

**Johnson, Derek University of North Texas. “‘Labors of Love’: Experimentations with Licensed Creativity in the Classic Network Era”**

Contemporary television production has been framed as a “transmediated” process where unified creative management newly extends beyond television to comics, games, and online media (Jenkins; Mann; Gray). Such claims often juxtapose emerging production models to previous licensing practices in which television properties migrated contractually to other media, yet produced work disconnected from, disavowed by, and distasteful compared to the legitimate creativity of television producers. This paper challenges those assumptions by historicizing the role of licensed creativity in television production, arguing that extant relationships among producers, executives, and licensees at the height of the network era had already reconfigured television authorship to operate across media.

To make that intervention, this paper mobilizes archival collections and reconstructs creative management practices in 1960s network television. Production memos from the Gene Roddenberry Papers evince how creators of the NBC series *Star Trek*—and Desilu studio executives overseeing them—integrated licensing into day-to-day production operations. As a supplement, NBC Records document how network executives may have conceived programming generally in licensing terms. Analysis of these historical traces uncovers first how producers opened space for licensees within the creative process of television production. Second, this evidence shows how executives reordered creative hierarchies and compelled direct producer oversight of licensed creativity as a “labor of love.” Lastly, this study shows how licensees managed these hierarchies to create from the televisual margins. Overall, this paper calls needed attention to licensing as a significant practice through which television authorship has been historically negotiated and imagined.

**Derek Johnson** is an Assistant Professor in the Radio, Television, and Film Department at the University of North Texas. He received his PhD from the Media and Cultural Studies program at the University of Wisconsin. He is currently working on a book manuscript exploring creative collaboration in the media franchise.