Global Formats and Canadian Television:  
The Case of Deal or No Deal

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ABSTRACT  This article discusses the circulation of format television, with a particular emphasis on the Canadian version of the program Deal or No Deal. It argues for the importance of circulation as a concept for understanding the ways in which format television programs—and other forms of popular culture—travel in different cultural contexts. Through the case of Deal we can see how delays, interruptions, re-purposing, and reframing of artifacts are part of the daily rhythms that characterize the circulation of cultural works on a global scale and serve as a possible analytical opening for appreciating the flows of culture that have historically existed between the United States and Canada.

KEYWORDS  Television; Canada; Circulation; Globalization

RéSUMÉ Cet article examine la circulation des formats télévisés, mettant un accent particulier sur la version canadienne de l’émission Deal or No Deal. Il affirme l’importance de la circulation pour comprendre comment les formats télévisés—et d’autres formes de culture populaire—diffèrent selon le milieu culturel. Avec Deal or No Deal, on peut voir comment les retards, interruptions, adaptations et recadrages font partie intégrante des rythmes quotidiens qui caractérisent la circulation des œuvres culturelles à l’échelle mondiale et offrent une ouverture possible pour l’analyse de ces flux culturels qui ont longtemps existé entre les États-Unis et le Canada.

MOTS CLÉS  Télévision; Canada; Circulation; Mondialisation

The television show Deal or No Deal is a modern-day take on the shell game. A contestant attempts to find the largest amount of money from a number of briefcases. Some of the cases contain small amounts; others have larger sums. After selecting a briefcase the contestant opens the other briefcases, often showcased by models, revealing their contents one at a time. The process of discovery is occasionally interrupted by a phone call from a “banker” who offers the contestant the opportunity to “sell” their briefcase for a sum of money. That amount is determined by probability: the more likely the contestant is holding a briefcase containing a large amount of money, the higher the offer from the banker. Toward the end of the round the contestant has to make a decision: either make the deal to sell the case or continue opening briefcases until discovering whether or not they made the right deal. The decision-making process plays out slowly, with interviews of the contestant’s family

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members of friends in attendance, guest appearances by local celebrities, and advertisements dragging out the suspense.

*Deal* was originally developed by the Dutch production company Endemol in 2004, and there have been adaptations in more than 60 different countries, from Albania to Zimbabwe. If *Wikipedia* is to be believed, the show has recently premiered in Costa Rica, Egypt, and Iran. Canadian audiences have seen numerous versions of the program. The American version aired on NBC and was simultaneously broadcast on Global. Two “Canadian editions” of the program followed: *Deal or No Deal Canada* aired six episodes in 2007 for English-language audiences, while *Le Banquier* offered a French-language version to Québec’s television audiences from 2007 to 2009. However these are not the only versions that many Canadians have seen since the show began. Numerous versions of the program air in other languages that are part of the programming of international satellite channels and there are versions of the show that air in syndication and *Deal* exists in a variety of other media, from an electronic board game to lottery tickets, as well as in various online forms.

While little has been written about *Deal or No Deal* within communication and media studies—indeed, the same could be said for the genre of game shows as a whole—much has been made about the international flows of format programs within studies of contemporary television (for example see Bielby & Harrington, 2008; Moran, 1998, 2009; Moran & Keane, 2004; Oren & Shahaf, 2012; Zwaan & de Bruin, 2012). Recent work has taken up this topic of format television in the Canadian context, with discussions on the *Idol* franchise and the proliferation of Canadian versions of lifestyle television programs, like makeover shows (Baltruschat, 2009; Boyd, 2012; Matheson, 2009). Such work follows a similar line of argument: That the movement of format television, a “global” aspect of culture, is based in large part on its ability to flatter cultural and national difference. This is because, as textual forms, format television programs are incomplete by design; they travel as shells of programs, with basic designs, rules, and regulations, but then offer numerous opportunities for the addition of localized talent, content, and sponsorship. The processes by which format television programs come to appear on the airwaves are usually characterized by a linguistic vocabulary having to do either with translation or with adaptation. In this article I suggest that these processes can best be understood with a broader conceptual vocabulary than that offered in the literature.

My reason for taking this approach is that in Canada the re-purposing, or localizing, of the text is really only half of the story, and this does not adequately account for the role played by media formats within the Canadian media landscape both historically and in the present day. In the introduction to their recent collection on format television, Oren and Shahaf (2012) note the importance of “grappling with the globally shifting structure of television consumption and reception” (p. 4). One might say this is something Canadian television audiences have experienced for some time now, even if such grappling has been either undocumented or poorly understood as part of the wider poor treatment afforded to television in Canada itself as an object of study. Canadian television has always been a hybrid system, one that mixes Canadian programming with material that comes from elsewhere. We might boldly say that
Canadian television was always a globalized system, since there was never any real belief that it would be an entirely Canadian system, only that a certain percentage of the total flows of television were to be Canadian in content and character, as we all know. With that in mind, in what follows I want to use *Deal or No Deal* as an opportunity to reflect upon some broader dynamics present in the study of television in Canada, as much as an understanding of the nature of how format moves from place to place on a global level.

What will become apparent is that the practice of “Canadianizing” format television represents one of the unintended consequences of key aspects of Canadian media policy. In return for Canadian ownership of television networks comes the ability for those networks to import Canadian editions of programs created elsewhere and produced by domestic production companies. The tendency towards what we call “import substitution” has historically produced a considerable amount of anxiety, often associated with the production of “derivative” cultural works, with the “Americanization” of Canadian culture and the decline of authentic forms of Canadian cultural expression. Yet the ability to import and re-purpose global texts for the Canadian marketplace has benefits—providing employment, generating revenue for independent production companies, and helping broadcasters meet their content restrictions. So we can say that format television shows do a considerable amount of “work” for national media systems that the literature on adaptation has been largely unable to address.

To illustrate, I provide a brief overview of the literature on format television and suggest how that literature might benefit from recent work on the concept of circulation that has been present in other discussions in cultural theory dealing with cultural movement. Then I turn to the case of *Deal* to draw attention to how the initial exposure to the show, viewing the American version on a Canadian network, is a prominent feature of the Canadian television experience. I then point to the role played by local production companies and ancillary agencies, such as board game manufacturers and lottery corporations, in acting as “envoys”—to use Albert Moran’s term (2010, p. 111)—who purchase the territorial rights to broadcast the show in Canada or license the format for some other purpose, before setting about adapting the show for Canadian audiences. I note the ways in which production companies in Canada frequently import and adapt programs from elsewhere, in part to generate revenues to support the production of works for smaller, locally based audiences. Finally, I note the role that is played by television critics, who help to circulate public talk about shows like *Deal* within broader discourses of television in general, and of English-Canadian nationalism in particular.

**Deal or No Deal and global format television**

*Deal or No Deal* is a typical example of the kind of television programming that Justin Malbon and Albert Moran term “format TV” (Moran & Malbon, 2006). By this term the authors referred to the fact that the show’s basic elements (its rules and regulations, its theme songs, its production information and set design, etc.) are developed by a production company and then licensed out to various entities, either production studios or broadcasters, to be adapted for local audiences. From reality shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* to talent contests such as *Idol* and *The X Factor*, and from
comedy and drama series like *The Office* and *Ugly Betty* to game shows like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, formats continue to represent a popular form of television—one that delivers steady profits to broadcasters around the world anxiously adapting to a media environment characterized by dwindling and fragmented audiences, unstable advertising revenues, and competition from new digital platforms.\(^3\) The popularity of formats, of course, is not restricted to television; as Jonathan Burston (2009) points out, the globalization of live theatre has created an environment of “recombinant” productions, adding local talent to mega-musicals such as *The Lion King* and, only occasionally, allowing for local content or colour to be added.\(^4\)

Some have argued that the circulation of formats is part of a longer story about the globalization of a hegemonic and homogenized monoculture, one that erodes the potential for local forms of expression (see Gordon, 2009). Recently, a number of scholars have countered this kind of claim, characterizing it as the latest iteration of arguments inspired by cultural imperialism, by drawing attention to the historical, cultural, and industrial components involved in the adaptation of format programs. Others argue that the global trade in formats is not new and that television shows have travelled and been adapted for some time (see Moran, 2008). Still others, like Kai Hafez (2007), note that the current demand for content means that countries once marginalized in the international television flows—like Colombia or the Netherlands, for example—now represent key players in the global format trade, producing texts that travel in ways previously unimagined, and that once-powerful television nations, like the United States, are now behaving like Canada, importing television from elsewhere to serve domestic demand and assuage the anxieties of nervous broadcasting executives (Hafez, 2007). Other scholars interested in processes of production have pointed out how the standardized elements of formats and local adjustments often exist in tension with each other (Baltruschat, 2009).

Whether through cross-cultural studies of formats in different settings or through comparative studies of individual programs in different contexts (Beeden & de Bruin, 2010; Hetsroni, 2005; Kjus, 2009; Moran, 1998), such work reveals the extent to which the adaptation of those programs is intimately connected to societal, cultural, and audience expectations that are, themselves, products of what Moran (2009, p. 122) has termed “national persistence.” Moran’s statement mirrors a sentiment now held throughout both the communication and sociological fields that even if nations are “imagined,” invented, or constructed entities, they continue to matter not only within the geopolitical sphere but also as a way of framing social experience (Calhoun, 2007).

That said, though, it remains a fact that some formats are more successfully adapted in different countries than others, and that others may not be adapted at all (see Smith, 2011). To appreciate this, then, one needs to spend more time not on the production end or on the reception end, but rather in traffic, making sense of the ways in which the values of social forms gain meaning and value within circulatory processes, not at the end of them. In other words, an appreciation of the circulation of format television—in this case, in Canada—is an appreciation of the ways in which format television comes to fit within Canada: the ways the format itself, and those
who make, distribute, and circulate it, come to manage and balance its movement within Canada.

A strain of cultural theory has emerged to take up questions having to do with the circulation of culture. Much of that work has emerged from the fields of anthropology and social theory, as well as in cultural studies to interrogate the uncritical acceptance of modes of distribution as simply pipelines through which culture moves from one place to the other (see Lee & LiPuma, 2002). The tendency, particularly within media and cultural studies, then, has been to focus either on the locus of production or on the various modes of reception. As Will Straw (2010) explains, an attention to circulation is a move away from “a concern with cultural forms which sees them principally as bearers (however mobile) of meaning” (p. 23). As an “anti-interpretive” intervention, in Straw’s terms, studies of circulation should then be preoccupied with the interrelationship between cultural forms, and address the conditions under which they occupy social space, interconnect, and move in relation to each other.

These assertions for a move away from textual analysis resonate in important ways when it comes to the study of Canadian television. Within Canada, the notion of circulation is a concept rich with nationalist implications. Indeed, the overlapping conceptions of communication and circulation are particularly resonant within the Canadian context. Observers like Maurice Charland (1986) coined the term “technological nationalism” in order to draw attention to the ways technological systems that encourage the movement of goods and media have been used to imagine a nation both in nationalist and in technological terms. Many others have noted the power of trains or public broadcasting within the Canadian imagination for precisely this purpose, and the role of the state in intervening to ensure that both transportation and communication could cover Canada’s vast expanses. However, as Kevin Dowler (1996) once noted, the same technologies that promoted movement of people and ideas within Canada were also used to encourage movement in and out of Canada. For Dowler, the effect of this condition—heavy government infrastructural involvement that facilitated easy access from outside—meant that “culture,” and not the economy or the military, would have to serve as the basis for Canada’s national security.

Since communication has always been grounded in profoundly nationalist terms, the question of how things move within Canada can be seen, in my view, to reflect a tension between sovereignty and dependence. Encouraging movement within Canada, such as ready and easy access to public broadcasting across the country, is seen as essential for the nation in “sharing its stories.” Ensuring the free flow of goods from elsewhere, of course, can be seen as something that threatens the nation, not only exposing it to values from elsewhere, but also to the vagaries of global capitalism, where jobs, local economies, and, indeed, local values reside.

Three brief examples will have to suffice here as examples of remedies to the promise of free and easy movement on something as serious as sovereignty. Tariffs make the importation of goods more expensive, and they also redirect the value of goods toward something that is beneficial both for the producer from outside and those who bring the goods into the country. Ownership restrictions ensure that those who are deemed to own key national assets—broadcasting and telecommunication
are two examples—possess Canadian citizenship. Finally, content regulations serve to
ensure that a certain percentage of Canada’s broadcasting schedule remains available
for Canadian talent and productions.Crudely speaking, what this means is that im-
porting material from elsewhere must be converted into something that benefits
Canadian society in some way. Various cultural forms are subjected to a series of delays
and substitutions in order that they may serve in the national interest. In other words,
part of the nationalizing of global content comes through the power of interruption of
global forms in order that they may be re-purposed not only for local audiences, but
also to the benefit of other cultural intermediaries.

One can see, then, how the ability of cultural institutions to interrupt simultaneity,
or to re-purpose cultural objects to appear simultaneously but after a delay, is a vital
feature of the logics of nationalism. Benedict Anderson’s (1991) famous observation
on the way the shared experience of reading the daily newspaper creates a situation
of “simultaneous consumption” of what he called “one-day best-sellers” (p. 35) tends
to uncritically consider the circulation of those texts as themselves subject to various
cultural logics. Of course, the circulation of media texts—from newspapers to the
Internet—is very much determined by a range of social actors. As Sandra Gabriele
(2010) has pointed out, the circulation of American Sunday newspapers in Canadian
border cities was severely limited during the early years of the twentieth century, a
product of heavy lobbying by religious organizations who viewed media consumption
as a violation of religious observations.

In the world of digital culture, one is well aware of the ability of one’s access, or
ability to circulate messages, being hindered either by repressive governments that
can shut down the World Wide Web traffic or by traffic management practices imposed
by Internet service providers. However, as I have written elsewhere (Wagman &
Urquhart, in press), Canadians understand these practices intimately, as their ability
to access websites such as Pandora and Hulu is blocked because an IP address indicates
that they are in Canada, or where Canadianized versions of iTunes or Netflix pale in
comparison to what is offered in the United States, a function of licensing agreements
and copyright rules. As we will see in the case of Deal, incorporating a conceptual lan-
guage around circulation in addition to the terminology that has to do with adaptation
would be useful because it would mark a move away from questions of identity and
adaptation and toward questions about the mechanisms by which national broadcast-
ing systems engage with and incorporate media flows from elsewhere.

**Deal or No Deal, American edition**
The first version of Deal that many Canadians saw did not come from the United States.
The American adaptation of Deal aired in prime time at various times from December
19, 2005, to May 18, 2009, on NBC. The show’s host, Howie Mandel, is a Canadian co-
median now based in the United States, famous for physical comedy, for his long-time
role on the popular prime-time drama St. Elsewhere (1982–1988 on NBC), and for his
recurring appearances on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno (1992–2009 on NBC). The
program Deal's various components involve a number of product placement oppor-
tunities and chances for various components of the American star system to be in-
cluded into the show itself. Telecommunication sponsors like AT&T sponsored the
call from the banker, and the show has featured a number of prominent stars and celebrities, including a videotaped appearance by then president George W. Bush.

The show began with a five-night run in prime time between December 19 and 25. It was an immediate hit with audiences, and media outlets trumpeted the fact that the first week of programs attracted over 11 million viewers in the United States. These were uncharacteristically strong audience figures for NBC, which had been experiencing sagging audience numbers since ending its run as the dominant American television network, a development precipitated by the decline of long-time successful shows such as *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. After the show’s initial success, NBC ordered another run of *Deal* episodes, which would air the following March, after the network’s coverage of the Winter Olympics in Beijing. Its return episode, in March 2006, attracted over 13 million viewers (Arthur, 2006).

Aspects of *Deal* are reminiscent of a number of older game shows that aired on U.S. television. Arguably the most famous was *Let’s Make a Deal*, which aired on NBC and ABC from 1963 to 1977 and then, in various forms since then, into the present day, featuring—until recently—another Canadian television game show host, Monty Hall. The show featured contestants competing for prizes and then determining whether or how to get a better deal (for an extended discussion, see Hoerschelmann, 2006). It bears noting too that *Deal’s* emergence came on the heels of the emergent phenomenon of prime-time game shows, beginning with shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (1999–2002 on ABC) and *The Weakest Link*, shows which, like *Deal*, continue in syndication during the daytime to greater or lesser degrees. The show’s original rollout of five nights mirrored the way *Millionaire* was rolled out to U.S. and Canadian audiences on ABC.

The American edition of *Deal or No Deal* also garnered large audiences in Canada. The first week of programming attracted 1.5 million Canadians, according to the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, the Canadian equivalent of the Nielsen ratings. These numbers made *Deal* the fourth-highest-rated show in Canada that week, behind three versions of the CSI franchise (*CSI, CSI: Miami, CSI: New York*) and ahead of shows such as *House, Criminal Minds*, and the highest-rated Canadian television show, the CTV evening news, a national newscast airing on the other private network (BBM, 2005). When the show returned to air in March of 2006, Canadian audiences continued to watch. Such success continued throughout the show’s run on American prime time. By the end of 2006, the show remained in the top 10; its 1.5 million viewers outdrew two different Law and Order programs as well as the popular Hockey Night in Canada broadcast (BBM, 2006). The years 2007, 2008, and 2009 delivered similar audience figures.

The experience of watching the American version of *Deal* is important to our discussion as it largely mimics the experience Canadian audiences have when it comes to watching television. Canadians routinely view television by watching it on at least two different channels, the American affiliate station and the Canadian station that owns the Canadian rights. For example, in the case of *Deal*, the program was available simultaneously on NBC affiliates located close to the Canadian border (in places like Watertown, New York; Bellingham, Washington; and Detroit, Michigan) as well as the Global Television Network, one of two major private Canadian television networks.
The simultaneity of the broadcast is what is significant here, since Canadian broadcasts have the right to simulcast the U.S. signal and to replace the commercials intended for American audiences with ads directed at Canadian audiences. In other words, Canadians may often watch an American television program like Deal on an American station, but what they watch on that station is different than what audiences on the other side of the border watch, because the commercials are lifted out and replaced by Canadian ones. But there is more to this story. The viewer’s experience of watching a program like House on Global, for example, is marked by the embossed network logo on the screen, promotions for other programs, occasional alerts for missing children, and of course, advertising. Any attempt to stream television programming from the websites of American networks always serves as a reminder of the dominance of location and the politics of copyright even in virtual spaces.

The logic for simultaneous substitution is simple. The Canadian broadcaster secures the rights to air the American show and then sells advertising to profit through the exploitation of those rights. Since the program may attract a large audience, a company based in Canada or interested in reaching the Canadian audience may see it fit to communicate to this audience. In addition, though, simultaneous substitution is reflective of a particular logic of Canada’s broadcasting policy, in which broadcasters are given the rights to simulcast and substitute programs from other places—and to profit from doing so—in order to satisfy two elements of their broadcasting licence. First, a portion of a broadcasting outfit’s total revenues must go toward programs that support the production of Canadian content programming. Second, the broadcaster must devote a certain percentage of the programming day to content that qualifies as Canadian. A third element of Canada’s broadcasting policy, one which restricts the ownership of broadcasting operations to Canadians, produces a different kind of simultaneous substitution, the “Canadian edition” of cable and specialty television networks, like Food Television Canada and the Discovery Channel Canada. These stations are owned and operated by Canadian broadcasting companies that carry most of the content from the American parent company, adding locally-produced programs to satisfy specific Canadian content requirements placed upon them by the broadcasting regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

**Deal or No Deal, Canadian edition**

After Canadian audiences had been watching the American version of Deal for more than a year, a local edition aired on February 4, 2007, just after the Super Bowl. The first episode opened with a tight shot of the soul-patched visage of Howie Mandel, recruited to host the U.S. version, against the illuminated buildings of Toronto’s downtown business district. Mandel opened by telling viewers that although many of them might have watched the show before, none had actually been able to compete for the top prize of one million dollars. However, this was about to change. “Now it’s your turn,” he announced, before adding a distinctive inflection to the show’s signature question—“Deal or no deal, Canada?” The show would comprise a grand total of six episodes, airing over one week, before Global determined that it would not continue to produce new episodes. Instead, they announced that the week’s programs would
be reprised on TVtropolis, the network’s specialty television station that specialized in syndicated comedies and game shows.

As is usually the case with adaptations of format programs, the Canadian edition of *Deal* was a production that used a crew comprised of Canadian workers and crew members from Endemol. It also featured contestants and models representing the different regions of Canada, a stage developed in the shape of a maple leaf, viewer contests, chances for product placements (such as a phone up to the banker sponsored by a local telecommunications firm, Rogers), and the insertion of Canadian dollar amounts—including the one- and two-dollar coins into the winnings. One of the key features of *Deal* is the opportunity to insert local celebrities into the show’s narrative. Contestants usually identify themselves in some distinctive way—as hockey fans in the Canadian case—allowing producers to insert relevant figures into the show, such as former Toronto Maple Leaf star Darryl Sittler. The version of *Deal* airing in Québec works the same way and has included a number of celebrities produced from the province’s noted star system, including one episode featuring Céline Dion and her manager, René Angélil, who played host and banker, respectively. The show had astoundingly high ratings; the January 24 debut episode attracted 1.91 million viewers, 55% of the Québec TV audience (Kucharsky, 2007).

The production company behind the English-Canadian edition of *Deal*, Insight Productions, represents the perfect example of the “Canadianizing agent” mentioned earlier. The company has made a name for itself recently for its successful adaptations of format shows including the *Idol* franchise, where they buy or share the licensing rights with a format producer, and adapt the format in such a way that make the final product in line with those exigencies laid out by the rights holder as well as the requirements of Canadian broadcast regulators, which often consider such programs as satisfactory to meet Canadian content programming quotas.

The importation of television formats is a vital part of the survival strategies for many independent production companies in Canada in much the same way as it is for broadcasters. Television formats often serve to generate profits that then can be used, ostensibly, to produce programming aimed at addressing the local market or work that may be more speculative or experimental in nature. While the same producer of the Canadian edition of *Deal* also produces a number of format adaptations for the English-Canadian marketplace, including *Canadian Idol*, *Top Chef Canada*, *Project Runway Canada*, and *How to Look Good Naked Canada*, these shows are complemented by shows made for local or smaller audiences, such as a full slate of specials featuring figure skaters, Canadian singers such as Jann Arden and Joni Mitchell, and drama and comedy shows for Canadian broadcasters. They even produce a program honouring new inductees into Canada’s Walk of Fame and provide coverage of the Juno Awards, a program honouring the best in Canadian music. Indeed, the French version of *Deal*, *Le Banquier*, was produced by the Québec-based firm Productions J, a firm started by Julie Snyder, a major celebrity within Québec television. Like Insight Productions, Productions J has produced other format television programs, such as *Star Academie*, but they too also produce a number of shows specifically for the Québécois marketplace, particularly *spectacles* involving Québécois musical acts whom
it represents, as well as industry events such as the Gala Artis, the annual awards show honouring the best in Québécois television.

Of course, it is not only in television where adaptations and Canadian editions take place. Students in high schools and universities are well aware that many textbooks are available in a “Canadian edition,” and, of course, there exists the Canadian edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, complete with words that are “distinctively Canadian.” A range of consumer products are sold in the form of “Canadian editions.” Board games, for example, are sold as the “Canadian edition,” featuring rules and instructions—and game content—that appears in both of Canada’s official languages. Companies like Irwin Toy of Toronto and Somerville Industries, based in London, Ontario, profited through the distribution of games based on television shows like *Starsky and Hutch* for the Canadian market. Both Michael Sawyer (1987) and Bart Beaty (1997) have noted that a dollar crisis in the late 1940s closed the Canadian border for the importation of comic books, forcing companies either to cut deals with Canadian printers who would import the plates and print them on Canadian paper, as in the case of the Superior company, or to adapt the American version in such a way as to add Canadian content. In an article about the comic book publisher Albert Kanter, Sawyer (1987) discussed how, to access the Canadian market banned for his Classic Comics series of abridged classic novels like *The Three Musketeers*, Kanter would have someone in Canada produce the comics, which contained most of the same material as in the American edition, supplemented with “material pertaining to Canadian heroes written by someone from one of the major Toronto newspaper firms” (p. 6). Others have also noted the case of the magazine industry, in which, until recently, magazines such as *Reader’s Digest* would produce Canadian editions featuring the same articles as those featured in the U.S. edition, but with an added article from a Canadian publication, such as *Macleans*. In each of these cases, the Canadian edition of the cultural artifact serves as a reminder of the fact that, as Straw points out, “Canadian cultural mediators almost invariably do their work with an explicit understanding that the Canadian cultural artifact is assembled from a particular ratio of domestic to imported materials” (Straw, 2004, p. 188).

A final point here concerns the expansion of the *Deal* game outside the television show itself. As Henry Jenkins (2006) and Jonathan Gray (2009) have suggested, a prominent feature of contemporary media franchises is how elements of the narrative are spread across a number of different media platforms and how such franchises engage with fans. Su Holmes (2008) recently observed that the expansion of quiz shows to subsidiary forms, such as lottery tickets, board games, and Internet sites, represents the extension of what we now call “participatory culture” (pp. 144–147). Such brand extensions also expand the value of the intellectual property of the format itself. In the case of *Deal*, Endemol operates a gaming division charged with profiting from the sale of its games to toy manufacturers in different countries, such as the version of the *Deal* electronic board game for North America produced by a Canadian company, iTToys, and most recently, through the licensing of the *Deal or No Deal* scratch-and-win lottery game, once available across Canada through licensing agreements signed between Endemol Games and provincial gaming authorities.
In a discussion of British television advertising, Renee Dickason (2000) pointed out how advertisements for lotteries on television typically stress “the possibility of winning (it could be you) and the idea of the Lottery as a national game, more loosely associated with the notions of identity and heritage” (p. 143). Such a statement reveals two important things: first, the ways in which lotteries blend individual winning with national purposes, and second, the ways in which lotteries provide revenues for television through advertising. However, lotteries are of benefit not only through advertising: many networks traditionally offered free television time to lotteries to broadcast the nightly draws, itself a means for drawing audiences, in hopes that they will stay on the channel for the next program on the schedule, usually the nightly news. That said, the presence of Deal in lottery tickets also locates the circulation of the game and format to an entirely different network of circulation, one tied to convenience stores, gas stations, newspaper kiosks, and supermarkets. Indeed, the presence of online games and “apps” played on mobile devices offers to extend the circulation of cultural works like Deal in new and interesting ways by placing it alongside the routines and rhythms of everyday life.

**English-Canadian television criticism and format framing**

A large body of recent scholarship has taken into account the constitutive role of cultural critics. Such work builds in part around concerns over the way artworks become valorized and framed as such through popular forms of communication, such as newspaper or magazine criticism (Bielby, Moloney, & Ngo, 2005; Janssen, 1997; Lotz, 2008). As Janssen, Verboord, and Kuipers (2008) explain, “through their selective and evaluative activities they publicly confirm, modify, or reject the ways in which cultural producers position their products on the market” (p. 721). More importantly, they argue that “coverage of international arts and culture is not merely indicative of the nature and volume of cultural imports, but it also signals elites’ awareness of foreign culture” (p. 721) and underline the role that elites play in appreciating the dynamics of transnational circuits of culture. Television critics, in particular, must tread a delicate line between competing discourses of art and industry. As Amanda Lotz (2008) maintains, since television is both an artistic and a commercial form, the discourse of television criticism often blends forms of discourse that, in other forms of cultural criticism, remain separate.

One of the features of television criticism in Canada has been that the distinction between art discourses and industrial ones has been conceived in nationalistic terms, particularly when the discussion pertains to comparisons between Canadian and American popular culture. In other words, American television is rarely presented in a manner that mixes language about aesthetics, narrative style, and so on, but is often framed in a moralistic language, especially when the subject pertains to the differences with Canadian television. Canadian television is often discussed in the context of the ways it differs from American television. This can take one of two forms: either discussions that draw attention to features of the show’s plot or aesthetic which differ from American produced programming, or those which castigate Canadian broadcasters and producers for making programming that looks “too American” or tries to look like work produced in the U.S.
A few examples will have to suffice for this discussion, even though a more thorough account of Canadian television criticism is necessary. Morris Wolfe (1976) a prominent television critic in the 1970s and ’80s, considered the difference between Canadian and American television in terms of “jolts.” In an essay published in Saturday Night magazine Wolfe explained Canadian television provided viewers with more “jolts per minute,” drawing attention to the crass commercialism and rich spectacles of American programming, which “gets the adrenaline flowing and that results in a pleasurable feeling” (Wolfe, 1976). Canadian television, by comparison, was seen as an oasis of calm, with its emphasis on realism and documentary, and programs working in the public service. Shows that move too slowly, Wolfe claims, are victims to audiences whose “attention spans have been shaped by the verbal aggressiveness of All in the Family and the physical violence of Police Story” (Wolfe, 1976). Since Canadian television offers so few jolts per minute, he explained, most domestic television has little chance of succeeding.

The Globe and Mail’s John Doyle (2007), arguably Canada’s most influential contemporary television critic, often mocks the tone of these kinds of critiques and yet, at the same time, also tends to re-purpose the essential character of the jolts language. In an article written for Television Quarterly, the magazine of the people who bring you the Emmy Awards, Doyle explained that the best domestically produced television, like the internationally popular Little Mosque on the Prairie, “by instinct or design rejects the common ingredients for comedy or drama on American TV and cooks up a distinctly indigenous television culture” (p. 3). “Gentle comedies,” he writes, “is our forte in Canadian-made TV”:

Few Canadian shows feature gun-toting cops, violent criminals or various branches of the military using high-powered weaponry. There is simply less violence. Aggression is under the surface. We see ourselves as a gentle people, proud of being peacekeepers, not warmongers. Once, in a column about the gentle, absurdist comedy that characterizes Canadian TV, I described Canada as “a nitwit nation” and said that when these shows are exported and seen around the world, we don’t care if that’s how the world sees us. Call us beer-swilling hockey nuts and we don’t care. Call us doughnut-eating and dreary, and we don’t care. Nobody disagreed with me. (Doyle, 2007, p. 5)

Doyle continues by referring to other Canadian shows as “quiet,” even cop shows, programs that operate where “the melodrama has been drained out” (p. 9). He writes that domestically made dramas “are not about revenge and triumph. They’re about survival, and there is a collective assuredness that we acknowledge and support victims” (p. 9). Such programs, Doyle explains, come through the collective struggle of those who make television to work their way through the bureaucratic apparatus that funds production, in order to make programming that is “detached from U.S. prototypes” (p. 9).

These ideals: that Canadian television is different and that its stylistic elements, often due to the exigencies of government funding, communicate an essential “Canadianness” is the dominant means by which discourse about television occurs in Canada. For example, coverage of format programs typically includes direct reference
to their format-ness, usually misinterpreting their original location in order to use the shorthand that such programming is “American,” or was originally American. What follows then are usually discussions that aim to determine the ways such shows are either different from or similar to the original, a distinction that often depends on the orientation of the critic. For example, cultural critic Hal Niedzvecki (2003, p. R3) described the Canadian version of the Idol franchise in the Globe and Mail as being “almost a mirror image of the American version,” without acknowledging that this version is itself an image—mirror or otherwise—of versions that began in other places before they came to America. Kate Taylor (2003), deploys the cultural imperialism thesis in stating that changes in television policy, which recognize such programs as Canadian content, were responsible for allowing Canadian networks to make “cheapo knock-offs of U.S reality fare” (p. R5).

Others offer a more distanced stance, noting that even if the Canadian version could imitate the American original, the adaptation would be different, based on cultural reasons. Scott Feschuk (2003a), in the National Post, expressed a more nuanced and humourous understanding by suggesting that the show’s opening sequence, with its promise of stardom, “perhaps should have been revised to reflect the reality of stardom in this country: I’m thinking maybe a glimmering midget trudging through a local community centre arena with a kite” (p. AL6). Or that when the contestants went to Las Vegas, that the show’s host, Ben Mulroney, “tries too hard,” and that perhaps a new award category should be introduced for Canada’s television awards, “Best Photocopy of an American Talent Show Based on a British Talent Show Originally Based on Karaoke: Canadian Idol” (Feschuk, 2003b, p. AL1).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Canadian television critics received the American version of Deal negatively. John Doyle referred to the show as “brash” and “loud.” As in the case of jolts, one critic noted the essential differences in volume from most Canadian shows. The Globe’s other television critic, Andrew Ryan (2006), called it “the dumbest game show ever.” (p. R3). Media coverage of the Canadian edition of Deal or No Deal focused as much on the show’s “Canadian-ness” as it did on its derivativeness from the American or formatted version. In the weeks leading up to the Canadian edition, the show’s producers launched a national contest to find women who would act as models charged with the duties of opening the briefcases and revealing the cash amounts. Numerous newspapers carried the model search, occasionally highlighting when a local applicant was selected for the job.

Indeed, this is a brief discussion, and it is also the case that in a world in which there are more than just newspapers, and for which discourse about television is now circulating in a range of different ways online, one should consider the full effect of such comments with some suspicion. That said, what this discussion shows is how nationalistic discourse blends with other kinds of artistic discourse to create a space where the derivative is not only an aesthetic category, but also one that is reflective of a national aesthetic sensibility. What is important to see is not that the nationalistic ideas trum p the other aspects of the critical vocabulary, but like Deal itself, that such discursive frameworks carry bits of both ways of speaking about cultural works. As mentioned earlier, the presence of “cheap knock-offs” is very much part of the
Canadian television system and part of the delicate balancing that those involved in television production must undertake as they mix programs intended to please both audiences and policymakers at the same time.

**Conclusion**

In their work on format television programs in Asia Pacific, Keane and Moran (2005) explain that the motivation of program producers is to produce material that allows for “near simultaneous international adaptation” (p. 90) in different contexts. In this article I have attempted to advocate for the study of near-simultaneous circulation of format programs by suggesting that a series of practices—the staggered flows of Canadian and American editions, the logics of simultaneous substitution, and the framing discourse of Canadian format television programs—are part of the processes by which we might begin to consider how format television programs travel within Canada.

Further investigation would likely support Nick Couldry’s (2007) position that the analysis of ‘media cultures’ can only develop through combining two types of comparison: first, a comparative analysis of the more ‘intangible’, more subtle, aspects of the media environment in different places … and, second, the degree to which media rituals are embedded in wider belief structures. (p. 248)

As I have sketched out in the case of Canada, ideas of circulation represent one set of “belief structures” Couldry outlines here, and intersect with broader ideas of communication and nation, making the study of format television a ripe area for comparative cultural analysis. The example of *Deal or No Deal*, a program originating outside North America but adapted differently by both Canada and the United States, invites an appreciation of the multiple ways the two countries now engage in processes of localizing global culture. Furthermore, the contemporary presence of format television invites us to consider the ways in which television and other forms of popular culture have moved between the United States and Canada, and between other nations, in earlier historical contexts.

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Notes
1. The decision-making aspects of the show have made the program a popular topic in other fields, namely economics, finance, and rational-choice theory. (See Blavatskyy & Pogreba, 2007; Brooks, Faff, Mulino, & Scheelings, 2009; Post, van der Assen, Baltussen, & Thaler, 2008).


3. The Format Recognition and Protection Association, a lobbying organization for producers of global format programming, recently reported that 445 original formats found their way into foreign countries between 2006 and 2008, with a production volume of 9.3 billion euros in that time frame (FRAPA 2009, see also Esser, 2010).

4. The idea of recombinant productions also derives from Todd Gitlin’s (1994) discussion of program spinoffs, or copies of popular television genres.

5. In an important sense, an anti-interpretive approach is necessary within the Canadian context largely because so few texts exist, a reflection of the poor state of the country’s audiovisual archives (Byers & Vanderbergh, 2011).

6. A Canadian version of Let’s Make a Deal was produced in 1980–1981, then a syndicated version was produced in 1984. The current version of the show began airing on October 5, 2009, on CBS, replacing the long-running daytime soap opera series The Guiding Light (1932–2009). A number of international versions of Deal now air, in 14 different countries, as the current version of the show is owned by Fremantle Media, an arm of the European broadcasting and production giant RTL Group.

7. The Weakest Link aired in syndication from 2002 to 2003; Millionaire has aired in syndication from 2002 to 2009, with occasional returns to prime time. Deal or No Deal has been syndicated from 2008 to the present.

8. For subscribers who have digital cable in Canada, there might have been as many as three or four channels running the same show at the same time, given that there are different Global stations for different regions of the country and that some digital packages allow subscribers access to all of these.

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