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Managing culture matters: genre, aesthetic elements, and the international market for exported television

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Abstract

Our research analyzes the international market for exported television. As a culture industry it is complicated by product uniqueness, culturally-based differences in understandings of desirable product attributes, and the considerable uncertainty of successful reception as programs cross regional, national, and international borders. We draw upon the concept of a culture world to examine both the ways in which matters of cultural production and distribution are "managed" through the business arrangements industry participants rely upon and the ways that the attributes of the products themselves are configured and interpreted by buyers and sellers as they cross borders.

1. Introduction

'I Love Lucy' is said to be on the air somewhere in the world 24 hours a day... (Fiore, 2000: A1)

'Bonanza' is watched by audiences all over the world. We've never been off the air in 42 years. (series' creator David Dortort, quoted in Hockensmith, 2001: 13)

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Our research examines a lesser known aspect of the culture industry of television: the global market for exported programming. This market, which now includes nearly every country in the world, originated almost immediately after commercial television expanded in the late 1940s. One of the earliest international exchanges of television programs took place between the United Kingdom and France in 1950 (Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974). The entry by the United States followed soon thereafter, and by the mid-1950s, its big three domestic broadcast networks—first CBS, followed by NBC, and then ABC—were participants. Initial efforts at systematic documentation of exported television reveal that by the early 1970s the United States, Britain, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany were leaders in its origination (Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974). Since then, vital regional markets based on geolinguistic, cultural, and geographic similarities have developed (Sinclair et al., 1996)—among them Asia and South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

The television industry is a major source of revenue for exporting nations, and increasingly, it is an organizational form that spans borders. We are engaged in a larger project that studies the global television market, and in earlier work we analyzed the world of American television programming as a cultural product for export abroad (Bielby and Harrington, 2002). Relying upon Diana Crane's (1992a,b) conceptualization of a "culture world"—which expands upon Howard Becker's (1982) concept of art worlds to include the specific contributions of organizations and audiences—enabled us to go beyond strictly business considerations such as risk, transaction costs, and profit and, instead, focus upon the forms of cooperation and patterns of collective activity that create television as a cultural product and render it available and accessible to audiences worldwide.[1] We found that industry participants draw upon an extensive array of cultural considerations—including language, translation, and local notions of the limits of entertainment—as they adapt television programs for export. The global market for exported television is complicated by product uniqueness, culturally based differences in understandings of desirable product attributes, and the considerable uncertainty of successful reception as programs cross regional, national, and international borders. We build here upon our earlier work by examining strategies program suppliers rely upon to manage the inherent uncertainties of the international television market. Specifically, we examine how certain attributes of television series, namely genre classification and aesthetic elements, serve as a rhetorical (and rationalizing) resource for producers as they attempt to sell their products.

[1] According to Crane (1992b: 112), culture worlds consist of: "(1) Culture creators and support personnel who assist them in various ways. (2) Conventions or shared understandings about what cultural products should be like; these are important in providing standards for evaluating and appreciating cultural products. (3) Gatekeepers, such as critics, curators, disc jockeys, and editors, who evaluate cultural products. (4) Organizations within which or around which many of these activities take place, such as those in which cultural products are displayed...those in which they are performed..., and those in which they are produced... (5) Audiences whose characteristics can be a major factor in determining what types of cultural products can be displayed, performed, or sold in a particular urban setting."

2. The international market for television import/export

Communication scholars have led the study of exported television. Consistent with their interest in understanding the exchange and impact of information, their scholarship has focused largely upon identifying the flows of programming from one country to another and the major national exporters in the global arena (see Mohammadi, 1997). In an early exploration of American contributions to these flows, sociologists Muriel and Joel Cantor (1986: 518) called for communication researchers to move away from an analytical model that assumes a "direct, single-centered, and worldwide influence to one that functions as interactive, multi-centered, and regional." Subsequent research on exported media identified numerous factors that potentially affect the direction and extent of television flows (Mowlana, 1997: 34). These are understood to consist of two sets of elements: structural conditions, which establish the potential for media flow, and catalytic actions, which consist of the efforts taken by individuals or organizations to enable the transfer (Schement et al., 1984). Since then, media scholars have called for the analysis of so-called "middle range" factors, such as business models, to explain the actual structure and operation of major international trade markets (Sinclair et al., 1996). This theoretical approach, which we employ in this manuscript, foregrounds analysis of the practices through which programming is made available to audiences.

The international market for exported television is comprised of numerous interconnected organizations, institutional participants, and products. Firms in the global import/export business range from complexly structured production companies with international syndication divisions to small, one-person operations selling a single product.[2] Many different organizational entities make up the industry—from the studios and other program suppliers, such as the networks, to companies that specialize specifically in the preparation, handling, and distribution of television products for the international syndication market. Institutional participants range from company presidents of large, multi-national media conglomerates to owners of local, community enterprises in developing nations. Ancillary to these key actors in the market are other players, including advertising agencies (whose clients generate the revenues that sustain the business), law and/or government regulatory agencies and ministries (which set policies such as import or content quotas), and ratings companies (whose measures of audience size and profile provide the basis for advertising rates). All participants pay close attention to the health of local, regional,

[2] The market for syndicated programming has existed in the US since the domestic television industry began. "In syndication, programs are sold individually, market by market, meaning historically a series might play on the CBS station in Los Angeles, an NBC outlet in Detroit and an independent station in Nashville" (Lowry, 2000: F-2). The enactment of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules ("Fin-Syn") in 1970 by the Federal Communications Commission – the agency that regulates the US television industry – requiring the networks to divest themselves of their syndication businesses gave rise to the pursuit by independent program suppliers of domestic and foreign markets for the recovery of the costs of production not financed by the licensing of programs to domestic broadcasters. Foreign sales proved to be an important source of profit for independent suppliers. When the FCC rescinded the Fin-Syn Rules in the mid-1990s, it opened the door for all program suppliers, including the networks, to participate in the lucrative global market (see Bielby and Bielby, 2003).

and global economies, which shape overall demand and the terms of trade for international commerce in television programming.

These players co-orient to one another through the buying and selling of television programming. The buyers include national and privately owned broadcast, cable, and satellite networks, cable systems, digital broadcasters, pay-per-view operators, station group owners, and independent television stations. Their representatives rely upon accumulated knowledge about what the television industry is expected to provide as a source of entertainment. That knowledge includes an understanding of the qualities that constitute desirable programming, the audiences that they want those programs to reach, the parts of the broadcast schedule that need to be filled, and the balance that acquired programming must strike with other, already scheduled programming in order to round out a broadcast day, week, or season. Of course, everyone knows that the ultimate goal is bottom-line profit, but it is those who understand the subtleties of buying and selling *cultural* products who are most successful.

To economists, a television series is merely "an asset consisting of a bundle of broadcast rights" (Owen and Wildman, 1992: 181), but it is clearly much more than that, given the debates that surround the medium. Television programming is a product that originates in the creative process of writers, embodies cultural substance reflecting interests and values, and is evaluated by critics and audiences who apply aesthetic criteria that ultimately determine the fate of individual series. Although those in the business are motivated by profit, a central feature of this culture world is the ways collaboration among individuals with disparate understandings about the cultural product shape its production, distribution, and reception globally.

Somewhat surprisingly, there is not a great deal of scholarly research to draw upon for understanding the inter-organizational complexities introduced by cross-national business transactions in the television industry. Paul Hirsch's ([1972] 1991) influential work of three decades ago on culture industries pointed to the key role of product distribution in linking producers to audiences, as well as the importance of organization middlemen (and women) to the flow of products in the production and sale of popular culture. Then, as now, in a recent revisit to his original conceptualization, he directs attention to the "interconnections and interdependencies" among the firms and individuals comprising industry systems (Hirsch, 2000). Although Hirsch's emphasis is largely on the functional organizational elements of culture industries—including gatekeepers and so-called "distributor organizations"—he also emphasizes the contribution of individuals in key roles and the actions they take as an important element to the business of culture industries. Referring to the many actors involved in the inter-organizational flow of cultural products, he states: "How this sequence is organized and traversed remains a fascinating forest of power plays and techniques, employed by role-occupants in the same positions as have existed since the advent of mass media" (Hirsch, 2000: 356). More recent research by Havens (2003) emphasizes the networking function of global syndication conventions and the importance of personalized relationships in "rationalizing" such a chaotic and unpredictable business. In short, the business of buying and selling is inextricably linked to the non-routine actions of and relationships among key individuals involved in the process.

Although there is considerable scholarly interest in the mechanisms of market embeddedness (see Dacin et al., 1999), very little attention has been paid to how the attributes of the products themselves contribute to it. According to Hirsch ([1972] 1991: 315), cultural products are "'nonmaterial' goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an esthetic or expressive, rather than a clearly utilitarian function." Unlike most industries, where product uniformity is the norm and variation tends not to occur, the television industry, in contrast, deals with a product in which almost every unit is unique. How then are the properties of specific television series understood in the process of buying and selling? One is the importance of *genre* in culture industries. Another is the importance of *aesthetic elements* of the programs themselves. In our analysis, we examine the ways in which matters such as genre, aesthetic elements, and other cultural properties of television series are "managed" by individuals and organizations as part of the routine business transaction of buying and selling television internationally. In our usage, *genre* entails the classification of similarities and differences (which may change over time) that producers utilize to market and distribute television series globally, while *aesthetic elements* refers to the unique features in a series that industry personnel identify as enabling resonance with local audiences. Thus, we focus on how both genre and aesthetic elements are used as framing devices that rationalize business decisions in the international market for syndicated programs.

3. Method

There are three parts to the analyses reported here. First, we analyze how the concept of genre is used by industry participants to organize understandings of the products that are bought and sold. Data for this analysis are qualitative, taken from promotional materials provided by distributors to attendees of the annual convention of the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE).[3] We compiled these materials during the years 1998 through 2003, and we supplemented them with data from online product information of participating companies.[4] Hundreds of national and international companies attend NATPE

[3] The NATPE Conference and Exhibition is the leading US industry trade association for the domestic and international syndication market. It is one of four major international industry trade conventions. The others are MIP-TV and MIPCOM – which are the Midem Organization of France's annual fall and spring events located in Cannes – and the by-invitation-only L.A. Screenings in Los Angeles – which are held for two weeks in late May to early June in studios and hotel rooms throughout the city.

[4] The global market for exported television relies upon a variety of approaches to advertise its products – promotional tapes, billboards, product branding, inserts in conference editions of industry trade publications, celebrity appearances, word-of-mouth, and so forth. At NATPE and other trade conventions, product brochures are one of the most established means of displaying information about series at company booths on the exhibition floor. Printed on thick, glossy cardstock, and often designed as foldouts, pop-ups, or in unusual shapes, they are expensively produced. Typically, they are highly visual and contain descriptive material, and copies are made readily available to potential buyers. Series promoted by brochures also tend to be advertised online, with online materials replicating much of the information found in brochures.

every year, and from that population we selected for our analysis established distributors who market one of the most important genres in the international market—serialized drama. From that sample, we selected direct quotes from written materials of distribution companies. Analyzing these quotes, we inductively developed a classification of common categories that demonstrate how genre is used as a framing device in the marketing of television series for export.

Second, we analyze industry discourse in media coverage and industry seminars regarding aesthetic elements of internationally successful licensed program concepts and exported series. Our archive of media coverage of the television industry dates from 1985 and includes industry trade publications—such as *Broadcasting & Cable*, *Electronic Media*, *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Daily Variety*—and entertainment industry coverage from major national newspapers—including the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. We identified relevant articles by searching for selected articles that included direct quotes of statements made by industry participants: producers, agents, actors, and journalists. Transcriptions of industry seminars held at NATPE conventions between 1998 and 2003 were also analyzed for discussion by attendees of aesthetic properties of series. From that sample of seminars we selected direct quotes by industry participants and inductively developed a classification of common categories as we did for genre.

Third, we consider how genre and aesthetic elements are interrelated as framing devices in marketing materials for television series. Our archive of written promotional materials, discussed above, provided the basis for our examination of visual and textual elements used to represent television series. We conducted an analysis that inductively developed a classification of common categories that depict the aesthetic elements of programs.

4. Analysis

4.1. Genre

Genres are socially produced constructs that delineate the similarities and differences among cultural objects. Generic classifications are not ontologically given but result from a shared orientation toward a cultural object among those interacting with it (Griswold, 2000: 331). Although early writing by some about television asserted, on the one hand, that it ought to be characterized by its sameness (that is, viewers are attracted to it as a product category rather than to its distinct programs—see, for example, Hirsch, 1980), subsequent work challenges that view, finding instead that viewers do indeed make program selections based upon discernable qualities [see, for example, Cantor (1980) about prime-time programs, Harrington and Bielby (1995a) about preferences among soap opera viewers, and Manga (2003) about daytime talk shows and their audiences]. Indeed, some research on the international market for television suggests that genre is crucial to the extent of importation, especially when time slots have been set aside for specific types of programming (see Wilkins, 1998).

The concept of genre has been a central element in economic planning since the early days of television, in part, because the industry relies so heavily on imitation over innovation. In a context of ambiguity and uncertainty over what constitutes "hit" television, network programmers rely on genre as a central framing device to legitimize and rationalize their actions (Bielby and Bielby, 1994: 1293). In general, genre classifications serve an economic need by standardizing production and stabilizing audiences: "Genres are production formulas that allow the routinized production of television series and provide heuristics for estimating the potential success of proposed programs based on the success of previous programs in the same genres" (Cohen, 2002: 205; see also Gledhill, 1997; Turner, 2001).

Genre is central to the challenge of successful marketing of cultural products across borders, and it is reflected in different ways in how programs are characterized in brochures and demonstration tapes, as well as the kinds of information marshaled for buyers abroad. One would assume that, to some extent, sellers have to know how best to frame product marketing itself in terms that are not only understood by those in other cultures but are also meaningful to how a buyer may want to use the product. But how is that accomplished? As will be shown, of all the ways that genre might be conceptualized in television import/export, only two—format and content—appear relevant at the level of global distribution.

Genre has been a key piece of information included in product descriptions or pitches since the early days of television sales. The content of pitches has gradually evolved into a standardized body of information about the program itself, including length of program, potential schedule location, basic plot points, and merchandising potential. Genre is a necessary ingredient to successful pitches, whether named explicitly (e.g., "sitcom"), through hybrid reference (e.g., "a cross between action adventure and romantic comedy"), or, as has now become cliché, through reference to other successful programs (e.g., "this is *Friends* meets *Everybody Loves Raymond*").

Genre is also crucial to developing a global corporate identity. Suggests media scholar Timothy Havens (2003: 29–30), "Programming genres and subgenres form the primary product in international television, around which many distributors build their corporate identities...Perhaps the most effective brand identities in international television come from a combination of proven ability in a programming genre and a clear national image." So Brazil gains a reputation for producing quality serials or novelas, Germany is known for action-adventure, and Scandinavia is heralded for its reality programming. Branding is much more difficult for "[n]ations and regions without readily identifiable images or those that do not have expertise in a particular programming genre" (Havens, 2003: 32). While some distributors resist being pigeonholed, the importance of brand presence to international sales is undeniable.

Genre is made visible in promotional materials in multiple ways. For case examples, we look at the online marketing of two US soap operas by the global distributor Fremantle Corporation, *All My Children* (ABC) and *Spyder Games* (MTV), as well as print materials for the US soap *The Bold and the Beautiful* (CBS)

distributed internationally by BBL Distribution, Inc.[5] While we focus on the serial genre, these materials are representative of international television marketing more generally. In its online product catalog (www.fremantlecorp.com), Fremantle categorizes shows by genre, country of origin, and language. Twelve broad genre categories are currently listed: Children/Animation, Documentary, Educational/Instructional, Entertainment, Events/Performances, Fiction/Drama, Film/Telefilm, Formats, Late Night, Magazine, Sports and Youth. As of this writing, Fremantle is featuring 24 products under five of the twelve different genre headings: Fiction/Drama ($n=5$), Children/Animation ($n=6$), Entertainment ($n=4$), Documentary ($n=6$) and Events/Performances ($n=3$). The products originate from the U.S., the UK, Canada and Australia, with 20 out of 24 created in the US. All are in the English language.

Of the five Fiction/Drama programs featured, two are designated as "soap operas," two as "films" and one as a "historical drama." One of the soaps is MTV's *Spyder Games*, a 30-minute non-continuing daily serial[6] that debuted in the US in 2000; episodes from 2000 are for sale for syndication around the world. The other is ABC's *All My Children*, a 60-minute program that began broadcast in 1970 and continues to air daily in the US. Episodes from 2000–2003 are for sale. (Fremantle also distributes several US daytime soaps not currently featured online, including ABC's *Loving* and *The City*.) Site links to *All My Children* specify its target audience as teen, young adults, family, and adults (its target audience domestically is women 18–49), and its target gender as both male and female. *Spyder Games*' target audience is specified to be teen/young adults (similar to its domestic marketing) and its target gender as male and female. While both shows are designated as soap operas under the Fiction/Drama genre category, *All My Children*'s link further specifies the program as Fiction/Drama/Drama whereas *Spyder Games* is Fiction/Drama/Soap Opera. What distinguishes the two subcategories (or subgenres) is not clear from the online descriptions.

To illustrate how genre is made relevant in the distribution of products for export, we reproduce in its entirety *All My Children*'s program description from Fremantle's website:

> The legendary TV success continues! Now in it's [sic] 33rd year, AMC wins top ratings and holds it's [sic] viewers because it's got the hottest characters and the most compelling stories! AMC has won over 30 Emmy Awards including

[5] Half of the ten daily network soaps now airing in the US enjoy significant international sales: *The Bold and the Beautiful* (CBS), *The Young and the Restless* (CBS), *Days of Our Lives* (NBC), *Passions* (NBC) and *All My Children* (ABC). MTV's *Spyder Games*, in contrast, has enjoyed only modest global sales as of this writing (see Brennan, 2001; *Soap Opera Digest*, 2002).

[6] In a continuing serial, the narratives continue across episodes, often taking weeks, months, or even years to resolve, and the characters evolve and change over time. In contrast, the characters in a non-continuing series remain fairly stable, with little growth or development, and each episode contains an independent storyline that is typically resolved at the end of the show (O'Donnell, 1999: 2). Theoretically at least, the episodes in a serial must be aired chronologically in order for the narrative to make sense, but series episodes can be shown in any sequential order.

> Outstanding Drama Series and, in 1997, it won it's [sic] 4th Emmy for Best Writing. AMC star, Susan Lucci, was nominated 19 consecutive years for Best Actress in a Daytime Series and, in 1999, she won. AMC has shown it's [sic] unique ability to captivate viewers with a blend of social issues, satire and emotional realism. The program has undertaken story lines on abortion, drug abuse, incest and interracial romance, always in a well-informed and sensitive manner. The characters and storylines of AMC win loyal fans each and everyday as this legendary series, created by Agnes Nixon, continues to define the successful modern soap opera (from Freemantle Corporation, 2003).

We note here the emphasis on popularity (as indicated by ratings and longevity), quality (as indicated by awards and award nominations), and celebrity (through mention of Susan Lucci, probably the only soap actor in the US with household name recognition), among other marketable characteristics of the show. These emphases are interesting in that it remains unclear how critical evaluation in the domestic context contributes to acceptance by audiences abroad, if at all. Genre is referenced indirectly through the program's continuing serial format (i.e., its 33rd year on the air) and through story style and content (e.g., social issues, satire, emotional realism, story lines on abortion, drug abuse). Genre is referenced explicitly through the claim that *All My Children* "continues to define the successful modern soap opera" (although, again, it is categorized as Fiction/Drama/Drama not Fiction/Drama/Soap). Only those readers with a personal viewing history of US daytime soap operas (which may or may not include potential program buyers) would recognize how *little* the description of story content and style captures the uniqueness of *All My Children* compared to other representatives of the genre shown domestically in the US.[7]

Compare the promotional materials for *All My Children* to the program description for MTV's *Spyder Games*, which reads (in part):

> Once again, MTV is at the forefront of a totally new genre in television...This is a new kind of entertainment for the MTV generation. In 65 titillating half hour episodes, each filled with fast, hard, twisting plots, the story follows the Carlisle family, owners of the cool "Spyder Videogame" empire. The series features all the attractions of a successful soap opera or a young telenovella [sic]: there's a murder mystery, sibling rivalry, a hot love triangle, an unspoken crush, cat fights, a torrid top-secret fling with a hot boy a few years below the legal limit, bare abs and closeted-gay action...[This is] an addictive daily series for the young "GenXer" audience...

The show is heralded as a "totally new genre in television" and a "new kind of entertainment for the MTV generation," but with the same "attractions" (defined

[7] The low cultural status of the genre domestically contributes to non-viewers' assumption that soaps are virtually interchangeable, whereas habitual viewers can readily point to differences in writing, characterization, production values, style, etc. among the serials airing (Harrington and Bielby, 1995a).

through story content) as traditional soaps and novellas—so what makes it new is not very clear. The description is both more specific than that of *All My Children* in its reference to the core family and their line of work, and it is equally non-specific in reference to the type of story content that stereotypically (in the US context) defines the serial genre. The characteristics spotlighted in Fremantle's marketing of *All My Children*—namely popularity, quality, and celebrity- are strategically absent in its marketing of *Spyder Games*, which is understandable given that *Games* was not very popular domestically, was not an award-winning drama, and included no cast members with widespread name recognition in American entertainment culture. Instead, most central to *Spyder Games*' export potential, at least as implied through Fremantle's online description, is its format (non-continuing, with a new episode airing daily) and the association readers will (hopefully) make with its parent company, MTV (e.g., youth, hipness, diversity).

Promotional materials on display at the annual NATPE Conference and Exhibition offer additional insight into the relevance of genre to export marketing. As noted earlier, available to anyone wandering the vast convention space are hundreds of glossy brochures describing programs to potential buyers. In contrast to Fremantle's online descriptions, consider the brochure for the most popular US soap in the international marketplace, CBS' *The Bold and the Beautiful* distributed by BBL Distribution, Inc. The four-page brochure includes 17 photographs, 16 of which depict characters on the show. The front cover depicts only the title of the show and photographs. The back cover features additional photos with a one-sentence description that emphasizes the show's format (continuing), key characters, and worldwide success, "Since 1987, the exploits of the Forresters, the Spectras, the Logans, and assorted friends, lovers, and foes have made '*The Bold and the Beautiful*' a global phenomenon." The lengthier description inside notes the show's well-known setting (Beverly Hills), the wealthy core family (the Forresters), their line of work (fashion), and considerable detail about characters and storylines. Compared to the descriptions of *All My Children* (ABC) and *Spyder Games* (MTV), this is a very program-specific description that could *only* refer to *The Bold and the Beautiful* (CBS). Significantly, *Bold* is not marketed here as a representative of the serial genre (i.e., continuing format). Rather, it is marketed as a television series (i.e., non-continuing format) with its genre type unspecified. This potentially allows programmers in the import market greater flexibility in its schedule location and frequency of airing, though it also risks mystifying new viewers if episodes are aired out of sequence (O'Donnell, 1999).

These three examples offer insight into the function and meaning of genre in television import/export. As noted, of all the ways that genre might be conceptualized or understood—in terms of program content, format, target audience, narrative structure, visual style, production values, aesthetic criteria, etc.—only two hold much relevance at the level of global distribution: *content* and *format*. The differences between programs that local viewers and critics can readily identify, some subtle and some not subtle, are glossed over or homogenized in the export market, reduced to stock descriptions of story content, length of episodes, and number of episodes available for purchase. The differences between televisual offerings are

re-constructed, in a sense, through scheduling, reception and evaluation in other markets.

4.2. Aesthetic elements

In complex and highly developed culture worlds, aesthetic consensus provides participants in the production of specific works a set of stable values that help regularize practice. Aesthetics is "knowledge of [a cultural object's] qualities in their immediacy and their immediately grasped relations," and aesthetic analysis is the demonstration of the relations among elements comprising a scheme or "structure" (Prall, [1936] 1964: 30–31). According to media studies scholar Nikos Metallinos (1996), the rules of art composition regarding sight, sound, and motion comprise the essential elements of television aesthetics. This approach emphasizes television's formal visual elements, such as line, shape, and color, and is consistent with modernist approaches to viewing works of art (Harrison, 1996).

However, unlike art forms that are premised on distance, detachment, or decontextualization for analysis of an object's relational elements (see Bourdieu, 1984), the aesthetics of television are experienced through the proximity, participation, and immediacy of the medium to the viewer (Stigel, 2001). In noting that television is "something more than a transmission device for other forms," television studies scholar Horace Newcomb (1974) observed that the medium's small screen (compared to the cinema) and embeddedness within the household creates a sense of *intimacy* or direct involvement between the viewer and the characters and plots, that the *continuity* generated by the episodic structure of series facilitates a density of character and plot more characteristic of literature, and that the medium's reliance upon social issues for its stories embeds viewers within a sense of *history* that facilitates consideration of personal and other local concerns. Taken together, these features of television are instrumental to fostering engagement by the viewer that is intimate, intense, and emotional (Toogood, 1978; see also Harrington and Bielby, 1995b).

Exported television is successful when series resonate locally abroad in culturally specific ways. Because the cultural properties of a series are integral to its success, at some level buyers and sellers of programs have to attend to and/or accommodate their understandings of what aesthetic elements work elsewhere. However, conventional economic approaches are of limited utility for understanding television as a cultural product. As noted earlier, most studies of the business (and, indeed, of culture industries more generally) assume that products are homogeneous.[8] But because every series is unique in the television industry, one way to understand how it is able to cross borders is by attending to how the institutional practices and business discourse of buyers and sellers are organized around aesthetic elements of the product. To operate successfully in the international export market for television, sellers need to adapt their product for use in other locales, and buyers need to

[8] Studies of culture industries that recognize product heterogeneity include Griswold's (2000) analysis of Nigerian novels (2000) and Pescosolido et al.'s (1997) examination of children's books.

be able to articulate their understandings of audience interests. Audiences engage television's cultural attributes, deriving pleasures and constructing meanings through aesthetic valuation. Industry participants understand this, with varying degrees of insight and accountability, and they formulate a wide range of arrangements that seek to retain creative control and ownership over products while simultaneously adapting them sufficiently to transcend cultural differences.

How do aesthetic elements enter into business considerations within the international distribution of television series? As case examples we consider industry discourse that rationalizes the global success of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, Pop Stars,* and *Xena, Warrior Princess*. *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* was launched in the US in the summer of 1999 and became the first highly successful game show on American primetime television since the late 1960s.[9] Although game shows were popular fare on primetime during television's very earliest days, a series of quiz show scandals in the 1950s all but eliminated the genre from the evening schedule. Despite the successful revival of game shows in the 1960s, audience preferences changed and the genre disappeared once again, not resurfacing until *Millionaire* aired as a summer replacement program on ABC 30 years later (see Williams-Rude, 1999).

Millionaire is a program format imported from England. Originally developed by Great Britain's Celador Productions for airing on the ITV network in the UK in 1998, it was brought to the US by Michael Davis, then an executive vice-president of alternative series and specials at ABC. Recalling his reaction to seeing the British version for the first time, Davis said, "I thought it was flat out the best television program that I had ever seen. No exaggeration" (quoted in Schlosser, 1999a: 24).[10] Commenting on ABC's plans to add the program to its regular primetime schedule in January, 2000, Stu Bloomberg, ABC Entertainment Television Group's co-chairman declared at the time, "This November *Millionaire* moved beyond the realm of hit program and became a cultural phenomenon" (Schlosser, 1999b: 9). By 2000, the format had been exported by Celador to at least 31 countries worldwide (Sutel, 2000) and, by 2002, to more than 80 countries (*Television Europe*, 2002).[11] What formal aesthetic elements underlie such enthusiasm? How are they adapted for export to other countries that may differentially value such overt attempts to acquire money?

The owners of *Millionaire* stipulate that certain aesthetic features must be "almost identical" wherever the format is produced. These features include use of the same music, set design, lighting, and action. Specifically, the *Millionaire* imagery includes "dimmed lights, suspense-charged sound effects, and sleek pods where the choice of

[9] Primetime refers to programming that airs from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on Sundays.

[10] Indeed, Davis was so enamored with the show and convinced it would be a hit that he subsequently quit his position at ABC to become co-executive producer of the US production with Paul Smith, creator of the *Millionaire* format.

[11] By 2002, the format had been licensed to 27 nations throughout the European region alone, with several additional Eastern European countries scheduled to begin production (*Television Europe*, 2002: 40).

answers flashes before contestants' eyes'' (Porter, 2000: 1). The only variation allowed is the language and the host, who is always local (Daswani, 2000). In India, where the program is broadcast in Hindi, the show became so popular that it virtually emptied the nation's streets when it aired.[12] One explanation for its appeal is its '''slick' factor—and the fact that it has normal people. Just regular, fairly unglamorous people who get the chance to win, and everyone loves winning'' (Delhi hotel chain president Priya Paul, quoted in Daswani, 2000). But that alone does not account for its local success. According to Steve Askew, executive vice president of programming for Hong Kong-based Star TV, ''its [*sic*] not about the money'' (quoted in Daswani, 2000: F13). Crediting the format as a programming innovation for India, and coupled with a lucrative advertising campaign, Askew attributes a great deal of the show's success to its host, Amitabh Bachan, who is one of India's leading film celebrities. For many viewers, the opportunity to see him in the intimate milieu of the television format is key to their interest in the show.

Who Wants to be a Millionaire? is also a ratings hit in the Middle East. The aesthetic attributes that make it one of the most popular programs among Arab audiences in this region of the globe encompass its use of politics as content for the show. The Arabic version of *Millionaire* is produced by the Saudi-owned MBC satellite station at a studio in Cairo, and it is hosted by former journalist, George Kordahi—who covered the civil war in his native Lebanon. Kordahi made Arab politics a condition of his employment as host, ''His show promotes pan-Arabism in its questions, asking contestants about politics and sports in the Arab word and about Islamic culture. Questions drawn from the Koran and Islamic history are commonplace. Though Kordahi is Christian, he peppers his patter with verses from the Muslim holy book'' (El-Magd, 2002: F12). This approach has greatly endeared him to his Arab audience, who have elevated him to celebrity status in large measure because of it. Known also for his designer suits (an aesthetic element of the show that replicates that of US host, Regis Philbin) and for his culturally-specific interactional style, he cultivates ''an immediate personal connection with his guests because of his warm manner and questions about their families and professions'' (El-Magd, 2002: F12). Clearly, Kordahi's style is instrumental to adapting the format to local customs and audience interests, which in turn contribute to his popularity. But it is his advocacy of the political ideology of the Palestinian cause that has garnered him celebrity status within the region and made the show a hit there. In short, that ideology provides a meta-narrative that turns a program permeated with Western values about winning money quickly into a transcendent cultural experience. That kind of experience is consistent with Newcomb's (1974) insights into the contribution of social and personal history to the aesthetics of television.

In a final illustration, we discuss the adoption of the *Millionaire* format by Mexico. There are two such adaptations in that country, neither licensed from the UK

[12] One journalist reported: ''Come 9 p.m., Mondays to Thursdays, big cities and small townships across India look as if they have fallen under some sort of military curfew.'' India's version is known as *Kaun Banega Crorepathi?* (or *KBC*) which translates literally to *Who Wants to Be a Crorepathi*? A Crorepathi is ''someone who has in excess of one crore, which works out to around $222,000'' (Daswani, 2000: F12).

format. One known as *A Millon* is an original production of the Hispanic TV network, Univision. The other—produced by Univision's competitor, Telemundo, called *Numeros Rojos* (meaning *In the Red*)—strayed too far from the format concept (reportedly, it relied on contestants battling each other in competitive games) and did not last more than a few months. Both Univision and Telemundo tried to "graft the emotions of the Latin American soap opera, the telenovela, onto that North American favorite, the get-rich-quick game show, to create must-see TV for the 32 million Hispanics in the US" (Porter, 2000: 1). Univision's more successful entry relies upon a set that reproduced the American version in features, quality, and design. To underscore that the goal is winning money (however melodramatically it is framed), the studio's predominant color scheme is green, and contestants enter the stage over a bridge that spans an ocean of oversized dollar bills (Porter, 2000: A6). However, it is the casting of contestants and the visual representation of their reasons for participating that makes the show a successful adaptation to Hispanic culture. Specifically, the show links contestants' dreams of winning cash to their aspirations for transforming their lives. This is noteworthy given that themes of bettering one's life socio-economically and romantically are the most common narratives of telenovelas, the primetime staple of Latin American television. In order to frame contestants' reasons for participating as culturally appropriate, the program airs a taped segment that illustrates the difficulties of their lives before the competitive portion of the show begins (Porter, 2000: A1). This touch of melodrama is carefully balanced so that contestants' aspirations do not exceed what they might win in the game. Casting director Daniela Romo explains: "We don't want too much drama, like a woman that needs a million dollars for a heart transplant. What if she only wins $1000? People might think we are soulless" (quoted in Porter, 2000: A6). To play it safe, financial needs are frequently tied to culturally approved aspirations for families, including struggles to meet household expenses or to start a family business.

Each of these illustrations describe, to varying degrees and in varying ways, the relevance of formal aesthetic factors such as set design, lighting, and action to the success of a local implementation of program format. They also illustrate how these factors interact with the preferences of the local audience—in particular, social customs, manners, norms, and practices. Disentangling the concrete effects of specific formal aesthetic factors requires an exhaustive, systematic analysis that specifies *a priori* the range of all conceivable categories and interactions within a given cultural or viewing context. Our examination underscores the importance of aesthetic qualities *per se* whether alone or in combination with others, to the successful translation and adaptation of format concepts across borders.

4.3. Emotional resonance generated through aesthetic elements

The importance of aesthetic qualities goes well beyond formal elements and extends to culturally relevant emotional resonance at the deepest level. This is a given to audience acceptance of a program (Bielby and Bielby, 2004). What is noteworthy, however, is the extent to which it plays into the decision-making process

among industry participants themselves as they conduct the business of buying and selling. For example, one of the most popular NATPE business panels in recent years focused on the international success of the reality/soap opera *Pop Stars* (NATPE Educational Foundation, 2001). The concept for this series is simple: thousands of young women sign up for open auditions, which are conducted with brutal honesty on air, in the hopes of being selected as one of several finalists who then go on to form a new pop singing act. Once selected, the new group is signed to a recording contract and then is followed through professional training and career development en route to doing a concert tour and making an album, which hopefully (for the artists and producers), will be a financial hit.

Pop Stars originated in New Zealand, became a hit in Australia, and has since been sold all over the world (the original US version was broadcast on the WB network in January 2001, with imitators like *Making the Band* and *American Idol* appearing on other networks in the US). Des Monaghan of Screentime Pty Limited in Australia is credited with picking up the worldwide rights to the series and pitching, commissioning, and further developing the concept that turned into a global phenomenon (NATPE Educational Foundation, 2001). According to Monaghan, the series was conceived by an (unnamed) "guy watching his young teenage daughters aping what they saw on a top-ten show [and who thought that] there must people all over the world who share this fantasy of being pop stars." After the creator took the idea to Essential, a New Zealand production company, the series was launched there on a budget that Monaghan said could only be described as "minuscule or less."

By Monaghan's account, *Pop Stars* was probably the most successful show on the TV2 network in New Zealand in 1999. Toward the end of its run there, Monaghan's firm heard of it, and instantaneously "loved" (his word) the show, because "like all successful formats, it's essentially very simple. It allows the opportunity for fantasy to become reality." In accounting for its universal appeal, he explained, "what's extraordinary is so many people share this fantasy of being a pop star." After examining the New Zealand version and admiring the effective product they had produced on almost no resources, Monaghan determined that to take it to larger, more demanding markets his company needed to "expand the initial premise of the show and create an event." So, in large measure through his efforts, the concept turned into "a much more complex operation than merely the show itself" and is now "a genuinely multimedia event." Upon acquiring the distribution rights, Monaghan pitched the series to the Seven Network in Australia, who quickly picked it up. States Monaghan: "The interesting thing about *Pop Stars*, wherever it's been taken in the world, is everybody [understands] it."

Following the involvement of key intermediaries in the global market, Scott Stone and David Stanley of Stone Stanley Entertainment, an independent production company in Los Angeles, became interested in acquiring rights for production in the US. Prior to the sale of the *Pop Stars* format to Stone Stanley, the major Hollywood studios monopolized the business of licensing formats and acquiring broadcast rights from abroad for production in the US. The sale to Stone Stanley was a first because it entailed a format owned by an independent producer and sold to a small

US producer/distributor, who only then entered into a production agreement with a major studio/network, the WB. What made this deal possible when prior industry practice favored large, established studios? In this instance, and in the case of *Xena, Warrior Princess* (see below), the emotional resonance generated through the aesthetics of production provided a convincing counter to the business uncertainty generated by the inability to predict a successful series. In short, industry participants also rely upon indicators of success that go beyond standardized "hard" measures such as proven ratings and projected revenues to include subjective perception of the emotional authenticity of a program as a key factor in the decision-making process of buying and selling television. That authenticity may originate from the characters, the narrative, or the quality of the writing, or may be identified in visual, action, or other formal aesthetic elements of the program. As a resource in decision-making, it is variably articulated by industry participants. Indeed, we found that while these criteria are frequently mentioned by industry insiders, they are not systematically utilized or documented. Instead, they are conveyed through verbal interaction that emerges from a readily understood co-orientation for identifying potentially successful shows. Although not one of the so-called "hard" market considerations, it is nevertheless, an essential component of the business of buying and selling television.

How did emotional resonance play a part in the selling of *Pop Stars*? After acquiring licensing rights, and in order to sell it to the WB Network, Stone Stanley Entertainment worked on revamping the show's production values to make it "more appealing" in look, feel, and sound while preserving its basic concept. Stated David Stanley about the considerations that went into adapting the concept for the US market:

> I think the only thing that's really significant from my perspective is that we took a format that really worked, that's really about real stories of these people who show up, and make sure you don't lose any of that feel, of really feeling that you are participating in the process and understanding the emotion in telling the stories. But then we tried really hard to step up the production values. We added a lot more graphics...lots of color, lots of backgrounds, lots of depth of field to make sure things look the way we wanted. When we got into post-production we made sure we added lots more music than existed in the original show. We [added] things that just made it look and feel more like an American television show than just a documentary. And the trick was to add all those things to the show without taking away from the essence of it. (NATPE Educational Foundation, 2001)

In short, Stone Stanley felt that while the format was effective, the UK version lacked visual and narrative impact. Such comments reveal the extent to which the look and pacing of a show are part of the aesthetic elements that are central to acceptance by local audiences abroad (as we noted above). In the case of the US version, the goal was clearly to intensify the representation of drama, and thus the emotional impact of the show.

In another example, the international success of *Xena* was attributed during a NATPE seminar to several aesthetic factors: quality of visual impact, good production standards, and the emotional resonance generated by authenticity of character (NATPE Educational Foundation, 1998).[13] A key consideration for Dan Filie, senior vice president of first run programming at Universal Television Group/USA Networks, Inc., in acquiring the series was its ability to capture the natural beauty of New Zealand. With an eye to the bottom line, he stated, "You get a jillion dollars worth of special effects just from nature there." Expanding on this point, series creator and executive producer Robert Tapert explicitly linked aesthetic elements to emotional resonance: "The scenery and the look is something that we could not reduplicate anywhere else and that brings a whole texture to the show that gives it an inviting and appealing feeling." Another important aspect of the show's "look" is the period costumes worn by the characters, although the producers acknowledge that in this instance they do not strive for historical accuracy (and presumably, whatever viewer interest this visual element generates) but only for "what works for the [camera] lens." These aesthetic elements contribute, in turn, to the emotional impact Tapert strives to achieve in each episode. Some episodes, according to Tapert, are "dark ones that bring a tear to the eye" while others are "comedy that makes [the audience] laugh." For him, the range of emotions as well as the unpredictability of what kind of story will appear from week to week are central to how he engages the audience. To Ned Nalle, president of Universal Worldwide Television, Universal Television Group/USA Networks, Inc., *Xena*'s international popularity is attributable to compelling characterization. "The stories come from the characters; that's what makes the show so relatable," he said. Finally, all who are associated with the series believe its emotional resonance is directly related to its exportability. States Lucy Lawless, the actress who plays *Xena*:

> We do bring stories with heart. And whether people know it or not, the fact that they feel something when they watch our goofy shows keeps people coming back for more... [T]he same things that make a French person feel make a Turkish person feel. [The show is] huge in the Philippines. And that's what matters. It's the same concept as sex appeal in advertising, that people *feel* something, they don't even know it...We aim to make you feel every single episode...

Clearly, aesthetic elements and the emotional resonance they generate are recognized and understood to be central to the international success of this series. But in an interesting development, the panelists differed amongst themselves about the importance of aesthetics relative to genre in the series' success. Perhaps not

[13] NATPE panel moderator, *New York Daily News* television critic, and acknowledged *Xena* fan David Bianculli shared at the outset of the discussion that while initially he favorably evaluated the show for his readership as a "guilty pleasure," not long thereafter he changed his assessment by dropping "guilty" and elevating his evaluation to the more respectable "pleasure." The global and domestic US audience agreed; it was a ratings leader in numerous countries, and in the US in 1998 it was the top rated series in syndication.

unexpectedly, for writer/producer Robert Tapert, genre was key to the genesis of the series. Recounting how he wanted to do a female superhero show "for years and years and years," and needing an innovative spin for the American audience, he settled on giving "the hero a bad past [and] on the road to redemption" as the way into the character. Senior vice president Dan Filie essentially agreed with Tapert's view, stating: "TV is kind of like an X-ray and the audience kind of gets to know who the person is...And part of the success of *Xena* is even though she has had this horrible past as a character, you can see goodness in her..."

However, the matter of whether genre or aesthetic elements matter more in the appeal (whether domestic or international) of a show was viewed quite differently from the point of view of network chief Steve Rosenberg, president of domestic television distribution at Universal Television Group/USA Networks, Inc. He asserted that aesthetic elements clearly carry more weight:

> I don't think hits are made by genre. I don't think people watch genre. They watch good shows. I don't think it makes a difference whether it's a police show or an action show, or a game show, or a talk show. People watch good programs. And, I don't think you can say, "*Xena* works and so this genre works."...What makes [*Xena*] work is that it looks great, it has terrific writing, it cuts through the clutter. In first run syndication, you've got shows running in time periods all over the map...You don't have the benefit of national promotions so that people can find you. And so you need to have a show that cuts through the clutter. And it doesn't matter what genre it is, people are going to watch good programs.

Michael Eigner, executive vice president and general manager of WPIX-NY, the WB affiliate in New York that was instrumental to bringing *Xena* into production because of its agreement to air the series in such a major viewing market, agrees with Rosenberg: "In [the] fantasy [genre], the key is bringing fantasy to life...through the special effects and through the scripts, they have really brought these shows to believability and life." The sharp difference of opinion captured here coincides in interesting ways with the social location of industry participants within the culture world of the television industry. To network executives concerned with the bottom line, "quality" matters, however undefined its measurement may be. To creative personnel, a series is a cultural object classified and managed according to given properties. The larger issue is to what extent these differences are significant to collaborative activity within the culture world of the international market for television.

4.4. The interrelation of aesthetic elements and genre

Our analysis of the contribution of genre to the international marketplace, discussed above, found that content and format are the foremost components representing the classification of a syndicated series to industry participants. Undoubtedly, these components facilitate important business considerations as

program buyers make determinations about the suitability of a series for their program schedule (Ellis, 2000). The fluidity of genre as a classification device in the global syndication market does not, however, reduce the utility of aesthetic elements as important in the classification of a series. Rather, because of that fluidity, the relevance of aesthetic elements becomes enhanced.

To illustrate the importance of aesthetic elements of programs relative to genre, we first examine their use in promotional materials for a well-defined genre, telenovelas—highly popular serialized primetime dramas exported from Latin America. Telenovelas are well known for their high literary quality and reliance upon prominent writers, casting of established or highly regarded actors, emphasis on melodrama, and ability to appeal to all audience demographic groups (Barrera and Bielby, 2001). An analysis of the sample ($n=41$) of all the 1998 NATPE promotional brochures from the Latin American producers of telenovelas—Columbia's Caralco, GloboTV from Brazil, and TV Azteca and Telearte from Mexico—revealed that of the two types of information (visual and textual) on the brochures, by far the greatest amount of space was allocated to visual representation of the series (see Fig. 1 for an illustration). Visual components of the brochures were comprised of the following categories: stills of actors in character/costume ($n=34$), stills of dramatic scenes from the series ($n=31$), headshots of actors representing their character's persona ($n=25$), depictions of character dyads ($n=17$), stills of actors in character overlaying scenes from the series ($n=11$), and ensembles of the cast ($n=7$). Each of these components, especially those used most frequently, conveyed crucial information about the type of story—including whether the drama is historical or contemporary, or if the action is psychological or physical. The less frequently used category of characters overlaying scenes was, in fact, highly illustrative of the dramatic impact the audience could expect; although used sparingly, these depictions signaled to buyers key scenes in the series. Visual components of the brochures also conveyed the social strata of the characters, the location of the story (e.g., a rural or urban setting; an affluent, middle class, or impoverished household), whether the story focused primarily on female or male characters, whether it included religious, political, or cultural themes, or whether it emphasized the network of characters' interrelationships or focused instead on a few pivotal characters. In short, visually representing the characters' personas, the amount of dramatic action or other key events in the narrative, the characters' interrelationships, and locales or settings signals to buyers the audience the serial would most likely attract.

Textual elements of the brochures consisted of the following categories: cast lists of actors ($n=41$), plot descriptions ($n=41$), and lists of writers, directors, and producers ($n=39$). The production company was always mentioned. The text was in Spanish, but a description of the plot was also usually provided in English. The prevalence of these particular textual components is consistent with the tradition of telenovelas being well financed, prestigious productions that attract the best creative talent. Sellers/distributors would want to advertise the quality of their production to potential buyers.

In the international import/export market, where differences in language, pacing, story content, and other culturally specific elements must be surmounted for

products to cross borders, visual elements are crucial for conveying information, even for established genres like telenovelas. However, representation of aesthetic properties can prove necessary even within geolinguistic regions (for example, Asia or the Middle East) or in regions bound by a common language. For example, there is little program exchange between Latin America and Spain, in either direction, due to colloquialisms and other linguistic differences. These extend to differences in cultural sensibilities that affect the content of programs in all aspects. Media journalist Lucy Davies (1999: 36) explains:

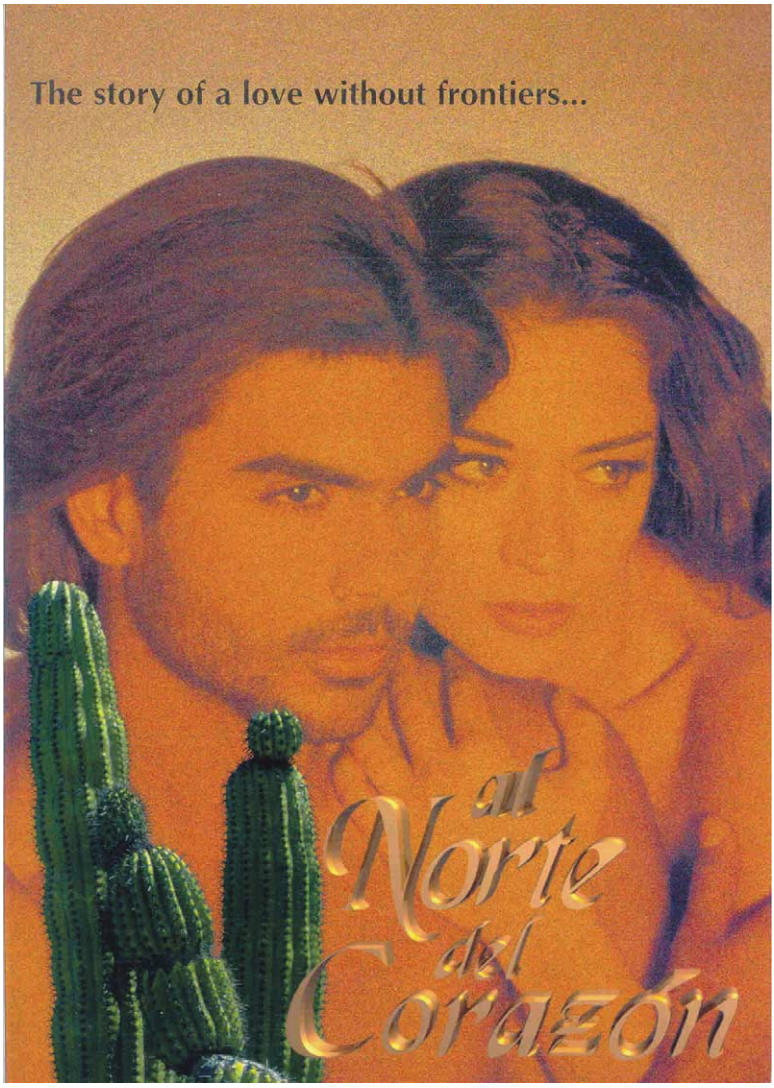

Fig. 1. Promotional brochure for a telenovela.

> Brazil's involvement in the region is hampered by the Spanish-Portuguese language dissimilarity and a myriad of cultural disparities. Its more liberal attitude towards risqué and violent programming puts it at odds with its more conservative Spanish-language counterparts in the region...Style and pacing also differ. According to [Horacio] Levin, [president of Buenos Aires-based Promofilms, a strategic partner of Madrid's Globo Media], Spanish programming tends to be slower in pace and delves deeper into its subject matter. Latino shows, on the other hand, are faster and lighter in content. They also tend to be shorter.

Although telenovelas from Latin America once commanded a prominent place on Spain's primetime schedule, they are now relegated to the early morning time slots (Davies, 1999). The solution sought between Mexico and Spain entails efforts to develop co-productions between the two countries, a business strategy that would address cultural differences up front in order to assure programming that is acceptable to both. Short of that, the aesthetic representation of a series produced solely by one country provides important indicators of the suitability of a program, even one within a well-defined genre.[14]

If visual and other aesthetic elements are crucial, even in a well-defined genre, how salient are they when genre is less clearly delineated? In short, very important. Consider, for example, the 2002 Columbia Tristar International Television insert in the convention publication *Television Europe*, which relied upon evocative descriptors as subject headings for groups of otherwise dissimilar series. "Always Proven" encompassed primetime ratings leaders *Family Law, Dawson's Creek, The Guardian,* and *As If,* while "Always Laughing" included the primetime sitcoms *Just Shoot Me, The Tick, The Steve Harvey Show,* and *The Ellen Show*. "Always Sexy" listed the syndicated action-adventure *Sheena* and the Pamela Anderson vehicle, *V.I.P.,* as well as the daytime soap operas, *The Young and the Restless* and *Days of Our Lives*. "Always Amazing" included several niche cable series, *Mysterious Ways, Strong Medicine, Ripley's Believe It or Not!,* and *Doc,* while the last category, "Always Daring" included the cancelled primetime series *Rampart* and *Pasadena,* and the daytime talk show, *Ricky Lake*. These categories were genres (if one could call them that) devised on a very loose notion of similar program content. Format, the other genre element we found to be important to framing television for export, appeared

[14] A further illustration of the importance of visual elements to marketing in the global export market appeared on the cover of the 2002 NATPE convention edition of *Television Latin America*. The cover reproduced the brochure for Globo-TV's telenovela, *El Clone (The Clone)*. This popular export was the story of a Brazilian woman living in the Middle East, in love with a local who dies. But before he passes away, his godfather clones him, and years later the woman falls in love with his clone. Just how similar the clone's persona is to his "source" is the focus of the plot, which explores the limits and possibilities of cultural boundaries and identities. The cover of *Television Latin America* shows the three characters; the Latin woman is in Middle Eastern garb, while the different wardrobe of the two men suggests opposing lifestyles. As a backdrop to the three actors pictured in character is the silhouette of a man in Arab dress riding a camel in a desert. Across the silhouette is text in Spanish that reads, "The first telenovela that speaks about the Islamic world and human cloning." However, the story is already apparent by the visual composition of the cover and the title of the series.

to be far less salient, with Columbia Tristar's shows seemingly grouped more by the imagination of the marketing department than by any established categories (to wit: a daytime talk show was included with cancelled primetime soaps, and daytime soap operas were included with racy primetime series that feature scantily clad female leads). More significant, however, was the importance of visual and other aesthetic elements for representing the similarities across these constructed categories. While "Always Proven" depicted the casts for the series in this category as ensembles, with the groups conveying a serious or somber tone, and "Always Laughing" showed the lead actor or actors in casual poses with warm smiles, "Always Sexy" (which included two daytime serials and two primetime series) depicted the female leads of the series either in minimal attire or projecting a seductive gaze as they encircled their male partners. It is noteworthy that each series in this latter category has very different audience demographics in the US; for example, daytime soaps draw predominantly female viewerships, while action-adventure series draw a predominantly male audience. In sum, aesthetic elements—however intangible or subjectively perceived—are a vital resource in the marketing of series for export abroad.

5. Conclusion

Our examination of the international market for exported television considers how the cultural properties of television series are understood and managed in the process of buying and selling. Aptly described as a chaotic, unruly, and unpredictable market by early sociological scholarship in the field (Cantor and Cantor, 1986), approaching this marketplace as a culture industry allows us to examine the ways in which its participants organize their understandings of the business and cultural contexts in which they operate. Our analysis takes a middle range theoretical approach to analysis of the international market (Sinclair et al., 1996) by relying upon Crane's (1992a) concept of a culture world to explore the cultural frames that organize the business decisions of industry participants. Although the television industry is understood to create, produce, and distribute a *cultural* product, there has been little systematic effort to date to analyze how specific attributes of the products themselves—complicated by the fact that in the television industry each series is unique—are understood or managed as part of routine business transactions.

Our examination of how genre classification and aesthetic elements of television series are utilized as framing devices to rationalize decision-making yields some unanticipated but interesting findings. The concept of genre is a central mechanism of classification in cultural systems, and as a culture industry, television relies heavily upon it to routinize the marketing and distribution of series (Griswold, 1987; Havens, 2003). However, genre as a method of analysis has been de-emphasized in television studies in the past decade due primarily to the influence of middle-range perspectives. We argue, however, that middle-range approaches typically take for granted the *fluidity* of genre both as a system of categorization and as an organizer of understandings. Television scholars agree in principle that genres evolve over time and are modified as they are produced and received, but then often simply proceed

to treat genre as a static label "assigned" at the level of domestic creation, to remain attached to a television program/concept/format throughout the import/export process (see Frith, 1996). Our analysis reveals the various ways in which genre categorizations and understandings are strategically modified at the level of global distribution. Rather than a static label, genre is dynamic—visibilized, invisibilized, and negotiated throughout the process of international syndication. Our findings thus invite further exploration of the extent to which differences among televisual offerings that matter to its creators are altered, diminished, or lost as they cross cultural borders and, if so, how they are re-constituted by the industries and audiences elsewhere.

The salience of aesthetic elements to business considerations in buying and selling television proved to be an especially important resource in industry discourse in several ways. First, industry participants utilize formal aesthetic criteria to implement program formats licensed for broadcast in other countries. Second, they rely upon the emotional resonance of aesthetic elements to make judgments about the viability or quality of a series. Third, in the context of the increased fluidity of genre as a classification device and its decreased utility as a meaningful descriptor—depending on one's location in the creative process—in marketing for export, aesthetic attributes and judgments about quality become an important alternative framing device. As a culture industry, television strives to find ways to rationalize non-routine business practices (Bielby and Bielby, 1994). Framing devices are important to business discourse, and in this industry "buzz" contributes to favorable impressions of series and distributors (Havens, 2003) and is an important resource among industry participants. Our findings reveal that this discourse consists of hunches, gut feelings, instinct, visceral reactions, and the like, that it relies heavily on seemingly non-rational considerations, and that it consists of subjective categories of critical evaluation based on judgments of quality, authenticity, and emotional resonance. Although reliance on such factors for decision-making may seem unlikely in a business context, television programs are both commercial commodities and aesthetic endeavors that are developed and produced based on artistic principles (Metallinos, 1996). Like other artistic products, they are abstract, non-utilitarian, invoke something other than themselves, and are not valued because of specific tangible features (Hirschman, 1983). Thus, industry participants, like audiences, orient to evaluations of programs according to perceptions that are based on intuition about their potential to satisfy or entertain.

The use of subjective criteria in decision-making by participants in this culture industry is not limited solely to evaluative judgments about programs. For example, in speaking of the considerations that go into finding co-production partners, Blumenthal and Goodenough (1998: 247) state: "Most co-producers are very selective, and make their decisions based on highly subjective criteria." Track record, performance, reputation, and other indicators of reliability are crucial indicators of a co-participant's dependability, and are important legitimating resources in the hypercompetitive global market of exported television. Research elsewhere on the domestic industry in the US has shown how subjective perceptions, judgments of quality, and the like are framed rhetorically to manage competing commercial

and creative constituencies and achieve institutional legitimacy (Bielby and Bielby, 1994). Our findings indicate the importance of similar considerations at the international level and offer useful leads for future research on the relevance of discourse about aesthetic and other evaluative criteria, with one significant difference. In the domestic industry, participants share the same cultural understandings about what a television programs ought to consist of as a cultural product. The culture industry of international television, in contrast, involves participants from many different cultural orientations that shape fundamental understandings about the cultural product and its production. Just how those understandings are recognized, negotiated, and achieved is the focus of our larger research agenda. Our work here and elsewhere (Bielby and Harrington, 2002) underscores the importance of analyzing this international industry as a culture world in order to understand how this industry, in which every product is unique, manages to make its products available and accessible to audiences worldwide.

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