Introduction

Independents Change the Channel

A hot and sweaty crew films a teenage woman for a low-budget pop music video outside a home in Westchester, a New York City suburb, in the second episode of Adam Goldman's indie web drama *Whatever this is.* Oscar, the head of production, sends one of his assistants, Ari, into the kitchen for a different camera lens after the teen requests more shots. The teen's father and video's financier, Ken Priest, stops Oscar: "Should he be going in there *alone*? . . . Isn't he a little . . . *brown*?" Later he calls Ari a "wetback," and Sam, Ari's roommate and coworker, says nothing to defend him. After the shoot Sam apologizes, but racism on set provokes Ari into educating Sam on his everyday struggles with gender, race, and sexuality as a gay man of color:

> You're my best friend and you say nothing to that shithead. . . . Sometimes, before I meet a guy, in the dark times when I used to meet people . . . I have a full-blown panic attack because I have no way of knowing if he's only meeting me because he's like *into* Latin guys, and he wants me to be some like macho fucking *papi*, because I am *never* macho fucking *papi* enough for those people, never. And then I come here. I come to fucking Westchester because it's all part of Sam's Big Plan to make us have a career and Ken fucking Priest acts like I just hopped the fucking border fence to pick fucking oranges in fucking California or some shit. . . . You know, sometimes I look at you and I'm like, "What problems does this straight, white guy have? Does he have any? Is that a word with any meaning to him?" Apology accepted.

By turns poetic and frank, *Whatever this is.* uses[1] dark humor to reveal how the television and media market fails to protect workers from wrongful termination, excessive overtime, and consistent humiliation

or discrimination based on gender, race, and sexuality. We see how unstable media distribution is today, how it prevents young, aspiring creative talent from meaningful work, and how it generates cheap, vacuous stories for audience consumption. *Whatever this is.* creator and writer Adam Goldman unspools this narrative slowly and lyrically, in six half-hour episodes, showing how characters survive or succumb to the trials of youth, compounded by poverty. Crowdfunded by fans, Goldman's meticulously written and produced show critiques our appetite for cheap content while showing the personal, political, and social consequences of a free market.

How did Goldman independently produce a series with half-hour episodes about how market inequalities affect diverse workers? He used the web to intervene in representations of gay and New York life. In 2012, Goldman was an underemployed Bard graduate living in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Around him were writers, musicians, actors, and cinematographers with lots of talent but no space to unleash it. Goldman saw opportunity. He wrote *The Outs*, a drama about a group of young, sad, broke Brooklynites searching for connection and same-sex love, which the press frequently compared to HBO's show *Girls*.[2] *The Outs* stood out in an already crowded online market for gay web series for its polished cinematography and sound, confident acting and direction, and for focusing on gay men not seeking marriage, a dominant theme on TV. After a second season that explored nonmonogamy, John Sherman wrote in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, "*The Outs* represents a plurality of queer politics with a greater breadth than in a show in which gay characters are shunted off to the side or fettered by the traditional boundaries of same-sex relationships and parenthood."[3]

Goldman uploaded to Vimeo the twelve-minute pilot for *The Outs*, "State of the Union," which he used to raise $1,000 on the crowdfunding site Kickstarter to make the next two episodes. His pitch? Help a team of creatives transform television with a sincere story about underrepresented experiences:

> Finally, you know that TV show you hate? No, not *The Good Wife.* The one with the stupid people and the bad actors spouting dialogue that makes you cringe? Less of that, please. Vote with your dollars. Then maybe next time someone's going to put something like massively of-

fensive, short-lived sitcom *Work It*[4] on the air, they'll think twice and produce something you'll actually enjoy. Makes sense, right?[5]

The pitch laid bare legacy television's failures in representation, and it worked. Goldman beat his goal by $600. Three months later, Goldman went to Kickstarter again to raise $8,000 dollars to finish the six-episode first season. He ended up raising $22,000, enough to produce a forty-five-minute "Chanukah Special," which premiered half a year later to a crowded room at Public Assembly in Williamsburg—*Good Wife* regular and *Outs* guest star Alan Cumming attended, along with famed queer director John Cameron Mitchell, who told Goldman after the screening that the show "makes me proud to be a New York faggot." Goldman's success granted him rare and limited access to corporate development. At the same time that Goldman took meetings with television producers to bring *The Outs* to a major cable or premium channel, he wrote *Whatever this is*. "I would love for the *The Outs* to be on TV but I also find this space that we're occupying really exciting, because we're something that people can't get on TV," Goldman told me. When he launched his third Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for *Whatever this is.*, he beat his goal and raised $171,000, much of it before the pilot aired in August 2013. Seeing the power of his fan base, Vimeo greenlit a second season of *The Outs* two years later in what would be its second original series after *High Maintenance*; creators of both series retained their intellectual property.

Goldman's story illustrates independent television's bottom-up approach to development, in which creative workers, fans, and new sponsors pilot new stories, represent new experiences and communities, and at times generate earnings, adulation, and experience for producers. Goldman joins a generation of creative workers who raised tens of thousands—and at times, millions—of dollars through crowdfunding for shows about gamers, black women, Asian Americans, Jane Austen acolytes, homophobic lesbians, and countless other underrepresented communities and brilliant personalities. They were years ahead of more established directors and producers like Rob Thomas, Spike Lee, and Zach Braff in discovering that fans could finance media independent of corporations.[6]

This book focuses on a generation of creative producers and entrepreneurs working to reinvent a medium that has never fully represented

the United States: television. I argue that the Internet brought innovation to television by opening mass distribution to those excluded from legacy development processes, fostering new ways of creating and marketing series. Web series are television because stories are told episodically, in seasons, or through channels. Yet they are different from what people understand as "television" in the way series develop. This book contrasts "open TV," web or networked distribution, with "legacy TV," linear or traditional network distribution, arguing that the former fosters innovation and diversity in series development. Legacy television is characterized by scheduled and time-based distribution via broadcast, cable, or premium (subscription) networks like ABC, TNT, or HBO, respectively. Most people understand the legacy system through multinational conglomerates composing "Hollywood," which yields power as "one of the focal points of the culture industry" that "has moved . . . beyond the silver screen" to encompass a wide range of cultural production and distribution globally.[7] The legacy system is one-to-many; we often call it "traditional," since its roots stem from the very beginning of American television in the mid-twentieth century. The development process is controlled by teams of network executives who solicit, license, and produce a select number of series.

By contrast, open or networked television distribution occurs via Internet or web protocols. It is digital, on-demand, and peer-to-peer, meaning any participant in the web—a producer, a fan, a sponsor—can directly connect to another at any time, eliminating the need for legacy network executives. In this book, "open TV" will refer primarily to independent web TV production and distribution. "Legacy TV" will refer to broadcast, cable, or premium channels or distributors who, during the period this book covers (the mid-1990s to mid-2010s), largely kept in place development practices from the twentieth century. Many of these distributors have started networked, or "over-the-top," applications— CBS All Access, NBC's SeeSo, and HBO Now—while tech companies like Netflix and YouTube are now using networked distribution to revive some legacy practices, including live-streaming, up-front ad sales, long-format programming, and re-airing of legacy TV series. It remains to be seen to what degree and in what ways networked distribution will continue to shift legacy development practices. Because of corporate dominance in both legacy and open TV markets, I will often refer to

web-distributed series as independent or "indie TV." Most of the book focuses on indie producers because their precarious status and access to distribution compels them to execute new ideas and strategies, the core of innovation.

To survive in an incredibly competitive market for television programming, open TV producers have to take risks and pilot projects by and for creative workers, sponsors, and fan communities, advancing innovation. Digital networking facilitates connections among television's core value creators—producers, fans,[8] and sponsors—more quickly and deeply than legacy distributors created in the mass media era. Open access to distribution gives producers a platform for creative expression and ownership, enables diverse storytelling for marginalized fan communities, and produces more dynamic ways of releasing, showcasing, and rewarding shows for brands, sponsors, distributors, and exhibitors. On the basis of over one hundred interviews with writers, producers, filmmakers, and network executives, I argue that the open TV market demonstrates the value of more open access to distribution in industries where access has been historically restricted.

In our networked economy, major studios and networks are struggling to meet rising demands from consumers, ease pressures on workers, and maintain cultural relevance. Twentieth-century legacy processes for developing, financing, rating, and rewarding art are confounding media conglomerates. They focus on maintaining their brands and profits, empowering top producers, executives, and shareholders while releasing a few quality but many more cheap programs that fail to represent a diversifying nation. Meanwhile, media workers face underpaid, temporary work. Audiences have exponentially more options but fewer real choices.

Left behind, independent producers, entrepreneurs, and fans are creating their own media system. For two decades, scores of producers have been making television independent of legacy television distribution, creating their own shows—"web series"—to create value as major distributors extract it. YouTube alone hosts hundreds of thousands of showrunners, comedians, talk show hosts, video game commenters, makeup and shopping gurus, and pop culture and political commentators, each with millions of followers. Beyond YouTube, producers from diverse communities make series for platforms like Vimeo and Funny or

Die and multichannel networks like Maker, Machinima, and Fullscreen. Netflix and Amazon reimagined original series development by giving producers more autonomy while incorporating viewer taste through big data. Social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tumblr give creative workers tools for speaking to and organizing fans. Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and other crowdfunding sites provide platforms for efficient financing campaigns that bring fans into the production process. New advertising technologies allow video distributors to make money for pennies per view. Productions shoot all around the country, with hubs in New York and Los Angeles but outposts in Atlanta, Chicago, Washington, DC, New Orleans, and college campuses across the nation.

In *Open TV*, I focus on how and why a specific set of practitioners participated in the early years of the rapidly expanding television market. In doing so, I combine a growing body of research in innovation studies with critical media industry studies.[9] I think of the web as a distribution platform where individuals and groups try to profit from new opportunities, a space where "cultural workers seek to negotiate to their own purposes."[10] Workers and entrepreneurs produce value for the economy but also for the public, expanding dominant notions of innovation beyond pure efficiency and investment. I rely on interviews, on-site observation, and my own indie TV production, supported with analyses of websites, advertisements, and marketing materials.[11] In this I follow longstanding traditions of ethnographies of subcultures and industries.[12] Because indie producers and markets are marginalized, much of the evidence for my claims is narrative-based, because few institutions or researchers systematically quantify this activity, perpetuating its marginalization. For me, understanding how producers make these digital objects, under what constraints and to what ends, is critical to understanding what, if anything, is new in new media. Innovation is never all good or all bad, progressive or regressive. This book focuses on value creation, but value is not limitless. Indeed, as the book progresses from production and representation to independent and corporate distribution—where strategies must generate revenue—we see how open markets challenge innovators and how conglomerates still dominate in this period. For indie producers and their fans, "open TV" is both an ideal and a demand, always already foreclosed and in process,

enabled by networked distribution but shaped by the cultural, political, and organizational realities of the early-twenty-first-century media.

Open TV builds on scholarly research about the value of independent production to creative industries—music, radio, television, and film—as well as how indie production fosters new products, addresses markets underserved by mainstream industries, and broadens society's base of producers. Few studies exist on how these producers use media distribution to develop communities and markets for alternative practices. S. Craig Watkins and David Hesmondhalgh's work on hip hop and punk music, Susan Douglas, Christina Dunbar-Hester, and Michael Keith's histories of amateur and independent radio, Devorah Heitner, Gayle Wald, and Deidre Boyle's work on alternative and community television, and Alisa Perren's work on independent film have influenced this book's strategy of examining how independent agents work to improve the industry through new narrative, production, and distribution practices and strategies.[13] Yet most of media studies, particularly television studies, still privileges projects from corporate distributors as a basis for theory. This is untenable in a networked economy where independent agents are constantly organizing, albeit with less capital than corporations.

The open TV market is massive, comprising thousands of series, and by the mid-2010s, its most innovative projects have inspired some legacy television networks to develop them. While increasingly common, particularly for cable networks like HBO, Comedy Central, MTV, and IFC, few indie web series transition to legacy television. The case studies throughout focus on indie producers developing work for the open, web-based market, even if they "sell out" down the line.

Open Development: Indie Innovation for the Networked Era

I often describe web series as independent television or "indie TV" to account for the way network*ed* distribution—as opposed to linear network distribution—allows producers to function independently of the legacy development system. This is different than "web TV" or "IP [Internet Protocol] TV," more general terms that focus on the changing distribution *technologies*—networked, many-to-many connections—and not the changes in *production* and *development* practices new

technologies facilitate, namely, increased opportunities for small-scale independents. Web and IP TV describe platforms like HBO Now, where distribution is networked but development still occurs through a cable channel and studio primarily invested in legacy, linear distribution in this period. In theorizing open TV development, I focus on the independence made possible with web or networked distribution compared with legacy TV development.

Open TV focuses on series produced and distributed wholly independently of legacy distributors. Independent of legacy development processes and linear cable exhibition, open TV development renders visible the stakeholders necessary to create television: producers or creators who write, act in, and film series; distributors, which curate, aggregate, and/or market series; sponsors—chiefly, brands and advertisers—who finance shows; and fans, who give their attention. In this book I use the term "fans" to denote communities of viewers who mobilize around texts and "audiences" or "viewers" to describe those communities as constructed by producers, organizations, and institutions who seek to profit from their attention and activity. I use "indie" and "independent" interchangeably in an attempt to expand "indie" beyond a genre category—as Alisa Perren and Michael Newman describe in film culture and industry[14]—to the practices and values promulgated by those who work outside of corporate development.

The reach of the indie TV market is wide. This book focuses on an undercounted segment of producers who create mostly short-form, scripted comedies and dramas and release them through online platforms. They are somewhat different from what most people define as producers of "user-generated content." Like consumers who choose to produce, most web series producers use corporate open-upload websites like YouTube, Vimeo, and Funny or Die. Unlike consumers who chose to produce, web series producers are more likely to be committed to production as a career—unlike early vloggers (video bloggers), who because of the newness of that form routinely described their initial participation as accidental. Indie TV creators include amateurs, film students and graduates, and television professionals[15] who produce video for themselves, for their communities, or, most rarely, for independent and corporate online and TV networks. In the early 2000s and 2010s, this sector got by on limited financing, chiefly algorithmic advertising,

licensing, crowd-financing, subscription, or sponsorship—a greater range of options but smaller pools of revenue than those available to legacy television networks during the period of this book.

The open TV market is unstable—in concept, production, distribution, consumption, size, texts, and value. As I elucidate in chapter 1, the market emerged in the mid-1990s and grew in the mid-2000s. Its styles vary widely, following and breaking visual and narrative conventions of web video, television, and film. Most stories are told in short episodes, usually three to fifteen minutes in length, though many are longer or shorter. For example, the creators of *Teachers*, a YouTube series picked up by cable channel TV Land, produced many popular episodes running under one minute, while Goldman and other ambitious producers told stories in long format, with thirty-minute episodes. In the open TV market, episodes can range from just one scene to a feature-length film. Critically acclaimed New York indie series *High Maintenance*, *Broad City*, and *F to 7th*, all of which secured legacy development deals, had episodes whose narratives run for one scene, shot in one location, in under ten minutes. Coquie Hughes and Kalup Linzy's epic black queer dramas are over two and a half hours long—Linzy packaged seasons two and three as a ninety-minute movie, whereas Hughes grouped the first three episodes into a ninety-minute film and later released an hour-long finale. Many shows are bounded by seasons, though some publish continually (like the news and soap operas) or sporadically. They are also distributed through a number of creative deals that send content to mobile phones and televisions, as well as film and industry festivals that place them on a big screen and around the world. Some are structured like TV pilots broken into pieces, others like deconstructed feature films, and yet others exist in between and outside of established forms. Web series span and integrate an array of genres, including comedy, drama, soap opera, sketch, vlog, and talk.

The open TV market's diversity reflects the newness of the form and the freedom with which producers operate. Even so, by many measures, it is not small. Efforts to quantify the sector are in their infancy. Trade group Film LA now counts digital pilots, and production budgets for companies like Netflix and YouTube are widely reported. But few accepted figures exist on how many indie TV series have been made or how much money has been invested in them. Compared to the cor-

porate American television market, which generates roughly $70 billion each year in advertising revenue, the web series market is no doubt smaller. The International Academy of Web Television (IAWTV), the market's first trade group heavily represented by indie creators, estimated that web series would see $250 million in production budgets in 2013,[16] almost double its $135 million estimate for 2012, which itself was a threefold increase from the year prior, calculations based primarily on submissions to their awards.[17] But the IAWTV's figures did not include Netflix's investments in original programming that year, valued at over $100 million, nor YouTube's short-lived investments, valued at several times that, though most of it in marketing support and not direct investment.[18] By 2016, Netflix earmarked over $6 billion for six hundred hours of original programming, half for U.S. release, and its competitors in the short-form market moved into ordering long-form series, including YouTube. Moreover, trade groups and analysts cannot account for independent series whose budgets are unknown or measured in time volunteered, which is the vast majority. In terms of audience, estimates by web analytics firm Visible Measures suggested that in 2010 the top ten series garnered well in excess of one hundred million views per month; it is safe to assume that the entire market, from the YouTube hits to the little-seen indies, now amounts to many times more than that.[19] By 2013, many of the top YouTubers had reached over one billion cumulative views on their channels, and an estimated two thousand had over one million subscribers. As corporate web TV distributors flex buying power, the indie web series market was seen as small only because of a lack of investment from brands, advertisers, or the state, not for lack of production activity or fan interest.

Who makes indie series and for how much? Again, calculations are difficult. Most indie TV creators are either amateurs or skilled professionals with degrees or experience in film and television. They come from all races, sexualities, ages, and geographic areas, though most productions are based in Los Angeles or New York, where industry workers live. Most of them are made for little or no money; most of the programs I profile in this book had budgets in the thousands to tens of thousands, compared to legacy TV budgets that routinely cost between $500,000 and $1 million for each episode. Independent television series are comparatively "cheap" television, and, as such, are generally consid-

ered "bad." Yet I argue that assessments of production value must consider available resources and cultural context. Corporate legacy and web television networks maintain quality standards through development investments, marketing, and a small pool of highly skilled technical crew. Even then, the public only sees a small percentage of the productions developed. Of those, even fewer are considered "good" by critics or Nielsen TV ratings. At their best, indie series producers can bring together passionate and skilled workers who are willing to sacrifice time and money for an artistic, social, political, or market-based project. Within these tremendous limits, independent television producers generate considerable value in production, storytelling, and distribution, not to mention more than a few superbly executed series.

Frustrated by legacy development, major brands and A-list talent have always been a part of the market, from BMW's *The Hire* to Joss Whedon's *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* and Ben Stiller's *Burning Love*. Hollywood directors, producers, and actors in search of creative freedom or extra work have developed web shows and networks since the late 1990s. Major advertisers have consistently used web series to sell products, before and particularly after the rise of streaming video, including Unilever's *Evan and Gareth* to sell Axe deodorant and Toyota's *Pool* made for mobile phones and publicized via TV commercials to promote the Camry. Major studios like Paramount and most major television networks have used them to create series for digital consumption. These tend to have higher production budgets. Nonprofits occasionally produce web series, either to solicit donations or to advance their missions.[20] Without a doubt, independent production comprised the bulk of new series, even if few were mass marketed, in the period this book covers.

As the open TV market developed, new institutions arose to define and assess it: conferences, award shows, and trade group meetings have become key information-gathering sites. There are a growing number of web series conferences and festivals, most notably the New York Television Festival (NYTVF), the International Television Festival (ITVFest), LAWEBFEST, and HollyWeb Festival. Film festivals screen episodes and host panels, and niche festivals cover specific aspects of the market—for example, the gay web series festival Out of the Box, and the gay black film festival Queer Black Cinema. Private trade meetings, including

quarterly meetings of the International Academy of Web Television (IAWTV), also serve this purpose. In recent years, film festivals have increased their involvement in the market, led by the Tribeca Film Festival, which started a New Online Work program in 2014 and introduced a curated marketplace of online writers and creators in 2016.

Awards for indie TV arose shortly after YouTube and the rise of streaming video. The Streamy and IAWTV Awards, explored in chapter 4, have been recognizing both corporate and indie web series since 2009 and 2012, respectively. Two of Hollywood's major guilds—the Writers and Producers Guilds of America—recognize web production. In 2010 the Writers Guild started giving awards to "original" and "derivative" new media, as well as video games, before changing the award to "short-form" new media, in part to allow big distributors of long-form TV like Netflix to compete with legacy programs; most of the WGA's short-form awardees were indie series, including *High Maintenance* (explored in chapter 2) and *Anyone but Me* (chapter 3).[21] The Producers Guild has been nominating a mix of indie and corporate digital series since 2012, from *30 Rock* webisodes to *The Guild* (chapter 2) and *Video Game High School*. Both the Primetime and Daytime Emmy Awards have recognized web programming since 2008, though both awards initially focused on series distributed by corporations.[22] In 2016 the Primetime Emmys, arguably television's highest honor, expanded web categories to include acting for men and women, and variety programs, but the only independent series nominated was Jen Richards and Laura Zak's *Her Story*, the first television series written by and starring transgender women.[23] That year, Netflix ranked third in overall Primetime Emmy nominations, nabbing fifty-four, just two less than FX but much less than HBO's ninety-four. Yet Netflix's haul was a near 60 percent increase from the thirty-four it received the year prior, whereas HBO fell 25 percent from 126 in 2015; Hulu received two, and Amazon received sixteen, up from twelve the year prior, when it won five for *Transparent*, the first television series with a transgender protagonist.

How did the open TV market come to exist? A number of developments influenced web series production, including lower prices for equipment (cameras and editing software, primarily), the mass adoption of broadband, the advent of streaming video distributors (chiefly, YouTube), declining interest in broadcast television, especially by younger

viewers, the rise of niche marketing (to the segments important to advertisers), and the digital convergence of industry operations. Indie producers justify their market participation in many ways. They experiment with genres, forms, and platforms; create work samples to raise their industry status; or work to build an enduring business for audiences underserved by market-driven narrowcasting. As with any new market, individuals and young institutions compete and experiment to generate formulas, models, best practices, and breakthrough innovations. The quest for dominance—through fame, fortune, community, or visibility—is a rough one. Failure is high and payouts are low in markets for innovation. Yet creative autonomy (production), community value (representation), and the chance to connect with viewers (distribution) are enough to motivate producers and entrepreneurs. They work hard to master the metrics for success in an open field. This desire is the fuel powering Hollywood and Silicon Valley, keeping workers happy by offering an outlet for their passions and driving innovation for companies to develop when they care to.

Scholars have underestimated the value of the open TV market because it has far less cultural and economic capital than legacy TV. It has been largely small scale, because legacy television distributors controlled processes for finding, financing, and rewarding higher-budget shows at the beginning of the networked era. To understand the value of the open TV market, one must understand how legacy distributors profited from the old system. The next section explores the pilot process and up-front financing, which supported legacy TV distributors' access to billions in video advertising during the period this book covers. I show how pilot production and up-front monetization are ill suited to an age of social media and rising indie production, and how legacy TV distributors' control over programming falls short of balancing art, culture, and commerce. I argue that networked distribution supports innovation in series creation by empowering producers, fans, and brands frustrated with legacy distribution. Throughout the book I explore how open TV production creates innovative television in three interconnected ways: creative expression supported by "free" labor, a "highly ambivalent" political project counteracting exploitation in corporate employment (chapter 2);[24] diversity in representation, through self-representation and fan-led development (chapter 3); and flexibility in development and

marketing, where open TV distributors work with sponsors and fans to support producer-led stories (chapter 4). These dynamics are in stark contrast to the closed legacy development system.

Closed Development: The Politics of Legacy Television Distribution

The open TV market developed at the turn of the twenty-first century in response to two opposing trends: the tightening of the series production market despite a greater number of distribution channels, and the opening of new TV markets through the Internet's decentralized distribution system. Networked or web distribution creates more choice and opportunity for both audiences and producers than in the broadcast TV era (1950s–1970s, characterized by the dominance of three linear broadcast channels) or the multichannel transition era (1980s–2000s, characterized by a rise in cable channels). The Big Three—CBS, ABC, NBC—controlled the broadcast era. A greater number of distributors— Fox, TBS, CNN—rose to power in the multichannel transition after the government opened TV to cable. Today, the web, the newest distribution technology, frustrates executives at legacy broadcast and cable channels: producers, advertisers, and consumers have more options. So, legacy executives focus on managing and generating hits on a cost-effective basis, as increased competition for advertising dollars, viewer attention, and new productions put pressure on revenue. These dynamics gradually led to a crisis in legacy television distribution during the 2000s and early 2010s.

The core of the crisis was the development process, the way legacy TV network executives selected new shows and financed them through sales. In development, executives solicited and licensed series pitched by writers, producers, and their companies. Scripted comedies and dramas were most important to legacy development, because they commanded high ad rates and branded TV channels as destinations. Despite the incredible rise of fandom and open TV production, a small group of executives continued to hold sway over the supply (creative production), consumption (fans or audiences), and financing (brands) of television content as we entered the networked era. The power imbalance between executives on one side and producers, sponsors, and fans on the other

were less visible before deregulation expanded options for developing and distributing TV through cable in the 1970s and through the Internet in the 1990s. By the 2000s the system's inefficiencies irked nearly every major player in television, including the decision makers themselves. Studying the mid-2000s up-front buying process, Amanda Lotz found it in "crisis . . . with many in the industry expressing open dissatisfaction in public forums, one-on-one conversations, in trade press articles and as evidenced by the creation of an industry discussion group to formally reconsider the process."[25] By 2014, Fox's Kevin Reilly openly expressed a desire to "cancel" pilot season.[26] Central to the crisis were the vast number of pitches for extremely limited slots (constrained production), declining ratings for new shows (the challenge of creating new fans), and brand dissatisfaction with the reach and attention of commercials.[27]

Television development differs in scale according to distributor: broadcast, cable, and premium versus the kind of open or networked distribution that is the topic of this book. Traditionally, the pilot process included the pitching of new series to development executives[28] and the presentation of the first episode to brands and advertising agencies at the up-fronts in May, where 75–90 percent of advertisements are sold to finance the rest of the season. Piloting and up-front ad sales governed nearly all of U.S. broadcast scripted television development—that of CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, and the CW—during the period this book covers. Sales for those networks represent half of all TV series monetization, totaling around $9 billion annually.[29] Cable channels comprised the other half of the annual haul, evidence of rapid growth in brand and advertiser interest in narrowcast programming over the 2000s.[30] Cable channels, most owned by conglomerates with ownership stakes in both broadcast production (series) and distribution (channels), increased market share by controlling costs, filling schedules with cheap reality television produced with nonunion contracts[31] while greenlighting a few costlier, more often union, productions to attract big financiers and critical attention. In the latter case, they tended to give producers more creative control (in shows like *Louie* or *Portlandia*) or develop series with passionate fan bases in other media or markets (for franchise shows like *The Walking Dead* or *Battlestar Galactica*). When cable networks released original shows, they piloted fewer shows and were more likely to commission straight-to-series.[32] Premium subscription distributors

like HBO and Showtime operated similarly but did not need to court advertisers, allowing for some more risk in development.

For several years, corporate networked TV distributors like Yahoo and Hulu replicated up-front selling through the NewFronts, run by marketing firm Digitas in its early years and later moving to the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB). The online networks' lack of brand recognition as original program distributors, however, meant that channels catered heavily to brands' perceived needs, producing shows too uninspiring to excite fans to watch or brands to pay for video ads. The IAB estimated 2015 Internet advertising revenue at $59 billion, more than legacy television's $40 billion. Most of this was search and display. Online *video* advertising, which delivered high rates for open television producers, comprised just $4 billion.[33]

Despite increased competition from the web, legacy distributors maintained and, in some years, increased the size of the pilot market and up-front ad sales. Lotz found up-front financing of series "remarkably steadfast" in the mid-2000s because of decades-old client relationships between channels and ad agencies, the perceived value of linear television compared to other advertising channels, and the ability, albeit challenged, for legacy channels to attract larger audiences.[34] The up-front process started in the 1960s to accommodate the needs of channels, brands, and their agencies. It favored legacy TV distributors: brands purchased time on series that had not been tested with audiences and without data on what rates other brands were paying; each channel established base rates for brand clients to guarantee stable annual sales; programming options were scarce, particularly for channels with hits, incentivizing agencies to spend high and bid quickly; and each channel used scatter markets to monetize slots that had not sold up front or if programs underperformed.[35]

Buoyed by the up-front market, legacy TV development executives increased the size and scale of pilot production, even as success rates for pilots did not rise in kind. The number of scripted series rose to a record high of 455 in 2016, two and a half times the number in 2002, with most of the increase from cable and streaming services.[36] Most shows still failed, but the pilot market stayed intact. Film LA, which coordinates and processes film and television permits in Los Angeles, has counted the number of television pilots in production since the 2004–2005 sea-

son. That year, 124 pilots were produced, 101 of them in Los Angeles. Pilot production dropped to under one hundred from 2007 to 2009, following the recession and Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike. Yet by the 2015–2016 season, production rebounded to 201 pilots, near the record 203 broadcast and cable pilots in 2013–2014.[37] Accounting for the remaining jump in production were dramas, the vast majority of which were shot in New York, Vancouver, Toronto, and Atlanta, which offer financial incentives: "Often, this means financial concerns trump creative concerns when deciding where to shoot."[38] These tax incentives do little to provide stable employment to local producers; studios, investors, and real estate developers benefit the most.[39] The total amount legacy distributors spent on pilots remained stable, despite increased competition for brands' campaign dollars. Film LA estimated pilot spending in Los Angeles at $309 million in 2005, dipping to $207 million in 2009 after the strike but rebounding to $296 million in the 2015–2016 cycle.[40] Later, Film LA started tracking a shift in pilot production: an increase in straight-to-series orders across broadcast, cable, and digital channels, up to fifty-seven (eleven broadcast, twenty-four cable, and twenty-two digital) in 2015–2016, compared to just eight (seven cable, one broadcast) in 2010–2011. The pilot system finally started to break in the 2010s. Yet unbeknownst and of little interest to corporate players, open TV creators had been developing straight-to-series since the 1990s, as will be shown in chapter 1.

Broadcast channels historically release the highest-value productions but have the least managerial and artistic freedom. Still beholden to advertisers and looking for security in a competitive market, legacy networks have focused on owning their own shows to protect their revenue from advertising sale declines. But brands still invested billions in legacy channels. Continued brand investment in legacy television, along with licensing fees from new distributors like Netflix, buoyed the market for financing and producing new shows, allowing legacy distributors to control who got to make television and what kinds of stories audiences saw. Legacy distributors have had this power for most of their history, and it has been fraught with uncertainty and conservatism about what kinds of shows audiences want. Because of this uncertainty, networks "develop[ed] ways to control both supply and demand—supply to smooth its workings, demand so that it remains of a sort the net-

works are set up to satisfy."[41] By controlling television's supply (production) and demand (advertising, range and type of stories audiences can see), legacy distributors avoided drastic shifts in revenue year-to-year and prevented advertisers from migrating to other platforms. But the process is antithetical to story creation. In his analysis of television development during the beginning of the multichannel transition, Todd Gitlin characterized the pilot process as a "slow 'no' . . . the business of satisfying executives who have to satisfy other executives—all with opinions about the mass market."[42] Because of limited distribution through broadcast, legacy control in series development historically has limited storytelling possibilities, with networks copying existing hits and working with established producers.[43] In the 2000s, broadcast executives' risk avoidance declined after they saw competition from cable series, paving the way for morally and narratively complex series like *Arrested Development*, *Community*, *Lost*, and *Scandal*.[44] But an unconventional program receiving a series order remained an exception to the rule, and was typically possible only when pitched by elite producers with lucrative multiyear development contracts or with multiple projects in development or production.[45] Why? The loosening of program and network ownership rules through the slackening of Financial Interest and Syndication Rules of 1970—which were eliminated in 1995 and prevented broadcast distributors from owning programming—and the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996—which accelerated media conglomeration and vertical integration—increased the number of executives who could say "no" to projects while limiting the bargaining power of the independent producers who wrote them because conglomerates owned multiple channels.

The Telecommunications Act, in particular, structured media distribution in favor of large media, telecommunications, and tech conglomerates, privileging incumbent and well-heeled stakeholders over firms invested in the public interest and the cultural possibilities of technological innovation. As Patricia Aufderheide writes in her extensive account of the bill, "[T]he shape of the industry was changing most rapidly through financial, not technical, convergence, as large firms got larger and more multifaceted."[46] Conglomerates in media like Viacom and Time Warner, and in tech like TCI, argued successfully "for concentration and cross-ownership relaxation. They could also argue that

the high-stakes, high-cost new network paradigms could only be accomplished by the very rich and powerful."[47] Among a host of complex provisions, the act allowed broadcasters unlimited rights to enter the digital space, companies with broadcast stations to own cable channels, and cable and telephone to combine services (as opposed to competing), all while nonprofit, public-access, and educational organizations and distributors were given very little in the way of new investments or support. Shortly after its passage, phone and cable operators rose in power as service fees increased—rising three and four times the rate of inflation in 1996 and 1997—and as broadcast ad revenue increased as well.[48] Communications and media companies have been surviving, even thriving, during the digital transition. As broadcast ratings consistently declined over the 2000s and early 2010s, revenue did not decline as quickly; for the 2016–2017 season, broadcast and cable networks saw double-digit increases in advertising rates at the upfronts.[49] Regardless, since the owners of broadcast networks also had cable and web holdings and investments, they had protection from market fluctuations, risk, and thus also innovation.

Centralized control over production kept diversity stagnant among writers and producers, even as the number of scripted series soared to record highs. Women and minorities made indie TV in part because they were not able to get employment in Hollywood. Employment for women and racial minorities barely rose as we entered the networked era: from 2007 to 2014, women composed 27–29 percent and racial minorities just 10–13 percent of all television writers, according to the Writers Guild, despite composing about 50 percent and 36 percent of the U.S. population, respectively.[50] Top writers with more control over story and employment—showrunners and executive producers—were even less diverse, with only 5.5 percent of positions going to minorities in 2013–2014.[51] This was despite the growth in series production and creation of network diversity programs in the wake of the black TV bubble in 1990s.[52] Three years after the Telecommunications Act passed, broadcast networks infamously debuted an all-white season of primetime programs, spurring protests and calls for reform from advocacy groups like the NAACP. In 2006, after UPN merged with the WB, the number of black writers fell sharply and rebounded slowly.[53] From the 2001–2002 to the 2013–2014 TV seasons, the number of black

writers actually decreased from 6.1 percent to 5.4 percent, according to the Writers Guild, despite a dramatic increase in scripted series production.[54] Inequalities persist across all positions, including directors, a position that a *Variety* study found white men dominating, notably on cable.[55] By the mid-2010s, industry leaders were openly working to correct the problem: Ava DuVernay, herself a pioneer in networked black film distribution with her ARRAY network, hired only women to direct her cable drama *Queen Sugar*, and FX CEO John Landgraf raised the percentage of women and directors of color on his network from 12 percent in 2014–2015 to 51 percent the next year: "[E]quity matters. . . . There is a privilege in American society to being male and being white, and I think it's hard for white males to understand that privilege, because we've never experienced the opposite," Landgraf told *Variety*.[56]

It is no wonder, as we see in chapters 2 and 3, that women, people of color, and queer producers enthusiastically embraced indie TV. Most of their projects could not make it into or through legacy television development. Deregulation protected legacy TV companies from market fluctuations, and they found ways to profit from niche audiences through cheaper reality programming or by focusing on wealthier audiences, as NBC did successfully in the late 1990s.[57] Corporate development processes make it difficult for executives to satisfy multiple constituencies—producers, brands, and audiences. Balancing what is marketable, engaging, and artistically or culturally valuable, development executives only occasionally satisfy all three criteria, prioritizing marketability and profit potential.

The Value of Open Development

The Internet attracts independent producers because they can make more connections—due to many-to-many networked distribution flows—to develop new and different ways of creating, supporting, and financing new stories than in the legacy system. Open development only creates value when key constituencies can connect: writers who want to tell original stories, crew who want to support its creation, fans who want to engage with it, and sponsors who need those stories to find new customers. In their effort to connect different constituencies, independents shift our understanding of television development away from a

top-down, bottom-line-driven activity to serial storytelling supported by fan publics. Of course, since they are developing new intellectual property, web series creators can sell their work to legacy distributors in "development deals," where a network or studio agrees to finance a pilot or order a series. In this way, indie TV is not too different from indie film, where festivals provide spaces for film distributors to buy and license or, as it is colloquially called, "pick up" indie films for mass distribution. Yet open, networked distribution means producers can release productions independently, find audiences, and attract financing without the major studios, distributors, and festivals.

An active independent media market is critical to innovation in a networked era. In the indie TV market, development begins with artists or creators and their ideas. First episodes or seasons of indie TV shows are best thought of as pitches and pilots, which, if successful, can sustain themselves through producer, fan, or brand support. The open TV market intervenes in legacy control over producers in the pitch process, intellectual property and labor once the series airs, what audiences watch through pilot selection and series renewal, the process of monetizing audiences through up-front financing and brand sponsorship, and systems for rewarding series with independent festivals and award shows.

In each segment of the market, indie TV offers an "innovation." Here, I am extending Stuart Cunningham's argument that innovation in creative industries is best defined beyond traditional terms of new products and modes of production to include "the application of those ideas for *realized or potential* economic, social or public benefit."[58] This framing of innovation "provides a value-driven orientation to productivity and, ultimately, quality of life, rather than merely a cost-efficiency driver for intervention," a foil to investment-driven innovation that dominates corporate tech and television development.[59] Our competitive commercial market incentivizes corporations to purchase existing productions and platforms rather than create new ones, as seen in the rise of TV network ownership of individual series (e.g., ABC Studios coproducing with Shonda Rhimes), of companies owning multiple channels (e.g., Disney owning ABC, ESPN, Freeform, etc.), and of media conglomerates purchasing networks of channels across broadcast, cable, and the web (e.g., Comcast owning NBC and Bravo while sharing Hulu with Disney, 21st Century Fox, and Time Warner).

In its ideal, the open TV marketplace values creative producers first, who then inspire fans and sponsors to support new projects. In this way, indie development reorients the value of television away from network intermediaries and toward those who drive the commercial television system with their labor, attention, and capital. Within the open TV market, producers labor to create value for writers, producers, and actors, through ownership of intellectual property, narrative experimentation, and producer-focused organizations like festivals; audiences, through community-shaped and -financed storytelling; and brands, through stories that appeal to communities specific enough for complex and targeted marketing and publicity campaigns.

While online indie TV producers focused on maximizing creative value, legacy TV networks valued advertising volume and price, both threatened by digital distibution.[60] Legacy TV distributors in the United States historically have profited from advertising. Advertising agencies' clients (brands) pay distributors for time (ad slots) within series. Distributors must value this time more than the agencies to command the highest price. By paying for time, brands get the audiences they value more than the network (potential customers), and agencies get fees for brokering the deal, solidifying their relationships with their clients and the legacy networks. As digital technologies allowed audiences to bypass commercial spots, and as ratings on broadcast networks declined due to audiences having more options,[61] brands started to question the value of legacy or linear TV time. The threat—the heart of the television "crisis"—is declining value for advertising from brands and viewership from fans. Both influence each other, driving revenue down, albeit slowly. It is a crisis of commerce, not of television's cultural value. Independent producers flipped the script by releasing shows largely without demanding financing up front, instead seeking it mostly after series have been published openly and have demonstrated some value.

Media studies scholars have explored challenges to legacy network processes in financing, audience behavior, and distribution.[62] Yet scholars have understudied the role of independent production in bridging competing industry stakeholders' needs through alternative practices and values. By considering alternatives to the pilot process, I expose the limits of corporate television's power to raise capital while supporting writers, audiences, and innovation. Lotz argues of proposals to restructure up-front

financing that "a different method of purchasing [e.g., an all-'scatter' market] would reallocate capital and value throughout the television industry in ways likely to affect the programming produced."[63] I argue that indie TV creators are already reallocating capital and value, responding to Hollywood's tightening labor market on the supply side along with demand from brands and audiences. As will be shown, the types of narratives independents produce are often different from legacy television, including a consistent theme of individuals struggling and surviving, often humorously, under the pressures of contemporary corporate capitalism.

U.S. scholars and policymakers have not completely understood the breadth of creative industry innovation enabled by open, networked distribution. Creative innovations have been, as Cunningham argues, "hidden."[64] Economists and social scientists, particularly in Australia and the United Kingdom, have attracted attention and investment from governments and universities for arguing that our perspective on innovation gives too much credit to corporations, venture capital, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).[65] As Paul Stoneman argues in his theorization of "soft innovations,"

> To date . . . the concept of innovation has primarily been centred around the scientific or technical, with the significance of new products and processes being judged upon the basis of improvements in functionality (technological product and process [TPP] innovation). Innovation that encompasses the artistic, formal (as in the contrast between form and function), intellectual, or aesthetic, has largely been ignored in the mainstream literature on innovation.[66]

For Stoneman, soft innovations are widespread and manifest in production innovation or differentiation (i.e., changes in creative products like films, music, etc.) or in the "aesthetic/intellectual dimensions of products in other industries" (product design, branding, etc., in noncreative industries).[67] To be sure, STEM fields drove innovation in the late twentieth century, allowing for the creation of tools that independent creators needed to open TV—the Internet and its applications and platforms chief among them. STEM innovations tend to focus on efficiency and scale, yet creative cultural production requires risk and experimentation, which legacy TV distributors have developed processes to mini-

mize. The U.S. market-competition model has proven ineffective at fully valuing the talent and skill of the country's media workers.[68] Thus, the Internet's technical efficiencies and innovation—the focus of most new media studies—cannot alone describe its role in transforming media forms, markets, and institutions. As S. Craig Watkins found in his study of hip hop and black cinema, individuals motivated by broader social, political, and economic conditions "adopt and manipulate technology to accommodate their intentions."[69] Independent producers use networked distribution to develop television on a smaller scale, equally valuable to society but undervalued by the market and state. In networked television, creativity from a broader base of producers, in cooperation with sponsors and fans who participate or fund production,[70] "reverses the increase in scale that has long characterized research and innovation," as participants "undertake large projects on the basis of many small contributions."[71]

Television's indie web producers are innovators taking risks in a creative market whose vast inequalities and new technologies encourage value creation outside of it.[72] Lured by the chance to transform a powerful culture industry, indie producers framed their work as necessary for social change: "[E]conomic risks are socially constructed," as Gina Neff argues of dot-com workers who supplied Silicon Valley with "venture labor."[73] Unlike corporate tech workers, however, independent media workers used the web's technical efficiencies to generate value for themselves, communities, and other market participants amid persistent corporate control over processes of media distribution—product development, financing, and marketing of original series. A broader perspective on innovation would help legislators and reformists "attend to evidence of system failure, not only market failure," and realize how much vitality exists outside risk-averse power centers.[74] In an open, digital economy, we have to study independent production in markets that confound old ideas about media—"television" outside of cable, journalism outside of print, gaming outside of major studios, film without celluloid, radio without broadcasting. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, entertainment businesses look healthy, if we only consider the stock prices and products of conglomerates. A broader view reveals evidence of declining value for producers and consumers but also sources of innovation in the face of systemic revolution or evolution.

How do we integrate and value these markets? Examining indie production directs studies of innovation beyond new products and efficiencies toward the way open markets encourage agents to generate value for society at large. Contemporary media and cultural studies works have been calling for expanded analyses of media production, including Henry Jenkins, Joshua Green, and Sam Ford's *Spreadable Media*, John Caldwell's *Production Culture*, Vicki Mayer's *Below the Line*, Pablo Boczkowski's *Digitizing the News*, Christina Dunbar-Hester's *Low Power to the People*, and Derek Johnson's *Media Franchising*.[75] While I agree with scholars like Angela McRobbie, who argues that "the call to be creative is a potent and highly appealing mode of governmentality . . . whose main effect is to do away with the kind of welfare rights in work by means of eclipsing normal employment altogether," I argue that we need to understand how and why workers engage in this kind of risky work in order to map progressive alternatives.[76] If worker exploitation also exists within the legacy system, we must see what value is created outside of it. Web series are television, despite their development outside of legacy distribution. They represent economic activity but also deliver social and public benefits to workers, citizens, and communities to help them endure the tough cultural economy and forge alternative paths.

Open TV investigates innovation, serving as both an ethnographic production study about market activity and a cultural and political critique of the current American media market. Out of necessity and inadequate resources, indie innovation tends to be more informal than functional, more exploratory than practical. The market for indie scripted comedies and dramas is small, experimental, and fraught compared to that of higher-budget legacy series. But this small corner of the Internet is rich with ideas, producing clear public benefit. For the likes of Adam Goldman and his contemporaries, these benefits could spill over into the larger economy if existing institutions would support them.

Studying Open TV

Open TV is based on one-on-one interviews with writers, producers, exhibitors, and development executives, mostly on the phone, though also in person and occasionally via e-mail. When possible I visited sets, studios, and postproduction offices. I interviewed 136 individuals

for *Open TV*, with each interview lasting twenty to ninety minutes. I interviewed a wide array of web series producers, from seasoned TV professionals like Marshall Herskovitz (*thirtysomething*, *My So-Called Life*) to producers unknown to anyone but their few fans. Most of the producers I interviewed share a general orientation toward "professional" scripted series: projects using semitraditional film and television equipment and production roles—director, screenwriters, editors, boom operators, etc. (though it will be shown that those roles are routinely reconfigured). Most of these producers distinguish themselves from "amateur" or "YouTube" creators.[77] Beyond their tendency toward professionalism, they vary widely. I followed producers and marketers of comedies and dramas targeted at advertiser-friendly audiences, as well as those whose series are explicitly aimed at underrepresented (i.e., less advertiser-friendly) audiences. That said, most of the creators profiled in this project have been marginalized by the industry in some way and entered the open TV market because Hollywood undervalues their labor.

I selected the key case studies in this book for the data they could provide: productions lasting more than one season and attracting fans or sponsors offer more insight into how open TV works. At the same time, I supplement these cases with insights from lesser-known or less popular series to show what practices and ideas extend beyond clear successes. Most web series are not clear successes, yet I find continuities in production and distribution practices.

In addition to interviewing producers about their work, I became one myself by coproducing an indie series. Production is as much a methodology as a form of economic activity and cultural critique. I begin each chapter with insight I gained from coproducing, with a small nonprofit, a sitcom, *She's out of Order*, by and about a black female journalist, Tara, played by creator Teresa Lasley. These prologues provide a grounded view of innovation and offer critical insights into the limits of open distribution and independent production. Like most series, our show did not reach as many viewers, or attract as many sponsors or development deals, as we had hoped. Therefore, while key case studies are slightly biased towards successes, *She's out of Order* provides a rare glimpse into the kind of precarious production that typifies the open TV market and how value is nonetheless created.

I used a matrix of news sources for greater context and data on trends in the market. Several blogs have regularly covered the web series market: *Tubefilter* focuses on web series and *GigaOM/NewTeeVee* focused on video in convergence culture. Throughout my research I constantly discovered new sites: *New Media Rockstars* grew quickly with its coverage of YouTubers, and smaller sites and podcasts like *Indie Intertube*, *Placevine*, *We Love Soaps* (which had its own award show), and *The Tangled Web We Watch* (*LA Weekly*) made it easier to keep abreast of new series. Major trade magazines and outlets, from *Deadline*, *The AV Club*, *Variety*, and *The Hollywood Reporter* to *paidContent* and *MediaPost*, occasionally reported on the market. Mainstream media publications also covered shows on occasion—the *New York Times* and *USA Today* have had regular columns on web video. Niche blogs are crucial to publicizing series to interested audiences. *Shadow and Act* and *Clutch* played pivotal roles in showcasing black web series; *Queerty*, *AfterElton*, *AfterEllen*, *SheWired*, *Deep Dish*, and *One More Lesbian* were regular champions of gay, lesbian, and queer shows; and *NBC Latino* and *Latino Rebels* published on the Latino market. Meanwhile, many individual members of the web series community, particularly those involved with IAWTV, blog about the market and invite others to comment and debate. A lot of information about the market came from press releases—which, like most releases, rarely get reported. In my research, press releases were useful tools for seeing how video networks and series creators communicated with the public about the importance of their activities.

I found a challenging production market, with frustrated, eager, and often talented people keenly aware of the limits and value of their work. No one was ever getting paid enough, many not at all. Everyone was pressed for time, hungry for recognition, and taking on considerable personal and financial risk. Yet in the open TV market, I also saw innovation.

The open TV market is a robust and complicated media world, complete with a rich history of development (which I explore in chapter 1), innovations in production (chapter 2), representation (chapter 3), distribution (chapter 4), and a rising tide of conglomeration (chapter 5). Chapter 1 focuses on the history of the "web series," how producers and organizations excluded from legacy television development used the Internet to create models for narrating and financing new stories. In chap-

ter 2, I chronicle the greater degrees of creative freedom and fulfillment producers had in the market. I show how indie producers experimented with giving both talent and audiences creative input, giving writers more creative control and integrating cultural identity into production and storytelling. These production contexts supported narratives better attuned to the lives of those historically excluded from legacy TV, particularly black, Latino, gay, and lesbian populations, explored in chapter 3. In chapter 4, I show more agency for producers working with distributors, exhibitors, and brands that adapted legacy models for series release, recognition, and financing. Independent web channels and awards institutions arose to curate stories for fans, sponsors, and critics. They worked to be more accountable to producers and fan communities than legacy TV, even if a lack of resources often impeded their efficacy.

Chapter 5 explores the "scaling" of web television—the growth of corporate online distributors like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube's "multichannel networks" (MCNs) that bundle channels from hundreds of creators. These networked TV distributors harness the web's vast information capacities to create epic productions or massive collections of small productions with dedicated audiences, or what I call "big data television." Corporate web TV distributors support some independent creators but focus on delivering high margins to shareholders, replicating legacy television's development inequalities by focusing on increasing scales of production.

The open TV market may not survive the growth of the video economy. This is a problem for those who have seen how the web democratizes distribution. If we want fair marketplaces in the twenty-first century, we have to start with what workers and consumers desire and what benefits society at large, not just corporate intermediaries. In the epilogue, I interrogate the networked television era and introduce my next research project: Open TV (beta), a platform for queer television designed as a system intervention. Independents have changed the channel. Will we watch and listen?