Australian Webisodes 2010-2014: Extending Narrative and Promoting Television Drama Online

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Abstract

This thesis analyses webisode production in Australian television drama. It defines webisodes as short-form original video texts connected to a television program and produced for an online audience. They emerged as a form of video content in the mid-1990s and are currently recognised as a component of multi-platform television in Australia. Their creation reveals important emerging trends in the Australian screen industry.

The study examines the production processes that shape these texts, and how webisodes contribute to the history of Australian television by reflecting larger changes in drama production. Through a consideration of both formal practices and storytelling conventions, the thesis employs Elana Levine's five modes of production as its core methodological framework. Developed to examine the production of the soap opera *General Hospital* (1963-), this thesis adapts a framework established for pre-internet network television in North America to the production process that shaped Australian webisodes from 2010 to 2014, a period where webisode production solidified. Four webisode case studies directly linked to TV drama programs are explored—Network Ten's *Offspring* (2010-2018) and *Secrets and Lies* (AU, 2014), SBS's *Danger 5* (2012-2015), and the ABC production of *Nowhere Boys* (2013-2019). Findings are based on interviews with 27 production personnel and visits to production sets, and the detailed examination of trade press, industry and government reports.

This thesis demonstrates how various processes shape the production of webisodes, in particular institutional forces, access to resources and the individual drives and career trajectories of personnel. Webisodes also benefit both industry professionals and audiences, providing a space for creative experimentation and opening up industry pathways, while at the same time extending the narrative worlds of traditional programming to enable audiences to experience expanded character, plot and setting associated with the anchor program, adding to their pleasure and commitment to that production by engaging them across multiple platforms.

In the period covered by this study, Australian drama production was undergoing a significant transformation. By analysing webisode production during this era in a wider context, this thesis reveals important elements of the ways the television industry responded to those changes on both an industrial and creative level, extending the parameters of previous webisode studies that have largely focused on textual analysis and transmedia theories.

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Declaration

The examinable outcome:

1. contains no material which has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome;

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3. where the work is based on joint research or publications, discloses the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors.

Signed: Matthew Loads

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Chapter One: Introduction

Since the mid-1990s when I began working off and on within the television industry – mainly at the fringes – I have performed various roles: a floor manager and cameraperson for two seasons of an SBS cooking program; a director of corporate videos for petro-chemical companies and educational institutions; a runner/production assistant on various reality shows and dramas for commercial television; and a writer/producer for a virtually-no-budget subscription television educational program for three seasons. Never once getting close to sustainable full-time employment I subsidised these endeavours through corporate communications work and academic teaching.

It was through this teaching – from 2006 onwards – that I became aware of new types of media storytelling, particularly through the work of Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture* (2006a) and discussions of transmedia storytelling. Reading case studies of transmedia, I noticed an informal pattern: discussions of transmedia storytelling typically focused on *how* narratives were connected or conceived, with little evaluation of *what* constitutes success with audiences or as perceived by the industry. This initial curiosity was sparked by critical debates surrounding transmedia practices and the *Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999), which while lauded by Jenkins, failed to acknowledge that the sequels and ancillary texts seemed not to be embraced by fans and were less commercially successful than the original film. I was also struck by discussions by Christy Dena (2009) and Elizabeth Evans (2014) about the detailed planning phase of transmedia texts, which ran counter to my experience on television programs, which were often put together by people at the periphery of the central (and supposedly more important) areas of the anchor text production. Ancillary texts were often pulled together quickly and largely shaped through access to limited resources and time constraints.

I was also aware through my industry experience of how digital television had opened up new areas of production. In the very early days of the ABC's second digital channel Fly TV in 2001, I worked on pilot programming which initially had very strict limits on what could be produced. This led to creative ideas in programming being pitched with my colleagues looking to distribute television ideas in short-form videos online. After YouTube was launched in 2005 (Burgess 2011), I also observed peers from the television industry increasingly shift focus

towards the production of short form videos—usually comedy skits—to further develop their skills and to pitch for work at community and public television stations, seen at the time as a way of gaining a step up in the industry. This would sometimes result in them being employed not to work on the anchor programs per se, but on other short-form videos aimed at online audiences *connected* to a specific anchor television program. I had also become aware of programs like *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999) and *The Walking Dead* (2010-) and Australian dramas like *Fat Cow Motel* (2003) using webisodes to connect with audiences, to further encourage a deeper engagement with the anchor programs.

Academic research in this field offered a means for me to articulate and garner the necessary methodological skill set required to best understand, contextualise and explain the changes in industry I was witnessing. This resulted in the article 'Transmedia television drama: proliferation and promotion of extended stories online' which I published in *Media International Australia* in 2014. While providing some insights into the industry, this publication also prompted further questions. That article presented a 'study of additional transmedia content … available online in relation to all Australian television drama productions and high rating international drama productions in a five-month period, between January and June 2012'. In particular, it asked what additional material exists, and developed a typology of different types of content in order to further explain the current state of play in Australian production (Loads 2014). This preliminary research argued that while webisode production was not widespread in Australia at that time, they were being produced in high enough quantities that critical arguments could be built around them. The programs I examined all had websites which included a range of content such as short 'making-of' style videos, promotional trailers and, though less popular, webisodes. Children's television, such as *Conspiracy365* (2012) and *iCarly* (2007-2012) offered the most sophisticated webisodes, with the programs I examined suggesting they were offered as one of a range of additional texts. Notably, public broadcasters at the time employed this industrial model slightly more than network and subscription television.

Research Questions

My research in this area proceeded with some preliminary interviews with practitioners, all of which in turn led to the formulation of further questions and the creation of a research methodology to attain more accurate and consistent data about the key factors influencing webisode production. These research questions were:

- How do these emergent texts extend the narrative world of Australian television drama productions?
- Can a pre-internet method of television production analysis be effective for multi-platform television?
- Can we see new conventions emerging in this type of storytelling across a range of programs?
- Is this a new style of production becoming formalised in these programs or is this informal style of production becoming an industry norm?

This study analyses webisode production in Australian television drama to understand an underexplored aspect of local television production and to provide broader insights into a national industry in transition. Examining the economic and cultural aspects of these productions, this thesis focuses on audiences, webisode stories, professional industry practitioners, the process of production itself and broader institutional factors, such as regulation and the role of production companies and networks. By focusing on a small, relatively new, yet peripheral part of Australian television production, I reveal a rapidly changing industry, documenting broader, specific changes in production culture. The Australian television industry is small compared to other western countries, and changes in production processes and government regulations have occurred since the introduction of digital television. How these changes have impacted production has not yet been well-documented. This thesis therefore seeks to address that gap by offering insights into these processes.

The Australian television industry has sought creative people who can attract online audiences into the industry since shows like *Hot Chips* (1994-1995) and *Behind the News* (1968-) in the 1990s. Shows such as *SoulMates* (2014-2016) and *Get Krack!n* (2017-) are more recent examples of productions that emerged through short-form videos online before transitioning into network television. My first case study, *Danger-5,* was brought to SBS in a similar fashion. Programs with large audiences and some critical success like *Home and Away* (1988-), *Spirited* (2010-2011) and *Wentworth* (2013-) have also employed transmedia practices. Likewise, my second case study, *Offspring*, has been a critical and commercial success on Network Ten. I have previously argued that the most innovative content is being produced by children's and young adult programming (Loads 2014) and this is reflected in my third case study, *Nowhere Boys*. The analysis of *Danger-5*, *Nowhere Boys* and *Offspring*

will further demonstrate the changes I see as being fundamental to the evolution to the Australian television industry during this period. Smaller production companies like Matchbox and Working Dog have formal and informal partnerships with overseas production companies and use innovation to compete with larger industry players. Hoodlum, who produced my fourth and final case study, *Secrets & Lies* (which should not be confused with the similarly titled US remake *Secrets and Lies*), is a production company that is adopting similar strategies to create its own space in the Australian television industry. I have conducted research for this thesis by speaking to 27 industry experts, through interviews and set visits with both key personnel from the four case study productions, and three other industry experts.

In this chapter, I will define webisodes and discuss relevant literature in three areas; television production studies, Australian Television and webisode production and how the changes to digital communication have impacted the industry. In the following chapter I will explain Levine's methodology in regard to production and why I think it is the best model to examine the production of webisodes. The second chapter will also further explicate the reasons behind my selection of these four programs and outline the structure of this thesis.

It's worth establishing from the outset that while webisodes are components of a web series, not all web series are webisodes. Webisodes, as will be further defined in this chapter, are short form videos connected to a television series. By contrast, web series, which emerged in the 1990s and grew in number in the mid- 2000s (Patalay 2008)(Christian 2018 p.9) are video texts distributed online that "combine the modus operandi of scripted television programming (series and serialization) with new formats (primarily short form) due to fewer resources and perceptions of audience attention" (Christian 2018 p.33). As Christian argues they are television "because [their] stories are told episodically, in seasons, or through channels" (2011 p.4), despite the fact they are often developed outside of a free-to-air or subscription television system (2018 p.15).

While web series are innovative in the types of content created, webisodes too "span and integrate an array of genres, including comedy, drama, soap opera, sketch, vlog, and talk." (Christian 2018 p.11). Discussing the 2012 series "The Outs' Taylor (2015) praised the show which "stood out in an already crowded online market for gay web series for its polished cinematography and sound, confident acting and direction, and for focusing on gay men," (2015). The show, Taylor argues, covered subject matter not discussed in mainstream

television, like plurality of political views in the queer community and non-monogamy. In the same paper, because of the collaborative method of writing, often taking into account feedback from viewers while in production, for Taylor web series producers "make for diverse, interesting content." (2015 p 11).

Audiences are able to have closer contact with producers of web series and this heightened interaction are outlined as a convention of web series texts. As Williams affirms, "more than any other medium, web series allows content creators to receive feedback from, and interact with, their viewers almost instantaneously" (2012 p.143). This is due to the networked nature of video sharing platforms and the internet (Majek 2012), where producers can allow viewers to comment on videos shared, or contact producers directly through email and since the mode 2000s, social media. This ability of web series to connect with audiences is put forward by Christian in what he describes as 'Open TV' where the "distribution occurs via Internet or web protocols. It is digital, on-demand, and peer-to-peer, meaning any participant in the web—a producer, a fan, a sponsor—can directly connect to another at any time, eliminating the need for legacy network executive" (2018 p.4). In fact how-to books on how to create web series are now common (Pyle 2014).

It has also been argued that web series production is also a space of reduced workplace hierarchies and more informal practices in their creation. Work in this area often is perceived as taking place in a space between professional production, art video installation and amateur work. often with low budgets (Williams 2012). As Healy argues, "The web series is a polarising format, embodying a kind of 'ground zero' for an industrial rift between craft labour and Hollywood." (Healy 2019). Similarly, Dan Williams describes web series production as a young industry with few templates and even fewer rules' (2012 p.16). For Ryan and Hearn the shift in established production hierarchies within web series stems from projects being created by collaborative teams rather than being the work of a singular vision: "Some teams consist of several participants, others no more than two, but collaboration is a consistent feature" (Ryan and Hearn 2010). For Christian however, web series producers remains closer to formal production than other content creators as because they are more likely to be committed to production as a career— unlike early vloggers (2018 p 8).

Defining Webisodes

Max Dawson defined webisodes as "short-form ancillary texts produced by television networks, studios or independent producers as digital extensions of present or past television series for commercial and/or promotional purposes" (2011, p. 205). Dawson bases this definition on how these texts are prioritised in network and studio programming strategies and industry speculation on the future of television in the US (2011, p. 205).

Expanding on this definition, Jenkins argues that webisodes are "not to remediate existing content from the series but to develop an extension of the fictional world which enhances our experience of watching the series." (2006b p.11). For this project, I have chosen to combine these two approaches, defining webisodes as *short-form original video texts produced for an online audience connected to a television program*. This connection to a TV program differentiates what will be discussed in this study from stand-alone short video content online. It interprets webisode production as a form of multi-platform or transmedia production practice and places it within the broader context of television production as a whole.

Since webisodes first appeared in the mid-1990s, the terminology used to describe them has been fluid. The word 'webisode' has always been strongly associated with television and was used to describe *The Spot* (1995-1997) (Christian 2012, p.1), an internet-only soap drama serial launched in 1995. The American show was aimed at young adults and was one of the first online serialised fiction programs (Chwastiak 1998). Described as a mixture of the MTV reality show *The Real World* (1992-) and the sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004) (Chwastiak 1998), *The Spot* covered the day-to-day dramas of a cast of young, attractive people, offering daily journal entries by the cast in a style similar to blogging, as well as short video webisodes and photography (see Figure 1). The website ran for two years and received between 100,000 and 180,000 views a day, which was considered large by the standards of the time (Chwastiak 1998). The website was free, so there was no cost to viewers accessing the webisodes. The site was created by Scott Zakarin, a young filmmaker from New York who was hoping to use the series to secure further work in the television/film industry.
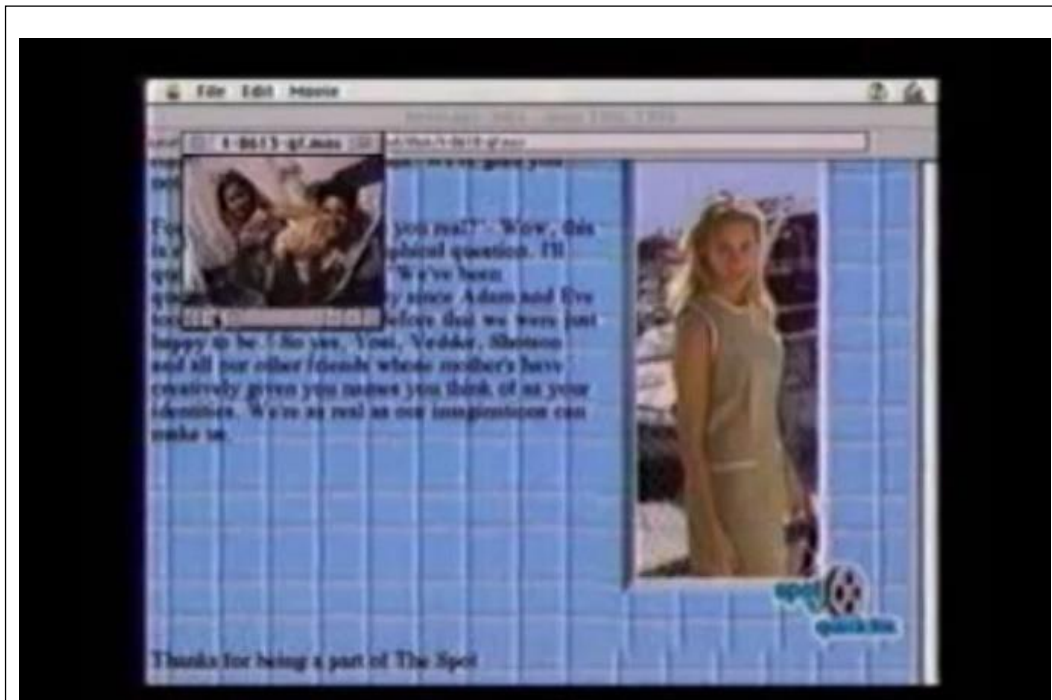
Figure 1: Screen capture of The Spot *website and webisode*

In 1996, the term 'webisode' was used to describe text-based online fan fiction for the science fiction television program *SeaQuest DSV* (1993-1996) (Kalay, 2016). A year later in 1997, the webisode series *Homicide: Second Shift* aired as a serialised short-form video text that was connected to the narrative of a broadcast television program, *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999) but was not broadcast on a television station. It was not produced as fan fiction, but as part of the storyworld of the show, by creators connected to the show and hosted on the NBC Network's program website, which was described it as a 'webisode series' (Dena 2006). In some cases, the term 'webisode' was used in competition with the words used by media conglomerates. For example, 'mobisode' was used by the media organisation News Corporation to describe short-form content specifically produced for mobile phones to promote programs like *Prison Break* (2006-2009, 2017) (Rustin 2008). Likewise, in 2007, Sony Pictures Television used the term 'minisode' to describe repurposed short-form television content (Dawson 2011).

In the United States, there have been debates over whether webisodes can be considered as marketing or storytelling. This argument was one of the key motivations for industrial action by the Writers Guild of America, which went on strike in North America in 2007. In particular, writers were told work on webisodes commissioned by networks was for marketing content and would be remunerated at a lesser rate than creative work on the

program directly. When the strike was settled in 2008, this area was unresolved, but negotiated out of agreements for other concessions. In a different context, academics have also referred to these texts as 'digital shorts' (Dawson 2011, p.206) or as ancillary texts (Calbreath-Frasieur 2015). In much of the academic writing on the subject, the term is often not defined explicitly, but 'webisode' is used most often to describe short-form original content video texts distributed online that are connected to television (Dena 2009; Scolari 2009; Jenkins 2006a; Evans 2014). More broadly, the term 'webisode' has also been used to describe short-form original content (Monaghan 2017) or content used in connection with other transmedia storytelling franchises like toy brands, such as *Barbie* (Austin 2017).

As I discovered throughout my research for this thesis, 'ancillary texts' was a term used by production personnel from Queensland-based production company Hoodlum to encompass materials connected to network program *Secrets & Lies*. This description included webisodes, audio recordings, photographs and social media posts. Though 'ancillary texts' is becoming more common, this is still an umbrella term, used to describe a range of texts that are separate to an 'anchor' text (a core program that is released on a traditional media platform, like a television network). Because the focus of this thesis is firmly on short video texts connected to a television program, therefore, the term 'webisode' is the most appropriate.

Literature Review

The Australian Television Industry and Webisode Production

Before turning to my case studies and methodology, a closer examination at the literature published on both the Australian television industry and webisodes more broadly is required here. Television broadcasting in Australia began in 1956 (Bevan 2019, p.1) as a combination of the public model from the United Kingdom and the commercial model from the United States, as Bevan describes, "Australia decided to adopt a partly commercial, partly nationally subsidized broadcast television system" (2019, p.464). To provide some economic context here, in October 2019, Screen Australia reported there was $430 million spent over the previous year on the Australian Adult and Children's Television Drama (Screen Australia 2019), with reports that close to half of all audiences were accessing free-to-air television online in 2017 (Bennett T, Gayo M, Rowe, D and Turner, G., 2020, p.84). Local drama production is heavily funded and regulated by government bodies and would not exist without this support (Potter 2017). The majority of drama production in Australian is produced locally by independent production companies owned or significantly connected to

large overseas-based media conglomerates. A consequence of the digitalisation of Australian television and the growth of subscription television has therefore changed the way television is distributed locally. There has also been a growth in the number of channels, with all free-to-air broadcasters in 2020 offering at least three channels, as well as online catch-up services. By 2009 some multi-platform television was funded by Screen Australia through an innovation fund (Screen Australia 2017d) (Healy 2019) and a multiplatform fund itself was established in 2011 (Screen Australia 2017b) to support a range of projects.

Using the internet as a distribution platform meant that new practitioners were able to create short-form video texts online that were able to reach audiences numbered in the millions. Australian television producers showed interest in reaching these audiences (Hutchinson 2017) , and in some cases were able to access significant advertising revenue without network television, through video sharing platform YouTube (Cunningham and Swift 2019). The Australian television industry's increasing globalisation—with large multinational media companies partnering or taking over many production companies—meant some smaller production houses were able to use their expertise in new types of production to enter a global television market. The current television practitioner now exists in a workplace that is described by Hilms as "a new digital world of intertextuality and expanding global franchises" (Hilms 2012, p.308). I will expand on certain aspects of the Australian screen industry and its history in the cases studies which are discussed in detail in Chapters 3-6.

From the outset it is also worth highlighting the role of what has been called 'aspirational labour' in the context of Australian webisode production. Anna Potter (2014) has discussed the casual and aspirational nature of production in children's television, where it is common for practitioners to initially experience long periods of no income or low-income work for many years as they develop their skills in the hope of building a career (Taylor 2015) . One consequence of this is a more homogenised workforce, as people who are successful in Australian cultural industries have often been able to work for little or no pay, which they can usually only do if subsidised by a partner or family member. Flew and Cunningham (2013) agree that Australia is similar to the United Kingdom in this regard concerning the intersection of casualisation and aspiration, and that this environment has proven to be attractive for those working in the industry. Production personnel can draw on this group as a new source of creative talent because of the success of some amateur work in reaching large audiences. These skills were introduced as transmedia texts such as webisodes were 'outsourced' (Thomas and Lobato 2015).

A small group of scholars in Australia have examined webisode production (Leaver 2008; Monaghan 2016; Ryan and Hearn 2010) across a variety of contexts. My previously mentioned 2014 article detailed the sporadic uptake of webisode texts in drama production, suggesting that the most innovative types of webisodes were being produced in connection to children's programming. Leaver's analysis meanwhile revealed the geographic consequences of globalised content, describing how transmedia franchises like the *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) television series facilitated illegal downloading by region-blocking Australian viewers from webisodes and other ancillary texts. By contrast, Monaghan has discussed how webisode production in *Starting From…Now* (2014-2016) on SBS2 in 2016 provided a platform to boost diversity. For Ryan and Hearn, their interest in webisode production is related more to its function as a potential new business model for emerging film makers. However, beyond these few examples, Australian webisodes have received limited academic attention.

Television Production Studies

Television production studies has an established scholastic history and offers an effective structure for the analysis of webisodes. Horace Newcomb states that television studies have been shaped by four related fields of scholarship (Newcomb 2007, p.2): literary studies focused on popular entertainment; an analytical approach focused on ideology; critical sociology; and film studies. *The Sage Handbook of Television Studies* (2014) divides television studies as an academic discipline into four areas: ownership and regulation; cultural forms; audiences and consumptions; and makers and making. Television production studies fits within this last area.

In this light, the concept of production warrants further elaboration. John Corner defines production as a moment in a process that is formative that has within it,

> …multiple intentions, corporate and individual however problematic these may be to recover. It is also a moment of creativity, in which various professional and artistic skills, framed by industrial requirements and constraints of resource and time, are brought to bear in order to get something on to the screen (1999, p.70).

Corner argues some areas of television production have been the subject of little or no academic discussion, with studies of news and drama production the two major areas in

which that limited attention have been granted. However, as discussions of cultural production have developed, television production studies have become more ambitious. As the scope of television studies has broadened, there has been an increasing convergence of television and internet platforms has led academics to reconsider key aspects of how to discuss television. Raymond Williams' idea of the 'flow' of programming—the idea that networks try to engage and keep their audience from one segment of a show to another and between programs themselves—has been reconsidered. With programs now distributed online and separate from a traditional broadcast schedule, the concept of the flow of programming now requires some re-contextualisation. As noted by Bennett, "There is an interest in the way the experience of television is increasingly removed from the linear flow of broadcasting" (2008, p.158).

Raymond Williams put forward the idea of 'flow' in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1977) to describe television as a cultural experience which is a "a flow of images, of constant representations," (1989, p.7). For Williams, television can be a *general* experience and contrasts with how we discuss film or literature from the point of view of individual texts, rather than a series of programs scheduled by a network. Caldwell (2003) and Fiske (2012) have similarly described how industry and technological innovations have reshaped the idea of flow, while other scholars have focussed on flow and its relationship to new technology connected to the television set (Murphy 2011; Uricchio 2004) and streaming video (Thibault 2015). Cox (2017) meanwhile, argues that flow is still evident in a world where television is streamed online. He argues that choice through menus and the ability to choose access as well as coding, algorithms and unseen (to the viewer) elements that prompt or move viewers to another program are a natural evolution of television as an experience from digital video recorders, DVD boxsets and gaming consoles.

This notion of flow is useful for my consideration of webisodes. These are part of what Williams would describe as the series of images that make up television (1989, p.7) but they also require deeper audience engagement than television in the 20th century. Whether discovered through internet searches or prompted through website links or suggestions in credit sequences, webisodes are a part of the new cultural experience of television. As such, they too will be influenced by advancements in processes that recalibrate points of access to content, as well as the patterns of industrial and audience usage that prefigure these elements (Cox 2017). If webisodes are part of the broader system of television, established methodologies developed for television production provide useful tools to define and analyse

these new texts. They can help us to understand how they adhere to past patterns and reveal innovative new directions.

Webisodes, making-of videos and promotional videos have already been considered part of television by some scholars. This further advances the idea that production studies could offer a new perspective on television studies. For instance, as Caldwell has argued it is "impossible to talk about texts or identity today without also talking about their corporate logic and institutional significance" (2003, p.133). Borrowing a key concept from Gérard Gennette (1987), Gray and Lotz (2019) contend that 'paratexts'—in this case, media with connections to an anchor television program like making-of videos and trailers—are an essential tool with which to examine the contemporary television ecosystem. Translated into English in 1997, Gennette's famous work defined paratexts as texts connected to other texts that deliver a message and can be understood through a relationship in time and/or location. A paratext has a location that can be "situated in relation to the location of the text itself," (Genette 1997, pp. 4) and is also part of a hierarchy that is subservient to the key text or texts. They are influenced as a process by advertising/promotion (Barra and Scaglioni 2017) and can create meaning separate to a key text, even when a key text is absent (Hills and Garde-Hansen 2017). In *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (2010) Jonathan Gray applies Gennette's concept to the creation of meaning in the film and television industry. Gray examines paratexts such as trailers, merchandise, prequels/sequels and fan texts, and although not mentioning webisodes specifically, he identifies websites more generally as a space that functions in terms of promotional practice and also as space to further develop engagement for audiences with stories. Writing more recently in collaboration with Robert Brookey, Gray further develops his use of paratexts in this context and he and Brookey note that the digital environment normalises and creates a setting that encourages interaction with paratexts: "digital media allow for the proliferation of paratextuality because we can click, click, click, and get through way more than we can get through in physical space. They allow for a heightened ubiquity and everydayness of all sorts of texts" (2017, p.3).

The concept of paratexts is useful to the central questions of my thesis. Webisodes can themselves be aligned with paratexts in the sense that they can be "understood as promotional, paratextual or secondary, subordinate to the primary text" (Calbreath-Frasieur 2015). Expanding from Gennette and this additional research, webisodes are clearly texts that exist in a separate location and time from an anchor text and yet still maintain a relationship

with that key text. Webisode production is influenced by promotional elements and can create meaning separate to that key text as part of a larger transmedia storytelling approach. Webisodes, like many other contemporary paratexts, exist in a digital space and have seen a proliferation in their numbers regarding the television industry specifically as television and the internet have converged over recent decades. Employing paratextual thinking on this basic level allows me to critically position webisodes in a specific relationship to a key or anchor text that is linked to promotion and subservient to that key text. This is distinct from critical approaches to transmedia storytelling perspectives, which tend to suggest that webisodes are not necessarily more or less important than other texts they are connected to.

In 'Second-Shift Media Aesthetics' (2003), John Caldwell argues for ancillary texts to be included in any critical study of television industry production. This is, in large part, a call to which this thesis is responding. Beginning with a discussion of *Homicide: Second Shift,* a webisode series connected to a network television series, Caldwell examines assumptions that webisodes such as this can be dismissed merely as stunts or marketing gimmicks. *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999) was a police procedural set in Baltimore, with *Homicide: Second Shift* showing the lives of police working the shift after the anchor program's protagonists. Caldwell argued that webisodes should instead be considered as part of what he calls 'second-shift aesthetics'. This means understanding webisodes as a television-based online practice, in comparison to 'first-shift aesthetics,'. Caldwell defines this as understanding the production of television from the perspective of programs being connected through the production schedule (leading us back to William's notion of flow). Caldwell argues that flow is still evident but suggests that it is the audience that is now in flow across mediums, through interacting with webisodes, rather than program schedules. A core tenet of this thesis' argument is that webisodes can therefore be understood as texts that are central to the contemporary cultural experience of television.

New Television

Webisodes do not solely exist as a transmedia storytelling phenomenon. Rather, they exist in a broader cultural context, so it is important to identify the larger factors that contribute to their production. The field of television production studies has changed rapidly in the last 25 years, and consequently new theories of television production have emerged. This scholarship offers clear ideas about how to analyse new forms of television production. In her influential

book *The Television will be Revolutionized* (2014), Amanda Lotz defines television "both as a technology and a tool for cultural storytelling" (2014, p.3). Lotz highlights network influence, executive producers and labour relations, emphasising the role of unions and guilds in particular, as technological changes fuelled conflicting needs for more content at less cost (Lotz 2007, p.88). Webisode production and the creation of other ancillary content was a key point of conflict, leading to the writers' strike in the United States in 2007. Unlike this thesis, however, Lotz does not discuss production from the point of view of shooting and post in the same level of detail.

The Television will be Revolutionized offers an overview of key theories in television studies, which Lotz describes as modes of television. The first of these modes is Horace Newcomb's view of television as a *public sphere,* which reaches a large and heterogeneous audience (Lotz 2007, p.40) and offers audiences a shared experience. The second mode is *a subcultural forum*, which describes television that reaches smaller and more like-minded audiences. The third mode describes how television has offered a *window on to different worlds* over time, so audiences can experience life unlike their own (Lotz 2007, p.43). The final mode is television in a modern setting as having *self-determined gated communities* (Lotz 2007, p.44), where viewers are more specific than the subcultural forum and can now also share and create their own television. Webisodes and their production currently fit into Lotz's idea of a self-determined gated community, blurring the lines between amateur and professional production in Australia and seeking to reach, in most cases, a dedicated niche audience.

More directly relevant to the concerns of this thesis is Lotz's discussion regarding how different media scholars have examined television and television production. She argues media studies scholars have paid attention "most closely to the ways in which programs, audiences, industries and socio-cultural contexts intertwine in the creation of television" (2007, p.31), with relatively few combining an approach drawing on humanities and political economy research (Lotz 2007, p.33). Importantly, Elana Levine, whose work largely underpins the methodology of this thesis, is one such scholar to combine those approaches. However, Lotz's definition of production is also worthy of note here. She describes production as "all of the activities involved in the creation and circulation of television programming" (2007, p.45). In *The Television Will Be Revolutionized,* Lotz establishes a framework of five components through which to analyse television production: *Technology*, concerned with devices that have recently enhanced or changed

viewing (Lotz 2014, p.49); *Creation*, which looks at the process of making texts from a network and production perspective (Lotz 2014 p.50); *Distribution,* how content reaches audiences (Lotz 2014, p.119); *Financing television,* how commercial outcomes have shaped production, with an emphasis on advertising; and lastly, *audience research* focusing on how the television industry evaluates its success by connecting with audiences (Lotz 2014, p.193).

Lotz argues that texts like webisodes have emerged as a result of broad changes within the television industry. She writes, "The industrial transformation of U.S. television has begun to modify what the industry creates" (2007, p.3). Webisodes and other new forms of production emerged in the US television industry due to changes in technology that precipitated a reworking of traditional modes of production. This uncertainty also created a space where new practitioners and ideas could be heard. As Lotz notes, "this period of transition created great instability in the relationships among producers and consumers, networks and advertisers, and technology companies and content creators, which in turn initiated uncommon opportunities to deviate from the 'the conventional wisdom'" (2007, p.5). Webisodes have emerged in large part because of online video being seen by audiences and producers as a distinct short form genre, and a need for television professionals to use the new skills of amateurs in their creation.

Technology was one of the key drivers of these changes, as it facilitated viewing flexibility and choice through new devices like VCRs and DVD players. More ways to watch television created a need for "more television and more revenue" (Lotz 2014, pg. 51). Smartphones and other mobile technology like tablets made television production personnel reconsider what television to make, initially creating less detailed cinematography to match the technological capability of the smaller screens (Lotz 2014, p.67). Short-form video was seen as ideal for this purpose, as Lotz notes, referring to a television executive who stated that "the mobile phone would prove better suited to 'snack tv'" which she describes as short snippet of programming (2014, p.67). These snippets are driven towards smaller more specialised interests, so that viewers feel their content is increasingly 'individualised' (Lotz 2014, p.59). More recently, the idea of people only wanting to watch short-form video on devices has largely been debunked (Mikos 2016). The failure of short-form video streaming service Quibi to gain a substantial following is also seen as evidence of this (Gahan 2020).

While this period of rapid change provided new opportunities for researchers, it also makes

studying television increasingly challenging as the change is continual. As Lotz notes, "It is difficult to consistently name developments and 'a medium' in the midst of such substantial redefinition" (2007, p.79). This is demonstrated in the difficulty in defining webisodes as a term. New forms emerging from these rapid changes have inherited some of the inconsistencies of television as an industry and form although Lotz concludes *The Television will be Revolutionized* by tempering any ideas of a complete 'revolution.' Despite conventional practices being pushed into unworkability in the new production contexts and changes being introduced, often with unexpected new outcomes in production, Lotz states that the television figures with the most power and entrenched interests are reluctant to change (2014 p.247). In many cases this means institutional forces are actively working to suppress or alter new forms of television production to better serve their own interests. In this study, the range of influences shaping the production process will be discussed and the conventions in production that exist across the Australian industry in webisode production will be identified. In this context, Lotz's framework offers a relevant approach to the analysis of webisode production within Australia. The emphasis on technology and the financing of this innovative type of production should be considered alongside storytelling. How webisodes are created at a grassroots level, and what platform they reach audiences also gives the reader a broad, but detailed perspective in the case studies she has chosen.

In addition to Lotz's consideration of the place of webisode production in relation to the broader context of the television industry, Caldwell's earlier chapter in the edited collection *Television After TV* (Olsson and Spigel 2004) provides another useful framework to consider. Published in 2004, *Television After TV* offers many ideas on how to analyse television production in the 21st century. Caldwell's chapter 'Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration', is of particular interest to this thesis, providing an overview of what he considers to be the main discussions in television studies in a post-digital world. Caldwell argues that webisodes are firmly part of the television industry and worthy of discussion not only in their own right but within their own mode of analysis. He begins by dismissing the popular idea put forward in the late '90s and early '00s that the internet would replace television, arguing instead that television has adopted new ideas and adapted to disruption and changes over time. As Caldwell writes, "Television as an institution has proven resilient in adapting to a series of fundamental economic, technological, and cultural changes" (2004, p.43). Webisodes, as a hybrid of internet short-form video and broadcast television, fit well within this perspective.

Caldwell states that in this new environment, production studies should be seen as an effective way to analyse the new environment of "dot-com/tv permutations, tv-Web synergies, multichannel branding, and marketed poses of 'convergence'" (2004, p.45), with at least as much attention paid to other types of analysis, particularly from a political economy perspective. To show how newer approaches can achieve this, Caldwell identifies five elements as a framework for analysis in production: *Ancillary textuality* looking at how content moves between platforms and is often repurposed; *Conglomerating textuality* which examines texts that display elements of two or more media, like television-based websites; *Marketing textuality* to consider the role of public relations, marketing and branding in production; *Ritual textuality* discussing collaborative writing and how pitching programs can shape production; and finally, *programming textuality* which looks at how the scheduling of programs affects production and how, in a United States context, stunts and sweeps weeks can shape production (2004, p46). In his work, Caldwell offers a detailed explanation of each element and employs these as an effective framework to examine production.

In the case of drama production—clearly of interest to the concerns of this thesis—Caldwell sees the success of webisodes and other transmedia texts being measured by "keeping viewer- users engaged long after a series episode has aired, and this requires greatly expanding the notion of what a TV text is" (Caldwell 2004, p.49). He therefore positions webisodes, television-connected websites and other online materials firmly as part of television production and part of television studies. He outlines four strategies to analyse this type of production: *story-based* (character, narrative and backstory); *discussion based* (meta-critical); *adapting to new technology* (technological augmentations) and *marketing based* (merchandising). Using the website for the popular young adult program *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) to illustrate all four methods, Caldwell argues this study should also look closely at the role of marketing, promotion and public relations in the creation of webisodes (2004, p.51).

There are further works of important scholarship that warrant inclusion in this literature review. For example, Lisa Parks' chapter in *Television After TV*, 'Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation and Television' takes a different view on some of the more altruistic perceptions of these changes. In a lot of ways her ideas serve as a precursor to Lotz's arguments about the television industry being hostile to change. While Jenkins (2006a) sees the new era of multi-platforming choice as a positive, empowering change for television audiences, Parks contends that this view may overstate the agency of viewers. She argues

that networks in the US and worldwide were in part pushed to merge and expand due to the threat of online platform, which initially led to a timid response online. Here Parks states, "The networks have not experimented very much with interactive programming. They have used their Web sites primarily as publicity platforms to announce television schedules, promote programs and stars, and direct users to other network-owned Web sites and cable channels" (2004, p.20). So, while this initial period offered the chance for innovation and new approaches, Parks believes that industrial convention is too cemented in current practices and that the mass audience is still the ultimate goal for networks in the US (2004, p.20).

In this same context, Parks further argues that while networks have some understanding of the idea of microcasting, defined as "personal television whereby viewers can make their own selections of television programs that can be preselected or preordered", reaching a broadcast audience is still their primary aim. So, for Parks webisodes are seen as part of a new type of television which is "suppressed or ignored by entrenched interests" (2004, p.20). Despite these views, over time there has been an acknowledgment that this mid-20th century business model was becoming unworkable, which lead to "crises throughout all components of the production process" (Parks 2004, p16). There are now competing forces at work in this environment. Television needs to find new way to build revenue through advertising and be willing to take small sporadic risks to find new sources for revenue, challenging the assumption that older models are still the best. It is within this environment that webisodes grew in frequency and as part of the approach of many programs' transmedia offerings. The growth of webisodes in some areas but not in others could then be seen as result of these forces, as "this industrial reconfiguration often produced unanticipated outcomes and developed haphazardly" (Parks 2004, p.20). It could also account for the form of webisodes, which are, in a simple sense, small TV shows online, with the connection to an existing television franchise making them more palatable to those conservative elements within the television industry.

Parks also suggests a larger role of public relations/marketing people in the creative process, tempering what Jenkins (2006a) would see as greater agency for audiences. Here she writes, "because material is 'pushed,' however, the process of selection—which is often celebrated as expanded viewer choice—is clearly circumscribed by marketers' determinations of 'relevant' content'" (2004, p.16). For Parks, the production of webisodes is driven more by the needs of promotion and publicity than it is by consumer demand.

Recently, a focus on transmedia production practices has emphasised production as a purely promotional practice (Grainge and Johnson 2015). While this has always been acknowledged within industry and academic discussions, the growth of production companies specialising in this area, who initiate these in-story texts in production as marketing concepts, has led to an academic approach that follows this thinking. The growth of work of this nature has also led others to see transmedia production as a place where the lines between amateur and professional production is blurred and acknowledgement that it leads to growing industry exploitation of their workforce by a competitive industry (Curtin and Sanson 2016).

This study will examine some of the questions these scholars have explored in order to explain how Australian webisode production has been impacted. This question of amateur production is an important one to consider further because if it is prevalent in webisode production it could point to broader trends in the Australian industry. There is greater access to the industry from "amateur production that have arisen with and been augmented by a revolution and in distribution that exponentially increases the ease of sharing video" (Lotz 2004, p.28). Continuing in this mode, John Hartley, in his chapter 'From Republic of Letters to Television Republic? Citizen Readers in the Era of Broadcast Television,' argues the growth of user content provides increased opportunities to enter the television industry. Amateur content increasingly finding an audience is changing the definition of television industry personnel, meaning that "the distinction between viewer and maker has been dissolving" (2004, p. 403). Hartley argues that 'amateur' does not necessarily mean a lack of quality, just that the quality is just different: "Sophisticated forms of writing and rewriting of television textuality are evident in the fan cultures that have been extensively studied by Henry Jenkins and others" (2004, p.403).

This growth in the use of amateur content and access to the industry from non-professional producers has seen a growth in scholarship around new production processes from the point of view of labour relations (Conor 2013). This increasing blurring between the informal and formal media industries has been discussed, and it is within this space that the production of transmedia texts often occurs. Lobato and Thomas (2015) contend that in this new economic practice, new workers are tentatively brought into an industry as some production is 'outsourced' to amateurs, giving media professionals access to new skills and practitioners on the periphery of traditional media industry experience in a more formal industry. Duffy (2015) describes these people as, "Aspirational labourers [who] pursue creative activities that

hold the promise of social and economic capital; yet the reward system for these aspirants is highly uneven" (2015, p.3). If some practices are moving into or taking place more predominately in an informal space, personal relationships also become increasingly important. This is the view shared by Cunningham, Potts, Hartley and Ormerod (2008) in their discussion of the creative industries and the importance of social networks. They emphasise that market processes affect social networks and production outcomes are shaped by this. I would contend that this aspiration can sometimes work not just from outside the industry into it but also across it more broadly. When the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) made tentative steps to establish an internet presence in the mid-1990s, scholars noted that it was driven by enthusiastic amateurs working outside formal processes (Burns 2000) and innovation in the marketing/promotion department (Hawkins 2001). Both these examples featured program personnel moving outside their perceived areas of responsibility to establish internet sites for television shows. Transmedia texts are often created by people also pushing the boundaries of their established roles (Christian 2018)(Edgerton 2013).

David Hesmondhalgh argues that this kind of aspirational labour has increased in the digital age: "One sector well known for its use of unpaid labour is the cultural and creative industries" (2014, p.189). Discussing how this practice was rife in the United Kingdom in 2014 (p.200), particularly at an entry level, Hesmondhalgh notes that unpaid work was looked on less favourably in television than film and less favourably by more established practitioners than younger people. The causes for this are the deregulation in the 1980s of the television market and a move towards independent production. A broader move across the economy to casualisation and a drop in union membership is also seen as a cause. Hesmondhalgh's survey of practitioners found agreement that this sort of exploitation was unacceptable but maintained a belief that an individual should choose to work for nothing if that person wished. He sees this as part of a perception that working in television has inherent 'cultural esteem' meaning people will more willingly work for nothing than other industries. As he writes, "Careers in film and television have been coveted for the rewards of putting together expressive and informative products, and the esteem involved in working in an industry with public renown, even acclaim and glamour" (2014, p.189).

Webisodes—as short form video linked to an anchor television program—have emerged as television and internet communication have made greater connections. A range of forces have shaped them, including technological advances that have made accessing video online easier

for audiences. Free-to-air and subscription networks have wanted to reach online audiences and feared that not being on these platforms may result in lost viewership. In the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia there is evidence that these texts are one option often used to extend story and promote programs. The people creating them are often on the peripheral of industry and are trading specialist knowledge to gain better access to positions within traditional television production.

Text Selection: Why These Webisodes?

All four programs chosen in this study illustrate particular trends within the Australian television industry and webisode production. *Danger 5* is a cult comedy program that broadcast two seasons on public broadcasting channel SBS. Broadcast from 2012 to 2015, *Danger 5* also reveals how the industry relies on new aspirational labour to produce the webisodes, and, as I discuss in Chapter Two, the reliance of drama production on government resources and how important the relationships are between the production company and the network. *Offspring* is a prime-time one-hour drama that aired from 2010-2018 was both a popular critical success on commercial network television. The study of the webisode production connected to it shows how large-scale traditional television approach internet storytelling, with both differences and similarities to the smaller scale of *Danger 5*. With *Offspring*, we can see how webisode production can be disruptive to traditional television production. *Nowhere Boys* is a children's program that was broadcast on free-to-air public broadcaster ABCME from 7 November 2013 to 15 December 2019. The show used webisodes to not only extend the story but to engage audiences as personnel in production. The study of this show pushes this framework of this thesis into new areas of discussion, looking at how amateur content is professionalised in a public broadcasting setting. The final show studied is *Secrets & Lies*, a prime-time thriller shown on commercial television that used webisodes in the most story-focused method of the four case studies. In this context Hoodlum can be seen as an industry-leading production company and this chapter will question if productions like this it points to the future use of such texts. These programs also offer a journey through a complicated process, initially looking at a simple, small production, then at more complex network television productions, a young adult production that stretches Levine's framework, and lastly a program that follows transmedia ideas more closely.

The next chapter will continue this discussion on production practices and theory and begin

to address the research questions set out at the beginning of this chapter. As I proceed I will unpack in detail Elana Levine's approach and precisely map out how her framework is so uniquely suitable for my particular approach to analysing webisodes. The chapter will also explore how ideas of multi-platform storytelling have arrived as a method of television production and demonstrate how scholars have fitted webisode production into this perspective. The impact of streaming television and short-form video sharing sites like YouTube and how this has changed the production of these texts will also be discussed. It is worth restating here that because webisode production is happening at the periphery of a changing industry its innovations are more obvious and fluid. By examining webisode production over this period this thesis will demonstrate the possibilities for better understanding how the industry is dealing with these rapid changes

Chapter Two: Critically Approaching Webisodes

This chapter will continue to develop the methodological approach to studying webisode production in the Australian television industry established previously. Firstly, I begin by examining Levine's method of production analysis in detail and outline its appropriateness to this thesis' particular analysis of webisode production. Secondly, I examine multi-platform storytelling, particularly transmedia, and the outline the impact this has had on encouraging webisodes production. Thirdly, I discuss the impact of television streaming services such as Netflix and video sharing websites such as YouTube in terms of their reshaping of television production and, in turn, webisode production. Fourthly, I outline in detail the research method I have chosen for this study of webisodes, focusing in particular on the selection of the four case studies, before concluding with a summary of the structure of the thesis. In doing so, this chapter establishes the central methods and approaches that I employ to address the four key research questions outlined in the introduction, in order to develop them further here.

Levine's Method

In 2001, Elana Levine devised a method of analysing television production on the cusp of the digital era. First published in her article 'Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes at *General Hospital*,' Levine initially used her method to research production of the American soap opera *General Hospital*. She argued for a new approach in television production scholarship and outlined five modes as a new template for industry-centred research. In summary, the modes are: *production constraints* (looking at institutional forces); *production environment* (looking at informal work practices); *routines and practices* (formal practices and methods); *production of character and story* (personnel's shaping of narrative); and *audience in production* (perceptions of the audience held by the practitioners). Levine bases her argument on the identification of a gap in the field of cultural studies in regards to television production, noting that texts, audiences and social contexts are instead privileged sites of scholarship. Further, Levine argues that the recognition of this perceived gap by Stuart Hall (1980) and his decoding/encoding model was based partly on this perception that production studies had been overlooked academically. I will both utilise and expand upon Levine's five modes throughout this thesis.

Building on Hall (1980), Ang (1982) and Johnson (1987), Levine seeks to "categorize, describe and analyze five major factors that shape a particular type of cultural production", (2001, p.75) by examining the broadcast network serialised day time drama *General Hospital*, a soap opera which has been broadcast on the United States free-to-air network ABC since 1963. Initially focusing on medical stories the serial has also moved into action and adventure plots (Matelski 1988, p.114) while remaining within the conventions of a traditional daytime soap opera. Popular and award-winning, since the late 1970s the program's plot has revolved around two families, the Quartermaines and the Spencers, and it remains the longest running television show currently in production.

Openly acknowledging that she is a fan of the show – and therefore not without preconceived ideas – Levine draws on interviews and observations over two weeks of production and drew from those the five modes as broader themes. Levine's particular approach strongly influenced the methodology I have employed for this thesis, and she has spoken with engaging candour about how easy she found her research in relation to her access to the production. This thesis is, in part, a response to her call for other researchers to undertake study in similar environments. It's worth noting however, that this perspective is not typical in most production literature, where the opposite is usually put forward—that lack of access is often seen as a significant barrier to research into television production (Corner 1999, p.72).

Levine builds on previous work by including new perspectives, arguing that, previously, institutional or political economy perspectives were more common when analysing television production. The modes she developed include a broader range of industry professionals and influences in modern television production. This mode of analysis has influenced a range of scholars (Croteau 2013; Mayer 2011; Redvall 2013; Duffy 2016; Dwyer 2019; VanCour 2018; Lindlof and Taylor 2017). Levine conducted her research during the period when digital television was being introduced to Australia and as the internet was being adopted as a type of communication by Australian television networks. Though it may be fair to question the value of Levine's method, given it was linked to an historical moment (pre-digital broadcasting), such potential criticisms overlook the strengths of the particular modes for my research, for reasons I will now outline.

For Levine, these modes "categorize, describe, and analyse five major factors that shape a particular kind of cultural production, broadcast network television production in the United

States" (2001, p.68). She positions her methods as bringing together cultural studies and economic determinist perspectives to find something new: "Conducting analyses of cultural production along these lines, as well as drawing upon the production scholarship executed by political economists, mass communications analysts, and sociologists, can help cultural studies scholarship gain a fuller picture of the intricacies of cultural circulation" (Levine 2001, p.75).

Production constraints is the first mode outlined by Levine, a mode that fits most easily into an economic perspective. As she writes, "I here illustrate some of the large-scale constraints that shape not only the resultant text, but the rest of the production process, as well. While mainly economic in origin, these large-scale constraints also have cultural impact" (2001, p.68). This mode explores how production is 'constrained' through large-scale influences such as the ownership structure of a program and the network that commission and broadcasts it, the influence of key stakeholders on program production, the production history of programs themselves and the status of drama production within the industry. Levine argues that if a show has some degree of security and/or prestige because of its perceived worth to the network, that is counterbalanced by the effect of budgeting decisions which limit what can be achieved on the program. Webisode production must be also shaped by these decisions. In Australia, both public and commercial television is shaped by funding, regulation and institutional policies. The extent to which webisodes are also shaped by these forces will be a key question I will address in the thesis.

Production environment is the second mode Levine discussed. Here she outlines two factors that shape the production of shows: the economic, through institutions like unions; and cultural factors, such as hierarchies around gender and institutional positioning. She then describes how the day-to-day production of the show is organised through the roles and responsibilities of key personnel "aspects of the production environment that best bring to light these economically and culturally shaped processes are the overall workplace milieu and the organizational hierarchy" (Levine 2001, p.71). Discussing the distinctions between technical and artistic decisions, Levine notes that some areas are more clearly defined through gender and gender roles. She then outlines observations and discussions with key production members that explain how cultural and economic factors constrain the production environment. How webisodes, as a newer form of text, are shaped by these ideas of hierarchy and informality and formality will also form a key consideration of this study.

The third mode is *production routine and practices*. As Levine explains, "I discuss the

practices…here to illustrate the way daily work routines negotiate textual meaning, at times fracturing it and at times fixing it" (2001, p.73). Levine begins this section by discussing how everyday work practices, such as production meetings or the responsibilities of key personnel, should not be analysed just by cost or efficiency but also as a cultural practice that can shape meaning in texts before they are viewed by audiences. She then goes on to describe how this influences *General Hospital* both directly (through meetings and notes given) and indirectly (writers' bias towards certain characters) and explores how continuity errors are rectified/explained to the production group and beyond that to a broader audience. This is significant to webisodes because the question of exactly *who* and *how* personnel produce webisodes is an important factor in my analysis.

The production of character and stories is the fourth mode and refers to how meaning is encoded in the creation of character and story through production. Levine argues that almost all personnel working across television drama have some influence on character and story. She focuses on the "most salient" (2007, p.143): the writers, actors and departments that bring characters and the diegetic world to life. How a writer conceives and executes character and story, how an actor portrays that character within a storyworld, and how other departments create character and storyworlds through other means (make-up, lighting, hair and costume) are also outlined in this mode. Applying this to *General Hospital*, she traces the production of meaning through the inception of character through the writing process and then the acting process and notes the contribution of staff working on set design, lighting and wardrobe. The story element also needs to be discussed in respect of webisodes given how firmly connected they are to the narrative worlds of their anchor programs, far more so than many other ancillary texts, such as making-of videos.

Levine's fifth and final mode refers to *the audience in production*. Here the focus remains on how the audience is perceived through the industry as "…continuing to explore the continuities among production, texts, audiences, and social contexts, can keep cultural studies true to its theoretical models while moving the field beyond its text and audience-centered focus" (2001, p.80). Initially, her focus here is on industry assumptions and traditional frameworks for understanding the viewer from the perspective of ratings, market research and other industry interaction; for example, how fan mail on *General Hospital* is responded to forms a key part of this analysis as well as how production staff such as crew create meaning through their discussions of storyline. Levine also acknowledges that the process of the study puts her in the position of being an audience, leading her to question if her study may also

have affected the production of *General Hospital* itself. Webisodes need to be discussed from this point of view because they are not part of the ratings system for television. If this study is trying to ascertain value to institutions and audiences then it's also important to reveal how those institutions perceive value outside of traditional broadcast methods.

Levine's approach developed out of a specific lineage of scholarship. Two articles about the production process of the 1970s US sitcom *All in the Family*, a commercially and critically successful series that ran for nine years, help to illustrate this. In a piece entitled 'Seven Days With 'All in the Family'', James Lynch describes the production of *All in the Family* ethnographically, concentrating on a week of production and post-production, in which he acknowledges, "If one considers the time it takes to create an idea, develop it into script form, and carry the show through to a finished 24-minute tape ready for airing on Saturday night over CBS-TV, the period is much longer than seven days" (1973, p. 273).

Reading this article from Levine's perspective, there is a discussion of roles taken in the production, examining directors, editors and others, the purpose of those roles and their relationships to others through the production. How the production is organised through routines and practices including discussions of scheduling, scripting and the post-production process involving sound and vision editing is also analysed. Some processes were observed, some relayed second hand and "special attention was paid to the work of the director" (Lynch 1973, p.272). There is some discussion of the creation of character and story and an emphasis on the talent, drive and vision of the show's creator Norman Lear, "who spurs writers, producer, and director to come up with just the right words to fit both situation and characters in the program" (Lynch 1973, p.264). The article is therefore an instructive, observational description of television studio production in the early 1970s. Lynch concludes by interpreting and distilling what he has seen into a twelve-point discussion for better practice in television direction, noting that, "Lessons learned about TV directing in that seven-day period could serve as a model for beginning, even established, television directors", (1973, p.272). The piece also provide some useful discussion of the context of the show's relationship to the network's ownership structure and further technical information in the footnotes.

Twelve years later in a piece titled, 'Television Production Techniques as Communication' David Barker examined the same program's production through a different framework, drawing heavily on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and comparing the production techniques of *All in the Family* with another innovative comedy, *M*A*S*H*. As he writes,

"Discussion has been restricted almost exclusively to only one of these "determinate moments": decoding. Indeed, the process of encoding, despite its homologous position in the model, has, by comparison, been virtually ignored" (1985, p.234). Barker shifts the emphasis from a discussion of production techniques to a stronger focus on textual analysis, in order to redress a focus on audiences. In that same piece, Barker also considers the broader industry context, the perception of the sitcom in late 1960s North America, influence and motivations of directors and producers on creating meaning through the production process, how space is used through camerawork in the show and the roles of lighting and set design: "a great part of that narrative gestalt was the creation through specific set design and lighting techniques of a physical environment that was itself a complete, self-contained unit, apart from the outside world" (1985, p.235). Barker also discusses how the audience is considered in production choices and the program environment that influenced and was influenced by these particular programs, concluding that production choices on the show were evidence of innovation and though risky had clearly shaped the meaning of the narrative communicated to audiences.

These two examples illustrate how ideas of production studies have evolved in a relatively short space of time. Drawing upon Hall's model, Barker's analysis considered a much wider range of factors than Lynch's emphasis on what Levine would call 'production routines and practices'. Barker considers production more broadly, looking at the institution of television, the role of genre and many other factors, writing "the communicative ability of any television narrative is, in large part, a function of the production techniques utilized in its creation' (1985, p.244). As part of understanding the production of meaning, it is clear that this approach sees television production studies as drawing on a much broader set of information. In doing so, this can lead to considering more viewpoints through the framework of the production of culture. It is this perspective that remains widely accepted within academic discussions of production studies, and accounts for why Elana Levine draws on this framework in the formulation of her five modes. More recently, Levine's work has been used to argue against the traditional focus on audience and textual analysis in scholarship. Instead, this new scholarship places production at the centre of meaning-making (Adams, 2015; Chow-White, Deveau and Adams 2015; Maier 2018).

Transmedia and Webisodes

As television has moved across mediums, narrative on television has moved across other mediums also, and webisodes are a key part of this new systemic flow. The theory of

transmedia in practice looks at creative outcomes that utilise multiple media texts across distinct formats to engage audiences. The concept of transmedia is therefore similar to William's idea of flow. Instead of the medium of television being experienced across different platforms, transmedia places the idea of *story* across different mediums. In this context, webisodes represent one aspect of a transmedia narrative. As of June 2012, the *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood* (2006-2011) had 41 stories running across the episodes of the show and the same number across other media (Hills, 2012). In Australia, *Conspiracy 365* (2012), which screened on subscription television service Foxtel, included two types of webisodes as part of its narrative as well as a large range of other materials online (Dillon 2012).

Most scholarly work on transmedia in television either discusses these texts from the point of view of transmedia relationships or they are comprised of textual analyses, audience impressions or commentaries on blog sites (Palomba and Wertz 2013; Dawson 2011; Jenkins 2006a). Production study perspectives on transmedia practice are dominated by a combination of industry discussions based on secondary sources, textual analysis that takes a cultural studies perspective and a political economy framework for a broader analysis (Dena 2009; Scolari 2009; Perryman 2008; Jenkins 2006a).Yet the role of personnel at the direct point of creation has not be explored in detail, either overseas or within Australia. Transmedia storytelling as an influence of the creation of webisodes, needs to be considered when examining the production culture of these new texts.

Transmedia storytelling thus offers a framework to discuss how webisodes, as a storytelling device, benefit both the television industry and audiences. A recent example of transmedia storytelling is can be found in the British Broadcasting Corporation's show *Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 2005-). *Doctor Who* exists in many formats, including as a television series, comic books, audio plays, video games, novelisations, webisodes and fan fiction. Christy Dena's widely cited 2009 *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media* and Environments thesis investigates the transmedia practice of webisode creation in Australia and overseas. The emphasis of her work is not on routines and practices, but instead focuses on practitioners' decisions around the design of projects. Dena asserts that many production practices are not within themselves exclusive to transmedia projects and, while not denying them as an influence, she argues that the study of transmedia practice should be examined exclusively within a framework that places the

concept of transmedia at its centre. In the context of this thesis, it's worth affirming that webisodes, regardless of quality, do give a viewer more story and enable producers to create more storytelling texts.

Scholarly discussion has examined the relationship between transmedia and television and argued it is beneficial for audiences. For Henry Jenkins, a transmedia approach is overwhelmingly innovative and positive, with each new text adding an original and beneficial contribution to a program's diegetic world. At the same time, however, Jenkins views the presence of webisodes as individual story nodes (2006a, p.98), meaning they are texts that also work narratively without connection to a broader storyworld. Scholars have explored how programs like *Doctor Who* (Perryman, 2008), *The Biggest Loser* (2004-) (Baltruschat 2010, p.140) and *The Gradual Demise of Phillipa Finch* (2011) (Goggin 2012, p.273) use transmedia texts to provide increased engagement and a deeper understanding of the characters, plot and setting of a storyworld (Hills 2002, p.138). Matt Hills (2012) explores the extended storytelling of *Torchwood* and argues that this series' narrative space is a place of negotiation between the fans of the show and its creators in which viewer's concerns can be addressed. Marwick et al. (2013) contend that transmedia extensions through social media of *Glee* (2009-2015) are used as a space for increasing engagement beyond the narrative of the show. Webisodes then, by creating more points of engagement between audience and storyworld are an example of how producers can create a deeper connection with their audiences.

Creation of transmedia texts has also led to new types of production in the television industry. It has been argued that transmedia approaches encourage partnerships that enrich storytelling (French 2003) (Kerrigan 2015). In particular, Mariana Ciancia (2013) argues that building additional content encourages collaboration between different media production companies. She states that contemporary programs like *The Spiral* need to build transmedia content that is two-tiered, engaging the very active audiences who consume most or all content while also focusing on audiences that are only interested in the traditional broadcast text. Newman and Levine (2012, p.143) argue that these practices have emerged for business reasons, as a way of 'courting fans' of cult programs like *The X-Files* (1995-2002, 2016, 2018). Likewise, Kozinets (2014) has outlined the way that creative industries adopting ideas from marketing and advertising in the 20th century can increase the engagement fans have with a brand, leading to mutual benefits if cultivated effectively. This approach has been constructed to suit many media companies' conglomerate structures, with different

merchandise/engagement aspects released depending on what can be produced through their subsidiaries. Whether it is between production companies or different divisions of large organisations, these relationships have led to better experiences for audiences.

How webisodes are valued in comparison to other texts will also be discussed in this study. Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009) sees texts like webisodes as being less immersive than Jenkins contends and more hierarchical. Scolari argues that some webisodes have more value than other texts depending on the types of forms they take and their connections to the main story arc of the key text. As previously discussed, terms like 'ancillary texts' and 'paratexts' support this concept as they situate webisodes as lesser texts that are anchored to a key text, typically a broadcast television program. Scolari instead argues that webisodes are the most valuable transmedia texts, as the ancillary texts closest to the anchor text in comparison to the range of other transmedia texts, and therefore have the most value.

Some scholars posit that transmedia storytelling has not produced a positive change within the television industry. Through her audience research, Elizabeth Evans (2011) argues that shows like *Spooks* and *24* have failed to please audiences through online games and webisodes. She maintains that this is because transmedia texts lack complexity and key characters in comparison with the anchor program and are limited by the form the texts take. These spaces can help audiences to negotiate adolescent understanding of sexuality and acceptance. In the case of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007-), Leigh Edwards (2012, p.3) sees transmedia content as leading to a loss of quality in narratives. In this case, corporate synergy and product placement take precedence over storytelling, which he finds 'highly aggressive' as a branding strategy. Denise Mann (2012, p.112) states that showrunners on programs like *Lost* (2004-2010) are becoming "brand managers", and she contends that the way television drama is produced is now changing, because "new technologies and viewing practices … [require transmedia franchise 'auteurs' to] produce original content for internet sites and blogs, DVDs, podcasts and books". Webisodes in this perspective, are seen to have a negative impact on narrative. This discussion illustrates that there are a range of views on how webisodes improve and/or detract from experiences for audiences. Transmedia television production has been criticised for a variety of reasons such as limiting creativity (Bolin 2007, 244), being too Hollywood-centric (Hills 2012, p.413), exploiting audiences (Sokolova 2012, 1579), or simply not being interesting (Anon, 2011). As has been demonstrated through the work of Levine, textual analysis that ignores the

production process is too narrow, and as I argue, webisode production also results in far more than just a given text as 'final product'. As I explore throughout this thesis, webisode production can lead to future work opportunities for industry practitioners and a deeper engagement at the audience level with a given series' broader storyworld. A key area of discussion in this thesis is examining how and if webisodes extend story and if this is seen as having a positive or negative impact by the people creating them. This study will also discuss the impacts of webisodes from the perspective of people creating them within the Australian industry.

Beyond Network Television: Netflix, YouTube and Webisode Production

The emergence of the internet as a communications platform for web-based browsers and applications was seen as either a distribution platform, direct competition or a marketing platform by many television creators (Kim 2010) (Christian 2018). Webisodes, it can be argued, are a marketing and distribution model (Christian 2011) that are in part an attempt to eliminate the competition of short-form video through online video-sharing platforms. Netflix, the online streaming service of film and video content, and YouTube, the online video-sharing platform, have been seen by scholars as shaping screen production across Australia and many other countries in the world. These two platforms have shaped the environment in which webisodes are produced and the effects of this are significant. Cunningham and Swift (2019) see YouTube as a new area of screen culture which is more accessible to entry level practitioners 'mainly by the professionalisation and monetisation of previously amateur content creation' (Cunningham and Swift 2019, p.1). Goldsmith correctly predicted in 2015 that the launch of Netflix that year would "transform screen production and the established system of rules and regulations around the financing and availability of new Australian content" (2015, p.2). Within a year it had quickly found an audience "attracting as many subscriber's as pay-tv service Foxtel, which had been operating for more than twenty years" (Lobato 2019, p.36). More broadly Graham Turner argues that Netflix's entry into the market illustrates the new more global nature of Australian television production, the effects of which included the "decline of broadcasting, the rise of the digital, the fragmentation of media audiences, and the globalizing tendencies right across the media industries" (2018, p.138).

Webisodes that offer more material than what is broadcast on free-to-air television offer a viewer greater choice and give a viewer more agency. Netflix is a large platform that offers

thousands of video texts to subscribers, whereas webisodes are connected to other programs and are notably mostly absent on the platform. In her 2018 book *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, Marieke Jenner characterised Netflix as a subscription-based streaming service that offers a range of television and film content to its subscribers. The organisation started as a DVD-rental-via-mail service in the US before moving into online video streaming. It launched in Australia in 2015. Jenner argues that Netflix is currently "part of a re-conception of television that is still ongoing" (2018, p.7).

Similarly, in Lobato's recent work *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*, the author describes Netflix as still "evolving" (2019, p.1), stating that "Netflix—like many disruptive media phenomena before it, including radio and broadcast television—is a boundary object that exists between, and inevitably problematizes, the conceptual categories used to think about media" (2019, p.2). Lobato then goes on to argue that Netflix is "a hybrid TV cinema- digital media distribution system with a unique set of experiential and aesthetic connections to older media" (2019 p.8). Specifically, Lobato insists that a synthesis of television studies and digital platform studies is needed in order to effectively examine Netflix. Webisodes, it could be argued, are similar in that they are a new form that exists in the space between broadcast production and online video and remains somewhat ambiguous in its definition. Therefore, webisodes should also be considered as a key part within the broader redefinition of television.

Jenner (2018), for instance, begins by placing Netflix as part of a series of changes in television that started with the use of remote control devices in the 1960s. Building on work from Dawson (2008), she places Netflix as part of a range of ancillary technologies that enhanced television by offering more choice and control. Here she writes, "The control that devices such as RCDs, VCRs, DVD players, DVRs, etc. give to viewers all offer possibilities to 'repair' television" (2018, p.36). She also states that these new technologies were often discussed in neoliberal discourses that saw this as a way to increase audience agency. These technologies helped shape a television culture where audiences would engage with television differently through repeated viewing, time-shifted reviewing and the binge-watching of material through VHS tapes and DVD box sets (Jenner 2018, p.37). Netflix, like these earlier products, offers itself to viewers as a way for audiences to remedy elements of television, positioned by the service, that audiences find troublesome. Here Jenner explains:

Ancillary technologies often come with a promise to escape the negative effects of

television, possibilities to avoid advertising and escape other 'bad' television that can elicit these negative responses. Successful ancillary technologies let viewers exert control themselves rather than being controlled (2018, p.37).

Webisodes are a product of new technologies but are not a new technology within themselves; they're a text that sits within an online environment, like a short-form YouTube Video, and in that sense, webisodes offer viewers a new range of choices. These new changes in audiences' ability to interact with television, facilitated by new services and devices, has impacted the industry. For Jenner, this has led to a new era that Netflix fits within where audiences are now seen as many smaller groups united by common interests who are serviced by providers on Netflix through much more idiosyncratic content that she labels 'narrowcasting'. This view is also reflected in Lobato's work, which sees recent work on television by academics as "map[ping] an ongoing but uneven set of transitions in the history of television that are collectively working to transform it from a mass medium to a niche one" (2019). As a consequence of this increased agency and choice, viewers can now choose to make more specific demands of their viewing content. This has also meant that the television industry has had to produce more content and create access to more content to accommodate this need for choice (Jenner 2018, p.35).

Webisodes are produced to meet this demand for narrow-casted content, a development seen by some scholars as aimed at very engaged fans (Hills 2002). As I have argued elsewhere, they are also a cost-effective measure to produce more content, as they often feature fewer sets and actors and are shorter (Loads 2014). Jenner argues that this change is a 'disruption' to traditional broadcast models, but sees this as having a short-term effect on the industry, which will go through a period of uncertainty and then reassert itself. She writes,

> Media scholars prefer the term disruption…The term describes the more short-term nature of the way these technologies come to disturb existing structures of the media industries, which reorganise to re-establish their hegemony. Yet, the hegemonic system itself ultimately remains intact (2018, p.42).

In arguing this, Jenner places Netflix in the same vein as what has come before, such as DVD and VCR technology; that is, something that is additional to television that enhances and extends it and is ultimately part of a larger definition of it. This disruption places webisodes in a noteworthy position. It must be acknowledged that as of November 2019 Netflix does

has not have any content that I would consider to be webisodes. Netflix has some paratexts, such as trailers and some making-of videos, but does not feature short-form videos connected to story programming. YouTube, however, is made up of a variety of videos and has been a place where short-form video texts, often made by amateurs, remain very popular. There are many webisodes connected to broadcast television on YouTube, and similar styles of connected short-form narrative programming are also on YouTube.

Webisodes as a form are much closer to YouTube material than anything on Netflix. Different approaches to telling television stories online should be seen as a reaction to both. Both platforms are seen as disruptive new technologies; however, they are also very different in terms of approaches to the length of texts, with Netflix featuring serialised 45-minute series and feature films of various lengths, while on YouTube anything goes, with a lean towards short-form videos (YouTube).

Burgess and Green's key work *YouTube Online Video and Participatory Culture* discussed YouTube in 2009, following on from its launch in 2005. They have since updated their work over the last ten years, most recently in 2018. Initially defining YouTube as a video-sharing service, they describe it as follows:

> YouTube was one of a number of services aiming to remove the technical barriers faced by non-expert users who wanted to share video on the web. The website provided a very simple, integrated interface that enabled people to upload, publish, and view streaming videos without much technical knowledge (2018, p.1).

Talking about the origins of video-sharing platforms, Burgess and Green also note that even before YouTube launched in 2005, the founders of the platform, Chad Hurley, Steven Chen and Jawed Karim, were speaking about the opportunities to present and promote amateur content. Speaking to potential investors in 2005, they pitched that one strength of this new platform is that "socially networked users might eventually sit alongside legitimately uploaded, professionally produced media content" (Burgess and Green 2018, p.2) with investors being able to monetise this content through advertising where, unlike broadcasting, the cost of production was non-existent.

Burgess and Green claim that YouTube as a platform has promoted a culture of viewing and creating short-form video content online, reporting that, "by 2013, YouTube was reporting that more than 100 hours of video were uploaded each minute; and in 2017 the company website that their users were watching a billion hours of content each day" (2018, p.3). The

short-form video text is the preferred mode of video produced and shared on YouTube. This is, in part, prompted by YouTube initially limiting video uploads to 10 minutes in length. This was extended to 15 minutes in 2010, with verified accounts (giving YouTube mobile phone information to confirm identity) offered the ability to upload up to 12 hours in length. YouTube has blurred the lines between professional and amateur production. The launch of YouTube has influenced and help grow webisodes through making distribution for amateurs easier, with these amateurs often hired to create webisodes for networks. These amateurs have also been able to reach substantial audiences through the YouTube platform, which is part of the reason they are attractive to professional producers.

This cultivation of short-form amateur content has led to new forms of television, new genres and a new industry sector. Burgess and Green argue that this new industry sector can be considered as a hybrid of social media and entertainment. Television, they state, has always been hard to define. They reference YouTube as fitting into television studies because of this difficulty in definition, citing Stephen Heath, who described it as "a somewhat difficult object, unstable, all over the place, tending derisively to escape anything we say about it" (Burgess and Green 2018, p.4). YouTube reflects broader television as being hard to analyse because of the swiftness of technological change, its everyday appeal, and the ceaseless flow of sound and vision (2018). Burgess and Green go further in their assessment, arguing that YouTube is more unstable than traditional broadcasting from this perspective.

In the recent book *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley*, Stuart Cunningham and David Craig (2019) continue the argument of this new industry being a hybrid of social media and entertainment, and discuss many aspects of YouTube as a production space, primarily examining it through the lens of the division between southern and northern Californian cultures. They see this as significant as these two different types of corporate cultures are key influences on the owners of YouTube (Google) and how they currently shape video production culture from their North American base. YouTube is seen as a hybrid internet platform and television and therefore part of the wider definition of television. YouTube content is argued to be closest to non-online television screen production "both in terms of the search for premium content and its co-dependence upon advertising revenue" (Cunningham and Craig 2019, p.380).

Cunningham and Craig see the YouTube platform, in part, as a process within itself and a process that is changing screen culture, specifically the television industry. They explain

further:

> It would be little overstatement to claim that these overall dynamics of the new screen
> ecology are a huge, unprecedented experiment in seeking to convert vernacular or
> informal creativity into talent and content increasingly attractive to advertisers,
> brands, talent agencies, studios and venture capital investors on a near-global scale—
> with implications for content/entertainment formats, production cultures, industry
> structures and measurement of audience engagement (2019, p.378).

One of the significant changes Cunningham and Craig outline is the emergence of a lo-fi
advertising –supported production where content previously viewed as 'amateur' is now
professionalised and monetised (2019). This process is then described as a way to
professionalise talent, but also as a way for television production to acquire new skills. They
state, "On the latter side, they are managing a quite different class of entry-to-mid-level
talent, who bring successful audience development and clear ideas about the roots of their
success with them" (2017, p.388). They also argue that this production culture is significant,
as it is in large part due to the volume and quality of its output, writing that YouTube screen
production is "a space of unimagined scale and scope of flourishing online creativity and
culture, which is at the same time turbulent and precarious for creators" (2017, p.388). This
precarious nature means that some amateur content creators see YouTube content creation as
a step up to other production, whether online or in more traditional television production
(Cunningham et al 2017, p.385). In this definition, webisodes are a step between YouTube
and the

television industry, not seen as part of the elite production of broadcast television but still
closer to it than the relatively amateur world of YouTube video creation. However, in
emulating television production the platform has, in turn, influenced broadcast television. The
impact of 'connected viewing'—the way content creators often cultivate large dedicated
subscribers as audiences and benefit financially from this base—is seen as one of the key
drivers in how media industries can "integrate digital technology and socially networked
communication with traditional screen media practices" (Cunningham 2019, p.377)

These discussions surrounding the impact of Netflix and YouTube both provokes new
questions and reaffirms the importance of the questions posed earlier for this study to
explore. It can be difficult to define Netflix and YouTube and it is a challenge to determine
how productions at the periphery of traditional production can be examined. Webisodes are

similarly difficult to define and exist at the edges of traditional production. The webisode is hard to define and to name and is unstable in its production, although there are some reasons as to why production is currently sporadic (Loads 2014). Lobato's description of Netflix also works as a definition of new forms of texts; like the streaming service, webisodes are a boundary object (Lobato 2019, p.2), a boundary text that exists between television and internet video. Closer in form to YouTube texts than programming streamed on platforms like Netflix and in production exhibit aspects of internet content management, television production and processes from publicity and marketing departments, webisodes have existed since the mid-1990s and continue into the present day. As we continue to define the webisode's place within the broader industry, we must also examine Australian perspectives on this quarter century-old phenomena to understand present webisode production.

I made two set visits to Adelaide in 2013 to see *Danger 5* during production of their second series and to the set of *Offspring* in Melbourne in 2016 to talk to key personnel. I interviewed 27 production personnel in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane and also interviewed industry experts on webisodes in New York in 2014.

List of study participants:
1) Andrew Garrick, writer and director *Offspring: The Nurses* (July 31 Melbourne 2014)

2) Benedict Hardie, actor (seasons 1-3 of *Offspring: The Nurses* and co-writer seasons 2 and 3 of *Offspring: The Nurses*) (March 2 Melbourne 2016)

3) Matthew Chuang, director of photography *Offspring: The Nurses* (February 23 Melbourne 2016)

4) Alicia Gardener, actor *Offspring: The Nurses* (February 19 Melbourne 2016)

5) Debra Oswald, co-creator and head writer, *Offspring* (February 24 Melbourne 2016)

6) Lulu Wilkinson, Head of Digital/Producer, Endemol Australia *Offspring* (July 21 Melbourne 2014)

7) Jennifer Wilson, director, The Project Factory, Creator of *Offspring: Moving In* application (23 February 2016)

8) Dario Russo: creator, director, writer, editor, Composer *Danger-5* (September 25

Adelaide 2013)

9) David Ashby, creator, writer, actor, creative consultant, Second Unit Director *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

10) Kate Croser, producer *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

11) Caterina DeNave, Executive Producer, Commissioning Editor for Drama, Comedy and Entertainment, SBS *Danger-5* (24 October Melbourne 2013)

12) Chloe Spalding, costume design *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

13) Sophie Spalding, costume design *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

14) Matt Tarrant, social media manager (Season 2) *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

15) James Parker, miniature landscapes and model maker *Danger-5* (September 25 Adelaide 2013)

16) Tony Ayres, creator/executive producer, Matchbox Pictures *Nowhere Boys* (July 6 Melbourne 2014)

17) Julie Eckerlsey, producer, Matchbox Pictures *Nowhere Boys* (July 11Melbourne 2014)

18) Ivana Rowley, Digital and Editorial Product Manager ABCME (interviewed twice August 26 2014 and March 3 Melbourne 2016)

19) David Hukka, director, webisode: *Visions of Yesterday - Nowhere Boys* (June 11 Melbourne 2016

20) Vanessa Arden-Wood, Head of Entertainment – Digital, Network Ten (Melbourne July 112014 and June 11 2016)

21) Nathan Mayfield, executive Producer, Hoodlum *Secrets & Lies* (April 24 Melbourne 2014)

22) Kate Dennis, television director, Hoodlum *Secrets & Lies* (April 25 Melbourne 2014)

23) Lucas Taylor, creative director, head writer *Secrets & Lies*: Multiplatform (April 25

Melbourne 2016)

24) Damon Gameau, actor *Secrets & Lies* (April 25 Melbourne 2016)

25) Cora Speer, Head of Digital content Channel 7 (June 9 Melbourne 2014)

26) Jeff Gomez, CEO/Director, Starlight Runner (April 12 New York 2014)

27) Frank Rose, transmedia writer (April 11 New York 2014)

I interviewed participants on set, in person and over the phone between 2014-2016. I did this according to Levine's methodology, which emphasised the importance of set visits and interviews as well as some observation. Speaking to personnel in production ranging from directors, writers, make-up artists, actors and camera people, provided a broad view of production and enable me to better address the research questions that form the basis of this thesis. Levine's approach has an emphasis on informal and formal forces, and also considers how all personnel contribute to the process, and as such a large group of personnel was necessary. The questions I am asking also refer to how the notion story was extended, whether certain conventions were emerging, and if these practices are formal or informal, an approach that draws from Levine's modes so as to ascertain if her modes complement the industry in a post-digital environment.

The Structure of this Thesis

The main body of the thesis is divided across four chapters which each examine one program and then concludes with a summative discussion in the final chapter. Having already set out a framework for analysis and having established the theoretical basis for this project, Chapter Three will outline the production process of the first of four television programs in production; *Danger 5*, illustrating how these transmedia texts are seen as a place to draw on skills established in an online environment and how funding sources and free-to-air networks are utilising talent from online video practitioners. This chapter will also provide an illustration of how very small production companies try to navigate a new form of production, and how multi-platform production is a place for experimentation, even with limited resources from season to season. This webisode production took place in 2010, and the chapter outlines how cultural and institutional forces like the network and funding bodies

shape the webisode production and the role of key creative people having in defining these texts and also defining when a text can be judged as successful either with audiences, critics or the creators themselves. The chapter will then restate a key theme of the project, illustrating how conventions with this sort of material are currently unformed and how many aspects of production are unclear to both the creators themselves and the broader institutions. This is illustrated by perspectives on the production by various personnel who see the webisodes as unsuccessful. These criticisms can be judged as unfounded given the perspective of time and will be contrasted with other industry perspectives. The thesis will also demonstrate that a lot of this self-criticism was driven by the lack of clear measurements of success from industry bodies and was mainly the result of the creators trying to recreate earlier viral video success.

Chapter Four analyses transmedia production as part of a larger traditional free-to-air television production, *Offspring*, and describes how a large foreign-owned production company and Network Ten approach ancillary texts. This webisode production took place between 2010 and 2013 and the larger scale and commercial imperative of maintaining an audience of a program which is both a critical and audience hit means that a bigger group of stakeholders were involved in the production, with the relationships between the digital entertainment production departments at Network Ten, the drama department at Ten and the showrunners at Endemol/Shine having an influence that was not seen in previous programs. It will be argued here that because of the complexity of this production, hierarchies, processes and institutional culture were more prominent than in smaller productions. Yet, the role of individuals championing production, a lack of clear conventions and a willingness to experiment are also still evident when discussing the influences upon production. We can see that key creative personnel envisaging these texts as separate to the key production led to some creative differences and confusion that potentially affected the quality of the webisodes. This section will also put forward the idea that for Network Ten, the period of 2010 to 2013 was a time where conventions for this sort of work were fluid and that this particular production led to changes in policy and influenced decision-makers committing more wholeheartedly to multi-platform production.

How multi-platform production in the storyworld of a program can break down barriers between production personnel and audience is the focus of Chapter Five. This chapter looks at how a sophisticated website connected to a young adult-focused public broadcasting network targets young people and creates new connections with them by asking them to

create webisodes within the storyworld of the television program *Nowhere Boys*. This webisode production took place in 2014 and this case study offers an example of transmedia content being created with very few connections to the original production, as webisodes within the storyworld of the show are created by fans and facilitated by the network with very little oversight from production company Matchbox. The focus of this chapter is to demonstrate how young people who are creating amateur content are co-opted into the production process as a type of promotion. The understanding that ABCME sees fan engagement and multi-platform production as somewhat interchangeable ideas is an outcome of this chapter. How the network negotiates working with a young audience, which is seen as vulnerable online, by creating a 'safe space' to interact is shown as a sophisticated and effective process. Lastly, how the users themselves see the creative process and environment as both a supportive and limiting from the point of view of the production process is discussed. This chapter illustrates a form of multi-platform production which actively engages a large group of users and is effective in utilising the creation of transmedia content as a promotional tool. It builds on the idea that public broadcasting is innovative and acts as a place of research and development that commercial networks could draw from.

Chapter Six focuses on *Secrets & Lies*, the last of the four case studies discussed in this project. This chapter provides us with an example of how the small production company Hoodlum operated successfully in a local and international environment in 2014. At the time Hoodlum needed the connections to an international industry to remain viable and because of its size needed a point of difference to set itself apart in a concentrated and competitive market in Australia. Positioning itself as an expert in multi- platform production is how Hoodlum was able to enter the screen production industry and find a level of success. As I will detail, *Secrets & Lies*, a multi-platform production, is closest to the theoretical model of transmedia discussed by academics like Kinder and Jenkins out of the four case studies. In the setting up of the program at Ten, Hoodlum was able to show innovation through the way it pushed multi-platform content and got Network Ten to agree to do something that it had not done before. The practices it engaged at the network changed the way Ten then operated with other production companies. The amount of money spent on the ancillary content, and even the location of the production was unusual for Ten and the industry at that time. While there were some contextual factors, such as Ten going through a period of change in regard to its online offering and wanting some expertise in engaging audiences online, this was taken advantage of by the smaller company in ways that larger companies would possibly not have been able to. The international sales made by the organisation before the first episode went to

air in Australia was evidence of the company operating in a similar way to bigger organisations like Fremantle Australia, with Hoodlum acting more like a service provider to overseas organisations than a subsidiary.

Chapter Seven summarises the work completed and concludes with a discussion of Levine's approach and evaluates its relevance in the present context, assessing the value of her approach as a methodological tool. The five modes outlined by Levine provide structure and stability in an environment where conventions and new methods of making television are sometimes unclear and still forming. The emphasis in some areas of Levine's model are better suited to traditional television production than webisodes. The thesis argues that webisodes do extend the narrative of the programs discussed in a way that engages the viewer and, while being promotional, still offer a text of reasonable quality. The production process shapes the creation of these texts in a number of ways, yet it is the institutional support (or lack of it) and the enthusiasm of individual practitioners that seems to be the most dominant factors determining production outcomes. Some conventions are seen to be developing in this type of production, with additional storytelling content now seen primarily as the responsibility of production companies rather than the networks themselves. It is argued this type of production is still seen by the industry as a niche area, and while there seems to be less scepticism towards multi-platform production, there are still strong reasons why it has not been widely adopted or accepted as a standard industry practice.

Initial research for this thesis involved examining ancillary texts in relation to TV drama production over a set period, a period throughout which many questions were raised that could not be answered through textual analysis alone or simply by examining the ownership structure of organisations involved in television production—as I have discussed previously (Loads, 2014). For example, content can also be interactive and generated by audiences (Peirce and Tang 2012 p.165). The increasing role of technology companies in producing and distributing television (Clark and Sherr 2013) and challenges around accessing revenue from this new type of distribution for broadcasters (Peirce and Tang 2012 p.165) are also part of this discussion of audiences for creative personnel. This study therefore needed to consider this question from the perspective of how this new way of connecting with audiences shapes the production process for the creators of those texts, a consideration that Levine discusses in her approach through the mode of audience in production.

Having worked in television production roles for around ten years, I was aware that the

routines and practices of television production as well as the environment itself were not being taken into consideration in current case studies. Webisodes being peripheral to a lot of production were more influenced by day-to-day factors and the personalities of personnel. The edges of production, in my experience, are often places of both volatility and more creative freedom. Informal discussions with television production personnel indicated to me that ideas of who within a production would be producing these texts as well as their personal opinions/biases towards these texts were having a big impact in how they were produced. Levine's discussion of individual writer's biases through the production process echoed this informal conclusion, an approach I consider throughout the work undertaken here.

Having read an increasing number of articles on webisodes and television's online presence from a business perspective (Sullivan and Jiang 2010; Lin, Venkataraman and Jap 2013; Tenderich 2013) and having worked in corporate communications and public relations for a number of years, I was aware of how this department in large organisations work with creative personnel for commercial outcomes. I was particularly interested in the role of institutional departments like marketing and digital content roles in shaping these texts in production. Levine's area of production constraints would allow for this to be part of the discussion. Finally, the transmedia approach's strong emphasis on narrative needed to be included. How the transmedia approach affects the creation of character, plot and setting and how it may differ in approach for ancillary texts in comparison to the key text of a television drama program was a key question that emerged from the pilot study. These questions about story could only be answered by speaking to people creating this type of television. Levine covers this approach in her five modes, through her production of character and story section.

This study examines webisode production connected to Australian television drama across four productions in public and commercial broadcasting. The study involves interviews with key personnel in these productions, set visits and further examination of broader scholarship focusing on Australian Television. The study will show how the production process shapes these new texts and consider the impact of this new production upon the industry. This is important because as this production is largely peripheral to traditional television production in Australia—we can make predictions on how the Australia television industry will change, as it becomes more closely aligned with internet platforms

Chapter three: *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* chasing Italian Spiderman

'...for networks who want to create an all-encompassing show that's successful on the Internet and has content that is online, free, exclusive to their catch-up services or YouTube, it's really, really difficult, because you basically have to be writing two completely contrasting types of material that then have to blend into the same entity...'

- Dario Russo, Director, *Danger-5* on creating webisodes (Personal Communication 2014)

This chapter studies the production processes at work in the creation of a specific webisode series connected to a network drama. It further expands on the relevant literature on this subject, continues my methodological approach based on Levine's notion of five modes and concludes through this analysis that personalities and an inability to measure success shaped the production considerably. *Danger-5* was first broadcast on Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in 2012. A second series aired in 2015. The broadcast program was released on DVD, distributed internationally on television-on-demand service Hulu, and in Australia on Netflix. Ancillary short form videos—webisodes—were produced as part of the first season under the separate title *The Diamond Girls*, but were not produced for the second series. Analysis of these *Danger-5* webisodes shows how various cultural and economic forces shaped their creation, while also providing insight into the inner workings of the larger television industry in Australia. As I discuss in this chapter, this begins to account for the utilisation of webisodes in some drama programs and not others, and, as I will now document, how the television industry was experimenting with online material to engage diverse audiences during the 2012-2015 period.

Of particular focus here is the transition from predominantly story-based webisodes for Season 1 to what became a much stronger social media engagement (without webisodes) for Season 2. SBS's chartered purpose to "present many points of view and using innovative forms of expression" (SBS 2020) was a key factor in the creation of the Season 1 webisodes, and also in the decision to not produce webisodes for Season 2. The environment, routines and practices in the creation of these webisodes were almost identical to the specific episodes of the program to which they were connected. I will shortly reveal the creative challenges

that were faced in trying to repeat earlier online successes, and how internal and external pressures to do this both shaped a given ancillary text (e.g. a webisode) and the specific program that it was associated. Of crucial importance here is the fact that shaping the story for these additional texts and the efforts to reach an online audience demanded that changes were made to the texts themselves.

This chapter tells a larger story of the industry's anxieties when faced with the transition from free-to-air broadcasting to a mode which includes online storytelling. Program makers are therefore required to experiment, and their uncertainty stems from having unclear metrics of success when it comes to webisode production. I argue that webisodes during this period were one of a range of texts that television networks were trying out in an attempt engage online audiences, but the challenges of both understanding the purpose and function of webisodes and how to measure their success ultimately saw them fail as an effective storytelling method.

The SBS Charter, TV Drama and Innovation

SBS was established through an amendment to the *Broadcasting Act of 1942* as an independent statutory authority on 1 January 1978 (SBS 2014, p.3). Thirteen years later it became a corporation, as a result of the *Special Broadcasting Act 1991* (SBS Act) (*SBS Annual Report 2014* p.3). As Sklovsky (1980) and Patterson (1980), noted the service should, at its core, support multiculturalism. The network should also present multicultural Australia in a more positive light to a broader audience and would service a demographic that had been previously overlooked (Bear 1979; Grassby 1980). Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy (2008) state that since then, SBS has successfully built a high profile recognised around the world. As Flew describes, SBS is "a broadcaster that critically reflects on the challenges of a multicultural society, not only providing non-English language programming for Australia's ethnic and other minorities, but providing all Australians with access to programming from throughout the world that facilitates cross-cultural communication" (2009 p.1).

SBS's charter sets out its purpose to provide multicultural and multilingual programming across radio, television and digital services that will "entertain all Australians and in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society" (*SBS Annual Report 2014*, p.3). The charter lists eight points outlining how SBS must achieve these goals, including an emphasis on audience, advocacy, the delivery of multicultural perspectives and multilingual

programming. The eight points also identify the resources that should be drawn upon in the creation of programming, and the need for SBS to differentiate from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and community broadcasting through offering innovative, alternate and multiple viewpoints. My focus on webisodes most explicitly is linked to the emphasis here on innovation.

Since its commencement, roughly 80% of SBS's television programs have been imported, mainly due to the significant cost of local production (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008, p. 92). Compared to the broader focused Australian Broadcasting Corporation, SBS's budget is roughly a third of the ABC (*SBS Annual Report 2014-15, ABC Annual Report 2014-15*). SBS initially defined itself as a home for multilingual programming through documentaries, feature films and news (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008, pp. 92- 134). Sports such as soccer and cycling which were not featured prominently by other channels became increasingly popular with viewers (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008, p.122). Drama production was not such a strong focus, however there has been a range of programs from *Women of the Sun* (1981) early in the broadcaster's history, to shows such as *The Circuit* (2007-2010)*, Remote Area Nurse* (2006)*, East West 101* (2007-2011) *and Kick* (2007) that have been both critical successes and supported by audiences. The creation of SBS Independent in 1994 (which operated for thirteen years) was a separate institutional body focusing on funding film, television and documentary that was "innovative and concerned with Indigenous issues and cultural diversity" (Smaill 2003, p.108)—it showed a commitment to fund television drama, offering producers greater ownership and even the ability for SBS to screen their productions in cinemas or other (non-SBS) broadcast channels. Films like *The Boys* (1998)*, Ten Canoes* (2006) and *Beneath Clouds* (2002) were all funded or partly funded by SBS Independent.

Despite this initiative, investment in local drama by SBS has been sporadic. In recent years SBS Annual Reports have positioned drama under the broader category 'Comedy, Drama and Light Entertainment', with funding and the hours of drama broadcast often amalgamated under this banner. In 2014, network excitement around their new show *Better Man* increased partly because it was their "first drama in four years" (*SBS Annual Report 2014,* p.4). SBS has largely relied on outside production companies to create local drama throughout its history, and currently depends on international organisations with local production offices like Fremantle Media Australia and Endemol Australia for this content although they also work with a range of smaller local production companies.

In contrast, SBS promotes itself as a home for 'quality' imported TV drama, achieving rating success with critically acclaimed cable dramas such as *Fargo* (2014-), *The Walking Dead* (2010-)*, Orphan Black* (2010-2017) and *Borgen* (2010-2013)*. Between one and three million viewers tune in per calendar month to watch both imported and local drama (SBS 2014). This suggests a stronger SBS financial emphasis on imported drama which offer linguistic and cultural diversity and innovation. It also provides evidence that SBS can "tap into international television trends" (*SBS Annual Report 2014,* p.4) for local audiences. Yet Bruns (2014) argues that the mere existence of the network is evidence of innovation. SBS states it has lived up to its charter through programs commissioned and broadcast since its inception, with a range of challenging documentaries, multilingual films, and an emphasis on international news and sports coverage. Its drama output has often tackled issues of particular concern to multicultural Australians in both serious and lighthearted ways. For example, SBS has given a "genuinely alternate choice" (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008, p.92) to viewers through comedies such as *Pizza* (2000-)*, Bogan Pride* (2008) and *House Gang* (1998)*, as well as more serious dramas like *The Bridge* (2011)*, The Girl from Steel City* (1987-1988) and *Carla Cametti PD* (2009). This is based on the idea that other channels would not produce these types of programs, and *Danger-5* sits most comfortably within the edgy comedy category of the former. SBS's innovative approach has also pushed the boundaries of Australian TV drama. Programs such as *Going Home* (2000-2001), which featured commuters discussing recent events on a trip home from work on a train, presented viewers with a scripted hybrid of soap opera and current affairs panel discussion. This program was innovative not only in regards to its content and characters, but also in how it was produced and its approach to audience engagement. Episodes were often produced very close to broadcast dates and viewer interaction that was encouraged online shaped the direction of the program.

SBS's approach to online audience interaction reflects its mandate to innovate. In 1997 its website was created to support television, radio and to sell merchandising. Currently, SBS defines its online audience as a combination of those who use either the catch-up service SBS ON DEMAND, or audiences watching through third party hosted video sites such as YouTube. It is clear that distribution on the web is a strong focus, with more than 7 million unique catch-up views per month online. The audience count grows by 25% in some cases (e.g. *Masters of Sex*) and nearly doubles in others (*Orphan Black*) (SBS Annual Report, 2014). Yet Roose and Akbarzadeh (2013) have outlined some significant barriers that SBS

has faced in fulfilling its charter and engaging audiences more broadly, including financial restrictions. Cunningham has argued that SBS could not be created "under present conditions, be they political, cultural, technological or financial" (2009, p.15), while Flew suggests that "The history of SBS has long been tied to the shifting politics of Australian multiculturalism" (2011, p. 216). Changes of government have often led to shifts in SBS's focus and funding. For example, the introduction of advertising on SBS in 1991 was not welcomed by many viewers, and was seen as revenue-raising tool for local production to reduce the 'burden' of SBS on taxpayers. To build audiences and please advertisers, there is a perception that SBS is moving away "from its original multicultural identity to something else" (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008, p.128).

Danger-5 is useful to consider in this broader landscape of SBS's history. It is a program created in this context outlined here, and as we will see, it demonstrates a shift to both innovation in content and delivery (Christian 2018), while also fulfilling SBS's multi-lingual content needs. The program is created in an environment where the need to innovate is a stronger consideration than the broader conventions of drama creation, as SBS does not have the pressure to produce drama programs every year. *Danger-5*'s production reveals that a program with a small budget can attempt to engage audiences through innovative practices, and that these new conventions demonstrate how production is transforming with this new emphasis on online storytelling.

Danger-5: Chasing the Youth Demographic Through Offbeat Comedy

Danger-5 is a pastiche; part comedy and part 60s spy action/thriller. It draws upon a range of sources, including '60s/70s European exploitation films such as T. Fikret Uçak's *3 Dev Adam* (1973) and Don Edmonds's *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1975). Characters and historical figures (such as Adolf Hitler, Emperor Hirohito and Joseph Stalin) are repurposed with little interest in fidelity to the source material. Other inspirations are popular genre programs of the 1960s such as *The Prisoner* (1967)*, Thunderbirds* (1965-1966) and *The Avengers* (1961-1969)*,* as well as men's adventure magazines of the same period (*Man's Life, World of Men, True Action).* This aligns *Danger-5* with other internationally produced contemporary 'retro' comedies that rely on genre pastiche such as the *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* (2004) from the United Kingdom and *The Spoils of Babylon* (2014) from the United States.

The narrative premise of *Danger-5* concerns a team of five spies drawn from different countries who are tasked each week with sabotaging Nazi plots and attempting to kill Adolf Hitler. Each episode has elements of action, high-melodrama, comedy, salaciousness and severely condensed plots that could easily be strung out over entire seasons of other programs. The show was commissioned by SBS in 2010 and Season 1 went into pre-production in the second half of that year. Its core production team was director/producer/writer/composer Dario Russo, writer/creator/actor David Ashby, and producer Kate Croser. SBS initially approached Russo and Ashby after the success of their web series *Italian Spiderman* which generated nine million unique views on YouTube (Ryan and Hearn 2010).

Italian Spiderman was initially a student film, a mock trailer for a film that didn't exist, produced by students in third year at Flinders university. The trailer parodies low budget Italian films of the 1960s and '70s that largely ignored the copyright laws governing established franchises. After finding 9 million views on YouTube, the South Australian Film Corporation funded the creation of a ten-part web series, following the further adventures of the Italian Spiderman. Ryan and Hearn discuss the web series in detail in the article 'Next-generation 'Filmmaking': New markets, new methods and new business models. Media International Australia'. In it they outline how the producers of this series are part of a new generation of media makers that needs to be "understood as not only disrupting and creating opportunities for production but also as disrupting and changing the very nature of the film audience and how they are engaged with media offerings" (2010 p.3). They also argue that the collaborative nature of this production was a convention of web series production at this time.

The commissioning of *Danger-5* also fits in with the 'outsourcing' arguments of Thomas and Lobato (2015) as Russo and Ashby were expected to bring their online audience with them to this new production. The program was produced by Dinosaur Worldwide, a production company formed by Russo, Ashby and Croser. After SBS deemed the first season a success in 2012, a second series of seven episodes was commissioned and these were created between September 2013 and January 2014, airing in January 2015. Importantly, *Danger-5* reflects SBS's charter and audience in a number of ways. Although the program is predominantly in English, four languages are spoken onscreen in keeping with its 'international spies' theme–two key cast members speak exclusively in Russian and German

(with English subtitles). It is a light entertainment comedy, a genre the SBS has moved into to reach new audiences over the last ten years, featuring alternative perspectives pitched squarely at a youth demographic and is typical of SBS's current Monday night line-up. It also builds on similar programs broadcast on the station like *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* (2004) and a history of broadcasting off-beat, cult movies late at night since its inception. A five-part webisode prequel series for *Danger-5* (titled *The Diamond Girls)* was produced alongside the six broadcast episodes and was released online in late 2011 in the lead up to the program's broadcast on SBS' main channel in February 2012. The webisode series was one broadcast episode divided into five parts between four and six minutes in length. *Danger-5*/*The Diamond Girls* were key cross-platform projects and part of SBS's overall innovation strategy (*SBS Annual Report 2012-13*). From a transmedia point of view of extending the story through additional texts, the webisode series was the main focus of the first season. Season 1 also had some merchandising and a website hosted by SBS to help promote the show. This strategy changed for Season 2 in 2015. Social media platforms were given a much stronger focus, and no webisodes were commissioned.

I will now explore precisely why this was the case in order to demonstrate how the entire production process shaped these texts.

Danger-5 and *The Diamond Girls* in Production

The following key *Danger-5* production staff were interviewed in pre-production of Season 2 in September/October 2013:

- Dario Russo: creator, director, writer, editor, composer
- David Ashby, creator, writer, actor, creative consultant, second unit director
- Kate Croser, producer
- Caterina DeNave, executive producer, Commissioning Editor for Drama, Comedy and Entertainment, SBS
- Chloe Spalding, costume design
- Sophie Spalding, costume design
- Matt Tarrant, social media manager (Season 2)
- James Parker, miniature landscapes and model-maker.

Participants were chosen based on their range of responsibilities, their impact on the

production of the webisodes, or their involvement in the webisodes.

Production Constraints

The production of Season One webisodes was governed by a number of broad industry and cultural factors which impacted the final product seen by viewers. SBS shaped the series through its policies and previous expectations of similar series. Funding was a key reason for this prequel series and its online release to audiences. Investment in the show was primarily from SBS, with the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC), the Adelaide Film Festival and Screen Australia providing additional funding. How this series was ultimately perceived in relation to both story and promotion also had an impact. According to the production team, how the broader television industry perceived risk and the brands of other channels were also factors. Subsequent changes to all of these factors explains why *Danger-5* opted to not go ahead with a second season of webisodes for Season 2.

Produced alongside the six broadcast episodes, the webisodes were seen largely as a 'seventh episode'. As producer Kate Croser explains:

> It really cost 1/7th of the budget, because it was scheduled as part of our main shoot, so it had equal kind of attention and schedule time, but the reason why we did that was because we knew that where our fans had come from was online, and we wanted to deliver them something exclusive first (personal communication, 2013).

The Diamond Girls webisode series had a larger budget than other productions of its kind, given that between five and ten percent of an overall budget is emerging as more of an industry standard (Eckersley, personal communication 2014; Mayfield, personal communication 2014). The range of investors in *Danger-5* certainly had an impact on why a program like this would choose to create webisodes like *The Diamond Girls* as part of its overall strategy as seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1: List of funding for Danger-5

Funding Source	Amount	Timing
SBS	$1 500 000	2010

SAFC	$269 250 production equity scheme	2010
	$20 000 web portal development	
	$4 000 lighting department attachment	
	$1 000 script	2009
	$20,000 for project development	
Adelaide Film Festival	$36,000 Short film	2010
Screen Australia	$250 000 TV drama	2010

(Figures taken from organisation Annual Reports (2014 and 2015) and *The Australian* Newspaper(2014))

According to Croser, funding went into one 'pool' of money, but the outcomes were reasonably specific. The case for funding for webisodes had to be argued separately to the network and the South Australian Film Corporation. The webisodes were then funded by the SAFC and SBS directly, they premiered as part of the Adelaide Film Festival (in their short film section) before going online. Funding for website materials also came from the SAFC, but part of the provision for that was that promotion had to be a strong part of the webisode purpose. Without specific efforts to argue the case for funding this additional content, *The Diamond Girls* would not have been part of the production.

For the production team, the size of the budget was a double-edged sword. The fact the webisodes were budgeted the same as a broadcast episode meant they were significantly cheaper than the average produced drama (Screen Australia 2014). The webisodes were shot the same, have the same sets and actors and have an identical tone. However, the process of creating web material through the TV production system with a budget limited creative spontaneity. Says writer David Ashby, "from a logistical standpoint, it's hard to make high budget, spontaneous content, because without a doubt you'd have…process" (personal communication 2013). Director and writer Dario Russo, had a similar perspective: "you know, as soon as you have investors to answer to, your options in terms of Internet content is kind of limited, and the…the magic of web content is that usually the people who make this have absolutely no one to answer to and they can do whatever they want, and that's why people enjoy it so much…" (personal communication 2013).

Both creators said that the television production process dampened the spirit of creative experimentation. They felt it resulted in the webisodes feeling contrived and made them a less enjoyable experience for audiences. This is worthy of note in regards to how a number of scholars have discussed the move from an informal creative production setting to a more

formal one (Duffy 2015; Thomas and Lobato 2015; Sokolova 2012). In this work, there is an assumption that the amateur skills are to a degree set and are then being accessed by the formal industry. But in this case, the *formal process* of interacting with SBS, changed the outcome for the creative team.

SBS's charter and network strategies helped shape the webisodes. Both Croser and DeNave (Executive Producer) said that a show like *Danger-5* and *The Diamond Girls* would not have been made anywhere else in Australia, with its innovative style and cross-platform storytelling (personal communication 2013). *Danger-5* and *The Diamond Girls* clearly fit within the SBS charter of differentiation and the desire for fresh, creative perspectives. The multilingual aspects of the program and the youth audience it targeted also fit within SBS's stated goals at this time. *The Diamond Girls* webisode series was shaped by broadcast marketing expectations, but distributing the webisodes online meant partnering with SBS Online. Croser saw their role as largely promotion focused: "their mandate is to promote the show" (personal communication 2013). As an investor, Screen Australia had similar attitudes as they "very much saw the webisodes as promotion" (Screen Australia, 2014).

The SBS and Dinosaur Worldwide team did however agree that the webisodes needed to be more substantial and to present something closer to the original television text in addition to merely being a marketing tool. This meant that the story had to have value to audiences. Croser felt that engaging an audience online using a communication tool used solely for marketing was too narrow for the webisodes. She argued that the webisodes were about connecting with online audiences and showing them they were valued beyond providing them with simple information driving them to a specific time to connect with the show on television (personal communication 2013). For Ashby, speaking about the webisode strategy and the tension between storytelling and promotion makes defining purposes difficult: "the model itself is quite grey so to speak" (personal communication 2013). This was solved by making the webisodes an origin story, thereby extending the storyworld of the show, while also engaging audiences with content not available on the broadcast program and thus also fulfilling marketing demands. But it is unclear if these marketing requirements were met by the webisodes. Watching *The Diamond Girls* it was hard to see a strong promotional or marketing angle at work. The episodes finished airing three months before the debut of Season One of the show. There were no narrative tricks to drive audiences to the broadcast

program, like ending with a cliffhanger or establishing a storyline to be continued. When it comes to production values and scripting, the webisodes felt almost identical to the show itself.

The broader industry's attitude to risk-taking and innovation with webisodes were a factor that the team felt also could have inhibited the creation of *The Diamond Girls*. The key creative team stated that the Australian industry was risk-averse compared to other countries and being an innovative comedy with cross-platform components, the project was hard to finance. Croser stated that even the ABC tended to be cautious with newer production companies, with a lot of their comedy output using the same production staff and resulting in some programs looking and feeling similar (personal communication 2013). While SBS was willing to risk resources and time on the *Danger-5/Diamond Girls* team, due to the risk and the financial pressures at SBS, the program was made with a budget about a third to a half of the average Australian drama budget (Screen Australia 2014).

By framing the webisodes as an origin story these texts are extending the story and giving audiences new information not available in the broadcast program. Financing the webisodes was also a key factor; the team sought separate funding to create *The Diamond Girls,* and this funding was the reason the webisodes existed in the first place. Regarding conventions, as the creators of the program have control of the webisodes, the idea of them having a mainly marketing function may be valid, but the webisodes are not effective as a promotional tool. The channel had no clear way to measure how audiences are bought to the free-to-air program through the webisodes, or what a metric could be used to gauge the successful size of a webisode's audience. This is an important consideration because we can start to see how much these type of texts are subject to strict financial pressures (like the rest of the show) and this becomes a key factor in their production. There was also a strong feeling of general uncertainty of the show's place in the industry including the role of webisodes more generally.

Levine's approach both takes into account and is shaped by economic concerns and we can identify that as a key factor here in the case of *Danger-5*. Financing webisodes and the whole program is a strong focus, and a range of strategies had to be employed to gain funding for this extra material. Without this understanding it would be hard to fully comprehend how creative decisions in production can be shaped by access to resources. This

perspective also shows us that by producing the webisodes in a manner that was financially equivalent to the anchor program meant that the quality of the text was the same. Thus, the institutional factors shaped the production of these texts in two key ways. Through policies, rules and regulation the team sought funding and tried to adhere to a network charter and direction from an executive producer. Where these policies were not explicit, it caused confusion for the team, and the production of the show in an industrial 'gray area', leading to the webisodes being a short-form five-part series that was very close to the original program, an outcome that was seen as a safer, but less creatively open option to the team.

It is within these informal spaces that Levine's next mode sees production processes having an impact and we will now proceed with a discussion of how these forces shape the webisodes.

The Production Environment

Levine (2007) discusses two factors shaping production: *economic* (through institutions like unions), and *cultural* (such as hierarchies around gender and institutional positioning). In the production environment mode she moves from the more strictly regulated forces of network policies and government regulation to the less discussed areas of the effects of unions, relationships within the production group and the issue of gender. The production process for *The Diamond Girls* was similar to the broadcast episodes. The series was created by the same production staff that created the first season of the program. Institutional forces shaped the shooting schedule of the webisodes, which were shot in a ten-week block in late 2010, in a non-sequential order. On any given day, work could be done on a scene from a regular episode and then a scene from the webisodes series. According to those who worked on the show, the set had a clear hierarchy and was a relaxed, professional environment. However, there was some initial confusion in how to remunerate crew members, as producer Croser acknowledged, industry awards had no definition for the work that was being undertaken. The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance assured me that webisode production was covered in an award from 2008 (personal communication 2016).

Ultimately, the producers decided to pay staff at the same rate as crew working on the free-to-air program. The production crew numbered 20-30 in pre-production, grew to 50 during shooting and shrank to 15 during the post-production period. The same fifteen department heads managed the production under the guidance of Russo, Croser and Ashby, whether

working on regular episodes or webisodes. Croser described the shooting environment as being closer to film than television, in that roughly three minutes of footage was produced a day, as opposed to eight minutes a day which is typical for TV drama production (personal communication 2013). A smaller crew with some personnel taking on multiple roles is one explanation of how this was achieved with less financial resources. This enabled more time for costume and set changes, as well as incorporation of more effects and miniatures within the production. It was noted by Miniature Model Maker James Parker this was a relative luxury not just from the perspective of more time, but in his area more personnel could be used to create landscapes and miniatures.

While there was more time available to shoot, the length of shooting that did that take place was dictated by institutional factors. Shooting was built around Screen Australia board meetings, as funding from them was crucial. With additional pressure from SBS to shorten the shooting time, the shoot was a week shorter than expected (nine weeks instead of ten). It is logical to assume if the original ten weeks had been available, it could have resulted in better outcomes. The general atmosphere on the set of *Danger-5* enabled production staff to contribute to creative decisions in a fairly open way. Communication methods were both formal (e.g. through documents such as scripts, program spreadsheets and briefs for each department) and informal (e.g. emails, Skype, meetings and one-on-one conversations). Because it was a smaller than average crew that was in pre-production of a second season, most already knew each other, with many having worked together on other projects over a number of years. In most conversations production staff outlined that if they needed more information on what was required from the creators they were more than forthcoming. As Chloe Spalding noted, "…in a series like this everyone does have a bit of an open-door policy, so if there is something that you want to ask and have reviewed straightaway, you're very lucky you're able to do this sort of production like this" (personal communication 2013).

When I visited the set during pre-production, what I witnessed tended to reflect this. I was free to walk around and speak to anyone and observe different areas. Dario Russo tended to work closely with David Ashby, who I observed several times in prolonged conversations relaying ideas and troubleshooting with producer Crosier, the props and miniatures departments and the social media manager, Matt Tarrant. It was clear the creators had a strong rapport with the crew, and my ease in being 'let loose' to discuss aspects of the production with them, with no strict surveillance, reflects a relaxed environment.

Levine's method, looking at informal methods of production is harder to define than the previous mode as, by their nature these factors are not discussed or documented in production the same way. The uncertainty of how to organize production of the webisodes and remunerate staff, shows these informal forces do effect production, in this case by cementing the idea in the creative team's mindset that webisodes were the same as the anchor program. Because the webisodes and broadcast regular show were being produced simultaneously, the webisode quality did not deviate. From these discussions we can argue that a convention emerging from this type of production focused on extended storytelling is to regard the production as a key part of the program and just as important as the production of broadcast episodes. The ability for the crew to tackle multiple roles and a sense of it not having a strict hierarchy in production for the entire production may be more reflective of the low-budget and entry level of this production, rather than any association of informality with webisode production.

Production Routine and Practices

Everyday work practices, such as production meetings or the responsibilities of key staff, should not be analysed just by cost or efficiency, but also as a cultural practice that can both directly and indirectly shape meaning in texts before they are viewed by audiences. There was little difference in this sense between the regular *Danger-5* program and *The Diamond Girls* webisodes. *Danger-5* organised production of *The Diamond Girls* in an identical way to the rest of the series production. Executive Producer Caterina DeNave worked with different departments within SBS, such as Marketing and Publicity and SBS Online, who had approval over the budget, casting, scripts, opening titles, style, key cast and crew, edits and the music. This approval occurred again through face-to-face meetings, email, phone calls and Skype. This communication was also two-way with department heads able to offer ideas for the show and obtain feedback in their areas of responsibility. These department heads would then communicate with their respective teams on how best to put the ideas into action. When asked directly about any differences between the practices of the regular episode and the webisode series, various interview participants only outlined a difference from a scheduling perspective.

The two creators of *Danger-5* (2010-2015) and *The Diamond Girls* had more control over the production process than is typically the case with other programs. The multiple

production roles Russo and Ashby occupied is typical of lower budget television and film and allowed them to influence more areas of the production directly. This was not an overwhelming issue when it came to stifling the creative contribution of people outside the pair as expected, because of the fact that the crew was small and many had worked together on previous projects. There was flexibility in recognising the specialised experience and knowledge of staff which would enhance the production. Costume Designer Chloe Spalding said there were boundaries when working with Ashby and Russo, but there was also flexibility. She was confident that they both knew she had specialised experience and knowledge beyond theirs in her area, which would add to the production positively. For Croser the stronger singularity of vision added to the show: "I think that's a good thing, because the whole feel of *Danger-5* is a handcrafted, very much a thing made of love, and that's what our audiences respond to" (personal communication 2013). Having the two people who created the show in multiple roles meant that they had more control over the creative output than other programs, as there was less need to delegate. This applied both to the webisodes and the broadcast program, except to again reiterate that the webisodes were considered equally important to the total *Danger-5* package, rather than existing on the periphery or as less important than the broadcast episodes.

Of the modes so far, this area of Levine's is the weakest from the perspective of illuminating differences between the production of the anchor program and the webisodes. It still demonstrates how routines and practices have an impact in shaping the production of both texts. The greater control Russo and Ashby had in multiple roles makes the webisodes close to the show and vice versa. Looking at who is completing each role and if the person is working in multiple roles is often overlooked by a purely economic perspective. This additional exploration of production continues with the next section. The construction of story is often dominated by the perspective of directors, producers and writers. But as we move on to the next section, we will see how a broader range of practitioners shaped the narrative drama within these webisodes.

Production of Character and Story

How a writer conceives and executes elements such as character and story, and how other departments create character and storyworlds through other means (e.g. make-up, lighting, acting, hair and costume) are outlined in this section. The story and creation

of the narrative was identical for both the webisodes and the broadcast episodes in relation to the jobs being done by the make-up, costuming and miniatures crew. Strong similarities also existed in production values. During the production process members of the technical crew felt they were contributing to story in the same way they did to the broadcast episodes. For the miniatures department, their contribution to the show's setting was key. For James Parker, this meant tonally referencing other programs of the 1960s such as *Thunderbirds* (1965-66)*,* making the sets recognisable but also clearly 'fake' and even being able to contribute to the pastiche nature of the show directly. Parker used small found objects in the detail of the landscapes to represent other parts of the setting:

> One of the briefs we have had is that if we can use something that is not what it's supposed to be...and then maybe they're [the audience.] 'Oh!...If the landscape is kind of funny as well...why not? That's great. (personal communication 2013)

When working on miniatures for *The Diamond Girls*, in terms of changing the story process for online distribution, Parker said that, "It is of no consideration to me at all, all right. I don't even think about it" (personal communication 2013). Likewise, Chloe and Sophie Spalding contributed to the creation of character through building on detailed briefs given to them by co-creators Ashby and Russo: "we will have a huge array of that catalogue of ideas that we've gone through and taking pockets and little bits from other characters or other references" (personal communication 2013). They both expressed a great deal of satisfaction in helping to create character through selecting boots for David Ashby's American character, Jackson (which changed his walk into a swagger). Ashby's character is a brash cliché ridden American agent who combines aspects of John Wayne, Snake Plissken and Han Solo. Contributing to Aldo Mignone's transformation to Pierre (a European sophisticate) he took ownership of his costume and accessories and changed into character in front of them.

Ashby and Russo however, expressed frustrations about writing plots specifically for the web. The pair stated stated that they wrote the webisodes differently from the broadcast episodes and their choices about scenes, storylines and access to sets affected the shaping of plots for *The Diamond Girls.* However, they struggled to make them different. Initially they felt a lot of pressure to be more original and daring with the content, to try and recapture some aspects of their earlier viral success with *Italian Spiderman* (personal communication 2013). As Russo explained:

We had made this transition from writing *Spiderman*—which was like 10, three-minute chunks that had made no sense whatsoever, we had them strung together with basically no plot. We tried really hard to elevate the show from just the succession of gags to something that was more layered, and our minds were stuck in that mindset…and bits of it worked and bits of it didn't (personal communication 2013).

The Diamond Girls was also plotted to fit in to existing materials, which could be a reflection of the commissioning later in the pre-production process. There were two elements that were altered for the webisode series story-wise. The story is a regular 25-minute television episode length divided into five parts of between four and six minutes each. Ashby and Russo also decided to keep all five of the team's characters together for most of the web series, which they saw as making the webisodes less confusing for audiences, as there was one main story arc, rather than numerous plot lines. Within these considerations they tried to rely on what had already been created and cut from other scripts, as Ashby noted, "we pretty much used bits and pieces left over from what we've had planned to write in the first season…we felt we weren't as confident as we were with our TV work" (personal communication 2013)

DeNave indicated that SBS evaluated the online material as being successful content if it was close in style and production values to the original show (personal communication 2013). Watching the webisodes, it is hard to argue that they feel radically different to the six broadcast episodes. Overall it seemed that *The Diamond Girls* was plotted to fit into existing material, which could be a reflection of the commissioning later in the pre-production process. The webisodes used all the key actors and have the same number of locations and action sequences.

There were however, two production benefits in making the webisodes similar in story, tone and style to the original show; it matched SBS's expectations and it was efficient for the production in using elements of existing scripts and sets within an existing production schedule. These webisodes extended the narrative world of this drama production. It gave viewers a chance to see the team working together and also tells the origin story of the group, something not referred to in the broadcast episodes. The process thus shaped the story; the episodes were written using leftover scenes strung together, giving the impression the series was not held in the same regard by the creators as the rest of the program. Also the discomfort and nervousness of the core creative team meant the team decided to make the webisodes style and tone identical to the broadcast program as the team were cautious and

did not want to take risks with the extended material. The predominant thinking here was that with more control Ashby, Croser and Russo ensured there was less creativity in the production, which ultimately lessened the innovation of the webisodes.

The Audience in Production

Borrowing again from Levine (2007), the final section here focuses on how the audience is perceived by production staff. In her writing, Levine goes beyond television ratings to examine how staff perceive audiences through direct communication and previous work. The interviews for this particular component of my research were conducted near the end of pre-production of Season 2. Questions about the audience for the webisodes was evidently a key concern. The interviewees repeatedly stated that the webisodes had not been included in Season 2 because they had not reached a large enough audience in Season 1. The first webisode attracted approximately 250,000 unique views, dropping to 90,000 for the second and to 74,000 by the fifth and final section.

Beyond ratings, numbers of downloads and website hits, there seemed to be very limited information on who was engaging with them online according to executive producer Caterina De Nave:

> There's very little demographic information available on the people who use online in Australia. So, I don't know if they're voracious or not. I do know this: people use online to catch up on shows they've missed last night. You know, the on-demand thing is quite big. We know that tens of thousands of people come to… the online, original material. Whether they're voracious users, I have no way of knowing (personal communication 2013).

Utilising different social media platforms was a preferred way to engage online audiences for Season 2, with resources and time devoted to this method accordingly. The immediacy of feedback and the interactive approach offered by social media was seen as a better return on investment for the producers and another option for growing audiences. *The Diamond Girls* webisodes did not have much formal pre-production audience research, which may have contributed to its lack of success. Key production staff felt that the serialisation of the story did not meet the expectations of their

audience and that its mode of distribution may have also been a factor in why this perception was not clear conveyed. The similarity between the show and the webisodes was also seen by the creators as not meeting audience expectations. Ashby and Russo spoke of the webisodes lacking spark by being too long and not being more sketch-like.

There was a strong sense among the production team that Russo and Ashby's success with *Italian Spiderman* could be replicated in regards to audience reach (Ryan and Hearn 2010) . However, Russo was quite open in saying that he did not know what made *Italian Spiderman* such a hit (personal communication 2013). In television production, it is standard for commissioning networks to rely on the previous work and expertise of creators to reach an audience, so clearly SBS was following this convention. Dividing *The Diamond Girls* narrative into five sections as a serialized storyline was perceived as a barrier to audiences by some of the production team. Ashby and Russo both expressed the view that their previous work was successful because it was short, chaotic and had many fast-paced jokes. Russo believed that the trailer format was the kind of material that audiences wanted: brief, original and humorous. As he explains, "The trailer was more successful (in reaching audiences) than any of our webisodes individually, and that speaks directly to the kind of experience people are looking for from the web content first" (personal communication 2013).

When looking at TV viewing figures, Croser argued that because of a drop in numbers after the first ad break, audiences as a whole were leaning towards a preference for shorter content. She felt the targeted audience for the program had a desire for shorter form comedy, and a short form version of the entire TV show would work better. Both the webisodes and the TV show had a decrease in viewing figures after the first few minutes, which supports her view and the argument against serialization. Croser also saw the drop in viewers for the second webisode as evidence of this: "people don't watch serialized content online. They just like to watch clips and snippets" (personal communication 2013). However, this does not explain why the first webisode still had a relatively small audience. DeNave felt that releasing the webisodes three to four months before the broadcast episodes was premature, and that not supporting them with any other online or offline marketing media meant it was hard to reach audiences. DeNave also felt the webisodes should have been released more frequently:

> ...we didn't promote them properly. I mean, how is anybody going to find them? I

mean…social media is reliant on people just stumbling upon something, and then retweeting it or Facebooking it. If I was doing it all again, I'd find some clever way of marketing *Diamond Girls* so that people knew it was there. So, we needed to market it, and I think our release plan was too long. We should've been releasing two a week, not one a week (personal communication 2013).

Both of these perspectives contributed to the move to engage audiences with social media for Season 2. The desire for *The Diamond Girls* to closely resemble the broadcast episodes was seen in retrospect as a hindrance to online audiences by the show's creators. Ashby found the stricter conventions of the TV format as 'stifling' and contriving the nature of the web content, with this lack of spontaneity registered by audiences themselves (personal communication 2013).

With network and funding bodies being broadly supportive of cross-platform drama in 2013 how to successfully create texts like webisodes is less clear to Russo because each medium requires something different, but not *too* different. He viewed this as a key problem: "now we actually have two distinct audiences with online content and the television content, and people are actually looking for completely different things from an experience standpoint". Russo continues,

It's almost impossible to create one project that is genuinely cross-platform in the sense that you can just throw it on one platform or another, and it's going to be equally as successful. So this is the problem we've got now, it's sort of more of a creator conundrum than it is any kind of financing conundrum, because people can access money to make x web series to try and get them to the next level, and now financing bodies understand the value in people being able to leverage further success over the minor success of something on the Internet (personal communication 2013).

For the creators of *The Diamond Girls*, utilizing social media seemed a better option for Season 2 to prompt higher engagement with viewers. A dedicated social media campaign built around interactive fan engagement on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram through competitions, promotional clips, trailers and character/plot revelations was therefore implemented. This social media strategy provided SBS with clearer and regular feedback

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through web hits, likes and followers. There was also less risk, as the majority of the material used on social media was clips from existing or upcoming programs, so the investment in original material was less. In 2013 at the time of my set visit, 13,000 Facebook likes and 2,000 Twitter followers was seen as a good measure of success, this has grown to 33,000 Facebook followers and 22,000 Twitter followers by 2020. The 250,000 views of *The Diamond Girls* on YouTube was considered unsuccessful, with the main point of comparison for *The Diamond Girls* being the unique views of *Italian Spiderman*, not other website unique visits.

The success of the *Danger-5* webisodes was therefore governed by a ratings-driven mentality. The webisodes were judged on unique views and 'likes', and thus *how* and *if* audiences were being driven to the broadcast program by the webisodes were not effectively measured. If *The Diamond Girls* could have been demonstrated as bringing in 50,000 to 100,000 viewers to the broadcast episodes, surely this would have been seen as significant. But this lack of metrics at the time is important, and ultimately it was compared to previous successes and cancelled. Once again, with this program we can see a sense of caution and confusion during this period in the creative team and the move to social media is seen as another decision made to reduce risk, as Matt Tarrant can demonstrate a better return on investment than SBS and the production team is capable.

Discussion and Conclusion

Clearly the production process of *Danger-5* shaped the webisode series *The Diamond Girls*. Without the work of the three key creators, and an environment willing to fund them the series would not have existed. The many similarities between *The Diamond Girls* and the broadcast episodes made them successful, but also could be a barrier to success from a transmedia perspective. The webisodes extended the narrative world of the central program. By making the transmedia text an origin story, online viewers were given something of value. Audiences were able to experience the story in a different way, as the origin story featured all five main characters in all scenes together not seen in the anchor program. Key creatives saw the short length and immediacy of webisodes as a factor that was important in their creation. They also acknowledged that the webisodes were a hybrid of online videos and TV, which they saw at the heart of the perceived failings of the webisodes because the style was too close to television production, and not to the style of their previous work. The team did not

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have clear answers as to what constituted success, and it is argued here that conventions in this area were not set for this production at this particular moment in time.

Using Levine's method has been effective here, as the production of the webisodes is so close to the regular television production, it provides an adequate framework to analyse the overall production. The role of government bodies in the funding and type of content produced is seen, and would fall within what Levine what term as 'Production Constraints'. The institutional pressures from the network are also different and it would be better served if this was discussed as a separate section. Webisodes were chosen to be a part of an engagement strategy because of a strong motivation by the producers that it would reach audiences which was supported by the SBS network. As noted, funding for the webisode series was secured later in the pre-production process, and without that funding a webisode series would not have been a part of Season 1. This supports Cunningham's view (2018) that funding for these areas is important, and broader arguments in Chapter One that Australian television needs government financial support (Healy 2019). This demanded that the producers approached funding bodies and SBS, but it also meant that these institutions had to support these types of innovations (Taylor 2015). Directors, producer and the executive producer all argued that the transmedia content could only happen at SBS, which seems unsubstantiated.

The following chapters will outline three other programs not on SBS which took more sophisticated storytelling approaches using webisodes. These shows were producing webisodes from 2010-2014, throughout the same period as *the Diamond Girls* was created. All four programs are working and experimenting, and like Ashby, Croser and Russo are looking to YouTube and other television drama for inspiration, rather than other webisodes connected to a drama program.

Ultimately, SBS took a risk using transmedia practices with a production company with no professional work on its resume. This lends support to the ideas of scholars who suggest that the industry is using skills of 'aspirational workers' in a transactional nature. As new production personnel gain access to the industry, whole networks benefit from new skills and ideas. The experience of creating *Italian Spiderman* and its subsequent success indicates the show *Danger-5* was an attempt to recreate that success, but, according to the producers, finding an audience for the network television program was the main focus when undertaking the production.

Still, the production of these webisodes alongside and in tandem with the broadcast episodes meant the material produced was of a very high quality. Compared to the vast majority of

webisodes produced in 2012 in Australia (Loads 2014), *The Diamond Girls* featured the same crew, cast, production values and budget as any other episode of the show. It offered viewers extra storytelling material as it outlined the origin story of the group, something not done in the broadcast episodes. From the point of view of SBS, making the online material as close to the show as possible made the webisodes successful. This follows Carols Scolari's (2009) view that transmedia materials do have an inherit hierarchy. This places this type of webisode at the top of his four modes, being almost identical to the original material, and from his viewpoint the most successful because of these similarities. The process of 'learning' television produced this outcome, but according to Russo and Ashby it resulted in webisodes that were not successful, from a content perspective. As 'aspirational laborers' (Duffy 2015) Russo and Ashby perhaps lacked perspective at this time, as they were interviewed during pre-production for the second season and had little feedback from audiences and SBS.

The webisodes were ultimately seen as a failure. Undoubtedly the network saw the purpose of the webisodes as promotional, drawing viewers towards the broadcast episodes. Although SBS had no way to measure how audiences moved between the web and broadcast television, it still labelled them as unsuccessful. An audience of 250,000 for a commercial program in prime time would be seen as a failure, but on subscription television wouldn't be seen negatively. The webisodes drew those numbers, but clearly the nine million views of previous work on YouTube was the measurement aimed for. The argument by the creators that the webisodes were too close to the original program seems to perhaps have some merit. The webisodes seem so much like a seventh 'prequel' episode. The webisode series storyline being self-contained—not relating to specific broadcast episode storylines in contrast to programs like *The Offspring Secrets & Lies*—could point to a barrier that stood between viewers of the webisode and the show, and vice versa. This is only speculated by producers based on the assumption that the webisode audiences dropped dramatically as each episode was released. As Croser noted, the broadcast episodes also had a similar drop off of audience after the first ad break, and it could be speculated that both the webisodes and broadcast episodes simply failed to engage audiences. If this is the case, then it could be argued the reason *Danger-5* went into production for Season 2 and the webisodes did not is more to do with each format

being evaluated differently.

For the team, the expectations of social media content engagement were much lower, in line with the investment required. As the webisode series resembled the show so closely, it felt more like an episode on a catch-up service that simply did not go to air. But according to the criteria outlined for success for SBS in its annual report, if *The Diamond Girls* had gained 250,000 unique views on its catch-up service (after being broadcast on its network) it would have been judged as an equal success as drama imports such as *Orphan Black.* The *Danger-5* webisode series illustrates how creating engaging online content is a difficult undertaking and is not easily reproducible with webisodes, at least during the period in question.

Chapter four: *Offspring*: A Flagship Show With Fledgling Ancillary Texts

> I suspect that that level of freedom that we had was something of an anomaly which wouldn't exist anymore. I think the networks understand what the Internet is now and how people engage with content on it. I kind of feel like we made it in a funny little bubble of time, and I doubt we would be able to make it again.
>
> - Benedict Hardie, actor and co-writer of *Offspring: The Nurses* on making webisodes (personal communication 2016)

This chapter draws again on Levine's approach in analysing cultural and economic factors that shaped the production of *Offspring*'s multiplatform stories. Using Levine, as demonstrated in the analysis of *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* and the following two productions gives us insights into television production at this time, moving away from a strictly economic and cultural perspective. By including an emphasis on processes, perspectives on story and audience, we learnt how *Danger-5* practitioners were aspirational labourers, who were often unsure of creating webisodes, their place in the industry and what constitutes success in audience size and perceptions of quality. Through interviews with key personnel who managed strategy and production staff, this chapter analyses how Network Ten and production company Endemol Shine Australia created these texts between 2010 and 2014. A range of issues are covered which includes examining views on the role of storytelling across platforms, what constitutes success in measuring audience engagement, institutional factors and routines and practices in production.

Like *Danger-5,* webisodes connected to *Offspring* were created by practitioners on the periphery of the industry, who were hoping to use their expertise to gain entry into traditional production. The creators of this series also used an informal group of close friends to put production together, but in this case it was distinctly separate from the anchor program. The director and creator of the webisodes was also unclear as to what constituted success with the production but were given feedback that what he had created was meeting expectations. One of the key differences in this production is the tension between the production company and the network on what the role of the webisodes were, and as the ancillary texts included

promotion and storytelling, the latter aspects caused friction between personnel.

Webisodes production show that the television industry was changing during this time. Innovation and fluidity are argued to be an aspect in the production of these ancillary texts. On a broader level, using *Offspring* as a case study, this chapter will help to document an industry in transition, from the perspective of a commercial free-to-air prime time drama production. As this thesis has argued, webisode production can provide a picture of the larger story of emerging trends within production over this period. Drawing on recent scholarship, the framework proposed by Levine offers the best way to analyse this production and to explore out these newer conventions. Having examined public television in the previous chapter, this chapter will shift focus to an analysis of commercial prime-time production, a space where in 2010 the audiences and resources were the largest in Australia. Thus*, Offspring* offers an illuminating counterpoint to the low-budget *Danger-5*. With an expansion in the number of stakeholders, commercial considerations and complexity of a larger scale production this chapter will contend that some conventions were similar in this commercial setting, but other forces are also evident. This will then be complemented by the other two case studies in this thesis which place multi-platform storytelling much more centrally when producing television drama.

Numerous production factors influenced the textual form of *Offspring: The Nurses*. Network Ten's attitude to the purpose of webisodes and the budgetary limits of the production resulted in limits to its scope, but at the same time granted an unusual amount of freedom for producers compared to *Danger-5*. The clear hierarchy in the production and the place of the webisodes within it were also a key factor. Limited access to key characters and strict limits on how the plot of the webisode series could weave through the core program was argued to encourage the creators in pushing the generic elements of the show, particularly in the use of humour. This chapter will examine how webisode audiences can be more formally understood as demonstrating sophisticated viewing practices through their simultaneous engagement with the complementary broadcast series*,* and this is seen by practitioners as a reason to continue production of ancillary texts. As we have already seen with *Danger-5*, webisode production often takes place in aspirational circumstances with practitioners entering the industry from a background in short-form online video, so in this period by comparison we can ask: how do (or did) webisodes work in a more established environment? To answer this question, we must begin with the broadcast program itself. *Offspring* had

been a successful show with both audience and critics since it first went to air and across its seven seasons. The program is broadcast in Australia on Network Ten and has also been released on DVD through Madman Entertainment and streams locally on Netflix. Ten produced three webisode series in conjunction with each of the first three series. Since the fourth season, the show has used a variety of alternative methods to reach online viewers, most notably a storytelling device being an application for mobile phones, 'Moving In', released in the lead up to the fifth season. This chapter will examine how the webisode series came into existence, and what maintained the production over three seasons in order to demonstrate how a commercial setting was more open to continuing webisode production. Some comparisons to later ancillary texts will be made to help understand if these processes are common to online narrative texts connected to drama production or more idiosyncratic.

Network Ten: An Innovative Latecomer

Network Ten, since its inception, has struggled to establish a clear identity (O'Regan 1993, p.8). It was the last commercial network to be established (Scott 2019). In 1960—four years after the introduction of television to Australia—government legislation controlling television broadcasting made room for a third commercial network. By 1965 Channel Ten (0 as it was then known) broadcast in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, joining the television networks Seven, Nine and the ABC (Stockbrige 2000, p.191). Ten Network Holdings, which currently owns Network Ten, is a publicly listed company, and describes itself as "one of Australia's leading entertainment and news content companies, with free-to-air television and digital media assets" (Ten Network Holdings Ltd, 2020).

Ten has endured a more turbulent history than its commercial competitors. Initially Ten positioned itself in a manner similar to its commercial rivals and pursued a broad 18-54 age demographic for its audience. Due to a number of poor business decisions, the network fell into receivership in the early 1990s (Jacka and Johnson 1998, p. 220). Ten at this time was seen financially as a 'basket case' (Stockbridge 2000, p.191). The company was taken over by Canadian Media Company CanWest on 30 December 1992, who reimagined the organisation as a 'niche broadcaster' and changed the focus of programming to the 18-39 age bracket, in line with the business model of its new owner. This was an unprecedented move by a commercial broadcaster in the Australian television environment. Within a few years,

Ten returned to profitability. It was able to maintain this low-cost, youth-focused model and was a more profitable business than its rivals well into the first decade of the twenty first century (Kruger 2005, p.1). Since 2011, Ten's viability as a network has been questioned, with a string of unprofitable years; the organisation has blamed this on many things including a significant drop in advertising revenue (Money Morning 2015). During this period the Network put its faith in cost cutting and lobbying the federal government to reduce its broadcasting licence fees (Neems 2015) to return it to profitability.

Network Ten and Drama

Like other Australian commercial networks, Ten considers drama a staple component of programming alongside sport, news, gameshows and—more recently—reality and lifestyle television. Ten has always relied on a mix of imported drama and locally produced content, and the network has used innovation in drama in a more direct way to revive its fortunes. Ten's 'first successful prime time drama' was the transgressive serial *Number 96* (1972-77) (Curthoys and Docker 1989, p.54). This program first aired in 1972 and was a rating hit, reviving a network that was nearly bankrupt and facing financial ruin. Just before the program commenced, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board was lobbying to remove the network from Adelaide and Brisbane (Smith, Paterson 1998, pp.210-214). *Number 96*'s success was part of the reason this did not happen. As the 1980s was ending, the network was once again facing financial troubles that would lead it towards receivership (O'Regan 1998, p. 40). Yet it was a time where blockbuster miniseries like *The Dismissal* (1983)*, Vietnam* (1987) and the *Dirtwater Dynasty* (1988) were at their zenith. They were ratings successes and exemplified a trend of short form drama becoming event television, and were applauded for being innovative (Cunningham 1989, p.39) and were subsequently sold overseas to ratings success internationally.

In areas like comedy it was noted that Ten's output was taking risks in an unstable environment (Smith and Paterson 1998, p.216). After Ten went into receivership in the early 1990s, the emphasis on low cost and a change in focus to a youth demographic meant that imported dramas and cult programs like *The X-Files* (1993-2018)*, Party of Five* (1994-2000)*, Melrose Place* (1992-1999) and *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) were seen as key to engaging the youth demographic (Stockbridge 2000, p.192; Giuffre 2013). This was the first time a commercial network in Australia had focused so narrowly on a specific demographic to

reach profitability. Local drama seemed less prominent in the late 1990s and early 2000s where cheaper light entertainment programs like *Good News* Week (1999-2008) and *The Panel* (1998-2007) were ratings hits aimed at this younger demographic (Harrington 2013 p.69). *Offspring* has been the biggest ratings success in drama for Ten since 2010, and Ten invested in a number of high-profile drama productions in its wake; *Party Tricks* (2014)*, Secrets & Lies* (2014)*, Mr and Mrs Murder* (2013) and *Puberty Blues* (2012-2014) were all less successful. At the end of 2014, Ten viewed *Offspring* as a key component in remaining the number one station with its youth demographic (Ten Network Holdings Ltd 2014). Network Ten has occupied the uneasy position as the third commercial channel in the Australian environment, and having a more precarious status than the other two commercial networks has had to innovate its way out of trouble throughout its history. It is obvious in this context that the network would look to new practitioners to reach online audiences and to experiment with new methods. Like webisode production, this network environment demonstrates, in its pursuit of new audiences, what new conventions were appearing at this time. It is strange then, that initially at least, Network Ten seemed reluctant to pursue an online audience.

Network Ten and the Web

As Network Ten was spending time reengineering itself as a niche-marketer in the mid-1990s, the channel missed opportunities in an industry that was moving into a period of transition. It was against offering multi-channels on digital (Given 2003, p.178) and has not managed its web presence or the arrival of pay-tv very well. One explanation for this could be that, unlike its competitors, 1995-2005 was on average a period of financial success for the network and the need to innovate due to financial difficulty did not occur. The channel did not launch a dedicated website until April 1999, two years after SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) and four years after the ABC, and even then it was regarded somewhat as 'a token gesture' (Barr 1999, p.57). Ten's annual report that year already signalled it was preparing to merge content on its new website with another site named Scape, a co-venture with Village Roadshow. Scape was launched in 2000 in an attempt to broaden the network's focus, and included an online radio station, had an emphasis on music news and even featured an online dating service. After only five months—and by their own estimates a AU $44 million loss—both parties agreed to cease operations citing "the failure of the online sector globally to develop as expected" (VR media release 2001).

It was not until the launch of the network's mobile application and online catch-up service Tenplay in 2013 that there was evidence of meaningful discussions of the value for engaging with an online audience. The development of this online catch-up service occurred in an environment where Ten was once again facing financial problems. The main difference here was that after fourteen years, there was a clear direction to at least meet their audience online, particularly through popular programs.

Offspring and *Offspring: The Nurses* in Production

Offspring is a drama centring on obstetrician Nina Proudman (Asher Keddie) and her efforts to find happiness and navigate a complicated life. Over the seven seasons that have aired as of the time of writing, Nina has had to negotiate barriers to finding happiness in her romantic, family and professional life. The program has been described as "witty, snappy and insightful, as well as being effortlessly engaging" (Kalina 2011). It was also argued that the show was part of a wave of audience engaging, progressive women-focused programming (Ritchie 2019). Created by production company Endemol the key creative team behind the program is co-creator and producer John Edwards, head writer and co-creator Debra Oswald and producer Imogen Banks. The program had a budget of roughly $800,000 per episode (Oswald, personal communication 2016) and was an immediate ratings success and consistently kept an audience of between 750,000 and a million viewers per episode throughout its run (australiantelevision.net 2020).

A 13-part webisode series was produced in conjunction with the first season *Offspring: The Nurses.* It was released online between episodes on Network Ten's website during the first season between 22 August 2010 and 20 November 2010. The series was episodic with most running for a length of three to four minutes. The focus of the first season is on Nurses Kim (Alicia Gardener) and Zara (Jane Harber). Narratively the story of these webisodes occurs between each broadcast episode and would often expand on minor details or discussions the nurses were seen to have with more central characters, like Nina Proudman. Each episode is notable in that the tone is often comedic, and while reflecting the anchor program, rarely shares the variety of tone the anchor program offers and sticks with comedy throughout. With an audience of 100,000 unique downloads per episode (Garrick, personal communication 2014) the series was deemed popular enough to continue for another two seasons and attracted corporate sponsorship from Nestle. In 2015 the program's online

presence was focused on the Network Ten website, and an official *Offspring* Facebook page (managed by Network Ten) with some information on Endemol's Facebook page.

To further investigate the program I interviewed the following key personnel affiliated with the production of *Offspring* in late 2014 and early 2016:

- Andrew Garrick, writer and director *Offspring: The Nurses* (2014)
- Benedict Hardie, director (seasons 1-3 of *Offspring: The Nurses*) and co-writer seasons 2 and 3 of *Offspring: The Nurses* (2016)
- Matthew Chuang, director of photography *Offspring: The Nurses* (2016)
- Alicia Gardener, actor *Offspring: The Nurses* (2016)
- Debra Oswald, co-creator and head writer, *Offspring* (2016)
- Lulu Wilkinson, Head of Digital/Producer, Endemol Australia (2014)
- Vanessa Arden-Wood, Head of Entertainment – Digital, Network Ten (2014)
- Jennifer Wilson, director, The Project Factory, creator of *Offspring: Moving in* mobile phone application (2016)

I chose these practitioners as they were able to provide the most essential information about the webisodes in relation to how they extended story, the institutional forces at work and what impact hands-on creation of the texts had on production.

Production Constraints

A number of factors influenced the production of *Offspring: The Nurses*. Network Ten's and Endemol's attitudes to the production had an effect in limiting the scale of production, but in other ways afforded producers unusual freedom. Contractual negotiations between Endemol and Network Ten was the first formal process that shaped material like the webisode series and how and by whom it was produced. The budget for the production was very small in comparison to the anchor program and this influenced the webisodes. The need to commodify this sort of extra material and its success in creating revenue for the production was a key reason why the web series produced a total of 40 episodes. Genre conventions and a need to push more comedic elements into the webisodes are also worthy of note here, as the perception by its creators to utilise the medium to its full potential encouraged them to push the comedy element.

Andrew Garrick produced webisodes because the network itself was responsible for creating the online material connected to *Offspring.* Responsibility for online content was negotiated between Endemol and the network in the pitching and pre-production stage. Speaking to representatives of both Network Ten and Endemol, the impression is that the process was fairly elastic and with each show and the approach for each program can differ widely through these kinds of negotiations. Digital content producers from both Endemol and Network Ten said there was no internal policy document that guided this process. Vanessa Arden-Wood at Network Ten, for instance, told me "I don't know if there's a formal document as such" (personal communication 2014).

Speaking to both Lulu Wilkinson from Endemol and Arden-Wood, there was, at the time, a sense that this process was gradually changing and becoming more formalised. That the original *Offspring* contract is still defining the show in 2014 is unusual. Wilkinson said that because the contract with *Offspring* was 'older', it limited what she could do and not do. She suggests that Ten controlling all of the online engagement was not typical now (personal communication 2014). In the case of *Offspring: The Nurses* this is important for two reasons: firstly, in 2009/10, there existed a policy framework where a certain amount of innovation was acceptable and what could be delivered contractually by Ten, as part of its online engagement, was fairly open, and secondly this clear division of responsibility between Ten and Endemol (with Ten being responsible for *Offspring: The Nurses*) potentially explained Endemol's perceived indifference towards the project.

The small budget the webisode series received across the three seasons meant key creative personnel were limited in what they could achieve, operating in an unorthodox manner in its creation. Garrick was working as a Network Content Producer at Network Ten, where his primary responsibility was to produce a variety of original content for the website. He describes the genesis of the series as follows: "It was actually a marketing project, where I was asked to make some additional content. I think they wanted me to do a 'behind the scenes' video and have a chat with the cast" (personal communication 2014). The project was driven by Garrick and the small budget of $30,000 for the first season of 13 episodes—just under 4 percent of the budget of the broadcast program—meant he was given a certain amount of freedom in what he delivered. In a production with this small a budget, it meant that what could be achieved dramatically was very limited. Each episode would have one or possibly two locations, often with two to four actors, shot in one or two days (for each season

as a whole) and with a crew that was often five people, which was much smaller than the anchor program. Considering the low budget, it was not initially clear how the webisode could be financially maintained, so money was taken from other areas. Key people involved in the production were paid very little, or not at all. Matthew Chuang indicated that as far as he could remember he wasn't paid across the three seasons (personal communication 2016).

On top of this, the webisode series—being part of a commercial entity—needed to generate income for Network Ten to ensure its continuation. As the second season was beginning production the Network, while pleased with the webisodes, did not have the budget for another season going forward. After the first season had been broadcast, it was licenced for distribution by Madman Entertainment. As part of that deal, Madman purchased the rights to *Offspring: Nurses* and this meant that Ten received income (through sales) as part of that contract. The Network viewed this income as above and beyond what had been expected of the webisode series, and so was happy to reinvest this amount (close to the budget of the original series) in creating a second season. The webisode series continued into a third season, with income generated to produce the texts through the sponsorship of Nestle, and its chocolate bar brand Aero. There is evidence of a trend of short-form webisode series connected to television programs having sponsorship of this style, at this time. The series *24* (2001-2014) had a webisode series sponsored by deodorant brand Lynx (Howarth 2012). Some brands have also got into short-form original webisode series, such as Kotex and the series Camilla (Channels KLS 2018). The third series of webisodes had prominent displays of the snack throughout the series. The awkwardness of the product placement is obvious, but within the world of the show this is played for laughs.

In her examination of *General Hospital,* discussing Production Constraints, Levine mentions how genre can shape the production of the program. This ties into this thesis's core reference to Levine's work in that it is aspects like this that can wield a strong, shaping influence on production, and that genre can have an impact in the same way as institutional or financial aspects (Levine 2001 p.68). Given other constraints, the webisode series saw emphasising comedic aspects as beneficial. It suited the medium, run time and access to sets and actors. The producers of the program felt they needed to move in this direction for many reasons, primarily budgetary constraints, and to not have a plot effect on the anchor program narrative at all. This meant, for Benedict Hardie, being funny was one option available that would engage audiences: "Sketch comedy is not about reference… they were like sort of little brain

farts from the episode" (personal communication 2016). The sketch comedy subgenre suited these webisodes as it was designed to not require many connections between individual webisodes or back to the anchor show itself. Producers saw the subgenre of sketch comedy as advantageous in an online format as this was more successful in finding bigger audiences. As Hardie noted, "sketch comedy is much more suited to that, in the same way…sketch comedy is the most common form in that media" (personal communication 2016).

Beyond resourcing, Levine's acknowledgement of genre as a factor is also clear here, as the webisodes push into sketch-comedy something different genre-wise to the anchor program. Levine notes that genre is "particularly salient during my research and seems particularly formative to *General Hospital*" (2001, p.68). Recently scholars have drawn on Levine's work and how genre shapes production in Australia (Douglas 2019), internationally (Banks 2018) and historically (Calafell and Phillips 2019). Recently drawing on Levine, Dwyer (2019) notes through the production process some types of genre can restrict creativity while others can be more encouraging of creativity, and it is argued that sketch comedy gave Garrick more freedom than the drama focus of the anchor program.

Both Chuang and Hardie noted that they felt that pushing into comedy was also part of Garrick's personality and that this particular focus was shaped by his ability to be flexible and make his own impression on that part of the show. Using Levine's analysis, we can see that institutional factors are a key force in shaping the production of these webisodes. The relationship between Endemol and Network Ten is important in prompting the creation of these texts, Network Ten having a marketing department used to creating video is one of the key reasons the webisodes exist. The Marketing or PR function of a production company is much smaller and able to do less than a free-to-air network. Levine's analysis does not account for the strong role the marketing department had in this case, which is part of the network, but a very important factor here.

Production Environment

According to my interview subjects, the small crew made the production feel less stressful and this relaxed and informal set contributed to the tone of the series. The production working outside of union awards also had an impact. The lack of oversight meant decisions were made quickly and so the production was able to move much more swiftly. The place of webisode production in the overall context of the entire production of the first three seasons

of *Offspring* was also a factor. These combined elements created a fast-paced environment with a lot of flexibility for the production personnel involved.

How union involvement shaped the production is one of Levine's' discussions in her original work and it is fundamental to note how it affected *Offspring: The Nurses.* In her study, Levine focused on how union rules impacted the shows when it came to costs and how delays would mean greater costs, as crews would be paid additional money if shooting would take over ten hours per day (2001 p.75). How, who and what people were paid and the effect on the budget was a consideration here also. The program had a very small budget; who and what people were paid is a little unclear from the discussions with key personnel. Garrick indicated that the key actors—Jane Harber, Alicia Gardener and Richard Davies—were paid, while my discussions with the crew gave the impression that they (the crew) were not. Reasons given for this range from ideas that the production was working outside of the system and would not exist otherwise due to budgetary constraints. Hardie suggested that at the time (beginning in 2010) those type of contracts did not exist. The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, the union responsible for these awards, via email and on their website, show that these awards existed from 2008 onwards for actors. From the perspective of crew payment, they considered webisode work to come under awards for any professional working for an organisation like Network Ten (email, 2016). I would argue that unlike the *Danger-5* practitioners who were seen as having skills in reaching online audiences, this crew offered free labour to get a prime-time show credit on their resume, bringing the webisodes very much in line with my earlier arguments regarding aspirational labour (Taylor 2015) .

The lack of oversight on the production from both the Network and the production company contributed to the flexible conditions under which the webisodes were produced. Key personnel working on the webisodes described it as moving fast, but remarkable in the autonomy it granted those involved in its production. How this environment was created is noteworthy here. When questioned further, interviewees spoke of two main reasons, Garrick's personal style and the lack of oversight from other areas of production. As Chaung (when discussing the shooting of webisode scenes) described, "we were moving pretty fast, but still quite relaxed because that's the way Andrew likes to run his sets, and myself as well" (personal communication 2016).

Garrick was aware that he needed to work quickly, but also saw the advantages from the lack of oversight from other areas of production. Control was exerted over the production through

approval of scripts and discussion of character and story. This occurred in pre-production. Andrew stated to me that once through that process he felt he had earned a certain amount of trust and had less interaction. Garrick notes that, "They were supportive, so long as it didn't interfere with them really… it was so small that we could make creative choices on the fly" (personal communication 2016). This lack of oversight also points to evidence of the placement of the webisode production within the environment's hierarchy. In *Offspring: The Nurses* the production is seen as being low on the hierarchy and of little importance to key creatives, like Debra Oswald. Oswald stated that that the webisodes were something to be cautious of. They were produced by Network Ten, and so separate to the 'real' production and not of real value, because of a smaller audience: "The webisodes of *Offspring* basically didn't cause us any problems and were fine, but I think the potential is there for it not to be fine" (personal communication 2016).

Levine's method looks at informal forces that shape production like the use of power between genders and union influence, and it is clear there is some evidence of informal forces at work here. "Hierarchies of gender and institutional positioning, for example, operate in *General Hospital* production and affect production routines and practices, as well as the television narrative constructed through the work process" (Levine 2001, p.71). Here, there is some obvious tension between the two crews although there a clear hierarchy exists between them. The crew working around the idea of being paid is also curious as it places this production as a somewhat amateur or outside the normal framework of filmmaking, though the relative comfort of the crew in this, and their happiness to speak about it openly seems to indicate that it isn't something unusual. This is quite different to Levine's approach as the union role in a much larger production environment would indicate this would not happen in the United States: there is no mention of anyone working and not being paid.

Production Routine and Practices

Garrick's role as director was of key importance in the longevity of the webisode series and questions around why it did not continue into a fourth season. Some of the production personnel saw the webisode production as a way to experiment with new work practices and a way to expand their media careers. The routines and practices of the web series certainly were different to the main program and lead to a different type of production. Shooting the webisodes meant decisions had to be made and technical practices altered to create a different style. Garrick had already decided to emphasise the comedic elements of the program, through the webisodes which he described as being "110% of the drama that you see in

Offspring" (personal communication 2016)**.** This meant that acting, editing, and shot sizes were changed to emphasise a more intense feeling for the viewer. Garrick described it as follows, "Everything was slightly more heightened, if that makes sense, so there's a little bit more active drama" (personal communication 2016).

How to achieve this heightened style was communicated to crew and actors in a different way than the main show. As already discussed, the environment was fairly relaxed, but moved quickly. Hardie spoke about the entire crew, including actors, as numbering ten at the most, and compared to other productions it was clearly a "skeleton crew" (personal communication 2016). To be able to function and shoot effectively this meant that all five crew, including Garrick, had to fulfil multiple roles on set. This meant that with a smaller group Garrick could communicate his needs quickly. The webisodes were made on a very tight schedule, with each season shot over two to three days, and to achieve that at this speed would not have been possible without working this way.

Garrick made choices to differentiate the webisodes from the anchor program to achieve this style. For Garrick it meant often choices around shot sizes. Watching the webisodes, characters are shot often much more closely than in the main program, there is a far greater number of close ups and medium close ups. This could be seen as a way to shoot around a static environment, as most webisodes were set in one or two locations at most. As Garrick clarified, "the camera was a little bit closer than would normally be" (personal communication, 2016), and felt this helped to create the comic and heightened style of the webisodes, which he was after. For Garrick, this decision took into account the audiences who were watching the program and how they would watch them:

> Four years ago, when I first made the first series, Internet video wasn't particularly good, so I made the decision to just stay on a shot longer and have the background change less…Audiences relate to human faces, so a little bit larger in frame than it does on a telly (personal communication 2014).

A phone might not have the capacity to process information which causes this (artifacting) and it can be reduced by using more moving images where there is less editing and the image doesn't change substantially throughout a shot (a talking face for example). *Offspring: The Nurses* was shot differently from the main program for reasons of efficiency, technical considerations and choices about what style would be effective for an online audience.

Levine briefly discusses the role of director as being a driver in this mode, "the role of the

director in daily tapings are some of the most significant routines and practices at *General Hospital*" (2001, p.74). In the case of *Offspring: The Nurses* the director is even more central to the production in his influence over its creation. Garrick had carte blanche, within limitations pertaining to both budget and access to actors, to choose whatever he wanted to do with the webisodes. They came about because he pitched to his line manager that it might be a more attractive approach to do something narratively with the $30,000 allocated to behind-the-scenes content for *Offspring* for Ten's website. An example of his unusual level of control was evident in how he was able to find people to work on the production. He drew the cast and crew from previous acquaintances, and according to Hardie he was surprised at Garrick's level of control over aspects like casting:

> If you're casting the regular TV shows, if you're casting the actors, they have to go through so many different approvals; there was no approvals for anything here, like it was really up to Andrew Garrick to do whatever he wanted (personal communication 2016).

For Garrick, this project was a way to expand his career. Hardie and Chuang indicated to me that one of their reasons for being involved in a production like this that paid so little and was not a strong focus of the network was because of the prestige of being associated with drama and particularly a hit show like *Offspring*. For Garrick, too, it was a chance to direct drama in a relatively safe learning environment and a way to expand his skills beyond advertising direction and short form comedy which he was more familiar. The crew was very much in the mode of 'aspirational labourers' discussed in the previous chapter. Like the creative team of *Danger-5* the small crew were eager to have a network program on their resumes, the main difference being that this crew was not seen as experts in reaching an online audience. Because of this Garrick sought mentoring from other established drama directors at Ten: "I had a phone call with a couple of directors who were on *Offspring* or *Rush* and got their advice on working with their crews and how to interact with them, so that was a different sort of approach" (personal communication 2016). For Garrick, directing *Offspring: The Nurses* was an opportunity to develop his skills and expand his career in a very competitive industry. It is my impression that without the money to pay for it and Garrick's drive the webisodes would not have existed.

The reason why the webisode series *Offspring: The Nurses* ceased production could, perhaps somewhat ironically, be explained by Garrick's control and enthusiasm. In conversations across this study, I asked participants why the webisodes did not continue and the answer was

the same: all indicated that Garrick had no desire to continue, or that his role had changed. I initially thought this unlikely, given the webisodes had found a successful audience, and even corporate sponsorship. Yet as I continued my research, it seemed that this was indeed the most likely reason. The webisodes had come about in an unorthodox way, and were initially seen as insignificant to the point of being under very little scrutiny by Endemol or Network Ten. Having learnt all that he could from the experience and having done as much as he could within the limits that were imposed and a change in the peripheral aspects of the nurses, for Garrick, there was no reason to continue.

Production of Character and Stories

Offspring: The Nurses had a complex relationship with the main program *Offspring* in terms of the creation of story and character. There were strong directives in shaping the plot, character and setting from personnel overseeing the webisode. Within these strict parameters there was a certain amount of flexibility; webisodes generally would take ideas from scenes within the broadcast show and, on a week to week basis, expand on themes explored in that scene. The hierarchy of the webisodes being a subservient offshoot of the key program is reflected in the choice of characters to feature in the webisodes. The plot was limited by concerns of how stories would affect the broadcast show. As stated previously each webisode was generally written to connect to the episode of the program that was broadcast at the time it was released. In some cases the connection is substantial for characters; for example in the very first webisode, broadcast after the first episode of Season 1, Alicia Gardner's character Kim speaks with Zara (Jane Harber) and Liam (Benedict Hardie) about her concerns over how to ask appropriately for sperm from a man for her and her partner in order to have a baby. They role play the scenario and comedy is milked from the idea that Zara is roleplaying a man, who refuses to help Kim out, because of her general manner, while Liam, an actual man, watches the role play and tries to interject that he is actually willing to donate sperm to Kim, but he is ignored. While not the main story of the first broadcast episode, when Kim appears it is certainly the main concern of her character. In that same first season, in the ninth broadcast episode and ninth webisode, the story connections are more tenuous. The broadcast episode deals mainly with reappearance of Dr Don Hany's (Chris Havel) estranged wife and the impact that has on the relationship he wants to pursue with Nina. While distracting herself from this early in the episode, Nina repetitively visits patients, and while doing so remonstrates with Zara and Kim who are

laughing about an 'ugly baby' that has recently arrived on the ward. The webisode takes this discussion as the basis for its story, showing a series of moments in the day of the 'ugly baby' from its point of view.

When it came to writing scripts, formally Garrick (and Hardie from Season 2 onwards) were given scripts for the show in advance. Story wise, the webisode writers were managed by both the drama department of Network Ten and the writing department at Endemol, with Oswald as the head writer. Oswald spoke about this not being something she oversaw, personally. It was outlined that there were clear boundaries in what Garrick could do and not do with the plot of these online texts, and that each plot had to be "in response to an issue that was raised in that episode, or highlighting or extending a storyline potentially from that episode" (personal communication 2014). As an ancillary text, these restrictions are different to the anchor program. The writing of the key program was not planned with any additional material in mind and is not generally restricted by any plot or character development that occurred in the webisode.

In some drama productions, the writing can be altered on set, and this can occur for a number of reasons. Because of the fast nature of the shooting environment, this did not seem to occur for *Offspring: The Nurses*. Garrick spoke about not really rehearsing with actors at all. Although limited by not being able to change location or plotting, Hardie indicated that there was room for improvisation around dialogue, which occurred mainly to experiment with humour. There is a general impression that in comparison to the anchor program, altering dialogue in this way would need to be negotiated between various stakeholders and not performed on the fly in the way the webisodes allowed. From the inception to production, the writing process was different to the main program, and this dichotomy between strict limitations and creative autonomy is reflected in other aspects of the production process.

The webisodes story and character production were affected by access to actors across the three seasons. In the preproduction phase of the webisodes, Garrick, with some restrictions, had a lot of freedom to focus on which characters he was going to highlight. His ideas were drawn out of the episode scripts before production began. There were a few reasons he chose the two nurse characters as a focus; he saw them as funny and he needed to convince actors it was in their interest to be involved. As an actor, Gardener definitely saw the attraction in doing work like *Offspring: The Nurses* as she found it personally rewarding as "it was challenging… and helped me flush out the character" (personal communication 2016). The focus on the nurse characters enabled Garrick to maintain and expand on ideas from the show

without affecting it. The nurse characters, particularly in the first season, were like the webisodes themselves; they were simultaneously part of the story, but also peripheral to it and mainly included for comic relief.

Questions of access to specific actors also affected the webisode series as it moved forward. Richard Davies (who play Nina's brother, Jimmy) featured prominently in the second half of the third webisode series and added to its comic tone, but he soon left. In the anchor program, Jane Harber's character had become more central to the program as she had begun a relationship with Jimmy. Garrick noted that this was because he wanted to push the webisodes in a different direction after the largely comic first two seasons, but it was specifically because of his access to Richard Davies (as well as the plot of the broadcast program) that made it possible. Hardie confirmed that this was the case: "It wasn't something that we started looking for, it was something that we found we could do with the material that was there in the episodes written by the main writers" (personal communication 2016). This further emphasises how much of the show was built around the nurse characters, and their role in the main program; we see this reflected in Zara's move from largely an acidic comic foil to Nina, to a more fleshed out character in Season 3.

The relationship between the two sets of writers was complex and while there was a clear hierarchy in place, the webisodes influenced the main program in production of character and story. For Hardie there was a clear sense not only of a hierarchy, but that they felt that what they were doing—creating ancillary texts—was disrespectful to the anchor program: "We were kind of piggybacking on their content and creating our own little sketches…I felt like I was kind of… slightly defiling the content of much more accomplished writers than I" (personal communication 2016). The maverick nature of the production and the lack of multiple points of contact with Network Ten or the writing team at Endemol intensified this for Hardie.

While this may sound like typical anxieties of a creative person in a fluid industry it may be that Hardie's concerns were not unfounded. For Oswald, the webisodes featuring the nurse characters were seen by actors on the anchor program as a barrier to further featuring them in the show and the initial reaction was to not expand their roles because of their involvement: 'We just thought Jane was capable of more, and the chemistry with her and Richard Davies was great…. If anything, the webisodes would've been a slight disincentive" (personal

communication 2016). Similarly, Oswald felt the webisodes may have "burnt too many options" (personal communication 2016) from the point of view of story; these texts were not part of the main focus and she found this frustrating, despite clear guidelines there were times that the webisodes affected the main program. She noted an example when a plot element for Nina's boss, Dr Martin Clegg was not able to be used as it was already spoken about in Season 2 of *Offspring: The Nurses*: "they'd already taken the story strand with him in the webisodes that meant we couldn't do that" (personal communication 2016).

Regarding *Offspring*'s other ancillary texts (such as the 'Moving In' application), from the point of view of story Oswald had a similar response. It is my impression that she saw this as partly because of the length of the show, as plot complexity was harder to keep a handle on as the show continued across seven seasons. She also made it clear that the show had had a variety of ancillary text devices. Collectively referring to the webisodes, the Moving In application and a variety of approaches to social media, Oswald saw them all as an exercise in 'experimentation' (personal communication 2016) by the network. From this, we can see there was a hierarchy in relationships between writing teams and friction was caused because of the effect the groups had on each other. Involvement of characters in ancillary texts were seen by creative personnel within the anchor program as something that had some negative consequences. This a remarkable revelation, considering how Garrick approached actors, pitching this work as something to assist them broadly, when in fact the opposite was true.

Levine's framework emphasises the contribution of all personnel to story, as she notes that "The ways that characters and stories, in all their ideological intricacy, are produced involves nearly all GH employees to some extent" (2001 p.76). Going further, Levine argues that by looking at how the process as a whole contributes to story, the process of creation of character and story is demystified. The webisodes production here is shaped by factors beyond a screenwriter and director. Stores were written to accommodate access to actors and sets. How the webisode was shaped by the anchor program's story is also a significant factor. Narrative links between the two texts were reduced in deference to the anchor program, though not always successfully.

The Audience in Production

Offspring has always been judged as being successful with audiences; it consistently rated between 750,000 and one million viewers across its seven seasons. Extensive market research was done on the show before it was launched. Focus groups were run with selected demographic elements, with the involvement of Network Ten and key creative personnel like

Oswald. The webisode series however, was not researched in the same way. The impression from speaking to digital content makers at Network Ten and Endemol is that feedback on audiences is more reactive. Assumptions about what will work with online audiences is based usually on the experiences of key personnel from previous productions, or previous series of programs. The smaller audience for the webisodes (around 100,000 unique views per webisode) was still seen as successful by Network Ten and Endemol and was not seen as a reason for the production to cease after three seasons.

The audience was imagined in a variety of ways by production personnel working directly on the show, as well as by Endemol and Network Ten's digital department. They were seen as being more passionate by all interviewees and the webisodes were shaped by their increased engagement. The creators of the anchor program *Offspring* saw the webisode audience as not as important as the regular show, and the need to manage that relationship became more important over time. How the webisodes provided feedback to creators of the webisodes was very simple in comparison to other modes of storytelling online that followed.

A prevailing attitude in the thinking of the production team about the audiences for webisodes like *Offspring: The Nurses* was that they were more passionate and interested in the program than the regular viewer. The size of the webisodes viewing was about 10-13 per cent of the regular program and it is important to note that as the webisodes were in production, very little information was given about the audiences to the creators apart from numbers of unique views. Hardie viewed the online audience as follows:

> I think it was for people who enjoyed the show, and like fringe dwelling fans of the show who might enjoy a look at the minor characters, which is what we were playing; we weren't given the major cast, we were given sort of the second-level cast (personal communication 2016).

This is reflected in conversations with Garrick who indicated that feedback for his work on the webisodes from his line manager was informal and positive and limited to discussions of unique views:

> The number of views of the 'behind the scenes' videos are pretty small, you're probably talking in the hundreds, whereas with the series of *The Nurses* we were getting up to 100,000 views, which is pretty phenomenal (personal communication 2016)

The Project Factory created an application 'Moving In' based in the storyworld of the

program which was released in a lead up to Season 5. The Project Factory director Jennifer Wilson said that in her negotiations with Ten, some two years after the webisode series had finished, there was an understanding that these online fans were engaged and wanted more, and that it made the process of pitching online content easier. Broadly speaking though, digital content managers—both in commercial and public broadcasting networks, speak about building content based on previous popularity of content on the site— giving the audience what it wants. Oswald and the other writers on the show were interested in audience opinions but did not have the same attitudes:

> It was great to feel that you were having a conversation with the audience about the show and the characters and how strongly they felt…. If you'd listened to the audience feedback on *Offspring*, you would just make Nina happy and that would be the end of the show. So, on the one hand it was fascinating to look at the audience feedback, but we tried to limit it, limit its influence on us (personal communication 2016).

This seems like a fundamental difference in the way production personnel view audiences, at the same time it is clear digital content managers are acting more like small scale programmers, placing content and repeatedly creating similar content that is successful. Oswald was actually creating content and so her ability to evaluate success is on a more micro level. How other online audiences were discussed at an intuitional level was more sophisticated once you moved away from video-based interaction. In some ways this could be seen as a more sophisticated approach to online audiences over the time of the show's run, but it could also be seen as an efficacy of the format. Mobile phone applications and social media can be designed to capture information or be measured in different ways, depending on what an organisation wants to know. Webisodes like *Offspring: The Nurses* being short videos only relied on unique views and comparing them to previous views.

Other online texts associated with the program had a much more sophisticated approach at engaging audiences. Lulu Wilkinson, a digital producer from Endemol, said that with social media applications like Facebook, her role required her to get as much information about the audience as possible. To go further, she looked at information on the show that had gone to air through ratings reports, and looked for differences between online audiences and the broadcast audience, to find new audiences for their social media presences (personal communication 2014). Facebook allowed users administering groups access to analytical information about how content is engaging audiences, how long they are looking at content,

who they are sharing it with, demographic information like age and gender, information about geographical location and information on who is discussing posts in comments most frequently (Facebook 2020a). Arden-Wood from Network Ten said that what this means for their Facebook page is that they could access the analysis of content itself, to see which characters are more popular online than others and also seek a more qualitative analysis of comments and/or interactions. She mentioned that these reports could have had a strong influence on content for genres like reality TV, but for shows like *Offspring* it is used more by the marketing department (Christian 2011).

With this information, *Offspring*'s story-based mobile application was able to provide more data and detailed information to producers. In the lead up to the fifth season, Moving In was deployed as part of the show's promotional campaign. The application was sponsored by technology company Intel and developed by The Project Factory, who specialised in digital content connected to television drama programs. The application itself was set in the storyworld of the program offering audiences insight into a new character intended to be introduced in the fifth season. It included a variety of content including videos, games, and puzzles as well as an opportunity to access emails and other written content created by the new character and placed on the laptop–like interface. Because of the nature of the application and the control The Project Factory had, they were able to provide Ten with a wealth of in-depth information about the users of the application (see figures 2 and 3 below).

According to Jennifer Wilson, Director of the Project Factory, this information was gathered by design, for both Intel and Network Ten, to show them a return of investment.
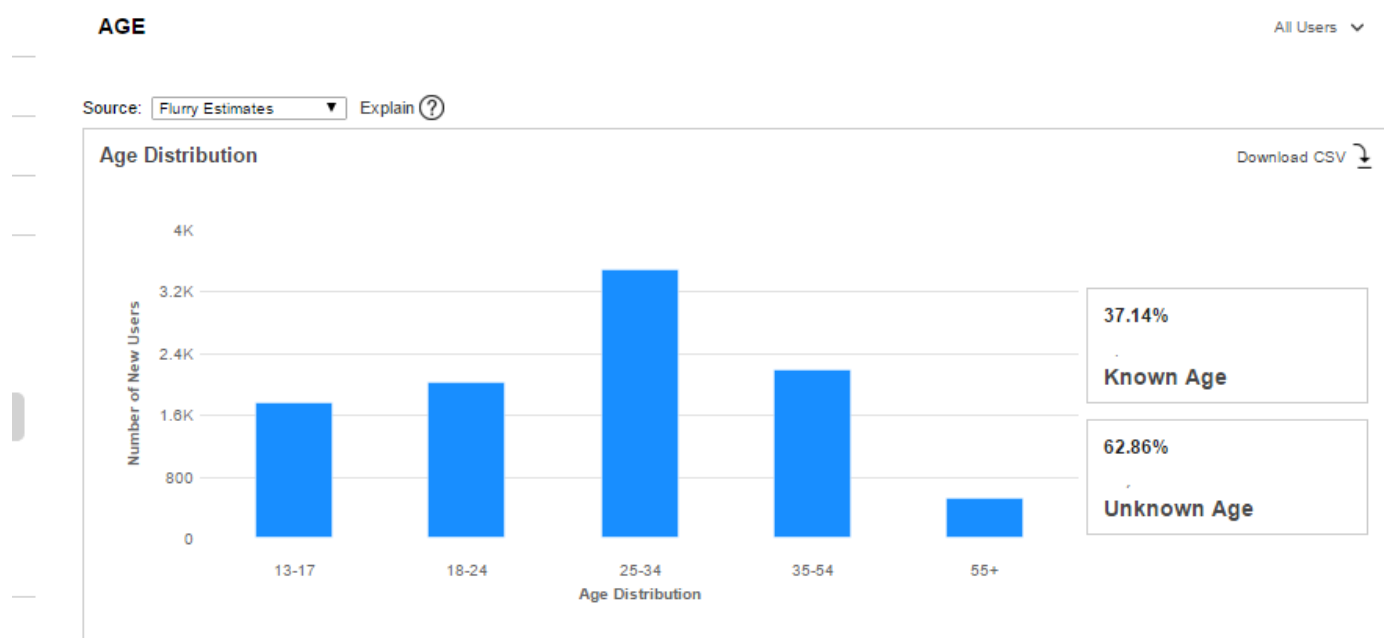

Offspring: Moving In (iOS) 1.01 > Analytics

AGE

Source: Flurry Estimates ▼ Explain ⑦

Age Distribution

37.14% **Known Age**

62.86% **Unknown Age**

Figure 2: Age distribution of known 'Moving In' viewers using an Apple operating system

Offspring: Moving In (iOS) 1.01 > Analytics

GENDER   All Users ∨

Source: [Flurry Estimates ▾] Explain ⦰

Gender Distribution

Male: 7.43%
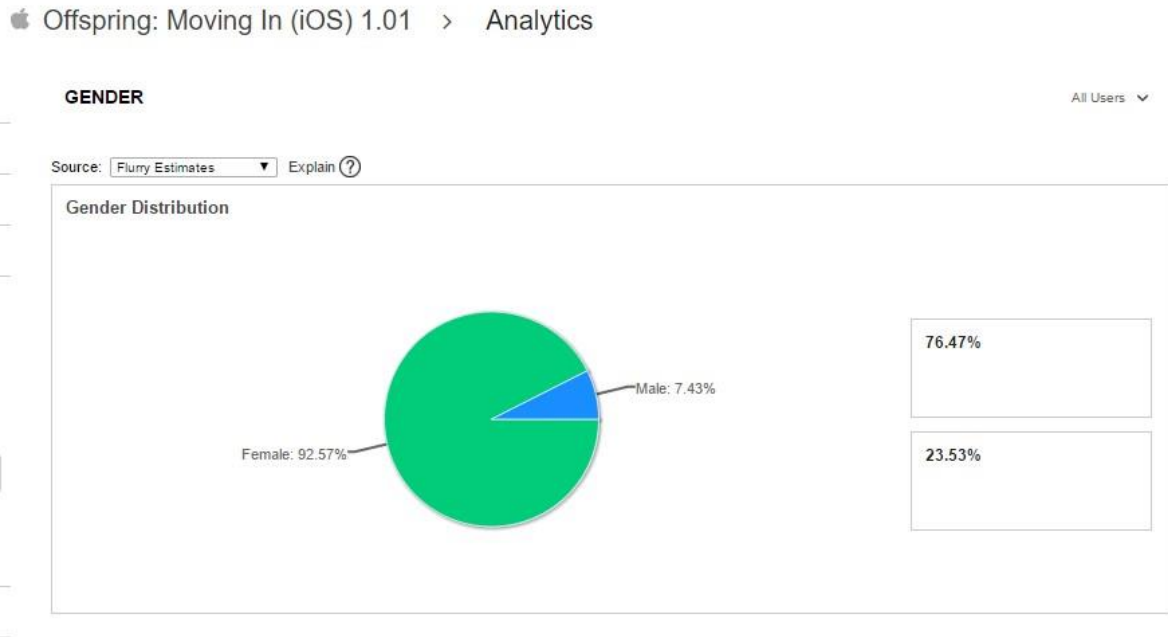Female: 92.57%

76.47%

23.53%

Figure 3: Gender distribution of known 'Moving In' viewers using an Apple operating system.

The value of this information differed between Network Ten and Intel according to Wilson:

> Intel was interested in the results of this so they did their own surveying afterwards
> to find out about intention to purchase and brand awareness….We put a fair amount
> of analytics in them to be able to do this (personal communication 2016).

In comparison, Wilson noted her relationship with Endemol was not very good when it came to discussions with digital content managers, and that Ten did not have a strong interest in the kind or in-depth information that Intel was interested in (personal communication 2016). Wilson had pitched ideas to Ten previously, who were encouraging, but unwilling to go ahead with an application like Moving In unless a sponsor, such as Intel, could come up with the entire $250,000 budget. It seems that to the network, views from online audiences—whether for webisodes, social media or mobile phone applications—were valuable mainly in the form of unique viewers. Arden-Wood spoke at length about online advertising revenue being a growing area of interest for Ten, but, when I interviewed her in 2016, it was still relatively small overall. She said that Network is at the heart of its culture,

driven to improve television ratings and this is what everyone works towards: "when Nielsen starts to actually count online views and actually recognise that, I think that will be a kind of turning point for networks like Ten" (personal communication 2016). Growing the number of online viewers was not a main challenge for the network as Arden-Wood explains:

> All our research and all our data says that they come to us, they watch one episode of something and then they go. So, for us it's sort of almost like changing that behaviour….We don't have a problem getting audiences so much, it's probably just going beyond the broadcast that's going to be the next challenge (personal communication 2016)

Based on this, it appears that Network Ten at this time was interested in information and data that it could acquire from online audiences to help them capture viewers across a range of programming and to explore how to keep visitors on the Ten website, rather than specifically seeking to further develop engagement with a particular show.

Discussion and Conclusion

Offspring: The Nurses was created in a much different production context than the anchor program. Looking at its production history through Levine's framework we can recognise significant influences on the texts and how they were shaped. The production constraints of institutions like the network had a significant effect on the program as well as aspects of genre. The relaxed environment spawned from the little oversight the production received made the process enjoyable for participants and added to the tone of the webisodes themselves. The routines and practices of the small crew and influence of the director had a great impact on the series, totalling 40 episodes in number. The story and character development of the webisodes was an aspect that was carefully controlled, and the content of each webisode reflected this. Attitudes towards audiences online by Network stakeholders can be seen as evidence for why the webisodes were not supported enough to continue into the fourth season.

Though Ten clearly saw website material as a place for experimentation and later distribution but remained focused on ratings and the broadcast programs as its core business. The webisodes could continue to exist as long as there was little financial risk for the organisation. This experimental and season-to-season approach was reflected in the variety of

texts offered in support of *Offspring* over its seven seasons, with audience reach not being considered a factor to continue production. Endemol's hands-off approach to the production was also a factor, from this point of view. Contractually separating this material away from the writing team caused friction and meant the webisodes were constrained in what they could achieve from the perspective of story and plot. This meant that producers of the webisodes felt they were operating without guidance and were concerned about negatively impacting the main program. This distance and lack of control seemed to produce an environment where the anchor program was largely unsupportive of the webisodes and their production, which resulted in a growing realisation that they needed to take a more active interest in these ancillary texts.

The relaxed production environment and Garrick's role as director and writer clearly influenced the final webisode texts. His approach was based on his previous experience with short form comedy and advertising, an interest in network drama, and a desire to be innovative. He shot the webisodes within an environment that—although having strict budgetary and storytelling constraints—was felt to be flexible and innovative by production personnel. Without his participation, there was little interest from Ten or Endemol to continue the webisodes, despite finding an audience and independent financing, through sponsorship. We can therefore deduce that a production like this—operating outside union agreements and which took some risks with storytelling—may not have been approved without his involvement at this particular time.

The creation of character and story was carefully moulded because of many of these factors. What characters and settings could be used, and to what extent, was controlled by access to sets and actors. The tone of the story changed when the characters available changed. The push into short form comedy was a result of these limitations, the crews' comfort with this form and the fact that the webisodes could not move the plot of the anchor program forward in any way. As discussed in Chapter Two, like *Danger-5*, the *Offspring: The Nurses* webisodes were a place for comic experimentation. *Danger-5,* and as we will see *Secrets & Lies* and *Nowhere Boys*, do not view webisodes in this way and these decisions add to perceptions of the webisodes as being insubstantial or unimportant in comparison to the main program.

Digital producers from Endemol and Ten indicated to me in interviews conducted during 2016 that attitudes to online audiences were changing. Their descriptions of processes, as they occurred at the time, suggested that a production like *Offspring: The Nurses* would in

2016 be contractually under the control of Endemol and not Network Ten. In 2016 this type of production would also be under more scrutiny from both the Network and Endemol before it would go into production. At the same time, it seems that in 2016 Ten and Endemol did not have a sophisticated view of audiences and had not yet realised the potential for interaction and engagement that some of these ancillary texts could offer.

Offspring: The Nurses was a product of its time. In many ways it was a success. It is enjoyable to watch and expands the understanding of the program. It can be seen at times to be whimsical and slight and have very little relevance to an *Offspring* viewer. Ten and Endemol were willing to take risks; at the time the third series was broadcast, only seven other international and local dramas were taking a similar approach (Loads, 2014) on Australian Television. It was innovative in ways that other programs aimed at a similar demographic were not. This could be read as part of Ten's overall history of a willingness to experiment in times of uncertainty. Ultimately, *Offspring: The Nurses* is an example of a supported production taking risks through a medium that was not easy for them to navigate. While this risk paid off for the network when it came to attracting a large online audience, lessons learned from this example were considered valuable only as they pertained to other forms (such as the broadcast program), rather than the webisodes being a successful model worth continuing

Chapter five: Nowhere Boys – ABCME, Matchbox Pictures, and Webisode Audience Engagement

> When I make a film, I don't think about it in terms of how it will look on TV. The first thing I think of is how it will look on Vimeo, Facebook, Vine or YouTube. I think about *that* audience and the restraints that come with that.
>
> But YouTube is big, YouTube is a scary place for young filmmakers and there's a lot of negative comments out there, a lot of negative feedback. ABCME's website and the people that are part of that community are just very, very helpful to everybody else—it kind of feels like a family.
>
>   - Dave Hukka, director *Nowhere Boys* webisode *Visions of Yesterday* (2016)

The suitability of the framework set out by Levine is most tested in this chapter as the production of webisodes is farthest removed from network television production. While the last two chapters have discussed the role of audiences and how they are perceived and interacted with by production personnel, this chapter will further test the application of Levine's model to transmedia texts as the audience, and a small group of particular audience members, move into the role of production personnel. In her analysis of *General Hospital* Levine examines audiences in several ways: how personnel speculate on audience meaning making; how production personnel literally responded to audience feedback through letters; how crew members can comment on story as fans of the shows; and how scholars can also be an audience for a program are ways in which audiences can be considered. She then argues this perspective is a way to discuss audiences "beyond the body of work around whom so much scholarship has centred" Levine (2001 p.79), referring to direct studies of audiences as a group. For this particular case study the group consists of crew members who are part of the audience for the program. It is the production of one fan webisode—*Visions of Yesterday,* created by a young filmmaker called David Hukka from Newcastle in 2014, as part of a fan competition— which is the focus of this chapter.

In Chapter Three the production of *Danger-5:The Diamond Girls* and in Chapter Four's analysis of *Offspring: The Nurses* it was argued that webisodes were a place of experimentation, driven by personalities with unclear means to measure success and a need

to understand who was required to produce these texts. This chapter gives us a stronger focus on the point of creation as a key point in shaping these texts, without overlooking how important institutional and other cultural forces are in this process. The production of webisodes is generally not as clearly defined when it comes to processes and conventions as regular broadcast drama production. Having examined two of four programs we can argue that some conventions have emerged. Webisode production in this period is driven by individual production personnel's perspective of their relative worth and the ability of personnel to secure funding. A willingness to work for better access to the television industry to make these texts a reality is another influence. A clear convention is that measuring success in these first two case studies seems to be very subjective. In this period success is largely based on comparisons to previous experiences, some measurement of audience numbers as well as audience, sponsor and network feedback. We have also seen in both previous webisode productions the role of aspirational labour, with networks utilising new production personnel to create this work, with remuneration unclear and in *Offspring's* case, non-existent. In both cases the blurring of promotional activities and narrative drive has caused some tension within production.

The case study of *Offspring* gave us some indication that this less structured style of production was becoming more formalised through more detailed negotiations between networks and production companies. Industry increasingly sees the responsibility for webisode production as something to be delivered by a production company to a network. This moves away from being the responsibility of a network's marketing department, which was argued in that chapter. The central argument of this study is that analysis of webisode production can tell us about change in the television industry over this period. The applicability of Levine's analysis of television production is tested as this chapter deals with television production created by audiences or fans of a program.

In the examination of *Danger-5* webisode audiences it was argued that previous audiences for YouTube work as the benchmark for short form vide online. The lack of an ability to measure if audiences were driven to the anchor program from YouTube, combined with the ability of social media applications like Facebook and Twitter to provide more information about audiences saw a move away from webisodes as effective audience engagement. How Russo and Ashby were also working as pastiche filmmakers, combining their love of other television, film and magazines into the production very clearly was also put forward. The *Offspring* webisode production saw audiences as sophisticated fans of the program, but

personnel were focused on anchor program ratings and measured success against audiences for online video.

As this thesis has argued over the previous chapters, the perspective of individual creatives is one of the key pressures that shape the production process of webisodes. In Chapter Three Russo and Ashby place the same level of importance on the webisodes as the rest of the production and can exert more control over the outcome due to both taking multiple roles in production. In Chapter Four it was argued that the entire production of *Offspring: the Nurses* was launched, directed, co-written, persisted for three series and then ceased to be based on the interest of the director. Beyond that he also had more control over the production than the regular television show it was connected. In Chapter Two, I referred to Mann's (2012) discussion about how showrunners are perceived as having a strong individual influence across all aspects of production are influencing webisodes on programs like *Lost* (2004-2010). Texts are also constrained through financing, policies and institutional procedures linked to funding bodies and broadcast networks. We have seen in both the cases of *Danger-5* and *Offspring* that the narratives of the programs have been extended through webisodes. *Danger-5* webisodes were a five-part origin story and *Offspring* included interstitial webisode stories reflecting and expanding on moments within their series.

This chapter returns to public broadcasting, with a key difference; the production of webisodes are taking place within the audience of the program *Nowhere Boys.* As we have already examined the role of aspirational labour as part of the previous two case studies, this chapter will contend that many of the conventions in these previous case studies are also present in audience or fan production. As this work on the periphery of the industry is utilised, it is argued that this is no barrier to reaching an audience or creating quality work. What relying on audiences in a production capacity means for a network will also be examined.

This chapter will also outline how the lack of access to resources for these fans also affects the production of these webisodes. We will also see how these amateur filmmakers working in the storyworld of *Nowhere Boys* can show us how their production still reflects emerging conventions of webisode production. It will be argued that these texts are as much a part of the storyworld in a transmedia sense (Jenkins 2006a) as previous ancillary texts made by marketing departments and production companies. It will also argue that at this time, who is responsible for producing this type of material is unclear, and this is emerging as a

convention across those webisode productions examined so far.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Regulation and Children's Television

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and its predecessors began radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 30s and since then have become 'a multi-platform media operation and a public broadcaster of international renown' (ABC 2017). The ABC is guided by a charter set out in its legislation, which 'requires the Corporation to provide informative, entertaining and educational services that reflect the breadth of our nation' (ABC 2017). Because of this charter and under the influence of the Reithian tradition of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the public broadcaster has a long history of providing a broad range of children's programming across multiple platforms. In her 2011 book Georgia Born describes the Reithian broadcasting ideal as "a means of bringing together Britain's different classes and regional populations" (Born 2011, p.28). Following in this tradition an international reputation of being able to produce children's television of high quality has emerged. The ABC has always included far more children's content than commercial providers. As Australia introduced digital television in 2001 the broadcaster launched the ABCKIDS branded timeslot on its first multichannel service, broadcast from 6.00am to 6.00pm. It was partnered with another brand 'FLYTV' a young adult programming service from 6.00pm to 11.00pm. 'FLYTV' was defunded in 2003, with young adult television absorbed into the 'ABC for Kids' brand which was now showing on both the ABC main channel and ABC2. In 2011 all children's content was moved to ABC2. ABC3 was launched in 2009 as a channel entirely devoted to young adult programming. The channel was rebranded as ABCME in 2016 (it will be referred to as ABCME in this chapter). At the time, this rebrand was explained by ABC director of television Richard Finlayson as part of a need to reposition the network towards viewers on mobile devices: "We've been listening to our young audiences and it's clear that they want flexibility, mobility and control" (Canning 2016). The new channel commissioned programming to help launch it, with programs like *Nowhere Boys* and *Dance Academy* (2010-) seen as key brands to help connect with their audience. 75 per cent of content on ABCME is made up of imported programs, mainly from the BBC (Dalton 2017).

The requirement for children's television standards (CTS) is set out in the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992. The current version of the standards came into effect in 2010 and the purpose of them is to "balance the viewing needs of children, the commercial needs of industry and community interests" (ACMA 2020). These standards were introduced because

of debate, beginning more seriously in the 1960s, over the value of Australian content and the need to protect children from harmful content. The 'C' classification introduced in 1979 mandated that commercial networks needed to create programming specifically for children. The Australian content and children's TV standards outline the number of hours of Australian content that commercial broadcasters must include in their schedules, including children's content. While these regulations have created an artificial demand for children's television, it has also created a need for mechanisms like Screen Australia to help fund the production of these programs. Despite this policy aimed squarely at commercial providers, young audiences largely ignore content produced for them by commercial networks: "research shows that "dedicated" ABC children's channels are consistently attracting a higher proportion of the younger child audience than commercial television" (ACMA 2015). The ABC has always strongly lobbied to defend Australian content, though not required to abide by the rules of the CTS. Given this, it is understandable, but a bit odd, that the former chair of the ABC, Maurice Newman pointed out in 2009 in his speech at the launch of ABC3, that regulation like the CTS had helped support an industry that made ABC3 possible: "I have no doubt that Australian culture today would be far less individual and distinctive than it is without… Australian content on TV" (Newman 2017).

Scholarly analysis of children's television in Australia has been dominated by concerns about the effects of television on children and their use of it, the role of regulation, descriptions of industry as speculation and to describe it historically. How children as an audience engage with television and its perceived effects has been a source of much academic debate over the last forty years. In 1977, Murray argued there were connections between the level of violence in children's programming and Australian culture: "it seems reasonable to suggest that the role of television can and should be considered when framing questions about the production and maintenance of violence in society" (Murray 1977). Over time, arguments about potential harm has made way for other analysis on how children's television can be used as a tool to encourage sustainability (Ward 2012), Australian identity (Kelly 2019) or to promote healthy lifestyles by reducing obesity. It was argued that the ABC was able to help children by shielding them from the power of fast food companies on the commercial channels: "this public-broadcaster….is celebrated as one prong of the government's response to the perceived threat of….food advertising" (2011). Examining how children understand television was a focus for some (Rendell 1980), (Zhang, Djonov and Torr 2016), (Hartley 1987), (Palmer 1986), while including how they identify with content (Noble 1979) brands (Kelly et al 2020), how it fitted in with home life (ABC Research 1978) and how a more

active child audience can be seen in reference to Raymond Williams' concept of 'flow' as discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis (Williams 1989; Greagg 1977).

As the ABC moved towards establishing an online presence, there are some similarities to transmedia texts over the period we have examined so far. Initially websites connected to programs were set up on an ad hoc basis, driven by individuals and programs interested in the area. In 1995 the producer of the program *Hot Chips* (1994-1995) "recognised that a show about computers needed a website, and was aware of the reluctance of IT to put the ABC online" (Burns 2000). He was contacted after launching the show online by producers of young adult current affairs program *Behind the News* (1968-) who informed them they had just launched their *own* website with another internet service provider. As we have seen with *Offspring* the marketing department was also at the forefront of the move online, but like the producers of these programs from the 1990s it was driven more by groups of passionate individuals than policy: "if a collective wanted to publish online it was often down to their initiative, commitment and ingenuity. I'm thinking of the *Heartbreak High* site, which was—interestingly enough—an ABC Marketing initiative'" (Hawkins 2001). Only a few years later moves by some politicians to privatise this new online arm of the ABC were argued against (Martin 1999). The ABC's charter and the ability to meet an audience of children online was one of the reasons to argue against this (unsuccessful) proposal. There was a sense as television was moving out of traditional formats that the children/young adult audience was better placed to be receptive to new styles of content and formats: "Children are leading the way through their interactive use of media ranging from simple computer games to time- shifting video to more interactive forms of multimedia" (Griffith 1996). This argument that children were a more active audience than adults continued in examinations of television with the introduction of streaming services (Meese 2017). Also it was contended that producers were meeting this active audience. An examination of transmedia texts on Australian television in 2012 concluded that the most sophisticated engagement was happening on children's television (Loads 2014). Potter and Steemers (2019) have also argued that children's television underwent a rapid change in this period but noted that few scholars have considered that change from 2004 onwards.

Another theme across academic discourse was to champion and defend Australian children's content. This was argued on many different fronts. There was a call in the early 1980s to create the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) as "the most cost-effective way of tackling the problem" of creating quality children's television (Lacy 1981). Scholars

also described how the ACTF was working successfully (Holding 1989) and attributed the establishment of ABC3, a dedicated children's channel, to the organisation itself: "this difference can be attributed directly to the policy intervention of the ACTF" (Rutherford 2014). The role of regulation in supporting the industry is seen as crucial in maintaining its survival (Sinclair 1992). Following this, in the late 1990s this regulation was successful in shaping and sustaining the industry (Keys 1999). How effectively individual programs like *Play School* (1966-), *Dirtgirlworld* (2009-) and *Bluey* (2018-) are finding an audience and delivering quality programming is also a point of celebration (Ward 2012; Hill 2009; Williams 2019). Calls for more financial resources to be directed towards children's television from the government (Dalton 2017; Spigelman 2013) and the ABC itself (Harley 2017) is another part of this support. This advocacy did not mean that children's television and the regulation that shaped it were seen as perfect. Children's television needed to be more reflective of our multicultural environment during the period where SBS was established (Grassby 1980). Classification was seen, in the 1990s, to not reflect children's concerns (Sheldon and Loncar 1995). Potter argues more recently that regulations have failed to recognise new formats like reality TV (Potter 2013). At this time there seems to be a pervasive view that children's television is important for cultural reasons, but it is increasingly under threat. As Wilkens argues, that it is now "an extremely complex, globalized business involving large-scale repeats and repurposing for different platforms" (2017).

In his study of the ABC, Ken Inglis (2006) argues that before ABCME the young adult market was poorly served, in drama or otherwise. Programs like *Countdown* (1974-1987), at the time of its broadcast "by far the most popular ABC program with viewers from ten to seventeen years old" (Inglis 2006, p.62), happened more by accident than on purpose.

Countdown was produced by the Department of Music and Light Entertainment and not by the Children's and Education Department. He also outlined the uneasy relationship between regulation and the ABC, in relation to children's content. The focus on set hours of content, using quotas, should have been supplemented by regulation around other areas. He says foreign ownership and advertising content should have been under similar regulatory scrutiny. Without these two areas, the ability to keep quality is compromised (Inglis 2006, p.227).

While always part of a brief to educate and engage young people, other scholarship has

looked at different aspects of audience engagement and the ABC. Talking about the program *Doctor Who* (1963-) Alan McKee argues that a far more engaged and active audience "seem to be those in the science fiction and fantasy genres" (McKee 2009). He also puts forward that due to a number of factors (a process of censorship, assisting with funding, number of repeat screenings and Australian content specifically included by the BBC) the ABC has created a different identity for the Australian broadcast of *Doctor Who*. This singular version of the program means that communities engaged with the program in Australia also have a different perspective and identity than fans in the United Kingdom or the United States. There was also an argument made that Australian audiences are not as actively engaged with programs because of the lack of production in the areas of science fiction or fantasy as "Australian television has not produced programs in the correct genres to invite organised fan community activity — which provides another insight into the history of Australian television as it is seen by its audiences" (Mckee 2016). In contrast to this, the program examined in this chapter does fit into this genre and this perspective could, in part, explain the enthusiasm by audiences for the series.

Hutchinson has looked specifically at the ABC and examined new methods the broadcaster was using to interact with audiences (2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2017). Drawing on his in-person engagement with the broadcaster in *Cultural Intermediaries: Audience Participation in Media Organisations* he contends that public service broadcasting is now changing to Public Service Media (2017) to accommodate the multiplatform needs of audiences. ABCME is under direction in 2014 to include user-generated content as "various in-house policies have shifted to accommodate increased user-created content on specific projects and programming" (Hutchinson 2017 82). This means the ABC has a much closer relationship with its audience as new programming and new forms of distribution have increased interaction. ABCME under this remit can "engage with new forms of audience participation and co-creation as it brings the audience member into the producer's seat for a variety of programmes" (Hutchinson 2017 81). This mindset, in 2014, is guiding the production of *Nowhere Boys*.

Before I continue in my focus on *Nowhere Boys*, however, it is worth noting that Griffen-Foley's article *Diary of a Television Viewer* (2017) talks about another aspect of audience engagement in her examination of a viewer's diary through the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. She criticises screen theory initially as being exclusively orientated towards texts and states that female fan studies have made a poor attempt to redress that. Her description of the

viewer Jenny Sketchly provides a portrait of someone who is actively engaging with programs she enjoys and consumes narratives across different texts. The viewer is involved in the storyworld of the program through creating fiction based in the world of the program and also finds comfort and support through groups united by their shared interest in programs. This chapter will argue that with *Nowhere Boys*, ABCME too specifically had this idea of a safe, comforting community in mind when designing content and encouraging user generated content on its website.

The demand for children's television in Australia as well as production and the content itself has always been under the guidance of detailed government regulation. All programs examined in this thesis are profoundly shaped by government policy and it is in children's television that this is most clear. The ABC has an odd relationship to this regulation as most key pieces of legislation are aimed at commercial networks and do not apply to public broadcasting, but the ABC has helped shape these regulations and currently benefits from the regulatory system, particularly with ABCME. Anna Potter's recent book *Creativity, Culture and Commerce: Producing Australian Children's Television with Public Value* (2015) thoroughly reviews the current state of Australian children's television with a particular focus on the post-digital period of Australian television. Overall it is a damning illustration of an industry that is barely surviving: "It is time for the Australian public to re-engage with the children's programmes they indirectly support, and to question the value that is being created on their behalf" (Potter 2015, p.185). She sees children's television as feebly reaching audiences overwhelmingly through ABCME which government policy is not designed to support or guide. "Unfortunately, there is a growing disconnect between the achievement of long standing policy objectives….and the production of much of the children's television that is made in contemporary Australia" (Potter 2015 p.9). An apathetic attitude from commercial networks is also outlined and Potter argues that currently the C classification and the Children's television standards (CTS) are now really in the service of international production companies, who use it to make sales of cheap animation to commercial networks "commercial networks… have always resented their C drama obligations" (Potter 2015 p.174). The need for investment in film, this way, outweighs ideas of public value. Potter also puts forward the idea that the ABC has no reason to make kids' drama, and is vulnerable to dumping it with increased cuts. She states that the production of children's television on commercial networks generally undercuts public value, through a focus on cheap animation, which meets regulatory needs, but programs are homogenous and do not fill the criteria of

telling Australian stories or being of high quality: "cultural specificity in children's programmes has never been particularly important to the commercial networks" (Potter 2015, p.174).

Potter then sets out a history of children's television production in Australia through this perspective. She argues that early production occurred through toy and food sponsorship. As we have seen above, she states that there were initial concerns television would harm children, so content regulation was established to assure the public that harm would be negligible. In the 1970s the production sector grew for a number of reasons, including regulation, cultural factors, cheaper production costs and rises in imported programming costs. She argues increasing government intervention occurred mostly because the ABC and commercial networks seem to do as little as possible to create or add to a children's television industry. She states that as a result of the more direct involvement from government from the late 80s to the late 90s, Australian children's television entered a golden period where the building of a production culture seemed to bear fruit. After 2001 the changes wrought for digitalisation have had a big impact on the industry, changed the way content is seen, and created pressures to monetise content in this new environment. She describes Australian television culture as a mix of models from the United States and the United Kingdom which is heavily influenced by content regulation and insists that the sector is really controlled by regulation created in a pre-digital environment.

Potter also strongly argues that at its core all children's television is a creation of government policy *including* demand and production. She outlines problems in measuring 'quality' in kids' television, and different points of view on whether the standards achieve this. These are two big factors in examining the webisode production in this chapter. From Potter's perspective ABCME really is placed at the centre of children's television in this period, quality television, of which *Nowhere Boys* is considered very much a part. ABCME is also ultimately shaped very strongly by government policy, including regulation of children's television it is technically not required to adhere to. ABCME is also acting in a role as an innovator. Considering it is leading children's television production as this time, webisode production is an example of low-cost production of Australian content which could offer a new approach to a troubled part of the Australian television industry.

Matchbox Pictures: Television for Global and Local Markets.

Matchbox Pictures creates work for an Australian audience while also staying connected to a

global market. The company was established in 2008 and was able to quickly produce a string of well received programs like *My Place* (2009), *The Slap* (2010) and *The Straits* (2012). Matchbox has been commercially savvy in producing *The Real Housewives of Melbourne* (2014-), for Foxtel, which has found a large audience at home and overseas. As a small production company, it has benefitted from government funding and has also been able to connect to the international marketplace. The production company has been criticised for accepting $750,000 from Screen Australia as part of an enterprise program intended to support fledgling smaller production companies, two years before its 2014 sale to US-based NBC Universal International (Potter 2015 p.133). This is seen by Potter as running against the intention of the funding and is compounded by the fact that Matchbox continues to be "eligible for Australian government production support mechanisms such as Screen Australia funding and the Producer Offset... a US conglomerate is now benefiting from Australian government support for local content" (O'Regan and Potter 2013).

Other scholars have seen this as a natural evolution of production company culture as Australian television has become part of a global market (Goritsas and Tiwary 2019). Other comparatively sized production companies in Australia have similar relationships; Playmaker Media, for example, was acquired by Sony Pictures (Bodey 2014) and Hoodlum has a 'first look' deal with Disney (Mediaweek 2017). These relationships are viewed in industry periodicals as a mix of Potter's views (Groves 2014) and alternatively as showing that the Australian industry is part of a worldwide industry that is increasingly consolidating (Groves 2017).

At the time of production, Matchbox has been able to leverage this relationship to enable remakes in the United States of both *The Slap* and *The Straits*. The parent company was also able to utilise Matchbox to create local versions of successful international franchises like *The Real Housewives*. Matchbox had a reputation in drama as being able to deliver a 'quality TV' product (Verevis 2015) and won the 2011 SPAA Independent Producer of the Year award and the 2017 Production Business of the Year at the Screen Producers Australia Awards. The majority of its drama content is found on public broadcasting and is supported by government funding. In 2012, Matchbox was able to secure funding of $1,750,939 for the first season of *Nowhere Boys* and an additional $147,350 for the multi-platform game 'The 5th Boy' from Screen Australia, and the program went into production.

Created by Tony Ayres, *Nowhere Boys* is an Australian young adult television drama series. It was first broadcast on ABCME on 7 November 2013 and ran for four seasons, the last in

late 2018. Between the second and third seasons, on 1 January 2016, an 80-minute feature-length movie based on the show, *Nowhere Boys: The Book of Shadows,* premiered in selected Australian movie theatres and was later broadcast on ABCME. The first two series followed the adventures of four mismatched boys, forced together on a school excursion. After getting lost overnight, the boys return to the small town they come from, only to discover they are now in a parallel world where they have never existed. During the show's run, goth Felix Ferne (Dougie Baldwin), nerd Andrew 'Andy' Lau (Joel Lok), popular boy Sam Conte (Rahart Adams), and athlete Jake Riles (Matt Testro) discover they have super powers based on elements, which they use to fight demons before returning home. A third series titled *Two Moons Rising* started airing in 2016 and effectively rebooted the show with a new cast of characters, who also lived in a world of magical powers and demons. The new characters also dealt with a parallel world, this time a post-apocalyptic environment into the fourth season.

The show was a ratings and critical success. It won 18 international awards and was nominated a further nominated 23 times. The program won an International Emmy Award, two TV Week Logie Awards, an AACTA Award, three Kidscreen Awards and has been sold into 180 territories overseas. The show has been praised for its "sturdy plotting and committed performances" (Matherson 2016) and particularly for its imaginative plot, "a storyline that is hard to pin down; it's generic and typical yet it is deep and oddly unique" (Inglese 2013). The show has gained a dedicated following both in Australia and overseas (Filmink 2018) from audiences who enjoy its *Breakfast Club* meets *Doctor Who* feel.

Its success also stems from attempts to engage its fans in a sophisticated way using transmedia methods that we have seen in other children's programs of the time such as *Consipracy*-365 (2012) and *ICarly* (2007-2012) (Loads 2014). 'The 5th boy' is an online video game created to be part of the first season with substantial links to the narrative of the program. There has been a novelisation of the first season by Elise McCreedie. There are unofficial social media accounts on Facebook (2020b), Twitter (2020) and Instagram (2020), the latter having over 5000 followers. There is also a range of unofficial merchandise and fan fiction available online. ABCME has built on this following through two competitions inviting the audience to create short video texts for an online audience. These competitions took place in the lead up to Season 2 in 2014 and at the conclusion of Season 3 in 2017. Both invited the audience to not *explicitly* create short form videos in the storyworld of the program, but required the audience to use incidental music and adhere to pre-set themes that

relate to the program. Because of this all, entries viewed as part of this study have multiple connections to the storyworld of the program, with many firmly placed in the world of the show.

Nowhere Boys: Vision of Yesterday in Production

David Hukka is a keen amateur filmmaker, a graduate of the University of Newcastle. As a teenager he created films to distribute on Vimeo, Facebook, Vine and was an active user on the ABCME site. He had entered a few similar competitions and had uploaded a dozen videos, including skits and montages set to music (personal communication 2016). He entered and won a competition to create a short form video on the ABCME website. On the site he is known as 'Epicdave'. He entered the film *Visions of Yesterday* as part of the 'Big Theme, short film' competition in 2014 which was oriented around the launch of Season Two of *Nowhere Boys*. In the lead up to the launch of the second season, the competition was advertised on ABCME and online. A panel consisting of ABCME digital producer Ivana Rowley, producer Beth Frey, another ABCME employee and the four key cast members selected the winner and finalists. There were just over a hundred entries and eight finalists were chosen. There terms and conditions of the competition stated that the winner must "adhere to the brief and is chosen by the promoter's panel of judges to be the most original and creative" (ABCME 2014). As a winner, Hukka was able to visit the set over two days, was interviewed by the channel and had his film feature several times on the channel in late 2014. Other finalists were also interviewed and had their shorts featured on ABCME.
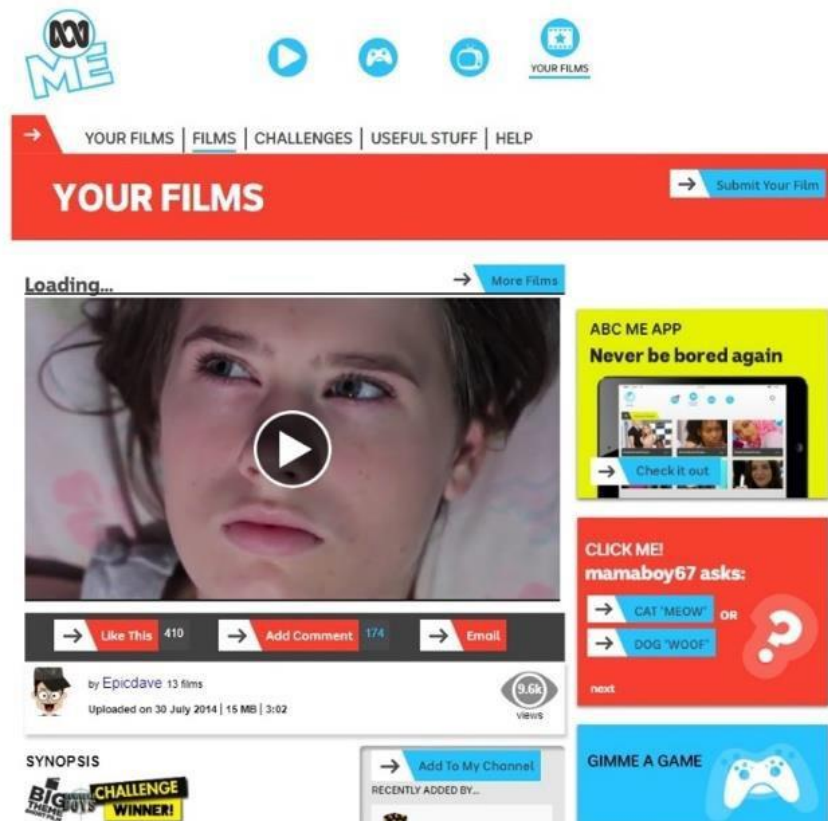
Figure 4: User-Generated Content Webisode: Visions of Yesterday by EpicDave part of Nowhere Boys 2014 on ABCME website

Hukka's film presents a young girl who is haunted by two figures (figure 4). Set mostly in a bushland setting, her dreams about the two figures draw her closer into the world of 1940s war-torn London. Realising she is related to them, our protagonist initially seems to stop moving between the two worlds by pencil drawing the two figures and acknowledging she will remember them. At the end of the film, she discovers her drawing in an old family album and then states to us she has left this world as "her dreams have taken over her reality". We see her disappear, presumably into the world of the past. The film is of a notably higher quality than the other finalists, and includes a sophisticated sequence containing digital effects, showing a bombing raid during the blitz in 1940s London. The film's ideas of moving between two worlds, ambiguous antagonists and similar shooting style feels part of the storyworld very much in keeping with *Nowhere Boys.* This connection is increased by the use of the same score and themes as the program.

The following five interviews of four key personnel affiliated with the production of the program took place in late 2014 and mid-2016 to facilitate this:

- Tony Ayres, creator/executive producer, *Nowhere Boys* Matchbox Pictures (July 6 2014)

- Julie Eckerlsey, transmedia producer *Nowhere Boys*, Matchbox Pictures (July 11 2014)
- Ivana Rowley, Digital and Editorial Product Manager ABCME (interviewed twice August 26 2014 and March 3 2016)
- David Hukka, director, *Nowhere Boys*: *Visions of Yesterday* (June 11 2016)

There was an attempt to speak to more of the young adult webisode creators, but ABCME was reluctant to put in me in touch with them, because of their policies of maintaining anonymity online for ABCME website users. David Hukka was 16 at the time of the competition and was older than 18 at the time of interview, so there was no issue with approaching him.

Production Constraints

In looking at the institutional factors in this mode Levine's framework examines policies and regulation, at a government and network level, while also considering genre. Here Levine argues how "some of the large-scale constraints… shape not only the resultant text, but the   rest of the production process, as well" (2001 p.68). This text is certainly shaped by policies and regulations. Creation of this user-generated content is defined in great detail by these guidelines. Levine states that this mode includes, but also goes beyond economic considerations and understanding production can only happen by seeing beyond purely economic factors: "De-naturalizing the television world in these ways is the first step to not only knowing that world, but understanding the particular ways its power is shaped" (2001, p.70). This case study follows this by including the role of government as the key force in this production in the same way that the commercial network profit-driven culture shaped *General Hospital* in the United States. Where this example takes this idea further is through its positioning of fan-made webisodes as being within production, whereas Levine sees fan engagement as only occurring through direct communication or the perceptions of personnel. ABCME and Matchbox see engagement with audiences as the primary purpose of these additional texts, but Matchbox also sees the delivery of that content as something dictated by network needs. Young people were made to feel comfortable on the ABCME site and the philosophy of ABCME and the guidelines of the website itself also were used to create an inviting and safe space. For Hukka, this was a consideration on the production of the short film. There is also a question of the purpose of

utilising this content and what it means for a production in transition.

A great deal of regulation and policies made Hukka's webisode possible. From ABCME's perspective, key shapers of this text include the ABC charter, the guidelines of the ABCME website itself, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act which applies to the site, the Australian television content G classification as outlined by the federal government's Department of Communication and Arts, and the terms of the competition itself. For Matchbox, the G Classification and ABC charter were of prime importance and criteria for funding both television production and multimedia content by Screen Australia are all factors in how *Nowhere Boys* was created. These policies strongly influenced the production in a number of ways. As Matchbox's producer responsible for managing transmedia content, Eckersley spoke of the G classification as having a strong influence on content which she stated simply as ensuring texts weren't "too scary" (2016). She was also required to understand the differences in regulation between the United Kingdom and Australian children's content, as she was responsible for altering content in the online game 'The 5th Boy' to ensure it would be acceptable to the market in the United Kingdom. Hukka altered his webisode before submitting because he was worried it would be a PG webisode, and reading the terms and conditions of the competition the G Classification was clearly defined: "there was like a close-up on… one of the girls' arms there was like a bit of fake blood…so we took that out because it had to be G-rated" (Hukka 2016). ABCME did not encourage viewers to visit social media sites, unlike websites connected to television programs directed at adults (Loads 2014). Ivana Rowley explained that as users ranged from 8 to 16 years of age, they were under regulation and could not be seen to encourage social media use "because of the COPPA rule and the fact that they're not supposed to be on social media until they're over 13" (Rowley 2014). The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) is a law in the United States that sets out rules for social media companies based in that country and their engagement with children and teenagers. Australian law takes its definitions of minimum age stipulations from this Act.

These regulations also meant that the ABCME website team needed to ensure the community who were active online felt safe. Having 185,000 active users in 2014, Rowley describes the informal policy to encourage engagement as being storytelling based: '"ABCME sees fan engagement and multiplatform as somewhat interchangeable" (Rowley 2014). This user base was different to other sites, in the sense that as the audience aged out, it had a large turnover. One reason the site has been able to attract new users are sites like ABCKIDS which built an

audience online through program distribution. The ABCKIDS free-to-air channel encouraged children to transition to ABCME through engaging with timeslots on ABCME that have crossover appeal to the ABCKIDS audience. Rowley also could see in great detail what users were doing on the site: "I can see what they do. I can see the comments they make. I've got access also to heuristic or soft data. I can see the words they use, I can see how many times they used the word 'awesome' next to a show" (Rowley 2014).

For Rowley, the criteria for the competition was based on her own experience that saw children enjoy watching other children on video sharing platforms like YouTube. Rowley was also motivated by receiving a lot of feedback from viewers and parents about YouTube being an unsafe space in both the content and comments on videos. The site rules were very clear in outlining to users to be supportive of each other, to use online identities and not reveal too much personal information to keep safe. It also outlined very clearly how to act if feeling unsafe on the site, and how to find help quickly. What this meant for a webisode maker like Hukka is twofold; while he found the content rules restrictive, the support online far outweighed any negative limitations. Hukka describes the environment as "nurturing'" and goes on to state that "in a way it is a bit restrictive because the rules are so harsh, but then that also works in the website's favour. It attracts a certain sort of content creator, a certain sort of webisode maker, one that's going to be very supportive of other people" (Hukka, 2016). Considering the number of active users and the kind of responses to calls for action, this suggested fans considered the ABCME website as a supportive, safe space.

The competition terms and conditions required young people to give non-exclusive rights to distribute the project on ABC platforms throughout the world 'in perpetuity' (ABCME 2019). These rights were given without financial compensation. The agreement did not exclude young filmmakers, like Hukka, from sharing his short form videos on their own social media accounts. Hukka did do this, but removed sound content copyrighted to the show before doing so. Beyond this, the site required webisode makers to agree that "your entry may be edited or adapted at any time by the promoter for legal, editorial or operational reasons" (ABCME 2017). There has been some criticism of this kind of approach (Davis 2017; Sokolova 2012; Chin 2014; Sefton-Green, Watkins and Kirshner 2019; Hesmondhalgh 2010). by scholars who argue that some unethical practitioners are using fan made content as a resource for new story ideas, at no cost to producers. There is no evidence that ABCME has taken this approach across any of its competitions but it does feature competition entries across the free-to-air channels. An argument against this is that the ABC has always engaged

children through competitions, clubs and games from the 1920s onwards (Griffen-Foley 2020) and displaying children's work on television is a well-established component of the ABC. This does not account for the sophistication of a webisode like *Vision of Yesterday* compared to something like a pencil drawing of a character. ABCME does clearly identify these texts as fan-made work and promotes it as such. It would seem problematic if this kind of fan-made work was moved into a commercial environment where it could be commodified. Another side of this is the way that it demonstrates Hukka's reasonably mature response to a legal framework that is complex, and highlights a part of the industry that has not altered in consideration of the young age of contestants.

Considering the detailed regulation already put forward, it is also important to examine some areas where regulation seems to not have caught up with current practice. The previous case study of *Danger-5* included confusion about what to pay people for work on additional material. People working on *Offspring* webisodes were paid mostly nothing. There is a realisation that this is another ancillary text produced using free labour to promote a program and is *also* used as content on a free-to-air channel, ABCME. Children providing free labour and giving away the rights to their work to the ABC as soon as it is submitted is another factor that could be seen as controversial. When asked about this, Rowley was noticeably uncomfortable and responded that it should be something spoken about at an executive level and was not part of her brief to consider this from a broader angle. She then went on to describe her perspective on user generated content on the ABCME website as essential in creating the comfortable space as the audience hear their own voice online: "It's about bringing a small amount of that voice to the network and allowing it to resonate and feel like they have a place" (Rowley, 2014). This, on the surface, seems like a deflection and points to a gap in regulation which seems to have been left undiscussed in the post-digital landscape of Australian children's television.

For Matchbox, choices about whether to include additional transmedia material as part of drama production was solely based on the needs of the client and how these are set out in the contract. For Eckersley the inclusion of a game for the first season of the show (and then the change to user-generated content) was driven by cost "The need to monetise these texts is key consideration" (Eckersley, 2014). Screen Australia funding paid for the online game, with ABCME covering the relatively small costs of administering the online competitions for Season Two and Three. Eckersley has also stated that in other negotiations, when cost is an issue, transmedia texts are treated like advertising or marketing. Transmedia texts were the

first cost to be cut between a production company and a network. Tony Ayres said that for him, unlike previous personnel that seemed to wrestle with the idea of the purpose of these kinds of texts, this material is something delivered as the client needs it. It is not something that was part of his approach to selling ideas: "We will make that work if it's part of the strategy of the network to make that work, I think it is kind of network-led. If it's an important thing then we would obviously tend to it, and if it's not then we wouldn't—it's all part of that discussion and brief" (Ayres 2014). For Matchbox, transmedia texts are part of a range of services, but not essential to how they produce film and television.

Production Environment

The production environment for the shoot of *Visions of Yesterday* was, in its fast nature and lack of resources, similar to the two previous program case studies in this thesis. As a webisode made by non-professionals there were some key differences. Here, the crew was made up entirely of friends and family. The close working relationship between Hukka and his sister Nicole is the key relationship in the production. The webisode makers in no way see themselves as part of Australian Broadcasting Corporation, but are mindful of ABC guidelines that pertain to content when shooting. The lack of resources also led to a more collaborative and creative environment. The emphasis on how informal hierarchies within the environment effect production was a strong focus of Levine's analysis of *General Hospital.* In this section it is notable that this aspect has a very minimal effect on the production of these webisodes. Levine emphasises there is a complex informal hierarchy in the production beyond roles, this included personnel being excluded physically from shooting (the writers) giving them more power, and the role of gender being highlighted in roles where "the feminine is distinguished, but not necessarily disempowered," (2001 p 72). Levine also uses an example of a female actress needing support in her creation of character while shooting being dismissed by a male technical crew who see their role relating to questions of efficiency in shooting (2001). In this section it will be argued that the complexity is not as evident in this fan-made production but positioning around gender and authorship is evident in a way Levine describes.

As the webisode was a one-off for Hukka, compared to the production of the show, there was not a set of environmental norms from previous work or from previous relationships. No one was paid for their work on the webisode or had an expectation they would be. Hukka was in charge of the direction of the webisode, but his role was still seen as largely informal as the

crew was made up of siblings and close friends, with a crew of four and three actors. This attitude is reflected in Hukka's comments on winning the competition: "It wasn't just me; I got to go down to Melbourne and got the credit for it, but it was me, my sister and some friends and everything—it was a group effort" (Hukka, 2016). Hukka describes the production as very relaxed with the only money spent being on food for the cast and crew. There was a clear idea of not being part of the program, unlike the previous case studies analysed. Because of the nature of this amateur production, it was known to the creators that what was happening was at the very periphery of television production.

Likewise, personnel were content with the webisode's place within a hierarchy of production. Hukka relied on creative input from the whole cast and crew to solve problems on set because of this informal environment and lack of financial resources and saw it as good support. Hukka understood the environment as creative and describes struggling on set to shoot a sequence involving three characters trapped in a house, while the city is being bombed around them:

> We had no idea how we were going to do that, so we sat down for an hour and figured it out. Eventually what we did is we had two guys outside the window holding up a big blanket to block the light so it looked like it was night-time and used Adobe After-Effects for the explosions. It was pretty complex, it required a lot of input from everyone. In a smaller shoot like this you cannot predict everything, there isn't days and days of planning and scripting beforehand (Hukka 2016).

Like the other directors spoken to for this thesis, Hukka saw working on webisodes in one sense as part of an effort to move towards professional production. Like personnel on *Offspring* he saw the connections to an anchor program as a helpful 'showreel' builder and like the *Danger-5* directors he was using skills he had developed in engaging an online audience to demonstrate his potential to a free-to-air network. Unlike previous directors and perhaps showing his youth, Hukka needed input to help solve key problems on the shoot, which at the time seemed impossible to solve.

Levine notes in this mode the scrutiny around gender roles. In the anecdote at the beginning of this section that outlines the conflict between story and technical aspects, Levine argues that the problems which play out around gender roles means that "these economically motivated constraints become distinguishable elements with gendered overtones suggests that the production environment is as culturally shaped as it is economically determined"

(2001, p.72). While this webisode production is not a commercial enterprise per se, I see a similar culture is at play here. Hukka wishes to complete the webisode ultimately to enter the competition and eventually benefit in his career. Through these discussions, Hukka's sister Nicole was seen as a source of support and is a key creative contributor, drawing upon her skills in the creation of story and storyboarding to achieve an efficient completion of the project. As a winner of a competition it seems then that her contribution is played down. This could be seen as reflecting the non-professional aspects of this production or more broadly could illustrate larger issues around gender in a family or work setting. Because of the amateur nature of the production, it could also be argued that Hukka's use of a non-professional crew had many similar moments where issues were solved in a group setting, and the crew did not expect any type of credit in the webisode's authorship. Nicole Hukka is mentioned often as the key collaborator in interviews and this also could be read as similar to how Levine outlines production on *General Hospital.* If this is the case, it would seem that the culture and gender influence on production, from the smallest to largest productions, and digitalisation have not impacted this area.

Production Routines and Practices

Like previous chapters, this section has looked closely at ancillary text production in comparison with the anchor program production. The production of the *Visions of Yesterday* webisode has some commonality with both the original production and other webisodes for a number of reasons. What is also worthy of note is that like the creative personnel in Chapter Three the effort to mimic the style of the show was seen as limiting and potentially something that meant it would not connect to an audience. In *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* creators expressed frustration with webisodes being too close to television production and blamed the webisodes' failure on not being closer to short-form online videos seen on platforms like YouTube. In Chapter 4 *Offspring: The Nurses* personnel emphasised the comedic aspects of the anchor program to shape webisodes into something resembling sketch comedy, to better engage their online audience.

Being an amateur fan-made production makes this a webisode produced mostly outside of a traditional television environment. Personnel are aged between 12 and 16, with only previous amateur experience. There is little direct oversight, no budget and equipment used to shoot and edit is for an entry-level practitioner. The webisode itself, while impressive, has more in common with fan-made materials available online than a webisode produced for *Offspring.*

Yet there are some similarities. As stated before, most of the policies and rules guiding Hukka in his shoot are the same that Matchbox would also have to adhere to. Hukka also had a set role as director, and clear roles for a sound person and grip on set. He had script meetings with his sister and a plan for pre-production, shooting and post-production. From the interview with Hukka, it is easy to argue that this would not be as complex as a professional shoot, the style of shooting being closer in mode to video blogging, another popular form of fan video. Like the crew on *Offspring: The Nurses* webisodes involvement with the production was aspirational with crew and cast not expecting any pay, there were greater opportunities for creative input and the environment was relaxed.

What is different with Hukka is that he based creative changes in the production of this webisode on the experience of engaging audiences in previous videos and some frustration that working in 'TV mode' will actually not engage an online audience. Hukka talked at length of shooting more establishing shots, and particularly of staying on shots longer and letting subjects move through the frame to make the webisode more like the anchor program. He argued that he had to jettison traditional narratives to build his following: "personally I would prefer longer-narrative films, like real stories, storytelling with characters…but I have a bit of a following doing short videos, and that's definitely the philosophy that I'm working with, immediacy, very, very fast, fast cuts, because that seems to be what gets kids' attention these days" (Hukka 2016).

Hukka also felt that the experience of making a webisode in these conditions did not teach him very much, as he confessed, "Maybe a little bit…. No, not really mainly because I was already making a lot of YouTube videos before that" (Hukka 2016). This could be seen as reflecting his young age, but at the same my personal impression was that he did not seem particularly arrogant or cocky. This point of view seems more to illustrate to me that instead, he was simply being honest.

Production of Story

How narrative and the people who create narrative shape webisodes are the focus of this section. Because of the nature of the competition and the clear guidance offered by the information on the ABCME website, we can see how this influenced the story of *Visions of Yesterday*. Music in this case influenced mood and was prescribed for specific outcomes. Creating stories in the mode of a television program was seen as creatively restrictive by the webisode makers. As a piece of user generated content, we can see that the webisode

production made attempts to mirror the anchor program in setting and tone, to fit into the storyworld of the show. The competition had four story themes: mystery, friendship, magic and alienation. Each theme had two pieces of original music created for the show for participants to download. As far as giving direction in the competition for story, participants were asked to make the theme and music central to their webisode but "You don't need to tell a *Nowhere Boys* story—just use the show as inspiration" (ABCME 2014). Regardless of this, the eight finalists feel very reflective of the show and tell stories either in the storyworld of the program or close to it, in individual stories. Hukka's webisode with its bushland setting, incidental music, and plot dealing with doppelgangers feels very much influenced by, and part of, the story of *Nowhere Boys.*

ABCME staff decided on the themes and chose music to ensure specific content was delivered, with Rowley acknowledging that one criteria was the inclusion of music. Previous competitions which encouraged audiences to cut a montage to music or featured lip syncing or simply dancing were overwhelmingly more popular with viewers and had a much higher level of participation. She then said she spent time thinking about what sort of webisodes they wanted at the end of the process, namely story-based and connected to *Nowhere Boys*: "We talked about, "Well, what sort of films do we want kids to make?"…and then we worked back from that… and everyone weighs in, then we refine that and then it goes live" (Rowley 2016). She made sure that Beth Frey, a producer at Matchbox was happy with the criteria, before releasing details. Another reason for making incidental music part of the competition was also to avoid the problem of participants using music that ABCME did not have the rights**.**

Hukka and his sister Nicole created the story through a traditional process and found it a restriction on the creative process. They chose the theme 'Mystery' and used the music 'Surrounded by Evil' and 'The Long Walk Home' by Cornel Wilczek to build their story. Hukka said he took weeks to create the script, through informal meetings with his sister: "the ideas have kind of evolved from one idea to another, we had maybe five or six drafts of scripts beforehand before we got to this final one" (Hukka, 2016). His sister then created a set of detailed storyboards, which the crew worked with when they went to shoot. Hukka spoke at length about the webisode story being in a 'TV style' and that it felt limiting. He said what this meant for him was that the story was a lot 'slower' and he had to spend a lot more time spelling out plot points. This was to him "much more in the style of the show of *Nowhere Boys*, it was definitely more in the TV format" (Hukka 2016).

Audience in Production

This mode is particularly relevant for this program as Hukka, being a fan, is the focus of most of this chapter. That a younger audience is more active is something that is referred to by all interview participants and from the perspective of ABCME this is backed up by detailed feedback. As we will see, another reason given for why the site was so successful is surprising. At the outset, ABCME staff and Matchbox had a strong inclination that their audience was active online. Tim Brook Hunt (then Head of Children's Content for ABC TV) in 2009 broke down the audience for the program in the lead up to its premiere:

> We find our audience goes online for two reason. One is for catch up on TV; the other is to play games. So when we launch a new drama like Matchbox Pictures' *Nowhere Boys*, it will be accompanied by an interactive stand-alone game that is related to that series, made with a significant budget contributed by the distributor, ABCTV and Screen Australia - Tim Brook Hunt (Potter 2013, p.63).

For Tony Ayres, though, "younger audiences will view things in different ways, they're already more interactive in their viewing" (2014). While we have heard this kind of speculation before from other production personnel, this point of view is based on more solid knowledge from ABCME based on detailed user feedback.

Rowley has describes how content is managed and created on the site, with what was then 185,000 active users, logged in to interact with the site, which enabled ABCME to track closely how people used the site, and what content worked and gave them details about the users including age, gender and location. This meant that when designing content like the competition, she knew what would generate interest. Music was included because videos with a strong musical element where far more popular than other content. Short form video was also more popular. When commissioning new content for the site, it was also very important to feature children and young adults having agency and not being facilitated through presenters. This information made the experience for audience members richer, and with the number of users having engaging with the site (though there is a large turnover as people age) means ABCME have a good understanding of their audience. Rowley agreed a lot of this transmedia content had been personality driven, saying she felt "part of my personality coming through" the site. The ABCME website is the most complex and strategically guided platform connected to a television show, compared to the previous two case studies. Rowley has a large amount of information at hand and is able to make informed judgements about

what her audience wants in a sophisticated way. For his audience Hukka was thinking more of a TV audience member than an internet audience:

> The television audience, definitely….*Visions from Yesterday* was very different to a lot of [his] previous web based videos because it was slower-paced… with the slow piano music… It's not the sort of thing that kids are going to watch; if you see that in your Facebook feed, it's like, 'Oh boring, I'm going to pass (Hukka 2016).

Hukka sees audiences as different, even if it is the *same* audience looking at different platforms. It is significant that the most 'amateur' webisode maker of the three case studies examined so far has the most sophisticated view of his audience. Hukka was able to get feedback in multiple ways for his webisode. His webisode had 9500 views, 406 likes, and 174 comments on the ABCME site in 2017. Comments on the site are broadly supportive such as from community member puppygirl1124's comment "such a great movie i wish i could make a vid as awesome as that" (ABCME 2019) which is typical of this style of communication. There are also more detailed comments pointing to specific aspects of the webisode or questions about how the webisode was made. From the Matchbox team Hukka also got very brief, positive feedback. This support could explain why Hukka had so much more confidence in pointing out what works and doesn't work with his webisodes, as *Visions of Yesterday* was his eleventh webisode for the site, and most had similar comments, though none were as popular as this webisode. Ivana Rowley told me that by the standards of ABCME this was viewed as a successful webisode based on the criteria of views (which was higher than average for the site) and the quality of the text.

Matchbox Pictures, ABCME and Hukka, all have a strong and sophisticated understanding of their audience. The ability of personnel on the site to get exactly the sort of content created by an audience that the site needs is evidence of this. Rowley was able to use data gleaned from the site to create terms and conditions for the competition that made it something that would engage the audience and be attractive to enter while also ensuring user generated content was useful for ABCME and Matchbox.

Discussion and Conclusion

Placing production with fans of a program is the furthest from *General Hospital* and Levine's framework that this thesis has reached. While pushing the mode of analysis it certainly does not make it redundant. These five modes: Production Constraints, Production Environment,

Routines and Practices, Production of Story, and Audience in Production, give a clear framework to scrutinise the economic and cultural factors that shaped the production of *Visions of Yesterday* as user-generated content connected to the program *Nowhere Boys*. One reason it was effective is that we can still draw some conclusions and see similar themes emerging across the three productions. Levine's process asks us to look beyond the economic and we can see in this chapter the role of government, individual aspiration, informal hierarchies around gender and formal hierarchies between a network, a production company and active fans as shaping this webisode.

As far as shaping the texts themselves, this method also shows that while all five modes contribute to the text as an outcome of the process, the production constraint mode appears to be most dominant. While there is an argument that the regulation of children's television is outdated and seen by some as controversial, the amount of policies and regulation associated with this sort of production provided clear rules and a structure to ensure that ABCME could interact with children without harming them. Policies that make fans feel safe and secure also help produce extended storytelling of reasonable quality. The environment of the webisode's production was also a safe community, reflecting both the ABCME site and Griffin-Foley's perspective of fan groups providing a supportive space. The routines and practices in the shooting, while not as complex as previous programs, did reflect industry conventions. Like other personnel, we can see the creator Hukka had a strong opinion on what he needed to do differently when creating a webisode for television or internet audiences. In terms of story, this fan-made or amateur content had a much more defined role in relation to the anchor program than previous case studies. This is partly because of the terms and conditions of the competition meant Hukka had a much clearer brief, which he was able to deliver on. It also shows how well ABCME knew its audience, in that seemingly unimportant aspects of the competition (such as the use of music) had a very specific reason for being included. Allowing the incorporation of these aspects lead to an expected result. The way ABCME understood and worked with its audience online is also a point of difference, compared to earlier case studies. With a great deal of data at hand, ABCME engaged with its audience in a way that, if it was on a commercial network, could have been potentially monetised.

Building on case studies in my previous chapters, *Visions of Yesterday* reveals consistent conventions in production of webisodes. All webisodes place funding as a key determinant, and as such, *Visions of Yesterday* was made at little cost to ABCME, yet the other two case

studies we have examined had webisode funding from Screen Australia and Network Ten's marketing department. While funding is hard to secure for Australian screen production, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the question about how to measure the success of webisodes is a factor in determining value to potential investors. Webisodes in these three cases are driven by personalities and less by industry standards. Rowley designed the *Nowhere Boys* competition using feedback from the ABCME audience, but her approach was based around her personal point of view. Lastly there is a certain ambiguity about who should exactly be making this sort of material. This personal interest feeds into this, as it seems webisodes are made by people who want to make them within the production sphere. As we have seen with Ashby and Russo from *Danger-5*, webisodes were made because they were funded to do so and to build on expertise from previous YouTube work. David Hukka, Andrew Garrick and the team behind *Offspring: The Nurses* both wanted greater exposure to the television industry through webisodes. All three webisode examples emerged in environments where the content was produced by the production company (*Danger-5*), the marketing department (*Offspring: The Nurses*) or as user generated content (*Nowhere Boys*/*Visions of Yesterday*), yet what unites them is that at the time there was no set convention on who would *normally* be responsible for producing this kind of material. Given other personalities, policies or funding models, these webisodes could have been produced by different stakeholders. The same could not be said of other areas of television production at this time, like drama production for broadcast or publicity.

The reason *Visions of Yesterday* can be judged as successful is because of this level of control. ABCME's online philosophy is different to previous case studies, which could be described as having a 'broadcast' mentality, namely 'let's make it and see if we find an audience'. *Visions of Yesterday* was made in an environment where ABCME already had a strong grasp of the audience for *Nowhere Boys*, created by a member of this audience from what he saw as a more 'network' perspective, so the chance of it engaging an audience was much greater. Once again, how subjective this definition of success is for producers is clear. The webisodes with the greatest audience, *Danger-5,* were viewed as a failure because of previous work on YouTube had a larger audience. The webisodes connected to *Offspring* would not be judged as successful by Network Ten if there were only the 9500 views achieved by *Visions of Yesterday*. This could be attributed to the attention paid to the audience for ABCME which could have been a barrier for greater number of fans and the need to meet a criteria of quality material. It does point to the fact that no clear conventions

have emerged industry-wide on what success for these kinds of texts means.

Chapter 6: *Secrets & Lies*: Working Globally, Thinking Locally

'The thing with Hoodlum that I think is different is they are still driven by story at every turn, they're so passionate about story, and Nathan… when it comes to multiplatform stuff...it's in his DNA.'

- Kate Dennis (director, *Secrets & Lies*)

This chapter will outline the final of four case studies examined in this thesis. Over the previous three chapters we have seen how the Australian television industry was in transition due to increasing integration with the internet and digitalisation. This change enabled producers to engage audiences on technical platforms beyond the traditional television screen. We have seen with *Danger-5* how practitioners with some success on a video sharing platform wrestled with ideas of how success is measured when moving to traditional broadcasting. The production of webisodes connected to *Offspring* has shown how larger, traditional production companies have worked with innovative networks to experiment with different approaches to ancillary storytelling. In Chapter Five we saw how a public broadcaster used the creation of storytelling texts, in the narrative world of the program *Nowhere Boys*, as a sophisticated form of user engagement. We also examined how the production process of webisodes is viewed by creators of user-generated content. From these three programs we can see how transmedia storytelling—telling one narrative across multiple platforms—was embraced as an innovative form of production by many broadcasting institutions. We can now argue that there were challenges in implementation, due to a number of complex factors. This chapter will further demonstrate how various complex institutional and cultural factors have also influenced webisode production.

Through my examination of these four case studies, and by analysing the influences on the production of ancillary texts, this thesis has demonstrated how new types of production companies were emerging in Australia at this time and how they were using expertise in multi-platform production as a point of difference. The hierarchy of these texts is examined and how the relationship between the anchor program and additional material like webisodes has had a direct influence on evaluating the success of these texts. How a new and smaller production company provided a space for networks to embrace innovation during this period will also be examined in this chapter, through an analysis of the webisode production linked to the program *Secrets & Lies* and to a lesser extent the anchor program associated with it.

Both the ancillary webisode and the anchor program were produced by production company Hoodlum for Network Ten and went to air in 2014. I will examine the history of the television production company in the Australian television industry and look specifically at how Hoodlum, as a production company, differentiated itself as a provider of innovative content. Again, using Levine's five modes - production constraints, production environment, routines and practices, production of story and audience in production - as a framework to describe production this chapter will build on the analysis of the three programs examined in previous chapters. As has been argued so far, webisode production extends story and adds value for audiences; government and other intuitional factors are the most important influences; the measurement of success is often unclear; aspirational labour is often involved in production; and who is responsible for production is often a source of tension. How Hoodlum reflects these findings in 2014 will be the focus of this chapter.

This chapter will demonstrate that the program *Secrets & Lies* was a successful multiplatform experience for fans despite the relatively small audience for the anchor program. I will contend that Hoodlum was able to work in a way that was innovative and provided expertise to Network Ten, which changed how the network worked. The analysis will also explore how the production process created a divide between some ancillary texts and others, which can be seen in the quality of the finished product. It will also demonstrate how audiences were engaged with, and production personnel attitudes towards them, were different to what had occurred previously with the network.

Secrets & Lies was a six-part crime/thriller drama series in which Ben Gundelach (Martin Henderson) discovers the body of a four-year-old boy near his home in Brisbane. This story hook opens the series, and very quickly Gundelach is revealed as the prime suspect in the child's murder. With an already tenuous relationship with some of his neighbours and a marriage that is under pressure, Gundelach feels he must find the killer himself, in order to cast off thoses suspicions. Over the series Gundelach is challenged as he discovers more about his neighbours while investigating beneath the surface of a seemingly normal community to exonerate himself.

The program was a critical success but did not rate strongly (Knox 2014b). It was praised by one critic, Denette Wilford: "so much great stuff is happening on this show -- the writing, the directing and the acting; it manages to be completely authentic without trying too hard"

(2014). On its premiere in the United Kingdom, Des Mangan at *The Guardian* noted, "Yes, we have seen its like before, in *Broadchurch,* but the opener more than holds its own against ITV's surprise hit" (2014). Airing on Monday nights on Network Ten the program rated between 320 000 and 415 000 viewers (Knox 2014a; australiantv.net 2014) for its six-episode run. As a flagship show for Network Ten for the year, this was not seen as substantial. Ratings of at least 700,000 to 800,000 viewers were needed to enter the top ten programs for the week, and not having reached that it was labelled 'a flop' (AAP 2014).

Before it went to air on Network Ten, the format had been sold by Hoodlum to the ABC network in the United States to be remade with the slightly different title *Secrets and Lies* (as opposed to the Australian version, *Secrets & Lies*), running from 2015 to 2016 and starring Ryan Philippe and Juliette Lewis. It was a ratings success in the United States for its first season, but was cancelled after the audience dropped off over the second (tvbtn 2015). The original Australian program sold overseas well, including the multi-platform content, to many European countries, Canada and the United States. After Network Ten commissioned the program, Hoodlum was able to get financial support from Screen Australia, Screen Queensland, distributor Cineflex and, through the network, a major sponsor in Ford Australia. The program's budget was $6AUD million dollars with an initial budget of $300,000AUD for the ancillary texts or digital content.

The show itself is a paranoid thriller with a strong focus on Ben's point of view while a range of multi-platform content expanded the story for fans of the program. Some material was introduced six weeks before the first episode was broadcast on a website specifically set up to promote the show, but the majority of material was released once the program went to air. Each week, a consistent range of materials were released including: 'police procedural' webisodes, piece-to-camera 'lie detector' webisodes, sound bites, documents and photo materials. This material had a specific narrative function, to expand the plot and flesh out characters in the main story to enable fans to become 'detectives' and use this knowledge to identify who was most likely to be the killer. This material was released in segments after each episode had gone to air with all materials relating closely to scenes and plot revelations within the anchor program.

The material was hosted on a website specifically developed for the show and was also promoted on social media platforms, like Facebook, and through Ten's own in-house social

media style engagement platform in 2014, Zeebox. Zeebox was an application specifically designed to act as an in-house social media application for television networks, to capture fans using second screens while watching a program being broadcast. The application had Twitter-like discussions, games, extra text, sound and video material. To give an example of how it worked: a viewer watching the show, while viewing a scene with the Zeebox application open on a tablet, would see the character Gundelach moving through the house speaking with his wife. The viewers could also see and hear his daughter in the background speaking on the phone, looking somewhat nervous. Audiences accessing the Zeebox application would then be notified in real time and asked if they wanted to listen in on the phone call, which (when clicked on) would lead to a sound recording of the conversation. That audio material was also available on the website once the episode had completed broadcast. Access to this sound material would highlight a character not seen in the series by that time and gave the impression that both his daughter and this character may have knowledge about the murder of their neighbour. *Secrets & Lies* has a very specific Queensland setting, but with its international star and Nordic noir tone clearly had ambitions for an audience beyond Australia. In the following section it will be argued production companies in Australia have created narratives exploring Australian identity while also making content attractive to an international market, following arguments made by Ward and O'Regan (2011). The question of whether Hoodlum is offering a point-of-difference with this program and the role of government in helping or hindering this new production company will also be analysed. This chapter will convey details about a creative industry going through rapid change over this period, and arguments about this program will fit into broader discussion about how the webisode production illustrated changes in television production in Australia in 2014.

Television Production Companies in Australia: Creating an Identity and Selling it to the World

Having focused previously on Network Ten and its culture of innovation in times of adversity in Chapter Four, and given the nature of modern outsourced television production currently, it is salient to examine production companies and Hoodlum in particular and examine what features make the production of multiplatform television attractive to it as an organisation, and in turn why this style of production was attractive to Network Ten. The Australian television industry, over the last sixty years, has seen a growing reliance on production companies for their content. Drama production in this period was heavily reliant

on these organisations separate to public and commercial networks (Screen Australia 2016). The independent production sector contributed $1 billion dollars to gross domestic product annually and employed 13,000 people (Screen Producers Association 2016). 71% of production companies were based in New South Wales (Screen Australia 2016, 19) and were seen as being part of a sector which is highly competitive and 'characterised by their professionalism, entrepreneurial spirit and quality of output' (Screen Producers Association 2016). Outside production companies offered a lot of advantages to networks. They could perform work often cheaper than in-house production, were flexible in utilising production personnel skills in the shorter term and offered access to a variety of creative expertise and innovation in television production. It is acknowledged that production companies have had and continue to have a major impact both locally and internationally. Many more Australian programs are now created by production companies than in the 1950s.

Independent production in Australia occurred for the first time in the 1960s. At the time independent production was seen as a way to cut labour costs by the commercial networks, and serialised drama in particular was seen as a cheaper option than studio-based programming (Moran 2014, p.176). Like other areas of the Australian media (Artero Flynn and Guzek 2019) independent television production in Australia has been dominated by a small number of larger organisations. Two particular companies and individuals associated with them have had a strong impact in the development of the television industry; Reg Grundy and companies controlled by him (The Grundy Organisation, Grundy Worldwide) and Hector Crawford and Crawford Productions. Crawford was seen as one of the "founding fathers of [Australia's] television industry" (Casson 1991, p.435), who, like Grundy, leveraged success in television from a background in radio production and, assisted by his sister, Dorothy and nephew, Ian, was able to establish drama productions in Australia in the 1960s. Crawfords were seen to "occupy a central space in Australian Television" (Cunningham 2014, p.183), and his programs were important commercial successes that also had a large cultural impact on their audience. He was seen as a producer of quality television and was also able to use technological advances to deliver programs more quickly to networks in the 1960s. In this way, he used innovation to increase his value to them (Moran 2014, p.177).

Crawford Productions continued production of local drama well into the 1990s and still exists today largely as a DVD distributor. Hector Crawford was also concerned with Australian

identity (Sharp 2020) and "would spend….his days trying to provide an answer of what it meant to be Australian through every medium at his disposal, especially television" (Bazzani 2015, p.59). He was regarded as "the most nationalist of Australian producers" (Moran 2014, p.627); not only did his company help lobby for the Australian industry (which was in his commercial interest as he was constantly facing competition from cheaper overseas imports), but Crawfords was also seen as providing training and experience to many practitioners in an environment where the high quality of the output was also seen as a hallmark of the work they produced (Davey 2014, 3).

Reg Grundy was associated with successful game shows such as *Sale of the Century* (1980-2001) and *Supermarket Sweep* (1992-1994) by Australian television audiences, but also had a noteworthy impact on drama production. He was known for facilitating a stronger international focus in the Australian television landscape. He moved into drama in the early 1970s, and at the time he was known for famously stating that the "press was saying I was the biggest producer of Australian television outside the ABC" (Grundy 2010, p.142). He was motivated by changes in government regulation of content that gave drama a greater weighting when measuring it, so he decided that "I had to get into drama" (Grundy 2010, p.142). Throughout a long career he created many connections in Australian production to a global production industry, for him "localness in no way excluded the global" (Dwyer 2020). During the 1960s and 1970s, he used the American industry and the market in the United Kingdom as a resource for programming formats, which he would emulate locally, and also as a source of production personnel to help produce drama for Australian audiences. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s he began selling drama productions for adaptions to overseas markets and had some success in this area. His outward looking perspective has seen him named in 2011 as "the international face of Australian television" (Moran 2011, p.156). His organisations exist currently as part of Fremantle Media Australia, which merged the Grundy organisation with another local production company, Crackerjack Productions, in 2006 and renamed the organisation as a subsidiary of the production house in the United Kingdom.

In many ways, Reg Grundy set the template for the Australian television industry environment at this time. Some companies utilised overseas experience as a point of difference in a local environment, and in other ways the Australian industry was a multi-channel environment where "recycling and franchising" (Moran 2014, p.180) was the new normal. Production companies were likely to have relationships with overseas content

providers, and in cases like the Australian version of *Big Brother* (2001-), were seen as local production houses for international franchises. Instead of local knockoffs of international programs, or locally licenced programs, these international franchises were produced locally, by locally purchased production arms. It has been noted that there had been a downturn in drama production because of the expense associated with it, and that Australia had lost its distinctive place as an exporter of international drama (Moran 2014, p.180). The industry in 2014 was dominated by a small group of larger companies, namely Endemol Australia, the producer of *Offspring* and Fremantle Media. Both organisations produced a wide range of reality, drama, and children's programming among a range of offerings. There was still a large amount of diversity in smaller production companies consistently producing material for networks, including Matchbox (producer of *Nowhere Boys*), Working Dog Productions and, as I will detail shortly, Hoodlum.

During the 1990s and 2000s the industry became increasingly integrated into an international market. This was driven by many factors such as the emergence of increasingly large transnational production companies, who were keen to acquire smaller companies worldwide to acquire intellectual property and further consolidate their production process (vertical integration) was one (Maher 2004). In his study of realty TV franchises, Michael Bodey described the local industry as seeing "creative suppliers…being gobbled up by larger entities wanting their formats to be looked after or tailored for local markets" (2011, p.242). The size of the industry was seen as another. With profits hard for production companies to realise in a small market, co-producing with overseas companies and international sales were seen as ways to compensate for poor box office returns and falling local licence fees (Maher 2004). Some Australian companies were also increasing international connections by purchasing overseas companies to expand (Maher 2004).

The two largest companies mentioned above are overseas owned, and even smaller companies like Matchbox have a majority stake controlled by U.S.-based Universal. This has caused some tensions as some smaller production companies have been critical of the level of government support directed towards some of these foreign-owned organisations. Screen Australia noted in 2010 it had been criticised for doing this, summarising the critics' stance by stating that "the effect is that Screen Australia's funding is ultimately diverting funds from the development of Australian intellectual property" (Screen Australia 2014). Others see this growth of smaller production companies and integration with larger international

organisations as signs of success for the local industry. As we have seen in previous chapters this tension between creating content for local audiences and appealing to international viewers is at the forefront of practitioner's minds in this period. Creators of *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* spoke of aiming to make their product suitable for the Nickelodeon-at-night brand Adult Swim in the United States, as well as appealing to prime time SBS viewers*.* They felt their program suited the latter better. Similarly, Anna Potter's arguments regarding children's television in Australia outlined that on commercial channels particularly, international audiences were being served better than local ones. This chapter will argue that by placing ideas of multi-platform production at the centre of their work Hoodlum makes a better effort in serving both audiences more effectively.

Hoodlum: Multiplatform as a Selling Point

Based in Brisbane, Hoodlum was founded in 1998 by Tracee Robertson in partnership with Nathan Mayfield. The company "has built its industry profile on designing online games and multiplatform experiences that exemplify a commitment to 'telling stories and connecting with audiences in bold new ways" (Polson and Cook 2014, 25). The pair met as recent graduates working in the art department for Channel 9 soap *Pacific Drive* (1996-1997)*,* when Mayfield was able to secure some funding from Film Queensland (now Screen Queensland) for a short film. This led to an opportunity to meet then Seven Network programmer David Franken. He offered them a timeslot on Saturday mornings, but no money to fund a production (Scott 2013). Following on from arguments in the last chapter, the program was aimed at young people and also qualified as Australian content, which had some value to the network. The duo then took an unusual step in seeking funding from technology companies. As Robertson explained, "The TV business is operated by boys who go to lunch in Sydney and Melbourne, and we didn't know anyone. We needed to have something that was different" (Cited in Scott 2013). They were able to secure $140,000 to produce *override.com.au* (1999), a multiplatform storytelling project featuring a sophisticated website and broadcast program, part of the reason they were able to fund the program was that technology companies wanted to see their products used in television production. Seven did not continue the relationship, but *override.com.au* lead to the next commission *Fat Cow Motel* (2003) funded by Austar, a subscription television operator focusing on rural and regional areas, which was subsequently acquired by Foxtel in 2012. This project was also prompted by Mayfield approaching the provider and pitching it as being able to fill the

Australian content expenditure requirement that the subscription network had been unable to fill until that point for that year. It was noted at the time as being innovative and one of the "few examples of multi-platform media events that are dramas" (Roscoe 2009, p.363), the majority at the time being based in reality television. *Fat Cow Motel* was the work used by the pair to establish some credentials overseas. A twelve-part murder mystery, the program was billed as an 'interactive drama' that viewers could log-on to a website to receive more information via email, SMS or voice mail. This style of delivery set a template for Hoodlum; a murder mystery with content drip fed to viewers across a series of platforms that they would, ideally return to often. They also used the template of securing work by offering innovation, being experts in new forms of television production. Some aspects of the production did not continue into their other work, mainly the ability for audiences of the show to choose the ending, and for sponsors to be able to 'buy' content within the program.

They applied for funding to attend MIPTV, the international television and digital content market, in Cannes in 2000 from Screen Queensland and continued to go for the next ten years. Robertson believes the company's first commission occurred because of relationships established at these functions. Over time, she was meeting with the same people every year and those contacts were eventually in positions where they were able to make decisions about commissioning content. That Hoodlum had both *Override.com.au* and *Fat Cow Motel* to show organisations was also an advantage. In 2006 the British drama *Emmerdale* (1972-) was the first overseas program to commission ancillary content from Hoodlum. The project was an online murder mystery played out on a website, over twenty weeks as an extension of the long running soap. This led to a Broadcast TV Award, a Horizon Interactive Award and an International Emmy nomination. This exposure lead to another commission from ITV for their espionage drama *Spooks* (2002-2011). From this point Hoodlum continued this trend of work on ancillary texts on large international television and film franchises *Primeval* (2007-2011*), Salt* (2010)*, The Bourne Legacy* (2012), *Vikings* (2013-2020), with local multi-platform productions *SLiDE* (2011) *and Secrets & Lies.*

Hoodlum at this time established a Los Angeles office to better connect with the market in the United States and to oversee productions of their work being remade for American network television. Hoodlum promotional material stated that innovation is part of its role and describes their relationship with networks as "a form of R and D [research and development] for…television organisations" (Ward 2009, p.139). They are seen as producers

of quality and innovative drama (Groves 2019; Sparks 2019). This chapter will contend that Hoodlum impacted the Australian industry in two ways, similar to the way production companies have made in the past: firstly, through utilising knowledge and experience gained in productions though international work and applying it locally, and secondly, by changing perspectives on what television as a medium is capable.

Secrets & Lies in Production

I interviewed the following key personnel affiliated with the production of the program in late 2014 and mid-2016 to facilitate this:

- Vanessa Arden-Wood, Head of Entertainment – Digital, Network Ten (2016)
- Nathan Mayfield, Executive Producer, Hoodlum (2014)
- Kate Dennis, television director, Hoodlum (2014)
- Lucas Taylor, creative director, head writer *Secrets & Lies* Multiplatform (2016)
- Damon Gameau, actor (2016)

These industry participants were chosen for many reasons: direct participation in the production of the webisode series, having a role that required some involvement or input into the production, and a mix of strategic knowledge with hands-on creatives.

Production Constraints

For *Secrets & Lies* there were a set of factors, institutionally, that shaped production. The role of the production company was in this case different to the usual production company-client relationship. Hoodlum was focused on multi-platform content from the start which meant they argued for a larger budget and the company set the direction in a much firmer way than we have seen with the previous three case studies. How the ancillary texts were paid for and if they are defined as either story and/or marketing when it came to generating income was also a factor. How genre was understood as more suitable to this type of production played to the production company's strengths, and within it the production itself played with ideas of genre also. The location of the story and filming in Brisbane was also a factor in shaping this production.

In interviews with Mayfield, Arden-Wood and Dennis the program was seen as shaped by policies and documentation that was typical of drama production at this time. The show had to meet standards for the network to ensure it would be appropriate for the timeslot and classification of the program. It was guided by a budget and a contract between Hoodlum and Network Ten. The main difference was the amount of detail in those contracts focusing on what ancillary content would be delivered, which included a specific set of documents regarding the story content, beyond the script, which will be examined in detail shortly.

Hoodlum's role in clearly driving the ancillary texts of *Secrets & Lies* was seen as unusual by the network and shows how their innovation and expertise were able to position themselves differently than a traditional production company. At the time it was commissioned Hoodlum had never worked for a commercial network in Australia and a number of factors influenced the network to pursue the program. As outlined in Chapter Four, Network Ten had gone through a long period of instability over its online offering in the period leading up to 2013. The network had launched its new catch-up service Tenplay the same year and was keen to engage an online audience. For Mayfield this meant they were in the right place at the right time and the company felt it was quite agile and able to develop the content quickly across multiple platforms. The production went from Network Ten commissioning the program to shooting in three months. This was something that, in Mayfield's opinion, set them apart:

> Multiplatform has been our sort of side door into these places…with something like *Secrets & Lies* that was a huge selling point as part of the project. Ten was launching *tenplay,* they had a digital department there… When we pitch every single show we ever do, we tell everybody that it's a multiplatform project, that that won't be a side hobby that we'll do; we will plan and write a story that intentionally will go to air on TV but also will have tentacles on to other platforms' (personal communication October 2014).

Arden-Wood was the main facilitator of digital content for *Secrets & Lies* for Network Ten. Having a program arrive with content clearly mapped out and with a larger than usual budget for digital content—over four times the amount of another typical prime time program, like *MasterChef Australia* (2009-)—was a new way of working for her:

> This is very unusual, but it was actually part of the budget for *Secrets & Lies* and a

fairly significant chunk of it was to produce all the multiplatform content. Hoodlum
worked to deliver that as well. That isn't the case at all… normally (personal
communication, 2016)

In 2014, Network Ten had moved from a series of websites highlighting stations individually
(Eleven, Network Ten) to a combined catch-up service. She described her work at the time on
individual programs as often being guided by one line in a typical production contract, stating
"online materials to be delivered also" with a budget figure next to it. What would be
delivered would then be negotiated between Network Ten digital and the production
company. In this case, Mayfield saw Hoodlum's role was to work collaboratively with Ten's
digital arm and to draw on their expertise in delivering content for prime-time programs like
Offspring and *The Biggest Loser* (2004-2017). At the same time, they saw themselves, as
producers, very much in "the driver's seat" (Mayfield 2014).

Having to present multi-platform content as offering different things to different audiences
was also important, both in the pitching process and more directly to the audience of
programs. In the broadest terms, Mayfield speaks about making the program to suit two
audiences: "we have a customer which is the network that signs the cheque to make the
show, and you have the customer which is the audience" (Mayfield 2014). Multiplatform
content makes the commissioning process more complex, and as Mayfield explains it, it is a
matter of perception, as depending who he is speaking to, these ancillary texts are seen as
fitting into a "storytelling' mode or a 'marketing/promotional mode". Mayfield also
acknowledges the role of promotion in these texts being a very strong one. For example,
when speaking about the role of marketing he is quite open about most of the material
produced overseas being funded this way: "We're doing a huge webisode series for *Vikings*
out of the US and Ireland which comes through marketing; in Australia we do our own
multiplatform project. It's in essence the same sort of methodology" (Mayfield 2014). At the
same time he describes it as something that has to be emphasised or de-emphasised
depending on what stage and who he was talking to about the project. As he described, "the
dirty little secret is all multiplatform is marketing, but it is how you actually define it to the
different stakeholders is where it gets a little grey" (Mayfield 2014). It is part of his task to
explain and define a multiplatform production to commissioning personnel, something a
regular production organisation does not have to do as often. This means terminology can
change and arguments about the purpose of texts like webisodes as being storytelling or

promotionally based are emphasised in different pitching environments "even though the end of that sentence is, 'We are creating multiplatform assets to actually get a broader reach to our audience'" (Mayfield 2014).

The role of selling multiplatform production means that for Hoodlum there is an element of persuasion for the company in getting networks interested in the process. The main barrier, Mayfield outlined, is cost. At the time of the interview Mayfield gave me the impression that commissioning bodies are interested in this sort of material, but often only want it after a series is already a success with audiences, and so the cost of extra material is justified. It is worth noting that Hoodlum's international work with *Lost* (2005-2010)*, Vikings* and *Emmerdale* certainly fits within this model. Beyond this, there is a question about who will pay to produce this content, with commercial networks often wanting a specific sponsor to offset the cost of this extra material. As Mayfield explains, "if you create a hit like *Breaking Bad* and you're not ready to actually provide audiences with additional material, there will be a demand that will force you to find ways to service that audience" (Mayfield 2014). With a range of multi-platform projects being commissioned in 2014 and seen as reaching audiences, Mayfield sees these views as changing at this time: "in the same way that 20 years ago producers realised there was a thing called 'behind the scenes' video, and all of a sudden now it's expected and nobody really has a concern about it" (Mayfield 2014). Arden-Wood tends to agree, and notes how in the case of *Secrets & Lies*, the conversations had changed:

> I think that certainly compared to 2012 there's been a huge evolution…within the production industry people went, "Oh, wow that's pretty amazing what Hoodlum did and what Ten did with it." What we've found is our conversations with production companies changed and they were way more open to doing real world, in character extensions (Arden-Wood 2016).

For Arden-Wood, dramas like *Party Tricks* and the sixth season of *Offspring* were open to using more extended storytelling texts because of *Secrets & Lies'* (and *Offspring*'s) own history of experimentation. Taking this at face value we can see a production company bringing new ideas to a network, and these ideas being adopted, internalised and then propagated by the network to other organisations they work with.

Under this mode of production constraints, Levine refers to genre and how it can impact

production. Adhering to the codes and conventions of the thriller genre, *Secrets & Lies* was attractive to Network Ten, and employed these generic elements in innovative ways when applied in multi-platform production. Hoodlum was comfortable working in this mode, as ancillary texts worked for *Spooks* and *Emmerdale* were close in style to the methods used in *Secrets & Lies*. For Mayfield, this genre had a strong efficacy with a multi-platform mode:

> This is an easy sell for me…to take in a show that has that sort of crime-thriller genre, because everybody knows that it's a whodunnit and this is how we can send people to other platforms…I just know that most commissioners will take this seriously, because it's a really easy thing for them to envision (Mayfield 2014).

Having spoken to Hoodlum personnel, it was this combination of expertise and the thriller component that 'sold' the show to Network Ten. *Secrets & Lies* further pushed its generic boundaries, particularly as a multi-platform experience. This will be further explored in the 'story' section of this chapter but considering how it would have impacted production overall it should also be mentioned here. *Secrets & Lies* is a paranoid thriller and was focused on the lead character, with other characters entering and leaving the narrative with unclear or mysterious motivations. In comparison, the webisodes are much more in the vein of a police procedural – Gunderlach's character is the focus of the plot, but he is mostly absent – with police detective Ian Cornielle (Anthony Hayes) is instead the primary narrative focus. When viewed in tandem, his character in the main show is enigmatic and intimidating, while in the webisodes it is very clear what he wants to know and what he is thinking. To have ancillary content used this way is atypical, and the producers were aware their approach was innovative. Storyliner Lucas Taylor says the production team knew this was an experiment in using different styles of programming while keeping the plot and characters consistent, so as to not alienate viewers:

> We believe it worked well…. they were slightly different genres in forming the pieces…and that was done with the aim of creating something a unique audience experience and we think it worked. We even kind of used the reference to ourselves 'we need the webisodes to be faithful to the show but inject a little bit of *Law and Order* to it (personal communication 2016).

As we proceed through this chapter, I will further demonstrate how these considerations changed the webisodes and what alterations were made to accommodate aspects of genre.

More immediately, however it is worth noting how Hoodlum leaned into their Australian and Brisbane identity to create a setting for the story of *Secrets & Lies*. From an industry perspective the location of Brisbane shaped the production process and reflects Hoodlum's ideology to be firmly based in the Australian industry with worldwide connections. Nathan Mayfield outlined that the Brisbane based company wanted *Secrets & Lies* to be a "local story" and envisaged that one of Hoodlum's purposes was to highlight Brisbane, remarking that "it's in our DNA" (cited in Cooper 2016a). Mayfield continues:

> We really want to capture the heat, the humidity and the light that you only get in Brisbane, it's so unique and we want to capture that. There's something nice about recognising where you come from as well' (cited in Cooper 2016b).

Production personnel gave the impression that the Brisbane base separated Hoodlum's perspective and their connections to the local industry. Most production companies in Australia are based in Sydney and to a lesser extent Melbourne (Screen Australia 2014). Kate Dennis is an international television director and in high demand (Porter 2018). She knew very little about Hoodlum before she worked on *Secrets & Lies* "because they're Brisbane-based" (Dennis, 2016) and remarked that it took a long time to sign on to direct, specifically because of the Brisbane location, and that Robinson took a long time to convince her to be a part of the production. Hoodlum had to persuade personnel by showing that company as 'unique' and selling the idea of multi-platform clearly didn't end with the program being commissioned. Actor Martin Henderson had an established career in the United States, having already been the lead in feature films *The Ring* (2002), *Torque* (2004) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004). This was something Hoodlum wanted in to make the series sell better overseas, but to make the offer attractive to people like Henderson, Hoodlum had to offer something that was different. Both Dennis and Damon Gameau (who played the lead character's best friend, Dave Carroll in the anchor program and ancillary texts) outlined that the combination of strong scripts and the multi-platform approach were two of the main reasons they wanted to be involved.

I have so far demonstrated how the impact of network contracts, the concept of multiplatform as a point of difference, and ideas of genre and setting all impacted production. Like the previous three case studies, the contracts between the content provider

and network had to be clear to ensure the webisode went into production and had some role in what would be provided, particularly around cost. Unlike previous case studies, the multi-platform production was spelt out and used as a selling point to the network. Like *Offspring and Danger-5* Hoodlum experimented with genre in webisode production and this was seen as serving the story and better for the audience. The setting of Brisbane is also seen as an additional point of difference.

Production Environment

I have argued what formal institutional factors had the most impact on this program. In this section other less formal constraints will be analysed, looking at the environment of the webisodes in production. In *Secrets & Lies,* how union awards were adhered to seemed to have little effect on the shape of ancillary texts, but beyond that what people were paid seemed to place some texts in a place of higher importance than others. There was a clear hierarchy on set, and the production seemed less relaxed and loose than we noted in the previous case studies. The experience of personnel in working with Hoodlum may have also had an effect on how the project was put together. Utilising the key shooting unit to create some of this material was seen as adding to the stress of an already fast paced environment, but for Damien Gameau, this made the process more engaging and was seen as adding to as creatively rewarding environment.

Speaking to Mayfield and Lucas Taylor, who managed the ancillary content, the effect of the union awards was minimal. Both stated that regardless of what crew members were working on, personnel were paid an award rate, as if they were working on a television program to be broadcast. Within that there were some differences. Some additional material, namely the webisodes featuring Anthony Hayes, were shot by the production unit shooting the anchor program for broadcast. The rest of the material (lie detector webisodes, photography, sound material and printed material) was created by a second unit. The first unit was much larger and pay was different as according to Taylor, as he explained, "there would've been a difference between the fees commanded by a director of a lie detector webisode and the director of a television episode, but that's more with the experience levels of the particular practitioners" (Taylor 2016).

There was some difference in the general atmosphere between the main unit, and the

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secondary unit while both were creating webisodes, with the hierarchy of personnel a factor. The main unit had to juggle a tight schedule shooting "anywhere between 7 and 10 minutes, depending on the day" (Dennis, personal communication 2016). Dennis, being responsible for delivering the program and webisodes on time and on budget, knew from her role that "the hierarchy is pretty clear usually on set. If you're the director and you're not running the show, then things are a bit weird" (Dennis 2016). She said that Hoodlum, gave her more freedom than she expected, but felt it was tempered by working with a crew that had worked with Hoodlum frequently which helped her have an understanding of the "Hoodlum Family" (Dennis, 2016). She remarked that fitting in the shooting of the police procedural webisodes was something that was adding to an already very busy shooting schedule and it added to trying to realise a lot in a short space of time; 'at the time it was very hard to achieve what we had to do in the schedule, so it was a bit like, "Oh my God, *and* we've got to squeeze in the webisodes!" (Dennis 2016). Arden-Wood felt that her relationship with Taylor and Mayfield meant she was letting them take the lead in creative decisions more than usual, because of Hoodlum's expertise and the recent changes in websites at Ten, but ultimately looked to Rick Maier, head of drama at Ten Network, as the person making decisions about the show. For Damon Gameau, an actor who worked across the police procedural webisodes, the lie detector webisodes and other sound and visual material, working with the smaller unit, offered a more relaxed environment:

> When you're doing the main episode you're sticking to a script, there's producers watching the split, there's a massive crew there that have all been gathered, so you kind of feel this obligation almost to honour the writer and the process that has got everyone to this point…you're just going to stick to the road a little more. When you've got a smaller crew, different cameramen, it's all a bit on the fly, it's like 'Yeah, we just want to get this stuff,' I think you inherently just feel a little more free, and it probably doesn't have the same significance or weight as the main does (personal communication 2016).

For Gameau, the size of the crew and the hierarchies that come with that meant staying under greater control, but the second unit offered an environment where he felt more able to contribute, but under the umbrella of it not being seen as having the same level of importance as the main unit.

As we have seen in all three previous case studies, *Secrets & Lies* ancillary texts were produced in a smaller, less controlled and more creative environment. This is because planning for the webisodes and outcomes needed are less strictly guided, according to Taylor and Gameau. What is different here is that this informality didn't extend to uncertainties regarding who was responsible for this content. It is clear to all stakeholders that Hoodlum is setting the direction and Taylor and Dennis are then creating the work. Like *Offspring*, the production of the webisodes was sometimes a burden or afterthought to the first unit.

Production Routines and Practices

Levine's analysis of *General Hospital* moves on from larger informal and formal institutional influences to discuss the creation of texts at the point of production. She describes this process as "influencing the kinds of stories that get told and the paths by which those stories proceed" (2001, p.76). The routines of communicating within the production personnel followed industry practice for the main unit but had a higher level of detail when outlining the ancillary texts. Communication between creative personnel occurred through meetings, phone calls, conference calls, emails, scripts, storyboards, visual style documents, face-to-face conversations, shooting schedules and a range of other less essential documents.

Lucas Taylor, whose work for Hoodlum was managing the ancillary material, describes his role as being in the writer's room with Steve Irwin (the show's writer) and Mayfield from the beginning to plot out how the narrative would work across each platform. Once the approach was locked down as well as a detailed script, a series of very detailed spreadsheets was produced listing platforms and story beats from a purely narrative point of view as well as spreadsheets listing timing of release of materials and platforms to be released on. This was included as part of a detailed 'show bible' which would outline in detail everything from the narrative perspective of the program. This material was then sent to Maier for approval and sent on to Arden-Wood for implementation. During shooting, Taylor was more involved with the second unit, as he told me that he was confident in the abilities of the main unit, and did not need to oversee it. He directed several of the 'lie detector' webisodes himself. He said he was most able to shape the material creatively in post-production and working in the edit suite. He described his position as essentially being responsible for all the extra material that was created during the six-week shoot.

As noted above, the ancillary texts were seen as working in a different genre than the anchor program, so this and considerations of the audience's perceptions and engagement altered the shooting of the material. Dennis spoke to me about a series of negotiated "style pointers" (Dennis 2016) by the creative team to emphasise the fact that the webisodes she shot (the police procedural webisodes featuring Hayes) felt different to the anchor program. From the point of view of style, the webisodes had shorter length shots, brighter lighting, fewer wide shots and exteriors and far more close ups of people speaking. For Dennis, these decisions were important as these decisions were made so that the audience understood that they were changing perspective when engaging with this material:

> You're meant to be suddenly in that classic procedural world of the cop, you feel like you're getting a key to another world rather than just going into the same world of the filmmakers. It felt maybe slightly less manipulative of us to do that, because you'd feel for a second like you are genuinely entering a totally different realm, rather than just seeing the same world from a different perspective that you happen to be given. I think it worked (Dennis 2016).

Dennis also expressed that a consideration for screen size was part of her thinking (with an emphasis on close ups) as her thoughts were that audiences would engage with this material on portable devices. She outlined that in some of the shooting for the main program, she would change where characters were placed in a shot, to emphasise or de-emphasise that character to lead to a pay off in the ancillary materials. This seems to show that while there was some consideration of distribution of materials in creation of these texts, the consideration of the webisodes being a different genre had a much bigger impact.

Taylor felt that these conversations around audiences were something that was more implicit in the shooting environment and did not need to be overly emphasised to other personnel. He felt that it was mainly serendipitous that "police procedurals were often 'two-handers…and so they were contained in that way from a story point of view, which naturally lent itself to that type of production" (Taylor 2016). He spoke about the narrative needs of the material having a stronger effect on shooting the webisodes than considerations of platforms of distribution. When viewing the webisodes, it is clear they are different in style and whether through the efficacy of the genre or deliberate decisions, they do work better for audiences on smaller screens than the anchor program.

The material shot concurrently with the anchor production was sometimes seen as disruptive by the director but had benefits to other members of the production. Dennis repeated to me several times that the extra material was agreed to from the beginning and an extra day was scheduled in the shooting to leave room to pick up the material, but nevertheless was sometimes seen as burdensome and simply extra work that needed to be squeezed into the schedule. As she describes,

> …Then you're asking yourself is it worth compromising the show itself for this material? That's when the equation becomes trickier to calculate… and that's when you need to know that it's going to be done well. You don't want to cut corners on the key show in order to produce content that might not be seen because it's not that great (Dennis 2016).

For other members of the production, this busier schedule was actually seen as a benefit. Gameau said that often the second unit would be at the ready and would shoot some material on set, when actors or sets were available and weren't being used by the main unit. For Gameau, this extra work was a bonus, as being an actor often meant waiting around for a long time when shots were set up or he was not needed:

> …most actors will tell you, and if they don't they're lying, there's a lot of sitting around, a film set can be incredibly boring…. I think making a film or a show can be a little monotonous, there's so much downtime between your takes. So for me the notion of being more active and engaged in the program on a personal level but also on a character level was something that was very enticing (Gameau 2016).

Gameau also spoke about the feeling that the second unit was more relaxed and it was easier for him to be creative in that situation. As he stated, "It was a bit looser and it wasn't quite as scripted, you haven't rehearsed it really, it's all a bit fresh and on the go….it is a little bit more spontaneous" (Gameau 2016). Dennis also said she got a lot of creative satisfaction working in a spontaneous, less planned way than when shooting the main unit. As an experienced director, she felt comfortable that she would still be able to deliver good content this way. Speaking to them both, the impression is that these times of being 'looser' with the production occurred more frequently with the second unit.

In this mode there are three factors that are a major influence. The perception of what audiences will want from a webisode on a portable device or computer, the ability to be creative with a smaller budget and the need for this material to fit-in with the schedule of shooting. These influences reflect how Levine describes *General Hospital* routines and practices: "The preoccupation with details and the persistence of assembly-line routines are in some ways necessitated by the textual form, in some ways by audience expectations, and in some ways by economic imperatives" (2001, p.76).

Production of Story

The narrative component shaped the production process of the ancillary texts. There was a hierarchy of ancillary material, from the point of view of story and each story section was plotted out before production commenced. Hoodlum's enthusiasm and innovation in the production of the story was evident, but they felt they were constrained on occasion by the network who felt that interest in using technology was in some places overriding an understanding of audience and tone. At times the Hoodlum personnel were seen as too close to the story and too focused on what could be done in multiplatform by the network.

In contrast to the previous case studies, plotting the narrative of the ancillary texts occurred at the same time as the scripts for the anchor program were being written. Producers of the program saw a hierarchy in the ancillary texts, with the police procedural webisodes being the most important. Taylor outlined that at the scripting stage he was with Mayfield and Irwin, and together they plotted out when, what and who would be involved in each story beat. This sometimes involved Taylor pointing to a plot point in the existing script as a chance to add extra material, or consciously removing material from the main storyline and repurposing it as ancillary texts. As Taylor explains,

> We stripped all the procedural out of the show and we put it online in these webisodes driven by detective Cornielle, and it was a great way for us to give really big, juicy story bombs within the webisodes, because we'd shifted our perspective and said, 'Well, this is a procedural so they can talk about the weapon' (Taylor 2016)

This information was written, as stated previously, into a large excel document that would relate each plot point to a medium and a time of release. Of the examples examined in this thesis this is the first example of Transmedia storytelling being implemented from the planning stage, and is much closer from a preproduction perspective to models put forward by Jenkins (2006a), Dena (2009) and Kinder (1993).

Carlos Scolari contends that ancillary texts, because of the efficacy of each medium, are inherently hierarchical and in the plotting of the story for *Secrets & Lies* it is clear the producers see a hierarchy at work. Not only are the police procedural webisodes shot by the main unit, elements of story are specifically positioned in the webisodes to emphasise their importance. Lucas Taylor describes the attitude:

> We wanted to migrate the audience across to the website, to watch the primary piece of content, the Cornielle webisode, and within that we wanted to give them one great piece of information, one great story bomb. And within that we would try to plot in more intrigue and the character beats around… One of the characters… What were they hiding? Were they being shifty when they engaged with Cornielle? (Taylor 2014).

The police procedural webisodes provide key information, for example the murder weapon is revealed in the webisode following Episode Two, and the other ancillary texts while conveying a lot of relevant and not-so-relevant information, does not reveal the same big surprises as the webisodes featuring Hayes. Hoodlum was seen by Network Ten as driving the show particularly in the implementation of the multi-platform storytelling, but there were some instances where Network Ten asked for changes in content. Claire Tonkin (Network Drama Executive) and Maier often would preview content before it was delivered to the digital department, or Arden-Wood would outline what sort of content was being delivered and would alert them to anything that was problematic, which was then negotiated between Network Ten and Hoodlum.

Arden-Wood outlined a particular scenario where ancillary texts where rejected because of concerns around tone. As part of the lead up to the launch of the program Hoodlum had produced an interactive music video. The clip featured a cover of a Nick Cave song and featured the viewer following the character of the little boy who is murdered just before the

beginning of the first episode. At certain points viewers were able to make choices about the direction the character was taking, and it also featured footage from the show 'flash forwarded' throughout the clip. Arden-Wood indicated she had to flag this content as being difficult for the network because the tone, despite the subject matter of the series, was too grim. As she outlines,

> Because you were following him and he had this little animated butterfly or dragonfly that was with him which were all very sweet and that feels nice, and then you realise, 'Oh, hold on. This is where he…' then you feel like you're responsible for leading him to this [his death], I think we were just a bit too close to him (Arden-Wood 2016).

This instance is noteworthy as, given Hoodlum's previous work with *Emmerdale, Lost* and *Spooks,* the thriller/mystery genre seemed to be a good fit for multi-platform storytelling. The drip feeding of facts to an audience is an aspect of that genre that works well across many platforms. In this case, however, the immersive nature of this approach did not work for Network Ten as, taken from the perspective of the victim (rather than the investigator of crime), the result was uncomfortable. Arden-Wood spoke about how a dialogue with Hoodlum continued about this for some time as they felt, as an interactive narrative, those reactions are what made it successful, and it was a stronger argument to use it. She continues:

> I think they had got caught up in the art of it and the cleverness of the interactivity, which was all great, but fundamentally it was not going to work for the show and so that was a bit of a battle….they were going, 'But it's really good!' and we were like, 'No, we can't do it because it is not what we want to be telling people!' (Arden-Wood 2016).

Arden-Wood specifically outlined the issues with this piece were that the tone was too bleak, and as a promotional piece it was highlighting the darkest moment of the show and the drama department felt that not only was it not a good way to draw an audience into a program, but that it may in fact produce the opposite effect. Arguments to Hoodlum were based not on the fact that the video may not comfortably fit into the storyworld of the program, but "there was something that they didn't feel like was in keeping with the way that the network was presenting the show or trying to sell a show to an audience" (Arden-

Wood 2016). So the argument here could be seen as being either a case of a production company being enamoured of technological possibilities or more likely an argument regarding what the purpose of this material ultimately was; story or promotion? At the same time, Mayfield and Dennis were arguing that they were trying to model the style of the show on darker Nordic Noir style dramas, so this reluctance may not have been felt at SBS or ABC. As Hoodlum's client, Network Ten's needs ultimately won out and the clip did not air: "Rick and Claire got a bit more involved, because we had to take it up a level just to make sure that [they knew] we weren't comfortable putting this out" (Arden-Wood 2016).

Despite the way Hoodlum presents itself through the media as an innovator, this shows that ultimately the production company is still there to serve the needs of the (in this case) network. It could be argued that this also illustrates that Hoodlum had changed in this time to something close to a traditional production company. It also challenges Mayfield's previous statement that "the dirty little secret is all multiplatform is marketing" (Mayfield 2014), and that perhaps in this case the marketing function is not being served, at least from the point of view of the network, and can lead to questions about how heavily based in promotion ancillary texts were really considered by the producers. It also points to the fact that this program was also part of an overall group of primetime programming that had certain institutional parameters, which Network Ten needed to adhere.

In her framework Levine uses a romantic plot point in the program *General Hospital* to "demystify" (2001, p.78) the process of meaning making in the process of creating the show. The story in *Secrets & Lies* is much more carefully planned out than the examples we have seen attached to *Danger-5, Nowhere Boys* and *Offspring*. Mayfield, Lucas and Irwin were involved in plotting out webisode story points from conception to release online. Although Hoodlum market themselves as using innovation to create a better connection to the audience, it is argued that Network Ten still exerts a strong influence on story, as the game focusing on the victim is vetoed. Ten's unwillingness with the technology or closeness in genre to Nordic noir is seen as the reason for this, but this point of story would have given audiences further perspective on the story, not offered in other texts.

Audience in Production

Levine contends that personnel consider audiences through direct feedback and often as an

audience of the program themselves (2001). The show's ability to reach an audience was something that was seen as both a failure and a success by production personnel. How the hierarchy works and if multiplatform can be successful without that anchor program succeeding was another question. How the audiences were managed online did not shape aspects of the production, but was an important part of the production, to help keep people engaged with the program. How the program was received internationally was also seen as validation of the program by some personnel.

Secrets & Lies was a critical success in Australia but was not able to reach a large enough audience for Network Ten. Scheduled on Monday nights the program had initially approximately 400,000 viewers and that number dropped to 350,000 during its run, then returned to just under 400,000 for the finale (australiantelevision 2014). This was not seen as adequate by Network Ten or Hoodlum, with numbers double that considered a success. A range of reasons as to why this program did not reach an audience was put forward by some personnel, including timeslot and the promotion of the program, but also all stated they were surprised and disappointed by the low ratings. Production personnel from Hoodlum were very careful in stating why the show was seen as not a ratings success, and its lack of local success was taken personally in some cases. Mayfield said that just under 40% of broadcast viewers were watching the online content after each episode and this was regarded as very strong by Network Ten also. Ultimately though, for Hoodlum "commercial success of multiplatform content is in some ways quite linked to success of the primary content which is the television show" (Taylor 2016). For a show with such strong multi- platform content, moderation of discussions on Zeebox and Facebook were shared by Hoodlum and Network Ten, mainly to have a presence over longer periods online. Both Network Ten and Hoodlum reported nothing unusual in this engagement, except for removing offensive content and enjoying the use of humour by some participants: "if they picked the culprit early in the piece, we didn't want to jump into a conversation and throw flags that might validate or dismiss theories. So we tried to stay relatively hands-off" (Taylor 2016).

How the success of the multiplatform content was measured by Hoodlum and what they saw as the purpose of the content was more sophisticated than seen in other case studies in this thesis. Both Taylor and Mayfield saw the ancillary texts as being successful in a number of measurements. Taylor stated that once on the site, audiences would look at nine pages on average, and when a video was played 86% of viewers would watch it to completion. The

numbers of people going to the website after the show went to air was also seen as very good, compared to Hoodlum's previous experience. As Mayfield explained, "I think the average conversion that we see on different things is two to three percent, and then on a big show for us out of the US like *Lost* or even *Emmerdale* in the UK, we were hitting sort of 20%, but to actually get something that hit sort of 40% conversion was just huge. So, in success the model worked, it's just that the volume wasn't enough" (Mayfield 2016). Hoodlum, perhaps in keeping with its history, measures multi-platform success based more on percentage of audience size rather than overall numbers:

> …you might have a million views in 24 hours, but it needs to be seen in the context of what's the primary broadcast, what's the flagship piece of content, what's their base audience? If you're working with an audience of 20 million … That's why I often think in percentages as the success rate as a multiplatform content creator' (Taylor 2016).

This is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, the discussions Hoodlum were having with me were much closer to how application developers communicate than television producers. The way Hoodlum saw audiences across multi-platform contexts, in this case audience members going from the anchor program to the website, was seen as a good thing, while other production case studies in this thesis were concerned with the website audience going to the anchor program. This perspective is based on Hoodlum's idea that audiences engaged with websites would return to the anchor program, also. How Hoodlum viewed the audience for this content was also different. As I have noted previously, often this content is viewed by producers as being for enthusiastic fans who are already very engaged. Mayfield saw the content as not having that purpose as "hardcore fans, they watch everything, good or bad, so you're not actually attracting any new viewers" (Mayfield 2014). Instead, he saw the role of the content as rewarding viewers and taking a marginally engaged audience member and making them more loyal:

> What we have to do in the way that we put these projects together is when someone finds a clue or when they're actually on top of the story, [the program] has to reach out, pat them on the back and say, 'You're a good sleuth,' that person will come back tomorrow. If the technology or the experience feels too cool, too tech-savvy, doesn't feel relevant or meaningful in story terms…you're just giving the finger to the

audience; you're making them work hard and you're making them feel stupid and they won't come back tomorrow (Mayfield 2016).

Despite the lack of audience connection at home, international sales and ratings were seen as validation of the project by a number of personnel, including its multiplatform content. While these deals were done before the first episode went to air on Australian television, the program has been a ratings success in both America and Europe. The remake in the United States was an initial ratings success running for two seasons before being cancelled. This was also a situation where Hoodlum was doing things differently, when the program was sold overseas the ancillary content was part of the deal. This was seen at the time by Arden-Wood as innovative:

> It's unusual that the digital and the ancillary digital content goes with it… For me it just further validates that it wasn't anything wrong with the show or with the digital experience, it was just the wrong place and the wrong time…our audience wasn't there yet. I honestly think if the show was on now, it would rate really well on Ten (Arden-Wood 2016).

All the people interviewed for this chapter expressed that this international success was a validation of two things; that the program had a strong story and that the multi-platform approach was correct, but mostly in that order. As Mayfield said, "the fact that we've sold it and it's done really well all over the world means that we got something right. I think it rated number one in Sweden, which is sort of like selling rice to China at the moment, selling a thriller to Sweden" (Mayfield 2014).

Discussion and Conclusion

Secrets & Lies and the production of its ancillary texts provides us with an example of how a small production company operated successfully in a local and international environment. Hoodlum needed the connections to an international industry to remain viable and because of its size needed a point of difference to set itself apart in a concentrated and competitive market in Australia. By setting up the program at Network Ten, Hoodlum was able to demonstrate an innovative approach in their production practice. It pushed multi-platform content and got Network Ten to agree to something the Network had not done before. The

practices it engaged with at the network changed the way Ten would operate with other production companies. The amount of money spent on the ancillary content, and even the location of the production, was unusual for the network and the industry at the time. While there were some contextual factors (such as Network Ten's going through a period of change in its online offering and wanting some expertise in engaging audiences online) this was an advantage for the smaller company in ways that perhaps it would not have been for larger companies. The international sales made by the organisation before the first episode went to air in Australia were evidence of the company operating in a similar way to bigger organisations like Fremantle Australia, with Hoodlum functioning more like a service provider to overseas organisations than a subsidiary. These sales also ensured that the organisation would be able to survive the poor ratings the program attained locally.

The environment, routines and practices shaped the production of texts. There were clear hierarchies that related to the texts and how they were made. The police procedural webisodes were produced with the most resources and effort and were of the greatest quality. They were also created by the main unit. The production of the other material was reliant on the second unit being very flexible around the main unit and offered a chance for greater creative input and a more relaxed environment. The nature of the genre and the intricacies of the plot meant additional processes were put in place to ensure that the story was consistent and all relevant material was created.

The story can be seen as the key factor in shaping these texts given that the ancillary texts were planned out specifically to serve the plot. In the minds of the producers, there was a clear hierarchy of platforms and plot points which were incorporated into different modes accordingly. The grim tone of the story was also a place where the Network would assert a stronger role overruling Hoodlum who argued the most important factor when deciding on ancillary content, was engagement. Hoodlum however, saw its audience differently, measuring engagement in a much more sophisticated way than in the other case studies in this thesis, by using several different metrics to measure success. They saw the material as more than just promotion of the anchor program. Their interest in how audiences moved between platforms was closer to transmedia theoretical approaches. They also saw the audience for this content as broader than other examples in this thesis. Where engagement with the multiplatform content was deemed successful, Hoodlum and Network Ten were clear both on what made it work and how they made it happen. The failure of the anchor

program to rate well was seen as something not understood or the fault of other people. This could be because the interviews focused on the ancillary content or because Hoodlum's experience was very solidly in the ancillary text world rather than television production, as this was Hoodlum's first commercial program.

In comparison to the two other small production companies in this thesis, Matchbox and Dinosaur, Hoodlum does see itself as an innovator, and worked differently to those organisations. Hoodlum was confident working in multi-platform content. While it cannot be argued absolutely that either the multi-platform content or the nature of a 'whodunnit' style thriller were the main reasons for success in international sales and a remake, the program certainly successfully engaged Network Ten's audience in ways that had not been done before. This led to a change in approach for the Network, while Hoodlum remained very much focused on the market in the United States, producing a range of shows during and after this period. The multiplatform approach remained the same on the remake of *Secrets & Lies* in the United States, but was renamed *Secrets and Lies*.

Having looked at case studies of the four webisodes in production between 2010 and 2014 we can now determine there are some common aspects across these examples. All programs had their story improved through webisode production. *Secrets & Lies, Offspring, Danger-5* and *Nowhere Boys* gave viewers more in the setting, character and plot through webisode production, particularly *Danger-5*, in its origin stories, and *Secrets & Lies* with its antagonist-focused procedural webisodes. All four productions were created by aspirational labourers: the unpaid workers of *Offspring* and *Nowhere Boys*; Hoodlum's offering of webisodes as a point of difference; the YouTube stars of *Danger-5* trying to bring their success to television. All four productions suffered from tension and anxiety as there were no clear measurements of when a webisode is successful when it comes to questions of audience size. For all the cases except *Secrets & Lies*, ambiguity over who was responsible for creating the webisodes caused problems within production.

In my conclusion, I argue that webisodes extend the story through reaching larger audiences and through offering more narrative across different platforms. I will also argue that the content needs to be of a reasonable quality and engaging and will make a case that Levine's mode can be adapted to suit webisode production in Australia, offering an effective framework for analysis with some refinement, including more emphasis on government

influences and the role of the global industry. I will also argue that webisode production reflects a changing industry during this time, with its particular emphasis on the role of aspirational labour on the periphery of the industry. Finally, the concluding chapter will point to further work and discuss the potential impact of this thesis.

Conclusion

As this thesis has demonstrated, webisodes as texts provide insight into larger issues at stake within the Australian television industry, while simultaneously revealing a story about an industry in transition. Webisodes were an industry practice that was part of the broader ecosystem, despite being ghettoised as wholly separate textual phenomena in previous academic treatments. This thesis contends that webisodes are worthy of a far more thorough investigation than they have received, particularly in how they mapped the changing terrain of Australian television between 2010 and 2014. Echoing Gray and Lotz, this thesis responds to the challenge that the field of television studies "requires the study of many other media… television's programs in particular requires the critical analysis of its paratexts" (2019, p.135). To do this, I reframed webisode production as both a cultural and economic practice. Through interviews and analysis of existing scholarship within the field, this thesis identified the key forces shaping four productions—my major case studies—during this period. The methodological framework for this was predicated upon Levine's method of analysis, which I have both refined, challenged and revealed to have enduring relevance beyond the period within which her work was originally produced.

This thesis differs from previous work that adopted Levine's method and thus offers a significant addition to the field. I looked beyond institutional analysis and audience analysis of transmedia production to reveal the key influences in this more recent development in television production. In response to Levine, then, I seek to de-emphasise the traditional focus on audience and textual analysis that permeates previous scholarship. Instead, this thesis is aligned more closely with other critical work that places production at the centre of meaning making (Adams, 2015; Chow-White, Deveau and Adams 2015; Maier 2018). This conclusion will explore and expand on arguments made previously in the thesis to illustrate influences on television production at this time.

Beyond Levine's Five Modes

Levine's five modes were developed to examine the production of American network soap-opera *General Hospital* in 2001. While examined during the period when television was transitioning to digital, the five modes - Production Constraints, Production Environment, Routines and Practices, Production of Story and Audience in Production - did not consider

online engagement as part of television production. These modes have provided an effective framework to analyse webisode production. A strength in these modes has been the ability to draw out themes and conventions on four productions that in many ways had little in common. The modes also offered scope to enhance the understanding of Australian drama's connection to a global industry and the significant role of government influence in Australian television production. It also enabled connections to be made showing that webisode production is an important – if peripheral – part of the television industry in this period.

Production Constraints: Identifying the Broader Influences

This study identifies production constraints, large institutional influences like regulation, economic factors and genre, as a key factor in creativity. Like Caldwell, I argue that without an acknowledgement of institutional forces, any comprehensive study of television production would be "impossible" (2003, p.133). Over the time when I undertook my research, my findings tend to support Caldwell's view here. I argue that, in relation to Levine's emphasis on production constraints, factors including government regulations, institutional forces and contractual agreements between production companies and networks were the most important forces that impacted the production of webisodes.

Regulation has historically shaped Australian television drama. Without content quotas, funding for public broadcasting and bodies to support drama production—as well as governments seeing value in local productions—these programs may never have existed. Government bodies like Screen Australia and the South Australian Film Corporation who supported the production of *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* offered some support for webisodes, but not to the same degree that they do their anchor programs. In 2018, Stuart Cunningham examined screen bodies supporting short form video production, but it was not a widespread practice to fund this material this way during this period.

Webisodes therefore existed on the periphery of television production because of the lack of government support, unlike traditional television. The need to monetise or fund the content was the main reason production was erratic and still without many conventions seen in Levine's mode. Rather, it was the contracts between production companies and networks that set out the framework for creation of webisodes. As stated by Tony Ayres in his discussion of *Nowhere Boys*, if additional material is in the contract, he can produce it, but if it is not, he does not. In *Offspring, Secrets & Lies* and *Danger-5,* network staff and production personnel tended to agree that these contracts were an important aspect of

production, even if in a small way such as in *Offspring* or in a greater capacity, such as in *Secrets & Lies*. One of the key lessons of the production of *Offspring: The Nurses* was that creative staff from Endemol realised that the responsibility for ancillary texts being created by Network Ten was an error. Endemol Shine created new webisodes for the show (*The Caravan*) in 2016, and in doing so took responsibility for managing ancillary texts. But the decision to change direction happened between seasons, through renegotiation of contracts.

Production environment: informal practices at the edge of production.

This mode emphasises the role of informal forces. Levine's article that includes union membership, genders and unofficial hierarchies. In her examination of *General Hospital* she speaks about how gender dynamics can influence production as some parts of production, such as the technical aspects, are male-dominated and other areas, like producing, can be female dominated (Levine 2001). She notes how some sections of production can have more power through limiting contact with cast and crew and how union regulation can affect work being completed. For the four case studies examined in this thesis, the dominating influences from this mode were the role of informal networks and a more relaxed atmosphere that is distinct from the anchor production.

This informality is reflected in recent discussions in scholarship, such as in the case of *Danger-5 the Diamond Girls, Offspring: The Nurses, Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday* and *Secrets & Lies*, webisodes that, as Lobato and Thomas would describe, are 'outsourced' (2015). They also adhere to Duffy's description of workers known as 'aspirational labourers' (2018). Defined as a formal part of an industry where workers gain skills or services from the informal sector—often with informal conditions for a range of reasons— 'aspirational labourers' tend to be less connected to production than people working within a more formal industry framework who trade skills and labour for access. Personnel across the four webisode case studies all spoke of the environment being more relaxed than regular production. That made this mode sometimes difficult to analyse as the *whole* of webisode production was labelled as being an informal practice. This made it somewhat harder to identify 'informal' forces at work, particularly in the case of *Nowhere Boys* and *Offspring*.

In the discussions with Hoodlum (*Secrets & Lies*) and Dinosaur Worldwide (*Danger-5*), union awards shaped pay rates, but there was no discussion of union activity in the production of *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday* and *Offspring: The Nurses*. Gender and

power are still an important and a relevant factor at all workplaces but did not dominate discussions across the four programs. Not recognised for her contribution to the *Nowhere Boys* webisode, the work of David Hukka's sister, Nicole, illustrated both family power dynamics and patriarchal practices in television production. While this has not been a strong focus of these thesis it is important to note that these phenomena support recent work that argues "these hierarchies persist—and may be exacerbated with—the ascent of more individualised and flexible regimes of work" (Duffy 2015, p.2). So the informal environment could increase divisions and lack of access to proper recognition for women working in the media industry.

One aspect of the informal production mode repeatedly discussed in the four case studies was the importance of an informal network of production collaborators. While "many informal practices exist within formal organizations" (Thomas and Lobato 2015, p. 23), this was not discussed at length in Levine's original work. This could be because she was not examining more than one production, as this thesis is doing, where these relationships became apparent. We see this informality in these case studies in a number of details: for example, Kate Dennis (*Secrets & Lies*) was encouraged to relocate to Brisbane with the offer of staying at the producer's beach house; Ashby and Russo's *Danger-5* crew were mostly friends from university. Likewise, Andrew Garrick, Dave Hukka and Benedict Hardie spoke about how they enjoyed the ability to cast actors and recruit crew from their informal networks for *Offspring: The Nurses* and *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday*, which added to a spirit of trust and creativity on the productions. It also meant that, knowing personnel were working from aspirational motivations and wanted a credit of *Offspring* on their resumes, they were willing to work free. David Hukka and his collaborators on *Nowhere Boys* also worked in an informal unpaid capacity, collaborating with family and friends in a manner that drew them together to make the film happen. In all four programs, the lack of budget was often seen to benefit creativity, reflecting previous arguments made by Maier (2018, p.66).

This also reflects Cunningham's perspective that these connections or "social network markets" (2018, p.7) are a space where choices about consumption and *production* (my emphasis) are made. Cunningham further states that productions now exist "at the borderland between social networks and established markets" (2018, p.7). This occurs because social networks are insurance against the uncertainty of demand from both audiences, for content, and the industry, for skilled professionals. All productions discussed in the thesis reflected this very point. This could also explain how organisations and

personnel were able to keep creating webisodes in environments where often it was unclear what made them successful, beyond broad perceptions of innovation. The social network market offered further employment opportunities. Working on projects in an unpaid capacity was part of relationship-building undertaken in the hope of ensuring paid employment within these networks in the future. Cunningham sees this not on the periphery of media production, but as a significant "proto-industry" (2018, p.8) worth examining on its own. The question of potential exploitation by producers here is worthy of note, but must be framed through the fact that "the informal economy is about desire as well as danger" (Thomas and Lobato, 2015p. 8). Despite the 'danger' of exploitation, these informal productions were often spaces where people willingly traded labour for experience or access.

This section follows in Levine's mode in looking beyond official or formal forces, like contracts or regulation to other large forces that shape production, but are often not explicitly set out. While the roles of unions and gender were touched on in this thesis, similar to Levine's examination of *General Hospital* (2001), other aspects have a larger impact. The more relaxed environment, use of networks within production and work on webisodes being aspirational labour are intertwined. They are the key elements in this mode of webisode production.

Production Routines and Practices: Creating Texts Using New Methods

Levine describes the impact of daily routines and practices in her work as having an impact on meaning making as "daily work routines negotiate textual meaning, at times fracturing it and at times fixing it" (2001, p.73). At times these processes can hinder or improve the production of texts, for an audience. In this mode we can see personnel making decisions that make webisodes different to broadcast television and improve them for viewers. Where it moves away from Levine's analysis of *General Hospital* is how much power over the texts is in the role of directors and/or producers, compared to broadcast drama.

In production routines and practices, we saw some changes in style to suit webisodes and the strong role directors had in shaping these texts. Directors would often speak of changing the composition of shots to suit web audiences, and Andrew Garrick *(Offspring: The Nurses)* and Kate Dennis (*Secrets & Lies*) included more close ups of actors to suit an online audience and talked about faster cuts. David Hukka (*Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday*) spoke about lengthening the temporal duration of shots in editing to suit the style of the anchor program;

in his case, it was more of a compromise between his style and the expectations of a television audience, not the assumed demands of an online platform. On *Offspring: The Nurses* and *Secrets & Lies* both directors spoke of working faster on shorter schedules due to time pressures and smaller crew sizes.

The role of directors was particularly important in webisodes, more so than in regular television production. Personnel working on *Offspring: The Nurses* spoke of how Garrick had an unusual level of control that encompassed casting, script approval and budget. The webisodes would not have existed at all if it were not for Garrick's involvement and passion. The $30,000AUD budget for the first season was originally intended for making-of videos, until Garrick pitched the webisode idea to his manager. In Dario Russo's case with *Danger-5*, webisodes were the result of two factors: a desire to emulate the previous success of *Italian Spiderman* (Ryan and Hearn 2010) and because he had specifically applied for funding to make webisodes. For David Hukka, while drawing on generosity of family and friends, *Visions of Yesterday* would not have happened without his interest in making the film. The *Nowhere Boys* fan films would have been produced regardless. So apart from *Secrets & Lies*, the webisodes in the four case studies in this thesis would not exist if other personnel were involved without an interest in this form.

This echoes the role of websites attached to television programs in the early to mid-90s, as argued in Chapter 5's analysis of *Behind the News, Hot Chips and Heartbreak High.* Webisodes were a significant new development for personnel, but not yet a 'must have' and it was unclear what purpose they served. Levine stated that "routines are in some ways necessitated by the textual form, in some ways by audience expectations, and in some ways by economic imperatives" (2001, p.76). It is the latter that adds to the ambiguity of purpose. In an environment where audience figures for a broadcast program are the sole measurement of success (whether for advertising rates or to meet a public broadcasting charter), not being able to clearly show how webisodes add to these numbers puts them in a statistical grey area.

Production of Story: Extending Narrative Beyond the Single Screen

Levine argues that narrative for *General Hospital* is driven by "nearly all *GH* employees to some extent" (2001, p.76). As an ancillary text to an anchor program this is a profound influence on webisode production. Having a symbiotic relationship to an anchor text, personnel are careful to add value to an original text, while being entertaining and

engaging in their own right. Webisode production certainly fits comfortably into Levine's arguments as it has been argued that all personnel contribute to storytelling. There is a lot of variety across the four case studies in the Production of Story mode. I contend that access to resources, and lack of access, is one of the other common themes when noting how personnel shaped the story.

Turning to the question of narrative, all four case study webisodes took different approaches. *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* was a prequel, set before the beginning of the first season. *Offspring: The Nurses* was a series of interstitial stories occurring between episodes of the anchor program within the first three seasons. The webisodes for *Secrets & Lies* and *Offspring* are set between episodes and are a different genre to the anchor programs. *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday* offered a parallel story from the anchor program's diegesis, with an unclear timeline in relation to how the two related. From a storytelling perspective, the conventions for webisodes linked to anchor programs are not rigid.

Stories were often created through practical decisions about access to resources. For Garrick, working on *Offspring: The Nurses* meant he would write webisodes around the access to two or three actors and one set (either the hospital or the bar). In Russo and Ashby's case with *Danger-5,* most of the scenes used for the webisode series were cut from other episodes, which were written in a linear order. As they were already created, sets and props did not need to be built or obtained specifically for these webisodes. David Hukka had the lowest budget of all four webisode case studies for *Visions of Yesterday*, and this shaped the production which had non-professional actors and crew, location filming and the need to cover most key roles in production between himself and his sister Nicole. While the *Secrets & Lies* webisodes were more clearly planned, their production also adheres to this framework. The police procedural webisodes featured two to three actors and one set, while the lie-detector webisodes were monologues to camera in one setting. This deviates from some key transmedia scholarship: Jenkins (2006a), Evans (2014), Scolari (2009), and Dena (2009) each discuss transmedia practice by examining pre-production, production and post-production as well as reception by audience and critics. As a relatively newer type of production, while this makes sense trying to understand this cultural practice, I have found a necessary emphasis on production is far more fundamental than this previous work has acknowledged.

My research has discovered that examining only flagship programs at the well-budgeted and innovative end of the transmedia spectrum obscures the reality that many other programs (and in this thesis, three out of four of my case studies) created transmedia texts based on questions of access. This meant stories could change on the day of shooting. This thesis places key decisions about the production of transmedia texts more explicitly in the actual shooting context of webisodes, not pre-production. This supports Corner's notion that production studies are a key point of the creative process (1999). I argue this was the second most important convention shaping production after contracts and regulation, differing from Levine's conclusions about *General Hospital.* For *Offspring, Danger-5* and *Secrets & Lies*, webisode narratives have been shaped by storylines edited out of the main text or organised around the availability of sets and/or actors.

Audience in Production: Success and Failure in the Eye of the Beholder

Levine describes "the industry's conception of the audience" (2001, p.78) as being behind all aspects of production. The makers of both *General Hospital* and the webisodes studied for this thesis spend much of their time considering how their work will be received by a potential audience. Where webisode production differs is that their personnel at this time are not building on work that has been occurring for years. They really don't know what is regarded as success, from audience size to ideas of quality. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, the way in which personnel working on these webisodes perceived audiences is crucial. There were notable differences in how production staff perceived audiences and their willingness to engage with information about them. How the lines between personnel and audiences blurred in a production context was another factor. This worked both in regard to audience members moving into the production space themselves, but also involved established production personnel becoming more like audiences. For commercial networks, ratings are the main shaping factor, with public broadcasters guided by public charters set out in legislation.

In her work with *General Hospital,* Levine discussed the perception of audience by production personnel through ratings. She also found producers placed great emphasis on letters received from viewers. The data available to production personnel is now even greater. Personnel working on *Offspring* monitored dedicated social media channels like Facebook, as well as network-owned applications like Zeebox. ABCME had a sophisticated dataset from the website including keywords from comments associated with content

attached to specific programs. This information included audience numbers, where they were from, how long they watched content and their age and sex. This fits with Kim's assertion that one of the key ways producers see the internet is as a marketing platform for broadcast programs (2010). The uses of fan made content by ABCME supports Matt Hills (2012) contention that extended storytelling is a space for negotiation between creators and fans of the show. In David Hukka's case, this concept of negotiation was taken to the extreme, where it occurred within his own creative process, rather than between parties. In the work of Russo and Ashby with *Danger-5,* there is evidence of what Banks—drawing on Levine—describes as "'audience-like' behaviour of production personnel" (2018, p.158). It is clear these two practitioners were expected to bring an audience perspective into their work.

Across this thesis I have examined production personnel's understanding of audiences, but this does not account for the fact that personnel were often unwilling to engage with information available to them about audiences. In the example of *the Offspring: The Nurses* and *Secrets & Lies,* Vanessa Arden-Wood (digital content producer) stated ratings really reflected audience interest. We saw this in how sophisticated information about audiences taken from ancillary texts were not discussed beyond audience numbers by production personnel. By moving away from webisodes to social media, *Danger-5* was able to understand their audience better. It is clear that David Hukka, who worked on the fan film *Visions of Yesterday* for *Nowhere Boys*, felt that ABCME was shoe-horning a television style into online videos, which was not the best fit for their audience. This is despite ABCME having the most sophisticated understanding of their audience, from online data, of all four case studies. Levine argues that production personnel are fans of the program and feedback is gathered through ratings, letters and personal opinions of *General Hospital* to form a view of the audience. Where webisode production differs is that some personnel want more information to form an opinion and cannot get it, while others have more information, but will not use it.

Response to Research Questions

This thesis has argued how each of five modes fit into and move beyond Levine's framework when webisode production is analysed over this time. A benefit of this approach is to make clear further arguments in favour of all five modes. In this section I will address the four research questions across all four case studies and Levine's five modes to show us how the process has shaped production.

This thesis contends that webisodes extend the storyworld in four ways: they provided a richer narrative in complexity and scope; they provided a more engaging story; they extended story beyond one platform; and they grew the audience. These case studies supported the idea that "film and television producers tend to surround shows only with those paratexts that are likely to add value for their desired audience" (Gray 2010, p.114). Across all of my case studies, producers sought to give audiences something of value narratively in the webisodes they created. Despite webisodes having a stronger marketing/promotional purpose, these examples clearly prioritised story.

The four case studies demonstrate how webisodes provided a richer experience for audiences by giving viewers additional narrative content. Building on studies by Perryman (2008), Baltruschat (2010, p.140), Goggin (2012) and Hills (2002), in these case studies producers used ancillary texts to provide better engagement and a deeper understanding of a narrative world. *Offspring: The Nurses* expanded on ideas introduced in the anchor episodes and shared more information about supporting characters and pushed the comedic sense of the show. *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday* was a story set in the world of the show that further reinforced the show's themes. *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* shared with audiences the protagonists' origin story, something not discussed across the two seasons of the anchor show. The *Secrets & Lies* webisodes provided a range of narrative information to help viewers solve the murder mystery, and specifically much more information on Anthony Hayes's character, which altered his meaning and function from a mysterious figure to a more complex, well-rounded character. These webisodes kept viewers engaged with material connected to the story of the program for longer. In the case of *Nowhere Boys,* that included the option of inviting viewers to make their own webisodes drawing on themes of the program and potentially set in the diegesis of the anchor show. The transmedia texts accompanying *Secrets & Lies* were abundant, allowing viewers access online to help solve a mystery. This engagement included two types of webisodes. All programs used webisodes to make original content available on a second platform—the internet—available on a range of portable and desktop devices.

Whether webisodes grew audiences is difficult to answer. All four programs certainly held audience attention for longer periods than audiences who watched only the anchor programs.

Audiences for webisodes were smaller in all cases. Personnel gave a range of responses to the question of if the webisodes grew audiences. *Danger-5* needed to bring the audience from a previous online film to the new project and failed. In *Offspring's* case, there was not much consideration to growing the audience, but there was satisfaction in getting much larger audiences than making-of style videos that had been relied on previously. Hoodlum saw the primary purpose of their webisodes as growing the audience. As a percentage of the audience, *Secrets & Lies* had the best outcome of all four by far, but there was no evidence given that this audience was new and the show itself was a ratings failure. This is a crucial point as the online audience for the program was 300,000-400,000. If it was clear to Hoodlum that this new audience was coming to the existing broadcast audience (700,000 to 800,000), the combined audience would have been enough to keep the show running into a second season. Without the online audience, the existing audience would be much smaller, but because Hoodlum cannot clearly show the connection between the two, we do not know. Hoodlum's Nathan Mayfield says the business purpose for these texts is to build audiences and court new audiences. This places these texts in the framework of Newman and Levine, a promotional strategy with some added story benefits. Levine does not examine the role of promotion in production in her work on *General Hospital*, but it does fit into the arguments of Newman and Levine that producer/writer/directors were using these methods for business reasons (2012, p.143). It may show that production companies may not have had a strong grasp on their return-on-investment, fundamental to most business ventures but hard to articulate in webisode audience analysis. My research found evidence that while webisodes kept audiences connected and engaged to programs for longer, they did not grow audiences significantly.

How should we adapt concepts and methods devised to explain traditional broadcast television for contemporary multiplatform television?

One purpose of this thesis was to answer the question of whether a pre-internet method of analysing television production is effective in a post-digital environment. The answer is for the most part yes, with some exceptions. Levine's method was open enough to give a structure to discussions of four programs which were very different. *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday* was fan-generated content. *Offspring: The Nurses* has webisodes set between episodes, in a different genre style, and features supporting characters. *Danger-5: The Diamond Girls* told a prequel, origin story and features the entire main cast. The *Secrets & Lies* webisodes were part of a range of texts between episodes that fit within a complex

narrative.

Levine's modes give more prominence to personalities, which did have an impact on all four of my case studies, and which would have been lost if the emphasis had stayed purely institutional forces and perceptions of the audience. Garrick drove the production of *Offspring: The Nurses*, Russo and Ashby from *Danger-5*, Ivana Rowley and Hukka from ABCME and Nathan Mayfield from Hoodlum ensured webisodes were produced in an environment which was supportive generally for webisodes but were largely indifferent to their production. The inability of webisodes to demonstrate their influence on both ratings and revenue is the main reason for this.

Webisodes are, as Carol Scolari notes, the closest in form to anchor programming (2009). Levine's five modes—particularly the informality of the production routines and practices, production of story and production environment—allows a methodological approach which helps me identify differences in webisode production and their anchor programs. I agree with Christy Dena (2009) that, overall, the practices outlined in this thesis are not within themselves exclusive to transmedia modes and have commonalties to television and fan fiction production. Where I differ from her however, is in placing the concept of transmedia *production* at the centre of analysis; Dena's approach risks de-emphasising the crucial role of institutions and spur-of-the-moment decision-making that is so vital to creative productions. It also privileges pre-production, by looking at scripting, funding and the producer's intentions thereby placing these productions more closely in line with the work of Jenkins (2006a) and Evans (2014). The value of Levine's approach, which emphasises factors such as contracts, the importance of informal networks and individual passion, is arguably lost in these other approaches.

Levine's five modes also highlight other factors that help illustrate the difference between the television industry in the United States and Australia during this period. The Australian industry is smaller and there are fewer clear conventions than industries in America or the United Kingdom. One illustration of this is that the personnel approached for this thesis worked across two of the programs. Kate Dennis directed *Secrets & Lies* and *Offspring* webisodes, while Vanessa Arden-Wood worked on both *Offspring* and *Secrets & Lies* also. Many people I was unable to secure interviews with worked on *Nowhere Boys, Offspring* and *Secrets & Lies* or some combination of the three.

Levine's modal approach allows a strong understanding of webisode production, but my case studies suggest this needs to be refined. In all of my examples, two areas have a significant influence on production, which I argue demand their status as new modes themselves: **Government Influence** and **Global Industry Factors.** All programs in this thesis and Australian drama on television at this time would not exist without government policies and funding. Government quotas for Australian content, funding bodies and government support for public broadcasting are key factors in the history of the Australian television industry and remains so. When Levine discussed *General Hospital*, this would have fit under the mode of Production Constraints. Government forces shape content to some extent in the United States, but this does not dominate production in the same way as it does in Australia. To be clear, all four anchor programs in this thesis were supported by government funding.

The second new mode I propose here looked forward to the future of Australian television and has a shorter history than government influence. Global industry factors that shaped local production *could* fit under Levine's method as Production Constraints, but due to the forces sometimes being in opposition to local factors, I argue it is more effective as its own mode.

I demonstrated how Hoodlum's international success in creating ancillary texts helped them with work in Australia, but local attitudes towards webisodes at Network Ten were largely indifferent. As noted in Chapter One, Ciancia (2013) argued that transmedia content building encourages collaboration between different production companies. We saw in this thesis that Endemol, Hoodlum and Matchbox all had global connections and are part of a worldwide industry. Further development of this mode could determine whether this phenomenon is part of widespread industry change or more common in multiplatform production. *Nowhere Boys* was a program created outside of a system that Anna Potter argues, in this period, primarily serviced international media companies (2015, p.133). *Danger-5* was created for Adult Swim as a secondary market that does not feel it was able to find a suitably niche broadcaster locally. This thesis argues that for production companies, creating ancillary texts is part of an approach that enabled producers in Australia to compete in a globalised workplace, one described by Hilms as "a new digital world of intertextuality and expanding global franchises" (2012, p. 308).

Finally, I would contend that the Production Environment mode needs further refining to be wholly suitable to webisodes. Levine's mode examines informal factors that can influence

production such as relationships based around gender or union membership. Yet in this thesis, I would argue that informal networks are a major factor in production. These are not discussed at length in Levine's paper. In *Offspring: The Nurses, Danger-5: Diamond Girls* and *Nowhere Boys: Visions of Yesterday,* we see crews that worked as extensions of networks of friends and family. This relationship speaks to "a certain kind of interdependency between formal and informal media" (Thomas and Lobato 2015, p. 4). These networks allowed production personnel leeway in blurring lines between professional and amateur, with people working on productions gaining access to an industry that might have greater barriers to restrict their entry into the workforce without their being part of an ancillary text.

What New Conventions are Emerging from this Type of Storytelling?

Using Levine's framework there are further industry conventions we can identify having developed over this period. Having an internet presence was important in the television industry, but how it was used varied wildly. For websites connected to drama programs, storytelling was a 'second stage' approach after providing basic information. Webisodes were seen as one of many strategies which were still text specific. Building on this, producing narratives across multiple platforms is a common approach at this time, but many connections across texts are rare.

All four anchor programs in my case studies had an internet presence, and all obviously have webisodes, but the kind of online engagement varied between programs. *Offspring* had information about the program in text, links to watch the program online, making of videos and connections to social media presences. The site also featured an online storytelling application in the lead up to Season Five. *Secrets & Lies* had a dedicated website, with two types of webisodes, photographs, written text and sound content firmly placed in the storyworld of the program. *Danger-5* had webisodes, some written text and an online magazine set in the world of the program on their SBS site. *Nowhere Boys* had short video extracts from the program, written text, a video game set in the story word of the programs, some making-of videos and fan made webisodes as part of their internet presence. All programs were experimenting with a range of ancillary texts, and we can see from these examples that webisodes were part of a range of approaches. Aside from written text in the case of *Offspring, Nowhere Boys* and *Danger-5,* the ancillary texts change between seasons. As I have argued previously (Loads 2014), webisodes are one of many approaches, but were not seen as essential in this period.

A convention that emerges from this study was that there were more participants in the creation of story via transmedia texts, and so more chance to participate in creative choices. We see in *Offspring, Secrets & Lies* and *Nowhere Boys* that new people were able to develop the narrative. In some respects, this is just an extension of production with new practitioners following the vision of a director, certainly in the case of Nathan Mayfield and *Secrets & Lies.* It also shows on the same program that by opening the creative process to other areas we do see differences in outlook. As Gray Lotz suggest, "We may see several players jockeying for power—a network's marketing team may choose to highlight certain aspects of a show and to sell it as one entity, while the showrunner or stars may…highlight different aspects of the show" (2019). In *Offspring* we saw an example of this in the difference of approaches to the webisodes, and the gradual realisation by the core creative team that the production of ancillary texts needed to be in-house. In *Secrets & Lies*, the drama department refused to allow an interactive game to be a part of the promotion of the show as it was seen as bringing audiences too close to the death of a child character.

If there existed a spectrum for transmedia practice, three of the four case studies in my thesis would be at less complicated end of transmedia practice with some, but not multiple, connections between texts. The use of webisodes with *Secrets & Lies* fits into the definition of transmedia storytelling set out by Henry Jenkins (2006a); the use of multiple texts, including webisodes, mean there were multiple points of story intersection between the anchor program and the ancillary texts. This included revealing facts like the murder weapon (which is significant in a murder mystery program) and giving viewers an insight into the police working the case (the webisodes portray police in a matter of fact procedural way, giving viewers insight into character while the anchor show portrays policies as shadowy mysterious figures). *Danger-5* gave viewers insight into the origins of characters through its prequel series, but most of this information was not referred to again and unnecessary to enjoy the show. In *Offspring: The Nurses,* the content provided insight into peripheral characters, but because of the comedic tone, viewers may not have interpreted the information as crucial to understanding the anchor program's story. David Hukka's *Visions of Yesterday* sits in the world of *Nowhere Boys*, but is the least crucial narratively in regard to the audience's enjoyment and understanding of the anchor program. While these case studies were chosen for many reasons, they reveal a convention where there are fewer connections between webisodes and anchor programs than more complex references.

How is this Style of Production Becoming Formalised?

This thesis argues that there are a few aspects of webisode production which are consistent. While initially managed by marketing and public relations personnel, production companies were mostly responsible for webisodes, although union awards did acknowledge this type of work. From a narrative perspective there was a clear hierarchy: webisode content is subservient to the main storyline. A clear aspect of this type of production is that webisodes were created by personnel who were not key creatives; on a film set they would be referred to as a second or third unit.

Scholars have been concerned with the de-professionalisation of television production in the last twenty years (Grainge and Johnson 2015; Curtin and Sanson 2016). The webisodes considered in this thesis in many ways reflect this position. In two productions, no-one or very few people were paid. In three cases, personal connections were relied on to find workers. The ability to have much more creative licence across all four are evidence of this. As noted above, I would describe all four programs in this thesis as involving what Duffy (2015) called "aspirational labourers"; people who "pursue creative activities that hold the promise of social and economic capital; yet the reward system for these aspirants is highly uneven" (2015 p.3). In the early days of the internet, Australian websites connected to TV programs were set up in similar ways to how these webisodes were produced by people who had a passion for the mode of communication and with unclear remuneration for their work. The Australian television industry has always been much smaller than the industries in the United States or the United Kingdom, and there is certainly evidence that with a small pool of people working full time on television production in Australia, inevitably people will have strong informal networks. The idea that networks—both free-to-air and public—would feel comfortable broadcasting online or on their networks, video texts that had been created by people who are not paid, is troubling. The idea that ABCME showed professional looking fan-made content on its free-to-air channel that had been created by children supports the idea that the industry is becoming less clear in its professional conventions (Curtin and Sanson, 2016). This trend also blurs the line between audience and program creator.

The Future of Webisode Studies

Where to next with this area of study? There are other areas that evidently could be further researched in respect to multi-platform and transmedia television. Studies that look closely at

games connected to television like *The Fifth Boy* and *Nowhere Boys* and game-like applications like the *Moving In* application connected to *Offspring* would help develop this field. A closer look at only one program, with a range of many texts, like *Secrets & Lies* or *Conspiracy 365* would also answer further questions about these productions, beyond this thesis' specific focus on webisodes. Another survey of transmedia texts, looking at Australian drama specifically, following on from my previous work (Loads 2014) would be able to examine if this type of production has grown or shrunk since 2012. Discussion of the arrival of streaming services—Stan, Netflix and Disney+—has not occurred at great length in this thesis, for reasons outlined in the first two chapters (Cunningham and Craig 2019; Jenner 2018; Lobato 2019; Turner 2018). They are now a part of the television industry and any further study of this type of production would need to include Australian drama on these platforms.

Recently scholars have started to examine screen production at the intersection of television and promotional practices (Grainge and Johnson 2015; Curtin and Sanson 2016). The use of product placement and sponsorship in webisodes and applications connected to *Offspring* is an example of where 'branding' meets network television. A production studies examination of multi-platform screen production from the perspective of commercial sponsorship would also help build an understanding of Australian drama production on television. This thesis has expanded Levine's analysis to suit webisode production. I argue this framework would also suit analysis of other ancillary texts and could be adapted to other professional environments outside of the United States. This thesis has also contended that the role of government is crucial in the production of Australian drama and was crucial in funding these webisodes (Healy 2019). Further examination of how policies, funding bodies and screen associations help or hinder webisodes would provide an alternative account of the production outlined in this thesis.

Australian drama production was going through rapid change in this time with an uncertain future in front of it. Webisode production reveals how the industry was coping with that change. This thesis raises some worrying aspects in this context: a reliance on pre-digital measurements to measure success in a post-digital world; a willingness to experiment only when there is no risk; an industry comfortable with personnel working for no money and a general indifference to the internet as a storytelling platform. More positively I would argue that embracing complex ideas have extended story successfully, new methods of analysing audience satisfaction are being used in some examples, and this innovation is driven by

passionate individuals and groups who have expanded ideas of what Australian drama production can be.

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Appendices

Ethics Application

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL of a RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Date Received
....

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

[Nb This application form should not be used for research involving clinical trials or ionising radiation. See below.**]**

PROJECT FULL TITLE	Webisodes: Extending Narrative and Promoting Australian Television Drama online.
SHORT TITLE (If applicable)	
APPLICANT DETAILS	
RESPONSIBLE SWINBURNE FIRST INVESTIGATOR / SUPERVISOR (Where project is part of	Name & Title/Position: **Jock Given, Professor of Media and Communications** Tel No(s) ext 4887 Email jgiven@swin.edu.au Fax 03 98195349

student research degrees or dissertations, Senior Swinburne Supervisor must still be listed as the first investigator)	Faculty / School / Centre / Institute: Swinburne Institute…………………………………… Swinburne Status: ☒ Swinburne Staff Member Adjunct Staff Member Address for correspondence: Mail #53
Please complete as clearly as possible. (For Honours, higher degree and discrete student projects.)	**Main Student Investigator(s): Matthew Loads** Email: 1181777@student.swin.edu.au Tel No(s) 0403011174 Student ID Number: 1181777 Fax 03 98195349 Degree Being Undertaken: PhD

List below the names of other Chief/Associate Investigators and Research Assistants (including those with access to identifiable data).

(Add (copy/paste) cells as required for additional investigators/assistants. Append Student lists for class projects.)

Name & Title: Julian Thomas, Director, The Swinburne Institute	
Institutional Address Swinburne Institute	Tel No(s) 9214 5466
Name & Title/Position:	
Institutional Address:	Tel No(s)

Proposed Period During Which Human Research Activity Requiring Ethics Approval is Needed:	**From**	1 *dd*	11 *mm*	2013… *yyyy*	**to**	21 *dd*	12 *mm*	2014…. *yyyy*

[Double-click on ☐   YES/NO 'check box' to select box, then enter Default Value as Checked ☒   or leaving as Not Checked ☐]

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	☐	Research by Staff Member	☐	Contract Research (Attach copy of contract)
(Select as many boxes as applicable)	☒	Supervised Postgraduate Research	☐ Supervised Undergraduate Research	
	☐ Supervised Class Projects: Subject Code & Short Title:	No of students involved:		

Broad Category of Research

Select <u>one</u> category box which best fits the application:

☒ Social/Cultural/Humanities ☐ Business/Management ☐ Education/Training/Program Evaluation

☐ Psychological/Brain/Neuro-sciences ☐ Health/Safety ☐ Engineering/Science/Technology

☐ Other (please specify) ………………………………………………………

[For research involving Clinical Trials or Ionising Radiation, please contact the Research Ethics Officer.]**

Official Use Only:

☐ **Higher Risk/Impact** ☐ **Minimal Risk/Low Impact Research Only**

☐*SUHREC* ☐ *SHESC (HBS - A / B)* ☐ *SHESC (SBT - A / B)* ☐ *Other* ☐ *Notification Only*

Human Research Risk/Review Classification **(Nb Checking to be consistent with <u>published risk criteria</u>.#)**

To enable a determination as to whether prima facie your research activity is Minimal Risk and/or Low Impact, please clarify by selecting [X] any one or more boxes below as to whether your research activity involves:

[Double-click on ☐ YES /NO 'check box' to select X by entering in Default Value as Checked ☒ or leaving as Not Checked ☐]

☐ Vulnerable participants, children or those dependent on care*	☐ Indigenous Peoples* or Special Cultural/Ethnic groups
☐ Externally funded research requiring HREC-level clearance*	☐ Multi-centre/Other sites requiring HREC-level approval*
☐ Research conducted overseas	☐ Conflicts of interest or dual researcher-professional roles
☐ Data access/use without an individual's prior consent*	☐ Data access/use subject to statutory guidelines &/or reporting*
☐ Identification of participant individuals/groups in research outcomes without full consent or there is unclear consent for this*	
☒ Sensitive information/issues vis-à-vis context/impact (legal*, regulatory compliance*, commercial, professional, cultural, etc)	
☐ Personally intrusive/confronting or quite inconvenient/embarrassing questioning or other activity	
☐ Physically confining/invasive techniques or significant physical contact/stimulation (TMS*, X-ray*, CT scan*, MRI*, clothing change, etc)	
☐ Working in hazardous environments (asbestos dust*, infectious disease*, war or civil strife*, etc)	
☐ Handling hazardous substances (eg, asbestos*, radioactive material* , explosives*, etc) or equipment	
☐ Administration of medical/herbal substances*/treatments*	☐ Administration of other (non-medical) substances/treatments
☐ Health/medical diagnosis*/therapy*	☐ Non-minimal impact therapeutic or other devices*/activity*

☐ Screening for healthy participant inclusion/exclusion	☐ Medical or psychiatric assessment/conditions ∗
☐ Serious psychological profiling, investigation or exploration	☐ Withdrawal of treatment/services or use of placebo
☐ Withdrawal/substitution of educational/professional/commercial/recreational/other programs or services	
☐ Deception or covert observation	☐ Limited or non-disclosure of research information/procedures
☐ Participant recruitment/selection via third party	☐ Human research activity commenced without clearance
☐ Participation incentives, prizes or significant payments	☐ Research placing researchers/assistants at risk

PLEASE NOTE: If you have selected any one or more of the above boxes, your project will ordinarily be put for SUHREC ethical review. Items above marked ∗must be put to SUHREC proper. But in other cases, you may wish to put a case for expedited review by a SUHREC Sub-Committee (SHESC) in the (expandable) box below in relation to the criteria for determining risk/impact. If you put forward a case, then in the first instance your application will be put to the relevant SHESC; however, the relevant SHESC may still consider the project needs full SUHREC appraisal or SUHREC may review or override the SHESC decision.

Risk/Impact Checked with a Research & Ethics Advisor (REA)? Yes ☒ **No** ☐ REA Comment, Initials & Date:	
……	

A1   *WHY* IS THE PROJECT TO BE UNDERTAKEN

Summarise in sufficient detail why the project is being undertaken. If references are quoted, full citations should be given. Include the educational and/or scientific aims of the project. *(boxes will expand for your text)*

> The research is being completed as part of a doctoral thesis. It is the first time a comprehensive study has taken place involving documenting the production process of Webisodes, in Australia, and at this stage internationally. The focus will be on television drama productions, which use webisodes, because of the importance of drama production to the medium of television and the significance of narrative to the genre of drama.
>
> Webisodes (short form ancillary texts which continue the narrative of television programs using original content online), hold a significant position as texts that:
>
> 1) Are a television format produced specifically for the internet.
> 2) Are used to extend the narrative world of story using methods that are relatively new.
>
>   3) Often have strong promotional aspects to them, which can lead to creative and unusual outcomes.
> 4) Are associated with television programs with a reasonable budget, but other motivations for using them are unclear.
>
>
> As television and the internet are more closely aligned, documenting the process of Webisode creation will fill a gap where there has been little analysis by academics, and some discussion by television industry.
>
> This is a vital topic, culturally and more specific to the television industry as despite nearly twenty years of texts like webisodes existing, there is still, for the most part,

industry speculation on the definition and purpose of these texts.

Webisodes: Extending Narrative and Promoting Australian Television Drama online will investigate the social, economic and technological motivations that shape television producers decisions in the creative process and offer fresh insight into an industry and a changing medium.

A2   _WHAT_ - BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

In plain English

> The project will be the first study of the production process for webisodes created in conjunction with television drama, intended for distribution online. Texts like webisodes, short form ancillary texts which continue the narrative of television programs using original content online, have emerged in Australia and overseas. This study aims to analyse these texts and discover what cultural and economic forces shape their creation, and what expectations producers have on the impact the texts will have on audiences.

A3   _HOW_ - PROCEDURES

Please detail clearly and sufficiently the proposed research/statistical method(s), procedures and instruments to be used in the project, including all screening and research 'procedures' to which the participants will be subjected, and asterisk those which may have adverse consequences.

Please include as appendices all screening instruments, questionnaires, interview protocols etc (at least in draft form if not finalised).

> The project will involve one kind of research involving human subjects:
>
> Interviews with Industry Informants:
>
> Six case studies of prominent contemporary television cross-platform drama productions.
>
> Interviews with other informants, television production experts.
>
> Length of Case Studies:
>
> Each Case Study will contain three stages of interview:
>
> Interview one: To be completed during an estimated 4-6 weeks of preproduction
>
> Interview two: To be completed during an estimated 4-12 weeks of production
>
> Interview three: To be completed during an estimated 4-8 weeks of post-production.
>
> <mark>Each stage of interview will be with the same individual participant.</mark>
>
> So within this framework it is estimated that each case study will cover a period

of three – seven months.

What information will be gathered:
Information gathered will cover a range of topics discussing the production process of webisodes. From the day to day production of these extended texts, as part of drama production, to the strategic place of these texts within the industry of broadcast television and where they are placed in terms of storytelling and promoting television drama.

The information will take the form of answers to questions based on several topics (see attached interview topics sheet).

Who will review it?

This information will be reviewed by the project supervisor, and any quotes used will be reviewed and consented to by industry participants.

The project will also draw on third party data sources, including (but not limited to):

internet usage data.

television ratings data collected by OzTAM;

Separate consent forms and Information for Industry Informants are attached, together with separate lists of Interview Topics for Industry Informants.

If you feel that it is necessary to include further material, please append.

A4   DESCRIBE ANY RISK THAT MAY ARISE TO THE PARTICIPANT / DONOR?

Risk to participants (and to researchers) can be real but does not need to be physical. Risk includes such as self esteem, regret, embarrassment, civil or criminal liability, disease, physical harm, loss of employment or professional standing, etc. Please consider such possibilities carefully

Some research activities may put the *participant* at risk through what is being done or simply through their participation.

Please describe the risk you perceive and the protective measures to be taken.

There is minimal risk for participants in this study.

Industry participants: These are media professionals accustomed to being interviewed about their work. They may make comments in the course of discussion with a trusted researcher which they would not want published. To avoid such a risk researchers must be scrupulous about checking back with interviewees for amendments and approval of transcripts.

Industry participants will be identified in the study, but this will be clearly communicated to them, and done with their consent. Apart from identifying the production worked on, their role and their name all other information pertaining to them of a private nature (Email addresses, phone numbers etc.) will be handled with the utmost care, including storing them in databases that are password protected and only accessible to the key researcher and supervisors.

At any stage of the process, when notified, participants can withdraw from interview(s).

A5   DESCRIBE ANY RISK THAT MAY ARISE TO THE RESEARCHER / ADMINISTRATOR?

Some research activities may put the *researcher* at risk through what is being done or simply through their participation.

Please describe the risk you perceive and the protective measures to be taken.

There is minimal risk anticipated for researchers in this study.
There would be a risk if a researcher published information and/or opinions expressed in interviews, which participants did not want exposed. Identities of case study principles and survey participants would only be cited with express written approval.

The researcher's presence in locations where television production is taking place will also offer minimum risk. Television production locations adhere to strict occupational health & safety guidelines, and the researcher will comply with these guidelines and attend any training as deemed necessary. The student

investigator has extensive experience in television production and has been employed by universities to train media students in workplace safety on set.

Section B describes the safeguards against such risk.

A6   WHAT BENEFITS ARE ANTICIPATED FROM THE PROJECT

Ethical principles would require that benefits flowed from the activities - but please avoid grandiose claims.

(a) To the Participant (what and how so)

The majority of the participants in the project are highly regarded television producers. They are working in ways that are innovative, in an area of production that is relatively new and experimental. Recording their thoughts on the production process, in itself is a recognition of achievement, and will enable them to share expertise with other professionals in the television industry and academia. This will enhance television production, and add to industry perceptions of them as being innovative thought leaders.

(b) More generally (to society, profession, knowledge, understanding, etc, and how so.)

As the first comprehensive study of webisodes, produced as additional material for Television drama the project will improve understanding of a vital area of Australia's creative future. The research will document how television production is transitioning in terms of changes in distribution, and how creative decisions are shaped by cultural, economic and technological forces. The project will also look forward by indicating which projects are successful in terms of audience size and critical acclaim, and will help guide industry, in future production decisions.

A7   POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

From time to time in the course of a research project important information, such as an individual found to be at risk, or entirely unforseen events may come to pass. What procedures are in place to handle unexpected or particularly significant personal or other information that may come to light through the project, eg, unknown medical/psychiatric condition, a particularly distressed participant, civil or criminal liability, etc.

Any unforeseen problems will be handled according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Swinburne's policy on the Conduct of Research. The project will be conducted with regard to the three basic ethical principles guiding human research: respect of persons, beneficence and justice.

A8   PROFESSIONAL/ETHICAL ABILITY & TRAINING (Researchers/Students/Assistants)

NS 1.15 Research must be conducted or supervised only by persons or teams with experience, qualifications and competence appropriate to the research … using (appropriate) facilities … (and with appropriate skills and resources for dealing with any contingencies…

(a) Sufficiently detail what investigators/assistants will do in this project and their expertise/competence to do so.

One researcher will conduct interviews. As a Public Relations professional of 14 years, the main student investigator has a strong background in interviewing and working with people, professionally, across a range of functions and industries.

(b) Sufficiently detail any further training/qualifications required for investigators/assistants to carry out the project.

No further training or other qualifications are required for investigators.

A9   FUTURE USE OF DATA

Will any of these data be used by yourself, your students or others for any purpose other than for this project as described in the protocol? If so please describe.

> Records and notes of interviews will not be used for any purpose other than for this project, without the express consent of interviewees.

A10   EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

Is a body external to Swinburne involved in initiation or support of the project?

☐   Yes   Name of body/organisation.

If an external body is associated with the project you **must** provide the HREC with detail of the arrangements, *including details of any funding or other resources being provided*. A copy of relevant pages from the contractual arrangements should be attached.

☒   No

A11   EXTERNAL APPROVALS

Projects involving other organisations or entities may require approval from other institutions or their ethics committees, etc. for such things as access to prospective participants, contact lists, data, facilities, etc. A copy of such approvals may be required to be provided to the HREC at the time of application or be made available as soon as possible. In which case, the project may not commence, until such evidence is provided.

Please indicate, as appropriate, if formal clearance/permission has been obtained or sought:

Institutional   Yes   ☐   Documentation Attached ☐ or to follow ☐

Next of Kin (for special groups) Yes   ☐   Documentation Attached ☐ or to follow ☐

 (estimate when likely to be obtained)

☒   No (please explain)

> External parties will not conduct Human Research for this project. Only the Swinburne PhD candidate will be inter-facing with people as subjects, in the course of data collection. Approval for participation in the case study will be negotiated with industry informants directly. When agreeing to participate, they will need to confirm that they have secured any approval(s) they need to do so.

A12   RESEARCHER / SPONSOR RELATIONSHIP

Is there any relationship or association between the sponsor and any of the researchers listed in Section A of this form, for example are any of the researchers directors, officers, employees, shareholders or promoters of the sponsor or do they receive any personal benefits from the sponsor under any other contracts or arrangements?

☒   No

☐   Yes (please explain the relationship(s), including how a vested or a conflict of interest situation does not arise.)

SECTION B: ETHICAL ISSUES

OVERVIEW B   ETHICAL ISSUES

[Double-click on☐   YES/NO 'check box' to select box, then enter Default Value as Checked ☒ or leaving as Not Checked☐]

	YES	NO
(a) Non-/Limited Disclosure or Deception: Is any detail in relation to research purposes, methods or questions being withheld from participants? Or will deception of any kind be involved? Or any covert/undeclared observation? (Refer *National Statement* Chap 17)	☐	☒
(b) Does the data collection process involve access to confidential personal data (including access to data provided for a purpose other that this particular research project) <u>without</u> the prior consent of subjects?		☒
(c) Will participants have pictures taken of them, e.g., photographs, video recordings? If "YES", please explain how you intend to retain confidentiality and ultimately dispose of the material.		☒
(d) If interviews are to be conducted, will they be record by electronic device? If "Yes", please explain how you intend to retain confidentiality and ultimately dispose of the material.	☒	
(e) Will participants be asked to perform any acts or make statements which might compromise them, diminish self esteem or cause them embarrassment or regret (minimal, moderate or significant)?		☒

(f) Might any aspect of your study reasonably be expected to place the participant at risk of criminal or civil liability (not just immediately or directly)? ☐

(g) Might any aspect of your study reasonably be expected to place the participant at risk of damage to their professional/social/cultural/financial standing or employability? ☒ ☐

(h) Will the research involve access to data banks subject to privacy legislation?* ☐ ☒
(NOTE: Annual reporting to Government may be required on this item. For info: please contact the Research Ethics Officer.)

(i) Will participants come into contact with any equipment which uses an electrical supply in any form e.g., audiometer, biofeedback, electrical stimulation, magnetic stimulation, etc.? If "YES", please outline below what safety precautions will be followed. ☐ ☒

(j) Will any treatment be used with potentially unpleasant or harmful side effects? ☐ ☒

(k) Does the research involve any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which may be experienced by participants as stressful, noxious, aversive or unpleasant during or after the research procedures? ☐ ☒

(l) Will the research involve the use of placebo control conditions or the withholding/substitution of treatment, programs or services (health, educational , commercial, other)? ☐ ☒

(m) Will any samples of body fluid or body tissue be required specifically for the research which would not be required in the case of ordinary treatment?

(n) Will participants be fingerprinted or DNA "fingerprinted"?

(o) Are there in your opinion any other ethical issues involved in the research?

☒

☐ ☒

☐ ☒

☐ ☒
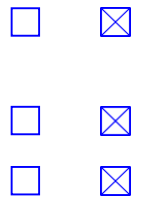
NOTE: If the answer to any of the above questions is "yes", please **explain** and **justify** below in sufficient clear detail. (The box below will expand to fit your response.)

Industry informants: Transcripts of interviews will be sent to interviewees who will be asked to approve and/or amend them as true records of interview and of the information they contain. Where the researchers wish to quote directly from interviews, express approval will be sought.

Recordings and transcripts of industry interviews will not be made available to anyone other than the research team named in this application or by other researchers directly employed on the project whose contracts will specify appropriate confidentiality obligations.

Attach further documents if appropriate

SECTION C: PARTICIPANT

DETAILS C1   PARTICIPANT

DETAILS

The composition of the participant group may, in some circumstances, distort and invalidate an outcome, and risks may arise through the composition of the participant group.

How many individual participants will be involved? *(Number/number ranges for which approval is*

sought)

Males:		Females:		Total participants	140

Over what range of ages?

From (youngest): | 21 | To (Oldest): | 70 |

If there is a gender or age imbalance in the number of participants please explain why.

> Industry informants: It is not possible to know in advance overall gender balance since participants are selected due to their roles (eg director of a company or project).

C2   RECRUITMENT

How will participants be recruited/selected?

Please outline the process in sufficient detail how this is to occur.
Note: Where participants are obtained from or through schools, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, appropriate institutional or other authority will probably be needed. If soliciting for participants by advertisement or poster please attach proposed copies or text.
(See also Project Information Consent Statements and Signed Consent Forms info at the end of this application form.)

> Industry informants will be approached directly based on their experience and relevance to the project.
>
> Projects will be selected based on the criteria of at least one of the four to six being form each category as listed below.
>
> 1) A free to air commercial production
> 2) A subscription television production
>
> 3) A public broadcasting production.
>
> The researcher has an established network of contacts in Australian television production; he intends to use this network to make contact with key personnel in productions suitable for case studies. When no contact has been established through existing networks, the researcher intends to approach productions through phone calls, face to face contact followed up by providing information such as the consent form, information sheet and list of topics attached.
>
> In the researcher's experience, and given the close knit nature of Australian Television Production, using existing networks and approaching 18-25 productions should ensure 4- 6 case studies will be examined. Once key personnel have agreed to interviews around a production, approaching industry informants within the production will be based on the informant's ability to shape production of webisodes, and willingness to participate.

C3   PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

In some situations an underlying medical or other significant condition of a participant may result in an otherwise relatively innocuous situation causing excessive stress and exacerbate the condition. Researchers must, therefore, be alert to such situations and be able to address the resulting issues.

Do participants have any medical or other significant condition of which you are aware, eg. diabetes, asthma, depression, epilepsy? What steps are in place to handle any resulting problems (you may need to correlate with A3, A4 and A7 of this form)?

No known conditions

C4   DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

How will participants be informed about the project in order to give valid consent:

☒   Consent Information Statement(s)/Letter(s) and Signed Consent Form(s) will be used.
A copy must be attached to your application. A guide to consent instruments is given at the end of this form.

☐   Consent Information Statement(s)/Letter(s) and consent implied by return of anonymous questionnaire

☐   Verbal advice (Please explain how and why)

☐   Other (Please explain how and why)

Copies of appropriate consent instruments must be attached to your application. Please consult the [Guide to Human Research Informed Consent Instruments](#) in carefully preparing informed consent instruments.

C5   COMPENSATION

Consent to participate must be freely given and not induced through the level of reward, perceived reward, or power relationships

Provide details of any financial or other reward or inducement is being offered to subjects for participation. Indicate the source of the funds.

No

C6   RELATIONSHIP TO INVESTIGATOR(S)

Free consent may be difficult to ensure if the participant is dependent upon the investigator for employment, assessments etc
Some relationships cause special ethical issues to arise
Are participants linked with the investigator through some particular relationship - eg. employees ultimately responsible to or superiors of the investigator, students of investigator, family members, friends etc.

No

C7   INVOLVEMENT OF SPECIAL GROUPS

Particular issues of consent may arise where special groups of participants are to be involved. There may be, for example, a need to obtain informed consent from persons other than the direct participant. Examples of such special groups include
special cultural groups - eg. indigenous Australians; children and young persons (Guidelines section 4.2); groups with special circumstances - eg. persons with an intellectual or mental impairment (Guidelines s. 5)
Please identify and describe the nature of the groups and procedures used to obtain permission.

Note. Persons proposing research projects involving Indigenous Australians should consult with the relevant University manager of indigenous programs prior to finalising definition of the project.

> None

C8 PRIVACY

The University is subject to the Victorian Information Privacy and Health Records Acts as well as the Commonwealth Privacy Act and, in particular, the Information/Health/National Privacy principles (IPPs/HPPs/NPPs) set out therein and is required to report annually on projects which relate to or utilise particular records.

Does the research involves access to data which was collected by an organisation for its own purposes (ie. not specifically collected for *this* project) such as student records, other data banks, human pathology or diagnostic specimens provided by an institution/s?
If yes, please indicate source/s.

> No

C9 LOCATION OF STUDY

Please indicate where the research will be carried out. If the research will not be on University premises permission of owner / occupier may be required. If so, please indicate what authority or permission may be required and how will be obtained. **NB***: Where required, please attach to this application evidence of authority obtained or provide the Secretary, HREC as soon as practicable.*

> Interviews will be conducted at venues most convenient to the respondents. This is likely to be company workplaces.

SECTION D: DATA & PUBLICATION ARRANGEMENTS (Nb Section D Revised Aug 2007)

PLEASE CONSIDER CAREFULLY YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS SECTION. YOU NEED TO BE CLEAR AS TO WHAT IS OCCURING WITH RESPECT TO DATA COLLECTION, RETENTION and DISPOSAL.

(In your responses, you should demonstrate familiarity with National Statement requirements for confidentiality, relevant Privacy Principles and Swinburne's *Policy on the Conduct of Research,* eg, Sect 4, see URL:
http://www.swinburne.edu.au/corporate/registrar/ppd/docs/PolicyontheConductofResearch.pdf**).**

D1 DATA COLLECTION/RECORDING (Nb Section D1 Revised Aug 2007)

Please note that, with any information or data collected/retained, if any individual can reasonably be identified, the information can be deemed "personal information" or "health information" under National/Health/Information Privacy Principles (NPPs/HPPs/IPPs).

(a) How or in what form will **data** be collected/recorded?

(*eg, notes; verbatim, audio and/or video recordings; transcriptions of recordings; recorded or signed consents; etc*)

> Interviews will be recorded by electronic device. Transcripts or detailed notes will be made from the recordings.

As regards **any individual**, in relation to any data collection or retention, you need to acknowledge <u>either or both </u>of the following:

[*Double-click on* ☐ *'check box' to select X by entering in Default Value as Checked* ☒ *or leaving as Not Checked* ☐]

☒ **An Individual can be identified OR is Potentially Identifiable / Re-Identifiable**

(*An individual can be identified at some point or by the very nature of the data collected/retained: at time of an interview, by signed consent form, identified or labelled voice or image recording, pen-and-paper questionnaire, on-line survey instruments, etc.*

Whilst data may not have (explicit) identifiers, an individual's identify can still reasonably be worked out.

Or data may have (explicit) identifiers removed and replaced by codes that permit matching of an individual with the data collected/retained, in which case it is possible to identify or re-identify the person to whom the data relates.)

☐ **An Individual is Non- or Un-identifiable**

(*Data collected/retained anonymously and with no reasonable possibility of being identified.*)

Your acknowledgement may require further explanation or clarification; if so, please include in the following box.

> Industry informants: Interviewees will be expressly identified in records and notes of interviews, since their identity and role is the basis for their inclusion in the project.

D2   DATA SECURITY **(Nb Section D2 Revised Aug 2007)**

Please note that "data must be held for sufficient time to allow reference. For data that is published this may be for as long as interest and discussion persists following publication. It is recommended that the minimum period for retention is at least 5 years from the date of publication but for specific types of research, such as clinical research, 15 years (or more) may be more appropriate." (Sect 4.3 of *Swinburne's Policy on the Conduct of Research*)

Please indicate **how data** (all types of data, including, eg, signed consent forms) **will be securely retained** (eg, electronic form in password-protected disk drive, locked filing cabinet, etc) **and where**? With more than one type of data, will the types be separately stored?

In your explanation, you will need to make clear **how due confidentiality and/or anonymity will be maintained**.

(a)   During the study

> Records and notes of interviews will only be accessible to the researchers on the project and will be stored:
>
> Electronic records – in password protected folders
>
> Physical records – in locked filing cabinets

(b)   Following completion of study

> Records of interviews and focus groups will only be accessible to the chief investigators on the project and will be stored:
>
> Electronic records – in password protected folders
>
> Physical records – in locked filing cabinets
>
> ==Data will be stored for five years post publication==

D3   PUBLICATION/OUTPUT (Nb Section D3 Revised Aug 2007)

Please explain in sufficient detail:

(a)   What, if any, publication (conference, news media, academic journal, other journal, etc) is envisaged following on or in relation to this project, both in terms of data proper and/or analysis of data?

(b)   Will participants be informed about any envisaged research publication/outcome? (This information is normally to be included in the information given prior to obtaining informed consent.)

(c)   Would any participants be able to be identified through the publication of data proper or research findings? If so, explain why this is necessary.

> (a) Academic journal articles, specialist websites, conference papers, PhD thesis, selected media outlets.
>
> (b) As part of the process of obtaining informed consent, participants will be informed of the general intention to produce academic journal articles, articles for specialist websites, conference papers, a PhD thesis, and articles for selected media outlets from the research. Industry Informants will be notified of particular publishing outputs, consistent with the terms of any consent they give to re-use extracts from their interviews.
>
> (c) Industry Informants will be identified and often quoted in publications. Their identity and reputation is generally the very reason for selecting them for this project.

D4   INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Storage arrangements for data relating to research into Indigenous matters must be determined in compliance with the Policy on the Conduct of Research after consultation with the communities involved.

What consultation has taken place and what arrangements have been made.

> Not applicable

D5   OTHER ISSUES (Nb Section D5 Revised Aug 2007)

Are there any other issue relating to data collection, retention, use or disclosure which the ethics committee should be made aware of and, if so, please explain how you are to deal with this.

(Eg, Research outcomes unduly impacting on any individual or group not directly participating, etc.)

> None

SECTION E: SUBSTANCES & CLINICAL ISSUES

☒   ***No*** matters in this section are applicable to the study   *or*

E1   ADMINISTRATION OF SUBSTANCES/AGENTS

Name of substance(s)		
Dosage per administration		
Frequency of administration		
Total amounts to be administered		

Anticipated effects:

NOTE*: If the research involves administration of foreign substances or invasive procedures, please attach a statement accepting responsibility for those procedures by a medical or paramedical practitioner with Indemnity insurance.*

☐   STATEMENT ATTACHED

E2   BODY FLUIDS OR TISSUE

What fluids or tissue? How will be samples be obtained?

Frequency and volume

How are samples to be stored?

How will samples be disposed of?

Who will take the samples?

What are their qualifications for doing so?

Do participants carry, as far as you know, the Hepatitis B or HIV virus? If so how will the risks be handled

Do participants carry, as far as you know, any other contagious diseases or viruses? If so how will the risks be handled

<table>
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SECTION F   Declarations for Signature [1][2][3]

1. With respect to this project**, I / We, the undersigned Investigator(s)/Assistant(s) agree**:

To undertake human research activity or handle data confidentially in accordance with Swinburne requirements, including any standard or special ethics clearance conditions, under the proper direction of the responsible Swinburne manager and/or principal Swinburne (or other) researcher/supervisor.

NAME: (block letters)	SIGNATURE:	DATE:
Jock Given		
Matthew Loads		

All listed applicants must sign. The Chief Investigator/Supervisor is also responsible for personnel subsequently joining the project. Expand this table or duplicate this page as required. NB This information is subject to Swinburne or external audit.

**** Please note that ****

PROJECTS MUST NOT COMMENCE WITHOUT PRIOR WRITTEN APPROVAL from the Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) or its appropriate Subcommittee (SHESC)

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2. Declaration of Compliance by Chief Investigator(s)/Student Supervisor(s).

I declare that the above project has been developed and will be conducted in accordance with relevant Swinburne standards, policies and codes of practice, including any standard or special conditions for on-going ethics clearance. I further declare that all listed and subsequently appointed researchers or assistants involved in this project will be made aware of the conditions of ethics approval as communicated to me, including approved documentation and procedures.

Signature & Date: …………………………………………………………………………

Name of Signatory & Position: Jock Given, Professor of Media and Communications, Swinburne Institute for Social Research

(Optional) **Form checked by a Research & Ethics Advisor (REA)? Yes** ☐   **No** ☐ REA Initials & Date:
……………..………

3. Endorsement of Head of Academic Unit (or Delegate) or Above.

I declare that this project: has been developed and will be conducted in accordance with relevant Swinburne standards, policies and codes of practice; and has research merit, adequate resourcing and appropriate leadership/supervision.

Signature & Date:……………………………………………………………….……………

Name of Signatory & Position: ……………………………………………………….………

(*Please note: This endorsement must be given by an authorised official who is **not** also a chief or co-investigator of the project and who is not also the supervisor of a student investigator with an interest in the project*.)