CHAPTER TWO

Making Hollywood Mobile

Elastic Production Geographies and Irrational Labor

In March 2019, Showtime's gothic period drama *Penny Dreadful* (2014–16) made headlines after the network announced its intention to relocate the series from Dublin to Los Angeles for the production of its fourth season, attributing the decision to the $25 million boost (the largest award to date) in tax credits it would receive from the California Film Commission. "Choosing where to set up production for the next chapter of the *Penny Dreadful* fable was one of the most important decisions we had to make, and there were many options we looked into," Jana Winograde, the network's then-president of entertainment, said in a media release at the time. She continued, "Shooting in California obviously has many attractions, but without the state's film and TV tax credit it could become cost prohibitive."[1] Reimagined as *Penny Dreadful: City of Angels* (2020), the series replaced Victoria-era London and gothic horror with 1930s Hollywood and Mexican American folklore. It premiered in mid-2020 to modest reviews but no commitment from Showtime for further seasons.

There is something telling, I think, about the contemporary production landscape when a decision to shoot in the most prominent media capital of the world warrants such fanfare in newspapers and trade magazines and is further characterized as a carefully considered option—one among many—by entertainment executives. It's an even a richer anecdote when understood within the context of the state's tax-credit scheme, which dedicates 20 percent of its $330 million annual budget for the sole purpose of luring *existing* television series away from the foreign and domestic cities where they had initially set up production. It's been an extremely successful provision.[2] In fact, *Penny Dreadful* was the sixteenth television series to relocate to California in less than four years, following similar moves (and headlines) by other high-profile productions like *The Affair* (New York) (2014–19), *American Horror Story* (New Orleans) (2011–), *Good Girls* (Atlanta) (2018–21), *Lucifer* (Vancouver) (2016–21), and *Veep* (Baltimore) (2012–19).

Accordingly, the transformation of film and television production into a more nimble, responsive, and mobile apparatus has reached a particular apex by firmly repositioning locations as a collection of largely interchangeable (but not identical) variables. So much so that today, efforts to lure large-scale productions with tax rebates and incentives are no longer considerations made only at the earliest stages of financial planning and creative development; even well-established productions are subject to competitive forces, easily packed up and relocated whenever an opposing region can offer a sweeter deal to producers.

As Myles McNutt observes about the "ongoing mobility" of television production, "focusing on the mobility of the productions reminds us that they were never in single, stable environments even after choosing initial production locations. These productions were always mobile, with producers continually tracking shifts in incentive structures and local infrastructure to determine the most efficient way to produce the series in question."[3] As a result, this dynamic, often championed as evidence of local job growth but quickly abandoned as soon as mobile production moves on to the next location, leaves local workers in precarious positions as, increasingly, they are simply given low-waged opportunities or never hired at all as key positions are allocated to crew brought in from elsewhere.[4]

But how did we get here? This question is not so much a historical one, though there is some history to tell, but a more direct concern with how we conceptualize a dynamic regime of accumulation that crisscrosses multiple locations, communities, and scales in its pursuit of capital. This query involves not only recasting in new light some of what we already know about the spatial dynamics of contemporary film and television production, but also unearthing the consequences that new conceptual frameworks render visible as part of our engagements with the scale and diversity of Mobile Hollywood. Ultimately, it calls for us to rethink the spatiality of media's political economy with particular attention paid to the excessive demands upon creative labor to shape—often times, quite literally—the elastic geography of contemporary Hollywood operations.

Accordingly, my intention in this chapter is to develop a more complicated understanding of capital, geography, and labor. I push back against assessments that assume mobility is a relatively rational outcome of economic logics and policy interests, a modest calculation of incentives and infrastructure that results in perpetual choice for producers but abstracts the role of labor from the production of value. Instead, I reframe Mobile

Hollywood as a much more tentative and contradictory socio-spatial enterprise that relies heavily on logistical coordination, service-oriented work, and relational labor to create the conditions necessary for a nimbler mode of production.

In the first section of the chapter, I distinguish Mobile Hollywood from prevailing accounts of film and television's spatial dynamics. Drawing on developments in anthropology and social and political theory, I argue for an analytical frame that privileges the contingent encounters that constitute mobile production as a means to understand more precisely what its global expansion requires from screen media workers. I take up the concern with labor more directly in the subsequent section. Here, I frame the industry's embrace of more flexible production processes as the historical preconditions for the mode of production's spatial expansion. While academic debate recognizes precarious working conditions as a feature of the global film economy's impact on creative labor, I draw attention to the heightened logics of collaboration, coordination, and synchronization that have emerged alongside changes within the mode of production. In the final section, I turn to accounts from workers, offering a grounded exploration of the ideas discussed in the previous sections as a frame for the chapters that follow.

GLOBAL, LOCAL, AND MOBILE HOLLYWOOD

As suggested, a few media scholars already have engaged with Hollywood as a particular spatial constellation of capital-labor relations that exceeds a discrete place-based industry in Los Angeles. Most prominent, arguably, is the critical view of American media hegemony outlined by Toby Miller et al. in *Global Hollywood* and its sequel.[5] These projects link the global coordination and control Hollywood studios exert over foreign filming locations and an international workforce to its powerful and troubling domination of international trade agreements, intellectual property regimes, and marketing prowess. By continually relocating activities to destinations that promise the most attractive benefits, the studios erode wages and working conditions around the world as complicit governments and labor organizations offer more and more concessions to retain the attention of producers.[6] Further, the authors articulate this power to a critical engagement with US economic and cultural capital more broadly. They write, "The source of Hollywood's power extends far beyond the history of cinema, to the cultural-communications complex that has been an integral component of capitalist exchange since the end of the nineteenth century."[7] As such, its intervention is attuned not only to the stringent study of Hollywood's global power but also to part of a broader political economic assessment of US-style capital expansion.

Whereas the arguments in *Global Hollywood* take up a concern with the financial interests, business strategies, and political maneuvering that contribute to the perpetual mobility of film and television production, economic development arguments offer an alternative take on the worldwide matrix of Hollywood operations. They emphasize the local circumstances that enable global integration and, as a consequence, understand local stakeholders as more active—though not necessarily equal—collaborators in the making of international co-ventures. The work done in Australia by Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan, and Goldsmith, Susan Ward, and O'Regan, is a paradigmatic example of this perspective. In two book-length publications and a series of chapters and articles, the authors develop a line of argumentation that distinguishes between the control and coordinating power of the major studios and the sometimes complementary and convergent actions of the local places caught up in the web of globally dispersed production.[8] According to this logic, the interests of global capital—already a mix of foreign and domestic finance from a range of investment sources—are subject to an iterative and contingent set of political, economic, and cultural concerns that converge around a particular policy agenda to facilitate a location's global participation.

Economic development perspectives offer a necessary corrective to critical political economy's overly deterministic and monolithic account of Hollywood's global hegemony. Indeed, as Goldsmith et al. themselves suggest, "This top-down perspective needs to be balanced by an examination of the critical role played by the many location interests . . . that not only support Global Hollywood but have acted as junior partners, collaborators and investors, innovators and supports in the very transformation and creation of this system of globally dispersed production."[9]

Yet despite their different political orientation, both perspectives accept capital expansion as a coherent project rather than something more tentative and incomplete. A focus on local, complementary dynamics may privilege the agency of junior partners but still depends on binary logics—global/local, push/pull, top down/bottom up—that obscure the complexity and contradictions that exist somewhere in the messy middle. Both lines of inquiry assume a relatively rational union between global capital and local interests. Disjuncture is either obliterated in the name of US-style capitalism or enthusiastically remade in the name of local advancement. Most critical to the purposes of this book, neither account fully appreciates how a more firmly established mobile mode of production reconfigures the organization of work and work routines necessary to sustain it.

The point here is not to besmirch the validity or reliability of these accounts but to signify a different and more contemporary framework through which we can engage with aspects of mobile production left unaddressed or not yet assessable ten or twenty years ago. This is to ask, as Anna Tsing suggests, what else has been happening in the context of capital expansion: "Like a giant bulldozer, capitalism appears to flatten the earth to its specifications. But all this only raises the stakes for asking what else is going on—not in some protected enclave, but rather everywhere, both inside and out."[10] For Tsing, the problem with how we understand projects of expansion is one of how we understand scale and scalability. In manufacturing terms, the prevailing view of expansion privileges the rationality and efficiency of the factor floor. All the component parts—whether we are speaking about drill bits and machinery or studio infrastructure and skilled labor—seamlessly fit together to enable global scale without disrupting (at significant costs) the rhythms of the assembly line, creative or otherwise.

Sometimes the route to industrial progress achieves its objectives through state-sponsored violence or sheer corporate power (similar to what we find in the Global Hollywood story), or project elements can coalesce more neatly or uniformly in what Tsing calls "precision nesting scales" (similar to what we find in the Local Hollywood story).[11] Critically, however, Tsing calls for more attention to the non-scalable aspects of expansion, by which she means the small elements that don't easily nest into larger ones, the components that are more indeterminate and never fully cooperative with capital's centrifugal tendencies, the parts of a project that are prone to contingency and failure, and the dynamics that are often pushed aside or hidden from view as impediments to unfettered progress. Drawing attention to these dynamics, she argues, allows us to understand scalable projects not as natural or inevitable but the product of much more local, peculiar, and divergent processes—not mere "hiccups" to capital expansion but constitutive features of it.

Tsing is an anthropologist who develops and employs her concepts, like scale-making and friction, in the context of global capital's encounter with the environment, from logging in the Indonesian rainforests to mushroom picking in the Pacific Northwest, and through her ethnographies, she interrogates how those entanglements affect and bring together a range of economic, cultural, and community-based actors. In her work she upends monolithic narratives of capital progress (or failure) to demonstrate how expansion actually manifests from quite localized forms of "messiness" as disparate agendas and social actors engage with one another in the making of capital relations, stories that are often obscured when we take the logic of progress narratives for granted. Michael Curtin has employed a similar strategy to illustrate how the globalization of Chinese film and television has unfolded not as a coherent global project but from a series of complex interactions that involved state actors, corporate executives, creative professionals, audiences, and a host of other players across local, regional, national, and global levels; in a separate article, he draws on Tsing more explicitly to deconstruct the financial fantasies that underpinned the spate of media mergers and acquisitions in the 1990s.[12] Aswin Punathambekar also has found Tsing's insights into scale-making helpful in analyzing "how the 'global' [was] variously imagined, acted upon, contested, and rearticulated" during the Bombay film industry's transition into Bollywood.[13]

For my purposes, I am less interested in the "spectacular discourses" that conjure Mobile Hollywood as a steaming engine of capital progress than I am in the material conditions such fantasies leave in their wake. As I argue in the next section (and throughout this book), such "messes" are inextricably linked to the surplus value workers provide when tasked with "cleaning" them up, subsuming the impediments to capital expansion across their personal and professional lives and within an ever-expanding regime of social relations necessary to pull the whole thing together. In short, Mobile Hollywood is an incredibly messy affair, but its messiness is the characteristic that has been most evacuated from our engagements with it—a simple glitch or discrepancy in the way of capital progress rather than a signature feature of the mode of production's transformation.

This assessment of the frictions and tensions inherent to capital expansion follows recent interventions in social and political theory. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson argue (drawing in parts from Tsing), "the deep heterogeneity of contemporary global space is the result of a continuous and systematic process of production that is adaptive, temporally variable and constantly redefines its own boundaries."[14] The system can contract, disperse, or dissipate altogether, because "its operations are flexible or pliable, capable of confronting the unexpected and thriving off contradictions and incompleteness."[15] Likewise, Curtin and I have posited a similar assertion about the contemporary mode of film and television production, concluding that it marks "what we consider a distinctive phase of flexible capitalism in the screen media industries, since it's characterized by a mobile regime of socio-spatial relations that entails a more protean mode of production, one that involves a constant refashioning of relations and resources across locations."[16] The current mode of production can easily accommodate variations in territory, regulation, and culture; respond to unexpected disruptions; or simply shift its spatial configurations on a whim. By intensifying its demands on labor, mobile production can bring together the necessary people, places, and resources into a series of provisional and iterative relationships that maintain a fiction of rationalism and coherency within an otherwise grinding system.

Accordingly, I understand Mobile Hollywood as a distinct spatial assemblage that is generated by the protocols and processes necessary for it to maneuver back and forth across an elastic production geography. It is constituted by a translocal network of social relations and operational logics that certainly emerge from and intersect with particular national economies and local cultures, but nevertheless reconfigures these territories into a geographic formation that is greater than the sum of its parts. There are generalizing tendencies and scalable elements, for sure, but it equally engenders dynamics that are more tentative and incomplete. Differences in policy, costs, culture, skills, geography, and history are as necessary as elements of standardization and conformity.

Mobile Hollywood, then, is more mutable and responsive. As a concept, it signifies how mobility has become a firmly entrenched feature of the mode of production and underscores the scale to which those adjustments have reorganized the socio-spatial relations of production. These changes have been gradual over the past two decades but no less impactful for the workers who must live and labor under what has now become—more so than ever before—business as usual. In the next section, I take up the concern with labor and geography more directly, framing the socio-spatial relations of production as an increasingly critical conduit for value creation in Mobile Hollywood.

LABOR, GEOGRAPHY, AND VALUE

While it's broadly recognized that the division of labor during the studio era did not fully replicate the mass-production processes of the manufacturing industry, the centralization of employment (labor power and time), resources (financial), and physical assets (the technological means of production) within a single entity (the major studios) helped anchor profit maximization to a particular place: the studio's offices, soundstages, and backlots in Los Angeles. The separation of planning or conception and the execution of creative duties allowed studios to increasingly subdivide tasks into ever more specific work functions and further rationalize labor time and labor power as means to increase wealth. While the capitalist orientation of the mode of production has never changed, both the management systems and the division of labor have evolved over time into ever-more specific configurations to keep pace with broader changes in the economy and creative practices. It was a dynamic process of adaptation that constantly retooled technologies of both management and creative production, as well as reconfigured its workforce to reinforce the mode of production.[17]

A more mobile mode of production is the most contemporary means of organizing the creative process with significant implications for its workforce. Namely, the expanded geography of production that has emerged over the past decade has made the coordination of people, places, and things an absolutely critical input for value creation. As I suggested in the previous section, this "coordination" is the consequence of capital's unpredictability as it expands across territories and, critically, it is no longer under the purview of a central producer ("management"), but increasingly and necessarily subsumed by laborers as a facet of both their personal and professional lives. It's the messiness of Mobile Hollywood that investors prefer to keep hidden from view but which labor must tackle as part of its ever-expanding work functions.

In what follows, I trace the socio-spatial adjustments in the division of labor that followed the industry's turn to flexible specialization, and then I argue that our accounts of labor need to do more than simply accept "precariousness" as the final word on labor-capital relations. Certainly, this work is precarious: productivity pressures, labor concessions, uncertain opportunities, increased responsibilities, diminishing budgets, and so forth characterize film and television employment. The arguments in this book add to those concerns. Yet it also aims to look inside the nature of that work in more detail to link the sustenance of a more mobile mode of production to the reconfiguration of its workforce—the diminishment of certain tasks, responsibilities, and forms of work, and the simultaneous rise in value of newer or revised labor inputs that help suture the ever-shifting socio-spatial relations of production into Mobile Hollywood.

"Flexible specialization" is a term used to capture the industrial shift from mass-production methods to vertically disintegrated production networks. In Hollywood, flexible specialization emerged in response to increasingly uncertain market conditions, including changes in consumption patterns in postwar America and the decision to divorce exhibition from production and distribution. This moment of reorganization saw the major studios look to reduce massive overheads by divesting their physical infrastructure, production services, and ongoing labor costs. While they retained control of market access in their roles as financiers and distributors, the studios externalized the production process and transformed it into a series of temporary and transactional relationships among independent contractors who provide "inputs" into a single project.[18]

Flexible specialization marked the embrace of an externalized, project-based logic in the industry's approach to creative endeavor. Independent producers or creative entrepreneurs brought together the necessary resources into a single unit for the duration of a project only to dissolve that unit once production finished. Accordingly, producers were able to distill the complexity of film and television production into smaller and more discrete processes and phases, which helped them further extract surplus value, control costs, and coordinate workflows across a large number of interconnected tasks and activities.[19] Yet for workers and other service providers, the organizational change transformed their standard employment relationships into something more ephemeral. Traditionally defined by long-term or permanent employment in a single studio, work now consisted of a series of short-term contractual arrangements that laborers needed to stitch together across a number of successive projects to sustain their professional livelihoods.

By making labor and capital inputs more variable, the shift in production operations helped the entertainment industries anticipate more profound spatial adjustments in global production processes in the second half of the twentieth century.[20] Many countries with histories of public service broadcasting experienced a seismic shift in their regulatory principles and communications policies, refashioning creativity and innovation as powerful engines of economic growth rather than subsidized cultural sectors. In the process (and amid much debate), policy-makers relegated the sustainability of national economies and cultures to the logics of the global marketplace and embraced the growth value derived from producing more immaterial goods and services.[21] Further afield, transitional economies and private businesses emerged in contexts once characterized by socialist regimes and state-owned enterprises. As a consequence, a number of domestic industries, including film and television production, entered a period of crisis that heightened the appeal of foreign (but not exclusively American) investment and private ownership as a source of economic stability, employment, and operational capacity.[22]

Given the structural shifts happening around the world, it was only a matter of time before the contracting of creative services extended to regions beyond Los Angeles.[23] Goldsmith, Ward, and O'Regan make this point, calling project-based thinking the "precondition for the larger canvas of places, spaces and individuals becoming involved in film and television production."[24] As I indicated in the previous chapter, Canada, especially Vancouver, was an early innovator in this respect. Regional producers, broadcasters, and film commissioners eagerly collaborated with their American counterparts, marketing skilled workers, exterior locations, and infrastructure as compelling "parts" made to integrate into a broader project-based production process conceived elsewhere. In return, the influx of foreign capital helped the regional industry combat its symbolic and financial marginalization within the government's national broadcasting policies and buoy its own globally oriented economic development strategy.[25]

Soon, other locations, both domestic and international, followed Canada's lead and competition increased, transforming the major entertainment conglomerates into a global command center for satellite locations in North America, Europe, and Australia.[26] In terms of value, the logic of the project—that is, the ability to stitch together variable "inputs" from a highly competitive and segmented (and increasingly global) group of "suppliers"—enabled producers to better manage costs and offset risk in an uncertain entertainment marketplace.[27]

Despite the wealth of scholarship on media and cultural globalization that followed these transformations (and the increased interest in creative labor, more generally), few attempts to explicitly link the spatial operations of the film and television industries to the plight of media workers remain. Again, the most prominent exception is the interventions of Miller et al. Despite my earlier reservations about their overly deterministic account of global power, the authors effectively link the emergence of a global network of subcontracted firms and individuals to the increasingly precarious working conditions for creative and cultural workers, creating what they call a New International Division of *Cultural* Labor (NICL).[28] As producers seek to gain cost advantages around the world, mobile production not only engenders a highly competitive global labor market, but it also exacts concessions from domestic labor organizations back home. As competition increases, wages go down and labor protections disappear, increasing surplus value for Hollywood as it is able to extract more and more from workers around the world by paying them less and less.

But, in Tsing's words, what else is going on? The integration of mobility into the mode of production over the past two decades requires taking seriously what, exactly, a more dispersed and nimble production apparatus requires from the workers who sustain it, and more precisely, what, exactly, workers do to shape, smooth over, and refine the contradictions inherent to a mobile regime of accumulation. No matter how seamless, rational, or inevitable mobile production appears, it depends on a series of operations and actions that are unpredictable and tentative, what Mezzadra and Neilson refer to as "a drama of frictions and tensions in which the efficacy of the operations appears far more fragile and elusive than might otherwise be assumed."[29] This is both experiential and procedural, traversing borders between workers' personal and professional lives as much as it resignifies and reconfigures the nature of work.

For many workers, the boundary-crossing nature of mobile production translates into an unequal process of relocation, respatialization, and resocialization. As I demonstrate throughout this book, they find themselves sacrificing family time, personal relations, and other nonwork concerns in exchange for employment, often for long stretches of time and at greater distances from home. Alternatively, cultural norms, class status, national identity, or reputational capital cut them off from the elite tribe of traveling workers, leaving them more vulnerable to the whims of mobile production. Many of these aspects of work exist outside of capital relations; that is, they exist as a "natural" prerequisite for wage labor produced outside the boundaries of a formal employment relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter, workers who accept mobility as part of their job must secure their potential labor value at no cost to the system, whether they are white, male, single, childless, and Anglo-American (as is often the case in this research) or benefiting from other familial structures that can accommodate home care, childcare, and any other domestic duties in their extended absence (not to mention other geopolitical matters, like eligibility for international work visas and the privilege that makes traversing international borders easier for some than others). A similar logic applies to the service producers I examine in the next chapter: many working in Prague and Budapest are American and British expatriates with previous experience as line producers, which establishes assumptions about trust, skill, and aptitude when dealing with Hollywood producers that does not extend to their local—non-American or British—counterparts in the region.

Less obvious examples underscore that the reproduction of value is not exclusive to the individual laborer but an increasingly variegated dynamic that draws upon relations that constantly shift between capitalist and noncapitalist forms. Location experts, for instance, often forge and nurture relationships with property owners and private businesses—who have power to shape the terms of access to space—outside of capital relations, but they nevertheless rely on those same relationships to prove their qualifications (and value) for each new job. Similarly, existing relationships are often leveraged for access to locations, which translates into value creation for the production but doesn't necessarily transform the nature of that friendship outside of the exchange; they both are alienated in the Marxist sense from the final commodity but not from the friendship that endures. In an example from my fieldwork, a neighborhood boy is hired by a production assistant (PA) to stand along the perimeter of a filming location, because the PA believed residents would react less aggressively to a "local" explaining why the beach is closed to the public. His value as a "local" was a noncapitalist attribute made valuable within the context of production. Further, environmentally sensitive and potentially hazardous shooting locations are bound by a series of regulations and protocols that are (often) at odds with the extraction of value: public, protected, and monitored by external agencies, such sites necessarily shape the contours of production as much as, if not more than, the dictates of internal management structures. Such distinctions are not highlighted to imply these examples exist in opposition to capital—somehow unsullied and pure—but as an indication of how the generation of value depends upon labor to constantly refashion patchy and fragmented interests into a workable frontier for Mobile Hollywood.

Accordingly, the "dramas" of mobile production make explicit the intensification of work functions that loosely coalesce around acts of "just-in-time" or "immediately responsive" coordination—logistical management, service-oriented work, and relational labor that help synchronize an iterative matrix of socio-spatial relations into the rhythm of film and television production. So many of these work functions are necessary preconditions for mobility and ensure the mode of production remains adaptable, flexible, and responsive to any disturbances, constantly suturing and resuturing the creative, human, environmental, legal, and administrative resources, among others, according to the logics of mobile production.

For workers on the front line, these practices constitute a regime of excessive and irrational labor. Curtin and I have previously defined "excessive labor" as "the persistent pressure for 'more' in the workplace, which is a consequence of equally excessive structural change that stems from the concentration of corporate power, the financialization of creativity, the proliferation of far-flung productions hubs, and the escalating impact of production subsidies."[30] I offer the additional notion of irrationality to signify that the demands for "more" have pushed the orderly processes of production and the rational protocols of management systems to their limits. This point is not to say that chaos reigns, only that producers are more concerned with the end result than the means of achieving it, a whatever-it-takes mentality that delegates and disperses operational oversight of potential complications and impediments out of their purview to ensure their conceptions of mobile production remain untroubled.

The global expansion of production processes only exacerbates this phenomenon and underscores the abdication of any real commitment to building human capital or standardizing labor. Tsing cites this as a signature feature of supply chain capitalism, in which "goods gathered from many arrangements can lead to profits for the lead firm; commitments to jobs, education, and well-being are no longer even rhetorically necessary."[31] The more spatially dynamic the process, the more diversity and disjuncture it encounters, making coordination of the "many arrangements" (subcontracted and outsourced, of course, and not confined wholly to one's professional life) necessary for value creation. These arrangements are indeterminant, patchy, and fragmented—in her term, "assemblages"—and exist both within and outside capital relations. She continues, "Amassing wealth is possible without rationalizing labor and raw materials. Instead, it requires acts of translation across varied social and political spaces."[32] For studio executives, producers, and other figures of capital interests, the rationality and standardization that frames mobile production might abdicate on-the-ground complexity or risks, but only when the labor of film and television workers keeps those perils out of sight. This process of translation is what I chart in the final section and other chapters in this book, focusing explicitly on multifaceted and increasingly valuable forms of coordination that contribute to a global supply chain for screen media production, and what these global configurations mean for our broader understanding of the contradictory and inequitable experience of work within a mobile production apparatus.

THE MESS BEHIND THE METRICS

The story of runaway production is most commonly understood in terms of its generalizing tendencies. Hollywood production expands across geography by approaching its locations as largely interchangeable assets, a package of tax incentives, subsidized infrastructure, and discounted wages that local policymakers have designed to attract interest from producers. Establishing cities like Wellington, Vancouver, and Prague as global production or postproduction hubs, proponents hoped, would boost local economies, create well-paying jobs, and facilitate elite training opportunities for local screen media workers with potential spill over impact on domestic industries. In return, producers would reap the economic advantages of supportive policy, state-of-the-art services, and an eager pool of creative workers. From this perspective, Hollywood is just another physical production location, whereby its creative, financial, and logistical incentives are evaluated (often unfavorably) against the suite of amenities presented by competing locations in other parts of the world. No longer is mobile production a comparison between purpose-built soundstages and exterior locations, but a deliberation among Los Angeles, Atlanta, London, Vancouver, and Budapest, all of which have well-developed physical infrastructures, diverse geographies, and deep labor pools to service large-scale productions.

For production executives, mobility helps mediate the trade-offs between the creative vision of writers and directors, the logistical requirements of large-scale productions, and the financial resources necessary to sustain it all. As one executive explained to me, "I'm immediately thinking about locations. . . . What locations offer what we need for what cost? Oftentimes we can do more creatively—get more bang for our buck—if we look at locations outside Los Angeles."[33] Such assumptions, however, demand a frame of reference that helps make the world legible in those terms. As Tsing argues, such homogenous or homogenizing frameworks are not natural but are created to help align with only one particular view of the world: They "must be brought into being—proposed, practiced, evaded, as well as taken for granted."[34] Production executives and producers depend upon the creation of such frames to ensure they do not have to think differently about what they do or how it happens—at risk of overusing an earlier metaphor, they prefer to keep the assembly-line production of the factory floor unchanged as operations disperse around the world. Difference and diversity remain, of course, but are pushed out of sight by more cogent and convergent narratives of capital relations—that's scalability.

Consider, for example, the prominence of the Los Angeles–based payroll and accounting firm Entertainment Partners (EP). Its entire business depends on its ability to conjure a world that aligns with the economic imperatives of the major studios. First launched as an accounting firm in the mid-1970s, the company—now one of the largest such firms in the world, with offices in the US, Canada, and London—specializes in automating business operations. Its proprietary software Smart Studio Suite systematizes everything from the earliest stages of script development and production budgeting through to scheduling and residual payments for cast and crew. According to one of its executives, "For almost 100 years, most of the industry focused on solving production as *an individual event.* [But] most of our clients produce more than one piece of content and [do] it over and over again, so we moved away from event solutions to a *continuum opportunity*."[35] What they consider a "continuum opportunity" is—in different terms—the scalable framework that prevents the idiosyncrasies of individual creative "events" from bringing the whole endeavor crashing down. It's a frame of reference that makes production (seem) possible without having to adjust the ways producers manage project-based workflows or calculate financial operations. Creative idiosyncrasies can remain non-scalable in the context of software that helps keep business operations coherent.

As the complexities of production have grown alongside its geographic expansion, it is no surprise that EP has extended its operations to include a global consulting service for production incentives and tax rebates. The division's website offers a very literal interpretation of scalability: it has transformed the entire globe into a map of competing jurisdictions that are represented by different colors and percentages, which correspond, respectively, to the particular type of rebate the region offers and the size of return available for producers. Visitors to the website can use the firm's estimation tools to calculate potential savings or use its comparison functionality to assess the value, criteria, eligibility, and general guidelines across three jurisdictions at once (fig. 3). At industry events, EP makes these maps available in glossy guidebooks, a handy tool for producers to make sense of the world without having to worry too much about the complexities those numbers elide. These services are matched by the firm's internal expertise that can advise on the changing laws and regulations, and leverage relationships with auditors and state departments of revenue to ensure the rhythms of capital accumulation are harmonized. All these services tie back into their accounting software, further cementing the firm's status as a conduit for scalable protocols.

ep ENTERTAINMENT PARTNERS — Production Incentives ⌄ Services ⌄ Our Team ⌄

Jurisdiction Comparison

Select up to 3 jurisdictions

Czech Republic | Utah | Fiji | Compare

Czech Republic	Utah	Fiji
Incentive		
20% Rebate Local Production Company Required: Yes	**20-25% Refundable Tax Credit**	**75% Rebate** Local Production Company Required: Yes
Eligible Production Types		
✔ Feature Films ✔ Scripted Television Reality Television ✔ Documentaries ✔ Animation Video Games Webisodes Talk Shows Game Shows Live Events Commercials	✔ Feature Films ✔ Scripted Television Reality Television ✔ Documentaries ✔ Animation Video Games Webisodes Talk Shows Game Shows Live Events Commercials	✔ Feature Films ✔ Scripted Television ✔ Reality Television Documentaries Animation Video Games Webisodes Talk Shows Game Shows Live Events ✔ Commercials
Project Criteria		
Minimum Spend: CZK 15M (film); CZK 8M (TV); CZK 2M (documentaries)	**Resident ATL:** 20% **Resident BTL:** 20% **Minimum Spend:** $500K **Project Cap:** None	**Minimum Spend:** $250K FJD (total Fiji expenditure) **Project Cap:** $15M FJD
Qualified Spend		
20% of qualified expenditures. Qualified expenditures incude goods and services provided and paid to companies or individuals registered to pay income tax in the Czech Republic. Costs incurred before the date of the submission of registration papers are not eligible. International costs paid to foreign cast and crew who pay withholding tax in the Czech Republic are eligible for a rebate of 66% on the withholding tax actually paid. Eligible expenditures are capped at 80% of the total budget.	20% of qualified expenditures. Qualified expenditures include direct production expenditures made in Utah that are subject to state taxes. **Bonus:** 5% if a production: • Will spend at least $1M in Utah • Hires 75% Utah residents for cast & crew (excluding extras and five principal cast members) or 75% of dollars left in the state (by the production) are spent in rural Utah.	Total Fiji Expenditure means the production expenditure on goods and services purchased from and paid to a Fiji resident.
Program Guidelines		
Annual Cap: CZK 800M **Sunset Date:** None **Screen Credit:** No **CPA Audit:** Yes **Cultural Test:** Yes	**Annual Cap:** $8.29M **Sunset Date:** None **Screen Credit:** Yes **CPA Audit:** Yes	**Screen Credit:** Yes **CPA Audit:** Yes **Cultural Test:** No
Additional Considerations		
Applicants must submit the project's budget, estimate of eligible spend, shooting schedule for Czech locations, co-production agreements and proof of 75% of the budget in place.	**Loan-out Registration:** Yes **Income Tax Withholding:** • Individual: Not Required • Loan-out: Requirements vary, please contact incentives@ep.com for more information	

Figure 3. Entertainment Partners' Jurisdiction Comparison Tool. Entertainment Partners. 2020. Jurisdiction Comparison. Accessed from https://www.ep.com/production-incentives/jurisdiction-comparison.

The normalization of mobility's scalable dynamics is not unique to the major studios and their business operations. The rationalized financial logics that drive expansion are equally embraced by the regions vying for international attention. The annual Locations Show—as the name might suggest—is one of the most visible manifestations of just how naturalized a mobile mode of production has become, largely because the event is so spatially concentrated: in exhibition halls, stalls representing different cities, states, regions, countries, and related services vie for a sense of distinction from their most serious competition as producers and executives wander through the hotel. The event is hosted each year in Los Angeles by the Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI), the professional body for film commissioners (typically a public employee who acts as a liaison between a location and incoming productions). As with most professional communities, the Locations Show has embraced its own cultural rituals and practices, even embracing an implicit but hierarchical code through which stallholders aim to capture the attention of distracted but potential clients.[36] For regions with an incentive, the percentage often becomes the most prominent design element of their stalls, sometimes the ONLY element they advertise (fig. 4). Other stallholders exploit publicity stills from previous productions successfully serviced in the region, hoping the association with films like the *Hobbit* or *Avatar* franchises might speak to the quality of its production or postproduction facilities (fig. 5). Less-established locations (often third-tier destinations that lack the physical infrastructure and labor pool necessary for hosting large-scale productions) rely on landscape photographs in hopes of attracting productions that simply need suitable exteriors for a second unit shoot or one-off visual effects work (fig. 6).

Figure 4. Utah Film Commission stall. Photo by author.

Figure 5. Film New Zealand stall. Photo by author.

Figure 6. Maine Film Office stall. Photo by author.

For many creative stakeholders, such financial logics speak to the evolution of the major studios into increasingly complex corporate enterprises that prioritize the concerns of shareholders, private equity, and short-term financial imperatives over an interest in creativity and craft innovation or the health and well-being of its workforce. As Curtin argues about the impact of financialization on the media industries, "One of the key functions of shareholder value is to rationalize corporate structures and behaviors that are essentially unfathomable. It does so by celebrating quantitative metrics and short-term profitability over foundational investments in research, human resources, and the communities where corporations operate."[37] Such foundational investments are much harder to scale up—open-ended research, interpersonal relationships, and local cultural dynamics threaten the coherency of corporate strategy by pointing to particularities and contingencies. They make it more difficult for capital elites in Hollywood to imagine a world according to the logics of mobile production.

Yet disjuncture does not disappear from view entirely. Of interest here are what the quantifiable metrics and financial logics of mobile production work to obscure from our accounts of how Hollywood generates value, with what implications, and for whom. In March 2015, for example, I interviewed production manager and location expert Stephen Burt about his experiences working on a number of large-scale productions across different European hubs, like Berlin, Budapest, and Dublin. At the time of the interview, the Scotsman was based in Dublin and working as the production manager for *Penny Dreadful*. Following up with him upon learning about the production's relocation to California, I found Burt not in Los Angeles prepping for the next installment of the series but in Budapest already working on a different program, *Halo*, based on the first-person shooter video-game franchise. While producers of *Penny Dreadful* had asked Burt to conduct budget comparisons in advance of the show's move that compared Dublin, Los Angeles, and other locations, the only crew, according to Burt, invited to join the series in its new destination were recurring series director Paco Cabezas and director of photography John Conroy.

Burt wasn't displeased or aggrieved, as far as I could tell, about his circumstances. Indeed, despite being relocated some 1,500 miles from Dublin (and more than 10,000 from his home in Glasgow), he was gainfully employed on another major television series in a production hub already familiar to him based on previous employment—and he admits he loves Budapest, so doesn't mind relocating there when required. For workers like Burt and his peers, professional obligations are inherently mobile and transient, a respatialized employment relationship that extends the well-documented, project-based career of screen media laborers across an expanded but discrete production geography, reorganizing one's personal and professional networks over an extensive terrain in the service of Hollywood operations. As Burt suggests, "It's about becoming part of a mobile production network. We're constantly in contact with one another. We know who is available when and where."[38]

During our initial interview, Burt acknowledged a defining tension in his work: a pleasurable and rewarding excitement associated with shooting in different and often "exotic" locations across the continent that was tempered by the personal challenges inherent to such a mobile career. He explained, "You can't have a family. I don't know anyone who does my job who manages to hold down a relationship. Your lifelong friends also become Facebook friends. I see my mates very rarely. I'm always on the move, in a different place. It doesn't bode well for any sort of commitment. I do keep a flat in Glasgow. . . . But it just sits there empty."[39]

In this sense, the dynamics of familial, romantic, and interpersonal relationships—even a sense of home and home ownership—are non-scalable. They don't easily align with an image of the world united under capital progress but are necessarily reconfigured as part of his capacity to work. Further, they point to the contingencies that riddle capital expansion and how the lives of workers are often caught between conflicting obligations and pleasures. For Burt, Mobile Hollywood has resignified aspects of his working life as a jet-set career, taking him to places he loves and rationalizing that mobility as the outcome of financial projections and budget sheets (which, ironically, Burt himself often calculates as part of his job). Other calculations—certain understandings and negotiations over home and personal relationships, in this example—are equally vital to value creation but outside the overt concern of management and necessarily invisible and unwaged: a standard prerequisite for the job.

My conversations with professionals at the Locations Show reveal similar dynamics. Discussions with commissioners and location managers make clear how the event is marked by a sense of "one big" global community as much as uneasy reconnaissance. Such tension generates anxiety: representatives from Shreveport, Louisiana, uncomfortably shrug off my questions about potential competition with New Orleans, unable or unwilling to answer if the priorities of the state outweigh those of individual cities. A few stalls away, another state commissioner confides in me that she is tired of being treated as "Hollywood's bitch" by studio executives who expect her to assume a much more flexible approach to the "fine print" within the state's already generous incentive.[40] The gendered dynamics at play were not lost on her either. She openly questioned how the same strong-arm tactics would unfold if she were a man, recognizing the attempt to generate additional "value" from her gender difference. And finally, at Booth 703, a location manager who represented one of the countries in the United Kingdom tells me that her job would be much easier (i.e., locally competitive) if she wasn't shuffled into the same stall as the British Film Commission, Film London, Northern Ireland Screen, Wales Screen Commission, Creative England, and Creative Scotland. It's a one-stop shop but with unclear benefits for the competing jurisdictions.[41] On the surface, the Locations Show presents a rational image of capital relations in which, according to one attendee, the "best offer seals the deal," but the relational dynamics—frustration, fear, suspicion, envy, competition—are as necessary to value extraction as they are potentially disruptive to the smooth operations of capital.

These interpersonal dramas may play out in the background of Mobile Hollywood but are no less central to its design. Likewise, the acts of translating, coordinating, and assembling the socio-spatial relations of production are equally rife with idiosyncrasies and contingent articulations when the operations of capital "hit the ground." Locations, especially environmentally sensitive, historically significant, or even privately owned ones, are not inherently conducive to capital and can actually slow down accumulation because the cultural, environmental, or logistical sensitivities they elicit act as impediments to those cornerstones of capital relations, efficiency and rationality. They are, in Tsing's terms, non-scalable elements because they are distinctive, diverse, and subject to unknown contingencies: local bureaucracies, state and municipal laws, and cultural norms related to work and work routines are only a few points of friction that stand in the way of Mobile Hollywood's seamless movement through space. Yet the desire to film in such locations tests the property regimes designed to protect them, requiring workers to sort through a series of overlapping bureaucracies, legal arrangements, safety protocols, technical practicalities, and creative quirks that allow for value creation.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, location experts are adept at forging makeshift relations and transformative assemblages with the pesky details that refuse to "nest" neatly within capital expansion. For example, when Sam Mendes petitioned the local council for permission to shoot scenes for his World War I drama *1917* (2019) on Salisbury Plain near Stonehenge, both the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) protested.[42] They feared his plans to build a French farmstead with full combat trenches threatened the historic site as well as its rare wildlife. Filming proceeded but not without a large amount of behind-the-scenes suturing from its location manager Emma Pill, a process that took about eight months of work not accounted for on any production schedule or call sheet:

> Normally with location movies, you're in and out in a couple of weeks. [But for this location,] I learned so much about soil. You have to put it back in a certain way. If you just throw it in, there'll be a certain amount of sinkage over the winter. I had to get a license to exhume bodies [following a geo-scan of the area because of its historical significance to Bronze Age culture]. Obviously if they were modern bodies, you're calling the police. But ancient bodies, you have to have a license to have permission to exhume them from the ground.[43]

Dead bodies notwithstanding, there also was the matter of local fauna, including one of the country's rarest birds, the stone curlew. The RSPB was on site each day to ensure neither cast nor crew disturbed the natural habitat. Pill added, "We couldn't strike [dismantle] the barn because some swallows and wagtails had decided it was a perfect environment to nest [and it's against the law to disturb them]."[44] Such imbroglios riddle Mobile Hollywood but are left to some of its most invisible workers, who employ "immediately responsive" or "just-in-time" work practices, to solve.

Critically, these processes are not necessarily replicable across space; while any site is potentially susceptible to capital appropriation, the operations that make it so often lack transferability to another location. Making a site like the Great Barrier Reef in Australia productive won't engender a set of protocols one can replicate when they attempt the same with the Charles Bridge in Prague. Sometimes these negotiations can generate productive collaborations that prepare a particular site for repeat use in the future, but it's just as likely that the encounter is less generative, if not destructive. Evaluating and assessing the variable consequences of capital encounters is what's possible when such frictions are made visible as an inherent part of capital expansion. Sometimes these actions might seem too small or particular to matter much in our considerations of how Hollywood works. Calming a resident who is upset that a production has blocked access to his favorite coffee shop, convincing preservationists that a large-scale pyrotechnic sequence won't damage local landmarks, or negotiating with local gangs to ensure filming can proceed without the threat of violence or vandalism are not forms of labor that moviemaking naturally evokes. Of course, one only has to recall the tragic death of second assistant camera operator Sarah Jones to illustrate just how excessive and irrational the dream factory's demands have become. Jones was struck and killed by a passing train while shooting a scene in Georgia after the film's director failed to obtain appropriate permissions to film on a live railroad track—a horrifically visible manifestation of what happens when the "just-in-time" impetus is pushed to its extreme.[45] Yet such work-related obligations are more normal and necessary than our glamorized misconceptions might otherwise lead us to believe. Further, they are absolutely critical in mediating between contradictory and diverse interests to produce value for studios, producers, and other investors.