along the professional fan continuum: *fulltime* fans, whose professional identities require a continuous personification of fandom, and *pastime* fans, whose optional status as fans unlocks professional opportunities. Together, their personal-professional narratives share common characteristic traits that fluctuate between self-discovery and identity crisis, trailblazing and conformism, legality and piracy, official and unauthorized, class struggle and individualism, precarity and success. In earlier analysis of cultural work, official culture and illegitimate subcultures were typically described to have opposing characteristics (Fiske 1989), but not so in the age of influence and professionalized fandom. The situation here is much more mercurial. In her discussion of geek girls and fanboy-auteurs, Suzanne Scott gives various examples of entertainment industry pros passing themselves off as fans of the very products that they professionally produce (2019), embracing all the while discourses of counter-hegemony, transgression, and bottom-up social motion necessary to establish a rapport with their target audiences. This rapport is a different way of assuming to know and to speak for audiences, a common theme throughout this dissertation. While Scott's protagonists are already members of the industry, here I take on a less defined group of social actors who are on the verge between two worlds, seeking to legitimize their pursuits as localization influencers or fan translators. What is common between her project and mine, however, is the silent but towering presence of platforms whereupon production, consumption, and social interaction all take place simultaneously. As noted earlier, in his deliberation of the concept of *info-aesthetics*, Lev Manovich declares the singular feature of the current moment to be that all functions and experiences of media are centralized onto the same networks and screens (2009). Thus, both users and producers use essentially the same technologies to view or produce content, the only difference being various levels of access privilege. Parallel to this technological convergence, in this chapter we also saw a social convergence where the trajectories of the professional and the fan meet. The result of this convergence is a disintegration of the "fourth wall" that traditionally separated actors from their public (Scott 2019:151). The act of breaking the fourth wall disperses the illusion that there is a barrier between performer and audience member, between influencer and fan, between amateur and pro. It suggests that the line separating them is arbitrary, perhaps even unnecessary. Prior to digital distribution, the presence of the "fourth wall" construct was assured simply because there were so many intermediary layers between source and destination. Policed by fans themselves, this separation shielded them from the efforts of industry to control its publics. With digital distribution, the distance between source (media) and destination (viewer) is shortened, not least thanks to the work of localization influencers and translators whose self-identification as fans enables them to embed themselves within fan communities. Building on Roland Barthes' conception of the birth of the reader and the death of the author, Jonathan Gray proposes a metaphysical conception of authorial paratexts according to which, by doing away with the

figure of the author, the author can re-"fashion himself as 'just one of the fans,' when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship" (2010).[152] The performative precarity of localization influencers nicely expresses just this type of ritualized self-harm, as does the ceremonial self-denunciation of the fan translator. As we have seen, the affirmation of fan identities is an integral element of localization influencers and fan translators' creative credentials. It is a form of self-promotion that speaks simultaneously to the global anime industry and to its global fans through the unifying figure of the professional fan. Here, professional fans "break the fourth wall" from the inside, by presenting self-reflexive narratives that eschew their positions as content creators, so that they may engage with fans as fans, as I have described in this chapter. In this way, they get around the contradiction arising from identities based in two separate worlds. By assuming the posture of the fan, the producer short-circuits traditional fan invisibility or illegibility and makes it seem like the fan is visible and matters.

This chapter examined the roles that online anime influencers and fan translators play in the culture of localization, as it appears to an observer situated in Quebec. These participants in the localization process serve the traditional function of explaining cultural phenomena and providing linguistic equivalences to local audiences, but beyond that, they engage in a very specific form of cultural localization, because they speak the cultural language of fans. This unique method of personalization is an important factor in opening up a cultural commodity to wider reception. Online content discoverability is achieved through the successful combination of two elements: algorithms and influence. On the machine side, discoverability is regulated via algorithms which are at their core a set of cultural policies about how to organize content, and which demographic to match it to, as McKelvey and Hunt (2019) and Sophie Bishop (2020) have aptly shown. But this is insufficient to create an environment of guided discovery. A human vector is required to complement the screen and to ensure that the viewer's attention has been optimally engaged. Platform influencers present themselves as a solution, but their ascendancy creates anxiety for platform managers who seek to rein in the social capital wielded by influencers. As I have suggested, fandom-powered influence peddling can potentially offset algorithmic predictions and proscriptions in significant ways, ultimately displacing the central position that the anime distribution industry imagines for itself. To evade this situation, global anime distributors proceed in two ways: they keep social power in check by continuously modifying and updating their algorithms and terms of service, and they encourage revisions of anime fandom's own symbolic history. A transition from fan-centred to industry-centered narratives accompanies the transition from informal to platform-managed anime circulation. When "underground" fandom ceased to be the main promotional vehicle, we see the foregrounding of alternative origin stories and shifts in self-presentations strategies, as global anime distributors inaugurate "legit" micro-empires online. The anime distribution industry keeps localization influencers and fan translators in their places by restricting their official affiliations with the industry. Access is restricted, but independence is unthinkable. Caught between two worlds, these fan/pro intermediaries must remain associated with the culture of

[152] In his essay "What is an Author?", Foucault further argues that the idea of the author as a singular, stable, and autonomous figure is a "mere psychological projection" that serves to mask the underlying power relations and discursive practices that shape the production and circulation of texts. In other words, the author, or in our case, the creative content producer, is not a fixed or objective entity but rather a discursive construct that is sustained through social and cultural processes that run parallel to the production of texts (Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books).

localization only in a supporting role. For the scheme to work, the professionals I have described in this chapter must continue to be seen, and to identify, as fans first.

Coda

This thesis aimed to explore aspects of media localization and its production cultures. It began with a straightforward premise: to analyze how global media distribution mechanisms leverage the social function of localizers to target and engage different segments of the audience. Initially, my curiosity led me to examine workers in the dubbing industry, where I had spent several years as a sound engineer. From the control rooms of various dubbing studios across Montreal, I had observed notable changes in work dynamics and attitudes towards work among dubbing actors, translators, and other technicians. Once considered an "art," dubbing had transitioned into a "service" with the rapid rise of on-demand streaming platforms in the late 2000s, fundamentally altering its place in local cultural life. Dubbing director Matthieu Roy-Décarie had lamented "Ce qui était autrefois un art n'a jamais autant ressemblé à une usine à saucisses, malgré l'immense talent de nos artisans. Pourquoi les Américains doublent-ils au Québec? Parce qu'on fait ça toujours plus vite pour toujours moins cher!" *What was once an art is now looking more like a sausage factory, despite the immense talent of our artisans. Why do Americans dub in Quebec? Because we continue to do it ever faster and more cheaply!*[153] Making the connection between this shift in the valuation of dubbing and its production context was an important starting point for my research. This transitional moment was also important because it signaled a decline of traditional media distribution within national borders accompanied by a rise of platform-based distribution, dominated by transnational corporations. Provoked into action, Canadian policymakers attempted to regain control over national media space by seeking to create and impose new regulations on those seeking the attention of taxpaying constituents.

This dissertation examines the interplay among platforms, policies, and people, all centered around quantified behavior (data collection) and engagement (focused attention). *Platforms* encompass both local and transnational entities, while *policies* refers to both governmental regulations and corporate guidelines, including algorithms. The *people* involved are the practitioners of localization, tasked with adapting and translating meanings from one context to another. *People* also refers to audiences, whose attention platforms covet, whose gaze policies seek to direct, and whom localizers claim to represent. Therefore, a key phenomenon studied here is the posture of being "one of the people" that the cultural producers described in chapters one and three adopt. They strive to represent, speak for, and be seen as members of the same social set as their viewers (albeit at different scales). Their personal-professional narratives position them as proxies for the cultural interests of local populations and as content promoters on behalf of global distributors all at once, existing in-between worlds as simultaneously "one of us" and "one of them." In contrast, in chapter two I examine an alternative approach through the work of Indigenous media producers, who employ different strategies in their search for broader audiences. By means of mainstream tropes and storytelling techniques, they convey their own narratives in formats familiar to outsiders. Here, localization exists as an abstraction where the "speakability" if Indigenous identities is "translated" for the global viewer using mainstream tropes.

[153] Matthieu Roy-Décarie, dubbing director, archived by Sylvio LeBlanc. LeBlanc is an avid "voxophile" and dubbing superfan who lives in Quebec and is highly critical of the Quebec dubbing industry. In the source referenced, he has archived personal opinions and countless spats with various members of the industry. https://voxophile.neocities.org/Livre.Doublage.2016-textes

While dubbers and localization influencers attempt to speak both to and for the audience, there are other, more subtle ventriloquists who speak for and exert significant influence over audiences: policymakers and algorithms. Without audible voices, they stage the conditions of work for all of the media producers examined in this thesis. Public cultural policy, along with its private computational counterpart, the algorithm, also aim to establish how content finds its intended audience. The likelihood that a specific viewer is matched to a specific type of content is termed discoverability. Online, audiences converge around on-demand content from around the globe based on individual preferences and identity markers, but the sheer amount of offerings makes it difficult for producers to reach their viewers. Although policymakers attempt to mandate platforms (especially transnational ones), to privilege local cultural expression, the online world remains a highly contested territory where access to audiences is jealously guarded, proprietary, and regulated. But alongside algorithmic regulation and cultural policy directives, human agents also play a crucial role in discoverability. Here my work makes an important contribution by providing a more granular view of localization cultures, integral to what Lobato terms the GILT industries (globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation) (Lobato 2019:118).

Another aim of this thesis was to move the conversation about localization beyond language and translation, topics amply addressed by translation scholars and linguists. Instead, I sought to examine the production cultures of localization. Moving beyond the confines of the recording studio, the focus on localization culture allowed me to transcend physical and geographical boundaries, into the realms of identity and belonging. By examining workplace narratives, I explored the experiences of dubbers, Indigenous media producers and localization influencers, shedding light on the nuanced borders of identity and belonging that shape their work. A focus on the experiences of media practitioners was prompted by the relative scarcity of empirical studies on the self-positioning and vernacular theories of media workers, particularly those involved in localization.

Looking at localization as a social mechanism is important because it separates process from content and allows for each to be examined independently. This is an experimental approach that has been sparsely applied in existing work. As such, it was inevitably predisposed to methodological shortcomings, which I have acknowledged throughout the text. For instance, the format and evidence in each chapter differ in various ways, because I wrote in response to my findings, in investigative fashion, rather than using my findings to support preconceived theoretical constructs. To paraphrase Chris Bilton, I aimed for evidence-based theory, rather than theory-based evidence (Bilton and Gonzalo 2020). The evidence prompted me to challenge and propose revisions to long-standing theoretical frameworks in communications and media studies. For instance, in chapter one, I illustrate that theories like cultural discount and accumulation, which assert that audiences favor the familiar and that familiarity can be cultivated through repeated exposure over time, do not align with the dynamics of dubbing in Quebec. This discrepancy, which nationalist intellectuals find vexing and academic linguists find perplexing, can be explained if we approach dubbing as a culture that exists in a global context. In chapter two, theories of on-screen identity representation, while necessary to redress historical gaps, do not accurately reflect the current direction of Indigenous media producers who wish to reach global audiences. The way these media producers choose to go about it challenges yet another set of theoretical assumptions: the notion that Indigenous content must be thought of separately from

mainstream content. Indigenous media producers demonstrate that for them, the pathways towards global audiences pass through the mainstream. Finally, in chapter three, I suggest that existing theories about fan production do not adequately reflect the professionalization and professional capital that fan producers accumulate. While fan productions are studied carefully and fruitfully for their bottom-up political potentialities, their motivations are almost always taken to be revolutionary and subversive. I question this interpretation in the case of fans who engage with localization, and who do so in exchange for professional or attention capital. Localization in particular is important here, because fan localizations and fan cultural commentary are inseparable from the anime experience.

Each chapter revealed something unexpected that rewarded my exploratory approach. In chapter one, I discovered that localization is not necessarily local. While appearing on local screens and addressing local viewers, it is becoming exponentially easier to produce localized content virtually anywhere. In chapter two, I was surprised to uncover the continuous emergence doctrine in a variety of contexts. I coined the term "continuous emergence" to describe a governance technique whereby the local is always subordinated to the global, the regional to the national, the Indigenous to the mainstream. Bringing Indigenous content to world screens requires a subversion of this doctrine, which Indigenous creators accomplish by using mainstream storytelling approaches to reach global audiences. Chapter three brought another unanticipated discovery. While studying the mechanisms by which anime influencers and fan translators interact and share content online, I realized that both groups are an integral, if unacknowledged, elements of the global anime industry proper. Through these three case studies, my thesis examines the transforming meaning of locality and localism in platform economies, the role of influence and belonging, and reassesses what it means to be a "local" cultural producer in a borderless mediascape.

Given the limitations inherent in a single scholar's ability to deeply explore diverse subcultures, as I have attempted to do in each chapter of this thesis, there are lingering questions that remain either unanswered or only partially explored, awaiting future studies or the involvement of other scholars. One such area ripe for further exploration is a comprehensive examination of Indigenous localization cultures, as alluded to several times in chapter two. Researching this topic could entail a closer analysis of the intricate linguistic tapestries of Indigenous territories, along with the complexities of language preservation and revitalization politics. Likewise, there is ample scope to explore the international dimensions of localization cultures, such as investigating fan translators and anime commentators in non-anglophone regions where platforms and formal distribution channels have not yet curtailed the informal economies, and where fan production continues to play a crucial role in anime promotion, such as in Africa, Latin America, or Eastern Europe.

The case studies presented here underscore several inherent contradictions. In chapter one, we observed local dubbers advocating for the preservation of local culture, yet seldom incorporating the local accent into their work. Chapter two revealed that Indigenous production, while actively promoted, faces stringent regulation, particularly regarding audience access. In chapter three, we encountered conflicting perspectives about the role of global fandom in the popular history of anime. Moreover, while professional anime commentators and fan translators are necessary counterparts to official global anime distribution mechanisms, they are also kept somewhat at

arm's length from obtaining official status. Focusing on the function and significance of narrative, I propose that narratives play a crucial role in navigating these contradictions. Both individual practitioners and policymakers employ narratives to rationalize and reconcile inconsistencies, to smooth them over, to patch up incompatible dimensions of lived experiences, seeking what Anthony Giddens terms "ontological security" (2013), the sense of stability and continuity in one's identity and life narrative that provides a perception of predictability and orderliness in an otherwise uncertain world.

My exploratory strategy to bring together the personal-professional narratives of creative industry workers with the cultural policies that govern their work led me to recognize the importance of reading the policies themselves as narratives. This is an experimental area of research, and is the direction future work may take following this dissertation. Every now and again scholars risk exploring uncharted territories in an attempt to uncover fresh insights and methodologies where existing paradigms or insufficient data yield contradictory or unsatisfying results. One example can readily be found in creative cities discourse, where "language has been crucial in situating cultural policy as an integral form of urban development" (Grodach 2017:89). Despite facing severe criticism from academics, unclear policy objectives, and questionable policy outcomes, writes Carl Grodach, policymakers continue to embrace "creativity" as an economic asset that might redeem (or conceal) otherwise insolvent economic policies. In "Cultural policy as mythical narrative" Chris Bilton and Gonzalo Soltero extend this argument to suggest that "Decision-making comes more from a priori assumptions rather than evidence, with the data being cherry-picked to support policy rather than policies being based upon evidence and analysis" (2020:681). In my discussion of cultural policies in chapters one and two, I made similar observations, but I did not question the mechanisms whereby these policies came to be accepted as status quo. Bilton and Soltero offer a thorough discussion in that direction, suggesting that narrative tropes such as emplotment, heroic journeys, foundational and mythic narratological devices are necessary to completement "the bullshit" produced in defiance of evidence. Conversely, in "Magical Thinking in Public Policy," John Boswell offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that what to some might seem the "naïve ideals" of policymakers are in fact critically important elements of a genre of public discourse that helps society move forward in the face of uncertainty, complexity, doubt, frustration, and cynicism (Boswell 2023). Naivety and magical thinking in policymaking are necessary, Boswell proposes, so that we can progress in spite of failures and disappointments. Policies, in other words, are neither fiction nor fact.

Being able to recognize the narrative behind policy and algorithm is an important skill today, because power has developed an efficient and sophisticated language to promote intent that requires interpretation. DeVereaux and Griffin explain that policy "operates in ways that circumvent rational analysis" by appealing to emotions, or by triggering confirmation bias, for instance (2013:92), which has little to do with the traditional building blocks of policy, such as the scientific analysis of data and statistics, or the qualitative analysis of stakeholder input. As instruments of power, policies are always evolving. Some research in that area includes work by Moran (1996), Gillespie (2010), Crane et al. (2016), and in the Canadian context Foote (2003), Druick (2007), Haque and Patrick (2015). However, those important authors rarely treat policies as narratives. Pioneering work in that direction as been done by DeVereaux and Griffin (2013) and Valtysson (2022).

Once in circulation, policies and algorithms become normative. They prioritize values and representations, shape discourses, and affect how we perceive the role and functioning of culture in society (Valtysson 2022). Ultimately, policies are the crucible in which futures are forged. Their claim to objectivity based on statistics and metrics is used as a vehicle to promote political will that, as I have shown in chapters one and two, is not always reflected by the data collected. Theodor Adorno saw the statistical quantification of culture (nascent in his day, and on full display today) as a form of "re-enchantment" or "re-mystification" of the world (Adorno 2020), which created distance between true art and criticism on the one hand, and the public on the other, allowing systems of power to lodge themselves in-between.

Perhaps one of the most effective methods of analyzing cultural policy comes from the world of fiction. As Jeremy Ahearne argues, uninhibited by legal or factual constraints, works of fiction may, following their own dynamic, yield significant perspectives upon the world of cultural policy (2017). They act as a prism through which to play out various scenarios and to evaluate their possible outcomes conjured by the writer's imagination. This technique is not new, and according to science fiction writer Greg Bear (who has served as policy advisor to the Microsoft Corporation, the U.S. Army, and the CIA), has been in use by various agencies in the US at least since the 1980s.[154] One Canadian example is the Policy Horizons Canada thinktank, a self-described "centre of excellence in foresight" that occasionally publishes little fictional vignettes to demonstrate for readers what the policy futures prophesied may look like.[155]

Policies set the stage for imminent actions in the legal, financial, economic, and cultural domains in very specific and tangible ways. As DeVereaux and Griffin suggest, reading policies as stories reveals "why policy is never merely a response to a set of precise data but most often an attempt to both work within, and influence, a particular unfolding of events." Like Californian occultism and Silicon Valley *magick*, policies are futurological incantations that involve "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (Crawley 2019).[156] The narratives policymakers hear and act upon take on lives of their own through the policies that they create, and which will have their consequences in some distant tomorrow. These narratives don't exist in isolation, as academic abstractions. Policies, read as texts, are active shapers of future political conversations.

This thesis concludes its exploration on the brink of a new technological disruption, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), that will undoubtedly prompt with renewed urgency the same questions about locality and localism that I have raised here. We can anticipate that beyond language and culture, the issue of digital sovereignty—concerning the ownership and control of citizens' data, including the monitoring of content consumption—will increasingly become a focal point in politics. This is particularly relevant given the broad deployment of highly invasive and socially untested digital technologies, and the timid policies that purport to regulate them. As I discuss in chapter two, and as Lemos and Perrone similarly warn in the context of the

[154] Greg Bear, in interview with "The Geek's Guide to the Galaxy" available at https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/feature-interview-greg-bear/
[155] Policy Horizons Canada: https://horizons.service.canada.ca/
[156] See also Aupers, Stef. 2009. "Enchantment and Maric in Silicon Valley." Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology 3 (January).

developing world (2022), the operations of disruptive technologies have a fundamental impact on the fabric of societies. While the architecture of platforms and the structure of algorithms and AI may benefit certain groups, this architecture implicitly encodes cultural templates that may not reflect local societies in authentic and meaningful ways. Developed to be global and borderless, these technologies exist in tension with ethical, legal, and social constraints which tend to be local. Regulatory frameworks, where they exist, are ad hoc, incomplete, and rarely enforced. Before the internet became "Big Tech", there were initial attempts at governance of the distribution pipelines of cyberspace that were eventually displaced by attempts to govern content. The physical and digital infrastructure became increasingly overshadowed by concerns over users, identities, and content, as if by design, to keep attention away from governance over the infrastructure, taken to exist as a feature of the natural environment, a natural resource accessible to all that has no connection to political life.

However, any novel methods of information exchange, such as the impending AI-powered platformization of media distribution, do not necessarily translate into the emergence of unprecedented phenomena and the creation of fresh new cultures, but rather the re-adjustment of pre-existing ones. It is for this reason that scholars like Abbinnett, Mattellart, Steinberg, as well as popular writers like Tim Wu point out continuities rather than breaks with the past, while phenomena which may seem like breaks with the past are merely fleeting moments of readjustment. During periods of adjustment, identities and shifting localisms play a significant role, producing the impression of newness. Condry, for instance, speaks of transnational fandom as "evolving" alongside technologies of reproduction and exchange, which reconfigure cultural practices in new ways (2013). Contra the seductions of novelty and of intellectual discovery, I argue that once adjustment to new technologies is complete, we find ourselves once again faced with familiar dynamics such as the circulation of capital, the maintenance of hierarchies, and the assertions of markets, as societies recreate new but familiar institutions populated by archetypal players. In that sense, it is not changing technologies that call for new scholarly approaches, but it is scholarly attention that shifts its focus from one perspective to another while phenomena occur with observably repeatable tenacity.

In the meantime, this thesis has allowed us to appreciate how accelerated reconfigurations of online work and platform management render localism and locality unstable concepts. On the horizon, we can anticipate a continued blurring of identity and place categories thanks to AIs and deepfake-style software capable of altering or generating images to fit a desired look, location, and language. Domesticating the foreign will become a more manageable challenge, as in this brave new world it would be possible to produce local content anywhere, even as the need for localization—linguistic and otherwise—persists virtually everywhere.

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