Television and Canada’s Aboriginal Communities
Seeking Opportunities through Traditional Storytelling and Digital Technologies

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Abstract: This paper traces the origins of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) and highlights current trends in indigenous film and television production. Indigenous film and television narratives are rooted in storytelling traditions and oral culture. They describe histories and communities, and highlight critical issues from land claims to language preservation. In spite of their local focus, film and television programs are also closely linked to global production modes through co-productions and international distribution. This results in a dichotomous dynamic: While First Nation producers are dedicated to preserving Aboriginal cultures, they also partake in the development of global cultural production.

Résumé : Cet article retrace les origines de l’Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) et souligne certaines tendances actuelles dans la réalisation de films et d’émissions de télévision autochtones. Les narrations filmiques et télévisuelles autochtones ont leurs sources dans une tradition de conteurs et une culture orale. Elles décrivent des communautés et leurs histoires, et soulignent des questions critiques allant des revendications territoriales à la préservation de la langue. En dépit de leur caractère local, les films et les émissions de télévision sont étroitement liés à des modes de production mondiaux au moyen de coproductions et de distribution internationale. Cette situation crée une dynamique dichotomique : les réalisateurs des Premières Nations, tout en se consacrant à préserver les cultures autochtones, participent au développement d’une production culturelle mondiale.

Keywords: Globalization; North-South; Production/co-production; Technology; Television/cable television

Since 2000, First Nation film and television productions have proliferated due to the emergence of a new television network, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). There has been a steady increase of First Nation media over the past decade, with award-winning productions by Loretta Todd—Today Is a Good Day.

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Day, a documentary about Chief Dan George—and Barb Cranmer’s videos about local life, history, and events in her West Coast community of the Namgis Nation of Alert Bay. Film and video production is a powerful tool in a media landscape dominated by English and French programming. However, access to commercial and public channels has been challenging and has forced many independent producers to find alternative distribution channels, such as film festivals and non-theatrical (educational video) sales. With the emergence of APTN, this has changed. First Nation languages, culture, and ideas can now be mediated and distributed to communities in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of the world.

This essay provides an overview of current developments in First Nation broadcasting and film and television production. Interview evidence from First Nation filmmakers, artists, broadcasters, and documentary producers frames the discussion in an attempt to collaboratively communicate about the creation of cultural production within indigenous paradigms. The first part of the paper details First Nations media development in Canada with a particular focus on recent achievements: Television Northern Canada (TVNC) and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). Interview evidence from First Nation producers emphasizes the importance of accessing production opportunities to explore, express, and negotiate cultural spaces challenged by political, economic, and cultural globalization. In the latter part of the paper, questions of globalization, localization, and hybridity are addressed to highlight the dichotomous relationship of film and television producers to global market forces, on the one hand, and the desire to document local histories, cultural values, and identity, on the other hand.

First Nation television: Perceptions and perspectives
Communication between non-Natives and Native communities played an important role historically in maintaining control over social and economic relations and institutions. English was the dominant language used in the interaction between Natives and non-Natives, from verbal communication to print, and later radio and television broadcasts (Valaskakis, 1988). Radio was introduced in the Arctic in the 1920s, with television broadcasts in English and French following in the 1960s. In response to these developments, Inuit leaders raised concerns about the nature of commercial television. “My main concern and I am sure it is the concern of many people in the North, is that you have two audiences watching television, one group that does not understand a word of English and the other does and most of the programming is in English” (Norman Attungula quoted in Valaskakis, 1988, p. 125).

The introduction of broadcast technologies and transmission of non-indigenous cultural and social values, combined with curricula and teaching from the South, affected First Nations and contributed to social disintegration (Valaskakis, 1988) as well as cultural hybridization. Grantzberg (1982, quoted in Valaskakis, 1988) noted that the influence of television on children in Native communities was especially evident, as television heroes became an integral part of children’s play, undermining the potential for in-group role players who could assume these
positions. However, this early research set within “the epistemological tradition of the neutral observer explaining the culture in terms of objective language of social science” (Bredin, 1993, p. 308) neglects to consider the subjective and negotiated meanings of televised images. It also overlooks the unique appropriation of media technologies by First Nation producers to reflect local needs and cultural forms of expression. Meadows (1995) points out that the form of indigenous media in Australia and Canada is variable and dependent on the local community, cultural preferences (the use of traditional song to accompany an Aboriginee story, for example), and a unique organization of the production process itself—such as legitimating the telling of a story by a whole community.

First Nation media in Canada can be traced back to the 1960s, when the Alberta Native Communications Society (ANCS) became the first Aboriginal broadcasting enterprise (Rupert, 1983). ANCS was the impetus for the development of other Aboriginal broadcasting organizations throughout Canada, which reached their audiences via remote transmitters or satellite (Fraser, 1994). The emergence of Aboriginal media in the 1960s illustrates that Canada’s First Nations people recognized an opportunity early on to create their own media for local community interaction and economic growth. Within the context of modern treaty negotiations between the federal government and First Nation communities, a new wave of initiatives ensued. Dana Claxton, a First Nation producer and creator of the series Artzone on APTN, recounted in an interview (2003) her beginnings as a filmmaker and video producer:

In 1984, we had a show on Cable 4 here in Vancouver. We called it The Canadian Indian: Television News. We basically tried to emulate mainstream news to talk about Indian news because we didn’t see ourselves on mainstream television. We still don’t see ourselves on mainstream news. There hasn’t been a drastic change.

Since these early days Aboriginal media has steadily increased, with broadcast initiatives and a growing number of First Nations producers of documentaries and television programs (Telefilm Canada, 2001).

Broadcasting First Nation content and news: TVNC and APTN

In 1978, the Canadian government experimented with satellite communication in the Arctic, which resulted in the launching of the Anik B satellite and the delivery of educational and health programs to Inuit organizations in Nunavut and northern Québec. Two years later, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) proposed the development of broadcasting services for the preservation of First Nations language and culture. The success story of projects such as “Inukshuk” in the Northwest Territories and “Naalavik,” an Inuit association in northern Québec, established the basis for the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in 1981 (Roth, 2002). The CRTC licensed Cancom (Canadian Satellite Communications) to broadcast programs from the Canadian South to remote northern communities and to carry locally produced programs developed by First Nations broadcasters (APTN, 2002). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
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CBC was also mandated to provide public-service channels for Native-language programming (Roth, 2002).

The year 1983 marked a pivotal point in the development of First Nation broadcasting. The announcement of the Northern Broadcasting Policy and the Northern Native Broadcast Access program created opportunities for extending First Nation broadcast initiatives. The Northern Broadcasting Policy highlighted

1. the necessity to allow for greater access to a range of programming choices to northern residents;
2. resident participation in the “determination by the CRTC of the character, quantity, and priority of programming broadcast in predominantly native communities” (Canada, Federal Government, 1983, p. 2);
3. access to broadcast distribution channels to maintain First Nation cultures and languages;
4. programming featuring Native issues, and content produced by First Nations; and,
5. regular consultations between Northern Native representatives and government agents to develop broadcasting policies.

Even though Cancom and the CBC provided a delivery system for indigenous broadcasts, programming was delivered during unpopular, early-morning hours, and was dominated by national programming (Roth, 2002). Discussions between the Canadian government and indigenous broadcasters made clear that a dedicated transponder was necessary to distribute television programs across the northern territories. In 1987, Aboriginal and northern broadcasters formed a consortium with the goal of establishing a broadcasting system for the North. These developments laid the groundwork for a northern satellite distribution system and resulted in the launch of Television Northern Canada (TVNC) in 1991 (APTN, 2002).

TVNC’s network was owned and programmed by 13 Aboriginal broadcast, government, and education organizations in Northern Canada. Its services extended to Labrador, Arctic Québec, Nunavut, Yukon, Western Northwest Territories, and Yukon. Programs were produced in at least seven Aboriginal languages as well as in French and English. TVNC’s mandate focused on “a dedicated northern satellite distribution system, for the primary benefit of Aboriginal people in the North, by which residents of communities across northern Canada may distribute television programming of cultural, social, political and educational importance to each other, increasing communications access and promoting dialogues in their remote and underserved homelands” (TVNC, 1993, p. 4).

TVNC broadcasting service spanned five time zones and distributed its network members’ programming to 96 communities in English, French, and Native languages. Programming consisted of Aboriginal and language broadcasts, formal and informal educational shows, and children’s programs (Roth, 2002).

TVNC was to become the vehicle through which First Peoples would represent themselves and their concerns to the entire North. They would no longer be
restricted by geography or technology to local or regional self-representation and identity building. In this sense, TVNC constituted a de facto recognition of the communication rights of First Peoples in the North. (Roth, 2002, p. 300)

In spite of funding shortages and programming challenges—Environment Canada weather forecasts and Broadcast News text filled the vacuum left by the lack of indigenous programs—TVNC remained the only Aboriginal television network in the world that broadcasted programming from indigenous sources. Its potential to connect to Aboriginal groups around the globe, in places such as Australia, New Zealand, Alaska, and Bolivia, through up-link satellite transmission was hindered by financial barriers and incompatible video technologies (Roth, 2002). These barriers are less of a problem today with the emergence of digital technologies and ease of transfer between film and video equipment.

Between 1997 and 1999, the TVNC board of directors and its staff made regular presentations to Aboriginal communities and submitted proposals to the CRTC. In 1998, the CRTC released a notice stating that an Aboriginal network should be “widely available throughout Canada in order to serve the diverse needs of the various Aboriginal communities, as well as other Canadians” (CRTC, 1998). In the following months, the TVNC board submitted an application to the CRTC for a broadcast licence for the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network—a move supported and endorsed by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the public. APTN was launched in 1999 and shortly after became widely available. Two years later, the network reached 8 million homes via cable television, direct-to-home, and wireless service (APTN, 2002). APTN’s $22-million operation is funded by a combination of subscriber fees, government contributions (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage), advertising, Canadian Satellite Communications Corporation contributions, and special benefits contributions (APTN, 2002).

**APTN: First Nation production and narrative**

With the emergence of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), a new chapter in Aboriginal broadcasting has begun. The network is unique in its operation, mandate, and programming focus. The programs blend traditional forms of storytelling with contemporary genres adapted from mainstream media. APTN features programs on Aboriginal affairs, news in Inuktituk, cooking and crafts shows, documentaries on First Nations artists and community leaders, and children’s programming. Most of APTN’s programs (more than 70%) originate in Canada, and they are broadcast in English (60%), French (15%), and various Aboriginal languages (25%) (APTN, 2002).

One of the key features of APTN is its multilingual programming. Programs in traditional languages such as Cree, Inuktitut, and Lakota provide an opportunity for Canada’s more than 60 indigenous languages to be spoken and heard through televised means. Interviews with indigenous elders and community leaders highlight discussions about environmental concerns, land claims, and natural resources. In addition, children’s programs educate about linguistic traditions (Claxton, interview, 2003). As First Nations seek to gain official status for
their languages, programs deal with the importance of language preservation and Aboriginal traditions (APTN, 2002). Catherine Martin, a filmmaker and current APTN board member, stated:

> It is a very challenging time in our history as First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples…. The media is a powerful tool to help our nations heal and bring understanding through the telling of our own stories. APTN, as the first Aboriginal television network in the world, can be a catalyst for change in our lives. (quoted in APTN press release, December 16, 2002)

This reference to storytelling traditions is key to understanding the choice of narratives APTN produces or acquires for broadcasting. Television being a visual and aural as well as textual experience provides a new means for First Nations people to communicate and connect with other indigenous groups throughout Canada and the United States. These groups are bound together by similar experiences of assimilation, discrimination, and displacement. They are also tied by cultural and linguistic traditions that transcend official borders.

APTN fosters cross-cultural bridges to the non-Native community through allowing viewers exposure to indigenous issues. It may not extend to an “Indigenization” of the Australian public sphere, where “Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ‘speak’ to each other via media coverage of Australian affairs” (Hartley & McKee, 2000, p. 6), but, nonetheless, producers in Canada are increasingly interested in working together.

Forging partnerships with aboriginal producers creates new opportunities for broadcasters and non-aboriginal producers. The most successful partnerships have respected and trusted the uniqueness and knowledge of the aboriginal point of view, enhancing an “aboriginal aesthetic” and voice, while generating interest and critical appeal. (Henry, Coyes, Cuthand, Green, & Talbott, 2003)

First Nation documentary producers spotlight sociopolitical and cultural issues in indigenous communities. According to Dana Claxton, many new and emerging filmmakers are eager to document their history, culture, and stories. Since Native stories and issues were traditionally underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media, producers seize the opportunity to create programs that would not be aired on mainstream broadcasting channels, not even on public television (interview, 2003). Claxton states that the “mainstream media can never tell our stories. They can try, but in terms of really knowing the interior of a culture, it’s got to be the people who speak for themselves.” Canadians want to know about First Nations people, says Claxton, and APTN provides a window into the lives and cultures of indigenous communities.

First Nations producers are documenting ancient indigenous rites and cultures and as a result establish an important record of Native life in Canada. Cultural appropriation of crafts, weaving, and arts by non-Natives is of concern to First Nations producers and artists. According to Barb Cranmer, a well-known West Coast documentary producer and Band Council member of her First Nations community, indigenous weaving and knitting styles have been appropriated for mainstream fashion. Here, globalization is encroaching on the local, creating con-
cerns about cultural identity and the need to maintain correct records for future generations:

I need to tell the stories before our elders pass on. There is urgency for some stories to be told, such as stories about the environment and the salmon runs…. Our stories are generally not shared with the bigger world, so there is a need for educating people…. I see myself as a messenger of stories people entrust me with. (Cranmer, interview, 2003)

Cranmer is also concerned about potential “exoticization” of First Nation life in mainstream media. This may even arise from young First Nation filmmakers who seek to adapt and popularize indigenous histories and cultural values for sensationalist mainstream consumption (Cranmer, interview, 2003). First Nations producers, therefore, find themselves in a predicament—to document and record their way of life and to create a viable cultural television or film “product” that appeals to mainstream audiences. Creating programs for mainstream audiences and global distribution often results in eliminating critical foci for the benefit of entertainment and sensationalist appeal (Baltruschat, 2003).

This dichotomy is also evident in APTN’s mandate and program focus. Even though APTN provides unique opportunities for First Nation producers, it also emulates mainstream network operations. For example, it focuses on the production and acquisition of one-hour and serial documentaries—a common practice of television networks. It also encourages interprovincial co-productions (collaboration of producers from different Canadian provinces for the benefit of accessing additional funds and creative resources) and international co-productions, which are governed by official bilateral treaties between Canada and other countries. Its mandate has, therefore, a dual focus: 1) the promotion of and education about local (or pan-indigenous) Aboriginal culture and language; and 2) the increase of revenue through exporting programs globally and attending international television markets such as MIPCOM in France and NATPE in the U.S., and trade forums in Australia and New Zealand (Jim Compton, interview, 2003). The commercial aspects of the network are crucial since many traditional income sources for Aboriginal people no longer exist. According to Compton, the network’s programming director, the “trap lines” are now expanding into other revenue sources, such as broadcasting, to generate jobs and monies for Aboriginal peoples.

Some programs, such as feature-length films, are imported from the United States. This reflects a common practice among Canadian networks, for American programs are easy to acquire at low cost (Starowicz, 1993). Nonetheless, since its inauguration in 1999, APTN has also triggered program development in the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. As a result of the Canadian Television Fund’s Aboriginal Production Fund (in existence since 1997), Aboriginal production budgets have steadily increased, averaging $430,000 in 2000-01, an almost 50% increase from the previous year (Telefilm Canada, 2001, p. 45). This trend continued in 2002 with $470,000 in production dollars (Telefilm Canada, 2002), and $523,000 in 2003 (Telefilm Canada, 2003). However, an analysis of the total television production budget for English, French, and Aboriginal productions
between 2000 and 2003 reveals that Aboriginal-language production actually declined from 2.5% in 2001 to 0.8% in 2003 (Telefilm Canada, 2001, 2003). APTN and First Nation film and television producers face many challenges, from competition with mainstream broadcasters and training of new Aboriginal film and television producers to accessing production funds for expensive television drama (Henry et al., 2003).

Canada urgently needs to develop the talent base to support the creation of television drama productions that are written, produced and directed by Aboriginal people and that reflect the true Aboriginal experience. As one focus group participant stated in 1998, “North of 60 is nothing like any reserve I have ever been on.” (quoted in Macerola, 2003, p. 98)

Native American audiences have expressed interest in APTN’s programming, as letters to the network attest. According to Compton (interview, 2003), Native Americans would like to see APTN’s signal extend into their communities, and negotiations are currently under way to make this a reality. Native American interest in APTN underscores the notion that Aboriginal people share a common bond through history, language, and culture that is not restricted by national boundaries. Aboriginal peoples in Australia and New Zealand are also interested in APTN’s programs (Compton, interview, 2003). Collaborations and co-productions between indigenous filmmakers and television producers is now a possibility, especially in respect to a new Maori Television Network in New Zealand (Maori TV, 2003).

International co-production between First Nations producers would allow for the pooling of technical, creative, and economic resources (Ferns, 1995). Cranmer notes that she has been approached by a Maori filmmaker to collaborate on a story about a young woman from her West Coast community who was adopted by a family in New Zealand (interview, 2003). These types of international co-productions on a grassroots level would be a welcome addition to the multitude of commercial collaborations that currently circulate through global airwaves (Murdock, 1996).

**Digital technologies: Opportunities for film, television, and new media**

Digital media provide an accessible alternative for production and distribution. Similar to other networks’ on-line options, APTN’s Web site features promotional and educational materials. The historical series on the Ojibwe people, titled *Waasa-Inaabidaa: We look in All Directions,* is hyperlinked to an elaborate and interactive Web site (Ojibwe.org, 2003). The series, produced by Lorraine Norrgard with input from PBS, attempts to expand programs in indigenous languages to southern parts of Canada and northern areas of the U.S. (Compton, interview, 2003). The collaboration between First Nations producers, public broadcasters, and organizations such as the National Film Board of Canada emphasizes the need to pool resources—technical, financial, and creative—in a competitive and expensive production industry.

Since 2001, APTN has increasingly focused on the youth market, one of the most important demographic groups for mainstream television. Programs such as
Cool Jobs are aimed at First Nations youth seeking employment. The show uses MTV-type camera moves, “funky” sound tracks, and “hip” entertainment-style hosting and interviewing techniques to engage viewers between the ages of 13 and 25. Another program, Seventh Generation, features young First Nations entrepreneurs celebrating their success in business. The series is an educational forum for young First Nations people navigating through difficult and scarce employment opportunities. The message is “empowerment” and strengthening of First Nations community ties to facilitate professional advancement and success.

One of APTN’s biggest challenges is the lack of access to broadcasting signals in First Nations communities. Even though the network is popular with audiences, the exact number of viewers is difficult to estimate. Many questions remain, such as how many First Nations people own or have access to a television set? And if they do, are they actually watching the network’s programming (Compton, interview, 2003)? There is no doubt, however, that Aboriginal producers of film and television are experiencing a resurgence of their culture by combining traditional storytelling and digital technology.

The film Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner received international acclaim and a Camera d’or award for best feature at the 2001 film festival in Cannes. The story, based on an ancient Inuit legend, deals with the dangers of setting personal desires above the needs of a whole community. In Atanarjuat, filmmakers Norm Cohn and Zacharias Kunuk combined traditional storytelling with digital technology to create a unique film. The accessibility of digital video, along with its relatively cheap production budget and ease of technology, allowed the filmmakers to create an original point of view of indigenous life in Canada’s North.

Video is a different way of representing reality. It’s a different form of narrative storytelling. All this video experience has been invisible except in the art world and in remote regions where it’s been an empowering tool for self-representation by getting inside-out points of view instead of the kind of authoritarian outside-in points of view. So this whole concept is a marriage of what was really a very experimental art form, video, with the richness of Inuit oral tradition. (Cohn, 2002)

The combination of traditional storytelling and digital technology resulted in a film that is very different from mainstream film productions. This blending of traditional narratives with new media is possibly paving the way for a new genre of indigenous filmmaking. This may be an attempt at counter-globalization to turn “media that dissolve and homogenize cultures into tools of cultural preservation” (Scott, 2002). But it is also a new way to generate funds and employment for First Nation communities.

In television, we see fewer innovative trends. Many producers still use traditional documentary techniques and technologies (Cranmer, interview, 2003). What is unique, however, is the variety of indigenous content that is produced. Many programs deal with traditional cultural values. They feature West Coast weaving techniques, Haida art, and traditional cultural rites. Documentation of these aspects of culture represents a first, not only from an Aboriginal-production
point of view but also in regards to subject matter. Even though First Nations make up 3 to 5% of Canada’s population, with large population concentrations in the Prairie region and the northern territories as well as some urban neighbourhoods, they have been traditionally underrepresented in mainstream media, or misrepresented due to stereotyping of Aboriginal life (Fraser, 1994). The emergence of prolific production activities among First Nations peoples is, therefore, a necessity to create a more balanced media in Canada and beyond.

**The push-pull forces of global and local program production**

Global information flows are creating a “new communication geography,” which 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 & Robins, 1995, p. 11). Increasingly, concerns are raised in regards to global standardization, resulting in demands for the re-territorialization of media in order to sustain the “integrity of local and regional cultures” (p. 18).

However, globalization is not an even process, but occurs on many levels simultaneously and with different levels of intensity and effects (Appadurai, 1990; Massey, 1994). Globalization is also linked to localization, through the creation of niche markets, on the one hand (Robertson, 1992), and a reaction against the erosion of a local public sphere, on the other (Dahlgren, 1999). Localization is as complex a concept as globalization itself. “Local” often refers to the national, which, in many instances, does not take any other “local” levels of organization into account: “In international relations, the ‘national’ level may be local vis-à-vis the global level, but in domestic relations the ‘national’ is itself a site of struggle, with a variety of ‘local’ identities and voices in contention” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996).

This dichotomy is evident in APTN’s operations, which reveal characteristics of mainstream media and global media production while focusing on local issues and documentary. The network’s adaptation of popular genres such as variety shows, from crafts to cooking, reveals the need to produce globally appealing products, which can be traded and sold in the international television market. The nature of some of these programs allows the viewer to experience cultural hybridity in action, the cultural transformation and adaptation of ideas and concepts. For example, an episode of *The Creative Native*, an arts and crafts show on APTN, features the making of Christmas ornaments by combining traditional Aboriginal headdress techniques with a non-Native holiday concept. Cooking shows, such as *Cooking with the Wolfman*, feature traditional foods and recipes combined with world cuisines from Italy and France.

APTN’s focus on youth as a consumer group for creating network loyalty is similar to mainstream network operations, as the Aboriginal youth population comprises a large portion of Canada’s First Nation communities. In addition, technical aspects, from MTV-style camera moves to fast editing techniques, simulate mainstream television in an attempt to compete for market share. This juxtaposition of traditional storytelling with mainstream genres and production techniques
creates a hybrid experience where *globalization* and *localization* are negotiated for new territories of cultural expression.

This negotiation for new cultural spaces highlights the continuous change of cultures, accelerated by globalization and mass-mediated consumption patterns. Here, the local response to mainstream media is the creation of alternative media from an indigenous perspective, which as new generations of filmmakers emerge changes to reveal mainstream foci and global perspectives. APTN is a unique network that combines alternative programming and mainstream broadcasting styles in a blend that does not exist anywhere else.

**Summary**

Many mainstream television programs provide instantaneous access to different cultures, traditions, and stories. Infused with romantic ideas, these global productions portray the exoticism of faraway worlds as non-contested sites of human existence. Discovery Television and Disney transform many world cultures into accessible and consumable “eye candy.” Travel and adventure programs highlight the beauty and allure of foreign places without ever revealing discrepancies based on economic, political, and cultural interdependencies. Globe-trotting through this televised landscape, the armchair tourist would never suspect that the true nature of many destinations, from Latin America to Polynesia, is based on struggles for economic and political equilibrium and access to the health care, education, and prosperity enjoyed by citizens of many Western nations.

In contrast, Aboriginal programs offer a distinctly different insight into cultural, economic, and political affairs of First Nation peoples. The stories told in the programs have not been told in this format before. They document a people struggling for cultural survival in a global economy. At the same time, the motivation and need to succeed makes producers and network executives part of the global economy as they attempt to create a viable broadcasting business. This dichotomy is expressed in the program schedule, which features the traditional next to the hybrid.

First Nations productions and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network illustrate the potential for creating co-productions based on shared interests and content rather than mere financial gain (Baltruschat, 2003). The possibility to document stories as they relate to peoples who share, in spite of geographic distance, cultural similarities, and historical backgrounds provides an opportunity for global stories to be told from critical perspectives. First Nations stories and their underlying message for the preservation of cultural traditions also relate to environmental protection, which is often tied closely to traditional lifestyles (Cranmer, interview, 2003).

The development of digital technologies and their ease of transfer from one digital medium to another offers an opportunity for young, emerging filmmakers to explore their own stories based on local and emerging evolving global perspectives. Diversity, balance, and critical perspectives are crucial in a media landscape saturated with infotainment, commercial productions, and sensationalized reality-TV programs. First Nations producers and APTN spotlight the potentials of
television—the ability to educate, entertain, and mediate debate critically through media channels.

**Note**

1. This paper was accepted for presentation at the *MIT 3: Television Conference* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in May 2003.

**Interviews**


**References**


quote originated from a submission by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, May 30, 2002. Reference to focus groups is made in this submission in the context of consumer research conducted for the APTN application to the CRTC for a national Aboriginal television network.


