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*Batman versus The Green Hornet : The Merchandisable TV Text
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Figure 1. Batman and Robin were a merchandising phenomenon, as evidenced by this image from National Periodicals Publications 1966 list of Authorized Products and Official Licenses, which circulated among potential licensees and advertisers (National Periodicals Publications, 1966).

Batman versus *The Green Hornet*: The Merchandisable TV Text and the Paradox of Licensing in the Classical Network Era

by AVI SANTO

Abstract: This article analyzes the shifting positions and dispositions of licensors in the mid-1960s through a case study comparing the highly successful *Batman* (ABC, 1965–1967) TV series merchandising campaign with the struggles encountered in producing and merchandising *The Green Hornet* (ABC, 1966). As licensing moved in-house, licensors lost the managerial autonomy and creative authority they had previously enjoyed.

In 1965, Batmania swept across America as the *Batman* television series (1965–1967) debuted on ABC. Like James Bond, which had opened in movie theaters a year earlier, Batman was a licensing phenomenon, with both properties generating nearly \$130,000,000 in merchandising sales between them in 1964–1965 alone (Figure 1). Though the fact is rarely mentioned in histories of the Classical Network Era (CNE) (1965–1975), all three television networks were heavily invested in the merchandising possibilities of their productions. In fact, ABC operated its

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own licensing and merchandising department as early as 1957 to capitalize on *Maverick* (1957–1962) toys and clothing opportunities.¹ Paradoxically, however, as licensing became increasingly central to media production strategies in the CNE, many licensed property managers (licensors) were losing the managerial autonomy and creative authority they had previously enjoyed.

Licensing of trade characters such as Buck Rogers, Little Orphan Annie, Tarzan, Superman, and the Lone Ranger had been ongoing since the early 1930s. Typically, however, these operations were handled by quasi-independent entities that saw their primary functions as managing the adaptation of properties across multiple media and merchandising sites. This earlier generation of licensors saw themselves as simultaneously *partnering with* and *policing* the sponsors and merchandisers they engaged in order to ensure that their properties promoted both appropriate civic and pro-consumerist behaviors. Striking this balance often enabled licensors to actively participate in creative decision-making processes and demand final approval over how a property was represented. These managerial practices were central to how licensors defined their positions within the field of cultural production. Now working *for* rather than *with* the film studios and television networks during the CNE, the occupational identities licensors had previously invested in were expected to shift to reflect their new status. Some flourished, while others refused to adapt.

In this article, I analyze the shifting positions of licensors in the mid-1960s by comparing the highly successful *Batman* campaign with the struggles encountered in producing and merchandising *The Green Hornet* (1965). Both series were produced by William Dozier's Greenaway Productions and Twentieth Century Fox Television (TCFT) for ABC. *Batman* was licensed by the Licensing Corporation of America (LCA), a subsidiary of National Periodical Publications (NPP), which also owned DC Comics. LCA closely coordinated its efforts with ABC and TCFT's respective licensing and merchandising divisions. The *Green Hornet* was licensed by George Trendle, an independent property owner who had been successful throughout the 1940s and 1950s in licensing and merchandising the Lone Ranger (1933) and Sergeant Preston of the Yukon (1940). I argue that in the mid-1960s the "insider-outsider" identity valued by the older generation of licensors, like Trendle, began to be perceived as unnecessarily interfering with the smooth management of cross-merchandising efforts. Yet, even as Trendle's autonomy diminished, he refused to cede his authority, resulting in repeated clashes with Dozier over how to adapt and merchandise the *Green Hornet* brand.

To put this another way, *Batman*'s success and *The Green Hornet*'s struggles during the CNE had little to do with any inherent qualities possessed by either character, or with their respective resonance within a shifting cultural zeitgeist, or even with the particular production environment in which both series were developed, but rather with how each property was *managed* by its respective licensor, and with the degree of

1 Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 164. I would like to thank the courteous staff at the Detroit Public Library as well as Jennifer Peterson, who collected materials on my behalf from the American Heritage Center.

creative authority and control each licensor demanded over the production process. In part, Batman's success in the 1960s and beyond can be attributed to LCA's and NPP's loosening of their managerial reins with licensees, a point I will pick back up in my conclusion. Trendle's occupational identity, however, was rooted in a certain type of managerial autonomy and creative authority actively being challenged in the CNE, but which he was unwilling to relinquish and continued to assert over the *Green Hornet* production. Though it would be simple to argue from our contemporary vantage point that Trendle's managerial style was wrong for the production culture of the mid-1960s, that conclusion can only be drawn based on the direction the entertainment industries have subsequently taken. As Michel Foucault reminds us, discontinued practices open up counter-historical possibilities that reveal points of historical rupture rather than natural progression.² In this vein, I argue that Trendle's managerial style was not so much "wrong" as it was based on an oppositional set of understandings of how the entertainment industry worked and what the licensor's role was within it.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on the field of cultural production offers insight into the changing roles of licensors during the CNE. Bourdieu suggests that the field of artistic and literary production—of which film and television would be included as forms of industrial art—is characterized by struggles between occupational communities working from asymmetrical positions and vying for authoritative power. While position determines to some extent the range of possible actions an occupational community might take, the choices of what goals, objectives, and/or modes of legitimation to claim are also the result of dispositions, or *habitus*, roughly defined as the values, attitudes, and beliefs that a particular community holds about itself. Bourdieu argues that the same set of beliefs can lead to different goals and objectives depending on a community's hierarchical position within the overall field of cultural production.³

Management is never simply or only about successful profit maximization strategies (though making money is always the desired outcome), but also about historically contingent beliefs about what "values" are economically valuable. As Paul du Gay argues, "The production of culture cannot be reduced to a question of 'economics' alone. Processes of production are themselves cultural phenomena in that they are assemblages of meaningful practices that construct certain ways for people to conceive and conduct themselves in an organizational context."⁴ As this article will demonstrate, LCA and Trendle understood the value of their respective properties differently, but, equally as important, they also understood their own value within the production process in very different terms. LCA's and Trendle's divergent understandings of their occupational positions and purpose produced very different discursive interactions in dealing with Dozier and ABC.

John Caldwell has shown how members of different occupational communities within the film and television industries construct their occupational identities by telling trade stories designed to establish their career capital. Caldwell divides these trade

2 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

3 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29–144.

4 Paul du Gay, *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production* (London: Sage, 1998), 7.

stories into genre categories, each serving particular cultural functions, arguing that specific labor sectors select those genres that best confirm and/or delineate membership and status within a particular community.⁵ Caldwell is careful to point out that trade story genres do not necessarily map exclusively or permanently along labor sector lines, but the largely presentist focus of his work does not allow for considerations of how particular trade stories and genres have migrated over time. Nor does Caldwell investigate the consequences of story/sector “misalignment,” which seems particularly pertinent if we are to believe that trade stories often respond to perceived changes in the production culture that threaten existing power dynamics.⁶ I argue that Trendle’s articulation of his managerial authority over the *Green Hornet* brand asserted a form of career capital incongruous with licensing’s shifting position within the entertainment industries during the CNE. To borrow Caldwell’s terminology, Trendle still saw his authority as on a par with above-the-line creative talent, while licensing as a field had shifted toward an intermediary position. Thus, Trendle’s trade stories—his repeated efforts to defend and affirm his creative authority—were treated by Dozier as little more than an annoying intrusion on the creative process, even as Trendle saw such turf marking as an essential part of his occupational identity as a licensor.

In the case of *The Green Hornet*, tensions over the changing functions of licensing produced competing memories about the historic appeal of the property. Both Dozier and Trendle looked back on the 1940s *Green Hornet* radio series to justify their claims about how to successfully revise the property, each remembering quite differently the reasons for its prior success. Trendle believed that *The Green Hornet*’s appeal rested in its ability to teach viewers about civic duty and police work, which in turn drove merchandising by stimulating consumers’ desires to emulate the property’s all-American values. In contrast, Dozier and ABC saw the gadgetry (the gas gun, the car) and adventure built into the *Green Hornet* formula as central to the brand’s historical ability to generate merchandising opportunities, which now might be renewed. In this manner, Dozier exercised an institutional form of memory that sought to repurpose a previously successful product within the framework of contemporary production practices. Trendle, on the other hand, not only took every opportunity to remind Dozier of his own central role in making *The Green Hornet* successful in the first place, but also strategically invoked memory as a managerial strategy designed to keep the TV series in line with the brand identity established for the property thirty years earlier. In sum, the discursive strategies employed by Trendle and Dozier invoke memory in relation to the production process in an effort to defend and improve on their respective positions within the field of television production in the mid-1960s.

While Caldwell might describe Trendle’s constant “giving [of] notes” to Dozier on how to better align the *Green Hornet* TV series with the *Green Hornet* brand as an example of the “pervasive ways that executives and management personnel from

5 For example, the above-the-line creative sector—generally consisting of directors, writers, and producers—relies on genesis myths (celebrations of an originating moment and artistic pedigree) that stress intuition and vision in order to legitimate an authoritative position. See John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 37–53.

6 See *ibid.*, 7.

the business end of film and television have *commandeered* creative functions;⁷ I would contend that Trendle's "interference" reveals licensing to be a complex if also contingent site of authorship and creative engagement. Trendle's investment in the Green Hornet brand extended well beyond mere economic management to also encompass a sense of creative authority that is typically not imagined as being within the purview of licensors. The rejection of this type of creative authority during the CNE (especially from those licensors still operating outside of the corporate chain of command) is significant not only because it represents a major redefinition of labor sector identities, but also because it would impact the relationship between textual production and merchandising extension in Hollywood for the next several decades. I return to this point in the conclusion, suggesting that in the contemporary era of brand extension, licensors and other supposedly noncreative personnel are once again emerging as purveyors of creative authority managing an increasingly dispersed creative labor force.

In what follows, I begin by examining the increased significance of licensing and merchandising within the CNE, focusing on the ways these practices shaped both the production of *Batman* and renewed interest in the Green Hornet. I then briefly step backwards to discuss how Trendle handled the licensing, marketing, and merchandising for the Lone Ranger in the post–World War II era. I will show how even at his height, Trendle's actions seemed designed to forestall his decline by anxiously articulating the continued importance of autonomous licensors at a moment when the media industries and sponsors were beginning to recognize the full economic potential of licensed properties. Finally, I analyze tensions emerging from the discrepancy between Trendle's self-perceived occupational identity and his diminished occupational status in the CNE, and how these tensions resulted in struggles over how to update the Green Hornet property.

The archival materials used in this article were found in the George W. Trendle collection housed at the Detroit Public Library in Detroit, Michigan, and the William Dozier collection housed at the American Heritage Center in Laramie, Wyoming.⁸ In particular, the article draws on materials dealing with the preproduction, production, and cancellation of the *Green Hornet* television series, including hundreds of letters exchanged between Trendle and Dozier from 1964 to 1970 as well as financial records, merchandising materials, and licensing contracts. In analyzing these materials, I extracted basic information about the production process, but more importantly, I read these documents symptomatically, as discursive exchanges revealing the perceived occupational identities of their writers and the underlying tensions and anxieties emerging from a shift in the relative power positions each occupied.

Licensing Trends in the Classical Network Era. The CNE is typically described by media scholars as an era of network hegemony, with ABC, CBS, and NBC consolidating their power over the television schedule and taking a dominant role in programming decisions. Television transitioned from a sponsored medium—where

7 Ibid., 198 (emphasis added). Caldwell further defines "giving notes" as a "corporate communiqué based on some artistic or economic ideal about how film/television *should* work" (217).

8 All materials from the William Dozier Papers are listed in endnotes as "Dozier" and all materials from the George Trendle Papers are listed as "Trendle."

corporations financed series production and dictated scheduling and content decisions to the networks—to an advertising-based medium, where the networks made programming decisions and sold advertising time to multiple sponsors. As Mark Alvey argues, this arrangement alleviated the risk for sponsors investing in an increasingly expensive production process, but it also greatly limited the number of potential investors available to independent producers.⁹

As a result of these changes, the era also saw increased network ownership and financial investment in the series the networks programmed. Employing a strategy of deficit financing, the networks paid only a percentage of the actual production cost and demanded creative input and control over distribution and syndication for their investment. By the mid-1960s, the three networks either owned or shared in the profits for 91 percent of all prime-time programming.¹⁰ Since the networks did not pay the full cost of series production, the Hollywood studios were practically the only players in the market who could afford to wait for syndication to recoup their investments. Even the studios, however, began contracting independent producers to handle the creative end of series production and, beyond sharing in the net profits, charged these independents significant overhead fees in exchange for leasing out studio space and equipment.

The growing significance of merchandising and licensing revenue to both the studios and the networks during this era is often mentioned only in passing. For instance, both Moya Luckett and Henry Jenkins point to the attractiveness of merchandising possibilities for *The Patty Duke Show* (1963–1966) and *Dennis the Menace* (1959–1963). Yet their focus remains primarily on the TV texts, rather than the ways in which licensing and merchandising arrangements might have structured their production.¹¹

Scholarship on the *Batman* TV series has largely been concerned with its appeal to multiple audiences—generational, countercultural, or queer—and with its relationship to the emerging pop art movement and camp sensibilities of the late 1960s.¹² Will Brooker's work is perhaps the most engaged with situating the series historically within the "institutional matrix" of television, but even as he concedes that the series generated thousands of commercial tie-ins and hundreds of merchandised spin-off items, Brooker's continued privileging of the television text leads him to identify licensing and merchandising as by-products of the *Batman* series, while I contend that they were integral to its genesis.¹³

9 Mark Alvey, "The Independents: Rethinking the Television Studio System," in *Television: The Critical View*, 6th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34–51.

10 *Ibid.*, 46.

11 Moya Luckett, "Girl Watchers: Patty Duke and Teen TV," and Henry Jenkins, "Dennis the Menace, 'The All American Handful,'" both in *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin (New York: Routledge, 1997), 95–118 and 119–138. For an example of the intersections of textuality and merchandising in 1950s television, see Sean Griffin, "Kings of the Wild Backyard: Davy Crockett and Children's Space," in *Kids' Media Culture*, ed. Marsha Kinder (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 102–121.

12 See Andy Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," and Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," both in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–163 and 117–148.

13 Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London: Continuum, 2000).

Dozier and TCFT licensed the TV rights to the Batman franchise from NPP, which, in turn, received \$1,000 for every episode produced plus 20 percent of the profits generated from advertising revenue and syndication sales.¹⁴ LCA handled the merchandise licensing for the series, with Greenaway, TCFT, and ABC-TV each receiving an uneven slice of the revenues. In 1966, *True Magazine* profiled LCA, explaining that the licensor acted as a “broker, deal[ing] out permission to manufacturers to make products using the name of the property.”¹⁵ Licensors performed this role in exchange for 5 percent of the wholesale price of a manufactured item, which was then split among the licensor, the intellectual property owner, and others involved in publicly promoting the property, such as television or film producers.¹⁶ Since NPP owned LCA, it double-dipped on the division of the merchandising percentage, claiming half for itself.

While NPP officially bought LCA in 1966, *True Magazine* called the deal an “all-in-the-family transaction,” since LCA already handled all of NPP’s licensing.¹⁷ By 1966, LCA represented thirty-five different properties, including James Bond, for eleven publishing houses and motion picture and television producers and had licenses with over nine hundred manufacturers, earning an estimated \$100 million annual gross from said licenses.¹⁸ NPP’s purchase of LCA not only provided extra revenue but also further integrated NPP’s existing properties within an increasingly transmediated and merchandised web. As NPP CEO Jack Leibowitz explained to stockholders, “[I]n one form or another, Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, the Flash, Green Lantern and other members of our family of fiction heroes can be molded and merchandised to suit every taste—as television performers, as illustrations for magazine advertising and point-of-sale displays, as promotional products for the ice-cream, dairy, soft drink, baking and confectionary industries, as syndicated comic strips, and as hundreds of different toy and apparel products for children and teenagers.”¹⁹ NPP’s acquisition of LCA and its TV deal with Greenaway and ABC combined to generate precisely the type of merchandising blitz Leibowitz envisioned.

Though short-lived as a TV series, *Batman* was one of the most successfully integrated merchandising and licensing phenomena of any era.²⁰ In 1965 alone, more than 500 merchandise licenses were doled out and \$75 to \$80 million of Batman merchandise was put on the market. Fifty-three companies signed endorsement deals and thirteen separate sponsors purchased advertising time on the series while simultaneously developing commercial tie-ins with it. Midway through its first season, 173 companies, ranging from toy and clothing manufacturers to producers of food and other household products, had signed licensing agreements to produce authorized

14 William D. Hartley, “Smash! Batman Is Hit on the Retail Scene; He Outsell Agent 007,” *Wall Street Journal*, n.d., ca. 1966.

15 Arthur Myers, “They Bought the Rights to Get Rich,” *True Magazine*, December 1966 (reprint, no page numbers listed). Dozier, Box 49.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 National Periodical Publications Annual Report, 1966. Dozier, Box 49.

19 Ibid.

20 With two 30-minute episodes airing per week, the series did reach 120 episodes in three seasons, more than enough for syndication purposes.

Batman-related merchandise.²¹ Along with James Bond, Batman merchandise accounted for 25 percent of the estimated total licensing business in the United States in 1966. While Batman comic book sales doubled the year the TV series debuted, it is perhaps more significant that NPP's net profits rose nearly 16 percent from the commissions they collected on Batman merchandising licenses.²²

Not only did LCA operate under NPP's corporate umbrella, but it also worked alongside Greenaway to better integrate merchandising opportunities into the actual *Batman* production. Luckett refers to the importance of "industrially orchestrated gim-

micks" during the CNE that would direct TV audiences to purchase show-related merchandise and vice versa.²³ In one instance, LCA licensed a Batman and Robin trading card game that claimed to be tied directly to the TV series (Figure 2). The pitch to retailers boldly stated, "The fantastic story situations that will appear on *next week's* ABC-TV's BATMAN program are shown on every BATMAN GAME card you distribute *this week*."²⁴ While the promotional gimmick was somewhat misleading (there was a *possibility* that the scenario portrayed on a game card might be included at the end of a *Batman* cliff-hanger episode), it suggests a highly integrated relationship between program and merchandise, designed to tie viewer ratings to consumer purchases.

Beyond this, the *Batman* TV series habitually introduced new gadgets and gizmos into episodes, which might then

Figure 2. This internal ad for the Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder game circulated among merchandisers and suggests a close (if also misleading) relationship between merchandising opportunities and textual strategies for the series (Trans-World Sales, 1966).

be made available for consumption in department stores and supermarkets across America. At the end of the 1965–1966 season, Dozier wrote to LCA requesting a list of available Batman merchandise in order to help better promote those items on the series.²⁵ As Lorenzo Semple, Jr., *Batman*'s supervising scriptwriter, bluntly stated, "I can tell you that we've created one absolutely guaranteed new t.v. star: The Batmobile" (Figure 3).²⁶ Similarly, in 1966, LCA advocated for Greenaway to introduce

21 "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder Authorized Products and Official Licenses," 1966. Dozier, Box 49.

22 *Advertising Age*, Press reprint (ca. 1966).

23 Luckett, "Girl Watchers," 98.

24 Publicity packet for Trans-World Sales for retailers of the Batman and Robin game. Dozier, Box 49.

25 Telegram, Dozier to Emmett, September 20, 1966; and typed letter signed (TLS), Emmett to Dozier, September 21, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

26 TLS, Semple to Dozier, August 6, 1965. Dozier, Box 6.

Figure 3. The *Batman* TV series generated hundreds of licensed merchandise items (Corgi Juniors advertisement, Reeves catalog, 1974).

the recently created comic book character, Batgirl, onto the TV series, promising that it would stimulate new merchandising opportunities for both licensor and producer.²⁷ One of the resulting product opportunities, the Batgirl-cycle, saw NPP split income from toy licenses fifty-fifty with Greenaway/TCFT.

LCA's Jay Emmett explained that Batman was a better licensing property than Superman precisely because of such gadgets. "Superman does everything with his own superhuman powers. This is fine for the forces of righteousness, but not so good for licensing agents. Batman, on the other hand, is a licensing agent's dream. Batman is a guy like you and me," Emmett said dreamily, adding "he needs equipment."²⁸ While Emmett's comments might, on the surface, seem straightforward enough, they actually represented a radical break from the merchandising logic employed by licensors only a decade earlier, when powerful personalities, not their accoutrements, were believed to generate revenue streams.

27 TLS, Dozier to Ducovny, October 14, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

28 Myers, "They Bought the Rights to Get Rich." Dozier, Box 49.

Emmett's relationship with Dozier also marks an important shift in licensing's position during the CNE. To be certain, Emmett's responsibilities included making sure that the Batman bible was not being too liberally interpreted by Greenaway and that the back catalog of Batman villains and contraptions were being effectively set up for new merchandising opportunities, but LCA was not in the business of policing Dozier, and Emmett's creative input was usually relegated to suggesting that new toy possibilities be integrated into scripts (the hows and whys were left entirely in Dozier's hands). In an interview I conducted in 2005, Emmett remained reluctant to articulate the precise nature of his work, repeatedly referring to licensing as a great profession precisely because there was no work involved since the characters essentially sold themselves.²⁹

Erasing the labor involved in managing powerful personalities is also a radical change from Trendle's enthusiastic foregrounding of his own role in ensuring the Green Hornet's success. Of course, Emmett's attitude was shaped by his position as an employee of a major publishing concentration, which had a stake in suppressing public knowledge of Superman's and Batman's corporate side. Hence, Emmett's career capital was at stake in his interpersonal relationships and contacts, not his creativity, and in conversation with me, he constantly foregrounded his good fortune at being at the right place at the right time and having the right connections.

Thus, it was both obvious and surprising that within the emerging media environment, *The Green Hornet* would debut as a television series. On the one hand, licensing and merchandising was now a fully integrated facet of cultural production, and the success of the Dozier *Batman* series awakened institutional memories of other successfully merchandised properties that might be modernized and repackaged for consumption. On the other hand, Trendle's valuation of the Green Hornet's appeal as well as his perceived right to external managerial authority were out of sync with a media environment in which licensors and producers worked together to generate plot-based rather than personality-based merchandising opportunities.

In fact, the contract Trendle signed on September 29, 1965, with TCFT and Greenaway is both indicative of the increased centrality of licensing and merchandising to network and studio production strategies and of the shifting, if also ambiguous, role Trendle was expected to play in this environment. The TCFT contract called for a \$2,000 initial licensing fee to be paid to Trendle's licensing arm, The Green Hornet Inc. (GHI), plus an additional \$750 for every episode produced. Similar to the Batman deal, GHI also earned 25 percent of any net profits from sale of the series and related merchandising opportunities. On March 1, 1966, before a pilot script had even been written, ABC bought the series from Greenaway/TCFT based largely on the success the latter had had with *Batman*.³⁰ ABC committed to seventeen initial episodes.³¹ In exchange for the exclusive merchandising rights, ABC agreed to pay TCFT \$72,500 per episode.³² ABC immediately went to work on the merchandising and publicity

29 Telephone interview with the author, April 16, 2005.

30 Telegram, Dozier to Trendle, March 1, 1966. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 4.

31 Telegram, Dozier to Trendle, March 3, 1966. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 4.

32 Synopsis of agreement between Twentieth Century Fox Television and the American Broadcasting Company, March 15, 1966. Dozier, Box 11.

campaigns for the new series, securing sixty-five licenses and an estimated \$267,500 in advance royalties from merchandisers before *The Green Hornet* pilot even aired.³³

Trendle initially seemed relieved to let others handle the merchandising, writing to his former partner, Raymond Meurer, “We don’t have a thing to do except see that the pictures are properly made.”³⁴ While the contract Trendle signed was theoretically generous, it actually contained multiple clauses that worked against GHI sharing in any profits from the series or its related merchandising. Both TCFT and ABC built profit-generating mechanisms into their contracts that ensured they made money before net profits were even calculated (which, in turn, severely reduced the total possible net profits the series could make). TCFT profited from distribution and overhead fees, while ABC took a percentage of the gross merchandising receipts, but both GHI and Greenaway had to wait until negative costs were recouped before sharing in net profits. Since the average production cost per episode of *The Green Hornet* greatly exceeded the amount of money ABC paid Greenaway Productions, the negative costs were virtually impossible to recoup unless the series was successful enough to have a long syndication run. (The actual cost of producing a *Green Hornet* episode ranged from \$112,000 to \$120,000.) Despite a financial arrangement that both minimized Trendle’s involvement in and ability to profit from merchandising, Trendle was personally paid an additional \$500 per episode as a consultant and was granted final script and casting approval, a possible nod to his previous success managing the 1950s merchandising phenomenon, the *Lone Ranger*.³⁵

Licensing the Lone Ranger. George Washington Trendle was the owner and licensor of several successful media properties throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, including the *Lone Ranger*, the *Green Hornet* and *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*. The post–World War II era was the height of Trendle’s success, especially with the *Lone Ranger* property. By 1953, *The Lone Ranger* was heard by an estimated audience of 12 million over 221 radio stations on the ABC-Radio network. The *Lone Ranger* comic strip appeared in 177 daily and 119 Sunday newspapers and had an estimated readership of 71 million people. There were three separate *Lone Ranger* comic books in circulation, selling a total of over two million copies per month. *The Lone Ranger* television series, which debuted September 15, 1949, and was sponsored by General Mills, was the biggest hit ABC had in its early years, averaging five million viewers per week. In 1950–1951, the year Nielsen began calculating national television ratings, it was the only ABC show to make it into the top fifteen. It ran for eight seasons and 180 episodes. By 1953, there were also sixty active *Lone Ranger* merchandise licenses in effect.

Believing that profits were generated through the maintenance of a stable and replicable character property, Trendle managed the articulation of his brands’ formulas

33 TLS, Trendle to Meurer, September 8, 1966. Trendle, Box 46, Folder 13. List of *Green Hornet* licenses and products assembled by ABC Merchandising Inc., and sent from Dozier to Maurice Morton, head of TCFT publicity, August 19, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

34 TLS, Trendle to Meurer, November 11, 1965. Trendle, Box 46, Folder 13.

35 In fact, the contract contained contradictory language that, on the one hand, gave TCFT and Greenaway the rights to create derivative materials based on the original *Green Hornet* series, while on the other hand protecting the original source material against substantial revision.

across multiple but separate media and manufacturing industries. As Trendle explained to Jack Chertok, producer of the *Lone Ranger* television series, "I think the directors are forgetting all about the fact that there must be some comparison made between the television Ranger and the AM [radio] Ranger and we cannot afford to ignore it."³⁶ Trendle also believed he cultivated consumer goodwill by ensuring that his properties always espoused appropriate moral, civic, and educational values and commercial restraint, which in turn justified their use in the business of selling to children.³⁷ Trendle devised a set of *Lone Ranger* rules that included forbidding performers from being photographed in costume without their mask, smoking in the presence of children, drinking in costume, receiving guests in their hotel rooms, or making unauthorized speeches. One final rule spelled out Trendle's reasoning: "The *Lone Ranger* is to be kept strictly a myth, handled as a business and kept on a business-like basis."³⁸

Trendle carefully policed how sponsors and licensees adapted his properties, ensuring their formulaic continuity. There were rules focused on plot consistency and routines were also codified to ensure the character's inherent "Americanness." An integral part of his postwar performance was the *Lone Ranger*'s recitation of the Pledge to America, a variation on the Pledge of Allegiance. Several scripted public appearances confirm the precision with which the moment was enacted, designed to arouse patriotic sentiment. The lights dimmed, music of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" played, an assortment of extras dressed in color guard flanked the Ranger, the music faded, and then there would be a brief segue into "America, the Beautiful." The *Lone Ranger* then recited his pledge. Afterwards, the *Lone Ranger* circled the stadium shaking hands with children and their parents while the announcer intermittently told the audience of all the various sites where the *Lone Ranger* was available: on radio and TV, in novels and comic strips, and on Decca Records recordings. In each instance, the script was designed to insert the sponsor's name and the local affiliate or merchant where these products could be found.³⁹

Nicholas Sammond argues that producers of children's media are often attuned to prevailing discourses on child rearing at any historical moment and seek to position their products in relation to dominant social ideals.⁴⁰ In the 1950s, at the height of what Lizabeth Cohen has termed "the Consumer's Republic," in which consumerism became the ultimate expression of citizenship, Trendle generated dozens of articles and press materials emphasizing the *Lone Ranger*'s "miraculous" ability to cure young

36 TLS, Trendle to Chertok, April 11, 1950. Trendle, Box 37, Folder 5.

37 One of the fundamental cultural changes that took place in America in the late 1950s was a shift in child-rearing strategies away from teaching children discipline toward encouraging play and imagination. Trendle's conceptualization of both the *Lone Ranger*'s and the *Green Hornet*'s appeal was rooted in a residual cultural approach to parenting that was losing salience by the 1960s. On permissive parenting, see Jenkins, "Dennis the Menace."

38 "Lone Ranger Public Appearance Rules" (ca. 1951). Trendle, Box 70, Folder 6.

39 See, for example, scripts for "Lone Ranger Personal Appearance" at Detroit, July 13, 1951, and New York, ca. 1951. Trendle, Box 70, Folder 11.

40 Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

children of psychological afflictions related to nonconsumption (Figure 4).⁴¹ In one case, the Lone Ranger visited a hospital and convinced a child to eat solid foods for the first time in three years by giving him a set of Lone Ranger dishes.⁴² As opposed to LCA's affirmation of Batman as a merchandising marvel because of the gadgets and gizmos at their disposal, Trendle credited the Lone Ranger's tremendous merchandising success with its message of "Patriotism-Tolerance-Fairness and a Sympathetic Understanding of fellow men and their rights and privileges."⁴³ These values were, in turn, believed to encourage child consumers to buy Lone Ranger merchandise in an attempt to emulate their hero.⁴⁴

In an era of sponsor—as opposed to network—supremacy, the Lone Ranger was also an important spokesperson for General Mills, promoting the company's all-American heritage. As such, the virtues the Lone Ranger preached were also perfectly aligned with corporate visions of America. Under "Patriotism," one of Trendle's internal guidebooks explained, "The Lone Ranger is motivated by love of country—a desire to help those who are building the West."⁴⁵ Under "Fairness," the document stated, "The Lone Ranger advocates the American Tradition, which gives each man the right to choose his work and to profit in proportion to his effort; and to retain for himself a fair proportion of his profits."⁴⁶ The overarching message sold by the Lone Ranger during this period was that free enterprise had made America great and that the benevolent power of contemporary American corporations had direct historical linkages with the pioneering spirit that had built the country.

This equation of Americanism with consumer choice and free

Figure 4. A tremendous amount of publicity was generated throughout the 1950s promoting the Lone Ranger's miraculous ability to "cure" sick children, often by offering branded merchandise as incentives (*Merita Family Magazine*, June 1953).

41 Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 7.

42 "The Lone Ranger Standards and Background" (ca. 1953). Trendle, Box 69, Folder 20.

43 Ibid.

44 Cross, *Kids' Stuff*, 107–108.

45 "The Lone Ranger Standards and Background" (ca. 1953). Trendle, Box 69, Folder 20.

46 Ibid.

market expansion was also in line with the cultural attitudes of licensors like Trendle. Through their successful brand extension practices, licensors embodied the populist myth of individual accomplishment, entrepreneurship, and faith in the market-driven economy that the new consumers' republic exalted. Still, the rise of the American corporation, and its increased centralization in the postwar era, actually threatened the independence that licensors sought to maintain. While Trendle certainly did his part to promote the consumers' republic, the licensor also faced anxieties over his own changing position within the culture industries. Independent licensors had prided themselves for nearly twenty years on their insider/outsider status, able to amass great fortunes by working between culture industries and offering their managerial skills to multiple corporate sponsors, all the while working exclusively for their own economic self-interest. While their characters might enforce corporate ideals, licensors did not work for corporations. In the postwar period, Trendle began to feel an acute need to sell his own virtues in ways that simultaneously stressed his entrepreneurialism and also his contiguous role within corporate America.

Caldwell argues that trade stories become pronounced and turf marking more deliberate at moments of change in the hierarchies or practices of cultural production.⁴⁷ As the networks consolidated their power and the film studios assumed greater control over television production throughout the mid- to late 1950s, Trendle certainly felt the authority he held over independent producers like Jack Chertok begin to wane. Moreover, as corporate America began to regain consumer trust in the postwar period (thanks in part to successfully patriotic sales representatives like the Lone Ranger), sponsors like General Mills no longer valued Trendle's external guardianship over the brand, which remained far more restrictive over how the Lone Ranger could be used than the permissive consumer culture seemed to require. Yet Trendle's defense of his authority as licensor discursively aligned him and his partners with above-the-line creative personnel, stressing their visionary status while linking their accomplishments to the relative independence they had from corporate sponsors and network/studio executives.

Significantly, the 1952 Lone Ranger Twentieth Anniversary promotional packet Trendle produced was far more eager to celebrate the roles that he and his business partners—salesman H. Allen Campbell and lawyer Raymond Meurer—played in making the Lone Ranger a star than in discussing the sales appeal of the property. While Trendle is referred to as “truly a twentieth century pioneer,” Campbell's salesmanship abilities are given heroic status. “Mr. Campbell accepted the challenge . . . unabashed by the countless difficulties. . . . He could have rested on these laurels but he didn't. . . . [L]ike the Lone Ranger himself, he was not one to rest on past performances.”⁴⁸ Comparing Campbell to the Lone Ranger situated the latter within corporate ideals while permitting the former to assert a kind of heroic independence at once compatible with, yet removed from, corporate life.

Protecting the American values the Lone Ranger embodied, Meurer is described as tirelessly traveling to every part of the country to “put down imposters, block

47 Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 7.

48 “Subject: Lone Ranger Anniversary Story” (ca. 1953). Trendle, Box 69, Folder 20.

infringements and guard against misrepresentation in publicity or advertising.”⁴⁹ While no direct comparison to the Lone Ranger is made, the language used in describing Meurer’s exploits might easily be used in describing the hard-riding hero who traversed the West putting down injustice. Corporate values are thus galvanized and Meurer is shown as possessing these qualities, yet, like Campbell, is also positioned somewhat outside the conformist corporate culture he nobly defends (much as the Western hero is rarely a member of the civilization he helps develop).

In the end, Trendle’s efforts at asserting the vitality of his independent position were for naught. By the end of the 1950s, many of the branding strategies and licensing practices he had helped shepherd were beginning to be handled in-house by the networks and film studios. Whereas in the 1930s, fear of a consumer backlash had led many corporations to welcome Trendle’s oversight because it provided assurances that sponsored properties served important civic as well as salesmanship functions, the subsequent validation of consumerism as patriotic lessened the perceived need for independent licensors to act as intermediaries between the public and corporations. The paradox of the Lone Ranger’s success is that it paved the way for the independent licensor’s obsolescence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Trendle sold his rights to the Lone Ranger property to the Wrather Corporation in 1954 for \$3,000,000.⁵⁰

Remembering the Green Hornet. Having sold the Lone Ranger at the height of its success, Trendle devoted his attention to landing the Green Hornet a television deal. Intended as a modern variation on the successful Lone Ranger formula, *The Green Hornet* radio series debuted in 1936. The series purposely evoked its distant cousin’s “memory” in order to capitalize on *The Lone Ranger*’s success.⁵¹ Both series featured masked men fighting crime. Both heroes were known for their weapons of choice (the Lone Ranger had his silver-handled six-shooters that fired silver bullets; the Green Hornet had his gas gun that fired pellets of “instant sleep”), their unique modes of transport (the Lone Ranger’s mighty steed, Silver; the Green Hornet’s souped-up car, the Black Beauty), and their nonwhite companions (the “half-breed” Tonto and the “Oriental” Kato).

However, *The Green Hornet* was never as successful as *The Lone Ranger*. The radio series lasted from 1936 to 1952, but its constant station hopping (Mutual to NBC and back, and eventually ABC radio) and lack of consistent national sponsorship prevented the Green Hornet from breaking through in the same manner as other Trendle properties. A *Green Hornet* movie serial was produced by Universal in 1940 as well as a sequel in 1942, and *Green Hornet* comic books were also published by Harvey Publications from 1941 to 1949, but unlike *The Lone Ranger*, these various media products did not produce an integrated merchandising and publicity campaign. Whereas *The Lone Ranger* made the leap to television early (1949), Trendle failed to make a TV deal for *The Green Hornet* until 1965. Seen by networks and sponsors alike as too violent for

49 Ibid.

50 “The Lone Ranger Sold for Upwards of \$3,000,000,” Press release (ca. November 1954). Trendle, Box 70, Folder 1.

51 The heroes were identified as actual distant cousins, with Britt Reid (the Green Hornet’s alter ego) as the great-grandson of Dan Reid, the Lone Ranger’s nephew and protégé.

children and yet too cartoonish for adults, the property stalled until Dozier came along and recognized its merchandising potential.

It must be noted, however, that this was not how Trendle would remember the Green Hornet. To a certain extent, memory had always been invoked strategically by licensors. Throughout the 1930s, Trendle relied on recycling strategies that necessarily recalled past successes at building an audience in one regional market in order to attract a sponsor or radio station in another.⁵² Trendle kept meticulous records of otherwise ephemeral events such as audience giveaways, phone surveys, and fan letters, which would continue to serve as contemporary justifications for the Green Hornet brand's appeal as well as his own managerial authority over it. As Walter Benjamin asserts, "to articulate the past . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."⁵³ Trendle's reliance upon remembering past successes was often a defensive posture taken in response to shifting industry practices that sought to limit his authorial control and marginalize his properties, or both.

In this sense, Trendle's invocation of memory should be understood not only as a managerial strategy designed to sell a particular vision of the Green Hornet brand, but also as integral to his articulation of a distinctive occupational identity as licensor, performing work that no other industry sector could do as effectively. Bourdieu argues that position taking is intended to defend or improve a community's position within the field, while Caldwell suggests that such defenses take the form of self-reflexive trade stories. Precisely because the terrain of negotiation was often uneven, particularly following the shift to the CNE, Trendle clung to particular and selective memories of what the Green Hornet represented that were intended to redress and forestall his own diminishing authority.

Competing Agendas: Trendle versus Dozier and the Death of a Brand. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dozier initially tried to convince Trendle that mimicking *Batman's* style would be necessary for adapting *The Green Hornet* to the contemporary television merchandising market. Urging Trendle to watch the *Batman* premiere, Dozier added, "I am sure you will agree that we can't do straight GREEN HORNET stories today as they were done on radio. We must give the characters an added style and dimension which they didn't have on radio in order to make the grade in the present day sophisticated television market."⁵⁴ As owner of the Green Hornet brand, Trendle had a vested interest in eliminating comparisons—even favorable ones—between his property and one owned by someone else, and thus vehemently opposed *The Green Hornet* being compared to *Batman* (Figure 5).

52 Trendle's promotional files are filled with letters from radio stations, advertising agencies, and sponsors commenting on the success of various merchandising campaigns. Uniformly, these letters answered questions about Safety Club membership, giveaway responses, and advertising tie-ins. Many of these statistical responses would find their way into promotional materials for the radio series or as merchandising strategies for maximizing sales. See "The Lone Ranger Merchandising Exploitation Publicity Supplement" (ca. 1937) and "The Lone Ranger Sales Manual" (ca. 1937). Trendle, Box 69, Folder 20.

53 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 255.

54 TLS, Dozier to Trendle, November 16, 1965. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 3.

It also quickly became apparent that Dozier and Trendle each had a very different understanding of what the “unique style” of *The Green Hornet* series would be. Even as Dozier reluctantly distinguished between the Batman and Green Hornet properties, he still saw them both as part of the same generic and stylistic trend. One would be played for laughs, the other would tell straightforward, costumed crime-fighter stories, but both characters were fantasy figures who fought bizarre villains with far-fetched gadgetry. As a 1966 ABC promotional press release summarized, “Like ‘Batman’ . . . ‘The Green Hornet’ will specialize in lots of action and plenty of far-out crime-fighting gimmicks. But ‘The Green Hornet’

will be played for straight adventure, without the ‘camp’ humorous approach of ‘Batman.’”⁵⁵ Trendle, however, defined the emphasis on gimmickry and gadgetry and the absence of logical and realistic plots or villains as the epitome of camp.⁵⁶ Writing to Dozier on November 26, 1965, Trendle exclaimed, “I’m afraid you’re planning on making the GREEN HORNET a fantastic, unreal person which in my opinion would kill the show in six months.”⁵⁷

Trendle complained that Dozier’s plots were designed to emphasize gimmicks and gadgets over the character’s detective work and civic virtue and, moreover, that these plots were often illogical and inconsistent when it came to the Green Hornet’s motivations.⁵⁸ Dozier argued that audiences, particularly for a 7:30 p.m. time slot, were willing to suspend disbelief in favor of fast-paced entertainment.⁵⁹ Trendle demanded that plots be logical, or else audiences would feel cheated. “I’m a nut for trying to keep these things logical, so that when they’re viewed, the audience won’t say . . . ‘that’s crazy!’ . . . , or ‘that’s fantastic’ . . . , or ‘this couldn’t be done!’ I like to stay within the realm of reality as far as we can. Give the audience all the action you want, but keep it believable.”⁶⁰ In one instance, he complained that a script called for the Green Hornet’s car, the Black Beauty, to withstand a laser gun attack, which was illogical since it would

Figure 5. Trendle and Dozier battled repeatedly over how closely the *Green Hornet* TV series should follow *Batman*’s camp aesthetic. Despite Trendle’s objections, the heroes did meet in a two-part crossover designed to improve *The Green Hornet*’s poor ratings—to no avail (ABC promotional still, ca. 1966).

55 “ABC Premiere,” Press release, August 17, 1966. Dozier, Box 49.

56 See TLS, Trendle to Dozier, September 22, 1966; and TLS, Trendle to Dozier, July 21, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

57 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, November 26, 1965. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 13.

58 See TLS, Trendle to Dozier, May 13, 1966; and TLS, Trendle to Dozier, June 2, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

59 TLS, Dozier to Trendle, August 19, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

60 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, May 13, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

obviously disintegrate the car's windshield or tires. Dick Bluel, Dozier's producer on the series, wrote back agreeing with Trendle's logic, but adding, "[H]owever, since there is no such thing as a laser gun in the first place, I think that once the premise is accepted the public will not offer any objection so long as we entertain them."⁶¹ Bluel compromised, however, by including a line of dialogue in the script that explained that the car had been coated with a special laser-proof liquid solution.⁶²

Trendle also complained that scripts detoured from the original Green Hornet formula. Trendle recalled that *The Green Hornet* was conceived for a young adult audience to teach them the civic importance of voting and to call their attention to crooked politicians and rackets that the government failed to bust.⁶³ Whereas Dozier sought to make the Green Hornet's civic mission mere window dressing for a show that focused on action, gadgetry, and frenetic entertainment, Trendle insisted that it was precisely this civic component that had made *The Green Hornet* popular. Invoking memories of audience responses to the radio series, Trendle boasted, "We received letters from all over the country asking if we could send the GREEN HORNET to those towns and clean up certain political problems which they weren't able to solve themselves. . . . One must keep the law-and-order man on a high scale doing things generally for the country not just for ordinary crooks and thieves—then you have a show."⁶⁴

Trendle's insistence on continuity was intrinsically linked to his beliefs about what pleased audiences. He believed that the formula he and his partners had developed had to be maintained, or else audiences would complain that the Green Hornet's TV incarnation bore no resemblance to his radio predecessor. Trendle believed that viewers remembered the details and not the more general or prototypical aspects of the plot. He was concerned that audiences would be confused that Britt Reid and Kato no longer lived in the apartment they had inhabited on radio and that Mike Axford, Britt's bodyguard on radio, no longer lived with them. Referring to proposed changes Dozier suggested regarding Britt Reid's place of residence and the hidden location of the Green Hornet's car, Trendle wrote, "These, I feel, must be preserved, to still have it a Green Hornet show, and popular. Otherwise, everybody will be making comparisons as to what it used to be and what it is now."⁶⁵

Dozier believed that audiences might remember the radio series more generically (if at all) as a set of recurring (imagined) images and devices, but would not be concerned with (or even aware of) minor plot changes and character relationships. Dozier understood the series as putting a modern spin on an established but essentially forgotten property, for which the plot details and characterizations had long faded from public memory, even as the broad surface elements—the Green Hornet's mask, his gas gun, his souped-up automobile, his "mysterious Oriental" crime-fighting sidekick/valet, Kato—continued to resonate in the popular imagination. Dozier saw those props as

61 TLS, Bluel to Trendle, September 6, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

62 Ibid.

63 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, November 26, 1965; and TLS, Trendle to Dozier, January 22, 1966. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 3, and Box 38, Folder 4.

64 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, November 26, 1965. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 3.

65 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, January 22, 1966. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 4.

the centerpieces for the new program, with the stories acting as vehicles for focusing on these gimmicks and gadgets (Figure 6).⁶⁶ Inevitably, Trendle saw the Green Hornet as a role model whom viewers sought to emulate through purchasing merchandise stamped with his insignia. Dozier, on the other hand, saw the Green Hornet as a fantasy that viewers could play along with through merchandise and other tie-ins, and as a distraction from the more serious and mundane aspects of American life.

Trendle's desire for continuity extended beyond maintaining *The Green Hornet* formula and encompassed his managerial role as consultant. In the 1950s, Trendle worked to contain possible deviations from the Lone Ranger's successful and profitable formula, justifying homogeneity across texts in terms of the need to consistently meet audience expectations. In the 1960s, he saw his managerial role in ensuring brand continuity as unchanged, with only a different financing arrangement to contend with. In reality, while his contract allowed him script approval, Trendle had very little leverage to actually refuse scripts. With *The Lone Ranger*, Trendle had also allocated the production funds supplied by General Mills and thus could threaten to withhold payment if changes were not made according to his specifications.⁶⁷ In 1966, though, ABC and TCFT had complete budgetary control, and Trendle's input was ceremonial at best.

It is important to recognize Trendle's continued resolve to maintain his creative authority and managerial autonomy not as evidence of his misunderstanding of the CNE production climate, but rather as evidence of the contested terrain upon which licensing operated. While some of his antics might seem silly or intrusive when looked back on through contemporary eyes (and were certainly treated as such by Dozier at the time), Trendle was merely continuing the managerial practices he believed had made the Lone Ranger successful only a decade earlier. Trendle's occupational disposition, and thus his position-taking strategies, remained resolute despite his diminishing position (and perhaps became even more pronounced because of this).

Figure 6. Much as with Batman and James Bond, Dozier and ABC believed *The Green Hornet's* appeal resided in its incorporation of bizarre gizmos and gadgets to aid in the hero's crime fighting, which could be transformed into merchandise streams (Corgi Rugged Crime-Fighting Cars advertisement, Sears Wish Book, 1969).

66 A July 28, 1966, ABC Feature press release described the forthcoming series in this manner: "For the uninitiated, 'The Green Hornet,' taken from the radio series of the 30s, is the tale of a 'larger-than-life' crime fighter who, along with his faithful valet Kato, and his super-car, The Black Beauty, fights crime wherever he finds it." Dozier, Box 49.

67 The General Mills agreement put Trendle in charge of money transfers to the series producer and gave the licensor absolute and final script approval. Signed Television Production Agreement between Apex Film Corporation and The Lone Ranger, Inc., March 22, 1949. Trendle, Box 65, Folder 10.

Trendle's objections to scripts were regularly accompanied by suggestions that Dozier's writers should listen to some of the radio programs he had produced. In a May 18, 1966, letter, Trendle even suggested that the practice of cannibalizing past scripts had been both routine and expected on his other two TV adaptations. "When we made the Lone Ranger and the Sergeant Preston series, they wanted scripts from me. . . . They used parts of the scripts and came up with what I thought were some very good shows."⁶⁸

Trendle also repeatedly reminded Dozier of his past economic success, which justified his careful reading of every script Dozier sent with an eye toward reproducing the *Green Hornet* formula. Before tearing apart the *Green Hornet* pilot script, he confessed to Dozier:

It makes it embarrassing for me to differ with you on any of these things, so before I get into the matter of discussing the first draft, I'm going to brag a little bit, and see if it will soften any of the criticisms I may later make. . . . I have personally proofread, corrected, approved, cast and assisted in the production of over 3,000 *Lone Ranger* radio shows which were very successful. The program carried a high rating for over twenty years, and was sold to Jack Wrather for three million dollars. During the same time, I also personally proofread, corrected, supervised and assisted in the production of some 2,000 *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* radio shows with like success over a long period of years, and later that program was sold to Jack Wrather for one million and four hundred thousand dollars. . . . I feel that I *do* know audience reaction; I *do* know what kept those radio shows clicking for that long period of time; and I believe I still have the audience "feel." This is rather an embarrassing statement to make, but I want you to know, Bill, that I am well qualified to judge whether [a] *Green Hornet* script is good or bad.⁶⁹

Trendle's rhetorical strategy in this letter is designed to emphasize his career capital by linking his business acumen directly to his creative authority (while also feigning embarrassment at having to confess his success). Though the letter is couched in economic rationalizations, they serve as window dressing for Trendle's authoritative and authorial claims. In other words, it is not the desire to make money that motivates Trendle's interjections (as was the case with Emmett at LCA), but instead the belief that his creative input is valuable. As licensing shifted during the CNE to a more embedded intermediary occupation, Trendle's statements must certainly have come across as self-aggrandizing and perhaps even delusional, but this may be the result of trade story/trade sector misalignment. In a previous era or coming from a member of a different occupational community, these statements would have likely seemed legitimate explanations for creative intervention—though still, perhaps, self-aggrandizing.

68 See TLS, Trendle to Dozier, January 22, 1966; TLS, Trendle to Dozier, September 14, 1966; and TLS, Trendle to Dozier, December 1, 1966. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 4.

69 TLS, Trendle to Dozier, January 22, 1966. Dozier, Box 7. See also TLS, Trendle to Dozier, June 22, 1966; TLS, Trendle to Dozier, August 4, 1966; and TLS, Trendle to Bluel, September 20, 1966. Dozier, Box 7.

While Trendle never went so far as to stop production, his micromanagement resulted in multiple rewrites and a refocusing of the overall thrust of the series. Even though Trendle was never satisfied with the final product, he succeeded in wearing Dozier down to the point where *The Green Hornet* never met either's expectations.⁷⁰ As Dozier conceded toward the end of the series:

It has not been easy, George, to work around your particular brand of censorship, and I must tell you if I have my way about it again, I would never go into another deal where a basic owner of a property has any rights of final approval of scripts. I think one thing that has been wrong with GREEN HORNET is that we have tried too hard to make it too much like the radio series, whereas had we been left to our own devices we would have probably gone much more in the modern direction—and yes, even in the direction of BATMAN, which is what I think the public was expecting and also what the network was expecting. Everyone was expecting that but you, and I think we have let everybody down and apparently we have even let you down.⁷¹

The Green Hornet was canceled (or, more accurately, it received official notification that it would not be renewed) on January 21, 1967. In total, only twenty-six episodes were produced. While it would be inaccurate to argue that the struggles between Trendle and Dozier were the only reason the *Green Hornet* television series failed, it is clear that these tensions led to a great deal of confusion over how to modernize the property. There are certainly other factors that contributed to *The Green Hornet's* failures, including an overreliance by ABC on national Nielsen ratings instead of urban population measurements (the series rated much higher when only the top thirty urban markets were considered, but did poorly when rural communities were counted). Ironically, *The Green Hornet* may have also suffered from *Batman* exhaustion. After an initial ratings bonanza, by 1966 *Batmania* was beginning to cool off. From 1965 to 1966, *Batman* ranked fifth in the Nielsen ratings. By 1966–1967, the series no longer made the top thirty programs.

The *Green Hornet* series and its related merchandise never produced a profit for either Dozier or Trendle. As of the final episode produced, the negative cost of the series was \$3,166,570.89, a figure that included a 15 percent overhead fee charged to Greenaway by TCFT. TCFT and ABC continued to profit from the series even in its failure because of the distribution and merchandising fees built into their contracts, which were guaranteed regardless of whether the show was successful. According to TCFT's accounting records, on September 26, 1970, *The Green Hornet* was still in the red even though the series had actually generated \$2,878,489.51 in gross revenue in the three years since it had first debuted. This revenue included earnings from licensing, merchandising, and off-network syndication sales. TCFT and ABC claimed \$419,155.26 of that revenue for themselves, even though, technically, the series was unprofitable.⁷²

70 TLS Trendle to Dozier, March 25, 1967. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 5.

71 TLS Dozier to Trendle, January 3, 1967. Trendle, Box 38, Folder 5.

72 All earning and loss figures culled from *Accounting on "Green Hornet"* as of September 26, 1970, receipt sent by TCFT to GHI. Trendle, Box 79, Folder 8.

While the network and studio continued to profit, Trendle was contractually forbidden from making another television deal with the Green Hornet property until April 1972. Trendle did not take this sitting down. As late as 1970, Trendle was still haranguing ABC to let him out of his contract. Still claiming that if the television series were made along the lines of the radio show, it would be profitable, Trendle offered to pay off the remaining \$1.3 million debt by giving the network a percentage of whatever profits he would make from producing a new series.⁷³ Trendle reasoned that this was the only way for ABC to recoup its losses and that it did not make financial sense for them to sit on the property instead of allowing Trendle to revive interest in it. Trendle failed to understand the degree to which merchandising and distribution revenue earned from syndication were central to network profits. The network's desire to earn residual income from repeats and discounted merchandise outweighed their interest in reactivating the brand.

Conclusion. As the increased consolidation of the CNE has transitioned (though not always smoothly) into the current era of conglomeration, licensing and merchandising strategies have become even more central to brand extension practices. The recently released *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008) broke domestic box office records by grossing over \$500,000,000 by October 2008. That same month, DC Comics published eight comic book titles starring Batman. An additional twelve comic books either featured Batman in a guest appearance or spun off a member of Batman's supporting cast (Robin, Two-Face, Batgirl, etc.). Seven collected editions of Batman adventures were also compiled reprinting materials from the 1940s to today. A new Batman animated series has been airing on the Cartoon Network since November 2009, and several Batman video games have recently been, or are about to be, released. Batman toys continue to sell well and have become even hotter commodities with the hype surrounding *The Dark Knight*.⁷⁴ While, in part, Batman owes its extensive reach to the ownership structure of its parent company, Time-Warner, which owns DC Comics, Warner Bros. Studios, and Cartoon Network, the property's growth is also subject to complicated licensing agreements that, for instance, have seen the video game rights based on the Batman movies licensed to Electronic Arts and the video game rights to materials adapted from the comic book adventures licensed to Eidos Interactive.⁷⁵

Of course, the movies are adapting materials from the comic books and vice versa, creating a potential legal mess and requiring careful creative coordination. Similarly, several different toy companies are currently licensed to create materials based on the movies, animated series, or comic books, all of which circulate simultaneously, draw on the overarching Batman brand, and bear resemblance to one another even as they circulate under separate agreements based on particular iterations of that brand.

In this environment, licensing definitely requires a less hands-on managerial approach than was employed by George Trendle. In fact, it might be argued that Batman's

73 TLS, Trendle to Goldenson, April 22, 1970. Trendle, Box 53, Folder 3.

74 Peter Suci, "Time for Action! Superheroes to Save the Day," *Playthings Online*, September 1, 2008, <http://www.playthings.com/article/ca6595449.html> (accessed June 22, 2009).

75 See Steven Boyer's comment on Alisa Perren's "More Dark Nights for DC Comics and Time Warner?" *FlowTV8*, no. 8 (September 18, 2008), <http://flowtv.org/?p=1758> (accessed June 22, 2009).

continued success and the Green Hornet's near disappearance after 1965 can be attributed in part to the different managerial styles employed by their licensors.⁷⁶ The sheer dispersal of stories, images, and products building off the Batman formula makes it impossible to oversee every facet of creative labor. This should not be interpreted, however, as a complete relinquishing of creative authority on the part of licensors and other creative managers. Rather, contemporary licensors employ less directly interventionist strategies that rely more on formula guidelines—as opposed to Trendle's rules—coupled with an openness to multiple and simultaneous interpretations of the Batman brand by different creative laborers given license to play with its canonical elements. These, in turn, open up new merchandising streams based on Batman's multiple variations.

George Trendle died in March 1972, one month before *The Green Hornet* TV rights would have reverted back to him. While it is questionable whether Trendle might ever have succeeded in landing another television deal, his belief that licensing served an important managerial function has gained renewed currency in the contemporary moment. Trendle's trade stories and turf marking might have been out of alignment with his shifting industrial position, but his belief that licensing was a site of creative authority has continued to be a part of the licensor's occupational identity, even if the strategic articulation of this authority has changed over time. As Randi Schmeltzer comments on the contemporary licensing environment, "Licensing is built on emotion and identification and passion. . . . [K]ey words when planning licensing programs are 'innovation' and 'engagement.'"⁷⁷ Clearly, the contemporary licensor is imagined as far more than a contract enforcer.

Where Caldwell sees a blurring of previously rigid distinctions between the "creatives" and the "suits," whereby the latter now "regularly adopt above-the-line postures," I contend that these lines have always been blurred when it comes to licensing.⁷⁸ As the positions held by contemporary licensors shift in response to the changing media production environment, it is essential that we situate current occupational dispositions historically within a continual struggle over creative authority and managerial autonomy. In order to do this, I have argued for a cultural economic approach to analyzing media practices, which explores how cultural dispositions and memories inform production processes. Even as we now understand how the particular power struggles between Dozier and Trendle shaped the Green Hornet brand and how these differed from Dozier's interactions with LCA over Batman, we must also recognize these tensions as emblematic of ever-present yet also contextually specific struggles over creativity, authority, and autonomy among different occupational sectors within an ever-shifting production culture. *

76 The Green Hornet looks to be making a comeback finally, in a 2010 feature film directed by Michel Gondry, starring and co-written by Seth Rogen, who optioned the property several years ago. "Seth Rogen Talks about GREEN HORNET," *Mania*, November 29, 2007, http://www.mania.com/seth-rogen-talks-about-green-hornet_article_56763.html (accessed October 22, 2009).

77 Randi Schmeltzer, "Tentpole Merchandise Battle Heats Up," *Variety*, June 9, 2008.

78 Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 238–239.

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