Chapter 9: International TV and Film Co-Production: A Canadian Case Study

Doris Baltruschat, ed.

In today’s global economy, media organisations increasingly respond to global market pressures. In the field of TV programme and film production – which constitutes the focus of this chapter – foreign competition, industry deregulation and convergences in technologies and content have all led media producers to adapt traditional production practices to international modes of programme development. As a result, media producers are increasingly seeking international TV and film co-productions as a way of accessing new funding and markets, and enhancing their competitiveness. This change in production organisation and practices, from a local production model to a model of international collaboration, can be linked to fundamental changes in the political economic context in which media producers now operate. Since the early 1990s, national policies in Canada and Europe have increasingly favoured deregulation and a laissez-faire approach to industry management. This has shifted the focus from public service mandates to commercial production practices. Within this changing production context, commercial media organisations have faced funding cuts for programme development, and production and public service broadcasters have also had to seek new ways to manage their operations with smaller funding allocations. Technical convergences, based on the ability to transfer digital information across a variety of platforms, have offered new possibilities for delivering programmes but in practice these have tended to be exploited as a means of maximising market opportunities. What we have witnessed across recent years, then, is a shift of emphasis from fostering culture as a public good to marketing culture as a commodity.

Both expressing and contributing to this wider shift towards the commodification of culture is the increasingly export-oriented production practices of the television and film industries and the production of ‘global’ products based on entertainment values rather
than critical reflection on ‘local’ issues. These developments are clearly discerned in the rise of international TV and film co-productions. Co-productions represent a new way of developing film and television programmes for international markets. Media organisations have sought to capitalise on this production mode as a way of raising new funding, accessing additional markets and competing globally for exposure and revenue. This chapter sets out to examine empirically these trends in a case study of television and film production in Canada. It does this by:

- charting the rise of Canadian co-productions and relating this to the changing production environment of film and television;
- consulting with television and film producers about the nature of co-production;
- analysing the shift from ‘local’ to ‘global’ content in terms of genre, represented issues and narrative structures; and
- critically reflecting on these developments in terms of their impact on forms of cultural and political representation and their contribution to a public sphere of engaged citizenship.

First though it is important to elaborate further on the context, rise and nature of Canadian co-productions.

Co-Productions: A New International Production Mode

Co-productions are based on the collaboration between producers for the creation of film and television programmes. The pooling of financial, creative and technical resources allows them to increase budgets and access new markets. There are two types of co-productions in Canada: official treaty co-productions and non-treaty co-productions. Both modes are used for big-budget films and television programmes, predominantly of the drama, animation and documentary genres (Hoskins et al. 1997: 102). Treaty co-productions are guided by bilateral agreements that are negotiated by governments for the development of cultural goods and content productions. Here, the goal is the creation of productions that are of national relevance to all partners.
involved, so that producers can access benefits from legislation and government assistance – such as tax incentives, investments and grants (Ferns 1995). Non-treaty co-productions, also referred to as co-ventures, include collaboration with countries currently not covered by a bilateral agreement. Co-ventures allow for greater production flexibility, but may not be eligible for public funding. They may, however, be considered as a Canadian content production if specific guidelines are met, such as equal decision-making responsibilities and budget administration (Telefilm 1999a).

The use of co-productions in a context of dwindling local resources is of course appealing to many commercial producers who seek to access global markets. Recent research suggests, however, that co-productions differ from film and television programmes developed for local audiences. In pursuit of global audiences they tend to emphasise drama, human emotions and the dynamics of close relationships (Strover 1995: 11); they also tend to prefer the production of particular genres such as science fiction, adventure, horror and fairy tales. Co-produced documentaries tend to be about nature, sports, international celebrities and common histories (Binning 1998; on nature, see Cottle this volume). As we shall see, in contrast to local programmes, international co-productions also tend to feature narratives that are neither spatially nor temporally bound – thus minimising their local cultural or political content and relevance. Even though co-productions aimed at global audiences have the potential to address global issues such as environmental degradation and the effects of world trade and represent cultural diversity and hybridisation, their commercial orientation undermines this critical potential (Murdock 1996: 107). In comparison local and independently produced programmes often prove to be more critical in focus, highlighting issues of public concern at local, national and international levels.

Co-productions have increased in the era of media deregulation, privatisation, conglomeration and convergence, a period that has also seen the development of narrow-casting delivered via multi-channel cable and satellite systems. In a climate of reduced licence fees for television programmes, co-productions met the need for new programming, especially in markets seeking to protect economic and cultural interests through trade barriers against US products. In 1992, Europe’s Television Without Frontiers initiative set a quota of 50 per cent for foreign programmes. The Canada-US North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) exempts cultural industries to
'prevent the cultural standardisation of content and the complete foreign control of distribution' (Government of Canada 1993: 33). Co-productions between Canada and Europe increased dramatically during the 1990s, consolidating regional markets and integration of media organisations. Alliance/Atlantis, Canada's major co-production company, expanded its operations through co-producing feature films, such as *eXistenZ* (a science-fiction/horror feature) with Natural Nylon Entertainment in England. Salter Street Film co-produced the television science fiction series *Lexx* with Time Film and TV Produktion Gmbh in Germany, and Filmline International collaborated with Talisman Crest, England on the adventure series *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne* and with Gaumont Television in France on *Highlander*.

In a global economy, economic interests and regional competition drive cultural protectionism even though, officially, policy often emphasises culture as a national good within a liberal, democratic paradigm. However, within this paradigm, culture is treated as a *commodity* rather than a *common good*. The concept of culture as a tradable commodity is based on profit motives and international markets where audiences are addressed as consumers rather than citizens (Garnham 1990: 105). This commodity logic also underpins productions that have a broad appeal and avoid critical reflection – such as co-productions – since they act as ‘fillers’ in a commercial system where audiences are sold to advertisers (Dahlgren 1995: 29). In contrast, ideas of culture approached as a common good provide the basis for creative works, the development of a body of knowledge and collective memory for communities and nations. Here, ‘cultural works allow for current realities to be explored, reflected, debated and contested, thereby laying secure foundations for independence and democracy’ [p. 152 ↓] (Audley 1994: 317). Local productions are often able to reflect contemporary challenges and changes in society; they are crucial for maintaining a viable public sphere in which current issues are mediated for critical reflection and debate.4

The rise of co-productions is practically facilitated by the growth of international networks between media organisations and producers. Producers regularly convene at trade shows, conferences and markets, such as the *Marché International des Programmes de Télévision* (MIP or MIPCOM) in Cannes, France and the National Association of Television Executives (NATPE) in the US, where they meet distributors,
government representatives and policy-makers to exchange information, forge financial relations, and create linkages for the development of cultural products for regional and international markets (Perlmutter 1993; interview with St Arnauld, Director, International Relations, Telefilm Canada on July 2000).

Co-productions are often developed for regional markets that are linked by cultural and linguistic traits and, in many cases, extend beyond neighbouring countries and include diasporic and migrant populations worldwide (Straubhaar 1997). In the case of Canada, cultural proximity allows producers to collaborate with English and French counterparts to create films and programmes suitable for both markets. However, marketing strategies and the deliberate production of ‘global genres’ indicate that producers also target global markets. Co-productions, global genres and conglomeration of media organisations create the basis for further consolidation of professional practices and commercialisation of cultural productions. The rise of co-productions can therefore be seen as an expression of the surrounding forces of globalisation – processes that have not gone uncontested.

The globalisation of cultural productions creates a ‘new communication geography’ that is increasingly ‘detached from the symbolic spaces of national culture, and realigned on the basis of the more “universal” principles of international consumer culture’ (Morley and Robins 1995: 11). Local independent productions represent, in many instances, a reaction – in format and content – to globalisation by reclaiming media spaces to sustain the ‘integrity of local and regional cultures’ (ibid.: 18). They express their own styles, techniques and narratives that reflect local issues and culture, and thereby help to preserve a public sphere in which debates between citizens can be mediated.

Local media are important, especially since trade liberalisation marginalises communicative spaces (Dahlgren 1999: 507) and undermines the aim of democratic societies to provide open media access for the presentation of cultural diversity. Media commercialisation replaces public speech with corporate speech, infotainment and tabloid-style television, which address audiences as consumers rather than citizens. Public service media and local, independent media are therefore necessary to reflect common experiences and collective memories. They are essential for expressions of diversity and plurality, especially in the face of continued pressures to liberalise the trade of cultural goods, such as reductions in foreign investment restrictions and content
quotas (The Canadian Film and Television Production Association and l’Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec [CFTPA and APFTQ, 2000: 11]).

Charting the Rise of Canadian Co-Productions

Currently with over forty-seven co-production agreements with fifty-five countries worldwide, Canada is at the forefront of countries involved in international co-production. Since the early 1990s, Canada’s co-productions have increased dramatically, making the latter one of the most prominent modes of production deployed by larger Canadian media organisations today. For these reasons Canada makes an ideal case study for examining the nature, rise and impact of international productions. Even though Canada’s first co-production dates back to 1963 (a film co-production with France), it only developed an additional thirteen productions between 1974 and 1983 (Pendakur 1990: 198). Then, coinciding with drastic changes in the film and television industry across the 1990s, Canada’s co-production activities quadrupled, indicating a clear departure from traditional production practices to international collaboration and a focus on global markets (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Canadian co-production activity 1992–2000 in film and television

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Co-productions Numbers</th>
<th>Total budgets in millions $</th>
<th>Canadian Share in millions $</th>
<th>as % of budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>621.0</td>
<td>345.0</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–1999</td>
<td>135*</td>
<td>762.0</td>
<td>423.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–1998</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>493.0</td>
<td>246.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–1997</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>290.8</td>
<td>133.4</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–1996</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>246.3</td>
<td>135.9</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–1995</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>340.8</td>
<td>156.8</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993–1994</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>212.3</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–1993</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>186.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figure includes some projects for the year 1999/2000 due to Canadian Television Fund (CTF) deadline.

Telefilm, Canada’s cultural agency responsible for the development and promotion of film, television and multimedia, is committed to finance co-productions for global markets: ‘The international market is a strategic priority for Canada’ (Telefilm Canada 1999b: 6) and co-productions are seen as a tool ‘to finance high-quality products for distribution in the global marketplace’ (ibid.).

Even though financial statements of the decade depict an increase in overall production, the actual public commitment to develop film and television programmes remained the same or declined (Table 9.2). Local media production continues to be challenged by large volumes of foreign production which increased from 30 per cent in 1994–95 to 44 per cent in 2000–01 (CFTPA and APFTQ 2002: 34). In addition, US distributors earn up to 85 per cent of the [p. 154 ↓ ] profits from Canadian theatres, whereas Canadian films in comparison make up only 5 per cent, outside of French-speaking Quebec (Mandate Review Committee 1996: 201). In television, 95 per cent of programming is foreign and consists predominantly of US drama (ibid.: 196; Juneau 1993).

Table 9.2 Canadian production activity 1992–2000 in film and television

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Locations in CDN*</th>
<th>Total budgets in mil. CDN$**</th>
<th>CAVCO Share*** in mil. CDN$</th>
<th>Public % of total financing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>4,564</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>3,673</td>
<td>1,888</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-1998</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>3,222</td>
<td>1,413</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-1997</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>3,098</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1996</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>2,698</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1995</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>2,320</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1994</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>1,937</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1993</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1,573</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Foreign location (shooting or productions) refers to film or television productions shot in Canada by US or foreign producers and independent producers.
** Figures include production budgets of CAVCO and non-CAVCO certified productions, foreign location shooting, and conventional broadcasters and specialty channel in-house productions.
*** CAVCO – the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office; productions that are certified ‘Canadian’ for the purpose of utilizing tax credits.

The increase of co-productions coincided with funding reductions for local productions and public service broadcasting. In the 1990s, Telefilm’s annual parliamentary appropriation was reduced by 50 per cent (Mandate Review Committee 1996: 241; Telefilm Canada 1999a), forcing the agency to embrace a more commercial mandate. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) also faced a 30 per cent funding
reduction and the loss of over 3,000 jobs (Gurd 1998: 47; Mandate Review Committee 1996: 130; Posner and Bourette 2000). These reductions posed a serious challenge to Canada’s film and television producers, who increasingly sought funding outside of Canada:

The model makes sense. You can find partners. You can bring financing to your project, soft money, from another source. It means that you'll be able to more quickly get your project made. You can only raise so much money out of Canada. (Scott Kennedy, producer, interview, 22 June 2000)

Access to foreign markets is also key. Canadian producer Michael Parker found that co-producing with Hong Kong allowed his film to be exhibited in more countries:

[p. 155 ↓ ] Lunch with Charles had probably a larger release in Asia than in Canada. Except for Japan and India, it has been sold and released in China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. (Michael Parker, interview, 15 March 2002)

Some film and television productions are considered ‘natural’ co-productions in the sense that their narratives lend themselves to this form of production. Parker’s film Lunch with Charles, for example, deals with the topic of immigration and resulting separation between a husband and wife. In spite of different approaches to production time-lines – Hong Kong producers tend to move faster from pre-production to project completion than Canadian producers – the film, none the less, benefited from a larger budget and additional exposure throughout Asia. British producer Nick Powell (The Crying Game, Little Voice) points out that co-productions are ideally based on ‘materials’ that naturally fit this mode.

You can't just say 'I've got this story set in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but I think it could be set in Halifax, Yorkshire’ … The most famous successes, especially in the low-budget films, have been very specific in terms of local character and colour of the places in which the films are set in. … I would have hesitations to move a story from Manchester
to Liverpool, or from Glasgow to Edinburgh, because they are different places in terms of character and people. (interview, 2000)

However, ‘natural’ co-productions are the exception rather than the rule, especially in television production. Most producers seek to collaborate solely for financial reasons, and content is created to fit the co-production mode. British producers seem to be interested in working with Canadian organisations to increase budgets, and to use Canadian locations because they can be ‘dressed up’ as US cities (British Council 2001). In addition, co-productions are suited for a particular genre:

There are particular genres such as horror, sci-fi that are perfect for co-production because they are not set in a particular place. The German-Canadian co-production Lexx works great because you never have to leave the studio set. (ibid.)

Co-productions rely on a global genre and narratives that are not culturally specific but can be adapted to international markets. The television series Lexx is based on a sci-fi plot: set in outer space, two men and a woman pursue a quest for a new home in the universe. Highlander’s immortal heroes and heroines encounter adventures throughout the world and centuries. A new television co-production between Canada and Australia, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Lost World, creates adventures in a prehistoric world. Another Canada-Australia television co-production, Guinevere Jones, features a teenage heroine as a reincarnation of a legendary Arthurian character who travels back in time to meet Merlin. Genres such as science fiction, adventure, horror and fairy tales are thus suited for co-production because of their global appeal and marketability.

Producing ‘Global Stories’

The increased collaboration between Canadian producers with European, Australian and Asian counterparts has led, in many instances, to content conversion and the creation of global genre. Many co-productions reflect styles and techniques of US films
and television programmes that through extensive global distribution have become a global blueprint for commercial productions (Straubhaar 1997). The co-produced television series *Lexx* (Episode: *Little Blue Planet*), and *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne* (Episode: *Southern Comfort*; see Figure 9.5) tend to produce at least one episode which relates to the US. The 2001/02 season of *Highlander: The Raven* goes as far as depicting an American flag in its opening scene. Co-productions reflect these popularised narratives and styles to make them easily transferable between countries and attractive for the US market. The adaptation of these global formats actually undermines the original intention for co-productions – to create regional competition for US cultural productions – and integrates them into a global market.

Many other co-productions are about ‘global stories’ that are defined neither by spatial nor temporal dimensions but occur ‘anywhere’ – out in space, in prehistoric times, or in changing locations and temporal dimensions. These global stories are useful because they can be shown in diverse cultural environments and markets. As Robert Wong, funding agent for British Columbia Film, explained:

I think producers that do international treaty co-productions are looking for global stories – stories that don’t necessarily pertain to our country. They may be set in Canada or outside Canada, but I don’t think it really matters too much. If you actually just change the country’s name, it wouldn’t make a difference. (Robert Wong, interview, 29 June 2000)

Canadian producers state that working on an international basis inevitably shifts the focus from Canadian content to an emphasis on global audience appeal:

This is a project I found, it was Irish. It is set in Ireland. … There’s really nothing Canadian to it at all. I saw it and liked it. And we put Dan Akroyd in it. He is Canadian, but overall it was Irish. So we immediately shot there. Plus the co-production treaty gives you an opportunity to maximize two countries … and also put together a cast that is going to have a global appeal. (Scott Kennedy, producer, interview, 22 June 2000)
The shift to global stories as a means to appeal to international audiences is problematic in the context of reduced funding for local and independent productions. In Canada, where local media have been traditionally dominated by foreign programmes, this is of real concern as many local issues – from First Nations topics to representation of diversity in Canadian society – are increasingly marginalised, and films and television programmes are saturated with commercial content and global stories aimed at international markets.

Initially, co-productions were seen as a means to improve and enhance film productions in countries with weak production industries. Even though co-productions are made around the world, activities are now especially pronounced in countries with stronger economies and viable production sectors (Taylor 1995: 414). The drive to compete internationally, on the one hand, and to protect regional markets, on the other, has led to increased co-production activity in Canada, Europe and Australia. Canadian co-producers collaborate especially with their English and French counterparts as they share the auteur tradition of European cinema. Moreover, from a European perspective, Canada is appealing since it exhibits North American sensibilities due to its proximity to the US.

European movies tend to be a little more melodramatic. They tend to be shot with a lot of wide lenses, longer shots, slower build-ups in terms of storyline … You don't need to have a car crash in the first 30 seconds. You can build characters and it actually works. Whereas in North America, if you don't have some action in the first minute or two, your audience is off to a different channel or walking out of a theater. (Kevin DeWalt, producer, interview, 15 June 2000)

Many producers complain about the loss of creative control when collaborating on a production (Hoskins and McFadyen 1993: 231). This compromise in technical, creative and stylistic means is probably inevitable when producing for international audiences.

People who make a production want to keep creative control of that production. When you take on a partner, there have to be compromises … I think that the natural reaction of anyone driven by their passion for
a particular story is to keep complete control; people that want to stay in business will look at marketing and the potential for making money to be able to make another show. (Tom Adair, President, BC Council of Film Unions, interview, 8 June 2000)

In addition to creative compromises, co-productions are also more expensive to produce. Some of the drawbacks include higher co-ordination costs such as long-distance travel and communications, and dealing with additional government bureaucracies. However, the potential for higher production dollars and access to additional markets outweigh these disadvantages, hence the rise of co-productions witnessed across recent years.

Global Stories: What's at Stake?

To understand better the relationship between Canadian co-productions and changing forms of media content, we can turn to a systematic and qualitative examination of co-production film and television programmes and their forms of output in comparison to locally produced films and television programmes. In this way we can see how international co-production delimits, shapes and inflects media representations and so can begin to appraise the influence of this in respect to cultural diversity, political representation and citizenship. A note on how we approach local and global culture is perhaps useful here.

Morley and Robins emphasise the necessity of local interaction and debate with global culture (1995: 41) and Robertson (1995) points to the ‘local’ as an aspect of the ‘global’ in respect of the inevitable exchange of concepts, social and cultural practices based on prior contact and migrations between and within countries. Too often notions of ‘pure’ culture have underpinned ideas of ‘cultural racism’ – the elevation of national myths and values to the exclusion of other cultures. Such ideas are untenable: ‘modern nations’ as Stuart Hall reminds us, ‘are all cultural hybrids’ (Hall 1992: 297). Therefore, inclusive definitions of culture are essential in a context of worldwide migration and diasporic cultures, and it is this definition that informs the present study. The point here is that rather than challenging international co-productions because they are not (by definition) local, we need to examine carefully their actual performance in
respect of representations of cultures, on the one hand, and their missed opportunity critically to address globalisation processes and issues, on the other hand.

For the purposes of this comparative study, 1,151 films and television programmes (compiled from catalogues from federal and provincial funding agencies, distributors and film festivals) were selected from the period 1990–2000 – the period that witnessed the most dramatic changes in the regulatory, economic and technical environment of film and television as well as the rise in international co-productions. This sample was then categorised according to the six following categories (Table 9.3).

Table 9.3 Categories of film and TV programmes

| Co-produced | (1) Films (8.25%) | (2) Television Drama (6.42%) | (3) Documentaries (5.12%) |
| Locally produced | (4) Films (14.24%) | (5) Television Drama (19.28%) | (6) Documentaries (46.54%) |

* The relative high percentage of documentaries needs to be understood within the context of Canadian local markets which consist of theatrical, broadcast and non-theatrical (educational video) sectors. Many local documentaries are never broadcast, but are used solely for educational purposes in schools and universities. Note: Per cent indicates relative proportion of each category from 1,151 sample.

In order to examine in more detail the possible differences of representation informing locally and co-produced programmes and films, thirty randomly selected titles – equally representative of the six categories above – were examined in terms of their local or ‘global’ reference and appeal using three key dimensions.

- 1. Main Character (costume/dress, speech/accent);
- 2. Place/Location (mise-en-scène, props/objects);
- 3. Plot/Story (time/historical setting, themes /issues, focus (of dialogue), treatment/development).

[p. 159 ↓ ] 1,941 scenes that comprised the films and programmes in this sample were then analysed and scored according to the above categories. A scene was defined as a series of continuous acts, in time and space, not broken or interrupted by the addition or departure of characters, or by a change in setting (Greenberg et al. 1980). These key categories of main character, place/location, plot/story, as well as their sub-categories, were next analysed according to a five-scale measure which defined a degree of local or global focus (Table 9.4).
Table 9.4 Five-scale measure establishing global or local focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>definitely, clearly local identification of character's heritage and place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of residence; the mention, visually or verbally, of place/location; plot/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>story based on historical facts; and/or local themes/issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>appears to be local, tentatively local. Depiction of place (no direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mention) but apparent through (1) place/location and local characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– for example, the red soil of Prince Edward Island and (2) plot/story and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>themes/issues, as in the case of a programme based on a novel, providing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intertextual references.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>neutral/conclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not identifiable in regards to (1) character and heritage, (2) place,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>location, and (3) plot/story, especially in the time/historical setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>category; for example, science fiction plots or adventure stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>appears to be not local (tentatively not local) Apparently non-Canadian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>locations identifiable in architecture, landscapes and props – the mise-en-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scene, and indication that characters are residents of another country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>definitely, clearly not local identification of character's heritage and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>place of residence; the mention, visually and verbally, of a different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>place/location providing the backdrop for the plot/story; themes/issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pertaining clearly to another place and historical events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparative study clearly indicates that co-productions have a greater global orientation than local independent productions. Both film and television co-productions featured more prominently in the *apparently not local* and *definitely not local* categories. Local independent productions, on the other hand, showed an *apparently local* and *definitely local* orientation. This was true for all main categories and their sub-elements (Figure 9.1).

**Figure 9.1 Mean scores for local and co-produced programmes**
Differences between media were also apparent. Co-produced television programmes scored more frequently on the appears to be not local and clearly not local scale than co-produced films (Figure 9.2). Co-produced television programmes were mainly of the science fiction (28.5 per cent) and adventure genres (42.8 per cent), whereas drama (14.8 per cent) and horror (14.8 per cent) genres were less frequent. Co-produced films, on the other hand, tended to be set in real-life locations – often more than one. In comparison, both local independent film and television productions clearly exhibited a local and culturally specific orientation.

Figure 9.2 Place/location mean scores for television and film

Co-produced drama and documentaries scored predominantly in the apparently not local and definitely not local categories. However, differences between genre became evident – drama was less specific in local and culturally specific orientation than documentaries. Drama tended to be based on fictitious narratives, whereas documentaries were set in real-life locations. Scores for co-produced documentaries reflected a split between a clearly local orientation and a global focus because at least two locations were featured. In contrast, local drama and documentaries showed a clear focus on local and culturally specific issues (Table 9.5).

Table 9.5 Summary of scores for both production modes
The scores highlight that co-productions are located predominantly in the 3–5 scale of *appears to be not local* to *definitely not local*, whereas local productions are more in the range of 1–3, *definitely local to appears to be local*. Differences between television and film are also apparent. Co-produced television scores dominate in the 3–5 range, whereas co-produced film are in the 3–4 range (also see Table 9.4: Five-scale measure).

Most programmes had received funding from federal and provincial agencies. Where applicable, programmes were predominantly aired during the evening prime-time hours, designated for programmes with Canadian content. Both co-productions and locally produced programmes were featured on public service broadcasting and commercial stations; however, local programmes were predominantly shown on Canada’s public service broadcaster, the CBC.
The analyses above have demonstrated how co-productions are more global in focus. Local productions, on the other hand, clearly exhibited a focus on local issues and often critically reflected on social topics and offered more representations of cultural diversity and difference. They portrayed First Nation's issues (North of 60, The Trickster), critically reflected on historical and social developments (Milgaard) and commented on the importance of community and political action (The Hanging Garden, The Last Streetfighter: The History of the Georgia Straight). Local productions also featured predominantly on public service broadcast stations, highlighting the importance of these outlets for local and independent producers.

To identify how co-production and local production practices differ and influence genre and narrative development, the study next explores how programme narratives create a global versus local focus, and how they represent cultural-specific and critical issues. In particular, the analyses identify how narratives transcend spatial and temporal dimensions (and therefore, minimise their local references, cultural specificity and political relevance), first in comparing two film productions (The Red Violin and The Hanging Garden), followed by two television dramas (The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne and Milgaard).

International co-produced programmes can often entail complex narrative constructions consisting of sub-plots which tie storylines together and which occur in several spatial and temporal dimensions. For example, The Red Violin (a tripartite film co-production between England, Canada and Italy), reveals such a multi-layered narrative. Here the story about a musical instrument allows for a multitude of spatial and temporal shifts as the violin travels from seventeenth-century Italy to twentieth-century Canada (Figure 9.3).

Figure 9.3 Co-produced feature film The Red Violin: narrative breakdown
The Red Violin’s narrative reflects cultural components of each participating co-producer; thus satisfying content requirements of participating countries. This film can be considered a ‘natural co-production’ – all the more perhaps in respect of its focus on music with its cross-cultural appeal. The narrative also revealed typical characteristics of co-productions as it transcended spatial and temporal dimensions.

[p. 163 ↓] In comparison, locally produced films tend to focus on one particular place. In the film The Hanging Garden, for instance, a small town in rural Nova Scotia remains a cultural anchor for the duration of the film. Celtic music, the idiosyncrasies of community and familial relations are all key elements in conveying the story. In spite of sub-plots and multiple narrative developments, the focus on one place and community is essential to the storyline and identity of its characters (see Figure 9.4).

Figure 9.4 Locally produced feature film The Hanging Garden: narrative I breakdown
In comparison to television co-productions, co-produced feature films are less tied to specific genre and tend to be situated in clearly defined locations. Co-produced television narratives, on the other hand, tend to be defined by movement through time and space to facilitate greater cross-cultural appeal and potential commercial success. Television narratives are also underscored by genre hybridisation and new programme formats which are developed for speciality channels and target audiences.

In the co-produced television drama series *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne* (a Canada-England co-production), a group of adventurers travel across continents and through centuries in a helium balloon combating the ‘League of Darkness’ – a conspiracy of powerful aristocrats dating back to the Middle Ages. Based loosely on the adventure stories by Jules Verne, the series borrows from a variety of genre – horror, adventure and science fiction – and changes locations and eras from episode to episode. From the outset, the co-producers sought to appeal to global audiences by keeping control over production: ‘We wanted to keep it international, because as soon as any one jurisdiction gets a hold of it, they turn it into their product and it kills it for the rest of the world’ (Rice-Barker 1998). [p. 164 ↓] This focus on international markets affects the series’ narratives that are filled with hybrid elements and digital effects.

In the episode ‘Southern Comfort’, the adventurers are thrown into the heart of the Civil War where they prevent ‘The League of Darkness’ from perpetuating slavery (Figure
The episode focuses on the struggle between good and evil (also the series' theme), and the personal relationships between the characters, especially the emotional ties between Phileas Fogg and Saratoga Brown.

**Figure 9.5 Co-produced television drama series The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne: narrative breakdown**

<p>| | | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph message drops its equilibrium</td>
<td>League of Darkness poses oppositional force</td>
<td>The Aurora crashes; causing further disruption</td>
<td>Verne and Passepartout on a quest to rescue equilibrium</td>
<td>Prometheus fights Aurora and Union army; disruption</td>
<td>Prometheus fights Aurora; Union army; disruption</td>
<td>Quest to rescue Brown falls</td>
<td>Prometheus is damaged; new equilibrium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Series sub-plot 1.** Fogg's and Brown's doomed love affair.

In contrast to television co-productions, local television programmes tend to focus on issues pertinent to Canadian society, its history and collective memory. For example, *Milgaard*, a docudrama about the wrongful conviction of David Milgaard, who spent twenty-three years in prison for a crime he did not commit, establishes a local focus from the beginning through highlighting locations throughout Western Canada. The story is part of Canada's history, and *Milgaard's* critical stance adds a new viewpoint to the collective memory of Canadians.

The narrative's opening scene depicts David Milgaard dancing as a free man outside a diner in British Columbia, anticipating the final scene in the same location – a circular construction typical for television. The narrative then looks [p. 165 ↓] back at different stages of Milgaard's life: his arrest, his time in prison and, finally, the reopening of his legal case leading to his release (Figure 9.6).
Television drama for local markets tend to identify place, visually and verbally, from the beginning and develop a narrative anchored in that location. They feature narratives based on local topics that reflect critically on historical or contemporary issues of concern. They also tend to be based on more ‘realistic’ themes, and are spatially and temporally bound, rather than featuring genre from the science fiction or adventure category.

In many cases local productions also have a global dimension by connecting issues, values and ideas between cultural diaspora – especially when they address sub-cultural themes (such as First Nations topics, women’s issues etc.). The narrative analyses, therefore, revealed that local and independently produced programmes were more critical and reflective of contemporary conditions than co-productions with their global market orientation and resulting non-critical commercial narratives. Co-produced narratives were structured around [p. 166 ↓] genres that are spatially and temporally non-specific. Science fiction, adventure stories and fairy tales, therefore, predominated in this production mode. In contrast, local narratives highlighted the importance of place, cultural identity and collective memory. They focused on specific topics that are of social or historical interest and offered new perspectives and insights.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this case study of Canadian TV and film international co-production points to a number of key findings. Co-productions have increased over recent years in
direct response to changing market conditions and regulatory environments. Squeezed for funds and encountering increased international competition, producers – both commercial and public service – have deliberately sought new sources of funding and markets. Canadian international co-productions have increased dramatically across the period 1990–2000 in response to increasingly deregulated markets and heightened international competition. With a view to winning new sources of funding as well as finding international markets for their productions, the films and programmes produced in these new forms of international production arrangements have tended to assume ‘global’ characteristics. That is, they tend to assume forms that are relatively culturally indistinct and which eschew political content. Some genres are preferred over others – drama, adventure, science fiction, documentary – and these tend to focus on human relationships and emotional storylines to increase their universal appeal. Narrative structures are also affected in terms of their temporal organisation and spatial reference. These features combine to marginalise ‘local’ production and the representation of local issues and concerns, whether played out in local, national, regional, international or global arenas. They also tend to displace cultural representations of diversity and difference. Films and TV programmes produced by local producers, though increasingly in short supply, demonstrate a capacity to provide a space for public engagement with local issues and concerns and the representation of cultural diversity. In short, the market-driven orientation and appeals of international co-productions contribute to the undermining of that public space deemed central for critical reflection, cultural representation and public deliberation. This erosion of the public sphere is injurious for democracy and public well-being.

We need to shift the current emphasis away from film and broadcast communication as culture as commodity to culture as public good. This can only be achieved if we manage to sustain and support a broad range of cultural institutions and production arrangements. Stable funding structures for independent productions and public service broadcasting are, therefore, essential in maintaining an accessible cultural infrastructure. Public policy should ‘promote cultural development because it is essential to democratic public life’ (Raboy et al. 1994: 310), and because it can prevent media monopolisation limiting diversity and plurality.

The increase of co-productions, as we have seen, is linked to changing production practices and the globalisation of media organisations. While co-productions have
increased, the commitment to local independent productions has decreased. Co-productions with their current financial structure and commercial market orientation cannot be permitted to replace local productions.

However, co-productions could be developed into a vehicle for local independent producers – as was originally envisioned for this production mode – to collaborate on international programmes that critically reflect on contemporary issues of local, national and international concern. Collaborative programmes about global issues, such as cultural diversity and the hybridisation of cultures, could yet provide insight into the changing natures of globalised societies. New narratives could be found to open up discussions about the environment, media commercialisation, the World Trade Organization, and other issues of international concern. The development of new technologies, such as digital video and web-casting, also provides accessible venues for production and dissemination. Official commitment to support and provide open access to a multitude of diverse media channels is, therefore, an essential aspect of the successful integration of old and new production methods within democratically inspired cultural frameworks. The future does not have to be confined to an extension of the present.

Chapter Summary

- International co-productions in Canada, as in many other countries, have increased dramatically in recent years, reflecting changing market conditions and processes of deregulation, privatisation, conglomeration and convergence.
- International TV and film co-productions are principally designed to secure sources of new production funding, new markets, enhanced revenue and international product exposure.
- International TV and film co-productions tend to prefer certain genres over others – drama, adventure stories, science fiction, documentaries – as well as human interest content and inflections. Narrative structures are also affected in terms of spatial and temporal dimensions and their local reference.
• Local productions have become increasingly marginalised in comparison to international co-productions and the importation of foreign products. In consequence, there is less representation of local concerns and issues and opportunities for engaged debate and deliberation conducted in relation to these at local, regional and global levels.

• International co-productions informed by the logic of *culture as commodity* rather than the pursuit of *culture as public good* have tended to erode the public sphere of engaged citizenship, critical reflection and the representation of global issues and concerns.

Notes


1 The terms ‘local’ and ‘global’ used in this discussion are defined as follows. **Local** refers to cultural specificity of locations, persons and social arrangements, underpinning identity and engaged citizenship. **Global** refers to the increasing interconnection of the economy, polity and culture defined predominantly within a commercial paradigm and consumer culture.

2 Canadian content productions and content rules stipulate a Canadian presence in film and television programmes. To qualify as a Canadian content production, key positions have to be filled by the director, writer, producer or actor(s). Co-productions are exempted from general content rules. However, as long as they follow overall treaty guidelines, they none the less qualify as Canadian content productions.

3 Deregulation of media industries refers to new regulations based on economic and entrepreneurial imperatives rather than the public interest.

**Privatisation** refers to the dismantling, sale or restructuring of public organisations along commercial and entrepreneurial lines.

**Conglomeration** or the merging of media companies results in the control over production, distribution and exhibition of media (vertical integration), as well as
ownership and control across a variety of media and related industries (horizontal integration), by a few media giants. **Convergence** – *Convergence of technologies* refers to the ability to transfer digital information across a variety of platforms. *Convergence of content* refers to content that tends to be based on global stories, styles and techniques popularised predominantly by US film and television productions.

4 **Public sphere**, a concept developed by Jürgen Habermas, constitutes a space of social life that is determined neither by market forces nor the state. It is a free forum, accessible to all citizens for the exchange of ideas, information and debate and underscores the formation of public opinion and citizenship.

[p. 169 ↓ ]

5 **Transcending spatial and temporal dimensions**: A narrative that is set in more than one place or era, and/or in which characters move from one spatial and/or temporal dimension to another, either within one film or television episode or, with regard to television series, from one weekly episode to another. Interestingly, these types of narratives reflect concepts such as time-space distanciation which relates to the disembedding of social relations from local contexts and their restructuring across time and space (cf. A. Giddens’ globalisation theory).

6 **First Nations**: Aboriginal or Native Canadian.

7 **Auteur**: The focus on the creator and director of a production rather than the actors/stars.

8 **The Last Streetfighter: The History of the Georgia Straight**: A local documentary chronicling the turbulent history of Canada’s oldest alternative newspaper. **North of 60**: A local television series which revolves around the lives of members of a First Nation community, addressing controversial issues from conflicts with non-natives to a history of oppression. **The Trickster**: A local documentary by Gordon McLennan features an aboriginal artist, Edward Poitras, and his works amidst discussion about cultural hybridisation, identity and native spirituality.

9 **Magic realism**: the combination of realism and surrealism, dreamlike or fantastic elements in a narrative.
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221587.n9