

# **The Big Shill: Branding and Niche Programming on American Television**

By  
Erin Giannini

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the rise of product placement, from 2001 to 2008, as part of the larger branding strategy of broadcast networks, which included narrowcasting to a particular “quality” demographic of upscale, technologically enabled viewers. This 7-year period was chosen because it encompassed both the era that saw the steep rise in the practice and the increased penetration of the digital video recorder (DVR) and digital versatile disc (DVD) format and the rise of the Internet as a vehicle for viewing both primary and secondary texts for these series. Despite the ability of DVDs and DVRs to eliminate advertising from programs and thereby potentially alter the economic structure of American broadcast television, and the availability of network-sanctioned alternate online viewing platforms, I argue that the older model of broadcast programming itself (a program interrupted by advertisements) remains relevant despite the professed fears of the industry that the 30-second spot was redundant. Indeed, the television and advertising industries reconstituted an older model of the television and advertising mix in response to these new technologies and formats. They claimed that it was necessary for their continued survival, suturing old advertising models to these new technologies and media. Borrowing from cable networks, broadcast, despite its remit to appeal to the largest possible audience, used the rise of new media and formats to ape cable strategies of branding and narrowcasting. Product placement thus served as a preeminent branding strategy for the broadcast networks; the products themselves were necessarily tailored to the demographics that the broadcast networks sought throughout this period, and the focus on targeting these niche audiences brought the broadcast networks closer to cable channels in terms of their branding practices. Through an examination of the debates within the industry, as well as a series of case studies, I will examine how product placement (as a form of brand flow) served as an important discursive site for the technological shifts in American television in the new millennium.

## **Brave New (TV) World: Branding and Targeting in Contemporary American Television**

In the *Bones* (Fox, September 13, 2005-present; Josephson Entertainment/Far Field Productions/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) episode “The Bones that Foamed” (4.16), forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan (Emily Deschanel) and Special Agent Seeley Booth (David Boreanaz) investigate the death of a car salesman. While being interviewed, an employee, Maureen Perot (Janet Varney), not understanding that they are there to investigate the murder of her coworker, tries to sell them a car:

Maureen: We sell adventure! So what can Mighty Mo put you in today? Mmm, you look like a sporty two-door man.  
 Brennan: Actually, he has a very nice car.  
 Maureen: Ooh, I’ll say. That Sequoia’s a honey.  
 Booth: Yeah, tell me about it.  
 Maureen: Roomy enough, you could have a Super Bowl party back there. What is that, GPS, side air bags.  
 Brennan: We’re looking for...  
 Maureen: Such great gas mileage for, you know, a can-do machine. Are you looking to trade in?

Despite serving as an extended plug for the Toyota Sequoia, with its best features dutifully laid out in a chipper fashion, the product placement<sup>1</sup> in this scene,

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to have a working definition, prior to this examination, of product placement. Increasingly, it has been referred to in the literature as “brand placement” as it is the brand and its less tangible associative processes that are being placed, rather than just a product in and of itself. However, Newell et al insist on keeping the term *product placement* to “maintain continuity with past industry and academic efforts” (Newell et al 2006:577). It has also been defined as “the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle” (Russell and Belch 2005:74) as well as “the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (Karrh 1998:33); however, the former avoids both specifying any potential economic arrangements that might occur to bring about the incorporation within the “vehicle” and any value judgments attendant therein and the latter is problematic when applied to television, as it neither takes into account the federal regulations that restrict the practice nor the economic apparatus of the practice within the television medium (Poniewozik 2001). For the purposes of this chapter, Newell et al’s definition works better to include the economics of television into its definition, that is, “the insertion of branded products and services into mass media content with the intent of influencing consumer attitude or behavior” (Newell et al 2006:577). While the use of the word “influence” is not unproblematic in its implications, studies of product placement managers and practitioners agree that influencing consumer attitudes and buying patterns through placement is their primary goal (Karrh 1995; Karrh et al 2003:138-149). Thus, Newell’s definition is the definition that this chapter will use.

as well as in a later episode, “Bones on the Blue Line” (5.15), share a very particular feature. In “Bones on the Blue Line,” the “hip” artist Angela Montenegro (Michaela Conlon) explains why she drives the Toyota Sienna minivan: “I’m an artist ... and the Sienna has plenty of room, plus I stink at parallel parking and that back-up camera thing is like the invention of the century.” Angela’s assertion not only dovetails with Toyota’s advertising campaign for the car that focused on redeeming the minivan from “soccer mom” status,<sup>2</sup> but in both episodes there is an association of product and character. Seeley Booth isn’t just a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), he could be a “sporty two-door man,” with the appropriate Toyota, or a “can-do” machine that still is roomy enough to party in (with). Angela Montenegro is an artist with a practical side, as evidenced by her choice of the Sienna despite the possibility of being perceived as a “soccer mom.” The product is thus used as a conversation between the character and the placed product; that is, using a particular marketing tool (product placement) to create a relationship between “people and objects” (Jhally 1990:1). It is a conversation that serves to brand both: a seemingly straight-laced FBI agent (and his seemingly straight-laced car) that exude both safety and “can-do” spirit<sup>3</sup>; an artist whose main artistic outlet is computer-generated facial and crime scene reconstruction. Thus the placement of a single line of products (Toyota cars) opens numerous sites for interpreting both the text and context of *Bones*.

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<sup>2</sup> In the advertisement “Meet the Parents,” the introductory ad for the Sienna campaign, the rather self-absorbed “hip” father explains that he has dubbed their Sienna minivan “The Swagger Wagon.” Toyota also created a YouTube channel for the Sienna, which features both the broadcast commercials and online-only web episodes featuring the parents from the ads in ongoing narrative interaction with the car (Sienna Channel 2010). It represents one example of the way in which, while television, as shown in the *Bones* example, aped commercial strategies, so too did advertisements ape narrative strategies.

<sup>3</sup> An earlier character played by Boreanaz, the vampire Angel on the series *Angel* (October 5, 1999-May 19, 2004; Mutant Enemy/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox), was similarly characterized by his car; a 1968 Plymouth GTX convertible. The irony of a vampire driving a car capable of being completely open to the sun was remarked upon more than once; a “swami”/therapist explicitly tells Angel that such a car indicates that Angel “hates himself” (“Guise Will be Guise” [2.06]). Such an analysis was very much in line with the portrayal of Angel through the series. The series *Supernatural* (CW, September 13, 2005-present; Kripke Enterprises/Warner Brothers Television/Wonderland Sound and Vision) takes such reification of the car a step further; a 1967 Chevrolet Impala is responsible for ending the apocalypse (“Swan Song” [5.22]).

The sponsorship relationship between *Bones* and Toyota can be found across multiple episodes and series of the show. Toyota also sponsors full episodes and clips from the series online. Of a piece with the thoroughgoing cross-branding practices that *Bones* engages in, it is not surprising that the webpage for *Bones* on Fox.com gives equal prominence to both the Toyota Sienna and Emily Deschanel and David Boreanaz, as if the Sienna functions as another character within the series itself.

Yet product placement is only one portion of the ways in which *Bones* is branded. It simultaneously serves as a procedural crime show (similar to the *CSI* [CBS, October 6, 2000-present; Jerry Bruckheimer Television/CBS Television Studios]) franchise both in subject matter and the use of technology [Bignell 2007:163-166] and a relationship drama, not only between Booth and Brennan, but Angela and fellow co-worker Jack Hodgins' (T. J. Thyne) navigation of marriage and parenthood, and, through the use of FBI psychologist Lance Sweet (John Francis Daley), a psychological study of workplace interaction and criminality. Its hybridity mirrors the increased level of hybridity across most programming on broadcast television (Mittell 2004).

It, too, is branded by being based on a series of novels by Kathy Reichs. This is subtly referenced within the programme itself by making Brennan a best-selling crime author whose main series character is a forensic anthropologist named Kathy Reichs, providing cross-promotion for Reichs's continuing series of novels. Finally, and most importantly for the concerns of this work, it airs on the Fox network. The "branding" of series on broadcast television and its numerous implications form the main thrust of this work's analysis. While Timothy Todreas's assertion that branding is "a product that is differentiated from its competition by means of a design, name, mark, image, or a combination of any or all of these" (Todreas 1999:173) provides a good basic definition, I am following on Lury's definition of a brand as "a set of relations between products or services" (Lury 2004:1). Lury leaves this definition deliberately open-ended, because of the very intangible nature of the concept of branding, which seeks to create association between one thing and another. She then explicates the various ways in which these relations operate, are



managed (by producers and consumers), and organized “in time and space” (Lury 2004:2). Thus I will use Lury’s definition as Lury does, which is as a building block to examine the operations, management, and organization of branding within television, particularly how product placement is used as a discursive branding site within individual programmes. As the above example makes clear, there are numerous levels—economic, generic, quality, industrial—through which a series can draw its brand identity from. Product placement offers a lens in which to view the technological, industrial, and textual shifts in programming in the new millennium; this is not to imply that there are not other ways in which to view these shifts, but I hope to draw a larger picture by focusing on a smaller area.

Following Paul Grainge’s work on branding in film, this work seeks to examine how broadcast television reacted to the technological shifts of the 2000s; that is, the use of digital video recorder (DVR) technology, the digital versatile disc (DVD) format, and online programming. This will be primarily situated on the programme level, and its relation, or not, to the network. While the overarching brand of a network is germane to which programmes they air, the 2000s’ technological shifts sought to disinter them from their broadcast context, to shift networks from “household brands” to a “house of brands” (Murray 2005:422) and thereby not only appeal to multiple niche audiences, but also to build brand equity for multiple entities within the media conglomerates (Johnson 2007:7) and “structure and stabilize global markets” (Grainge 2008:6). As Barbara Selznick argues:

The brand filter employed by a network necessarily shapes the programmes that the network airs. Programming serves, like other forms of branding, to develop a network identity for both viewers and industry participants. In the mobile and portable post-network era, television shows—that are branded, sold internationally, and licensed to other manufacturers—are no longer merely what airs between commercials, but are now profitable intellectual property (Selznick 2009:183).

This thesis focuses on the branding strategies of niche programming on broadcast television, examining the debates within the industry and engaging in a series of case studies to view how product placement (as a form of brand flow) served as an important discursive site for the technological and format shifts in American television in the new millennium. The term *brand flow* in this context is borrowed from Celia Lury, who argues that brands are organized in a pattern of loops—initial condition of the brand, feedback, and subsequent new conditions and behaviours of the brand based on the feedback—or what she refers to as the “logic of flows.” Using Raymond Williams’ concept of flow as creating associations between disparate parts, Lury argues that the “logo” of a brand is a “mark of this operability of the interval” (Lury 2004:89) between commercials and programmes, connecting them with one another. This “management of the interval” through the use of a brand’s logo, “enables the series of programmes...to be personified in the face of the brand” (Lury 2004:93). To put this in the context of this work, the NBC Peacock logo that appears in the corner of the screen while watching any of its programmes unites all of its programmes under the single brand NBC, despite their objective differences. That is one type of brand flow, but product placement also inflects the programmes in which it is placed; placed products can indicate socioeconomic status, serve as a form of characterization by its use by characters, and, on the industry side, be read as an indicator of the show’s positioning within the network.<sup>4</sup> Lury doesn’t specifically address product placement as a form of brand flow (that is, operating invisibly [Lury 2004:90] in the interval between commercial content and programme); this work thus relates the practice of product placement as one kind of brand flow within the greater context of branding on niche television, as it represents another form of the “management of the interval” in adding to a programme’s diegesis, characterization, and network positioning.

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<sup>4</sup> There is some debate within the trades about what the use of product placement says about a series. Depending on both the types of products placed and their prominence, the use of product placement can be as simple as ameliorating high productions costs (Carter 2006:76), or as complicated as adding monetary value to a struggling series (McDowell 2005).

Eleanor Baird (2007), Amanda Lotz (2007), John Caldwell (2006), Jimmy Reeves et al (2007), and Barbara Selznick (2009), have argued that beneath the big tent of the network brand exist numerous “subbrands” (Baird 2007) or tiers (Caldwell 2006). This thesis will deal primarily with the programme tier; that is, the relationship between how an individual series is branded to audiences, touching on both the use of product placement as it operates within the series brand, and how the programme fits, or doesn’t, into the metabrand (Baird 2007). The use of branding and product placement on the series level will be further contextualized within this work through an analysis of a selection of trade journals, with five main areas of focus: 1) an overview of the advertising and television industries; 2) the ways in which networks used branding to “court” viewers; 3) the influence of online programming and its implications (both textually and industrially); 4) the increased release of library and current series on DVD; and 5) a case study of the branding practices and adoption of the TiVo DVR.

This enumeration, however, does not imply that each of these areas are distinct phenomena with no influence on one another. Online and DVR viewing, as per example, not only represented alternative programme consumption platforms, but caused the most anxiety among networks and advertisers; product placement gained new longevity when included on series released on DVD, and was deemed necessary due to the increased penetration of DVRs that allowed viewers to skip conventional advertising. As Adam Arvidsson asserts: “[T]he transformation of the media environment in the 1990s both tended to diminish the effectiveness of advertising and—through the integration of media culture into life in general and the proliferation of new informational tools—enables a more far-reaching subsumption of the productivity of consumers” (Arvidsson 2006:75). These new tools, such as the Internet and DVRs, build on the shifts in media—increased conglomeration, regulatory and ownership changes, and multiple viewing platforms for television—may have decreased the effectiveness of one kind of advertising, only to saturate the text of films and television with another in response.

The broad context of both the trade literature review in the following chapter as well as the review of literature here (encompassing television branding theory,

flow, and quality and cult television) is necessary to provide a foundation for the main thrust of this work: examining the branding of and in broadcast niche programming on an industrial and textual level. It follows Paul Grainge's assertion that "branding assumed new currency in the attempt to manage the relationship between products and consumers and to structure and stabilize global markets." Thus, his work, blending textual and industrial analyses, examines how the film industry adjusted itself, using various branding practices, to economic and technological shifts, in order to "better [understand] the contingencies of branding as a discursive and material practice." This is what I seek to do in this work, from the perspective of television rather than film. In this way, this work seeks to both build on the existing literature around branding on television while simultaneously addressing two areas that have been neglected within television studies work around branding: 1) the use of branding practices in broadcast television, as opposed to cable (see Baird 2007), and 2) the use of product placement (as a type of branding) in contemporary television. The latter, in particular, has not been examined in any sustained manner within contemporary television outside of advertising and marketing journals (Avery and Ferraro 2000; Russell and Stern 2006; Russell 2002; Karrh 1998) or historical analyses of its use in early television (see: Boddy 1992; Samuels 2001; and Barnouw 1978).

Deborah Jaramillo addresses this lack when she writes that "[b]randing...is not as widely discussed or written about in the field of television, either because it seems callous to apply a commercial aspect to the text or because it seems superfluous in a commercial medium" (Jaramillo 2002:64). These two widely divergent opinions represent the challenge of attempting to examine such practices within broadcast television, as much theory around television (as will be discussed below) takes a similar either/or stance—either the text is separate from the commercial context (particular via the new technologies and formats I will discuss), or it is all commercialized/commodified, with the attendant moral judgment inherent in that statement. My view is that the "commercial aspect" is not separable from the text, particularly *because* of the new technologies and formats of the 2000s sought to eliminate the advertising break. This is more noticeable in series

positioned at a niche demographic. Their smaller viewing numbers are, by industry logic, made up for by “quality” audiences, as well as “quality” products placed within their diagesis. Yet the implication is that the focus on niche scripted programming on contemporary television represents an increased trend of targeting smaller audiences based on age and income to the exclusion of the broader audience that the concept of “broadcasting”<sup>5</sup> means. My analysis is not precisely focused within the realm of political economy, but rather engages with the “politics” of branding (Grainge 2006) and the implications of such on the text of television.

I will argue that Grainge’s engagement with the “politics” of branding in Hollywood films are also operative within television. Grainge separates these into three main points: the politics of commercial obviousness (that is, using the text to comment on the context of production<sup>6</sup>); the politics of corporate obfuscation (that is, using branding and promotion to distance a media work from its corporate genesis<sup>7</sup>); and the politics of global homogenization, through the lens of entertainment complexes and film exhibition. While questions of exhibition are obviously different with regards to television, both “commercial obviousness” and “corporate obfuscation” are highly relevant entry points for examining the politics of branding on television, and both represent central points of analysis within the case studies in my work. Catherine Johnson’s analysis of branding in TVIII<sup>8</sup> is another

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<sup>5</sup> See Gripsrud (1998) for an on-point analysis of the metaphor of “broadcasting” as a key term for television studies.

<sup>6</sup> As will be addressed in greater depth below, John Caldwell’s analysis of the rise in available ancillary material is germane to the “politics of commercial obviousness” within the context of television. He argues that the media industry is using ancillary material to offer “inside material” on media processes in order to “mediate knowledge” about the media industry for the viewer; in essence, taking control of the audiences’ readings or perceptions of the text, as well as animating the audience into “consumer activity” in order to add value to the series (Caldwell 2006:117-118).

<sup>7</sup> See also Deborah Jaramillo, who argued that HBO’s marketing of its original series as distinct and better than broadcast television (made manifest in its branded tagline “It’s Not TV, It’s HBO”) as if it were in competition with broadcast series obscures the fact that only a small number of media conglomerates provide programming across broadcast, cable, and satellite, thus limiting actual competition (Jaramillo 2002:59-60).

<sup>8</sup> I am using the term *TVIII* based on Steve Behren’s definition, which splits television into two eras: TVI, which encompassed the three-network era (1948-1975 [approximate]) and TVII (1975-1995), when cable was introduced and proliferated. The term *TVIII* was added to encompass the shifts between 1995 and the present (Rogers, Epstein, and Reeves 2002:55), including the rise of digital signals, and new technology and platforms. Amanda Lotz terms the same era as *postnetwork*, dating it from October 1995, when the first network programmes were offered on iTunes, but since post-

important element within this work; in particular, Johnson's assertion that "the programme as brand can also be understood to exist beyond the moment of transmission, and hence to transcend and exist separately from the network as brand" (Johnson 2007:20). While Johnson was specifically addressing the exportation of HBO programmes to Channel 4/E4 in the United Kingdom, I argue that her analysis is equally relevant with regard to the disinterment of series from the network through the use of DVRs and the DVD format.

Each of the case studies represent an aspect of the aforementioned potential for disinterment of programmes from their original platform: the use of characters and setting outside the context of the series for advertising and promotional purposes; broadcast series written as a "DVD text"; the dissemination of both narrative and commercial content to multiple platforms; and, finally, an examination of the perils of "competing" brands within a series—that of a network and a television auteur.<sup>9</sup>

The throughline that connects each of the series and the thesis as a whole is the aforementioned term *brand flow*. Thus, each of these case studies will touch on the network/programme's "ongoing process of (product) differentiation" (the series differing themselves from one another) and "(brand) integration" on the micro (series) and macro (network) level. That is, the use of product placement to develop character and diagesis, and thereby aiding in positioning the series as its own brand, and its relation to the macro-level brand of the network. In this way, branding serves as a "unity" (Lury 2004:76) of discrete parts that together are more than the sum of themselves, or what Baird calls the "metabrand" (Baird 2007). I will address this point in greater depth below when I discuss the ways in which networks attempted to brand themselves between 2001 and 2008. As Grainge argues:

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network has also been used to describe TVII (Behrens 1986), the term *TVIII* avoids the confusion, and will be the one I'll use within this work.

<sup>9</sup> John Caldwell provides a detailed analysis of "creator brands" in film and television, particularly the ways in which they are constructed within trade and mainstream journals. This is the lens through which I will address this brand competition; that is, the way in which "creator brands frequently pose as institutional anti-brands" (Caldwell 2008:206) and how that operates within and external to the programme.

In a period defined by audience fragmentation and accelerated media flow, branding was taken up within commercial literature as a means of expanding, systemizing, and managing the function of contemporary marketing, addressing the consumer in ways that were both proximate and increasingly personal in approach (Grainge 2008:28).

Contemporary branding practices sought to be near enough to consumers to understand how to market to them in both unobtrusive and ubiquitous ways. The macro-level address of the network thus used its programmes and ancillary material to address consumers across multiple platforms in order to “aggregate multiple niche audiences and establish a basis for industry expansion” (Grainge 2006:56) using micro-level, “proximate” tactics, such as product placement. This focus on branding, as will become clear in the review of the trade journals, was borne of professed anxiety about the potential loss of spot advertising.

While 30-second spot advertising did not disappear during this time period, the fact that it might was a source of anxiety for broadcast networks and their advertisers. The reintroduction of product placement within scripted programming served (at least) a dual purpose during this time; it added a revenue stream before spot advertising could be eliminated, and the products (and their branded associations) added an additional textual level to the series they were placed in. They, in essence, cross-fertilized one another; the placement of Burger King, as per example, in *Arrested Development* (Fox, November 2, 2003-February 10, 2006; Imagine Entertainment/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/Hurwitz Company), inscribed both with ironic humour; the placement of a Birkin bag in *Gilmore Girls* (WB/The CW, October 5, 2000-May 15, 2007; Dorothy Parker Drank Here Productions/Warner Brothers) spoke to the socioeconomic status of its characters.

Furthermore, I will also address some of the debates around quality and cult television, in order to examine how placed products were congruent with the branding of the examined series, all of which could lay claim to either quality or cult status (sometimes both) as will be addressed below. These quality markers influence what products are placed. *American Idol* (Fox, June 11, 2002-present; FreeMantle Media North American/19 Productions) has a thoroughgoing

relationship with Coca-Cola—the judges drink Coke out of Coke-branded cups, and contestants await their results in the Coca-Cola Red Room, whose colour scheme matches that of the soda’s can. As *American Idol* is one of the top-rated broadcast programmes across numerous demographics, the placement of a mass-market item is in line with the series as a mass-market programme. Within the same genre, however, a reality series such as *Project Runway* (December 1, 2004-present; Weinstein Company), shown on the Bravo—and later Lifetime—networks, places niche products such as Mood brand fabrics, judge and designer Michael Kors’ clothing line, *Marie Claire* magazine, and Garnier hair products; these inscribe the series to a different demographic, both in its initial position on Bravo, and later on the female-centered Lifetime channel. Thus, analyzing these practices takes different forms depending on the programming in question.

By many accounts (Friedman 2001:S2-S3; Steinberg 2008:10; Atkinson 2008:S12-S18), the rise in reality programming across broadcast and cable at the start of the new millennium was instrumental in driving the rise of product placement. There were numerous economic reasons for the onslaught of reality series on broadcast: rising production costs and salaries for long-term, popular dramas and sitcoms such as *ER* (NBC, September 19, 1994-April 2, 2009; Constant c Productions/Amblin Television/Warner Brothers) and *Friends* (NBC, September 22, 1994-May 6, 2004; Bright-Kauffman-Crane Productions/Warner Brothers); competition from cable and satellite programming; the importation of proven formats that were successful in other countries (such as *Big Brother* [Channel 4/E4, July 18, 2000-September 10, 2010; Endemol Productions], *Pop Idol* [ITV, October 6, 2001-December 20, 2003; 19 Entertainment/Thames Television], and *Expedition Robinson*<sup>10</sup> [SVT/TV3/TV4, September 13, 1997-present; Castaway Television Productions]) ameliorating the risk any new programme faces when it debuts, and situating the strongest brand on the programme level, as per Johnson, as each of these imported formats built brand equity for their networks (CBS and Fox); and the ease with which networks and advertisers could form sponsorship and placement

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<sup>10</sup> *Expedition Robinson* is also known as *Survivor* in many countries it was exported to, although some have retained the original title translated into their own language.



relationships even at the nascent stage of programme development. Indeed, this was how Mark Burnett convinced CBS to pick up the series *Survivor* (May 31, 2000-present; Mark Burnett Productions/Castaway Television Productions/Survivor Productions LLC); when it was pitched to CBS President Les Moonves, Burnett had apparently lined up numerous product placement deals prior to the pitch, and the series was accepted on the condition that Burnett and CBS could cover the costs of shooting and prize money with additional sponsorship deals (Carter 2006:70-76).

Given the aforementioned spiraling production costs of television in the 1990s and 2000s, these “high concept” (that is, television product that is “differentiated” by “an emphasis on style” and “integration with marketing and merchandising” [Wyatt 1994:7]) programmes allowed networks to share the costs of production, not have to pay large salaries to known names, and market them easily. Despite some key differences, Justin Wyatt’s definition of the high concept film is germane: “Advertising is key to the commercial success of these films through representing the marketable concepts of the films, but, more basically, advertising as a medium of expression is fundamental to the very constitution of the high concept film” (Wyatt 1994:23). Wyatt further defines high-concept films as being able to be described in a single sentence (Wyatt 1994:7). Combined with the conflation with advertising mentioned above, Mark Burnett’s description of the series to Moonves as “an adult version of *Lord of the Flies*” (Carter 2006:74), works as high concept on multiple levels, both by its ability to be described simply and by offering a version of the *Lord of the Flies* that featured Reebok shoes, Tylenol pain medicine, and Doritos snack crisps, among other items, making the programme an easy vehicle for this type of advertising; these product placements were indeed created to be “fundamental” to the programme’s “life-world” (Arvidsson 2006:13).

The ability to both produce and market series that are reducible to the one-line description did not start with nor is limited to unscripted, reality television, but reality television has been able to use it to great effect. It also represents, like the high-concept film, a “financially conservative, less risky approach” (Wyatt 1994:154) to television production, due to the ease of product placement and sponsorship arrangements into its diagesis, the shared production costs, and the

lack of big names (and the salaries that go with them). Economically, the business of product placement has generated a great deal of income, which continues to rise. According to a report by PQ Media, a media economics research firm, product placement spending grew 33.7% to \$2.9 billion in 2007. Patrick Quinn, the President and CEO of PQ Media, attributed the growth to “[h]igher DVR penetration combined with increased TV program product integration” (PQ Media “Press Release” 2008). While much of this rise occurred within reality television, sitcoms have also been a fertile genre for placement: “The presence of products [within sitcoms] is perhaps the most defining element of the lifestyle community, with products serving as significant objects in the consumption scenarios that pervade the genre” (Russell and Stern 2006:9). Russell and Stern’s contention that sitcoms sell “lifestyle” is yet another feature they share with Wyatt’s definition of high concept films (Wyatt 1994:7). While only one non-reality series (*One Tree Hill* [The CW, September 23, 2003-present; Tollin-Robbins Productions/Warner Brothers Television]) made the top ten list of greatest number of product placements in 2008 (Nielsen Media “Top Product Placement Programs” August 12, 2008), Nielsen Media also tracks 24-hour recall of placements (on a bimonthly basis) for both reality shows and dramas/sitcoms. Within their metric, a score of 100 represents the average recall, which is indexed against the mean score for all placements with sitcoms and dramas. The highest recall score for a reality series was 175 (for *The Amazing Race 9* [CBS, February 28, 2006-May 17, 2006; Jerry Bruckheimer Television/Touchstone Television/Earth View Productions/Amazing Race Productions/CBS]); the lowest recall score within the sitcom/drama analysis was 189 (for *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* [Fox, January 13, 2008-April 10, 2009; Bartleby Company/C-2 Pictures/Warner Brothers Television/Halcyon Company/Sarah Connor Pictures/SyFy]).<sup>11</sup>

This may be due to the very ubiquity of placements within reality television; this pervasiveness could create a white noise, easily ignored by viewers (Steinberg 2008:10). Thus, the focus in this thesis on scripted, niche programming, to the

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<sup>11</sup> The highest score (230) was given to the season premiere of the series *Supernatural* (“Lazarus Rising” [4.1]), which featured a prominent iPod placement.

exclusion of reality series. While the Nielsen data above does not conclusively prove that product placement is more effective in one type of programming than another (particularly given the data's limited nature, both in scope and time), the combination of placement with dramatic or humorous scripted material, either through incongruity with the material or through viewer investment in the drama/sitcom seems to command more viewer attention.<sup>12</sup> In a recent study of product placement prominence on television across formats (news, sports, reality, sitcom, and drama), Carrie La Ferle and Steven M. Edwards found that "traditional programming" (read: drama and sitcom) offered the greatest exposure to placed products, as well as providing "a relatively calm environment free from clutter, and the most character interaction of the programming formats discussed" (La Ferle and Edwards 2006:78). Indeed, each series addressed in this work combined visual placement with dialogue, humour, or dramatic situations, so that that the focus was drawn to the product in question as an integral part of the diagesis of the series, episode, or character.

In this work I will thus limit my analysis, as stated above, to niche scripted programmes, as branding practices and placement have significant differences when interacting with scripted and unscripted television, examining how product placement operates within the interval between the production context of a series and its text. Along with John Caldwell (2006:101) and Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, examining one element without reference to the other "impoverishes examination" (Newcomb and Hirsch 2006:561). As for the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature around branding, quality and cult television, and flow.

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<sup>12</sup> In his analysis of the "growing practice" of product placement across media, James Karrh cites a study that found a 90% recall of the humorous product placement scene in *Wayne's World* (February 14, 1992; Paramount Pictures) (Karrh 1998:41). While the study was not definitive (it used a small sample size and limited recall time frame), the finding is nonetheless suggestive of the idea that product placement, when combined with fictional material, might be more effective, as the Nielsen data cited earlier seemed to indicate.

While Caldwell asserts that some theorists view textual analysis as little more than hollow aesthetics<sup>13</sup> (Caldwell 2006:102), it nonetheless was used to give legitimacy to the study of television. It is connected with literary theory, as that represented its starting point, and which also initially struggled to find legitimacy as worthy of study until it was more codified by F R Leavis and others at Cambridge (Eagleton 1996:26-29). Semiotics became a way to make the analysis of literature (and other forms, including television) more “scientific” as well as perhaps serving as a way to provide a moral or social critique of the material and/or society as a whole (Hartley 2002:31). That being said, John Corner defined such textual analyses as having three crucial strands: viewer seduction into stories which keep them from questioning what they see or maintaining critical distance; too much “closure” oversimplifying complexities; and the privileging of certain perspectives and denial of others (Corner 1999:51).

That is, debates around the text of television can also encompass its relationship to the visual (Caldwell 1995), aural (Altman 1986), whether the viewer engages meaningfully with the programme on a social or political level (Jenkins 1992; Fiske 2006), or merely glances at a less than compelling narrative or visual image (Ellis 1992:164). Important distinctions have been made as to whether television is merely conscripting viewers into a capitalist “culture industry” (Adorno 1991), turning them into consuming ciphers (Bauman 2007), or represents “democrataintment” (Hartley 1999). Yet the focus remains on potential consumption practices by viewers, at the expense of examining how the industry both produces and itself consumes these same texts. In order to understand these shifts, the theorist must acknowledge “the extent to which textual production—and the analysis of texts by industry—stand simultaneously as corporate strategies, as forms of cultural and economic capital integral to media professional communities,

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<sup>13</sup> In her analysis of the way the “notion of ‘audience’” is constituted in cultural studies, Rosalind Brunt does not go so far as to say that textual analysis is empty and aesthetic, but does take issue with the ways in which the “semiotic embrace of ‘the text’” tended to subsume the idea of audience into the text itself, rendering them monolithic and undistinguished from one another (Brunt 1992:70). Brunt concludes by suggesting opening up examination of text-audience interaction—that is, how audiences interact with text “*in the real world*,” calling to mind Caldwell’s own desire for media to integrate examination of text and production context, albeit situated on the audience level.

and as the means by which contemporary media industries...rationalize their operations” in an unstable economic environment (Caldwell 2006:102) Acknowledging how programmes use ancillary material as well as textual strategies such as intertext, irony, or metafiction, is not just positing a more sophisticated audience or self-aware texts, but can be used to justify the programme’s existence or importance.<sup>14</sup> This is an important point for this work, as branding and product placement are both industrial operations and integral parts of the text, and are dealt with by series such as *Arrested Development* using those very strategies.

Thus, Jonathan Gray’s work on what he terms *paratexts* (that is, promos, making-ofs, director/writer commentaries, fanwork) provides an additional plank to the structure of this thesis, because “paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans; they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings we associate with them” (Gray 2010:6). In other words, these paratexts, whether industrially or fan-created, are another important aspect of the brand of the programmes that accompany them. In particular, the case studies around *Heroes* (NBC, September 25, 2006-February 8, 2010; Tailwind Productions/NBC Universal) and *Firefly* (Fox, September 20, 2002-December 20, 2002; Mutant Enemy/20th Century Fox) will be informed by Gray’s work, as these paratextual elements are fed back into the series brand. Finally, this thesis will draw on Eleanor Baird’s analysis of broadcast network branding on network television, informed by Raymond Williams’s influential theory of flow.<sup>15</sup> As Baird writes:

The new multi-platform, on-demand universe of repurposed channels and content disrupts Raymond William's concept that flow, sequences of items in a programming lineup, is a defining characteristic of television as a medium. Without the ability to control flow, broadcast networks—lacking the strong viewer identification and brand strength common to cable—seem to be in danger of losing [*sic*] relevance as a medium or distribution channel

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<sup>14</sup> It also recalls Mimi White’s contention that television expects the viewer to be as fascinated with television as it fascinated by itself (White 1986:58).

<sup>15</sup> That being said, Baird’s article is interested in providing workable solutions for broadcast networks struggling with the technological shifts of the contemporary era. That is not the point of my work; I am more interested in mapping the terrain of the shifts rather than offering specific solutions to the issues of broadcast networks.

and moving further and further into content production and promotion of engagement with a stable of content sub-brands (Baird 2007).

This “multi-platform, on-demand universe” that Baird refers to was discussed and debated a great deal in the trades between 2001 and 2008, most particularly DVRs, the DVD format, and online programming adjuncts’ rise to prominence in the current era. Not all of these elements caused equal concern, or, in fact, should have. One of the twists regarding the industrial dialogues around DVRs is that their *potential* was feared much more than their actual use; stand-alone DVRs (such as TiVo and ReplayTV, which were the focus of much of the early anxiety within the trades at the turn of the century),<sup>16</sup> never managed the kind of penetration that television, video cassette recorders (VCRs), and DVD players experienced. They only reached significant numbers as part of cable or satellite packages (Nielsen Co. 2009),<sup>17</sup> which did not allow commercials to be skipped but rather fast-forwarded, not unlike VCRs. While these technologies did cause some shifts within how programs were presented,<sup>18</sup> they were not as wide-ranging as feared, as will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> While Todreas talks about how much the industry focused on finding the perfect set-top box, he argues that what the industries were interested in was reestablishing the distribution bottleneck television enjoyed in both the broadcast and cable eras through a set-top box that would act as a high-definition converter (Todreas 1999:140-142). While DVRs were quite new at the time of his writing, Todreas asks the questions the television and advertising industries will spend the next decade asking: how will DVRs affect audience measurements and will advertising die out? (Todreas 1999:83). Clearly DVRs were not the set-top box the industry was looking for, although NBC, CBS, and ABC were early investors in TiVo, to cover their bases if it became a high-penetration item.

<sup>17</sup> According to Nielsen Media Research, DVR penetration rose from 12.3% in January 2007 to 30.6% by March 2009; 95% of those DVRs were part of a satellite or cable package, with the remaining 5% as stand-alone set-top boxes (Nielsen Co. “How DVRs are Changing” 2009).

<sup>18</sup> As per example, the Fox network, in the 2008-2009 season, launched an initiative called “Remote-Free TV” within two debuting series: JJ Abrams’ *Fringe* (September 9, 2008-present; Warner Brothers Television/Bad Robot) and Joss Whedon’s *Dollhouse* (February 13, 2009-January 29, 2010; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/Mutant Enemy Productions/Boston Diva Productions). In exchange for lessening the commercial time and number of interruptions (90-second ad breaks every fifteen minutes, rather than the usual 3 to 4 minute breaks), advertisers would pay a premium for the spots (Gough and Hibberd 2008). The premium rates, however, did not make up for the amount gained by selling the regular amount of advertising time, and Remote-Free TV was abandoned (“Fox Scraps ‘Remote-Free TV’” 2009). The series *Mad Men* (AMC, July 19, 2007-present; Lionsgate Television/Weiner Brothers/American Movie Classics) included short vignettes regarding the products placed in the show, between the programme and commercial break, in what *Variety* termed a “DVR-busting” initiative (Flaherty 2008:6).

As this thesis will discuss in depth, these two elements—the creative and the economic—represented the tent poles that determined what strategies were allowed under the big tent of the network for the individual subbrands. Baird argues that successful broadcast branding should still rely on Williams’s flow model (a sequence of programs that sets the tone of the network itself), with the new technologies, formats, and platforms as extensions of the brand rather than the main plank of their strategy, as television is a “live, audio and visual community experience” that alternate viewing options cannot duplicate (Baird 2007). That being said, these options cannot help but disrupt how flow is defined, hence Baird’s (and others) revision of the concept as a sequence of programmes that brand the network.

Thus, many of the theories and revisions around flow in particular represent an undergirding structure within this work. Raymond Williams argued that the combination of advertising, programmes, previews, and coming attractions that operate within commercial television represent a “flow”; that is, television programmes are written to aid the viewer in the act of simply watching television, rather than necessarily investing in the specificity of the programmes themselves. Of particular importance is Williams’s contention that advertising is part of the rhythm of American television programmes; that is, American television is “a sequence in which the advertisements are integral rather than as a programme interrupted by advertisements” (Williams 2003 [1974]: 66-67). Williams in fact pinpoints ad-sponsored programming and product placement, now so prevalent within American programmes, as an example of this contention. He underscores this when he argues about the particular relationship that advertising plays within both programmes and on a cultural level:

The reduction of various life styles and characteristic situations to fast-acting televisual conventions is thus a feature not only of commercials but of the kinds of television within which they are important. The attachment of these conventions to a range of products can be separately analysed, but the particular specializations to products and brands are in the end less important than the common conventional mode within which the definitions of

need, satisfaction, and anxiety are generally made. And these are evidence of the character of a dominant culture, in which needs and satisfactions are mediated, over a very wide range, in terms of commodities, rather than of a separable and marginal commercial enterprise. Because of the sequential and integrating characteristic of television in almost all its existing uses and systems, this organic relationship between commercials and other kinds of material is much more evident than at any point in earlier systems of advertising, and television advertising is in this sense qualitatively different from press and post and isolated display advertising in any period (Williams 2003:68).

That is, by showcasing products in amenable settings, television naturalizes said products the way television itself is naturalized into the domestic setting (Feuer 1983) and thereby “dissolves the difference between the ‘supertext’ and ‘supermarket’...and inscribes the audience as consumers” (Browne 1984:181).<sup>19</sup>

It can also serve as an advertisement for itself; not just in the promotional materials for upcoming series or a particular network’s branding practices, but on a textual level through the use of crossovers within the “world” of television (White 1986:51). “The promotional function of such interprogramme referentiality supports viewership of the individual programs by cross-fertilizing audiences. In this sense it localizes the general industry strategy of programming flow at the level of a specific episode” (White 1986:56). Flow, according to White, can also be used describe the planning for commercial placement, audience loyalty to a channel, competitive programming, and intertextual product placement. It can describes the mediation between television technology, the industry’s definition of programmes, and the television text and the viewers’ experience of said text, making it, as a definition, both too broad and too narrow (White, 2002:94). Further, the lack of importance Williams’ gives to the specificity of both brands and programmes in favour of examining the macrolevel mediation of “needs and satisfactions” that television’s flow seemingly inculcates (or seeks to do so) in the audience is inherently problematic, at least from the view of this work, which posits that both

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<sup>19</sup> Klaus Jensen builds on Browne’s points regarding supertext, which he terms “superflow,” as the house brand of a particular channel that serves to socialize audiences as to what to expect from the channel (Jensen 1995:109); in essence, “superflow” as a form of branding a network.



programme and product work to differentiate themselves from other programmes and products while simultaneously associating themselves with one another to provide, as Arvidsson asserts, “contours” of meaning through the “intertextual links” with one another (Arvidsson 2005:245). Williams’ work, does, however, help map the contours of the intertextual links of programme branding and product placement, particularly their associative properties, despite the issues discussed above.

John Caldwell also takes issue with the idea inherent in flow that individual programmes are not differentiated within Williams’s analysis (or John Ellis’s or Rick Altman’s later revisions, both of whom argued against television as an object of much interest).<sup>20</sup> He argues that at least since the 1980s, the visual aesthetics of certain series and specials set up clear boundaries between themselves and ordinary programming. He writes “loss leader events, programmes, make every effort possible...*to underscore and illuminate their textual borders*, no matter how big those borders are” [emphasis in original]; this is essential to the event-status, loss leader programmes: they “sail *above* the mind-numbing flow” [emphasis in original] while simultaneously serving to draw viewers into it (Caldwell 1995:163). Further, they serve as a showcase for products, promotions, and tie-ins, thereby unifying the commercial content and the programme in the way Williams suggested, and the ways in which television certainly operates in the current era.

Jeffrey Sconce, Jostein Gripsrud, and Brian Winston separately argue that the theory itself reveals a fundamental contempt for television generally. Sconce argues that flow allows scholars “hostile” to television to “dip into its flow” and act like it is similar to “sticking one’s finger in a bucket of slime to better gauge its viscosity.” In Sconce’s view, television has built complex “narrative universes” that allow new

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<sup>20</sup> Ellis contended that viewers rarely gave any amount of attention to the programmes they watch on television; they instead “glance” at it; that is, they allow television to mediate the outside world for them, from the comfort of the domestic setting, while television itself strives to keep their distracted attention (Ellis 1992:164). Altman built on this, claiming that sound unified Williams’s flow and Ellis’s glance theory, in that it signaled the viewer as to what was important, a viewer distracted by “household flow”; that is, the maintenance of a home or family (Altman 1986:40).

audience modes of engagement (Sconce 2004:94-95).<sup>21</sup> Gripsrud's analysis takes issue with how flow views the audience as "passive and non-discriminating" (Gripsrud 1998:28); Winston's combines these views to argue that Williams (and later Ellis) are essentially working from the perspective of middle-class viewers who believe other viewers are indiscriminating or duped (Winston 1984:259).<sup>22</sup> Finally, with the introduction of the DVR, DVD format, and online viewing, flow as a metaphor for the "central television experience" (Williams 2003:96) becomes problematic; how can one even define what the central television experience is at this juncture?

Yet compelling arguments regarding flow's continued relevance have been made. William Uricchio argues that producers, advertisers, and programmers are relying even more heavily on Williams's notion of flow, including the network and advertiser strategies that maintain the original idea of flow, such as starting a programming block with a strong lead-in (known as "hammocking"), genre nights,<sup>23</sup> stunt programming, and "hot starts."<sup>24</sup> Derek Kompare argues that DVDs address the "limits" of flow by shifting flow from a "time quality" to a commodity; they objectify the programme and allow it to be commodified (Kompare 2006:353), or, as Caldwell argues about event programming, set firm textual boundaries around series to lift them above the "mind-numbing flow" (Caldwell 1995:163). Yet by Williams' own definition, these firm boundaries are seemingly nonexistent in the overall context of television and its advertising; his description of his first

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<sup>21</sup> These narrative universes, as Grainge argues, also serve as a textual response to competition in the multichannel era. They can serve as part of the conglomerates' goal to create a "total entertainment environment" (Grainge 2008:58).

<sup>22</sup> In his analysis of consumer and social sciences critiques of branding, Douglas Holt makes a similar point in his definition of postmodern consumer culture. He argues that marketers shifted from the branding paradigm of modernity, which was focused on "abstraction and cultural engineering" (that is, associating products with the "good life" and teaching people new to prosperity what constituted that life in consumption terms) to a postmodern focus on consumption as freedom (see also Thomas Frank [1997]), and setting up cultural engineering as a convenient straw man—that is, everybody's duped by advertising but me; every company is trying to dupe you except us (Holt 2002:80-83).

<sup>23</sup> As per example, BBC America (available via satellite in the United States), aired in 2008 "new" episodes of *Doctor Who* (BBC One, March 25, 2005-present; BBC Cymru Wales) and *Torchwood* (BBC/Starz, October 26, 2006-present; BBC Cymru Wales/Starz Entertainment) together under the title "Supernatural Saturdays."

<sup>24</sup> "Hot starts" refer to starting the next programme immediately after the previous one has ended; that is, with no commercial break in between.

experience with American television indicated a difficulty in discerning the difference between programmes and advertisements (Williams 2003:66-67).

Caldwell addresses this to a certain extent when he argues that “digital media aesthetics” (Caldwell 2006:101) can be used, through branding strategies, to underscore the power of the current institutions and the market; that is, even new media such as DVR, online television content, and DVD rely on their initial progenitor, television. The convergence of the Internet and television is not just a facet of corporate synergy or postmodernism, but an example of how the industry is using digital media to “leverage cultural capital, visibility, and financial benefit” by using “branding strategies and discourses of distinction...to position and value their respective conglomerates in the capital markets” (Caldwell 2006:131). Caldwell’s analysis of what he terms “first-shift” (traditional) and “second-shift” (digital) aesthetics will be examined more closely in my case studies.

In another analysis, Caldwell examines John Fiske’s “tripartite” model of television texts—primary, secondary, and tertiary—and how the latter two became dominant in the multichannel era. He argues that producers and critics have a tendency to compartmentalize “power and industry” and “audience and text” into different spheres—which is not how the logics of television texts operate (Caldwell 2006:101). The text, in television theory, has been prized above the context—politically, socially, economically—that it is created under. For those who do focus on context, they claim, as mentioned earlier, that textual analyses amount to little more than hollow aesthetics. Caldwell stresses that in the current media conglomeration climate, text and context need to be examined jointly. If textualism is an “institutional phenomenon,” then the “industrial logic” of new programme formats needs to be analyzed, particularly since they are “overt and explicit institutional performances of context” (Caldwell 2006:104-105). That is, media texts are deconstructing the practices of the media industry itself,<sup>25</sup> or, as Grainge terms

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<sup>25</sup> Joss Whedon provides a satirical analysis of this phenomenon in “Commentary! The Musical,” which accompanied the DVD of his successful Internet series *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*. He sings a song (“Heart, Broken”) about how “making-ofs and mobisodes” might make the audience buy the DVD, but the “narrative dies, stretched and torn.” The series *Supernatural* takes this even further, featuring one episode nearly every season that breaks the series diagesis to comment on the

it, playing the “politics of commercial obviousness” through the text and paratexts of television programmes (Grainge 2008:127-128). As David Barker asserted, the “communication ability of television narrative is largely influenced by the production techniques used to create it,” citing Norman Lear’s use of static cameras and proscenium arch framing in *All in the Family* (CBS, January 12, 1971-April 8, 1979; Bud Yorkin Productions/CBS/ Lear-Tandem Productions) to distance the viewer from Archie Bunker’s perspective (Barker 2006:171).

This is equally applicable to how a series is promoted, supported, and scheduled; a new series placement following an established, popular one can launch the new series more effectively (“hammocking”). The products placed within the diageis of the series can indicate the socioeconomic status of both the characters and the intended viewer for the series. All of the elements feed into the branding strategy for both the series and the networks they air upon; both the production and text could thus mark the series as a quality offering.

Arvidsson argues: “Brands...rely on the productivity of consumers not only for the realization, but for the actual co-production of the values that they promise” (Arvidsson 2006:35). John Hartley makes a similar argument with regards to television, in that it should not be understood as a technology or aesthetic system but as a “fundamental human mechanism for sense-making” (Hartley 1992:14). Thus branding on television represents a dialogue between the viewer and the industry to make sense of what the programmes, channels, or even the industry as a whole are attempting to communicate. Given that, I will proceed within this work with a series of case studies of programmes whose text and context positioned them at a narrower demographic despite their place on a broadcast network. Each was branded in a particular way to make “sense” of both the text and the demographic it was positioned at, as well as create “value” for the associated channel, conglomerate, and the audience itself.

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television industry, fandom, or production, including “Hollywood Babylon” (2.18), “The Monster at the End of This Book” (4.18), “Changing Channels” (5.8), “The Real Ghostbusters” (5.9), “The French Mistake” (6.15), and “Season 7, Time for a Wedding” (7.8). For an in-depth analysis of *Supernatural*’s metafictional and reflexive narrative strategies, see Garcia (2011:146-160).

Each of the examined programs within this work could lay claim to a dedicated audience and all have some claim to the “quality” or “cult” brand—*Gilmore Girls*, *Arrested Development*, *Heroes* and *Firefly*. Although both terms are not necessarily synonymous and boast a multiplicity of definitions, which will be explicated throughout this chapter and the thesis as a whole,<sup>26</sup> they do indicate that a series generically defined as “quality” (as per Jason Mittell, who argues that the programme’s schedule and channel brand are relevant to how a programme is generically defined [Mittell 2004:58-59]) presupposes a particular audience; this dovetails with Gary Edgerton and Kyle Nicholas’ assertion that genre is increasingly important within television as a “marketing device” rather than a “production strategy” (Edgerton and Nicholas 2005:249), although, in essence, television is using a production strategy *as* a marketing device.

In what amounts to a how-to manual for network branding practices, Walter McDowell and Alan Batten identify seven necessary steps for a network to build its brand image: relevancy; emotion; consistency; simplicity; proper positioning, according to “audience-centered dimensions”; primacy; and borrowing a brand name (that is, bringing disparate elements into a megabrand that enhances rather than dilutes the original) (McDowell and Batten 2009:43-47). While this may seem obvious, McDowell and Batten’s definition is a necessary starting point to examine some of the literature around branding in a more academic context, as it is a much more simplified way of saying that, regardless of context, branding represents a form of “storytelling” (Twitchell 2005:2). Within television, as seen in the example at the start of this chapter, effective branding should dovetail with the storytelling that television engages in. On the programme level, for instance, a product placed within a series should both say something about the character and characterize the product. To use an example from one of the series I examine in this work, the placement of Juicy Couture sweatpants (with the word “Juicy” on the backside) in

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<sup>26</sup> *Firefly* hews the most closely to the definition of “cult” as defined by Pearson (2010:9) and Jancovich and Hunt (2004:28) through its opposition to mainstream television. That being said, I also agree with Johnson (2010:135), who argues that cult is better defined through its reception than its text, which would reintegrate a series such as *Gilmore Girls* back into the definition, as will be explicated in greater detail in chapter three.

*Gilmore Girls* as worn by 34-year-old Lorelai Gilmore characterizes her as someone with enough confidence to wear “Juicy” on her backside, sexualizes her, and sets her in opposition to her more conservative mother, all of which are established in her character at this point in the series (“An Affair to Remember” 4.06). Yet, it also inscribes Juicy Couture with some or all of Lorelai’s characteristics in return. Finally, not only does it provide revenue to the airing network, but clothes placements such as Juicy Couture, Diane von Furstenberg, and Anthropologie—affordable only to higher-income individuals—could inflect the airing network with the same distinction.

Given the numerous levels a single type of placement creates within a single broadcast programme, branding can operate as “means-end theory” when applied to branding a network and a series; that is, it “incorporates all levels [of brand meaning] into a conceptual framework” (the network) and “focuses on the associations between the levels” (the individual series) (Batey 2008:21). Branding practices are simpler for cable, where the majority of programming can fit under the banner of a single network brand,<sup>27</sup> but a broadcast network, with its numerous dayparts that can feature informational programming, soap operas, local and national news programs, game shows, dramas, and comedies, represents a different challenge to the concept of a single brand that would encompass all the diverse offerings under a single umbrella. Broadcast networks thus must employ a three-pronged strategy: logos, “signature shows,” and syndicated or rerun programming that fit the network brand (Caldwell 2008:245). McDowell and Battan assert that because of the continuous shift in programme content, it is “extremely difficult” to effectively brand a television station (McDowell and Battan 2009:36).

The spring “upfront” presentation—in which networks present their fall schedules to advertisers—represents an ideal venue for networks to offer advertisers a particular brand identity (Curtin and Shuttac 2009:48). The upfronts

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<sup>27</sup> As per example, “Characters Welcome” is the branding line for the USA Network (owned by Universal, who later merged with NBC). Their original programming focuses on quirky protagonists, in series such as *Monk* (July 12, 2002-December 4, 2009; Touchstone Television/Mandeville Films/Universal) and *Psych* (July 7, 2006-present; GEP Productions/NBC Universal/Pacific Mountain Productions).

provide an opportunity to examine “industry priorities, practices, and strategies of internal promotion” (Lotz 2007:4), a proving ground for a broadcast network’s branding strategy that can thus be migrated to viewers. In her analysis of the May 2003 upfront presentations, Lotz analyses the promotional strategies enlisted to introduce the first audience (advertisers) to programmes; they are, she argues, inherently different from the branding strategies used to promote them to viewers. That is, they “make apparent the commodity status of the audience” as well as create “buzz,” and, most importantly, “determine the textual forms that circulate” within the culture. Examining these events can thus reveal “the complicated range of promotional efforts used to construct a perception of a network’s programming, mission, and brand position” for the most important, initial audiences: advertisers (Lotz 2007:5-6). Depending on the success or failure of the previous year, this brand identity can shift regularly, can assume a proactive (“we’re number one among teens”) or defensive (explaining away failures, pushing new and different programmes) posture (Curtin and Shuttac 2010:48). Thus the difficulties in broadcast branding are not just in their necessarily disparate offerings but also in the need to produce valued audiences year after year, as advertising prices can depend on these numbers. Further, as Johnson argues, the fact that many programmes are co-produced by different companies means that a series can build the “brand equity” of a range of different entities (Johnson 2007:7).

There are other implications to this disinterment, with regards to issues of programme ownership that Johnson touches on in her analysis—namely the ways in which programme brands can build the brand equity for numerous entities within the conglomerate structure. She uses the example of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s (WB/UPN, March 10, 1997-May 20, 2003; Mutant Enemy Productions/Kuzui Enterprises/Sandollar Television/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) ability to build the brand of Mutant Enemy (Joss Whedon’s production company), producer 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, and Warner Brothers (the network it initially aired on). While she uses this to challenge Timothy Todreas contention that the media industry’s current climate puts content creators at the forefront at the expense of producers and distributors (Todreas 1999:175), Johnson does not herself problematize this example by not

explicitly addressing the battle over licensing fees, between Warner Brothers and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox over *Buffy*, which ended with *Buffy*'s cancellation on the WB and subsequent move to UPN, with a \$2.3 million per episode license fee agreement and 2-season guarantee (Schneider 2001:21, 76). This high-stakes battle for content gives more weight to Todreas' contention, particularly since it is the content that 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox felt was more valuable than the WB was willing to pay for, and UPN's subsequent hefty offer to use the series as part of a re-branding process (Schneider 2001:21, 76). Johnson is correct in her contention that such a battle did not put the power in producer Mutant Enemy's hands, per se, but the negotiations seemed to prize the content (and its associated brand) over its distribution, in that UPN executives assumed the programme itself would provide a "halo effect" that would draw in viewers and allow them to raise advertising costs (Schneider 2001:76), putting the power in the hands of content over distribution.

How, then, can these disparate parts be unified? As Celia Lury writes: "[T]he object-ivity of the brand emerges out of relations between its parts, or rather its products (or services), and in the organisation of a controlled relation to its environment—that is, to markets, competitors, the state, consumption and everyday life" (Lury 2004:2). Meaning that an object gains its meaning through its relation to other things, both internal (what it is made of) and external (the environment it exists in) to itself. Thus a programme, if viewed as an object, is not just its genre, characters, or writing (its internal components) but when it is scheduled, the network it airs on, the commercials that support it, the audience that watches it, and the programmes that surround it (its external elements). If this is broadened to the network level, it is the relation of the various dayparts to one another that develop a "metabrand" (Baird 2007). Or, as Mike Benson, Senior Vice President of Marketing, Advertising, and Promotion for ABC expressed it: "Branding is not simply graphic packaging, it is developing a voice, personality, and feel for a network and its programming" (2006:16). It allows them "compete effectively in an increasingly crowded marketplace by creating strong, distinctive, loyal relationships with viewers" (Johnson 2007:7), by creating programmes related to one another and the metabrand. John Wells, producer of series such as *ER*, agreed that "[e]ach network



has a very specific identity that a consumer expects when they turn on that channel. All the network successes have been specifically within the brand they have been known for” (Grossman 2006:10-12).

The converse of this, of course, implies that programmes that do not fit the pre-conceived brand are doomed to fail, which does not take into account the numerous times and ways in which broadcast networks rebranded themselves in this era, with certain programmes serving as the opening shot, so to speak, of a rebranding effort. The aforementioned sale of *Buffy* to UPN is one example, but others, such as *Survivor*, represent examples of a programme that did not necessarily fit in with the rest of a broadcast network’s schedule, but nonetheless signaled a branding/programming shift. In the case of CBS, *Survivor* was part of an ongoing effort within the network to appeal to younger audiences (Carter 2006).<sup>28</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, NBC’s “Must-See TV” brand was defined by, as Nancy San Martin argues, programmes linked through story arcs, cross promotions, ensemble casts, high production values, self-reflexive pop culture references, intertexts, and similarities in acting, writing, and directing styles. Such linkages, Martin argues, offered a “representational flattening that makes this block a serial narrative form in its own right” (Martin 2008:34). Certainly in the era Martin examines, NBC successfully developed a “flow” of programs for Thursday nights. In the 1980s, it was two family-oriented comedies (*The Cosby Show* [September 20, 1984-April 30, 1992; Carsey-Werner Productions] and *Family Ties* [September 22, 1982-May 14, 1989, Ubu Productions]) followed by two adult comedies (*Cheers* [September 30, 1982-May 20, 1993; Charles/Burrows/Charles Productions] and *Night Court* [January 4, 1984-May 31, 1992; Starry Night Productions/Warner Brothers Television]), finishing with a drama (*Hill Street Blues*, [January 15, 1981-May 12, 1987; MTM Enterprises] and later *LA Law* [September 15, 1986-May 19, 1994; Stephen Bochco Productions]). Later, the Fox network targeted young men

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<sup>28</sup> Nor is it limited to the current era. Sally Bedell’s account of network executive Fred Silverman’s rise and fall in the 1970s and 1980s provides an intriguing inside look into the ways in which, once established as his own brand (“the man with the golden gut”), Silverman was courted (and hired) by all three broadcast networks at various times to, in essence, rebrand them (Bedell 1981). Brandon Tartikoff, as well, was brought into NBC, post-Silverman, to shift its brand from, in his own words “K-Mart” to “Sax Fifth Avenue” (Tartikoff 1992:12).

aged 18-34 with series such as *21 Jump Street* (April 12, 1987-April 27, 1991; Stephen J. Cannell Productions/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox), *The Simpsons* (December 17, 1989-present; Gracie Films/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox), and *Married...With Children* (April 5, 1987-June 9, 1997; ELP Communications/Columbia Pictures Television). The comedies in particular, were irreverent and even offensive to some, positioning Fox as anti-establishment, which they incorporated into their brand image (Kimmel 2004:236), but even *21 Jump Street*, with its increased focus on Johnny Depp's newly established heartthrob status, use of then-contemporary music (such as U2, REM, and Depeche Mode), and underground figures such as John Waters<sup>29</sup> was markedly different from most other programming at the time (1987). Jennifer Holt argues that Fox's success at targeting this demographic "spawned a new age of niche marketing in broadcasting and with it, a new universe of advertising capital and incentive for investors" (Holt 2008:19).

Lury draws further parallels between brands and television networks, positing that the brand itself is a "new media object" that can "translate something into another object" (Lury 2004:6), much like the conflation of Toyota cars and *Bones* characters referenced at the start of this chapter, as well as serving as a "medium" in its own right. That is, it is not only the relationship between placement, packaging, promotion, and the qualities of the products themselves that create a brand, but the conflation of the "concrete" aspects of a product (for instance, its use, the way it looks) and its more abstract qualities (such as, how it makes the buyer feel on an emotional or social level, tying it directly with the pathetic fallacy in Romanticism [Twitchell 2005:36]). This "information object" can thus be viewed as a "paradigmatic embodiment of the logic of informational capitalism" in the way that consumers interact with it (Arvidsson 2006:13). The "dynamic unity" of the "relations between products in time" (Lury 2004:76) is highly applicable to what a broadcast network schedule seeks. To put it in baser terms, branding needs to do at

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<sup>29</sup> John Waters appeared in the episode "Awomp-Bomp-Aloobomb, Aloop Bamboom" (4.18), which aired fewer than 2 months before the debut of Water's film *Cry-Baby* (April 6, 1990; Imagine Entertainment/Universal Pictures), starring Johnny Depp, thereby serving, intentionally or not, as a cross-promotion for both.

least two things—guide audiences to a channel, and convince advertisers to buy time (Curtin and Shuttac 2009:58). The ability to develop a network metabrand, in which programmes serve to differentiate the network from the competitors, and differentiate themselves from one another while simultaneously retaining some level of association, seeks to capture a particular demographic and convince advertisers that the relation between its programming and demographics make the network one that the advertiser should want to be associated with. For broadcast networks, these parameters must, by necessity, be broader than cable, and thus the aforementioned difficulty in developing metabrands within broadcast.

While much has been written about the branding practices of cable television channels (Johnson 2007, Nelson 2007, Selznick 2009, Jaramillo 2002), which, as stated above, are easier to brand because of their more limited programming remits,<sup>30</sup> the targeting of specific demographics by broadcast networks cannot be separated from the increased “will-to-brand” (Grainge 2008:52) that is endemic across all facets of the entertainment sector. Branding can serve as “a platform for the patterning of activity, a mode of organizing activities in time and space” (Lury 2004:1), defining not just the product but the “*contexts of consumption*,” making it a “propertied form of life to be realized in consumption” (Arvidsson 2005:244). To tie this in with television more specifically, if a programme gains the desired demographic the network wants the programme to appeal to, it allows the use value of the series to be translated into a more general value to the network (Arvidsson 2005:249)—that is, allowing networks to charge more for advertisements and placements based on the series attracting the right demographics—through the immaterial labour (that is, viewing and possibly buying the featured brands or ancillary material) of the audience.

For instance, the aforementioned “must-see” brand for NBC had a very specific meaning in previous eras: it was a brand that created the expectation of a

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<sup>30</sup> That being said, Selznick’s article specifically addresses the challenge of the SciFi (now SyFy) network’s attempts to build a brand identity by appealing to a broader base of viewers without alienating the core science fiction fan audience. She argues that, with the brand “built right into the name of the network,” branding should have not been difficult, but instead served to overly narrow the demographic it might appeal to (Selznick 2009:186).

particular kind of experience of television, one that would be looked at as perhaps the apotheosis of Raymond Williams's flow; the four comedies and a drama format that was so successful for NBC for more than a decade thus depended on how each of the series built on the next: family comedy, adult comedy, and drama. Or, as Paul Grainge writes in his analysis of the use of branding within the film industry: "As corporate strategy, branding attributes value to products and platforms in ways that help aggregate multiple niche audiences and establish a basis for industry expansion" (Grainge 2008:56). By virtue of scheduling specifically for particular family patterns (that is, family programming first, with adult-oriented fare later), NBC could conceivably cover a wide swath of the broadcast audience, united under the NBC Peacock logo that served as a "mark of flow" (Lury 2004:89) that didn't exist in just one timeframe but served as a coordinating site for multiple parts of the NBC schedule. In the current TVIII era of eroding audiences, DVRs, and illegal downloads, logos can also serve another function; entertainment industries can "project their logos as a means of confirming specific kinds of industrial authority and viewing pleasure" (Grainge 2008:70). That is, if the branding is effective enough for a viewer to make very particular associations with the network itself.<sup>31</sup> As Catherine Johnson suggested, when series are exported overseas, the programme's brand can both supersede that of its originating network and build the brand equity of the network it is exported to (Johnson 2007:14).

With the emergence of multiple avenues for viewing television content—DVDs, DVRs, online, and iTunes—broadcast networks, both through their programming and through offering alternate viewing or repurposed content online, are targeting smaller niche audiences that are capable (both in terms of knowledge and technology) of following said content across multiple platforms; that is, "brand enthusiasts" (Selznick 2009:177) that will form "brand communities" (Muñiz and

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<sup>31</sup> In their analysis of whether network branding or programming is responsible for drawing audience to networks, Lin et al found that those audience members who used television to relax were more likely to watch a single network, despite what was on, while technologically adept viewers were less loyal to networks, seeking out particular programmes across numerous channels. Lin et al conclude that the latter viewers should be courted, stating "this upscale target should not be abandoned in favor of downscale 'broadcast only' audiences" (Lin et al 2002:30), thus making explicit the class-based nature of much branding efforts.

O'Guinn 2005:63-85). In this context, it is the programme that serves as the brand, rather than just the network (Johnson 2007:18). It is at this point that the branding practices around niche programming and the debates around quality and cult television intersect, with product placement as one discursive site in which this intersection is clear. The programme brand thus moves (flows) through a multitude of iterations: from the network and series logos, its place within the schedule and what surrounds it on the schedule, the types of advertising that support it, the audience segment it seeks, and the products placed within individual series. All of these form the frame or "interface" (Lury 2004:155) in which the programme brand operates. This "interface" is manifested in the logo itself (or "face" of the brand), which serves to organize this flow in a particular way. Product placement, as stated earlier, has the ability to serve as short-hand characterization of both character and series; thus a "quality" brand can refer to either a placed product (for example, the placement of video iPods in *Heroes*) or the series itself; preferably, from a network perspective, both will inflect and reflect upon one another.

While the ways in which viewers interact with this brand do have an effect on it, Lury argues that rather than a face-to-face communication with the brand, it is more a "face-to-profile" (Lury 2004:132). Paul Grainge agrees that "branding relies on the participation of consumers, but on terms that have been forethought" (2008:29). This is the point of rupture in which culture jamming and anti-branding movements gain their traction; because brands seek interaction while simultaneously seeking to control it, the power structure remains "asymmetrical" (Lury 2004:137) in how brands and consumers interact. As Lury points out, changes in trademark law means that copyright infringement can now be applied not just to those who created a similar brand, and thereby cause confusion as to which is the original, but also to products that "dilute" the associations the brand creates. As she writes: "creating associations between products is becoming established as the exclusive prerogative of the trademark owner" (Lury 2004:108-109). One can see this operating in, for instance, Warner Brother's crackdown on fan-created videos on YouTube (Sandoval 2008). This is why it is important to briefly examine some of the debates around anti-branding movements, as it provides a fuller view of

branding as a practice.<sup>32</sup> Culture jamming is often aimed at the most popular and pervasive brands, much to the surprise of industry. Douglas Holt points out that:

Academic marketing theorizes away conflicts between marketing and consumers. Such conflicts result only when firms attend to their internal interests rather than seek to meet consumer wants and needs. The marketing concept declares that, with the marketing perspective as their guide, the interests of firms and consumers align. The most puzzling aspect of the antibranding movement from this vista is that it takes aim at the most successful and lauded companies, those that have taken the marketing concept to heart and industriously applied it (Holt 2002:70).

In other words, to the advertising industry, bad branding (or bad product placement) is the problem; consumers don't mind brands and placements as long as it's done well (Avery and Ferraro 2000:219; Russell and Stern 2006:9; Russell 2002:306-318; and Karrh 1998:38). To certain consumers, however, branding talks *at* rather than *with* the consumer. They thus seek to talk back on their own terms—often through what is referred to a culture jam. Culture jamming is basically “parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their message” (Klein 280), such as covering a billboard with a photo of sweatshop workers and branding it with the Nike swoosh logo. As Naomi Klein argues, culture jamming serves as one response to this “one-way information flow” (Klein 2002:281) or “face-to-profile” (Lury 2004:156) communication of branding. While Kalle Lasn, founder of *Adbusters* magazine, argues that culture jamming is equivalent to the civil rights, feminist, and environmental movements and “will alter the way we think and live” (Lasn 2000:xi), Klein argues that this kind of talking back to brands could be “evidence of our total colonization by them” (Klein 2002:297). Indeed, Lasn and *Adbusters* launched their own line of products—including the Black Spot sneaker and the Culture Jammers toolkit—a point at which Andrew

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<sup>32</sup> Muniz and O'Guinn, in their analysis of brand communities, do delineate a form of brand community termed “anti-brand,” but in this instance, they are referring to groups that are organized around their aversion to a particular brand (such as Mac users aversion to PCs, or Pepsi drinkers who abhor Coca-Cola) rather than being against branding as a corporate practice (Muniz and O'Guinn 2005:74).

Heath and Joseph Potter, in their analysis of the anti-branding movement, argued it was clear that such a movement was no real alternative to the system (Heath and Potter 2004:1). “Culture jamming’s strategy of disintermediating the perceived artificial effects of bad culture ironically opens new avenues of consumption through the pursuit of authenticity and the embrace of the natural” (Carducci 2006:125); it is the postmodern consumer culture paradigm Holt describes in his analysis (Holt 2002:82-85). This rebellion against image culture, by turning its own tools against it, does seek to address the ways in which the practice of branding can be used to “distance companies from the complicated, and often messy, political-economic relations they engender in the real world” (Goldman and Papson 2006:335), that builds a “representational wall of protection” (Goldman and Papson 2006:342) against criticism.

Yet, Klein argues that while culture jamming can represent an entry point of taking action to address and redress corporate injustices that the face of the brand obfuscates, it should not represent the whole of an individual’s action. “[T]here is much that is unsatisfying about fighting a war of symbols ... It is still only symbols, facades, representations” (Klein 2002:453). Heath and Potter, in their analysis of counterculture rebellion (which owes a large debt to Thomas Frank’s *The Conquest of Cool* [Frank 1998]), take issue with Klein’s analysis of branding practices, accusing her of conflating advertising and branding in her analysis of The Body Shop (which built its brand sans advertising) (Heath and Potter 2004:208), not acknowledging that at the start of *No Logo*, Klein very clearly delineates the difference between advertising and branding. That is, brands represent the “core meaning of the modern corporation” (Klein 2002:5), while advertising itself is only a vehicle for spreading that meaning to a greater portion of the population. She even goes so far as to argue that not all advertising is bad, and that the idea of a “lost innocence” in American culture is a “romantic fiction” (Klein 2002:31).

Further, Heath and Potter themselves do not acknowledge the inequalities that the face of the brand can obscure. Putting anti-consumerist critique in the realm of class warfare, they argue that the “cultural elite” disdains places like McDonald’s or Wal-Mart because their products “are an affront to the higher

aesthetic sensibility” (Heath and Potter 2004:240). They relegate questions about the effect of McDonald’s business practices on the environment to the realm of “interesting questions” and praise the ability of Wal-Mart to keep prices low and provide plenty of RV parking. They make no mention of, for example, the real economic and political consequences of Wal-Mart’s success, including poverty-level wages for their workers, predatory pricing, destroying local economies, and using undocumented workers in store and overseas sweatshop labour for a large portion of its products, despite its own “Buy American” branding campaign (Bianco and Zellner 2003).

It is when they argue that the counterculture and anti-consumerist stances actually reinforce consumerism, because of the tendency to equate consumerism with conformity, not realizing that “rebellion” drives the marketplace, rather than the other way around, that they gain the most traction (Heath and Potter 2004:99). In other words, this is where the influence of Frank’s *The Conquest of Cool* is seen the most clearly. Frank argued that the counterculture of the 1960s was in line to similar revolutions against authority in the advertising industry. Even in the current era, Frank argues, advertising executives “imagine the marketplace as a site of perpetual revolution, a certain jaded rebel hipness as the ideal consuming posture and consumerism itself as a machine propelled madly onward by no less plentiful a fuel than popular disgust with consumerism” (Frank 1998:227). In what Frank terms “liberation marketing,” the marketplace absorbs most spaces of dissent for itself. It “imagines consumers breaking free from the old enforcers of order, tearing loose from the shackles with which capitalism has bound us, escaping the routine of bureaucracy and hierarchy, getting in touch with our true selves, and finally, finding authenticity, that holiest of consumer grails” (Frank 1997:175). Which is precisely the thrust of Lasn’s manifesto against image culture (Lasn 2000); but that, as Heath and Potter (2004), Klein (2002), and Jo Littler (2008) point out, is why it cannot represent an alternative to that system. That being said, culture jamming provides a useful lens through which to view my final case study—*Firefly*—particularly the ways in which one character acts as an embodied culture jam.



It is perhaps, then, more useful to follow the analysis of Mica Nava, who critiqued the tendency of Marxist analyses of advertising and branding to decontextualize advertising from the context in which it appears (Nava 1997:34); she asserts that advertising is as much about selling the corporate brand as it is about selling products, and thus we need to recontextualize advertising analyses into their production and consumption processes. Indeed, branding can represent “an ongoing conversation within a culture about the meaning of objects” (Twitchell 1997:13). Grainge opens his own conversation regarding branding by asking certain questions that recontextualize branding practices back into the media that they support: What does branding indicate about corporate power and authority? What does it say about the relationship between products and consumers, and how does the industry manage that relationship? Grainge is careful to point out that his analysis is not focused on branding as a “metaphor for the injuries of global capitalism” (as would be the case with Naomi Klein’s analysis in *No Logo*), or to examine media corporations through such a critique; his focus is primarily on how the film industry adjusted to shifts in the “entertainment environment” during the 1990s and 2000s. That is, he is less interested in the “machinations and cynicism of brand marketing” (although he admits it exists) than with the “scope and nuances of Hollywood’s promotional culture of production” (Grainge 2008:7), a point that Caldwell has made in numerous instances (Caldwell 2003, 2006). Thus, in addition to the questions referenced above, he seeks to understand how it operates in film and what implications that has for the “film experience” (Grainge 2008:7). These questions inform my own case studies within this work, particularly, as Selznick writes in her analysis of the branding struggles of the SyFy cable network, the “tension” in the relationship of channel brand and programming, which attempts to “target” and “grow” audiences at the same time (Selznick 2009:178). Grainge ends his study with a call for “patient analysis” of the “historically determined forms of knowledge and practice, meaning and feeling, pleasure and desire that serve to frame (and reformulate)” how media is “understood as an object and commodity” (Grainge 2008:179). This, too, is what I seek to do in my own analysis.

The context of my analysis, as stated above, looks primarily at how brand flows operate within niche programmes. The smaller audience segment that certain programmes seek must, necessarily, be desirable to the networks and advertisers; that is, “quality” audiences. Each of the series analyzed within this work offers some claim to the term *quality*, whether through its production, visual or aural aesthetics, or text. Thus in this part of the chapter I will examine some of the debates around the term *quality television*, as it serves as a way to brand both a programme and an intended audience.

In their analysis of how *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart* (July 22, 1996-present; Mad Cow Productions/Comedy Central/Comedy Partners) both brands and is branded by Comedy Central, Jimmy Reeves et al argue that the debates around quality television represent “contested ideological ground” that is “rife with contradictions” and “emphatically political” (Reeves, Rogers, and Epstein 2007:98). Indeed, many of the assertions made with regard to quality television indicate that one of the main markers of such programming is the way it which it transcends the medium of television; that is, comparing it to literature and/or cinema, and thus attracting an educated “quality” audience (Bignell 2007:158) to the exclusion of a broader base. Both Robin Nelson and Deborah Jaramillo argue that HBO’s marketing of itself to educated professionals brands its programmes as “quasi-cinema” (Nelson 2007:26-27). Jaramillo asserts that, in regard to the high use of product placement in *The Sopranos* (HBO, January 10, 1999-June 10, 2007; Park Entertainment/HBO), despite its airing on a non-advertising supported network, is in line with product placement’s high use in Hollywood cinema, and thus serve only to make *The Sopranos* “more cinematic” (Jaramillo 2002:67).<sup>33</sup> Jane Feuer argues, in her analysis of MTM Productions, that quality television as both a commodity and a textual

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<sup>33</sup> Product placement has a long cinematic history (see Segrave 2004 for an exhaustive historical detailing); however, television at its inception ran on the sponsorship model exclusively (Boddy 1995; Baurnow 1978). In that light, Jaramillo’s contention seems somewhat glib; she makes a stronger point tying *The Sopranos* to cinema on the genre level; she correctly asserts that there is a history of mafia films, including those in which they serve as protagonists, that does not really exist on television (Jaramillo 2002:68-69). In this way, *The Sopranos* provides a strong association with HBO’s cinema-infused brand, another instance of Edgerton and Nicholas’ contention that genre can function as a marketing device.

production cannot be separated (Feuer 1985:34). In that same vein, Paul Kerr examines how the rise of MTM Productions was tied with the increased importance of the Nielsen ratings that separate audiences into demographics (Kerr 1985:157). These ratings tended to exclude the poor, rural, and very young and old, resulting in programs that skewed to those demographics (for example, *The Beverly Hillbillies* [CBS, September 26, 1962-March 23, 1971; Filmways Productions]) being cancelled and replaced with programs of “social relevance,” such as the type MTM specialized in producing. Thus, as Kerr (1985:90), Feuer (1985:35), Thompson (1997:13-15), McMurria (2007:67), and Reeves et al (2008:67) argue, quality television operates as a brand; a shorthand for programmers, audiences, and advertisers to indicate the type of demographic being addressed by both programme and advertisements. The previous eras of demographically motivated programming shifts have implications for the current era. As John McMurria argues, in the digital era of television, the focus has shifted from distribution to “branded programming networks” that “package content” (McMurria: 2008:67) or, to put it another way, from networks to “content aggregation and distribution” sites (Lotz 2007:247). Both McMurria and Lotz’s arguments recall Todreas’ assertion that in the digital era, the power balance shifts from distribution to content.

Such a term as *quality* is necessarily a loaded one, with the debt being owed for to the shows’ literary text or film-based aesthetics (Feuer et al 1985), a point that both Derek Kompare and Matt Hills touch on with regard to the transition of television text to the DVD format (Kompare 2006:343). Hills argues that the choice of which series to release on DVD reproduce the same quality markers as television, to the exclusion of programmes that may appeal to a broader demographic, a point I will address in greater depth in my case study of *Arrested Development*.<sup>34</sup> Quality

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<sup>34</sup> While I agree with Hills’ assertion that the overrepresentation of cinematic or literary-influenced series that appeal to a monied or educated audience is a problem, one point he fails to address with regard to the small number of mass appeal shows available on DVD (such as *American Idol*), is a simple one: much of their appeal lies in the surprise and tension of competition, which would necessarily be absent on rewatching. The ability to revisit programmes is a strong selling point for DVD. As Caldwell writes “reality TV hypes real-time observation and discovery, bound in a specific time and space” and thus becomes “old news” when it’s over, with “little value as reruns or repurposed digital media” or potential co-branding opportunities (Caldwell 2008:263). He does note an exception, in the way the Outdoor Living Network repackaged *Survivor* by appealing to “niche

could also mean that the show transcends its own medium (Bignell 2007:158), or serves as a marker of “middlebrow” programmes whose only differences from ordinary fare is the expense in producing them (Caughie 2000; Davies 2007:172). It can be viewed as “liberal TV” (Feuer 1985:56) in that it is “literate” and appeals to those who disdain television, which, as both Johnson (2007:10) and Jaramillo (2002:60) argue, can be a strong branding function as well. Sarah Cardwell argues that quality television is often so designated based on “observation and apprehension of textual qualities” rather than a “gut” response to whether it represents “good” or enjoyable television. Cardwell calls for a distinction between “quality” and “good” television, which she defines as “rich, riveting, moving...and relevant to and valued by us” without the burden of being edifying or educational that quality television is saddled with (Cardwell 2007:158).

Further, quality television can also serve as an institutional definition; that is, a programme is labelled as quality because it attracts what is thought of as a “valuable” (Jancovich and Lyons 2003:2) or “blue-chip” (Thompson 1997:14) audience—aged 18-34 years, upscale, urban males (Davies 2007:172)—or positions itself above the flow of ordinary television (Jancovich and Lyons 2003:2) by virtue of its production values (Caldwell 1995), writing (Espenson 2010:46-49), or quirkiness (Hills 2010:73). To these, Thompson adds additional definitions, including: breaking or defying genre rules; possessing a “quality pedigree” (that is, it “borrows a brand name” [McDowell and Battan 2005:45] from those who built a reputation in other, better regarded media, such as filmmakers David Lynch and Barry Levinson<sup>35</sup>); undergoing a “noble struggle” against “profit-mongering networks and non-appreciative audiences” (Thompson 1997:14); featuring a large ensemble cast to provide a variety of viewpoints (Thompson 1997:14); employing “memory” in continuity and character development; and able to boast critical

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hunting and outdoor audience[s]” (Caldwell 2008:417). It may also be the reason why procedural shows with limited or non-serialized narratives, such as *Law & Order* (NBC, September 13, 1990-May 24, 2010; Wolf Films/Universal Television) or *CSI* do not sell strongly on DVD (Higgins 2003:1, 22).

<sup>35</sup> Lynch and Levinson were responsible for *Twin Peaks* (ABC, April 8, 1990-June 10, 1991; Lynch Frost Productions/Propaganda Films/Spelling Television) and *Homicide: Life on the Street* (NBC, January 31, 1993-May 21, 1999; Baltimore Pictures/Fatima Productions/MCEG Sterling Entertainment), respectively, both which won praise for their varying “cinematic” qualities.

acclaim. The series selected for analysis within this work meet some or all of the criteria that Thompson enumerates here.

The concept of quality television as transcending the ordinary is the place in which branding practices and quality television seem to most closely intersect. As Robin Nelson argues:

Distinctive product is the name of today's television game in channel branding and 'must-see' television or 'event TV' programming. Thus technology, industrial change, multi-channelling and fragmentation of the audience have together yielded a range of fundamental industrial changes, including a virtual inversion of at least the claims to quality that television now makes of itself (Nelson 2007:46).

This inversion, as per Nelson, is that the focus on distinctive branding across networks means that even shows and formats that do not bear the "quality" brand nevertheless share at least some of the markers of quality, such as better production values and cinematic visual aesthetics. In this assertion we can clearly see the operations of brand flow from a different perspective; the flow between programmes of a particular network's "house of brands" (Murray 2005:422) create an association between series by virtue of the network they air on.

The DVD format and its ability to allow viewers to archive and rewatch programmes to a greater extent than even syndication or VHS allowed (Kompere 2006) could also serve to raise the visual bar for television (Thompson 2007:xix). Indeed, Thompson argues that quality has become the dominant television aesthetic of the new millennium. If that was the case, being "distinctive" would grow ever more difficult in such an environment. Since the entire point of branding is to not only create an affective response to a product (Batey 2008:xiv) or to insert itself in the social life of consumers (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2005), but on a basic level to differentiate similar products from one another through emotion and social positioning (Arvidsson 2006:82), branding becomes even more important in the televisual context of quality going "mainstream," to both differentiate and associate programmes with one another and a network.

This potential mainstreaming of the markers of quality represents another area in which the discourses around quality television and cult television intersect, and even overlap. Roberta Pearson defines some of the markers of cult television as seriality, an “infinitely large metatext” that can encompass non-linear narratives, multiple settings/time frames, and a potential “infinite delay” of narrative resolution (Pearson 2004:xii). Pearson herself draws the parallel: “Both cult and quality serve as marketing brands to attract particularly desirable audience segments and both are central to industry strategy in the ever-shifting TV3 environment” (Pearson 2010:16). Matt Hills makes a similar argument, in that the generic hybrids, that contain elements of cult and mainstream, are “recalibrat[ing]” the cult/mainstream binary. Instead of thinking of cult as “selling out,” a more useful approach would be to view these shows as “deconstructing” said binary to create commercial TV that “self-consciously draws on discourses of authorship, sophistication, and quirkiness” (Hills 2010:73).

Rather than representing an opposition to the mainstream (as in Henry Jenkins’ textual poachers [Jenkins 1992]), Hills contends that “resolutely grass-roots and non-commercial audience activity set against industry machinations” doesn’t work in a contemporary media environment, where “cult fans have become one niche market amongst others to be surveyed, understood, and catered for” (Hills 2007:69).<sup>36</sup> While cult fans often position themselves as outside the mainstream (Jancovich and Hunt 2004:27), engaging in subversive readings and practices outside the structure of television (Jenkins 1992, 2006), both Eileen Meehan and Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt argue that fan communities often replicate the same power structures both inside (Jancovich and Hunt 2004:28) and outside

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<sup>36</sup> Hills’s analysis of Russell T. Davies and Stephen Moffat and others as fans turned showrunners and performers and its implications for the *Doctor Who* brand provides insight into this process, in that Davies in particular makes choices regarding continuity and characterization highly informed (by Davies’ own admission) by his position as a fan (Hills 2010:25-53). The paratextual short episode “Time Crash,” positions actor David Tennant as a fan of *Doctor Who*, in that the Tenth Doctor (David Tennant) proclaims to the Fifth Doctor (Peter Davison): “You were my doctor,” thereby making him part of the audience simultaneous with his presence in the series’ diagesis. Since by the series own mythology, any regeneration is still The Doctor, with all memories and quirks intact or incorporated, the line is purely metatext on both Tennant’s and writer Moffat’s own positioning as fans of the series.

(Meehan 2000:72) the community. As Meehan writes, the positioning of fans amongst themselves as superior to non-fans (more discerning, more intelligent) means they “replicate the hegemonic practices that so effectively reinforce hostility among affinity groups in the interest of capitalism” (Meehan 2002:76). Muñiz and O’Guinn make the same point about brand communities more generally; their definition of brand community’s characteristics including “consciousness of kind” (we are all fans); rituals and traditions; and community responsibility (that is, providing advice and assistance to others) (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2005:66). The first two elements in particular overlap with fan communities the most strongly—“consciousness of kind” is synonymous with being a fan, and the desire to “reify the culture” of the community through shared history, stories, and special language can be seen in “Slayer Speak” for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fans, or the use of the euphemistic swear words “frak” or “gorram” for *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy, October 18, 2004-March 24, 2009; British Sky Broadcasting/NBC Universal/Dick Eick Productions) and *Firefly*, respectively. “It is in the expression of these rituals and traditions that these communities most powerfully and effectively challenge the marketer’s supremacy in creating brand meaning” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2005:66).

Yet, as Derek Johnson argues, despite assertions within both academia (Jenkins 2006; Fiske 1992), and the industry (Elkin 2003:6; Neff 2004:1, 53) of increased viewer power driven by new technologies that allowed greater interaction, these interactions are often tightly controlled and managed by industry. He writes: “[W]hile audiences proximate to the hyperdiabetic television world and its production often harangue industry stewardship, that same stewardship operates through the management of fan practices to channel them into corporate profit” (D. Johnson 2007:76). Or, as Arvidsson puts it, the media industry offers “managed forms” that provide a “context where it can evolve in a particular direction,” a process that stretches back historically to Josiah Wedgwood’s building of his Wedgwood china’s reputation through associating it with a particular lifestyle

and shopping experience (Arvidsson 2006:66-67).<sup>37</sup> Thus a series like *Heroes*' management of its brand through use of multimedia to guide and direct viewer interaction could also be viewed as an attempt to recoup its high production costs—including computer-generated imagery (CGI), location and night shooting, and large ensemble cast salaries—and generate profit. What goes mostly unaddressed in these analyses of quality and/or cult series is how much of the desire for the quality brand within network programming is tied to the steep rise in production costs, particularly for quality and cult series. While Selznick argues that networks felt branding was necessary to deal with the increase in viewing options, it is also seemingly necessary to use viewer loyalty to quality shows to “claw back [to] economies of scale” (Murray 2005:420) or reestablish a distribution bottleneck (Todreas 1999:140) in an increasingly fragmented market.

Further, both cult and quality separateness from the main “flow” of networks, the establishing of textual, visual, and production borders that separate from “ordinary” television (Hills 2007:52), is part and parcel to how they brand themselves. Thus, the need for cult properties to become a brand in and of themselves also becomes more important in order for them to be “effectively exploited...across all digital platforms” (Richards 2010:180) or even international borders (Johnson 2006:15). It represents the same (potentially false) binary between mainstream and quality, or mainstream and cult television.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Arvidsson touches on Wedgwood's formative role in contemporary branding practices, but for a fuller account, see Wernick (1991:1-19).

<sup>38</sup> An interesting case in point is the success of the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, September 24, 2007-present; Chuck Lorre Productions/Warner Brothers), a series about four friends—an experimental physicist, a theoretical physicist, an engineer, and particle astrophysicist—which makes numerous references to cult television from the position of fans, including *Babylon 5* (PTEN/TNT, February 22, 1993-November 25, 1998; Babylonian Productions) *Battlestar Galactica*; *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (First-run syndication, September 28, 1987-May 23, 1994; Paramount Television), with numerous appearances by Wil Wheaton; and *Firefly* (including a guest appearance by Summer Glau). While the implications of its success are too involved to explicate in this space (including the fact that it is one of the few series not available steaming online, or available for sale on iTunes or Amazon onDemand), it stands as an example of the “mainstreaming” of both cult television and fan culture. Its third series finished 12<sup>th</sup> in overall ratings and it was subsequently moved to Thursday nights to compete with NBC's comedy block.



In terms of product placement, the high use of product placement in shows that have been labelled as “quality”<sup>39</sup> and addressed to an upscale niche audience, or “cult” and positioned at a dedicated audience, is a development worth examining. If quality television is television that is either experienced positively or serves an edifying or educational function, any products placed within said programme could be inscribed in a similar way. If cult programming can command audience attention beyond that of ordinary television, than any products placed within them could potentially command the same level of attention. It is not, then, only programmes themselves that are branded in a particular way, but also how the characters within the series are branded (as indicated in the *Bones* example) and the ways in which they seek to brand the viewer. While this is not an ethnographic or effects study, how audiences are construed in the industry is a vital component to these new advertising and programming practices, as they are often addressed as co-producers of meaning within contemporary television.

In this vein, John Fiske articulates the importance of the use of terminology in how television viewers are constructed, delineating between audience, audiences, viewers, and readers. For Fiske, the term *audience* serves a dismissive or “homogenizing” function that delegates power to the technology of television and its producers—or, in the case of my work, television and its associated technologies and formats. The plurality of “audiences” at least takes into account the heterogeneity of the audience on a broader scale and allows them to be viewed in terms of the power relationship between audiences and producers. “Viewing” and “reading,” for Fiske, account for any “meanings and pleasures” that those consuming television might make or experience. Indeed, the viewer “experiences a far greater variety of modes of watching” (Fiske 2006:17)—and it is this term that I believe adequately represents the concerns of my own work. Each of the series I’ll examine

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<sup>39</sup> See Robin Andersen (1996:1-2) for her analysis of product placement in *Northern Exposure* (CBS, July 12, 1990-July 26, 1995; Cine-Nevada Productions/Universal TV/Falahay/Austin Street Productions), and Susan Faludi’s analysis of *thirtysomething* (ABC, September 29, 1987-May 28, 1991; MGM/UA Television Group/Bedford Falls Company) in which she argues that “[advertisers] were willing to look the other way because the show rated high in ‘quality demographics’ ... [t]he majority of ‘thirtysomething’ viewers had household incomes that topped \$60,000 a year—and better yet, more than half had a child under the age of three.”

within this work inherently assumes a level of engagement with the text, whether through the heavy use of intertext, ancillary multiplatform content, or heavily serialized storylines. That being said, when analyzing the series that explicitly flow their text and advertising across different platforms, I add a second term: *user*. I define *user* within this context as a step-up from viewer while maintaining a great deal of correspondence with the term *viewer*, to the point of, at certain junctures, referring to these viewers as *viewer-users*. I am following John Caldwell's use of the same term to describe those with a high level of interaction with convergence technology in consuming television programmes (Caldwell 2004:43). A user, as I am referring to them, is targeted as following the text of the programme across multiple platforms, which can include reading online graphic novels, participating in interactive story adjuncts, or involvement in promotional work. While there seems to be little difference in this term, as compared to Fiske's term of *readers* or Jenkins' textual poachers (Jenkins 1992), this work does not engage with the fan activity implied by Fiske's definition of readers as "producer[s] of texts...maker[s] of meanings and pleasures" (Fiske 2006:17). Rather, it examines, with reference to these issues, the network's attempts to reincorporate these alternative readings back into the structure of networks' economics, thus following on from Derek Johnson's work on how TVIII invites viewers in—but, as he argues—along the lines of "domestic help" instead of valued co-producers (D. Johnson 2007:78).

Hence, *users*, while a more general term, is a more accurate one for how these multiple platform initiatives addressed the interested viewer, while simultaneously indicating a higher level of engagement that nonetheless cannot truly constitute a counter-reading. Indeed, it is John Corner's contention that advertising-supported television represents a "brokerage"—that is, not just television and advertising imposing ads on an unwitting public nor entirely viewer controlled, but an interplay between both (Corner 1999:13),<sup>40</sup> that represents my analysis of viewers.

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<sup>40</sup> Jesus Martin-Barbero also argues that television is not just about the industry and marketing but also influenced itself by culture, everyday life, and perceptions of the world (Martin-Barbero 2000:146).

These viewers and the ways in which they consume television remain a source of debate within media theory—which can alternate between Fiske’s and Jenkin’s conceptions of the viewer as engaged and capable of reading against the text and ideas presented within programmes at one end of the spectrum, to viewers as duped by a constant stream of programming that conscripts them into an army of consuming ciphers who allow television to mediate the outside world for them (Ellis 1992:160)—a view that, as stated earlier, Brian Winston claims represents a middle-class view of television viewers (Winston 1984:260). Winston was responding specifically to John Ellis’ “glance” theory, which seems to indicate a fundamental mistrust of television’s purpose as well as a condescending “middle-class” view of television viewers.

Sut Jhally argues that viewing television could be considered a form of labour; as in the work place, viewers exchange their time for what the networks give them in the form of programming. Jhally argues that such an exchange represents the same kind of alienated labour that exists within the capitalist system, since television is part of the capitalist system. That is to say, since the viewer is not involved in a meaningful way in the creation of the programme they are watching, the “labour” of viewing is disconnected from the creation of what is being viewed (Jhally 1987:83). Viewing television as labour can also be tied in with the idea of leisure as “individuality, freedom, and self-determination” posited by Eileen Meehan—which are connected to consumption of goods and services, media, and leisure—that the best society is consumerist, freedom is the choice of brand names, and democracy intricately linked to the marketplace. In this view, capitalism repurposes “recovery time” from work as an opportunity to shift worker to consumer and time off into consumption-based leisure, which undermines the purpose of leisure, turning it into something that can be appropriated in commodity-consuming labour on the part of the viewer (Meehan 2000:75-76). The current decrease in programming time to fit in more advertising is thus read by Matthew McAllister as “demanding increased productivity with an accompanying cut in pay” (McAllister 2000:113). If, in fact, how people “labor” helps develop their consciousness, what occurs if we are not involved in that labour? Created goods

become only commodities, and we the consumers of said commodities (Lury 1996:40). To tie this argument into the practices of watching television, our lack of involvement in the creation of what we are viewing means that we are allowing someone else to develop our consciousness; in particular, the programs and advertising that we consume when we watch. As Raymond Williams writes:

[T]he ‘commercial’ character of television has then to be seen at several levels: as the making of programmes for profit in a known market; as a channel for advertising; and as a cultural and political form directly shaped by and dependent on the norms of a capitalist society, selling both consumer goods and a ‘way of life’ based on them, in an ethos that is at once locally generated, by domestic capitalist interests and authorities, and internationally organized, as a political project, by the dominant capitalist power (Williams 2003:36-37).

All of these levels, though, are at the point of production; that is, the advertising, entertainment, and distribution ends of the equation. These “production-led explanations” (Lury 1996:68) for consumer behavior appear in Williams’s work (1960:27-32), as well as that of Stuart Ewan (Ewan 1976)<sup>41</sup> and Jhally himself. Jhally makes a similar argument with regards to Williams and Ewan, without implicating himself within the same context, claiming that both fall victim to “commodity vision”; that is, that without the context of advertising to give objects meaning, humans would not seek to invest said objects with meaning. Jhally argues that the capitalistic practice that strips its objects of meaning creates a void that advertising fills; advertising is the agent of fetishization (making the object something of worship or fear) of the commodities on offer, which still puts his analysis in the realm of the producers of advertising. As Thomas Streeter argues, this view of watching as labour is in danger of treating the audience as the industry does; that is, as a “simple commodity” (Streeter 1996:290). Arvidsson, in his analysis, also points out that the “immaterial labour” of both viewing and consumption can take “unanticipated forms” outside the preconceived marketing plan and can create an

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<sup>41</sup> Ewan argues that advertising served as a way to exert social control over the masses and nullify resistance to problematic working conditions by colonizing our minds (Ewan 1976).

“ethical surplus” through “social relations, shared meaning and...emotional involvement” (Arvidsson 2005:237), much in the way Muñiz and O’Guinn define the “community responsibility” aspect of brand communities as “shared commitment, collaborative action [and] assistance” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001:66). It thus does not have to be as dire as theorists such as Williams, McAllister, and Jhally contend, but merely a representation of the integration of “media culture into everyday life” (Arvidsson 2006:27)

Further, what is not involved in any of those effects is any true involvement on the part of the viewers themselves. Meaning, viewers would continue to represent an object that needs to be filled with meaning; that is, people as products placed to sell themselves to the world at large: consumers and commodities (Bauman 2007:6) both. Yet, by being “consumers” of television’s end products of programmes and advertisements, viewers can use the objects advertised to indicate affiliation with a particular class and cultural group, or, “brand community” (O’Guinn and Muñiz 2001, 2005). That being said, even viewers embracing a particular technology or format, such as DVRs, the Internet, or DVDs—that those in the industry, like Rupert Murdoch (Murdoch 2006, qtd in Lotz 2007:150), as well as theorists such as Jenkins, claim empowers the television consumer to create their own meanings and/or content, to embrace or deny the programming that networks offer—are thus doubly inscribed as “early adopters” and “upscale”<sup>42</sup> consumers. Therefore, the viewers, as recipients of the messages of television, have not yet achieved a status on par with the producers, creators, and advertisers of the media that they receive, regardless of *how* they receive it, despite these theoretical and industrial avowals to the contrary, as well as audiences’ view of themselves as empowered (D. Johnson 2007:74). Rather, certain demographics are courted, through programming and advertisements, to engage with television on multiple levels. Measuring these demographics becomes increasingly vital in terms of programming, to create a programme brand that will “intervene in the existing code” (Twitchell 1997:13) of the intended audience. As David Marc writes:

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<sup>42</sup> The earliest set-top DVRs (TiVo and ReplayTV) retailed for upwards of \$500, plus a monthly subscription fee (Davis 1998).

The aim of television is to be normal. The industry is obsessed with the problems of norms, and this manifests itself in both process and product. Whole new logics, usually accepted under the general classification of 'demographics,' have been imagined to create transformational models that explain the perimeters of objectionability and attraction (Marc 1996:5).

In this tangle of meanings, signs, and targeted demographics, what changes have occurred within the context of the relationship between television, advertisers, and viewers? Lotz defines three particular eras within the economics of television: the network era, which is defined by the hegemonic control of television by the three broadcast networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC<sup>43</sup> from 1952 to the mid-1980s; the multi-channel transition era, from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s, which is characterized by the emergence of cable and satellite television that split the broadcast audience without actually adding to the diminishing pool of television viewers; and the post-network era (TVIII),<sup>44</sup> which Lotz dates from October 2005 when Apple iTunes began offering network programming for sale within their online iTunes store, to the present. By post-network era, Lotz is careful to point out that she does not mean to imply that network television is dead, but rather that networks no longer have control over how, where, and when viewers consume television.<sup>45</sup> With the emergence of video-enabled mobile phones, DVRs, online content, and video-game consoles enabled with programme-playing capability, viewers are no longer homebound in terms of how they watch television. Richard Dienst also argues that the "intent" of the creation of new technologies cannot be separated from the context of capitalism (Dienst 1994:24), which would certainly undermine the idea that technologies such as DVRs can work against the dominant economics of television.

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<sup>43</sup> William Uricchio also defines this era as hegemonic (Uricchio 2004:167).

<sup>44</sup> A term that Jeffrey Sconce also used to describe the current practices in American broadcasting (Sconce 2004:98).

<sup>45</sup> She further argues that the success of television in the post-network era will depend on whether networks view themselves as networks or as being in the "content aggregation and distribution business" (2007:247).

In her examination of “new media” and its effects, Lisa Gitelman argues that there is an unnatural division within media theory (as well as art and technological theory) that new technologies represent a rupture with the past (Gitelman 2006); the kind of technological determinism that Williams decried and attempted to avoid within his own work.<sup>46</sup> She writes: “The introduction of new media ... is never entirely revolutionary: new media are less points of epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded sites for the negotiation of meanings as such” (Gitelman 2006:6). In this assertion, she is also in line with Caldwell and Anna Everett’s view of the introduction of new technology when they claim that corporations are the ones that sell new technology as a rupture with the old technology; this is a selling tool to hit niche markets (Caldwell and Everett 2003:xxi). This leads to what Lisa Parks defines as the “personalization of television”: due to technologies such as the DVR or video-on-demand, content producers are able to narrowly define content for particular viewers, to commodify the individual’s preferences (Parks 2004:135).

The key word, however, is commodify: this customization and “mobile privatisation” (Williams 2003:88) has the potential to lead to silos based on individual interest and can lead to the breakdown of community outside of the television (or the Internet). William Uricchio argues that while the VCR and the remote allowed both time-shifting and advertisement “silencing,” the DVR represents a more profound shift. Its use of meta-data protocols and filtering technologies to suggest and store preferences for the viewer, are not, he suggests, neutral—they have the potential to affect how we conceptualize programme categories and where and how we can locate certain texts. Further, this new technology could allow packaging of programming into a “never-ending steam of custom-made pleasure” (Uricchio 2004:178). While the concept is not necessarily a bad one, and DVRs minimize the disruption to programmes and allow the concept of the liveness or pseudo-liveness of programmes to be abandoned as part of medium, programming based so heavily on the “taste profiles” (Uricchio 2004:179) of

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<sup>46</sup> John Caldwell and Anne Everett also point out this dishistoricizing of much of new media theory (Caldwell and Everett 2003:xxi).

particular technologically enabled viewers could lead to homogenization of the content of said programmes.

Joseph Turow's analysis speaks directly to this issue. He defines media as having two different functions: "segment-making" and "society-making" (Turow 2000:239). Segmented media encourages the like-minded to encounter one another, while society-making media can provide a "national community" (Turow 1997:13). The dark side of each is that segmented media can cause a more narrow or prejudicial view of those not in that segment, whereas society-making media is in danger of excluding groups under a collective identity and providing an idealized view of the "corporate establishment sponsoring them" (Turow 1997:3). The ideal, in Turow's view, would combine "equilibrium between healthy social segments" and a collaborative vision (Turow 1997:1). In the current media environment, with its focus on personalized television and niche demographics, little cross-cultural dialogue occurs; viewers are targeted by what makes them different, which damages society (Turow 2000:247-248), both in separating individuals from one another (Turow 1997) and in creating "envy" for those excluded from upscale targeting (Turow 2006). Derek Johnson also situates this at the audience level, when he argues that "invested" viewers can not only be antagonistic to the industry, but between themselves. He writes: "In this context, niche markets can thus further break down into factionalized interest groups" (D. Johnson 2007:74).

Others have referred to such practices and groups as lifestyle "enclaves" (Andersen 1995:115)<sup>47</sup> and "clusters" (Schor 1998:10-11); "neo-tribalism" (Lury 1996:252-255); "brand communities" (O'Guinn and Muñiz 2001, 2005); or "subcultural forum/self-determined gated communities" (Lotz 2007:39-40)<sup>48</sup> that create affinity groups based on consumption, either of goods or television, to the

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Featherstone also argues that what we buy "connotes individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-consciousness" (Featherstone 2002:83), none of which can be viewed as community-building qualities.

<sup>48</sup> In describing the modes of television viewing, Lotz draws something of a distinction between subcultural forums and self-determined gated communities, in that subcultural forums are affinity groups based on mutual interest and have the potential to be heterogeneous, while self-determined gated communities are akin to fan communities in which television represents a creative and/or social networking function. In my view, the similarities outweigh the slight differences, and I have thus grouped them as one.



determinant of social or political engagement. Jhally makes a similar argument, quoting Margaret Thatcher's famous speech: "There is no such thing as 'society,'" as part of his argument that niche television is part of the market appeal to individualism and selfishness that damages society building (Jhally 2000:33). Others have argued that American society is focused on "personal consumption" rather than "social good" (Berger 2000:31), with television as its prosthalyzer, encouraging a lifestyle that is destroying the environment (Budd et al 1999). As Don Slater writes: "the mode of consumer choice came to be seen as the most adequate model for *all* forms of modern citizenship, the market as the only means of social coordination, that secured both freedom and progress" (Slater 1999:37). In her analysis of the show *thirtysomething*, Andersen argues that the individuals within the show represent a "lifestyle enclave" based on economic and class similarities, but despite the text of the programme, does not in fact represent a community based on mutuality or society beyond their narrow social sphere (Andersen 1995:188-189).

A pertinent example of this lies in the programming and branding shifts of Fox and the WB, from their inception (1985 and 1995, respectively) forward. In both instances, Fox and the WB counter-programmed; that is, rather than scheduling a hospital drama against a hospital drama (as CBS did in 1995, scheduling new drama *Chicago Hope* [CBS, September 28, 1994-May 4, 2000; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/David E. Kelley Productions] against NBC's then-new *ER*), these networks would seek to target an under-served demographic. Both networks thus targeted what was euphemistically referred to as "urban" viewers (read: African American) (Poniewozik 2005; "UPN's Ostroff Looks for Flow" 2003:24; "Colorless Fall Sked" 2001:4). For the WB, the first promotional video for the network's launch in 1995 featured a majority of African Americans—Robert Townsend, Jackee Harry, Shawn and Marlan Wayans, and Jamie Foxx—all of whom had programmes on the channel. The video featured each of them singing about their new series, set in a mock-up of the WB backlot, and interacting with "Michigan J. Frog," the animated logo for the network. By 1999, the WB's new slogan was "Faces of the WB," and the promotional video featured various cast members in a "photo shoot" to the tune of

“Thisway” by alternative group Crawl; with the exception Jamie Foxx and Tangi Miller (from *Felicity* [September 29, 1998-May 22, 2002; Touchstone Television/Imagine Television]), the promo was dominated by the mostly white casts of *Dawson’s Creek* (January 20, 1998-May 14, 2003; Columbia Tri-Star), *7<sup>th</sup> Heaven* (August 26, 1996-May 13, 2007; Spelling Television), *Charmed* (October 7, 1996-May 21, 2006; Spelling Television), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Roswell* (October 6, 1999-May 14, 2002; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/Jason Katims Productions). By 2000, the branding had shifted to “The Night is Young”; the promo was set in a dance club to a remix version of “Oh What a Night.” Jamie Foxx appears for the last time, as his series was off the air by Fall 2001.<sup>49</sup>

The Fox network, in 1994, did a similar rebranding/counterprogramming against NBC’s “Must-See Thursday” by featuring two comedies and a drama, all featuring African-American or multi-ethnic casts: *Martin* (August 27, 1992-May 1, 1997; HBO Independent Productions), *Living Single* (August 29, 1993-January 1, 1998; Sister Lee Productions/Warner Brothers Television), and *New York Undercover* (September 8, 1994-June 25, 1998; Wolf Films/Universal Television). But by 1998, when teen-oriented series began to gain traction on the WB, they shifted or cancelled those three series, counter-programming with series such as *World’s Wildest Police Videos* (April 2, 1998-July 27, 2001; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/Paul Stojanovich Productions).<sup>50</sup> By 1999, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested this programming practice, leading to the

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<sup>49</sup> With the shift in focus to a teen demographic, cast members of *The Steve Harvey Show* (August 25, 1996-February 17, 2002; Brillstein-Gray Entertainment/Sony Pictures Television), which focused on more family-centered viewing, never appeared in the promotional videos after 1997, even though the series was on the WB until the fall of 2002. Despite this, it lasted six seasons on the WB, making it the longest-running sitcom on the network.

Indeed, despite the presence of adults in most of these series, the promotional materials for viewers focused exclusively on youth. Lotz, however, indicates that the WB upfronts in 2003 only showed the young actors in a video montage, while the older cast members were the special guests. She indicates that this was purposeful, claiming that the adult actors would hold more cachet with advertisers and would be less likely to go “off-script” (Lotz 2007:17), an obvious indication of the difference in branding to advertisers versus viewers.

<sup>50</sup> In Bill Carter’s account of the challenges facing broadcast networks in the new millennium, he implies that some network executives, such as Les Moonves, hesitated to incorporate reality series onto their prime time schedules because of their association with Fox’s reliance on “World’s Wildest”—type reality series (Carter 2006:76). This was more obvious on CBS, known for decades as the “Tiffany network” (with all that implies).

establishment of an NAACP Hollywood Bureau to monitor representation of African Americans in film and television.<sup>51</sup>

John Hartley, on the other hand, argues that television itself can serve as a metaphor for the idea of “nation” (Hartley 1999:104) and present “democrataintment” in its availability to all viewers regardless of class, socioeconomic status, or education level (Hartley 1999:41).<sup>52</sup> Indeed, to Hartley, its position as a “transmodern teacher” can simultaneously celebrate difference and teach viewers about other cultures, joining disparate audiences into “cultural citizenship” (Hartley 2004:532). Yet his example (a Coca-Cola commercial featuring an Aboriginal man drinking Coke and transforming into an African-American street performer), which he claims allows white viewers to access other identities, is inherently problematic. His analysis shares the same blind spot that anti-branding campaigns fall prey to—that appropriate representation (of another culture or identity) is enough to cause substantive social change (Klein 2002:107-113). Hartley’s analysis of the Aboriginal-themed Coke commercial shares features with the counter-programming branding of Fox and the WB in that both “borrow” from a particular culture or group to establish or reform a brand identity—but only in so far as it generates profit. John Caldwell argues that these “identity politics” that such content is seeking is also operative within the industry to define itself (Caldwell 2008:245-256).

Perhaps it is more accurate to argue that television can provide “social agency” and serve as an “interpreter of culture” (Fass 1976:50)—without the added baggage and pitfalls of debates around identity politics—that can foster some sense of community, even around products. In their multiple analyses of brand communities, Muñiz and O’Guinn indicate the ways in which these affinity groups aid one another in both purchasing decisions and care for the products that bond them together (for example, the best place to repair said product) as well as sharing personal stories with regard to how the product has helped them help others

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<sup>51</sup> About the NAACP Hollywood Bureau. NAACP.org. Available at: <http://www.naacp.org/pages/hollywood-bureau-about>

<sup>52</sup> Julianne Newton also posits that television represents a collective experience (Newton 1976:112).

(Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001:418-421). Such a community is not dissimilar to those that form around cult television properties; as will be addressed in the chapter on *Firefly*, the community of fans of the series not only served as brand ambassadors/prosthelyzers for *Firefly* (thanked personally by Whedon at the start of the film *Serenity* [September 30, 2005; Universal Studios] for helping make it happen) but also engaged in raising money for creator Joss Whedon's favourite charity from 2006 onwards (Can't Stop the Serenity "About").

As these differing perspectives on branding, programming, technology, viewers, and even television's purpose indicate, broadcast networks needed to find a way to navigate these shifts. One way in which they did so was to increase the level of programming that targeted specific demographics and brand them in a way that would attract them. Thus, I will be examining how niche programming employed brand practices, particularly through the use of product placement as a form of brand flow on American television from 2001 to 2008. These years in particular represent a time in which new formats and technologies became more widely available and were perceived, according to the debates within the trades, as potentially impacting on the advertising and programme model. It is thus important to examine what may have been driving these changes on an industrial level. Broadcast networks tried several different strategies to deal with audience fragmentation, new technology, and viewer erosion; which will become permanent parts of the text and context of television is difficult to surmise, much less what its effect on the social milieu might be. As Amanda Lotz writes: "Experimentation with placement and integration in texts that maintain thirty-second advertisements clearly suggests an increasing commercialization of television, but with marketing strategies shifting substantially, their specific cultural effects remain uncertain" (Lotz 2007:179).

One way to trace the "uncertain" cultural effect of branding and product placement practices is to examine their influence on a programme's text. Thus, within the case studies presented in this work, I will examine the ways in which series wrote for or around products, the blurred line between advertising text and programme text, and how placement fits in with how viewers are addressed as both

viewers and consumers. The introduction of new technology, formats, and platforms, according to the trades, were driving this rise; both the advertising and television industry would thus need ancillary revenue streams to make up for the potential short-fall if ad-eliminating technologies made the 30-second advertisement redundant. Were that to occur, not only could they no longer rely on the revenue spot-advertising generated, but it would fundamentally change how programmes themselves were written, that is, the “flow” that draws viewers into the act of watching television. Yet, as will be clear throughout this work, these new formats and technologies are incorrectly viewed as rupture with older media such as television; the next chapter specifically deals with how even potentially disruptive technologies such as the DVR were incorporated into the existing structure of television economics.

Further, these industries reconstituted an older model of the television and advertising mix in response to these new technologies and formats, claiming that it was necessary for their continued survival, suturing old advertising models and new technologies. Underlying this concern was the very real issue of who was using these formats and technologies, and who, according to the trades, these industries wanted watching their programmes and consuming the products placed within the programme: the young, white, and upper middle class. These fears and desires have been used by the advertising and television industries to reaffirm these older advertising models.

Each of the programmes examined within this work additionally share the feature of being produced in-house—that is, the producing studio and the broadcast networks are the same corporation. This would not have been possible between 1970, when the financial incentive and syndication (fin-syn) rules were introduced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and 1993, when they were eliminated. This means that for each of the series examined, the network had a greater financial stake and potential benefit in their success, as they both covered all costs of production and didn’t have to share licensing and syndication monies with another studio. This risk-benefit ratio could certainly influence the amount of control networks could or would cede to advertisers to defray production and

distribution costs. Indeed, as Jennifer Holt argues, the adoption of the fin-syn rules, in theory gave more power to independent production companies, but in reality “strengthened” the Hollywood studio system by making the studio the primary supplier of programming, rather than the networks. In essence, it returned it to the model of the 1950s. Its elimination thus reversed this structure (Holt 2003:14-15).

As Amanda Lotz claims: “The competitive situation of a network—i.e., its level of desperation—contributes to how it prioritizes creative and economic factors in determining programming” (Lotz 2007:90). As was seen in the brief analysis of counterprogramming earlier in this chapter, African-American series provided a way to generate ratings by programming to an under-served demographic, until they were displaced by the next perceived under-served demographic. The series I shall examine in my case studies aired on 3 of the 5 broadcast networks in the United States—Fox, The WB/The CW, and NBC—but what sets them apart is not only the aforementioned disinterment from broadcast and/or diagesis that each engaged in, but that such disinterment was easier because none of these four series represent a perfect fit with the supposed brand identity of their respective network; their outlier status prompted different responses from their respective networks, ranging from throwing their full promotional might behind the series, to cancelling it outright. *Gilmore Girls* stood out on the WB as a multi-generational series set in a town full of quirky residents<sup>53</sup>; despite one of the main characters being a teenager, *Gilmore Girls* closest televisual predecessor would be *Northern Exposure*, rather than *Dawson’s Creek*.<sup>54</sup> *Arrested Development*’s dense intertextuality and “unlikeable” characters were seemingly at odds with other elements on the Fox conglomerate, despite the presence of tonally similar series such as *The Simpsons* as a lead-in.

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<sup>53</sup> In something of a reversal from earlier viewer-based promotional material for the WB, Lauren Graham (who played Lorelai Gilmore, aged 32 at the start of the series), does appear in the WB’s more youth-oriented promos. This, however, was fully in line with Lorelai’s portrayal in earlier seasons of *Gilmore Girls* as an overgrown teenager. The advertisements leading up to *Gilmore Girls* debut in 2000 played heavily on role-reversal aspects, with “they act like sisters, but they’re not sisters” as a repeated tagline.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as will be examined in greater detail in chapter 3, they also shared a similar industrial genesis; *Gilmore Girls*’ pilot was funded by the Association of National Advertisers’ Alliance for Family Entertainment, and *Northern Exposure*’s initial short-run summer debut was sponsored in part by Proctor and Gamble (Schmuckler 1992:14-15, qtd in Budd et al 1999:211).

*Heroes* was one of the only science fiction/fantasy series on NBC to last longer than two seasons since *Quantum Leap* (NBC, March 26, 1989-May 5, 1993; Belisarius Productions/Universal Media Studios) went off the air.

Finally, *Firefly's* premise (set in a dystopian future) required world-building and character development that was apparently untenable in an era of instant ratings success, addressed issues of globalization and branding untouched by most broadcast series, and was branded by viewers as belonging to creator Joss Whedon more so than to Fox. *Firefly* in particular examines the issues that Muñiz and O'Guinn address in their analysis of brand communities—that is, the influence of brand communities on the meaning of the brand (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2005:67). All of these series thus represent the challenge of identity for broadcast channels, which have a specific remit to appeal to the broadest possible audience, as well as satisfying advertisers, leading to two possibly contradictory goals—targeted marketing (to sell the advertised products) and high Nielsen numbers (to raise the price of advertising). As will be discussed in greater depth throughout this work, the former could override the latter, if a series received high ratings within an important demographic.

The first case study, *Gilmore Girls*, represents a more traditional relationship between the programme and promotional and product placement issues. It simultaneously gestures, through its use of product placement and its willingness to flow the world of the series outside of the boundaries of its own diegetic world, at later shifts within this model. The expansion of the boundaries of the programme, however, remained within television itself.

It is the next two case studies that address the shifting boundaries of the programme and network brand and the advertisements/product placement that support it outside of the context of broadcast television. *Arrested Development* represents, in the words of its creator Mitch Hurwitz and of a piece with Derek Kompare's analysis of television's shift from a flow to a published model, a DVD text, despite its initial debut on broadcast television. While Kompare argues that the DVD format allows television programmes to "transcend" (Kompare 2006:349) their broadcast roots, I argue that the use of product placement and promotional material

within the text affirms its broadcast roots, and is valorized through its positioning as a DVD text (Hills 2007:45), thus capturing the flow model in a published form. *Heroes*, on the other hand, employs the second-shift aesthetics Caldwell addressed to flow both the programme and its advertisements onto multiple platforms. It does so by reconfiguring the older single-sponsorship model within a new media context; that is, the sponsorship relationship within the world of the series is evident (and even more emphasized) in its network controlled ancillary material. The text of the broadcast programme is both informed by and dispersed across web episodes, graphic novels, and interactive online applications; so too is the product placement and advertisements. Its online adjuncts seek to contain fan response within the context of network/advertiser-sponsored interaction. While the broadcast television airing still contains traditional advertising breaks, the online components use the old broadcast model of single sponsorship. Like the other programmes examined within this work, it is a process of suturing new media and older broadcast models that networks and advertisers chose as a response to the perceived shifts brought about by these new platforms, formats, and technologies.

The final case study, *Firefly*, also crossed multiple platforms while remaining, like *Gilmore Girls*, a more conventional example of the programme/advertisement break relationship and the use of product placement. It thus blends the concerns of the previous three case studies, as well as serving as the only programme that explicitly uses the high integration of a placed (fake) product in order to critique globalization, branding, and corporate-sponsored education. Further, its troubles with the network and the perception of the series as a Joss Whedon property (rather than a Fox series) represents a different type of branding strategy that shares features with Klein and Lasn's anti-branding stance as well as touching all points of Thompson's enumeration of quality programming (Thompson 1997:14). Thus, *Firefly's* similarities to and differences from the other programmes examined highlight some of the central concerns of this work by making manifest within its text the more problematic aspects of the targeting of niche audiences and branding practices within contemporary television.



## **They're Stealing TV! The Broadcast and Advertiser Response to New Technology**

The previous chapter addressed the debates that have occurred around quality television and branding in order to set the research agenda for this work as a whole. In this chapter, I will examine how DVDs, DVRs, branding, and product placement were discussed within three trade journals: *Variety*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, and *Advertising Age*. They are a representative rather than exhaustive selection of trade publications. In addition, I will examine how these publications positioned and addressed the viewer in light of these changes. That is, the industries' economic and gendered assumptions about viewers with regard to these technologies, formats, and platforms, which Eric Hirsch (Hirsch 1998), William Boddy (Boddy 2004), and Lisa Gitelman (Gitelman 2006) have asserted, inevitably recur with each new media. As Boddy argues: "The commercial launch of any new communications technology typically combines a public rehearsal of contested and self-serving fantasies of the new product's domestic consumption with a polemical ontology of its medium and an ideological rationale for its social function" (Boddy 2004:1). The fantasies, debates, and rationales of these shifts are the focus on this chapter, and fit well in with Boddy's further contention that the advertising and television industries' relationship with home electronics alternates between being "fearful" and "euphoric" (Boddy 2004:4).

This chapter will follow the suggestions by Caldwell, who asserted that closer attention should be directed at the "industrial logic" of these shifts, as well as how these industrial shifts inscribe the text of television with "overt and explicit institutional performances of context" (Caldwell 2006:105); that is, the text of television itself is not just influenced by these shifts but overtly engages with them within the text of series. This examination will proceed in five sections: an overview of the status and concerns of the television and advertising industries during this time period; an examination of how branding was discussed in the trades, informed by Catherine Johnson, Simone Murray, Paul Grainge, and Celia Lury's analyses of branding practices, and how it was used to "court" the viewer, as well as the

implications and outcomes of such on television and advertisers, including the use of product placement; a discussion of how the industry reacted to the quick rise of the DVD format, using Derek Kompare's and Matt Hill's linked analyses of its implications in TVIII; and a short case study of the introduction of the TiVo set-top box, how it branded itself and the advertising industry and network's reaction. Such an analysis unites the strands of branding practices and changes in modes of delivery and reception within the examined period.

The first year of the new millennium did not start well for the American television industry; at the industry's annual upfront presentation, in which broadcast and cable networks make the majority of the advertising deals for the fall season, ad sales dropped precipitously, down nearly \$1 billion from 2000 (Friedman and Goetzl 2001:1, 42). Since the upfront is always in the second quarter of the fiscal year, advertising and media analysts were not hopeful that things would or could recover by the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter (Schlosser 2001:5, 8). They didn't. Due to the events of 11 September 2001, both cable and broadcast television channels went commercial free between September 11 and September 14, 2001; the longest period in American broadcast history.<sup>55</sup> It was considered the "right thing" to do, with claims that "the emotions are too raw to be commercialized" (Friedman and Linnet 2001:3, 27). These four days of commercial-free television cost approximately \$400 million across broadcast and cable (Friedman and Linnet 2001:3, 27).

If four commercial-free days could cost that many millions, it is understandable that the prospect of ad-skipping technology has caused consternation in both the network and advertising industries. From that difficult start, the American television and advertising industries were seemingly obsessed with new technologies' perceived ability to change the advertising funding model, enabling the behaviour of a fickle and fractured audience that insisted on television their way. Most of these concerns could be boiled down to one piece of technology: the DVR. The time-shifting, ad-skipping DVRs elicited a gamut of reactions within

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<sup>55</sup> Fox, ABC, CBS, and NBC were the only networks of broadcast and cable to remain commercial-free for the entire 4-day period.

the trades, from worries that it would kill television, to praise for its (later) ability to (potentially) deliver the demographic information of its users to advertisers. This chapter will trace the trajectory of these industries' response to both DVR and DVD technology and the technologies' own shifts to address these concerns. Further, I will briefly examine how, just as the industries' and technology were forming uneasy truces with one another, the issue of content delivery online rose to prominence and sparked concern across several sectors of the entertainment and advertising industries. By early 2007, former NBC president Bob Wright was claiming that they were currently in the "last business cycle" for traditional media delivering content without reference to digital delivery and its implications (Eggerton 2007:5, 33). Wright's prediction has been borne out in the last few years of the first decade of the new millennium. Most networks stream episodes online, and brand those shows and networks across multiple platforms.

Simone Murray expressed it thusly: "[A]ny media brand which successfully gains consumer loyalties can be translated across formats to create a raft of interrelated products, which then work in aggregate to drive further consumer awareness of the brand" (Murray 2005:417). Unshackled from the constraints of traditional, analogue media, networks and their subbrands of series were free to float on that "raft of interrelated products" both within the bounds of television's regular flow, and into the seemingly uncharted waters online. As will be seen both in this chapter and in my *Heroes'* case study, however, these digitized waters were very quickly mapped and dammed inside the network brand.

In the interest of providing a framework for the debates around these formats and technologies, I am focusing primarily on three separate industrial publications: *Variety*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, and *Advertising Age*. Each provides an overview on the industrial changes during this time. In particular, I will be focusing on the years 2001 to 2008, although TiVo (one of the earlier set-top DVRs) entered the market in 1998, DVDs began to be adopted as a preferred format by the major

studios in 1996,<sup>56</sup> and online adjunct programming appeared as early as 1997.<sup>57</sup> These years, however, represent a time period in which all three of these publications struggled with the implications of these changes in technology and format, both of which caused fears of and actual shifts in practice in both the television and advertising industries.

Digital video recorders<sup>58</sup> and DVDs are simultaneously discussed in both the network and advertising areas as the “end” of television as they (and the viewer) know it, and sold as a liberating technology that empowers the viewer to create their own schedule and free themselves from the advertising-based model of network (and the majority of cable) programming. In particular, two individuals represent the opposite ends of this spectrum. In “Will TiVo kill television, or are viewers too lazy to zap?” Jamie Kellner, chair of the WB Network, called TiVo “a great threat at high penetration levels” and suggested “it might not be good for consumers either” since it threatens the economic model of television, and “[t]here ain’t no free lunch.” In the same article, however, Shelly Lazarus, CEO of Ogilvy and Mather, disagreed, saying that viewers were too passive to bother to “zap” commercials (McClellan 2003:19). *Advertising Age’s* columnist Scott Donaton, on the other hand, dedicated numerous columns to several arguments supportive of the new technology and the subsequent changes that it is “forcing” upon the advertising and entertainment industries: “[T]his is not a time for fear, resistance, denial or defensiveness—despite the natural inclination to protect an existing pile of cash. It’s the most exciting time ever to be in or around the businesses of media, marketing and communications” (Donaton 2005:26). During the time period covered here, he

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<sup>56</sup> Credit for the adoption of the DVD format has been attributed to the efforts of Warren Lieberfarb, known in the industry as “The Father of the DVD.” Warren Lieberfarb was the “most outspoken supporter” of DVD; he brokered compromises between consumer electronic companies to produce a single standard, then “browbeat” studios to back DVDs. This allowed the studios to avoid a costly format war, such as that which occurred between VHS and Betamax (Sweeting 2001:26).

<sup>57</sup> The series *Homicide: Life on the Street* had a brief web series “Homicide: Second Shift” that appeared exclusively on NBC.com in November 1997, with the stories between the web series and broadcast series crossing over, but also able to stand alone (Caldwell 2003).

<sup>58</sup> In the earlier years that I am examining, DVRs were more consistently referred to as “personal video recorders,” or PVRs, within the industry. However, since the more common usage has shifted to DVRs, that is the terminology I’ve chosen for this chapter.

wrote no less than three columns during the upfronts calling for the end to this “outmoded” system:

The real problem with the upfront is it doesn't jibe with anything else that's happening right now in the media business. Ad agencies and marketers talk about media neutrality and integrated services. The theory is advertisers will no longer blindly employ a model centered on the 30-second TV commercial, but will instead identify from scratch the best tools for solving their marketing challenges (Donaton 2001:26).

In Donaton's view, DVRs represented a much-needed shift in this process, by forcing the hand of both industries to embrace change. It isn't until 2004, however, that the broadcasting/entertainment industries begin to speak of this in their own publications. An Association of National Advertisers survey found that 60% of advertisers were dissatisfied with the upfront process: “The estimates are off. The shows are iffy, and the timing stinks” (McClellan 2004:28). The view of the upfront process became more contentious after that, with *Advertising Age* claiming that buyers and marketers were “tired of an upfront that play more to analysts, TV critics, and affiliate executives than it does to them” (Atkinson 2007:1, 33). Questions on how to monetize online content (Atkinson 2007:3, 41), cross-platform deals (Winslow 2007:3A, 9A), and commercial and DVR ratings remained divisive (Atkinson 2007:S6-S15; Learmonth 2007:18, 21). The recession and 2007-2008 Writers' Guide of America (WGA) writers' strike had the largest effect in subduing and changing the upfront process (Steinberg 2008:4, 29), with a perceived shift in power on the part of both the networks and the advertisers to the advertising industry (Steinberg 2008:1, 43; Steinberg 2008:27; Marich 2008:3, 26; Hoffman 2008:58; Neff 2008:1, 28; Guthrie 2008:12-13).

That being said, Amanda Lotz argues, in her analysis of the 2003 and 2005 upfronts, that the upfronts can “provide both buyers and sellers with certain efficiencies and value” by guaranteeing programmes will be paid for, and allows advertisers to buy in an intense period of activity, rather than the constant selling activity that an “all-scatter market” (that is, buying advertising on a per-show basis throughout the year) would inevitably create (Lotz 2007:556). Further, buying the

majority of advertising space for a season (aggregation) is, Lotz argues, “an important tool for buyers in influencing the negotiation process”; that is, certain clients only advertise at certain times of the year, while others advertise year round. Thus, being able to sell a range of different advertising at the same time provides media buyers more flexibility in negotiating a fair deal for multiple clients (Lotz 2007:557).

What seems most clear is less a fear of technology than a struggle for control of the technology and its implications on the part of both the advertising and entertainment industries. Eric Hirsch argues that the tension between technology and consumption of it within the home has a long historical pattern of consumption being sustained and threatened by new technologies: “[T]he innumerable connections gathered up by broadcast television also foreshadowed its perceived limits and eventual ‘undoing’ ...during the current phase of socio-cultural and technological innovations” (Hirsch 1998:159). Hirsch examines a 200-year period from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to argue that these debates reoccur with each communication-based “upgrade” (Hirsch 1998:159), but it’s also applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> century innovations such as the DVR, as will become clear throughout the chapter. The concerns and debates around DVRs, DVDs, and product placement proceed in a circular fashion through these publications; the same issue reoccur, without resolution, each year, despite shifts in practice. As Gitelman writes: “The introduction of new media...is never entirely revolutionary: new media are less points of epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded for the ongoing negotiation of meanings as such” (Gitelman 2006:6). The meanings of these transitions and their implications were sought throughout these circular discussions.

By 2006, as cable and satellite systems incorporated DVR technology into their set-top boxes and dishes, and advertisers and content providers began to strike numerous deals for alternative methods of blending content and commercial messages, the tensions regarding these “new” technologies began to ease, only to open up a new series of questions regarding a perceived blurring of content and advertising and its effect on the viewer. What is most intriguing is the constantly

shifting perception of the viewer among these industries within the context of their publications; as Kellner's and Lazarus' perspectives cited earlier indicate, the viewer is alternately vilified as biting the hand that feeds them content (McClellan 2003:19), passive couch potatoes (McClellan 2003:19), or the foot soldiers leading a technological revolution (Thompson 2004:1, 51). Yet, as Raymond Williams asserted in his predictions of the uses of new technology under development: "Nearly all the equipment that is currently developed is reactive; the range of choices, both in detail and in scope, is pre-set" (Williams 1974:139).

Thus, despite claims by DVR manufacturers and the television and advertising industries, that DVRs, especially TiVo, as will be discussed below, empowers the viewer at the expense of networks and advertisers, it does serve as a "reactive" technology. Depending on one's perspective, DVRs could serve as a reaction to viewers' dissatisfaction with the mix of advertising time vs. programme time, or as a device that re-engages viewers with television at a time when they have additional options for entertainment. Indeed, a 2008 Nielsen study comparing 2005 and 2007 viewing practices found that DVR users actually watch 3% to 5% more hours of television than non-DVR-enabled households, with heavy DVR users watching up to 26 hours of television per week (Nielsen Media 2008). They can thus serve, along with DVD, to reassert the primacy of the televisual form by repositioning the programming and advertising flow across multiple platforms (Caldwell 2003).

### **The Courtship of the Distracted Viewer**

As Lotz indicated in her analysis of the 2003 upfronts, the coming season's branding practices are rehearsed in a particular way for advertisers during this time. In the late 1990s, the WB network promoted their network under taglines like "The Night is Young." By 2002, WB president Jed Patrick's words seemed to indicate that he thought this branding strategy worked; he pointed out how many of their viewers were younger than 20 years, quipping "that's a lot of belly rings and tattoos" (McClellan 2002:28). In this section, I am examining how the trades talked about branding broadcast networks and series, as a way to address the questions Paul

Grainge asks within his analysis of the film industry: What does branding indicate about corporate power and authority? What does it say about the relationship between products and consumers and how does the industry manage that relationship (Grainge 2007:7)?

Catherine Johnson succinctly articulates this issue by arguing that the development of web and other kinds of mobile content means that networks will “increase the need for strong brand identities for television programs in order to provide a coherent identity across the range of media platforms and products that will form the text of television” (Johnson 2007:20). As will be analyzed in this section, the preservation of the less-tangible qualities of the brand in the viewer’s relationship with them was of paramount importance, particularly the ways it can be used to “analyze the relationships between the texts of television” as well as their “relationship with networks and producers” (Johnson 2007:20).

As the decade progressed, the industry focused on multimedia; Jeff Gaspin, of NBC Universal, in discussing NBC’s TV360° rebranding campaign in 2006 (in which *Heroes* played a large role), specifically referred to broadcast as “on-air” tying it purposefully in with “online” (Becker 2006:3). By all accounts, NBC was struggling to rebrand itself mid-decade, when the Must-See brand was retired with the end of series such as *Friends* and *Frasier* (September 16, 1993-May 13, 2004; Grub Street Productions/Grammnet Productions/Paramount Network Television). According to Paige Albinia’s analysis, such rebranding efforts either translate into networks relying on “A-List names” to launch new series, or allowing themselves to take risks (Albinia 2004:22). In their rebranding efforts, NBC relied more heavily on their owned cable networks to cross-promote broadcast offerings,<sup>59</sup> combined advertising sales of their owned cable<sup>60</sup> and broadcast channels, and experimented with video-on-demand, all of which were new “risks” for a struggling network (Higgins 2004:9).

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<sup>59</sup> This included nearly simultaneous syndication of broadcast series to their cable networks, as well as running cable series on broadcast as needed.

<sup>60</sup> These cable channels included Bravo, SyFy, MSNBC, USA Network, and CNBC.



The NBC network was not alone in its struggles, although it only took one season for the network to fall from first place to fourth. *Broadcasting and Cable* reported that broadcast networks' terrestrial viewership fell below 50% of viewers for the first time in 2002 (McClellan 2002:6-7). It did not rebound above that during the examined period, with cable, DVDs, and the Internet competing for viewers' time. Borrowing the strategy from cable and "packaged goods" corporations such as Proctor and Gamble, broadcast networks began to focus on branding their own networks. Mike Benson, marketing chief for ABC, claimed in September 2005 that branding was a low priority for his network; by June of 2006, he had launched the "One" campaign, stressing the connections between both the network's total schedule and their ability to "bring people together" (Grossman 2006:2, 24). With *Gray's Anatomy* (March 27, 2005-present; Shondaland/Mark Gordon Company/Touchstone Television) as their linchpin show, Benson claimed that the success allowed them to "build subbrands" around the series, including the spin-off series *Private Practice* (September 26, 2007-present; Shondaland/Mark Gordon Company/ABC Studios). For Benson, branding is about "developing a voice, personality, and feel for a network and its programming" ("Brand Builders" 2003:12A-13A). In ABC's case, they focused on a female demographic, in order to make the network and its schedule "our Coke can" (that is, universally recognized as a particular brand) ("Brand Builders" 2003:12A-13A). This comes the same year Steve Heyer, Chief Operating Officer of Coca-Cola, gave a speech at the first Madison and Vine conference that big brands such as Coke are a "network" that can command a bigger audience than television (Rothenberg 2003:20).

It is clear that the blurred line between television and advertising was not just in terms to their relationship with television content, but in the ways they branded themselves and the image of themselves as particular corporations. That is, a brand such as Coke can be large enough to be a "network" of committed consumers, while a network can represent a (somewhat) tangible item that can be branded and sold. As John Wells, producer of *ER* and other dramas, expressed it: "Each network has a very specific identity that a consumer expects when they turn on that channel. All the networks' success have been specifically within the brand

they have been known for” (Grossman 2006:10-12). While Wells’ words are highly applicable to, for instance, NBC’s long-standing “Must-See TV” brand, other networks have been perhaps less successful in maintaining a consistent brand identity and flowing its programming through that particular concept.

As per example, as cited earlier, the WB claimed in 2002 that it branded to the “belly ring” demographic (McClellan 2002:28). Yet, its co-presidents of marketing Lew Goldstein and Bob Bibb claimed that their branding strategy was “escape to youth,” with series featuring “good teens” or, in their words “counter-counterculture” youth (“Brand Builders 2003:12A). Yet a look at the schedule for 2002 does not bear out the first assertion; while 2002 featured the debut of the short-lived comic book series *Birds of Prey* (October 9, 2002-February 19, 2003; Warner Brothers Television), the multigenerational family drama *Everwood* (September 16, 2002-June 5, 2006; Warner Brothers Television/Berlanti Liddell) also debuted, as well as *What I Like About You* (September 20, 2002-April 24, 2006; Tollin-Robbins Productions/Warner Brothers Television), about two sisters sharing an apartment in New York City. Returning series included *Gilmore Girls*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *Reba* (October 5, 2001-February 18, 2007; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television), *Angel*, *Smallville* (October 16, 2001-present; Tollin-Robbins Productions/Miller Gough Ink), and *Charmed*, essentially splitting the network between family comedy or drama, and science fiction or fantasy-influenced series. But Goldstein assertion of marketing the WB to “good teens” does not account for either the multigenerational series such as *Reba*, *Gilmore Girls*, or *Everwood*, nor the characters’ ages (early to mid-20s) and the often dark or violent serialized storylines of series such as *Smallville*, *Charmed*, or *Angel*.

The rise and eventual failure of netlets such as the WB and UPN provides insight into the challenges of broadcast branding. As addressed earlier, with numerous dayparts, broadcast networks’ content is often widely divergent. Yet the WB and UPN, as smaller networks, only programmed approximately 20 hours a week; this should have made it easier for these networks to create a consistent brand. Indeed, *Advertising Age* named Goldstein and Bibb the “entertainment marketers of the year” in 2003. The award, however, was for their *Smallville*

campaign, which focused on rehabilitating the image of Clark Kent/Superman as an “insipid Goody Two-Shoes” and inserting him into a teen drama that focused on “typical teen problems” through a superheroic lens. The series had a 29% rise in viewership in its second season and attracted a young male demographic to the WB for the first time (Pendleton 2003:S4), but it is significant that the award is for a series’ brand, rather than a network-wide branding campaign. Tim Brooks, senior vice-president of research, Lifetime network, claimed that in fact “broadcast networks don’t have a brand; they have to attract viewers to a show, not a network” (Pinsker 2001:15). Despite Brooks’ assertion, all of the broadcast networks did attempt to brand themselves in a similar fashion to the way in which cable networks did.

UPN struggled visibly with its brand image; Dawn Ostroff, president of entertainment, asserted that her priority at UPN was fixing its “flow” problem, in that each night of entertainment should build on the next (Albiniak 2003:24). Five years later, with Ostroff now running The CW, flow had been transformed from a goal to a “buzzword”: “For the first time ever, we have real flow across the schedule. We can bring people in on a Monday night and really keep them throughout the week.” Ostroff’s new concern had transferred to “cross-platform flow,” in that too many viewers were watching the networks’ signature series *Gossip Girl* (September 19, 2007-present; 17<sup>th</sup> Street Entertainment/Alloy Entertainment/CBS Paramount Network) online rather than during broadcast. The CW responded by removing full episodes and replacing them with short web episodes, hoping that both the removal and addition would force viewers back to broadcast viewing (Guthrie 2008:16). These concerns are in line with Feuer and Caldwell’s assertions that “flow relates to television’s scheduling practices” (Feuer 1983:16) and has been standard practice for networks since the 1950s (Caldwell 2003:155).

The Fox network, which built its initial reputation on “edgy” programming, launched a branding initiative in 2008 that “poked fun” at its previous image. Under the tagline “So Fox,” the broadcast network began airing general advertising in the summer of 2008 about what “So Fox” meant as a logo, transitioning into show-specific spots about how each current and new series fit into the brand. Joe Earley,

executive VP, marketing and communications, described it thusly: “The thing that's important about this line is that it allows us to be self-effacing, which we think is very important for the Fox brand. Fox does have a naughty side, a bad side, a funny side. Our animated shows make fun of the network all the time” (Grego 2008:2, 32). While it was true that series such as *The Simpsons* (December 17, 1989-present; Gracie Films/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television) and *Family Guy* (January 31, 1999-February 14, 2002, May 1, 2005-present; Fuzzy Door Productions/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) repeatedly satirized both the network and the industry in general,<sup>61</sup> for Fox to thus incorporate such satire into their own branding campaign both reifies and co-opts such satire’s potential counter-reading.

Further, what differentiated this campaign to a large extent was that, unlike the WB’s various campaigns (“Faces,” “The Night is Young”) or NBC’s 2006 TV360° initiative, which either sought to establish a network (the WB) or aid a struggling one (NBC), Fox rebranded at the precise moment they became the number one network. It allowed “self-effacing” to be a selling point, which would have potentially not worked if the network had been in last place. It was also tied in with a complete redesign of their website and new title cards and graphics for both national stations and affiliates. The website itself became more streamlined, providing clips and full episodes; further, shows such as *Fringe* were given Fox-owned additional sites, such as [Imagetheimpossibilities.com](http://Imagetheimpossibilities.com), which featured “case file” footage from the archives of the series fictional “Fringe division” of the FBI. Both Peter Liguori and Sandy Grushow, current and former chairs of entertainment for the network, indicate that the branding is driven by the shows, rather than branding driving the shows. Grushow, in 2003, said: “Brands don’t sell shows, shows sell shows. It’s about seizing an opportunity and a void in the marketplace. Then it’s about quality of execution in programming and marketing” (Karrfalt 2003:4A). Liguori maintained a similar view three years later, claiming that their best defense against competition from other networks is “hit shows.” Liguori also

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<sup>61</sup> One notable example was the *Family Guy* episode “PTV” (4.14), which features Federal Communication Commission (FCC) “agents” monitoring the Griffin family’s conversations and other personal time for inappropriate behavior.

asserted the primacy of television as a delivery system (Grossman 2006:11), which remained a theme throughout the trades during the examined period, as will be addressed below. He also stressed Fox's willingness, from its inception, to work closely with advertisers to create branded partnerships that would be beneficial to both parties.

Making the website a part of the rebranding effort thus becomes a way to use digital media to "leverage cultural capital, visibility, and financial benefit" by using "branding strategies and discourses of distinction...to position and value their respective conglomerates in the capital markets" (Caldwell 2003:131). Fox used the redesigned website and its associated paratexts to both simplify ("So Fox") and make distinct a network whose strategies had already positioned it as the number one network.

While branding, from the network side, became an important way to draw viewers back to broadcast, from the advertising industry, there was some level on concern that it was more of a benefit to the networks than to those advertisers who participated in branded entertainment deals. The DVR was the technology through which these concerns became manifest. While David Poltrach, executive vice-president and Chief Research Officer at CBS, claimed that because DVR users were heavy television watchers they would be exposed to brands and logos even while fast-forwarding through commercials, media buyers disagreed (Friedman and Goetzl 2006:18-20), as will be addressed in greater depth below. Yet some of the same concerns pervaded both sides of the industry; that is, how to match the brand of the product with the brand of the network and its associated series. This was an issue throughout the examined period; Phillips Electronics hired Carat Media to help facilitate new media integration and provide insight into media consumption. They wanted to be more fully integrated into programmes, to be simultaneously "brand-centric" and "consumer-focused" (Elkin and Linnett 2001:3, 37). A thread that runs throughout all of the debates in the trades, regarding branding, product placement, DVDs, and DVRs is measuring audience response; in essence, create an "involvement index" (Rossi 2002:16). If television initially allowed brands to enter the national stage, to advertise enough so they were generally recognizable, then advertising,

product placement, and branding were now tasked with duty of brand differentiation, to make viewers aware of the “brand experience” (Rossi 2002:16). While this is basic to any analysis of branding within both industrial and academic publications, both industries staked millions of dollars on the degree of involvement in branded series and products.

In 2000, Omnicom Group (which is the parent company of BBDO Worldwide, DDB Worldwide, and TBWA Worldwide ad agencies) sponsored a Dixie Chicks special on CBS. In exchange, they received a premium of the ad spots for the hour-long programme to sell to their clients. The first season of *Survivor*, also on CBS, also made several deals with sponsors, integrating products and spots from Frito-Lay, Reebok, Target, Dr. Scholl’s, Visa, and General Motors, among others. “More and more marketers are going to be involved in developing programs that surround the brand. It’s more than a product making an appearance in a show; they’ll become part of the fabric of the show” (Bernstein 2001:13). This prediction from Mark Kaline, the global media manager for Ford Motor Company, was borne out in the following years.

*Advertising Age* also noted the increasing importance of product placement in monetizing viewers: “The longtime advertising tactic of product placement is attracting new interest in a TV universe of ever more fragmented, distracted viewers” as well as serving to “backfill” the gap that the death of the 30-second spot would eventually leave. They pointed out that, at that point, product placement had made the greatest incursions into syndicated programming and reality shows; what was obvious, if unacknowledged in 2001, was that syndication and reality programming mainly served as a testing ground for placing products within primetime scripted shows (Friedman 2001:S2-S3). They also cited Hallmark’s Hall of Fame programming and the Association of National Advertisers Alliance for Family Entertainment’s (AFE)<sup>62</sup> role in the creation of the pilot of *Gilmore Girls* as an

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<sup>62</sup> The Alliance for Family Entertainment was formally known as the Family Friendly Programming Forum. While the article in question referred to it by its former name, in keeping with the case study in Chapter three of this work, I’ve chosen to refer to it as the AFE for the sake of continuity. The name change, according to the Association of National Advertisers, was part of a rebranding effort to reflect

increasing way that advertisers could help fight against “ad and content clutter, media fragmentation and the increasing threat from commercial-zapping technologies like TiVo and ReplayTV” (Neff 2001:S3); the relationship between the AFE and *Gilmore Girls* will be addressed in the next chapter. Shows like *Gilmore Girls*, in particular, were a haven for advertisers who were searching for shows that were non-controversial; sponsors were nervous about investing in certain shows that were considered politically “hot”<sup>63</sup> or too “racy” (Bernstein 2001:27).

*Broadcasting and Cable* added that the bad economy in 2001 and a weak upfront meant a \$1 billion downturn in ad revenue; product placement, sponsorships, and other “value-added incentives” served as both “make-goods” and a way to help networks during an economic crisis. Vice President of Ad Sales at CBS Joe Abruzzese claimed that these were “rewards” for big sponsors but they weren’t planning to make a practice of it, a viewpoint they would change in subsequent years. ABC was far more comfortable with the practice, making sponsorship deals for both *Alias* (September 30, 2001-May 22, 2006; Touchstone Television/Bad Robot) and *Lost* (September 22, 2004-May 23, 2010; Bad Robot/ABC Studios/Touchstone Television). According to Alan Cohen, their executive vice-president of advertising, marketing, and promotion: “When the market is not as strong, you are willing to do more. Realistically, though, we here at ABC have had the approach that we want to do more of these deals because they help both of us. It helps us get more awareness and visibility, and it helps them sell more product” (Schlosser 2001:5, 8).

Indeed, ABC did do more of those deals; in 2003, they made a deal with media buyer MindShare to produce programming. They would split the commercial time and production costs equally. *Variety* said such a deal “reveals the diminishing power of the broadcasting nets to run the game solo” (McClintock and Schneider 2003:26, 28); Alex Wallau, ABC’s network president, pointed out that such a deal

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the “evolving media industry” (“HUMANITAS and ANA Alliance for Family Entertainment Partner” 2009. Available at: <http://www.ana.net/news/content/1767>).

<sup>63</sup> In 2006, ABC could not get one sponsor to advertise on their 5-hour series: *The Path to 9/11* (September 10-11, 2006; Marc Platt Productions/Touchstone Television/UAP Productions); *Survivor* also lost sponsors when it split its competing groups by race (Dempsey 2006:14-15).

might give advertisers a greater sense of the difficulty of producing and financing 22 episodes of scripted programming (Bednarski 2003:6). *Advertising Age*, while hailing it as number 5 out of the top 10 “biggest impact Madison and Vine deals” of 2003, seemed more concerned about whether MindShare knew what it was getting into, wondering if “MindShare and its clients ultimately have the stomach to play in the money pit that is network TV deficit financing” and worried it might be better for ABC rather than MindShare and its clients (“10 Biggest Impact” 2004:20), a prevailing concern throughout the decade.

By 2004, the deal had resulted in a family-oriented show called *The Days* (July 18-August 22, 2004; Mindshare Entertainment/Tollin/Robbins Productions); each of the six episodes chronicled 24 hours in the life of the fictional Days family as seen through the eyes of their 15-year-old child. When it didn’t pass the pilot stage, MindShare covered the show’s deficits and it was slated for 6 episodes during the summer season. They shared commercial time, and products from MindShare clients were integrated within the text. According to *Variety*, networks felt this could be a “fresh” business model (despite it harkening back to the sponsorship and product placement model of the early days of television, which *Variety* was quick to point out); advertisers looked at it as a new way to connect with viewers; and “some Hollywood creatives” were “concerned over their [the advertisers] growing influence on the creative process” (Schneider 2004:20). The advertising industry hailed the “success” of *The Days*, but didn’t think that this model of production would become the “norm” in the near future, as network programming in the wake of DVRs was still “evolving” and “in flux.” Of the greatest concern to them was the continuing question of the appropriate measurement of the worth of product placement or integration. Until that problem was solved, they were concerned that the advertisers would continue to carry the burden and risk of investment in such programmes without being able to measure the material benefit to themselves. Frances Page, head of Principal Strategy and Business Affairs at Magna Global Entertainment, described it as: “The difference with a show like 'The Days' is that the advertiser owned the property and the risk. As an advertiser, you're the person in charge of the distribution and the back end. We'd like to see something that



shares the risk equally between the studios, the networks and the advertisers” (Bannan 2005:S5).

Despite reservations regarding content, measurement, and usefulness, the practice of product placement and integration continued to rise during this period. The practice shifted from a barter and/or “value-added” system to its own industry from 2001 to 2008 (Consoli 2005). CBS, who earlier claimed that they would not seek out product placement deals, was doing precisely that by 2002, when they were noted for “aggressively” seeking out (and procuring) product placement deals with Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile USA, Eastman Kodak Company, and Royal Caribbean International (Friedman 2002:8). In 2005, Les Moonves, president of CBS, said that they were seeking deals from “the kind of cars they drive in *CSI*” to “the kind of orange juice they drink in *Two and A Half Men*” and predicted that there would be a “quantum leap” in placement on broadcast television (Higgins 2005).

It was precisely at this point that articles concerned about this rise in product placement began to appear in the entertainment trade publications. An editorial in *Broadcasting and Cable* referred to cross-promotion on broadcast television as: “an itch that won’t go away, a spreading fungus tolerated by viewers because they are either blind to its deception or desensitized.”<sup>64</sup> It also assumes a perspective of the viewer (blind or desensitized) that is problematic but not particularly consistent across all discussions of this practice, with some positing that viewers are aware and unfazed by the practice (Hoffman 2008:34). Such construction of the viewer is similar to, as analyzed by Boddy, that of the radio amateur, who was mostly construed as a young or adolescent boy; this allows a particular paternalism on the part of both industrial and government observers, one that only grew as broadcast radio grew into a commercial medium and began to be incorporated as a domestic technology (Boddy 2004:31). Constructing a viewer who is either duped or helpless against an onslaught of advertising and programmes designed to only consume and never question, or as a Fiskian counter-reader reinterpreting and remixing programmes is not my interest within this work. While the average viewer (that is,

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<sup>64</sup> The editorial was referring specifically to the “plugs” for other shows that appear within the text of a programme (Rosenberg 2005:38).

neither rejecting television programming wholesale nor a “fan” in the sense of level of investment in a particular programme) may not be aware of the full scope of the industrial and governmental regulations and concerns that effect what they see, the programmes themselves, on average, do not tend to address viewers as ignorant or watching television ahistorically. Nor is that how I construct the viewer within this work. As will be addressed in Chapter four and as argued by Mimi White, television series in general address viewers as having at least a working knowledge of previous texts and some sophistication with the production side (White 1986:51). Hence, the ongoing concern within these publications about how these viewers are watching and how not to alienate them, particularly those who could afford the formats and technologies in question.

Thus, a 2004 Yankelovich Partners survey of consumers’ views of marketing that found that more than 60% viewed it more negatively and thought advertisers “don’t treat consumers with respect” would be of concern. Gary Ruskin, of the consumer advocacy group Commercial Alert, tied this in with the rise in product placement, although the study doesn’t explicitly cite product placement (Lowry 2005). There was also concerns that product placement was hitting a “saturation point” and was “like crack cocaine to the networks” who saw it as a cure for ad-skipping and distracted viewers (Dempsey 2005:20, 23). *Advertising Age*, on the other hand, actually targeted this as a potential issue three years previous. The critique came again from Scott Donaton, who had also written a column in 2001 warning against the overuse of these “new” marketing tools. He reiterates that in 2002:

An expanded toolbox gives marketers more options with which to reach consumers in a cluttered and fragmented marketplace. In some cases this inspires truly creative solutions. But it also poses a tremendous challenge as marketers stampede the boundaries of consumer tolerance. At what point does the consumer become so jaded that the messages lose effectiveness (Donaton 2002:15)?

This concern was echoed and endorsed in a study that found product placement’s use in reality programmes to be “spectacularly average”; that is, the

placement was obscured, overdone, or unrelated to the programme (Steinberg 2008:10). A consumer backlash would also affect their return on investment (ROI); however, with exceptions such as Donaton's two editorials, the main concern regarding product placement and integration remained the development of an appropriate metric to measure ROI in terms of product recall and increased sales. By the end of 2002, *Advertising Age* was already exhorting the industry to think beyond programme placement, including integrating ads into video games such as *The Sims*, ad-supported video-on-demand services, placing ads within DVR menus, creating ad-supported virtual channels available on DirecTV, long-form advertisements, and product-sponsored short films (Elkin 2002:10, 12). Later solutions included behavioural and demographic targeting utilizing information gathered online (Klaassen 2007:17) and scripted shows set in placement-friendly (advertising, fashion) industries (Madden 2008:12; Flaherty 2008:6) or the placement industry itself (Eggerton, Grossman, and Weprin 2007:6). The NBC-owned Spanish language channel Telemundo as well as Univision offered numerous branded entertainment and product placement opportunities for ad buyers, including one telenovela that eliminated advertising breaks in favor of funding from product placements (Bednarski and Marich 2008:16), a rare instance of product placement being targeted to the Latino community. Significantly, and of a piece with the television, advertising, and electronics industries focus on white (often male) upscale demographics, there was no concern expressed regarding the effect of increased product placement on the Hispanic community, an area which deserves further examination.

As the entertainment industry struggled with "how much placement is too much," the advertising industry's main issue in 2005 was "how much payment is too much"; they felt they were being "fleeced" (Klaassen 2005:3, 124) in branded entertainment deals. They felt there was not yet a way to measure whether viewers were being affected by their participation; 40% of respondents to an Association of National Advertisers' survey felt that an assessment tool was vital to justify the cost of these entertainment deals. The solution, according to 80% of those surveyed, was

that the advertising industry needed to develop their own measurement tools (Klaassen 2005:3, 124).

This was underscored by a suit brought Mark Burnett, producer of series such as *Survivor* and *The Apprentice (US)* (NBC, January 8, 2004-present; Trump Productions LLC/Mark Burnett Productions), against Madison Road Entertainment, a product placement firm, claiming that they had “pulled off a stunning double deception, misrepresenting itself to Burnett and his executives as the sole conduit to advertisers who wanted to buy integration deals in ‘The Apprentice,’ while fraudulently convincing the advertisers it was the exclusive agent for Burnett and his super-hot branded-entertainment property” (Graser 2005:1, 54). If the title of the article “Hands off my cash” wasn’t enough of a clue to how *Advertising Age* felt about this suit, the title of a follow-up article in the next issue quoted Madison Road Entertainment’s statement in its countersuit, which referred to Burnett’s actions as “greedy and devious” (Graser 2005:1, 37).

Where the backlash was most obvious was within consumer advocacy groups, which may be the reason why the trade publications focused so heavily on the ethics of the practice within their publications in that year. In 2004, Ralph Nader called for an index that would “punish marketers who consistently go overboard in targeting consumers, such as product placement within movies and TV shows that is not identified as such and marketing in schools” (Atkinson 2004:35). Further, Commercial Watch, an organization started by Nader to monitor the television and advertising industries, also petitioned the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to examine the rise in product placement (Atkinson 2004:35). An editorial in *Advertising Age* praised Nader’s idea, saying somewhat condescendingly that “[t]he marketplace benefits from hearing the crusading activist’s ideas” and that is vital for the industry to know when they’ve crossed the line. They did, however, call for his index to be credible and specific, rather than “blanket indictments” that would be ignored by the industry, and suggested that he also create an index praising those who didn’t cross the line (“A Good Idea” 2004:18).

The east and west chapters of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild also became involved, publishing a white paper in early November 2005 regarding the practice of product placement/integration. They proposed a “Code of Content” calling for:

1. Full and clear disclosure—we call for both the visual and aural disclosure of product integration deals at the beginning of each program, so the program’s audience knows ahead of time that it will be subject to hidden or stealth advertising.<sup>65</sup>
2. Strict limits on the usage of product integration in children’s programming.<sup>66</sup>
3. A voice for storytellers, actors, and directors arrived at through collective bargaining about how a product or brand is to be integrated into content.
4. Extension of all regulation of product integration to cable television, where some of the most egregious abuse is found (WGA 2005).

As a “last resort” they also threatened to go to the FCC, where they felt they might find an ally in Jonathan Adelstein, the Democratic commissioner. Writers’ Guild of America West president Patric Verrone said they were being put in the position of writing “advertising copy” and that “they have to draw the line somewhere” (Grossman 2005:23). In an interview, Adelstein claimed that “plug-ola” was a major issue for his second term as commissioner, but since the FCC is not an investigatory body, they would be relying on “outside” sources to report on violations, including

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<sup>65</sup> Disclosures usually were made in the closing credits; however, many networks split the screen during the closing credits, to either preview the next episode or start the next programme, meaning the disclosures could easily be missed during the original broadcast. This again assumes that the viewer is unaware of product placement unless it is pointed out.

<sup>66</sup> This comes a little over a year after an article in *Advertising Age* pointed out the increase in marketing to children and harnessing “pester power”; ad spending rose 15% for children’s programming, reaching \$1 billion for the first time. This was due to non-traditional marketing towards children, including auto manufacturers, retailers, hotel chains, and tourism bureaus, hoping that children would nag their parents to buy the car or take the vacation advertised during their cartoon (Stanley 2004:75). As Jason Mittell argues, this is just part of a long tradition of using children’s programming as a “test” for broader programme changes; he argues that the move of children’s programmes from prime-time to Saturday morning “presaged” narrowcasting (Mittell 2004:75). Both the focus on “pester power” and the WGA’s objections to it mirror similar concerns in the 1950s and 1960s regarding television advertising toward children. Advertisers sought to exploit the “nag” factor by targeting adult-oriented products toward children, claiming that children were the “gatekeepers” to family consumption practices (Samuel 2001:206-207). It is another instance of contemporary television advertising practice reaching back to early television for their models.

viewer complaints (Eggerton 2006:12, 14; Eggerton 2007:3).<sup>67</sup> In 2006, both the WGA and Screen Actor's Guild staged an anti-product placement protest outside of the Madison and Vine conference, to little avail.<sup>68</sup> A later proposal to include a real-time disclaimer of product placement during programmes that featured paid integrations (Eggerton 2007:24) was dismissed by the advertising and television industries as unfeasible (Hoffman 2008:36) and unnecessary (Eggerton 2008:10). The implication that television programmes ever existed outside the commercial structure of American television was unaddressed by Verrone or the WGA. Nor does it address that such a disclaimer may draw more attention to the placement than it might otherwise receive.

It remains clear, within the debates in the trades, that neither industry accepted responsibility for the rise of product placement, preferring to apportion it to the DVR and the viewer. As mentioned above, the advertising industry was warning against the practice becoming too common as early as 2001, citing viewer exhaustion and potential clutter, something that product placement was supposed to address, while at the same time praising television pioneers of the practice. Milton Berle was lauded as an innovator in product integration, a reminder of a time that could not be recreated, and an example of how advertisers needed to think beyond television (Danzig 2002:28); Bob Hope, however, is cited as having “combined a tremendous capacity for work on his career and commitment to his craft with being a very smart and successful businessperson in his own right” and still stands as an example of an excellent “Madison and Vine” relationship (“Some lessons” 2003:14).

For the entertainment industry, product placement was viewed as a salvation from the onslaught on TiVo and other DVRs, distracted viewers, and too many choices, while at the same time, came with certain reservations from, as *Variety* termed them, “the creatives” about compromising the integrity of the text of programmes, regardless of how or where they were viewed (McClintock and

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Copps, the other Democratic commissioner and potential nominee for FCC chair in 2009, was more proactive, calling for an end to “bad” programming (read: reality television) and greater diversity in representation and ownership (Frazier 2008:1, 23).

<sup>68</sup> They had also been barred from attending the conference (Graser, Stanley, and Cuneo 2006:37).

Schneider 2003:26, 28). As of 2008, however, neither industry had abandoned the practice.

While there were definite points of rupture between the industries regarding all of the technological and advertising issues that were the focus of so much of the trade discourse during the examined period, the correspondences between the two were often present if not always acknowledged. In an article about how to market in a “TiVo world,” while Rob Kennelly, television package agent for Creative Artists Agency, said he sought to bring brands together to “save” both television and advertising, Jamie Kellner accused Kennelly of “drinking the Kool-Aid,” claiming that the DVR would lead to lower ratings, lower advertising revenue, and fewer quality programmes (Friedman 2005:3). Yet corporations and advertising agencies also took their cues from the entertainment industry, with some looking to television’s branding practices for inspiration for their online advertising (Elkin 2003:86). Verizon’s chief marketing officer claimed that the mobile phone company should be defined not merely as a telecommunications company, but as an “entertainment and information medium; an advertising platform; and a marketer of its own brand” (Donaton 2006:12). Or, as Pepsi’s Frank Cooper said: “We’re all telling stories. We’re all trying to create meaning” (Graser 2006:1, 37) As long as television and the advertisers that supported it could understand one another’s objectives, find the right talent, have a good ROI, and guarantee both seamless integration and early involvement, a survey of blue-chip advertisers responded that they would be interested in creating branded entertainment with both cable and broadcast networks (Stanley 2006:6).

By mid-decade, it was clear from the trades that a *détente* between networks and advertisers had arrived. Studios added divisions specifically to liaise with advertisers with regards to branded content. The NBC network created the Universal Studios Partnership as a “one-stop shop” for brands that wanted to be involved with NBC Universal’s programmes, films, and DVD releases (Graser 2005:1, 2). In 2008, NBC president Ben Silverman held an “infront” a month before the May upfronts to offer advertisers integration and branding opportunities for the 2008 fall schedule (Hampp 2008:1, 34); he and Cameron Death, vice-present of NBC’s

digital division, also proposed online programming that would be tailored to advertisers' needs, with advertisers and producers working together to create content. As Death asserted: "If the brand is all about back-to-school, there's no reason we couldn't launch the show around back-to-school season" (Hammp 2008). Such a relationship was suggested at the second annual Madison and Vine conference in 2004, which called for advertisers to develop relationships with television producers, so that their brands would not just "exercis[e] economic leverage, but creative leverage" with "contextual integration" (Kim and Stanley 2004:1, 51). Time Warner created a liaison position for the WB for the same purpose (Graser 2005:1, 2).

In a lengthy editorial, Bob Garfield prognosticated about new advertiser/programme paradigms when and if traditional marketing became obsolete. Garfield praised the fragmentation of the audience as a "holy grail" for marketers, as it could lead to "conversation" with small clusters of consumers (Garfield 2005:1). Not all agreed within the industry; a later article acknowledged the profit benefits of targeted marketed to niche demographics, but, in the same vein as Turow's analysis of segment-making versus society-making media (Turow 1996), expressed concern that it could make consumers less likely to engage with anyone or anything different from themselves (Iezzi 2007:11).

Both industries also sought involvement with the consumer, particularly "leading edge consumers" who could create value and meaning for the brand (Harlow 2006:37), to shift from "command and control" to "interactive dialogue" (Liordice 2006:8). Robert Maxwell argued for identity marketing that would match "human and product brands," claiming that viewers would be more likely to accept branded entertainment and product integration if it is congruent with both the character and viewer identity, and allows "quality" programmes to survive (Maxwell 2007:17). Donaton argues that these meetings of "Madison and Vine" were helping to shift marketing communication from an "intrusion-based" to an "invitation-based" model (Donaton 2003:12).

To this end, Dish Network satellite company first developed interactive "ad triggers" that would allow viewers to access additional information about products,



which would then be passed on to the advertiser, as advertisers were not just investing in numbers of viewers, but in fact were “buying [their] response” (Guthrie 2008:3, 22). Dish later partnered with Invidi advertising to develop a similar technology that would allow satellite receivers to pass demographic, purchase, and viewing statistics to particular companies who could then create “addressable ads” to viewers based on said information (Steinberg 2008:1, 48). Finally, the debut of Hulu (the joint online venture between News Corporation and NBC Universal), was praised for its ability to allow marketers to “align...with high quality content” that would thus have a “good rub-off” on their brand, and help said companies to “purchase intent and brand favorability...from association with the content” (Klaassen and Atkinson 2007:1, 26).

In terms of online programming, while its possibilities had been touted in 2001 (Kerschbaumer 2001:61), issues remained, including debates over copy protection (McClintock 2001:10), the concern over “siphoning away both viewers and ad dollars” (Adalian and Schneider 2007:41; Adalian 2007:14), and which ad model would be effective continued through the examined period (Benson 2007:13; Klaassen 2007:1. 61; Dempsey 2007:17-18; Klaassen 2007: 3, 41; Winslow 2007:3A, 9A; Stilson 2007:S17; Fritz 2007:8, 90; Creamer 2008:3; Learmonth 2008:3, 41; and Hampp 2008:22). The issues of licensing content for online distribution when produced by a studio separate from the network (Becker 2006:8) became less of an issue as more programmes were produced in-house (Benson 2007:10-11).

Programmes such as *Heroes* and *The Office: An American Workplace* (NBC, March 24, 2005-present; Reveille Productions/NBC Universal Television) were both promoted through their online and VOD distribution; indeed, NBC executives say that *The Office's* use of ancillary distribution is a template for other digital spin-offs, as it “pioneered how to take advantage of digital media” (Whitney 2007:S7). Some queasiness about providing online episodes for free and the absence of a solid funding model were balanced with a perception that the networks themselves might be squandering potential online resources (Grossman 2007:10, 12). The use of meta-data protocols, which would target viewers within individualized ads (the same protocols DVRs used to suggest content) was considered to be the best

funding model (Dickson 2007:16-17); a case of one technology informing another. Other ad models include the “pre-roll” (a brief ad at the start of the programme) or an embedded single ad sprinkled throughout (Littleton 2007:12, 16). *Variety* called online content “the most rancorous and disruptive issue to confront Hollywood in decades,” particularly the divide between its marketing possibilities and the legal issues of distribution (Fritz and Learmonth 2007:1, 61). *Advertising Age*, however, claimed that the network sites drew “blue-chip advertisers” and served as an answer to some of the “viewer erosion” on broadcast television. The goal should thus be to find a way to ameliorate the “threat” they felt YouTube posed (Whitney 2007:S16); that is, to make “professional” (Cubitt 1991:19) the formerly do-it-yourself aesthetic of sites such as YouTube.

This search for a “YouTube Killer” (Klaassan, Atkinson, Halliday, and Bulik 2007:S16) was considered accomplished with the launch of Hulu, for which co-founders NBC Universal and News Corporation provided content from their own libraries. As Hulu became more successful, other broadcast networks began offering content as well (Steinberg 2007:3, 65). It was praised for its ad structure, which tailored ads to the length of content (Becker 2007:36), as well as providing a “safer environment online”; that is, a promise that sponsor’s ads would benefit from the “halo effect” (Berger 2004:70) from having their ads paired with “high-quality” video, rather than with “questionable content” (Steinberg 2007:3, 65). While the question of expanding the definition of television networks as “content aggregation and distribution” (Lotz 2007:247) sites is beyond the scope of this work, what is clear is that the networks and advertisers sought to as closely recreate the experience of American broadcast television in an online environment, as Caldwell predicted in 2003 (Caldwell 2003:131). Since Hulu’s launch in March 2008, it had an 85% rise in unique viewers, and its ability to “offer the familiar in an elegant way” and serve as a “safe vehicle for advertisers” (Garrett 2008:14). The fact that its users fall into the 18-49 demographic seemingly completes the circuit between Web and TV.

Online content thus stood as an additional way to build brand equity online and connect on yet another platform with consumers. John Harlow argued that

marketing would do well to embrace “leading-edge consumers” as shareholders (“brandholders”) who aid the companies in important “value creation” for their brands (Harlow 2006:37). Despite this positioning as “brandholder,” it was, as Celia Lury (Lury 2004:131) and Paul Grainge (2007:29) both argued, important to set the terms for the “interactivity” with the brand. The car company General Motors (GM) allowed users to create “mash-ups”<sup>69</sup> using GM’s commercials for the 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe, a sports utility vehicle (SUV). As a result, numerous users created videos calling the SUVs gas guzzlers, war vehicles, and environmental destroyers. When GM saw what had occurred, they left the content and the interface online. A GM spokesperson said: “We knew when we entered into the area of two-way discussion with our customers that there might be some negative interpretations of our ad,” and were pleased at the amount of time users spent on the site (Oser and Taylor 2006:58).

Numerous columnists within *Advertising Age* thought this was a bad idea. The “consumer cannot be controlled,” and thus companies need to figure out “how to protect the brand” and “ensnare consumer involvement” without risking brand equity (Oser and Taylor 2006:58). The use of the word “ensnare” is significant in its (perhaps unintended) implication that the consumer is a wild animal that needs to be lured and trapped and controlled. As columnist Rance Crain expressed it, it is important for marketers to be able to wrest control of the brand from the same consumers by staying “true to the core message” of the product (Crain 2006:18). Despite Albert Muñiz and Thomas O’Guinn’s assertion that “online brand and consumption communities” are potentially able to “force marketers to recognize the reality of consumer-to-consumer communities” and “exert considerable influence on how the brand is represented in the marketplace” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2005:78), marketers seem unwilling to cede such power to consumers. As Baird points out “In contrast to television, this medium gives the network far less control of the image of both the sub-brand (the content) but also the meta brand, the context in which the sub-brand is experienced (the network)” (Baird 2007). Much as the relationship

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<sup>69</sup> “Mash-up” in this context is the practice of inserting one’s own content into a preexisting film or video.

between television and advertising, the relationship between advertising and consumers was one of a “pull” to “invite audiences into discourses of distinction” and simultaneous “push” “aimed at disciplining and controlling the audiences in these spheres” (D. Johnson 2007:77). These are the “forethought” (Grainge 2007:29) terms in which audiences are allowed to provide “free labor” (D. Johnson 2007:77); they can play, as long as they allow advertisers and networks to set the rules.

As will be clear throughout the rest of this analysis, this love/hate relationship with the viewer was inscribed upon the new technologies and formats that came to prominence in the new millennium.

### **Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss**

The coverage of the January 2001 meeting of the National Association of Television Program Executives (NAPTE) conference in *Variety* neatly sets the tone for the entertainment industry’s subsequent reactions to the rise of new technology and its effect on the current television economic model. Since 1993, according to the article, NAPTE has been on a “new media kick,” debating the implications of “the coming interactive entertainment revolution” (King 2001:28). New technology vendors at NAPTE comprise the bulk of the coverage given to the conference in *Broadcasting and Cable* (Kerschbaumer 2001:94-95). Beth Braen, senior vice president of creative services for NAPTE called it “a new paradigm for how users and viewers will have an experience with content. New technology has a role to play, which gives the content people new ways to get their work out and gives advertisers new ways to come up with business models” (Kerschbaumer 2001:94-95). Such a contention is in line with both Gitelman’s (Gitelman 2006:6) and Everett’s and Caldwell’s (Caldwell and Everett 2003:xvi) assertion that new technology is often sold as a rupture with the old in order to sell to niche markets.

That being said, both *Variety* and *Advertising Age* point out that these “new ways” are essentially the old ways, borrowed from the sponsor/programme relationship of 1950s television. “For all the hype about revolutionary changes in business, it’s ironic that the most successful revenue-generating models come not from new relationships between consumers and content owners, but instead hark

back to the early days of television” (King 2001:28). *Advertising Age’s* coverage of NAPTE takes a more neutral tone while making the same points as *Variety* (Friedman 2001:S2-S3). It is in Scott Donaton’s column, not strictly about NAPTE but rather the general direction of the merging of advertising/entertainment sectors in the face of new technology, that a more critical tone emerges: “More advertisers and TV networks will turn to product placements, but their attempts to disguise them as natural, entertaining extensions of programming will not fool viewers, and a backlash will begin before the year is out” (Donaton 2001:16).<sup>70</sup> Donaton stands out as being one of the earliest to express overt concern about potential viewer alienation with regards to product placement; as addressed above, it was not until 2004 that all three publications began to regularly address this concern. Caldwell finds that such “old media” strategies, such as the branding that product placement is a part of, are thus being carried over into the “new media” paradigms brought about by these new technologies, platforms, and forms. While he argues that these new technologies “attacked the fundamental, institutional logic that had served as the very foundation of network television” (Caldwell 2003:155), the television industry has shifted their practices from these “first-shift” strategies of flow, as per Williams, to “second-shift” programming that uses the old strategies adapted for a new context (Caldwell 2003:155).

The overarching issue that each of these publications returned to incessantly was how to monetize the viewer within these new technologies; that is, “realize a viable flow inside the bounded brand of a network” (Caldwell 2003:135). One of the earliest strategies, as stated by *Advertising Age*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, and *Variety*, was interactive television. It was both industries’ initial answer to the competition that DVRs, distracted audiences, and too much choice provided (McDonald 2001:41; Dickson 2001:119; Elkin 2001:S2-S4). Interactive television would blend the distraction posed by the Internet by incorporating it into the programming, thereby engaging the viewer on at least two levels. “Advertisers will be able to link a brand

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<sup>70</sup> In his later book, *Madison and Vine: Why the Entertainment and Advertising Industries Must Converge to Survive*, Donaton somewhat reverses himself in his analysis of product placement, saying that if done properly, it “can enhance both a brand’s image and the entertainment experience” (Donaton 2005:149).

to target audiences in new and creative ways. More importantly, a return path will allow advertisers to close the information loop with their audiences, providing a wealth of consumer data and one-to-one marketing options” (McDonald 2001:41). Yet the technology was slow to develop; in 2001, most internet-enabled homes were still using dial-up connections, meaning complicated applications loaded slowly or not at all. Worse, there was a struggle for definition; advertisers, content providers, and consumer electronics manufacturers all had different ideas about what form interactive television would take, including viewer-decided outcomes to programmes, internet-enabled surfing on television, or point-and-click shopping within sitcoms and dramas (Dickson 2001:119; Shaw 2001:50; Shaw 2001:116; Kokerna 2001:s10; and Donahue 2001:41, 42). It was only *Advertising Age* that seemed to understand that some form of interactive television existed already within TiVo and other DVRs.

The intersection of content and commerce via the Internet and new broadband technologies has yielded a variety of platforms that fall under the iTV tent. They range from digital video recorders with TiVo's Personal TV Service, ReplayTV and Microsoft Corp.'s UltimateTV, to cable operators' interactive and early stage video-on-demand services through TV set-top boxes (Elkin 2001:S2).

With regards to DVR technology, Josh Bernoff of Jupiter Research summed up the two industries varying reactions thusly: “Agencies look at this and say ‘how should we shift our advertising mix?’ Networks say, ‘Oh my God, there's a locomotive coming down the tracks’” (Elkin 2001:S2). Since American television relies on advertising for both production and distribution, this was a fair assessment; although advertising too relies on television—as they perceive it provides access to a larger audience than any other medium—how it allocates those dollars has a greater effect on the network than on the agencies and clients themselves. Within *Advertising Age*, the discourse around TiVo was far less inflammatory; to some, it was even viewed as ushering in advertising's “golden age,” since it would force advertisers to be more creative to reach the “empowered”

viewer (Goodby 2003:23). Such ideas were reintroduced with regards to the commercial ratings system introduced in 2007 (Bloom 2007:16), as will be covered in greater depth below.

As John Beniger argues in *The Control Revolution*, the difficulty of “control” following the Industrial Revolution centered around the fact that materials and goods could be created more quickly, leading to a crisis of consumption. A desire for all these materials needed to be created in the general public, hence the rise of advertising, from print to radio to television, as an effective way to create this need (Beniger 1986:8). Despite Gitelman’s contention that Beniger falls prey to the technological determinism that Raymond Williams warned against with regard to new technology (Gitelman 2006:159), his arguments provide a useful context for these issues within the industries. While there was little need to create a “desire” for television consumption—that is, its “mode of address...already assumes you are watching” (Cubitt 1991:31)—individual programmes would certainly have to work harder to be noticed and television itself needed to stay relevant in the light of these new technologies.

The industrial response to an increasingly fragmented audience overwhelmed with programming, channel, and technological choice, was concerned greatly about quantifying viewer behaviour, similar to Beniger’s argument that “feedback” was crucial to control (Beniger 1986:8). In both industries, these questions regarding viewer behaviour were revisited each year, and a search for the most appropriate way to measure advertising viewership and effectiveness was of paramount concern for both industries. At least three different measurements from two different sources appeared during this time, to measure viewership in homes that had DVRs and the effect of advertising and product placement on audiences. Nielsen, in 2003, announced it would begin a study of product placement effectiveness (Albiniak 2003:6); and in 2004, they announced that they would begin to integrate “time-shifted viewing” into a show’s ratings.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This actually started in 2002, when Nielsen brokered a deal with TiVo to place the set-tops in 20 homes to gauge viewing habits; the results would then be given to Nielsen clients so that they could

The latter was slow to catch on; it was not until the upfront presentation in May 2007 that both industries came to an agreement on the time-shifting metric; networks pushed for the “live plus seven” (counting programmes recorded and time-shifted up to a week after airing) or “live plus three” (time shifted up to three days) whereas the advertising industry wanted commercial ratings (that is, rating how many viewers saw an advertisement) to be included within the metric and felt time-shifting undermined those commercial messages that were time sensitive, such as film advertisements the day before a premiere (Atkinson 2007:S6, S15).

The eventual metric adopted was known informally as “C3”; C3 incorporated “live plus three” and the commercial ratings within one system (Guthrie 2007:26). While NBC made a multimillion dollar deal (Steinberg 2007:1, 34) based on this metric (conveniently released in the two weeks prior to the 2007 upfronts), its feasibility and reliability were not universally agreed upon, citing its newness (Robins 2007:4), the relative importance of the metric itself (Fantom 2007:34), and whether it was merely a ploy to drive up ad prices in a weakening market (Steinberg 2007:1, 34). The company iTVX developed a complex algorithm for measuring product placement and integration within television. iTVX, which billed itself as a product placement leader, since its founder Frank Zazza was responsible for the Reese’s Pieces placement in *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* (June 11, 1982; Amblin Entertainment), measured the amount of time a product appeared in a programme, rated it on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being a brief shot of the product and 10 being an entire episode or storyline being built around the placement), and then compared its effectiveness to that of a 30-second ad. The company then attached a monetary value to the placement itself (Chunovic 2002:4).

Although Zazza’s efforts were lauded, some also complained that his algorithm was finite, didn’t measure residual impact of the placement, and could be confusing (Mandese 2004:18). (Residual impact became much more important as television on DVD grew in popularity.) Other companies also attempted to measure effectiveness, including Nielsen’s PlaceViews, which tracked each second of product

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measure how time-shifting affected ratings. The study only covered viewing habits, though; they did not gather ratings at this juncture (Kerschbaumer 2002:15).



placement and gave it a rating. They did not, however, place a market value on the placement, claiming that it was up to buyers and sellers to do that. The company IAG also developed a product placement research service that tracked placement<sup>72</sup>; many media and advertising firms also developed in-house measurement protocols (Mandese 2004:18).

### **We're in the Money: DVDs as Industry Salvation**

With all the focus on the impact of DVRs and online content on entertainment and advertising, comparatively little was written on the impact of DVDs on either industry. Certainly the argument can be made that because DVDs started as a format primarily for film releases, rather than ad-supported television, the advertising industry would have a less vested interest. Yet, as Derek Kompare argues, DVDs are positioned to have a far greater effect on shifting television from Williams' flow model to Bernard Mieve's publishing model, similar to the film industry (Kompare 2006:335). Much like films, television on DVD contains no advertisements to interrupt the programme. What did pique the interest of advertisers and the television-focused *Broadcasting and Cable* was how DVD leant itself to releasing television shows, both old and new, within this format.

What was released on DVD was a question Matt Hills addressed in his analysis of the cultural implications of television on DVD in TVIII. Hills argues that (building on Kompare's analysis) DVD "recontextualizes TV series as symbolically bound art objects" outside of television's flow, and thus series branded as cult or quality television are overrepresented among DVD releases, often reinforcing the cultural hierarchies of television (Hills 2007:45). The related analyses of Kompare and Hills inform this section of the chapter.

According to *Variety*, DVDs were originally conceived as a "collectable, sell-through item" but made a good showing in the rental market, particularly among PC users whose computers had DVD-ROM drives, and owners of game consoles that could also play the format (Sweeting 2000:12). A later editorial listed all the ways in

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<sup>72</sup> Nielsen bought IAG and its ratings system was incorporated into Nielsen's own in 2007 (Marich 2008:12-13).

which DVDs were worth owning rather than renting, such as commentaries by actors, directors, or others, deleted scenes, interviews, the “chapter” format that allowed the user to select scenes, and the cost of owning a DVD versus a trip to the cinema (Gray 2003:52). The entertainment industry, however, was still struggling in 2003 as DVDs grew in popularity. Questions to be decided included what to price something that was originally conceived to be a collectable item once it was clear that was going to be a mass market item, when to finally phase out VHS, and how DVDs would affect the rental business. Power struggles within the studios led to several executives being deposed, including Warren Lieberfarb, who was a driving force behind DVD adoption in 1996 (Bloom 2003:15).

What seemed to take both industries by surprise was the popularity of television shows on DVD. Industry analysts predicted that sales of television on DVD would top \$1 billion for 2003. Although the market was still considered to be “too young” by some studio executives and Wall Street analysts, others claimed that the popularity of shows released in this format was starting to affect development. One example cited was the show *Family Guy*. Although the programme was cancelled by Fox in 2003, it was the top-selling television DVD for that year; due to that, Fox was considering “reviving the series.”<sup>73</sup> Executives at HBO also claimed that sales of *The Sopranos* (HBO, January 10, 1999-June 10, 2007; Home Box Office/Park Entertainment) on DVD meant they had recouped the cost of the show’s earlier series.<sup>74</sup> By 2005, two polls from Gallup and America Online (AOL)/Associated Press found that more consumers were buying television on DVD rather than films, and that the television DVD buyers were actually younger than those who watched the shows when they were broadcast on networks (Hettrick 2005:1); television DVD profits were predicted to reach \$4 billion by the end of that year (Fritz 2005:18) and outperformed the sales of film DVDs, which were slow that year (Stanley 2005:1,

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<sup>73</sup> Fox did in fact revive the series in 2005, and as of this writing it has been renewed through the 2011/2012 season (Goldman 2008).

<sup>74</sup> In a more recent example, the low-rated *Dollhouse* was renewed for a second series. While this exists outside the time period addressed in this chapter, it is interesting for the fact that two of the reasons for its renewal were the anticipated sales of the first series on DVD, given the popularity of Joss Whedon’s other series in the DVD format, and its high ratings in DVR and online viewing. I will briefly touch on this in the final case study of this work (Cusack 2009).

33). Yet, sales of non-serialized shows, such as *Law & Order* or *CSI*, did not do well in the market despite their broad demographic of viewers, and regardless of the robustness of the television DVD format, the loss in foreign sales of American television properties that was occurring at the same time was not made up for in DVD sales (Higgins 2003:1, 22).

DVDs did aid in reviving the “mini-series” (or “limited series”), as “DVDs let consumers undertake such commitments on their schedule, not the network’s,” something not possible with older mini-series such as *Roots* (ABC, January 23-January 30, 1977; David L. Wolper Productions/Warner Brothers) and *The Winds of War* (ABC, February 6-February 13, 1983; Jadran Films/Paramount Television), which was no doubt a greater concern in this era, given the amount of channel choice (Lowry 2005:15). In this instance, the discussion around DVD mirrors that of DVRs, by drawing an explicit connection between these technologies’s ability to allow the viewer control over scheduling.

But which viewer? As Hills argues, by taking only certain programmes out of the flow of television (that is, those that are specifically “authored,” such as by the MTM production company, or through a producer-auteur figure), it reinforces the same pattern of aesthetic value as exists within the television medium. They can be branded as valuable (Kompere 2006) by being separated from “ordinary” television (Hills 2007:46), which, as Brett Mills argues, is further underrepresented in academic discourse around television. Mills terms this *invisible television* (Mills 2010); that is: “programmes that have run for many years, have repeatedly garnered high ratings, yet have rarely, if at all, been examined in academic work.” This underrepresentation can thus lead to “rendering mute a whole series of voices that desire to speak on the popular” (Mills 2010:12). It thus runs the danger of reconstituting class distinctions through value judgments of television content. While Mills cites UK programmes such as *Top Gear* (BBC Two, 1977-2001/October 20, 2002-present; BBC Productions) or *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC One, February 18, 1979-present; BBC Productions), it can certainly be translated to the soap operas or the “live” aesthetic of series such as *Big Brother* (Channel 4, July 14, 2000-present; Bazai/Brighter Pictures/Channel 4 Television [UK]; CBS, July 5, 2000-present;

Evolution Film and Tape/Arnold Shapiro Productions [US]) that Hills offer as examples of “ordinary” television. The “brand” of such series is not, in Hills’ view, considered transferable to the DVD format due to their positioning as unauthored. This “text-“ and “author-function” becomes a method of not just branding the series, but the viewer as well (Hills 2007:46-52). As Jonathan Gray argues, DVDs allow media conglomerates to “play with notions of different audiences and posit their own audience as more knowing, savvy, aesthetically attuned, and sensible lot” (Gray 2010:103).

This “branded” viewer is similarly constructed in the trades as blameworthy for the 9% drop off in television viewing from 2002 to 2003: “Consumers worldwide will spend \$30 billion buying and renting DVDs this year. In the US alone, DVD sales are running 70% higher today than they were a year ago. Maybe they’re watching those discs, which are blissfully commercial-free, during primetime” (Amdur 2003:1, 53). Although the article went on to claim that the 9% drop was not significant, they were concerned that advertisers might notice it and start spending less on television (Amdur 2003:1, 53).

The other difficulty concerned just how much profit DVDs were generating. Studios considered DVD profits a “safe haven” that helped offset rising talent and production costs; indeed, DVDs offered a 66% profit margin (compared with 45% for VHS) in 2002. Studios received 80% of the profits from DVD sales, leaving the remaining 20% to be split between directors, actors, and writers; this split was a holdover from the negotiations between talent and the studios in the 1980s over the videotape market (Brodesser and McNary 2004:10). Ken Kamins, the talent manager for Peter Jackson, argued that the reason why DVDs sold so well was because of the aforementioned “extras” they included, which required the “talent” to participate; therefore, the royalty structure is unfairly cutting out those who were responsible for its value. An unidentified Oscar-nominated writer was quoted as saying: “This is an issue that’s worth striking over” (Brodesser and McNary 2004:10). On November 5, 2007, the WGA did just that; the strike (which will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter five) led to predictions (Grossman 2007:6) and promises (Hampp and Steinberg 2008:14; Steinberg 2008:3, 24; Adalian and

Schneider 2007:24, 28; Steinberg 2008:4, 40; and Steinberg 2008:3, 35) of large-scale changes to the industry; concerns over its financial consequences (Grossman and Guthrie 2007:5, 28; McClintock and Graser 2007:1, 65; Steinberg 2007:3, 63; Steinberg and Ives 2007:1, 27; Guthrie 2007:4, 29; and Grossman 2007:6); the surprising beneficiaries of the strike, including the motion picture advertising sector, syndicated and cable programming, and shows that struggled in the ratings (Albiniak 2007:20-21; Albiniak 2007:11; Grossman 2007:3, 27; Becker 2007:12; Adalian and Schneider 2008:13, 16; and Steinberg and Hammp 2008:1, 39); the importance of the Internet from a programming (Guthrie 2007:3, 30; Guthrie 2007:3, 32; and Littleton 2008:1, 37), advertising, and public relations standpoint (Littleton 2007:7, 64; Grossman 2007:6; and Lowry 2008:1, 50); and its effect on DVD and overseas sales of series (Grossman 2007:8).

Another surprising beneficiary of the strike was Joss Whedon (Littleton 2008:1, 37), who, according to his own account, used the downtime created by the months-long strike to collaborate with family to create an Internet-only musical: *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (Vary 2008). Whedon's reasoning around the creation and distribution of *Dr. Horrible* was to prove to the industry that such content was capable of generating profit. That being said, the profit primarily came from the sale of the series on iTunes and the later DVD sales, meaning that only when it became tangible did it become profitable. What is unaddressed in this account is to what extent, following Hills' argument, Whedon-as-author-brand drove the success of *Dr. Horrible*. Whedon as brand will be discussed more explicitly in my analysis of *Firefly*, but the strike and its aftereffects are germane to the discussion of these new formats and technologies, in the ways in which DVD profits and monetizing and professionalizing online content were two of the most discussed reasons for its occurrence.

Despite DVDs relatively easy adoption as the preferred format in 1996 (Sweeting 2001:26), by 2007, an additional concern over which high-definition (HD) format would be accepted: HD DVD or Sony's Blu-Ray (which has more storage space). Indeed, the journalistic rhetoric around these formats centered around the idea of these two formats as being "at war." *Variety* articles were at times

accompanied by cartoons of dueling discs (Frankel and Fritz 2007:6, 122), and one marketing executive described the process of the format adoption as “launch, wartime, and expansion” (Bulik 2008:S15), underscoring its connection to the functions of empire. Solutions such as dual-format discs that were both HD DVD and Blu-Ray, and players that would play both Blu-Ray and DVD (but not HD DVD) were suggested (Fritz and Kirsner 2007:3, 50), but adoption of either among the general public at first remained minimal. Indeed, the lack of an agreed format and the length of the debate lead to some concern that “high-def discs will be overtaken by digital delivery before they ever gain mass-market appeal” (Frankel and Fritz 2007:6, 122). Such “anxiety” was somewhat ameliorated when Netflix and Wal-Mart announced their acceptance of Blu-Ray as the preferred format, prompting Toshiba to announce it would stop production on HD DVD players in February 2008, making Blu-Ray the de facto winner (Garett and Shilling 2008). By September 2008, 6.5 million Blu-Ray players had been sold, up 160% from 2007, with predictions of even larger sales for the holiday season (Bulik 2008:S15).

As the sales of DVDs began to flatten in 2007 and 2008, Blu-Ray was not the only solution; taking a cue from cable and satellite VOD platforms, the entertainment industry began to offer “on demand” DVD; DVDs would be pressed to order, which they felt would be a good way to monetize older or less popular shows (Marich 2008:2, 19). As of this writing, the most high-profile on-demand pressing has been the Amazon.com exclusive release of *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*; three weeks after its release, it was ranked number three in DVD sales.<sup>75</sup> Of the formats discussed here, on-demand also may have the most potential to disrupt the cultural hierarchy around DVD releases Hills decried.

The ad industry, however, seemed more concerned that there was not a place within the large profits generated by DVDs for them, particularly since marketing for DVDs was normally handled by studios’ internal marketing divisions. Others suggested that it was just a matter of finding their place. J. Walker Smith, president of market research firm Yankelovich Partner, argued that “DVDs offer a way to open

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<sup>75</sup> *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*. Amazon.com. January 9, 2009.

up the movie experience that was not possible with VHS, with alternate endings and other extras that lend themselves to group activity” (Cardona and Fine 2003:1, 22). Miller Brewing did precisely that by creating a tie-in promotional campaign for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary release of *Animal House* (July 28, 1978; Universal Pictures/Oregon Film Factory/Stage III Productions), including toga parties in bars, autograph signings with cast members, and sponsored banners, collectable cards, and other ephemera (MacArthur 2003:6). It is most likely because of the difficulty in the advertising industry in monetizing DVD that it was so rarely discussed within this publication.

What remained unaddressed within *Advertising Age* regarding DVDs is the increased longevity that DVDs offered for product placement. While DVDs eliminate the commercial breaks, any placements *within* the programmes remain. Indeed, as Kompare argues, television on DVD positions itself as above broadcasting, with advertising elimination (Kompare 2006) and series choice (Hills 2007) as markers of “quality.” That is, “DVD culture encourages audience-text ‘closeness’ and, at the same time, operates at the level of textual valorization” (Hills 2007:48). Yet it does so by using “quality” as a brand, which underscores the “valourising systems” of broadcasters and producers and “enforces hierarchies of ‘quality’ TV” (Hills 2007:49).

Thus, the presence of the placed products is subject to the same quality markers, as well as benefiting from limited distraction and competing products. If, for example, Coca-Cola is placed within a programme, watching said programme means that no other competing cola will be seen within that context. Depending on how many times the DVD is viewed, the viewer is thus repeatedly exposed to the product. The DVD format has implications and benefits for the advertising industry despite the lack of 30-second spot advertising, as will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter four of this work.

### **TV Whose Way? A Case Study of TiVo**

These debates and concerns over advertising, programming, and branding of television programmes discussed above were accelerated in discussing the DVR,

particularly TiVo, the brand most associated with the technology. As a way to focus these debates, this final section will examine both the entertainment and advertising industries “fearful” and “euphoric” (Boddy 2004:4) reactions to the TiVo, and TiVo’s attempts to shift perceptions through its own branding practices.

The emergence of the DVR and re-emergence of product placement and integration on broadcast networks between 2001 and 2008 seemed to occur simultaneously. Certainly, the entertainment and advertising industry both seemed to scramble for a new advertising and programming model in response to the technology. Yet, TiVo, which became synonymous with DVRs during this time in a way that other models, such as Replay TV, never did, struggled to define itself as well. Penetration within American homes remained minimal; TiVo was only in 1.5 million homes by 2004. This, despite deals with DirecTV to include TiVo software as part of their satellite package, an investment deal with AOL/Time Warner that provided them with \$43.1 million to build its brand publicly, and investors from NBC, ABC, and CBS, presumably to cover their bases if TiVo (and DVRs generally), became a high-penetration item in American homes.<sup>76</sup>

The notion of definition eluded TiVo, as it tried to brand itself as both consumer-friendly and network-/advertiser-friendly. To the consumer, TiVo sold itself as “TV Your Way,” going so far as in one commercial showing two men throwing a programming executive out the window and (presumably) to his death.<sup>77</sup> But who was this consumer? For the advertising and entertainment industries, TiVo sold itself as a way to narrowcast both programming and advertising to a particularly gendered and class-based consumer: “a high-end demographic audience of affluent, well-educated urban males who comprise an early adopter, enthusiast audience for TiVo” (Elkin 2001:S12): the same elusive young male demographic that American television sought. As Caldwell and Everett write: “Style became lifestyle and lifestyle became—for the most favored demographics in the 1990s, anyway—a social space defined by high tech consumer technologies and digital media” (Caldwell and Everett 2003:xvi).

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<sup>76</sup> TiVo Investors. Available at: [http://www.tivo.com/tivo\\_inc/partners.asp?frames=no](http://www.tivo.com/tivo_inc/partners.asp?frames=no)

<sup>77</sup> TiVo ad: Network Executives. Available at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZl2Y5wX\\_zk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZl2Y5wX_zk)



This “social space” is also applicable in the 2000s, and certainly represented the space that TiVo was aiming for. TiVo is thus positioned as both a class-based and gendered technology, and opens up numerous questions as to why, if DVR penetration remained so minimal during the years in question, networks and advertisers were so nervous.

Although a thorough comparison of the sales of consumer mass-market goods with upscale merchandise is beyond the scope of this work, both these marketing concerns and the aforementioned view of the audience expressed by Jamie Kellner and Shelly Lazarus are problematic on a social and socioeconomic level. Kellner’s view of DVR users as “thieves” can thus be read in numerous ways. First, as an indictment of the “cowboy” culture of the tech-savvy viewer who believes it is one’s right to have broadcast television on one’s own terms ruining it for the rest of the audience. As a slightly more balanced editorial in *Broadcasting and Cable* describes it, a “Web culture [that] has grown up seeing security measures as an Everest to be scaled...a cowboy (and cowgirl) that is paradoxically both outside the establishment and a major force within corporate culture,” which apportions responsibility fairly equally between the dominant corporate and hacker culture (“Free for All” 2001:70). Boddy argues that this kind of response is historically tied in with the portrait of the young male amateur radio enthusiasts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Boddy 2004:31-33). Second, it can be read as an general indictment of an audience who should be pleased that they get any programming at all, regardless of quality. This melds with Lazarus’ condescending contention that viewers are too “lazy” to take control of their viewing experience and the aforementioned concerns about wresting control of brands away from consumers. It also seemingly evinces nostalgia for broadcast network’s pre-cable “least offensive programming” theory/strategy developed by Paul Klein, executive vice-president of programming at NBC in the 1970s. In an article for *TV Guide*, Klein posited that viewers watch the medium of television, rather than a specific programme, and thus viewers chose the programme that offends them the least of their limited choices, with no real involvement (Klein 1971:6-9; Bedell 1981:259-260). The only goal for the networks would be to gain their third of the audience share, without having to

target specific demographics. In this way, Klein and programmers like him are in line with theorists such as Ellis and Williams in both their analysis of television viewing, and in evincing a certain contempt for the mass audience.

The shift to targeted demographics in the same era thus meant that it became vitally important for even broadcast networks to deliver an upscale audience to advertisers (Kissell 2003:23). For TiVo to position itself to an upscale demographic, through both its marketing and its price, is to align itself with television and advertising in the same way as the networks. *Variety* noted the slow disappearance of any working class characters on American television, drawing a comparison between the similar political and economic situations of the 1970s, when the top-rated show was *All in the Family*, and the current era, showcasing “the moral bankruptcy of the super-rich...and the neurosis of well-educated professionals” (Littleton 2008:1, 81). That being said, I would argue that such a shift is a marker of the differences in how “quality” is defined in different eras; the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by numerous corporate scandals, and thus the “socially relevant” quality brand shifted its focus—as will be more clear in my analysis of *Arrested Development*.

While broadcasters claim that “high-concept” is easier to sell in the multi-channel era, these programmes and the high cost of TiVo and other DVRs were both positioned at one segment of the viewing audience to the exclusion of others. It also eliminates its potential for those for whom time-shifting would be a potential liberating technology; that is, users whose schedules are other-dictated, the other being either family care issues or a routine work schedule. In the series of advertisements that TiVo ran from 2000 to 2001, the advertisements were uniformly positioned toward a male demographic; the aforementioned “Network Executives” was one<sup>78</sup>; another featured Joe Namath plugging a fake “masculine itching” cream to Ronnie Lott.<sup>79</sup> The only one that focused on a domestic context featured a man explaining to his fascinated wife how TiVo could help them block non-family friendly programming from their children’s viewing, with the wife

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<sup>78</sup> “Network Executives.” Available at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZl2Y5wX\\_zk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZl2Y5wX_zk)

<sup>79</sup> “Masculine Itching.” Available at: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=0qglQfqYX10>

echoing Renee Zellwegger's line from the film *Jerry McGuire* (December 12, 1996; Tri-Star Pictures), "You had me at TiVo."<sup>80</sup> In this way, the domestic sphere is reclaimed for an active, engaged, upscale male viewer, an "armchair Columbus," or, as Boddy expressed: "the position of the TV set within the larger masculinist subculture of home theater technophilia and connoisseurship has already affected the medium's position within both the household and wider cultural life" (Boddy 2004:130). This is only underlined by the industrial debates around TiVo and other DVRs, in which its "penetration" was the focus of discussion and anxiety among both advertisers and networks. Further, as Robert McChesney contends:

Advertising accentuates the class bias in media. Advertising, on balance, tends to be interested in affluent consumers with disposable income. Hence, media firms find it far more rewarding to develop media fare for the upper middle class than for the poor and working class (McChesney 2004:19).

Sean Cubitt asserted that with regard to new technology, class and gender issues are translated into "professionalism." The new formats set up a binary between what is "good taste"; that is, professional and by extension, commercial. While new technologies certainly allowed "professional"-grade content to be created by amateurs, the reaction to GM's "mash-up" by the advertising industry meant "good taste" could easily be separated from professionalism, depending on who viewed it. This focus on appropriateness and professionalism has the potential to thus co-opt or marginalize other perspectives and rob them of the possibility of giving a voice to those outside the mainstream (Cubitt 1991:19). Cubitt argues that video's potentiality is related to "the building of a democratic media culture" (Cubitt 1991:1). While TiVo's own slogan (TV Your Way) and the broadcast and advertising industries' claims that the DVR is a viewer-centric set-top box, such possibilities are shut down before such potentials are reached by its acceptance and co-option into the prevailing economic system, and its branding toward a narrow, gendered,

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<sup>80</sup> "You Had Me at TiVo." Available at: [http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=364o\\_HggEjw](http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=364o_HggEjw)

upscale demographic. The only viewers who could have “TV Your Way” were the ones who could afford it, and would thus allow themselves to be commodified and sold to increase this technology’s acceptance into the greater economic structure of television. As William Uricchio argues, even these viewers are not entirely in control; for all of TiVo’s claims that it is viewer-centric, the reagggregated flow model is controlled by meta-data protocols rather than the viewers themselves (Uricchio 2004:168-172).

TiVo’s efforts to brand itself as advertising- and network-friendly were met with skepticism by many (McClellan 2003:12); CBS commissioned a study that found that 40% of TiVo users time-shifted programmes and 70% skipped the commercials (McClellan 2003:12). Others hailed TiVo as helping to change a dated and outmoded broadcasting/advertising system (Elkin 2002:36), and the DVRs generally represented nothing more than that viewers want to be in control of their viewing experience (Downey 2007:18). What is consistent is the way that each publication wrote several obituaries for TiVo (since TiVo was the most widely known and associated DVR, regardless of its difficulties), citing financial difficulties (Higgins 2004:12); issues with brand identity (Adamson 2005:19); executive issues (Higgins 2003:4); lack of widespread adoption (Lowry 2004:18); cable and satellite adoption of DVR software that didn’t require a set-top box that could confuse the user (Higgins 2004:12; McClellan 2003:12; and Schneider 2003:23); and the broken deal with DirecTV, from which the majority of new users came from (Fritz 2004:17; Sanders and Klaassen 2005:3, 84).

By 2007, TiVo had reported a loss of 247,000 subscribers, approximately 6 months after the DirecTV deal officially ended (Hemingway 2007:8). David Poltrach, Vice-President of Research Planning for CBS, claimed that TiVo’s stand-alone status meant it would never properly penetrate enough homes to make it financially viable; he went on to say that even at 30% to 40% penetration, it would not be a “medium killer” (McClellan 2003:12). Roy Rohlstein, senior vice-president of programming for Zenith Media, also said it was too pricey and was “one too many machines” for the average user (McClellan 2003:12). An editorial in *Advertising Age* even claimed that “If TiVo didn't exist, the TV networks would have to invent it. The

ad-skipping mechanism, I boldly predict, will be the best thing that ever happened to the networks.” He went on to claim that rather than TiVo and other DVRs destroying the 30-second spot, it merely adds a second revenue stream that allows networks to gain more money from advertisers despite a softening market (Crain 2003:22).

The later, DVR-influenced audience measurement tool from Nielsen, known as C3<sup>81</sup> engendered similar criticism when its adoption led to a multibillion dollar deal between Group M and NBC, which was perceived as forcing ad buyers’ and other networks’ hands in accepting the new metric (Fantom 2007:34; Steinberg 2007:1, 34). The fact that TiVo wouldn’t initially release its own internal studies of user behaviour was viewed as problematic as well (McClellan 2003:12). New fears were potentially engendered when a study finding a 12% drop in the purchase of a particular packaged good among longer-term DVR users (Neff 2007:8).

Each obituary proved premature; as of 2008, TiVo was still around. The TiVo brand itself, however, shifted with each of these setbacks, as it too struggled for control of how it should be used. In 2001, it made a deal with Miller Brewing, a one-year agreement that gave Miller 30 minutes of pre-loaded content in TiVo recorders—newly purchased recorders came with a half-hour block of programming produced by the advertiser. Such a partnership would necessarily fit in well with their goal to reach the urban male. In fact, the first thing the user would see when they turned on the TiVo for the first time was a list of advertiser-produced programmes. They could choose to watch, save, or delete, and the deal gave TiVo veto power over the content. They also made an agreement with the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) to produce half-hour programmes that included golfing bloopers, PGA tour highlights, and golf-equipment merchandising and cross-promotions for the PGA website (Hall 2001:43). TiVo continued to sell itself as a venue for long-form advertising, making additional deals with Acura, Porsche, Lexus and BMW, underscoring their targeting of upscale purchasers. Software within the

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<sup>81</sup> The C3 (commercial and live plus three) metric provided ratings for whether a commercial had been watch and included “live plus three” (that is, rating programmes recorded and viewed up to three days from broadcast) ratings.

TiVo would “tag” a 30-second spot featuring their partners, allowing the viewer to access more information about the product and allowing the sponsor to access more information about the subscriber, which raised some concerns over privacy (Elkin and Halliday 2003:4). It is indicative of the level of mistrust in both industries that privacy issues were raised with regard to TiVo’s offer of their subscriber’s demographic profiles, but the similar offer by Dish network raised no such concerns.

In 2004, TiVo also started to develop an Internet-based service that would allow subscribers to download movies and shows from the Internet straight to the TiVo, a move that worried cable and satellite providers (Romano 2004:8; Kerschbaumer 2005:26). The fact that they then announced, in November 2005, that they would add software that would allow TiVo subscribers to download programmes to iPods and PSPs for free also angered the networks, “who were just getting over their fear that ad-skipping would spell ruin for their business” (Learmonth 2005-2006:15-16; Dickson 2006:22). At the same time, the new CEO Tom Rogers, whose former employer was NBC cable, said that TiVo was enabling “searchable ads” and developing technology that would give TiVo users “new ads” while they fast forwarded through the broadcast ones. Rogers and departing CEO Mike Ramsey both claimed that the advertising business was the most important relationship to TiVo (Learmonth 2005-2006:15-16).

Finally, in 2006, it sued EchoStar and cable/satellite DVR providers for copyright infringement, a move that *Variety* had suggested in 2004 to help it “zap” through its financial difficulties (Fritz 2004:17). It also began to release its “season pass” information; that is, the data on the top 50 shows TiVo subscribers had asked their DVRs to capture all episodes (Dickson 2007:8). Deals with Rhapsody music to provide their subscribers access to more than 4 million songs (Dickson 2007:16), Dominos Pizza to provide interactive ordering (Steinberg 2008:48), and YouTube to allow viewing of their videos on television (Dickson 2008:30) were just some of the ways TiVo attempt to brand and rebrand itself during this time period. In trying to simultaneously be advertiser- and consumer-friendly, whether providing subscriber data or seeking out cross-promotional deals with other companies, TiVo was not an alternative to advertising-supported television in any other way than time-shifting.

Like DVDs, it did not stand in opposition to the advertising/programming model, but rather valorized it.

By 2005, some sectors had started easing off on their concerns over DVRs changing the broadcasting advertising model. Cable channel ESPN commissioned a 6-month study in which they placed DVRs in 100 homes to see if they changed viewing habits. The results were mixed; they found that 75% wanted to keep the DVR, but its uses were not consistent among all viewers. Most of the participants in the study enjoyed time-shifting, but skipping commercials was a “secondary concern” and didn’t “appear much different from viewers who change channels or leave the room” during commercial breaks (Kerschbaumer 2005:26). This came only two months after reporting that the May upfronts were focused primarily on how DVRs have a “deleterious” effect on the current advertising model (Kaplan 2005:24).

By 2007, such rhetoric had been dulled, with *Variety* going as far as to say that “TiVo might finally help the networks” by allowing them to more accurately measure audiences despite their viewing habits (Adalain and Schneider 2007:17, 41). A study released in 2007 that examined commercial skipping by age group concluded that most users used the DVR to “conform television to their schedule and consume more television than they could without it,” with 17% to 18% actually watching commercials even with the ad-skipping technology (Downey 2007:8). A Nielsen study was even more optimistic when it reported that 40% of DVR users watch commercials (Guthrie 2007:10). The timing of the release of this data, so near to the acceptance of Nielsen’s own commercial rating system, certainly seems conveniently positioned to reassure advertisers of the relevance and usefulness of the new metric. *Advertising Age* seemed less sanguine, referring to the current era as the “post-advertising age,” where online video, DVRs, and an empowered consumer lessen the viewing and effectiveness of ads; thus, many agencies were focusing more on targeting individuals within these niches (Garfield 2007:1, 14).

It’s clear, then, that the networks, advertisers, and TiVo itself had difficulties in defining its purpose; however, networks and advertisers shifted little in their

views of the technology, regardless of how TiVo shifted itself. As seen throughout this chapter, TiVo was not the only technology suffering from problems of definition.

### **Conclusion**

The debates around how the traditional model of television and advertising would be affected by new technologies and formats, as seen throughout all three publications, proceeded in a circular fashion through most of the first decade of the new millennium. Each year brought the same questions to the surface: What does this technology mean for the traditional advertising model? How should these technologies, series, and viewers be branded? How have viewing patterns changed or not changed with the addition of DVRs, online distribution, and DVDs? How do we bring viewers back to television? Why do some new media technologies garner more excitement and focus than others? All of these questions have the same concern at their base; that is, definition. How do you construct a viewer who can watch a programme on broadcast, or online, or on a DVR, or on DVD? Are they still television viewers? Is a programme that debuts online and moves to network, as the web series *Quarterlife* (NBC, February 26-March 9, 2008; Bedford Falls Productions) did, a television programme? As Gitelman writes: “[T]he definition of new media depends intricately on the whole social context within which production and consumption get defined—and defined as distinct—rather than merely on the producers and consumers themselves” (Gitelman 2006:15). That is, the social and governmental structures that are in place for media, such as the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that allowed vertical and horizontal integration of media, for instance, are part of the social context within which the television and advertising industries, and the viewers they seek, operate. The type of viewers, as seen through these publications, that was assumed to be using these new technologies, formats, and platforms, and thus the most sought after by both industries, had gender- and class-based implications.

Both industries seemed inclined to “blame” the other for not adapting quickly enough to change (McClellan 2004:32; Crain 2003:22; and Amdur 2003:53), or blame the audience (such as Jamie Kellner’s contention that the audiences were



“killing” television, quoted earlier) for not supporting television, being so easily distracted by new technology and/or platforms (Thomaselli 2005:23), or not treating brands with enough respect (Oser and Taylor 2006:58). This, despite numerous assertions by both industries that the consumer is in charge and should be respected (Kim 2002:1, 14; Bulik 2004:1, 14; Thompson 2004:1, 51.).

This is perhaps not surprising. This era saw the rise and increasing penetration of DVR technology into American homes; the promise of video-on-demand (VOD) came to some degree of fruition, particularly through Apple iTunes (Becker 2006:A2; Fritz 2005:18) but also through cable and satellite services adding and refining VOD capabilities within their set-top boxes<sup>82</sup>; programmes on and for the internet were incorporated into the broadcast model; and the DVD format went from “collectible” to “mass market” only seven years after its first introduction, with 87% of American homes enabled with DVD players by 2007.<sup>83</sup>

The debates around an agreed-upon system for measuring DVR ratings and product placement/branding effectiveness, even though numerous metrics emerged during this time, added to the confusion and stress of incorporating and accepting the new technology. Despite the eventual acceptance of the C3 ratings, debates remained about whether it represented an effective measurement. Even as the industries began to shift and embrace these developments, the technology also continued to shift and change. Yet, why weren't these industries prepared for DVR technology and its (potential) implications? Or perhaps the better question is, why did they say they were not prepared? Each of the broadcast networks had invested in TiVo, in preparation for a widespread adoption that never occurred. The NAPTE

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<sup>82</sup> As of this writing, such capabilities have shown some effect on production and distribution. The NBC Universal series *Friday Night Lights* (NBC/The 101 Network, October 3, 2006-February 9, 2011; Imagine Television/Film 44/NBC Universal Television) debuted its third season first on DirecTV's VOD service before debuting on NBC in January 2009; DirecTV paid half the production costs in exchange for debuting the first 13 episodes of the third season on their on-demand service; the entire season would then be aired starting in January 2009 on NBC (Grossman 2008:36). *Friday Night Lights* had previously broken new ground when NBC Universal used a preview DVD of the show's first season as a free sample included with the first season of *Heroes*, as well as selling it exclusively through Wal-Mart (Grossman 2007:3, 10).

<sup>83</sup> This is compared with the penetration rate of VCRs and television, which took 15 and 25 years, respectively, to reach the level DVD players did in seven (Cardona and Fine 2003:1, 22; MPAA Inc 2007:17).

conference had focused on new media since 1993, according to both *Variety* (King 2001:28) and *Broadcasting and Cable* (Kerschbaumer 2001:94-95).

The question of bringing viewers back (and buying) implied a second question that neither entertainment publication really addressed: Was the reason people weren't watching broadcast television because there was nothing they wanted to watch? A simple question, perhaps, but a spike in broadcast viewers for the fall 2006 season made it a question that needed asking, and *Advertising Age* was the only publication of the three that addressed it specifically, saying: "CANCEL THE FUNERAL: Broadcast TV is alive and kicking harder than it has in years." Although they acknowledge that the "threats" to broadcasting were real, by 2006, the networks were "fighting back." All the networks have hired high-priced talent, invested in costlier productions and are getting savvier about promoting their wares on every outlet from online to VOD" (Atkinson 2006:1, 53). The content of the new season was also praised in an earlier editorial that explicitly addressed the importance of content in combating the technological threats: "the sense of excitement that surrounds the new season is proof that product quality and innovation still count" (Donaton 2006:14). Donaton's use of the word "product" to describe television content is of a piece with the increased conflation through the decade of programming and advertising.

William Boddy argues that it was the shift in the gendering of television in the 1990s and 2000s, from a passive, "feminine" medium in which viewers just "watched" what was on, to an active "masculinized" medium with the introduction of technology that allowed the viewer to serve as programmer/scheduler; this "active" viewer upset a network hegemony that was still unsettled by the introduction of cable (Boddy 2004:103). Yet responses like Kellner's, which fit in well with Boddy's assertion, were by no means universal; confusion and concern were the most prevalent, with some network and advertising executives, as mentioned earlier, even expressing excitement over what was perceived as an important shift. Further, the importance of exactly who was adopting these technologies over the years in question, the products that were placed within shows to lure these particular audience members, and the implications on a socioeconomic

level is one I will examine further within my case studies of certain network programmes.

It is clear that many of these problems and issues remained unresolved by the end of 2008. Despite numerous prohibitions and some concerns about viewer response, product placement, branding, cross-promotions, and product integration stood out as the central response to the growing adoption of these technologies and the “ADD” viewer distracted by the Internet, video games, and DVDs. Aside from some dissenting voices (particularly that of Scott Donaton in *Advertising Age*), both industries became more comfortable with pooling their resources, or, as *Advertising Age* termed it, meeting at “Madison and Vine.”<sup>84</sup> Stephen Heyer, president of the Coca-Cola Company, was an outspoken advocate of ad/content convergence, exhorting advertisers and entertainment industries alike to “collaborate or die”: “If a new model isn't developed, the old one will simply collapse” (Kim 2003:1, 12). He also viewed DVRs as an opportunity, rather than an obstacle:

Those technologies represent another way to embed you in the hearts and minds of consumers. ...These industries need to decide if they want to evolve in an advertising-friendly way or in an advertiser-competitive way. Then they need to decide if it's advertising as traditionally defined, or some other form of connection. That's where the game needs to be played for us to rationalize all this technology and get back to doing something that matters to people, and that allows advertisers to take advantage of what the technology can offer (Heyer 2002:16).

Buffeted by changes in viewing habits, economic downturns, strikes, and new technology, both industries appeared to struggle with how to reach viewers across every platform a viewer could access, while simultaneously seeming to resent having to do so. Product placement and other branding practices remained as one of the easiest ways to monetize consumers regardless of how shows were viewed. Indeed, the “digital media aesthetics” as Caldwell dubbed them, which came to prominence in this era, used these

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<sup>84</sup> This concept was so integral to *Advertising Age* during these years that not only did they have a weekly column termed “Madison + Vine,” but launched a Madison + Vine website in October 2002, devoted to examining the phenomenon. Available at: <http://adage.com/madisonandvine/>

branding strategies to underscore the power of these industries and the market itself (Caldwell 2003:131).

What was obvious in these circular debates was how the networks' and advertisers' used the opportunity of these new formats and technologies to add revenue to the current model—hence the shifting views on technology such as TiVo, regardless of numbers, research, or collaboration. The next four chapters will address how branding and these new technologies operate within the text of series during the period in question; that is, following Caldwell's call for "context" of the text in question. To a greater or lesser extent, each of these series responds to the shifts addressed in this chapter in terms of how brand flow operates within the programmes. Caldwell's work on "second-shift" aesthetics is a useful context for the series' responses; *Gilmore Girls*, *Arrested Development*, *Heroes*, and *Firefly* are all inflected by aspects of these "second-shift" practices, whether it is the shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting (*Gilmore Girls*, *Arrested Development*), from "mass economies of scale to niche economies of scope" (Caldwell 2003:136) (*Firefly*), or "serial flows" to "tangential and cyclical flows" that disperse the text across "brand boundaries" (*Heroes*) (Caldwell 2003:131). These case studies will build on Caldwell's multiple analyses of these shifts, as well as the work around branding by Grainge, Arvidsson, Lury, and Baird.

**Neither the Cow Nor the Milk Are Free: The Marriage of Advertisers and  
the *Gilmore Girls***

In mid-July 2003, an advertisement for Aquafina aired on the WB Network, as part of their “Pure Luck” campaign. The campaign involved blimps and ground crews searching out individuals drinking their brand of bottled water and giving on-the-spot prizes. The advertisement focused mainly on providing that information, explaining how the contest operated.

What really stood out about this campaign was not just its vox pop aesthetic, nor the lengths, according to the company’s spokespeople (Cheplic 2003) that individuals went to be noticed. It was the advertisement that announced it. Shown during the summer hiatus, the commercial was set in “Stars Hollow”—the fictional Connecticut town where the series *Gilmore Girls* is set. The main characters of that series—single mother Lorelai (Lauren Graham) and her teenage daughter Rory (Alexis Bledel)—walk down the main street of the town, while Lorelai talks about how she’s “dying of thirst.” Luckily for them, an Aquafina cart is there on the street, an object never seen within the series itself. The woman ahead of Lorelai is spotted with a bottle and wins a prize, prompting Lorelai to complain “She bought my Aquafina.” The tag features an Aquafina blimp hovering over the town, and finishes with “Pure Gilmore/Pure Luck,” tying the commercial and programme together explicitly as cross-promotion.<sup>85</sup>

Written by series creator Amy Sherman-Palladino, the advertisement’s dialogue is stylistically identical to that of the series. Further, the diagesis of the ad is the series—it is not Lauren Graham and Alexis Bledel—it’s Lorelai and Rory. The Aquafina commercial represents what has been termed by some in the industry as “situ-mercials” (Steinberg 2004:B11); that is, commercials that either reference the text of the series it is supporting or featuring characters or scenes from said series.

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<sup>85</sup> *Gilmore Girls* Aquafina Commercial. YouTube.com. Available at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0-gebU\\_yTQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0-gebU_yTQ)

There is a textual circuit at work within this advertisement, between the text and environment of the show and the text and environment of the advertisement that in many ways presages the multiplatform dissemination of later series such as *Heroes*. The world of the series is flowing beyond the series, expanding its “brand boundaries” (Caldwell 2003:136-137). While this type of cross-promotion won’t recur until the seventh series, it stands as both a clever piece of cross-marketing and, outside of the series itself, in line with the production genesis and continuing engagement with consumption that is one of the defining elements of *Gilmore Girls*.

In this chapter, I will examine how *Gilmore Girls* creates a “life-world” (Arvidsson 2006:13) focused on brands and consumption. While Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s view of objects as “bridges” and “fences” as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of class representing the undergirding structural analysis, it is Adam Arvidsson’s examination of the mediatization of culture—that is, the current lack of distinction between “media culture” and “everyday life” in contemporary society that serves as the primary lens through which to view the use of brands within *Gilmore Girls*, how they define characters as well as serve as the primary method of communication within its diagesis. Brands—from high- to low-end, work to produce a “common” (Arvidsson 2006:19; cf Hardt and Negri 2004:206) in *Gilmore Girls*. That is, they “become valuable through their ability to manage and program human communication and appropriate the ethical surplus...that it produces as a source of value” (Arvidsson 2006:13). This occurs both within the series and outside of it, as the Aquafina commercial makes manifest.

*Gilmore Girls* debuted on October 5, 2000. It was the first series to be developed under the auspices of the Alliance for Family Entertainment (AFE)—then known as the Family Friendly Programming Forum. The AFE is a consortium of advertisers whose stated purpose is to: “support and promote the informational programs that are aired during key prime-time hours when adults and children in a household are most likely to watch television together (8-10 p.m.)” (AFE “Mission Statement”) and, as part of its transition and rebranding efforts that led to its name change, to be “a formidable influence supporting and promoting the development of

family friendly content across multiple distribution platforms” (AFE “FAQ”).<sup>86</sup> The term *family friendly* in its original name seems to indicate some allegiance to the Parent’s Television Council (PTC); a monitoring group for objectionable content on American television. In fact, they are frequently at odds, since the AFE was created by advertisers and the PTC campaigns companies to drop advertising from shows they term objectionable, such as *Nip/Tuck* (FX, July 22, 2003-March 3, 2010; Ryan Murphy Productions/Warner Brothers Television). For the AFE, created by members of the Association of National Advertisers, *family friendly* equals “key demographics” that sit together watching TV in a cozy consumer haze.<sup>87</sup> These differences are apparent in their separate analyses of *Gilmore Girls*. Whereas the AFE praised *Gilmore Girls* for its “responsible resolution” of 19-year-old Rory’s loss of virginity (“Raincoats and Recipes [4.22]”), the PTC gave it “a yellow light for its casual treatment of sexual material.”<sup>88</sup>

*Gilmore Girls* centers around the personal and romantic adventures of single-mother Lorelai and her teenage daughter, a relationship that is referred to in both the series and its publicity as more like friends than mother and daughter. Their relationship is set against Lorelai’s troubled past with her wealthy, conservative parents, Richard (Edward Herrmann) and Emily Gilmore (Kelly Bishop)—prior to the start of the programme they are estranged. This chapter will trace briefly the role of the AFE in developing *Gilmore Girls*, and how this industrial relationship affects the text of the series.

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<sup>86</sup> *Gilmore Girls* did not really benefit from multiplatform dissemination or publicity until its final season, as will be addressed later in the chapter.

<sup>87</sup> Aside from the funding provided by the 45 members of the AFE, 17 companies provide additional funding for the Script Development Fund: Coca-Cola, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, FedEx, Ford Motor Company, Home Depot, Inc, IBM, The J.M. Smucker Co., Johnson & Johnson, Kellogg Company, Merck & Co Inc, Nestle USA, Pfizer Inc, Procter & Gamble, Sears, Roebuck and Co., Tyson Foods Inc, Unilever United States, Inc, Verizon Communications, Wal-Mart, and Wendys.

<sup>88</sup> Parent’s Television Council *Gilmore Girls* page. Available at: <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/shows/main.asp?shwid=2420> The PTC rates programmes using “traffic lights”; that is: green indicates a “[f]amily-friendly show promoting responsible themes and traditional values”; yellow, “adult-oriented themes and dialogue that may be inappropriate for youngsters”; and red, “gratuitous sex, explicit dialogue, violent content, or obscene language, and is unsuitable for children.” As per example, two of the other series addressed in this work—*Arrested Development* and *Heroes*—are “red light” series.

The series itself is significant both for its focus on class issues rarely addressed on American television, and how that informs its relationship with product placement and branding. It also stands as a more traditional example of how brand flow operates within the show, while gesturing toward some of the eventual shifts that have occurred in the relationship between ads and programmes.

The AFE's main initiative to bring about their stated goals of more family friendly programming is through the Script Development Fund. According to their website, the Script Development Fund provides seed money to a network for "family friendly scripts." If the scripts are developed into a pilot, the network reimburses the fund and it is redistributed on more scripts. *Gilmore Girls* was the first show to be developed under these auspices, and the WB was the first network to enter an agreement with the Fund.<sup>89</sup>

Yet the AFE has also come under fire by conservative commentators for their portrayals of a single mother as head of the family, as well as Lorelai's (and later Rory's) seemingly casual treatment of sex and the downplaying of the importance of fathers in the family circle. "The stars of this family-friendly comedy? A thirty-two year old unwed mother and her sixteen-year old daughter. Hardly a model family to help America stabilize its moral crisis" (Family Zone Staff 2002). On the other side of the political fence, the fact that the programme was developed under the auspices of a group with "family friendly" as part of its name was claimed, on the part of show creator Amy Sherman-Palladino, to incite fear that *Gilmore Girls* would simply be a mouthpiece for conservative values. "I was concerned that four guys all dressed alike were going to march into my office and say, 'Here is what we consider family friendly' ... Thank God that didn't happen" (Weiner 2002). Conservative politics in *Gilmore Girls* are most often expressed by Richard and Emily Gilmore, and are less concerned with religious and moral questions and more with class, money, and propriety.<sup>90</sup> The discourse surrounding Lorelai's unintended pregnancy at the age of

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<sup>89</sup> ANA AFE Script Development Fund Page. Available at: <http://www.ana.net/AFE/content/scriptdevelopment>

<sup>90</sup> In fact, the only time a religious figure appears in the elder Gilmore's home (Stars Hollow does include minor characters who are religious, including Reverend Archie Skinner [Jim Jansen] and Rabbi David Barans [Alan Blumenfeld]) is when Richard and Emily bring a reverend (Michael C.



sixteen were centered around “how it would look” (expressed by Lorelai’s mother) and lost opportunities (expressed by Lorelai’s father: “I had to tell my friends, my colleagues, that my only daughter, the brightest in her class, was pregnant and was leaving school” [“Christopher Returns” (1.15)]). Of course, this begs the question as to whether the intent of *Gilmore Girls* was ever to “stabilize” moral crises. As I will argue below, its intention is focused far more narrowly on consumption (that is, making Lorelai and Rory metonyms for the products displayed on the show, as the Aquafina advertisement made clear), and less on making political or ethical statements about family life in the new millennium.

The AFE’s web site<sup>91</sup> insists that their purpose is not censorship. Indeed, overt censorship does not seem to have occurred on any AFE-sponsored programming. However, the pressure to retain advertisers has the potential to impact the writing process (not portraying a character using a product in an inappropriate way); self-censorship also seems to be an issue. One particular incident occurred at the 2000 AFE Family Friendly TV awards. When Allison Janney accepted an award on behalf of *The West Wing* (NBC, September 22, 1999-May 14, 2006; John Wells Productions/Warner Brothers Television), she was reported as being “surprised and distressed” that she had to cross the Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists picket line to attend the ceremony, and during her acceptance speech, remarked: “As an actress, I just have to say, don't take away what's rightfully theirs; they have families to support too.” The Association of National Advertisers was one of the groups negotiating with the unions; presumably to appease them, Dick Clark announced immediately following Janney’s speech that “Janney's remarks would be edited out of the final program.” John Wells, the executive producer of *The West Wing*, returned the award (Pardy 2000).

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McCarthy) to dinner to counsel Rory about saving herself for marriage (“Twenty-One Is the Loneliest Number” [6.7]). There is no other indication through the series that the elder Gilmores are regular churchgoers; further, Lorelai and Rory explicitly state that neither of them are churchgoers either (“Always a Godmother, Never a God” [6.4]).

<sup>91</sup> Family Friendly Programming Forum FAQ. Available at: [http://www.ana.net/family/familyprogramawards/talk/qanda\\_A.cfm](http://www.ana.net/family/familyprogramawards/talk/qanda_A.cfm)

The definition of “family friendly” then, based on the corporations that provide their support to the Script Development Fund, seems to be programming that is non-controversial and attracts a range of ages and demographics that have disposable income to spend on the products featured on the programme. As Eileen Meehan writes in her examination of the Nielsen system: “From an industrial perspective, television shows are only successful when advertisers get a large chunk of the audiences that they have selected as worthwhile” (Meehan 2003:130). Indeed, Nielsen ratings seem to be a secondary concern for the show; *Gilmore Girls*, in particular, was low-rated but critically lauded in its first series, and yet was renewed for subsequent series. This is an important point, as the WB network had few ratings successes during its 10 years as a network. Shows, such as *Gilmore Girls*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Angel*, were never contenders against major network programming, but did provide much-needed credibility from the critical community. Both *Buffy* and *Angel*, however, were considered problematic in terms of cost and for purveying less family-friendly fare than *Gilmore Girls*.<sup>92</sup> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* lasted five series on WB before being cancelled because of a battle over licensing fees between the WB and Fox, who produced *Buffy* (Adalian 2004). *Angel* was cancelled after five series, with low ratings and high cost cited as reasons (Adalian 2004). While *Gilmore Girls* was significantly cheaper due to the lack of special effects and night-time shooting that shows such as *Angel* required, it still calls into question why a similarly low-rated show such as *Gilmore Girls* survived for seven years on a network with extremely high turnover for hour-long shows of any genre.

To that end, in this chapter, I will argue that *Gilmore Girls* represents what John Thornton Caldwell refers to as “boutique programming,” which “constructs for itself an air of selectivity, refinement, uniqueness, and privilege” (Caldwell 1995:105). Lorelai herself would argue that “refinement” and “privilege” would be words only associated with the elder Gilmores, but Stars Hollow is also an insulated

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<sup>92</sup> Indeed, *Buffy*'s sixth series was rated the number one “worst” series by the PTC; *Angel* made the list the same year at number four.

community, with no apparent poverty, homeless, or violence.<sup>93</sup> It is hardly a proving ground for a single mother to raise a child. Numerous examples throughout the show indicate that the town is “watching out” for Rory; in the final episode, the entire town holds a “Bon Voyage” party for Rory, with the town selectman giving a lengthy speech about how the town itself “birthed” Rory into the young woman she became (“Bon Voyage” [7.22]). The “boutique” that *Gilmore Girls* represents is multilayered within the “life-world” of the series. First, the show is predicated on its ability to be narrowcast to a particular (and generally moneyed) audience who are able to afford to “shop” *Gilmore Girls* or who aspire to the particular lifestyles seen within the show; this extends to its relationship to its advertisers. In its final incarnation on the CW Network, a new sponsor, American Eagle clothing, launched a segment called the “Aerie Girls.” Aerie is a line of clothing from American Eagle that is geared toward women aged 14-24, the same demographic *Gilmore Girls* was aimed towards.<sup>94</sup> The Aerie Girls provided commentary during the commercial breaks of the show, what they liked and didn’t like, while wearing Aerie brand clothes and attempting “Gilmore Speak.”<sup>95</sup> In addition, the American Eagle website provided an episode guide for *Gilmore Girls*, completing a seemingly mutually beneficial cross promotion between The CW and American Eagle, and explicitly pushing the idea that the Gilmore girls themselves were both worth emulating and that such an identity could thus be purchased. Further, the Aerie Girls segments, in showcasing the supposed audience for the series, connected by their enthusiastic participation in the Gilmore life-world, seemed to be an attempt by advertiser and

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<sup>93</sup> Erin K. Johns and Kristen L. Smith argue that Stars Hollow stands as both a utopia (as defined by Richard Dyer) and as a representation of the hyper-real (as per Baudrillard) (Johns and Smith 2008:23-34).

<sup>94</sup> In his analysis of “Gilmore-isms” (that is, the particular way that the characters, particularly Rory and Lorelai, communicate with one another) as a marker of *Gilmore Girls* as a “quality” brand, Justin Owen Rawlins self-consciously writes from the perspective of an atypical viewer (“twentysomething male”) and the ways in which the audiences positions the series as “not a typical WB show.” When Rawlins examines how the DVD sets “foreground” these quality markers through both case interviews and “favorable quotes” from the critical community about the series production value and content (Rawlins 2010:36-56), it is worth noting that these “favorable quotes” were also used throughout *Gilmore Girls*’ broadcast life in the promotional materials.

<sup>95</sup> As will be addressed in greater depth below, “Gilmore Speak” would be defined as speaking quickly and with numerous obscure and mainstream popular culture references (known as “Gilmore-isms”).

network to create a common, using the “ethical surplus” created by audience investment within the series.<sup>96</sup>

The AFE itself fits in well with Caldwell’s assertion that “Broadcasters from the start did not see the viewer as a couch potato, but as an active buyer and discriminating consumer. ...As long as advertising revenues and Nielsen numbers ruled broadcasting, audience activity and consumption would be crucial and overt parts of the television equation” (Caldwell 1995:250). Mentions of products, services, and shopping itself are numerous and excessive within the programme. Stephanie Coontz, in her discussion of early television, said:

[A]dvertisers favored shows that presented ‘universal themes’ embodied in homogenized families without serious divisions of interest by age, gender, income, or ethnic group. The hope was that everyone could identify with these families and hence with the mass-produced appliances that were always shown in conjunction with the mass-produced sentiments (Coontz 1992:175).

With the increasing market segmentation in American television, such universality is no longer possible; *Gilmore Girls* seemingly responds to this segmentation by providing three generations and an attempt at representing working, middle, and upper class. In both cases, two are perpetually in conflict, but none are entirely untenable in terms of audience identification<sup>97</sup>; this allows them to “sell” to a greater range of demographics, which is most certainly what made them so appealing to the AFE. As Arvidsson argues, this type of televisual market segmentation has existed since the 1960s; a “lifestyle format” that allows

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<sup>96</sup> It didn’t work; fan reaction on the CW Message boards was universally negative regarding the Aerie Girls, with the majority of commenters indicating that the segments were “dumb” and insulting the intelligence of the audience. “Christina” writes: “They don’t have any real insights into the show, but rather go on about how cute a male character is”; she goes on to argue that the Aerie Girls were “skewing much younger and sillier than the show’s demographic” (CW Source blog, November 2, 2006). Numerous posters made the same argument, indicating some level of sophistication with network processes. The Aerie Girl segments were subsequently discontinued in March 2007.

Available at: [http://blogs.trb.com/network/cwsource/2006/11/whats\\_the\\_deal\\_with\\_the\\_aerie.html](http://blogs.trb.com/network/cwsource/2006/11/whats_the_deal_with_the_aerie.html)

<sup>97</sup> The exception would be the baby boom generation of “superrich” Huntzberger family who are shown with few if any redeeming qualities; the Huntzberger “children” are spared, for the most part, from being coded as snobbish or mean.

advertisers to link “particular...and imaginary forms of life’ for consumers to engage in” (Arvidsson 2006:27-28).

Finally, its references to popular culture, and literary and political allusions require a particular (and possibly generational) level of cultural currency to understand.<sup>98</sup> As the 30-something Lorelai serves as one of the primary point-of-view characters within *Gilmore Girls*, this focus on referentiality and immersion in popular culture fits with the assertion that she is “the first Gen X mom” on television (Lotz 2006). I further argue that these elements are influenced by the show’s initial advertiser-created pedigree, and Lorelai’s assertions that she repudiates the world of “refinement” and “privilege” for herself and her daughter, while both still lay claim to said refinement and privilege serve as a metaphor for the show’s seeming mismatch between what it is trying to say about class and consumer culture and what is portrayed on the show itself.

The attributes of both *Gilmore Girls* and the products placed within its diagesis create a Gilmore-infused brand that inflects both the series and products; that is, it allows the “controlled reintroduction of quality into the means of exchange” (Lury 2004:5). Lury draws a parallel between brands and television, as they both serve as mediums, with their use of “association units” that can magnify associations between variant items and help consumers develop associations as well. As will be seen throughout these case studies, the brands placed within the diagetic worlds of these series are “hyperlinking” (Lury 2004:12) themselves to setting, characterization, and even channel positioning. Arvidsson underscores Lury’s analysis when he argues that “[b]rands thus rely on the productivity of consumers not only for the realization, but for the actual co-production of the values they promise” (Arvidsson 2006:35). It is one of the reasons why the aforementioned *Aerie Girls* segment was so despised; viewer reaction indicated that these content wraps were not representative of either the content of the series or the characteristics of the audience. This stands in opposition to the Sherman-Palladino penned “situ-mercial,” which carried the style of writing and characterization into

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<sup>98</sup> These references are so extensive and occasionally obscure, that the first 4 series on DVD included an insert explaining them; the last three series’ booklets are available online.

the commercial setting. Thus, both this chapter and the subsequent case studies will examine how these brands flow through these series, both marked by and marking the characters in particular ways.

The action of the series takes place in two cities: Hartford and the fictional town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut; however, while Stars Hollow itself could be considered a part of the cast, "Hartford" is limited to two locations: Chilton Academy, an exclusive private school that Rory Gilmore attends from series one through three and the Gilmore mansion, home to Lorelai Gilmore's parents. Yale University, in New Haven, is added as a set from series four onward.<sup>99</sup> Significantly, Rory seems to have a limited interaction with New Haven; there is a large class divide between Yale and its surrounding community.

These three settings: a university, a small town, and a mansion, should have permeable borders to the companies participating in the AFE. However, language and physical products remain the two inroads for advertisers. When Rory's final high school boyfriend, Jess Mariano (Milo Ventimiglia), gets a job at Wal-Mart, a scene set in the employee section of the local retailer contained no signage reading "Wal-Mart," despite the fact that it is a member of the AFE. Worse, the plot itself involves the absence of a monitoring system for a school-aged person's working hours; Jess works so many hours a week he slips below legal attendance hours for high school, flunks out, and loses his home and girlfriend ("Keg! Max!" [3.19]). This certainly does not represent a positive endorsement for the working environment at Wal-Mart, especially since they made the news in the United States several times regarding unfair labor practices (Barbaro and Joyce 2005:E03; "Wal-Mart to Face" 2001). Additionally, Jess is routinely mocked by his uncle Luke Danes (Scott Patterson) for everything from the iconic blue vest of Wal-Mart employees to the idea that being a Wal-Mart employee would be the highest aspiration of someone of more than average intelligence. That this mockery comes from a character who is supposed to represent the "working class" in Stars Hollow underscores the class issues at work within *Gilmore Girls*. Furthermore, the character of Jess is at least

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<sup>99</sup> Actually, the "Yale" scenes are filmed at University of California, Los Angeles.

doubly coded as an outsider (he's from New York) and ethnic (the name "Mariano" stands out in a town of people with names like Doose, Danes, Gilmore, Belville, and St. James; the only individuals of color are the Kims, who are Korean,<sup>100</sup> and Michel Gerard [Yanic Truesdale], who is Afro-French). Although Jess is at least as intelligent as Rory, he has no interest in college and no plans for the future. Most of the discussion around Jess revolves around "falling" or "failing"; when he "steals" Rory from the more acceptable Dean Forester (Jared Padalecki), Luke hopes Rory will inspire Jess to make an effort to improve his circumstances and Lorelai worries that Jess will drag Rory down. In fact, Rory's relationship history from series three onward is the site in which much of the dialectic around class issues occur within the show, in a way in which Lorelai's do not until the fifth series, with both intelligence and social standing as equally weighted currencies.

The second point represents the seemingly inviolable borders of Stars Hollow. Although Jess works for the big box retailer, it is never seen within the borders of the town.<sup>101</sup> In fact, no big business appears in Stars Hollow. The grocery store, bakery, mechanic, video store, bookstore, diner, and movie theater are all town-owned. The only complaint elicited by the Rory and Lorelai regarding the town's retail options is the lack of a Sephora, a beauty supply boutique. Yale, similarly, shows no overt reference to the Barnes and Noble-owned Yale bookstore; and none of the coffee carts Rory frequents carry any Café Java signs, the main coffee purveyor within Yale.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the conventional television borders—broadcast network, advertisements confined to the break in the programme—can exist within the series; the products that do enter the diegetic space of the series are thus inscribed as special. That is to say, there are set limits to what products merit placement within the series. Of a piece with the class issues within the series, the products that are given the greatest prominence—that is, allowed passed the

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<sup>100</sup> Complicating this is the fact that the actors playing Lane and Mrs. Kim are Keiko Agena and Emily Kuroda, both of whom are Japanese. That, however, is only one of the many issues with Asian representation in *Gilmore Girls*. As Hye Seung Chung argues, the prizing of Lane's Americanness over her Korean-ness, particularly the representation of Korea as backwards and conservative ("Those Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer" [3.01]) is particularly problematic (Chung 2010:165-185).

<sup>101</sup> Dialogue indicates that it exists within the borders.

<sup>102</sup> Yale Web Site: <http://www.yale.edu>

borders of the town, university, or mansion, are either more expensive, high-end products: Sidekick Slide mobile phones, Diane von Furstenburg apparel, the Roomba Robot vacuum cleaner, Hermes Birkin handbags, and Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik shoes, or mass distributed companies and products, such as McDonald's and other franchises, or Kellogg's Pop-Tart pastries. I define prominence by either the number of times the product is referred to, or the building of an episode or dialogue around it. As per example, the Sidekick Slide was featured so prominently within one episode that its name was included within the episode's title ("I Get a Sidekick Out of You" [6.19]).

There are three separate ways in which product placement can be used within the context of a show: the product is viewable, the product is in use by a character on a show, or the product is mentioned by a character (Galican and Bourdeau 2004:16). The last is the coup d'grace for advertisers, and is, in fact, what *Gilmore Girls* specializes in. Language is the primary function of *Gilmore Girls*. The show is so dialogue heavy that a typical *Gilmore Girls* script runs 75 pages, 25 pages above the industry norm.<sup>103</sup> Given that the most dialogue is given to Lauren Graham and Alexis Bledel (Lorelai and Rory), it is a character point that both talk faster than anyone other characters.<sup>104</sup> Further, it ties in with Williams' analysis of the relationship between advertisements and programmes; that is, the shared "fast acting televisual conventions" that are a feature of both (Williams 2003:68). While *Gilmore Girls'* plots and stories unfold at a less frenetic pace than other series, the quick, caffeine-fueled speech of Lorelai and Rory mirrors that of many of the 30-second spot advertisements that support the programme. Further, Lorelai and Rory are positioned, as stated earlier, to serve as an endorsement, through their use of the products being placed.

The show utilizes an "autumnal" colour pattern. The credit sequence, from all seasons, is overlaid with a sepia tone. This is significant, as the sepia tone is culturally coded as "antique"; it complicates the "modernity" of a single parent by

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<sup>103</sup> *Gilmore Girls*. Available at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0238784/trivia>

<sup>104</sup> The show *MadTV* (Fox, October 14, 1995-May 16, 2009; Quincy Jonez-David Salzman Entertainment) parodied this in a skit called "Gabmore Girls" (9.14).



adding a patina of nostalgia. This “nostalgia” is also underscored by the diagesis of Stars Hollow, with its town-owned businesses, friendly neighbours, and government by town meeting, pushing it toward a particular ideal of the American small town (Feuer 2010:148-161). Each credit scene is in motion, not still frames, from the show itself, synced<sup>105</sup> to the song “Where You Lead,” sung by Carole King and her daughter, underscoring the mother/daughter connection. Diagetic music ranges from classical, which is played during the “Friday Night Dinner” scenes at the Gilmore mansion, to modern rock. Although Lorelai and Rory will often listen to modern music, the main conduit for diagetic rock is Rory’s best friend, Lane Kim, who is both an audiophile and the drummer for a rock band. Although Lane is of Rory’s generation, her music collection and tendency to judge others based on their “indie cred” ties her culturally with Lorelai. We see the same tendency in Lorelai, Rory’s father Christopher Hayden (David Sutcliffe), and Rory’s series three boyfriend, Jess.<sup>106</sup> Both diagetic and non-diagetic music often accompanies silent or scene transitions, to aid “reading” of a scene; a notable instance of the use of diagetic music was in the episode “Raincoats and Recipes” (4.22), in which Rory and Dean consummate their relationship to Lou Reed’s “Satellite of Love,” with the notable lyrics “I’ve been told that you’ve been bold/with Harry, Mark, and John” and repeating bridge of “I like to watch things on TV” as the two sink onto the bed and off-screen; the song choice underlines sexual “boldness” while in fact not allowing

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<sup>105</sup> “Synced,” in the sense that I am referring to, means that the words and actions relate to one another; that is, the opening line: “If you’re out on the road” is a wide shot of a small eastern town with a car driving in the distance, followed by trees in autumn colours, transitioning to a shot of Lorelai and Rory in Lorelai’s Jeep; further, the repeating chorus, “where you lead, I will follow,” is accompanied by the following: Rory walking through the door at her Yale dorm, Rory walking away and being followed by Lorelai, Rory and Lorelai in Rory’s dorm room her first night at Yale, and Lorelai following her mother, Emily, into the foyer of the Gilmore home.

<sup>106</sup> Numerous examples exist of these connections, including Rory’s father Christopher mocking Lorelai’s fiancé for a music collection that contains the Dave Matthews Band (“Red Light on a Wedding Night” [2.3]); Jess later mocks Dean’s fiancée for being a fan of the band Matchbox Twenty (“Keg! Max!” [3.19]). Music also serves to indicate to Jess that a stranger at his uncle’s diner is in fact his father when both quietly sing along to David Bowie’s “Suffragette City” (“Say Goodnight, Gracie” [3.20]). Faye Woods provides an in-depth analysis of the use of music in *Gilmore Girls* to “define generation interactions as well as to configure and cement character identity and relationships” (Woods 2008:128). It also fits with Arvidsson’s contention that “goods” have shifted from a way to express “individuality” to becoming “natural parts of social processes” (Arvidsson 2006:27); that is, naturalized within the social matrix.

the viewer to “watch” this particular act on TV.<sup>107</sup> Diagetic music is also provided by the “town troubadour,” played by Grant Lee Phillips, who will sing either an original or cover song relating to the action of the scene as a character walks past him; scene-transitional non-diagetic music is often a series of the note “la” as sung by Sam Phillips that will shift in tone according to the action of the scene.

In terms of setting, the Gilmore mansion, Chilton Academy, and Yale University are represented as gray stone edifices. You cannot enter without being accepted or invited and all three are considered historical. Even the Gilmore mansion; in one episode, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), of which Emily is a member, host a tour of the house as an “historic” site. Although the dining area is roped off, the people on the tour watch them eat and think they are “actors” hired by the DAR to lend “authenticity” (“The Nanny and the Professor” [4.10]).

Stars Hollow, on the other hand, is both open (no tall buildings, doors left unlocked, streets are wide and open) and insulated (you have to leave to enter wider consumer culture); it is assumed that the town residents thus have a say in one another’s lives, as in the episode “Written in the Stars,” in which a town meeting is held to discuss whether Lorelai and Luke should be in a relationship (5.3). There is no hiding in Stars Hollow; everyone knows what everyone else is up to. Government is by town meeting and under the control of the local grocer and town selectmen, Taylor Doose (Michael Winters), who is portrayed as increasingly totalitarian and conservative throughout the show.<sup>108</sup>

Stars Hollow, in terms of production, has its own historicity. It is based on the town Washington Depot, Connecticut; however, the exteriors of Stars Hollow are actually the Warner Brother’s backlot known as “Midwest Street” and the residential street is “Kings Row.” Both were built for films; Midwest Street was created for the

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<sup>107</sup> The episode is also notable for a Trojan condom placement; it is the “raincoat” referred to in the title of the episode; the following episode (“Say Good-bye to Daily Miller” [5.1]) has Rory choosing “Candyman” as sung by Sammy Davis Jr. as “their song” underscoring their feelings of the sweetness of the moment as well as foreshadowing the short duration of their future relationship.

<sup>108</sup> While Taylor is initially shown as a busybody and control freak, by the fifth season, he opens a museum in town featuring talking dioramas decrying modern morality and claiming evolution is a debunked theory, tying him in with a particular strain of fundamentalist Christian cultural thought not indicated within his character previously (“Live and Let Diorama” [5.16]).

film *Saratoga Trunk* (March 30, 1946; Warner Brothers Pictures) and Kings Row was built for the film of the same name (April 18, 1942; Warner Brothers Pictures). The town square itself was featured on *The Dukes of Hazzard* (CBS, January 26, 1979-February 8, 1985; Lou Step Productions/Warner Brothers Television) and *The Music Man* (June 19, 1962; Warner Brothers Pictures); the exterior of Lorelai's inn, The Dragonfly, is actually the house from the series *The Waltons* (CBS, September 14, 1972-June 4, 1981; Lorimar Productions/Amandas Productions), tying it visually with the previous generation of family drama and thereby underscoring the historicity of Stars Hollow in televisual and cinematic terms. No new exteriors have been created for the show throughout its run.<sup>109</sup>

I will examine in-depth two episodes from the fourth and fifth series of the show, respectively, as well as studying the show as a whole. I picked these episodes primarily for the use of products and/or services as part of the storyline; both stories also fall near the center of the run of the show, and would represent the show at a point when it had become an established part of the WB line-up and had a stable time in which it aired.<sup>110</sup>

The main thrust of the show is the close relationship between Lorelai Gilmore and her daughter Rory (short for Lorelai); they consider themselves “best friends.” As mentioned earlier, the original promotional material emphasized this aspect of their relationship with the repeated tag: “They look like sisters, but they’re not.” Lorelai left home at 17, after getting pregnant and refusing to marry the father—Christopher—moved to Stars Hollow with 1-year-old Rory and got a job as a maid at the aptly named Independence Inn. She visited her family at holidays, but had no real relationship with them. The show starts when Lorelai asks her parents for a tuition money loan for private school for Rory, whose ambition is to attend Harvard and be the next Christiane Amanpour, who actually appears as herself in the final episode of the entire series (“Bon Voyage” [7.22]). The series makes clear at

<sup>109</sup> *Gilmore Girls*. Available at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0238784/trivia>

<sup>110</sup> The first series aired on Thursday nights at 8 pm, eastern time; when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* moved to UPN starting with the 2001-2002 season, *Gilmore Girls* moved into *Buffy's* old timeslot (Tuesday night at 8 pm eastern time) and remained in that slot on the CW network until the end of its run. It also represented an example of competitive scheduling; *Buffy* retained the same timeslot on UPN as it had on the WB, pitting the two female-centered dramas against one another.

numerous points that this ambition would not be achievable without the proper credentials, thereby excluding anyone who does not have access to the resources that the elder Gilmores command. Her parents agree to loan her the money, with the caveat that Lorelai and Rory must attend dinner at their house every Friday night. When Rory graduates high school and her mother's finances make her ineligible for aid, Rory extends her financial obligations to her grandparents, underlining the idea that money is the only bridge across the Gilmore generation gap.<sup>111</sup> This is eventually resolved in the final episode, in which Emily attempts one last time to bribe Lorelai into keeping in contact with her parents; Lorelai asserts that, even without Rory's presence, they no longer need an excuse to be connected to one another ("Bon Voyage" [7.22]). The tension between Lorelai and her parents remains a central plot point throughout the series; both their past relationship and Lorelai's present choices are brought up again and again. Rory is also a source of tension; her choice to attend her grandparents' alma mater and her increasing comfort in the world of money and privilege leads to an estrangement between mother and daughter by the end of the fifth series ("A House is Not a Home" [5.22]).

The two episodes, "Scene in a Mall" (4.15) and "How Many Kropogs to Cape Cod?" (5.20) bookend one another; not only are both heavily informed by consumption and class, but also because we see goods being a "bridge" and a "fence" between mother and daughter in both episodes (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:12). Further, both episodes feature one or both of the central characters as a viewer, commenting but either excluded from or resisting involvement with another character or situation at hand. Given the presence, within these two episodes, of numerous products, both are in line with Altman's contention that flow is connected to "commodification of the spectator in a capitalist, free enterprise system" (Altman 1986:40).

Yet this same positioning does not imply, as Altman does within his essay, that *Gilmore Girls* does not require attention, or that sound is used to call back a

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<sup>111</sup> Indeed, when Rory and her grandparents become estranged in the sixth series of the show, Christopher agrees to take over the financial obligation, thereby deepening the rift ("He's Slipping 'Em Bread...Dig?" [6.10] and "Friday Night's All Right For Fighting" [6.13]).

distracted viewer. While the show could be “glanced” at, in Ellis’ sense of it (Ellis 1992:164), the rapid dialogue and dense textual referents to literature, film, and popular culture seem to address the viewer as requiring a great deal of attention in order to experience the show as it is intended. The cultural referents within the show extend beyond intertextual references to the “world” of television (White 1986:57), but also to music, politics, and ephemera of popular culture, naturalizing both these and the products placed within the series and, as Browne contends, “dissolv[ing] the difference between the ‘supertext,’” as represented by these references, “and the supermarket” as represented by the products (Browne 1984:181).

In “Scene in a Mall” product-placed language and the boundaries of consumerism butt up against the bucolic, insular worlds of Lorelai and Rory. Within the space of 39 minutes, products mentioned or seen include: The Gap, Radio Shack, McDonald’s, Vera Wang, Manolo Blahnik, Sbarro, Brioni, Kenneth Cole, Life-Savers, and Orange Julius. It is an orgy of product placement; yet this is incorporated into the text of the episode in intriguing, if problematic ways.

The “scene” in the mall can be interpreted as the “scene” Emily causes when Lorelai tries to stop her from shopping; yet, if examined as a homonym, it can refer to Lorelai and Rory’s purpose for being there, to window-shop, as well as a later scene in which they both try to avoid being “seen” by Emily. In *The World of Goods*, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood explain that “Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges” (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:12). However, as Celia Lury argues, Douglas and Isherwood do not take into account “how modern systems of production, publicity, and communication, such as television, films, newspapers, or advertising, affect individuals’ participation in this process of making judgments and being judged” (Lury 1996:14), or, as Zygmunt Bauman asserted, how people are complicit in being products in and of themselves (Bauman 2007:6). This will become clearer in the second episode I’m analyzing, “How Many Kropogs to Cape Cod?” where the notion of the aspirational nature of consumption on *Gilmore Girls* becomes more evident. In this episode, all three Gilmores are using consumption as a palliative for something else; Rory and Lorelai

go to the mall to window shop like “Roz Russell and Ava Gardner on Fifth Avenue,” as they have no money. Emily, in a previous scene, has been teased by her husband about her shopping addiction; she is using shopping as a way to fill the increasing distance she feels from him and his new life and the emptiness of her own life without him to define it. Grant McCracken, in *Culture and Consumption*, argues that:

Great wealth enables the individual to buy virtually any and everything he or she might want. As a result, the consumer devalues the purchase and transfers ‘bridge’ status to another object not yet owned. When anything can be bought on whim, there can be no location in space or time that can be used a refuge of personal ideals...There are no happiness or fulfillment contingencies in the lives of the very rich (McCracken 1988:113).

McCracken’s use of “bridge” dovetails with Douglas and Isherwood’s analysis of the use of goods in consumer culture; Emily cannot access the “bridge” between her daughter and granddaughter because the goods in question no longer have any meaning; she is “fenced” in by her own economic status and ability to have anything she desires to devalue the social and therapeutic quality of shopping. Indeed, in a later episode, Emily deals with a fight with Rory by attempting to buy an airplane (“The Prodigal Daughter Returns” [6.9]).

In *The Way We Never Were*, Coontz argues that “Most individuals still attempt to carve out space for personal commitments, family ties, and even social obligations, but they must do in *opposition* to both job culture and consumer culture” (Coontz 1992:179). *Gilmore Girls* problematizes this in significant ways; although Coontz’s words may be applicable in a real world context, the world of *Gilmore Girls* seeks to undermine this perception. First, Lorelai’s first job after leaving home was as a maid at the Independence Inn<sup>112</sup>; this also came with room

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<sup>112</sup> This is a characteristic choice, as it is a continuing plot point that Emily treats her maids terribly; each episode features a different one. Lorelai’s choice indicates that she aligns herself with the abused and disposable domestic staff within her parents’ home. Rory makes a smaller scale choice when she helps one of her grandmother’s staff polish silver while conversing with her in the maid’s language—Spanish. Emily is horrified at Rory associating with the “help” and the maid is replaced immediately by a white German maid. As Rory doesn’t speak German, she is unable to communicate

and board for her and Rory. It was at her mother's job that many significant events in Rory's life occurred, and staff of the Inn, including the owner, serve as an extended family to Rory, thereby mixing the personal and professional, rather than having them at odds with one another. The fact that the owner of the inn, Mia (Elizabeth Franz), commands at least enough resources to own an upscale inn in Connecticut, does not allow her to be coded as "working class"; that she serves as a surrogate mother for the young Lorelai further undermines Lorelai's repudiation of the world of money and privilege. Mia is genteel and soft-spoken; the only significant difference between Emily Gilmore and Mia is that Mia has a sense of humour and is not coded as being overly concerned with class distinctions and propriety. More significantly, in terms of my argument, consumption serves as a social glue for the younger Gilmore women; "retail therapy" is employed over and over as a palliative for life's ills; this is also what Emily attempts in this episode. Yet even though the younger Gilmores put in it a context of socializing and connecting with one another, and are appalled by Emily's excesses, their attitudes toward consumer culture share more features than not. As Zygmunt Bauman states in *Thinking Sociologically*:

What does it mean to have and to display a consumer attitude? It means, first perceiving life as a series of problems, which can be specified, more or less clearly defined, singled out and dealt with. It means, secondly, believe that dealing with such problems, solving them, is one's duty, which one cannot neglect without incurring guilt or shame. It means, thirdly, that trusting that for every problems, already known or as may still arise in the future, there is a solution—a special object or recipe, prepared by specialists, by people with superior know-how, and one's task is to find it. It means, fourthly, assuming that such objects or recipes are essentially available they may be obtained in exchange for money, and shopping is the way of obtaining them. It means, fifthly, translating the task of learning the art of living as the effort to acquire the skill of finding such objects and recipes, and gaining the power to possess them once found: shopping skills and purchasing power (Bauman 1990:204).

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with the new maid on the same level; it also reveals a heretofore unseen strain of racism in the Gilmores' classism ("The UnGraduate" [6.03]).

While all three Gilmore women follow this formula quite precisely, it is Emily who is left powerless at the end of the episode, when her purchases go unnoticed by Richard. As stated above, this episode turns on the idea of shopping as therapy, but it is certainly not the first episode nor the last episode to do so.<sup>113</sup> The only reason that Lorelai and Rory are at the mall is to solve the “problem” of their inability to spend time together; that they choose to spend that time at a mall even after both claimed they were “skint”<sup>114</sup> rather than other activities that don’t revolve around consumption point to their own belief that consumption is the best way to connect, or produce a “common” with one another. In this instance, Bauman’s analysis is a relevant one to the concerns of this episode. Further, it naturalizes (as Browne contends) a portion of the products Lorelai and Rory desire by incorporating them into the text and making them objects of desire.

Indeed, Arthur Asa Berger argues that “it is now our ‘duty’ to have fun, and we do this, to a great degree, by being a member in good standing (and good purchasing) of our consumer culture” (Berger 2004:19). After an hour and a half of window shopping, Rory and Lorelai express envy of “all these haughty people with their bags, just rubbing our faces in it” and bemoan their inability to participate, to be “member[s] in good standing” (Berger 2004:19) of the shopping experience. They are at as much of a remove from “shopping” in this episode as the viewer is; the viewer is watching Rory and Lorelai watch others shop. The unproblematic view of this episode is that the two younger Gilmores learn that they are rich in the *intangible* things that matter: a purpose in and respect of the outside world. Their lives neither depend on goods nor the opinion or affection of one person. This follows on an episode in which both Rory and Lorelai suffer setbacks in their lives and are unable to connect with one another; both end up turning to a friend (“The Incredible Shrinking Lorelais” [4.14]). At the start of “Scene in a Mall,” Lorelai jokes with Luke about her “meltdown in the park,” which will be made into a film: “Baz

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<sup>113</sup> In fact, it can cut across gender lines; in “Help Wanted,” Lorelai takes Richard to an office supply megastore, where he marvels at its ease of use and inexpensive process, and is impressed with Lorelai for introducing him to it (2.20).

<sup>114</sup> Rory explains that she has just learned this British slang for broke.



Luhrmann's directing. And the movie Luke wears tights and sings."<sup>115</sup> This is not merely a nod to continuity; it sets up the third Gilmore female for her own "meltdown" and serves as a way to show the other two that, academic and financial crises aside, they have one another and fulfilling lives. They fight to resist what Emily wants to buy them.

Lorelai: Hey, see those marbles rolling on the floor? They're Mom's. They spilled out of her head.

Rory: I do like the chapeau.

Lorelai: Do not get sucked in! This is craziness!

Rory: It's just a hat.

Lorelai: It's a symbol. We don't know what it's symbolizing. Resist.

Lorelai's understanding that goods are symbolic, even if not always understanding what they symbolize, extends back into the first season; it is one of the defining points of her characterization. In the episode "Kill Me Now" (1.3), Lorelai responds to Rory's friendliness and connection with Richard by arguing with Rory about borrowing her sweater, not agreeing to stop the argument until "you quit stealing my stuff." Lorelai recognizes the subtext as soon as the argument ends; it's unclear that Rory understands until Lorelai explains it to her. It thus ties in with Douglas and Isherwood's view of goods as an information system that "reinforces or undermines existing boundaries" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:72).

Yet the boundaries that are being reinforced or undermined, I argue, are related to the industrial genesis of the series itself in several ways. Graham Murdock compares television viewing as similar to moving through a department store; its goods and the narrative inscribed upon them promise a new or improved life (Murdock 2000:61-62). Each character seems passive; the emphasis throughout the episode is Emily, Lorelai, and Rory watching rather than engaging. Lorelai and Rory window shop, then watch Emily tear through a department store buying everything she sees, even things that are not for sale. Later, Emily watches Lorelai's deft

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<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the episode title references both Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (11 April 1973; Cinematograph AB) and, more closely, Paul Mazursky's *Scenes from a Mall* (February 22, 1991; Silver Screen Partners IV/Touchstone Pictures).

handling of inn business and expresses admiration for her daughter's life and her ability to be "forceful." When Lorelai claims that she learned this from Emily, Emily is not satisfied: "I order maids and salespeople around. That's different. I've never done anything." Clearly, the show is trying to make the point that "unearned" wealth and privilege does not provide appropriate agency in the world at large, which dovetails with Lorelai's initial repudiation of that world as a teenager. Yet its continued engagement with consumption undermines these assertions.

The other problematic, which more severely undermines Rory and Lorelai's lesson learned, is their response to Emily's dive into shopping. Their act of "resistance" is to drag Emily from high-end products: Brioni, Vera Wang, Manolo Blahnik, to the low-end: the food court. As they sit down at a plastic table (set against Emily's "plastic," her credit card, for which she tries to pay for the food), the viewer is treated to a lingering shot of a happy, multiracial couple sitting down to a McDonald's meal.



**Figure 1: McDonald's being consumed by the happy couple.**

Lorelai and Rory return to the table with no less than 4 trays, piled high with food, despite their claims of being “skint.” McDonald’s is visible from the packaging, and Emily drinks and comments favorable on her Orange Julius. Thus the boundaries of appropriate consumption are reinforced when Lorelai and Rory take action and show Emily what proper consumption really is. Indeed, while the episode clearly states that “ordering maids and salespeople around” is neither useful nor appropriate within wider culture, Lorelai and Rory have conscripted a food court employee to carry two of the trays for them. Later, at Luke’s Diner, Lorelai comments: “People of means see what they want and simply take it, regardless of others,” unaware of the irony until Luke points out that she went behind the counter in Luke’s absence and served herself, despite his repeated requests that she not do

so. In her comparison of family life and morality during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Coontz states that: “[T]he elevation of family life to the center of morality sanctioned a rising degree of consumerism and selfishness within the middle class, by distinguishing the legitimate spending from the ‘irresponsible’ dissipation of others” (Coontz 1992:109). To Lorelai, in this episode, buying material goods merely because you have the resources to do so, at best, makes the buyer an object of mockery; at worst, is mentally ill. By Coontz’s aforementioned definition, Lorelai has thus aligned herself with middle class values in respect to consumption. Yet, despite her pretensions of being independent and not of the ruling class, she unconsciously aligns herself with them by taking from Luke, regardless of his own wishes. In that way, the episode eludes being coded as a straightforward polemic on class issues; Lorelai’s only response to Luke’s displeasure is a shrug.

Consumption is thus not rejected within the episode; “Scene In a Mall” seems to emphasize the usefulness of goods. That is, if the good can create a connection (“common”) between people, as the food does between Lorelai, Emily, and Rory, than it represents appropriate consumption. Emily’s diverse purchases—including Venetian glass apples, diamond watches, and a moustache comb—are off-putting and “dissipated.” They do not serve to create a common but rather emphasize difference.

A more Bourdieu-ian perspective with regards to issues of taste and education is employed in “How Many Kropogs to Cape Cod?”, set in series five. Rory has entered into a relationship with Logan Huntzberger (Matt Czuchry), the wealthy scion of an old-money publishing family. His family does not approve of his relationship with Rory and treat her badly (“But I’m a Gilmore !” [5.19]); she does not tell her grandparents this, and they insist that protocol must be followed and Logan must be invited to dinner. The majority of the episode occurs within the Gilmore mansion in Hartford, adding to the sense of a “closed world” that permeates this story line.

The episode itself begins in a manner rarely seen in *Gilmore Girls*: there is no dialogue and no music of any kind. The only sound is a mechanical whirring. As the teaser progresses, we see Rory and Lorelai on the phone to one another,

uncharacteristically silent. As the shot goes wider, it is obvious that they are watching the Roomba robot vacuum cleaning their separate floors. There is a lingering shot of the Roomba.



**Figure 2: Lorelai and Rory watch the Roomba at work.**

There is no explanation of where the vacuums came from, why both of them have them, and as of the end of the series, they are not seen again. The lack of dialogue and the appearance of the Roomba represents a slippage between advertising and the text, as it was unclear that advertisements had ended and the programme had started. Such a slippage recalls the example given at the start of this chapter; “Lorelai” and “Rory” are in the service of a product, with a shifting diagesis employed in both instances: one from both the Gilmore girls and Stars Hollow being employed outside of the boundaries of the text, and one from the product being

employed to such a high degree within the diagesis of the programme. Both share the feature of being the focus of attention, rather than the plot, narrative, or characters.

As in “Scene in a Mall,” watching rather than action is emphasized.

Lorelai: So is this more or less fun than watching the same TV show at the same time?

Rory: I think it's more.

Lorelai: You know, if we died right now, and decomposed, it would vacuum us up and no one would ever know.

Rory: Freaky.

At the very least, the dialogue conveys a certain fear of the “strangeness” of the technology.<sup>116</sup> Further, it underscores that this the technology requires the same passive action as television, and, in fact, outstrips television’s entertainment value. The product has won out over the story. Nor was this a one-time occurrence; as mentioned earlier, the sixth series dedicated an entire subplot of an episode to Rory’s gift of a new Sidekick mobile phone from her father.

It is easy to draw a parallel here between the aesthetic value of a series like *Gilmore Girls*, marked as “quality” television, and potentially more ordinary television, as illuminated through these placements. The Sidekick placement represents a case in point. While originally embraced and marketed toward the hip-hop community (with artists such as Jay-Z actually working a plug for the phone into his song “Excuse Me Miss”), it soon became a celebrity accessory, with users including Paris Hilton, Demi Moore, and the Pussycat Dolls<sup>117</sup> (“Text Addicts” 2006). The Sidekick also began to be heavily placed in series aimed at a young female

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<sup>116</sup> The Roomba also appeared, in the same year, on at least two different shows; a commercial parody on *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, October 11, 1975-present; Broadway Video/SNL Studios), as “Woomba,” a feminine hygiene product (30.8), and on *Arrested Development*, where it actually constituted a minor plot point, which will be covered in more depth in the *Arrested Development* chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, all three shows seem to come to the same conclusion about the Roomba as “freaky.”

<sup>117</sup> The Pussycat Dolls are an all-female group who had their own reality series on the CW network (CW, March 6-April 24, 2007; Ken Mok’s 10x10 Entertainment, Pussycat LLC/Interscope A & M Records/Wonderland Sound and Vision/Warner Horizon Television)

demographic; indeed, in the series *Veronica Mars* (UPN/The CW, September 22, 2004-May 22, 2007; Warner Brothers Television/Silver Pictures Television/Stu Segall Productions/Rob Thomas Productions), private investigator Veronica (Kristen Bell) uses the Sidekick to send a life-saving text (“Not Pictured” [2.22]). This trajectory follows the same one as the WB network—first branded toward African-American viewers, then transitioning to a young female demographic. Again, the placed product engages in a conversation between character and product, and the industrial context that produces both.

Although the Roomba is not seen again, the sense of strangeness does pervade the episode. As mentioned earlier, the Hartford, New Haven, and Stars Hollow locations are very insular; they are bounded areas, with little crossover and few outsiders. Yet, like the self-propelled vacuum in the teaser, the outside world makes a rare impression on the text of the episode itself. Hartford, New Haven, and Stars Hollow are invaded by the new. A new set is introduced, that of the *Stamford Eagle-Gazette*, where Rory starts an internship. Lorelai takes a meeting with the Durham Group, who are interested in buying her inn and making her a world-traveling consultant. Rory, attempting to get an “in” at the newspaper, studies publisher Mitchum Huntzberger’s (Gregg Henry) history and work as a foreign correspondent, going so far as to harass Logan about it, despite Logan’s obvious discomfort in talking about his father. Richard and Emily Gilmore discuss buying a compound in Cape Cod, as a place for Rory and Logan to take their future children, as well as to keep up with Logan’s family, who own property in Martha’s Vineyard.

Faced with all this “outside” interference, it fits that the other theme of the episode is that of “belonging”; that is, who is “in” and who is “out.” Although class is a prevalent and ongoing theme in the show, the fifth series, and this episode in particular, gives it primacy. Rory strives, with mixed success, to find an “in” with Mitchum, whom she looks at as her first step to a successful career as a journalist. Lorelai, after her estrangement from her mother, wants back in at the Friday Night Dinners; however, once there, her mother acts as if it is the first time Lorelai has visited. Her mother’s passive-aggressive insistence that Lorelai’s favorite drink is a Sidecar when her usual drink is a martini textually sidelines Lorelai as a passenger.

Emily: And your usual, Lorelai? A sidecar?

Lorelai: Sidecar? No.

Emily: Isn't that your drink?

Lorelai: No, my drink is a martini. It's always been a martini.

Emily: Really?

Lorelai: Yes. Pretty much every one of the other eight thousand times I've had a drink here it's been a martini.

Emily: I would've sworn you were a sidecar girl.

She is as “strange” in this environment as the appearance of the Roomba is in Rory and Lorelai’s homes; further, Emily claims within the dialogue that what Lorelai consumes defines her: “sidecar girl.” Language is key in this scene; the conversation revolves around being a Yale insider (which would be everyone in attendance except Lorelai), including the use of the word “kropog,” defined by Logan as: “Years ago, someone at Yale started measuring things based on the height of a kid named Kropog.”<sup>118</sup> Since the use and manipulation of language is Lorelai’s forte, this is an effective strategy to exclude her from the group.

At the dinner, the entire conversation is based on Yale and education; *Gilmore Girls* makes manifest within its fifth series, particularly, a confluence of the importance of both education and background as status markers, as per Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1989:1). The previous episode does the same; at the Huntzberger mansion, Rory is overwhelmed by both the scale of the home (class) as well as correctly identifying artwork by Velazquez (education) (5.19).<sup>119</sup> As Bourdieu argues, the positioning on an individual on a class and cultural level is a “product of upbringing *and* education” [emphasis mine] (Bourdieu 1989:1). Despite the firmly middle class environment of Rory’s upbringing (that is, no one in Stars Hollow is markedly more wealthy than anyone else), her ability to correctly identify artwork within the Huntzberger home places her culturally above the Huntzbergers,

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<sup>118</sup> “Kropog” is not actually part of the Yale vernacular; it was made up for the purposes of the show. According to the forums on the website Television Without Pity, it is based a tradition at MIT, a unit of measurement called a Smoot, named after a young man named Smoot, obviously.

<sup>119</sup> This patina of wealth and class is later revealed to be fraudulent, when Emily avenges the slight to Rory by reminding Shira Huntzberger (Mitchum’s wife) that Shira (Leann Hunley) was once a cocktail waitress (“We’ve Got Magic to Do” [6.5]); an insult that Lorelai later claims is Emily’s equivalent to “the other ‘C’ word” (“Friday Night’s Alright For Fighting” [6.13]).



for whom it is implied own the Velasquez because of its position as a status marker rather than for its aesthetic value. That is, they have not allowed themselves or others to forget how the art was acquired. Rory, however, is more flexible than either the Huntzbergers or her own mother. She has the capability of appreciating all of the “zones of taste” Bourdieu explicates: “legitimate taste,” as seen through her appreciation of the Velasquez, developed through her self-education through reading as well as her private school and Ivy League educational pedigree; “middlebrow taste,” as seen through her connection of her own trip to Europe with Emily (“A Messenger, Nothing More” [5.2]) to the film *A Room With a View* (April 11, 1986; Merchant-Ivory Productions); and “popular taste” as fostered by her mother—seen through her enjoyment of “bad” films, such as *Hardbodies* (May 11, 1985; Columbia Pictures) and “bad” television, such as *Cop Rock* (ABC, September 26, 1990–December 26, 1990; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/Steven Bochco Productions) (Bourdieu 1989:16). Rory is thus positioned as the ultimate consumer, able to move across taste and class borders. In this episode, and across the series, Rory stands as a metaphor for the series itself and its relationship to class and consumption.

Finally, as is probably not surprising given the slippage at the start of the episode, and much like “Scene in a Mall,” shopping, appearance, and pop culture are the large-scale themes of the episode. In both episodes, we see Rory and Lorelai plugging into consumption in order to connect at a time when they are increasingly either physically or emotionally distant from one another. Lorelai begs Rory to pick up a sweater she’d asked to be returned to a shop in Hartford; it is clear from their conversation this has happened several times, and Rory is concerned that the shop owners in Hartford now think she is “retail simple” or “Paper Moon”-ing (scamming) them. This scene is notable, too, for the lingering shot of a Chrysler PT Cruiser being washed in the town square. Rory worries whether her outfit for her first day at the newspaper will make her look too “Lois Lane.” Lorelai vacillates on whether the sweater she insists Rory buy her looks good. Later, she compares herself to Rory after a sleepless night, referencing the products “Neutrogena” and “Tumi” luggage in her description. Unlike “Scene in a Mall,” consumption no longer acts as the social glue that it did before: Rory is upset that Lorelai cannot make a decision regarding

the clothing she bought, and Lorelai's reference to facial wash and luggage privilege Rory's youth with her own aging. They are now coded as standing at opposite ends of class and consumption. Is that really the case, though? It is obvious, throughout the show, that the creator's interpretation privileges that reading; however, there is no real repudiation of consumption, only its excesses. In this way, it codes as being firmly middle class in its intent, with the subsequent queasy mixture of appealing to both an upscale demographic and an aspirational one.

In the second series, a rupture occurs between Rory and her grandfather, due to Richard's insistence that her boyfriend Dean is "not good enough" for his granddaughter; that is, neither smart nor ambitious enough. Rory accuses her grandparents of snobbery, and Emily insists that Richard apologize to her so they will not lose touch with their granddaughter ("Hammers and Veils" [2.1]). Although Emily is polite to Rory's next boyfriend and tries unsuccessfully to connect with him by telling him she owns stock in Wal-Mart, where he works, she refers to him later as an "abominable thug" ("Swan Song" [3.14]). Three seasons later, Rory, having acclimated to the world of wealth through attendance at Chilton and Yale, is flummoxed by the snobbery of the Huntzberger family, parents and grandfather of her new boyfriend, Logan. She contends that her connection to the upper class should shield her from being on the receiving end of the social exclusion experienced by Dean and Jess,<sup>120</sup> not to mention her ability to conflate "aesthetic consumption" and "ordinary consumption" and her ability to master the codes of each class through her consumption patterns (Bourdieu 1989:6). To make up for it, Logan's father, Mitchum, offers Rory an internship at one of his papers. Rory accepts it, deciding to ignore both her mother's advice and her own sense that she only got the job because of her object status as "girlfriend," rather than on her merits. This also shows her increased comfort with trading in on privilege and status.

Lorelai, meanwhile, is in a relationship with Luke Danes, the proprietor of Luke's Diner, a Stars Hollow fixture. As Luke is, not unproblematically as mentioned

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<sup>120</sup> The episode title "But I'm a Gilmore!" comes from Rory's insistence that the Huntzberger's snobbery is wrong, as she is of the same class as they are. However, it is Rory's career ambitions rather than her class that seem to be the greater problem to the Huntzberger family.

above, coded as working class, Lorelai's relationship with him codes her as, if not a member of the working class, at least intimately connected to it.<sup>121</sup> Her parents do not approve of their relationship; they first respond by trying to remake Luke:

Emily: He is not good enough for Lorelai, or to be Rory's stepfather!  
God forbid!

Richard: Can we be a little more of a snob, Emily?

Emily: The fact that you paraded him around the club. Our club!

Richard: It happened to be a fruitful outing. I am going to assist him in franchising his diner.

Emily: Richard! That hirsute lout is not capable of running a complex business!

Richard: Well, that's obvious, Emily! That's why he will have no significant role, he will be the frontman! We'll shave him, stick his picture on the menus. The whole thing will, hopefully, bestow some credibility on him. At least then, if this insane relationship between him and Lorelai continues, we can legitimately take him to places like the club. At least on holidays ("I Jump, You Jump, Jack" [5.7]).

It is obvious that the elder Gilmores do not consider opening and owning a small business to be an achievement in and of itself, which puts them firmly within corporate culture; small business exists solely to be enveloped by larger corporations. Further, it shows a desire on their part to also objectify Luke; that is, transition him from Luke Danes, diner owner, to Brand Luke. The preceding dialogue privileges physicality as a component of class; that Luke doesn't possess the appropriate pedigree is further complicated by an emphasis on "cleaning him up" for display; although he is ethnically coded as white, the elder Gilmores socially code him as "other" because of his class, dress, and lack of education. This does not just extend to Luke; Richard also connects Lorelai to a business associate with the Durham Group; a large corporation that buys up bed and breakfasts to create a chain. This would take her away from Stars Hollow, and, by extension, Luke Danes. To not allow absorption with the larger corporate structure is to lack skill or ambition (a lack of monetary resources is also implied in both). When Luke and

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<sup>121</sup> This is underscored in the episode "Written in the Stars" (5.3). Lorelai and Luke's relationship is "outed" to the town when Lorelai mistakenly appears in the diner at 6 am wearing Luke's iconic flannel shirt and nothing else. McCracken offers an on-point historical account of the importance of clothing as status signifiers from Elizabethan time to the present (McCracken 1988).

Lorelai resist these attempts, Emily convinces Rory's father, Christopher, to drive a wedge between the couple by trading in on their emotional connection as Rory's parents. Although Emily admits that Christopher is "weak," she goes on to say: "you have good breeding...[y]ou come from an impeccable family and you love Lorelai," comparing this favourably to Luke, whom she claims is: "uneducated" and "not a proper stepfather for Rory" ("Come Home" [5.12]).<sup>122</sup> Lorelai and her mother remain estranged for several episodes. During this period of estrangement, Lorelai's inn, The Dragonfly, is featured in a prestigious travel magazine; Lorelai repudiates her family within the article (she compares her mother to Pol Pot), indicating that she is self-made and has not traded in on the benefits available to the upper class ("Live and Let Diorama" [5.18]). It is only the chance to meet Rory's new boyfriend that draws her back into the Gilmore mansion. For Luke's part, he finds the ostentatious wealth of the Gilmores to be just as disturbing as they find his working class status:

Luke: This is a house?

Lorelai: This is a house.

Luke: What a waste! See, this is what causes peasants to revolt. This is how heads end up on pikes ("I Jump, You Jump, Jack" [5.7]).

As Lorelai is aligning herself with Luke, and by extension, the working class, Rory is being seduced by Yale's secret society, The Life and Death Brigade, a play on Yale's infamous Skull and Bones Society, of which various industrialists and politicians are rumored to have been a part of, including then-president George W. Bush. Rory is there in her capacity as a reporter for the *Yale Daily News*; she observes an outrageously expensive campsite, in which each of the participants has adopted both posh accents and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century clothing. The clothing and dialogue are

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<sup>122</sup> The different standards of "proper" paternal behaviour are made manifest here; while Luke remains a constant presence in Rory's life throughout the series, including baking her a cake and decorating a table in his diner for her sixteenth birthday ("Rory's Birthday Parties" [1.6]), attending her high school graduation ("Those Are Strings, Pinocchio" [3.22]), and offering to stage an intervention to return her to Yale ("A House is Not a Home" [5.22]), Christopher is only an occasional presence; he is present only at Rory's debutante ball ("Presenting Lorelai Gilmore" [2.6]) and her university graduation ("Unto the Breach" [7.21]).

obvious signifiers of pre-World War I English colonial culture. Although an argument could be made that the intention of the Life and Death Brigade was an ironic commentary on their paired status with that era as the scions of the new industrial colonists, over the next two episodes, we see Rory adopting these same signifiers, despite both her “objective” stance as a reporter and the political/social climate in which she was raised. Further, Lorelai’s response to the antics of the Life and Death Brigade seems to cue the viewer into the correct reading: “a bunch of selfish rich kids, the children of entitlement, blowing off school, drinking for days, spending thousands on a stupid and potentially dangerous stunt, knowing full well that they’re not going to get in trouble, ‘cause Daddy is important” (“Wedding Bell Blues” [5.13]), an accusation that offends Rory. In the episode “The Party’s Over” (5.8), Rory returns to her mother’s house from a party at her grandparent’s, with the same social group from the Life and Death Brigade. The increasing distance between mother and daughter is made clear; Rory stumbles drunk from a limo, wearing her grandmother’s diamond tiara as Lorelai lounges in sweatpants, watching *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*. *The Daily Show* is mentioned more than once as a “must-see” programme for her and serves here as character shorthand to remind us of Lorelai’s left-wing politics as opposed to her parents’ conservatism as well as free advertising for *The Daily Show*.<sup>123</sup>

With Lorelai as one-half of the primary point-of-view characters, her repudiation of this class, and her connection with Luke codes her response as the appropriate one. Throughout the series, each instance of Rory asserting class privilege is coded as a bad choice; she ends the fifth series having left Yale and living on her grandparent’s money, completely estranged from her mother. The first 8 episodes of the sixth season are a long dialectic on class issues, as Rory immerses herself in the DAR and becomes the partying appendage of Logan. In the episode “Welcome to the Dollhouse” (6.6), the implications of this are more fully explored

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<sup>123</sup> Lorelai has made numerous disparaging remarks aimed at George W. Bush, starting with the first season (“Christopher Returns” [1.15]); one notable instance occurred in the sixth season (“Friday Night’s All Right For Fighting” [6.13]) as she explains to her best friend Sookie (Melissa McCarthy) how to properly leash Lorelai’s dog, Paul Anka: “Oh, he’s perfectly happy having his personal freedom stripped away, just as long as he’s not aware it’s happening. Just like a true American.” This is set against her parents being close personal friends of Scooter Libby (“Fight Face” [6.2]).

when Logan gives Rory a Birkin bag, which retails for approximately US\$13,500. Fully one half of the episode could serve as extended placement of Hermes-Birkin, starting with the appearance of Logan holding a shopping bag with Hermes clearly marked upon it and ending with Emily repeating the words “Birkin bag” over and over in a shocked tone. It is clear from their conversation that the bag has a particular code; it represents “an instance of the tendency for groups of individuals to use goods to make distinctions between themselves and other groups of individuals and... supports the view that consumption practices can be understood in terms of a struggle over social positioning” (Lury 1996:80). Rory is unaware of these economic and sociological implications of the handbag—she’s happy because it has enough room to carry her computer cords—when it is actually a signifier of her relationship to someone of higher “social positioning” (Lury 1996:80). Logan instructs her to talk to his sister and she will explain what it means; when Rory tells her grandmother, Emily immediately decodes this signifier for her granddaughter: “A Birkin bag is meant to be used. And seen.” However, her initial excitement over what that means for her granddaughter’s relationship is soon subsumed by jealousy of the Huntzberger’s greater wealth and the fact that a “twenty-one year old girl has a Birkin bag and a grown woman doesn’t” (“Welcome to the Dollhouse” [6.6]). The Ibsen-esque implications of Rory being a kept woman of a wealthy man implied by the episode title do not seem to make an impression on Emily, nor, surprisingly, on the bibliophilic Rory; however, it does represent an example of McCracken’s contention that the wealthy devalue and transfer “bridge status” to new objects and shows that aspirational consumerism exists even within the upper confines of wealth (McCracken 1988:113).

As for Rory, it takes the return of Jess Mariano, previously coded as working class and “other,” as mentioned above, to reconnect Rory with both her “roots” and ambition. Jess has moved to Philadelphia, gotten a job with a publishing company, and published a novel called *The Subsect*<sup>124</sup>; he thanks Rory for helping him get his

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<sup>124</sup> Although no such word exists, it is easy to read this as a shorted version of “subsection”; this underlines Jess’ “underclass” status, and his commentary on that status as crediting Rory with helping him transcend it.

life together just as hers has lost all direction. As Logan has led her down the wrong path, so Jess sets her on the “right” one, regardless of the fact that he is not saying anything her mother hadn’t already told her months before:

Jess: What are you doing? Living at your grandparents' place? Being in the DAR? No Yale—why did you drop out of Yale?  
 Rory: It's complicated!  
 Jess: It's not! It's not complicated!  
 Rory: You don't know!  
 Jess: This isn't you! This! You going out with this jerk, with the Porsche! We made fun of guys like this!  
 Rory: You caught him on a bad night.  
 Jess: This isn't about him! Okay? Screw him! What's going on with you? This isn't you, Rory. You know it isn't. What's going on?  
 Rory: I don't know. I don't know (“Let Me Hear Your Balalaikas Ring Out” [6.8]).

By the next episode, she has secured a job at a newspaper, re-registered at Yale for the spring semester, and reconciled with her mother (“The Prodigal Daughter Returns” [6.9]), fulfilling Jess’ role as the “magic other” that sets the hero or heroine on the right path.

While *Gilmore Girls*, for the most part, hews close to the original definition of flow, both its genesis and its engagement with consumption position it at a crossroads between older models (single sponsorship) and newer ones (expanding textual and commercial boundaries). “Scene in a Mall” features AFE corporations and subsidiaries like Sears Roebuck and Co, Sprint, McDonald’s, Sbarro, and Pepsi in a favorable light, including an endorsement of Orange Julius from the upper-class Emily. “How Many Kropogs to Cape Cod?” is notable for the slippages between advertisement and text, as well as its focus on the aspirational nature of the consumption of a particular class of goods. Although the creator of the show claims that the AFE has had little interference in the programme, and the AFE’s own website claims they only are involved during the script development process, both episodes give away *Gilmore Girls*’ continued involvement with consumption. Emily is referred to as “crazy” for her spending habits in a high-end store; sanity is restored

by a visit to a food court with wall-to-wall eateries directly owned by or otherwise connected to AFE corporations. “How Many Kropogs to Cape Cod?” does the dual work of appealing to both high-end and aspirational demographics. Although I have chosen to focus more intensely on two episodes, this tension between consumption, politics, and class pervades the series. The series also makes clear that the appropriate boundaries of consumption in the *Gilmore Girls* “life-world” are influenced by their advertiser-sponsored pedigree and undermine the show’s populist assertions. It further gestures at the shifting boundaries between advertising and text, which become more explicit in the following case studies.



### **The Tendercrisp Chicken Comedy Half-Hour: Brand Flow and the “Transcendent” DVD Text**

In his analysis of contemporary shifts in the formerly “stable” sitcom form, Brett Mills examines the characteristics of recent British series such as *People Like Us* (BBC Two, September 20, 1999-June 24, 2001; BBC Productions), *Human Remains* (BBC, November 13, 2000-December 18, 2000; Baby Cow Productions), and, in particular, *The Office* (BBC Two/BBC One, July 9, 2001-December 27, 2003; BBC Productions), as “new forms” that “undermine accepted notion about the stability of sitcom’s characteristics and representations” (Mills 2004:65). Their mixing of other genres, such as cinema verité and documentary aesthetics, have led to a preponderance of sitcoms that have developed a hybrid form he terms *comedy verité*.

Ethan Thompson has used Mills’ analysis to examine American programmes such as *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (HBO, October 15, 2000-present; HBO Films/Production Partners) and, most notably for my work, *Arrested Development*. Thompson makes the distinction between the documentary style of *The Office: An American Workplace*, and the documentary “look” of *Arrested Development*. Yet Mill’s comedy verité can apply to, on a selective basis, to series such as *Arrested Development*, which uses the documentary and verité forms as part rather than the whole of its aesthetic. As Thompson writes, comedy verité “can best be understood not as a subgenre of television comedy but as an emerging mode of production that is being adopted for its efficient, visual complexity, and semiotic clout” (Thompson 2007:63). That is, it makes sitcoms “look different” and, stylistically and economically, suits a limited budget and the time constraints of producing television series, as well as shifting the source of humour within these series from the standard joke set-up to a more observational mode of production of humour.

Using Mills’ analysis and terminology and Thompson’s refinement, I will be examining how *Arrested Development’s* generic definition as a “comedy verité,” and as a series described by creator Mitch Hurwitz as being made primarily for DVD (NPR 2005) due to its dense textuality, affects how brand flow operates within this

context. In particular, it is Derek Kompare's and Matt Hills' analyses of how the DVD format works to "transcend" its television roots (Kompare 2006:335-360) and "valourize" certain television texts above others (Hills 2007:45), as well as Mimi White's "world" of television (White 1986:57), which informs the analysis of this heavily intertextual and carefully scripted series. Its relationship with the sponsors that placed products within the series, its position as a DVD series, and its niche appeal that presupposes a particular kind of audience are vital to understanding its positioning within this work as a whole; that is, as a halfway point between *Gilmore Girls'* more traditional brand flow and *Heroes* dispersed and reaggregated multiplatform brand flows.

Finally, it is Paul Grainge's analysis of what he terms branding's "politics of commercial obviousness" (Grainge 2007:111) that best encapsulates *Arrested Development's* relationship to both its form and content; that is, the reflexive stance the series' text takes to the industrial context in which it exists, by acknowledging the critiques of its use of strategies such as product placement while simultaneously deflecting said critique through parodic or ironic stances incorporated within the text and diagesis. This "commercial obviousness," for all its satiric elements, "serves to perpetuate and maintain a reliable system of consumerism" (Grainge 2007:129) within these branded media properties. I will argue that such "commercial obviousness" also serves as a mark of quality through a sense of "in-the-know" (Feuer 1985:49) as a mode of audience address that is further codified by its status as a DVD text.

As Jonathan Gray argues: "DVDs fully illustrate how multimedia corporations can employ networks of paratextuality to brand their products and increase the salience and depth of their meaning across the synergistic spectrum" (Gray 2010:102). Hills makes a similar point when he argues that the "symbolic work" of both producers and consumers (viewers) to break down the "cultural world of signs and meanings into discrete texts" has become so "naturalized within media culture" because, as he had argued earlier (Hills 2005), "the selling and branding of texts require that they be symbolically bounded and set apart from the surrounding flow" (Hills 2007:46). That is, DVDs as a format bind and brand selected texts because

they have already been branded as a quality or cult property. Thus while Kompare argues that DVDs isolate and transcend the text from its televisual roots (Kompare 2006:335-360), Hills argues that this process valorises certain texts at the expense of others and in doing so, acts in “complicity” with the commercial and value-generating systems of television broadcasters and rights owners (Hills 2007:49). This is also addressed by Mills in his analysis of “invisible television,” as touched on in Chapter two; that is, the idea that certain television is unworthy of further study, which ties back to Hills’s argument that the academic community is one part of the valorising process, as DVDs ease the studying of texts (Hills 2007:47).<sup>125</sup> Building on these arguments, this chapter examines how *Arrested Development*, as DVD text, is branded as quality, intertextual television, and through the use of product placement and other promotional material within the DVD text, both valorises it and maintains its relationship with its television roots, with its satire in service to its commercial base.

*Arrested Development*, as a series, provides a compelling argument against John Ellis’ glance theory (Ellis 1992:112), particularly its heavy reliance on the use of inter- and intratext. As Robin Anderson writes: “Viewers are now historically sophisticated, steeped in the knowledge of TV genre and conventions and eager to see the rules broken” (Andersen 1993:206). *Arrested Development*, as a single camera sitcom using a reality television aesthetic, represents a hybrid form that depends on viewers’ knowledge of the conventions of older sitcoms, current political issues, and the industrial conditions and issues surrounding the series. The series as a whole could be viewed as a “discrete sequence” within the greater flow of television, as it in and of itself represents a “dense textual network” (White 1986:57) of intertextuality stretching back to the 1960s. *Arrested Development* seeks to combine “television’s individual fictions...as parts of a larger, continuous imaginary world” (White 1986:57). Even its use of product placement, foregrounded and serving, at points, as nearly as much of an interruption to the text as the actual

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<sup>125</sup> Mills does acknowledge the cultural context from which he is writing; that is, the smaller population in the United Kingdom compared with the United States means that the US may have greater access and buying audience for a range of DVD releases (Mills 2010:10).

commercial breaks recalls early television's same use of product placement and thus negates, to a large extent, the ability of DVD to eliminate said break. *Arrested Development*, being expressly created to eventually serve as a "published text," as Derek Kompare argued, resuscitates the old model in a new format and imbues it with the distinction of "quality" that Kompare argues is part of DVD's transcendence of the television medium (Kompare 2006:349). In this way, product placement serves as a way to mirror the content itself, much as the "situ-mercials" (Steinberg 2004:B11) discussed in Chapter three; this is a vital point with regard to DVD. That is, within *Arrested Development*, the extended Burger King placement in "Motherboy XXX" (2.13) serves a similar function to the *Gilmore Girls'* Aquafina commercial, as will be addressed in the analysis below.

Therefore, in this chapter, after providing the production and textual context and contents of the show itself, I will closely examine two episodes in which the use of product placement and the industrial conditions of promotion that the show seemed to labor under are foregrounded, and inscribed, via association, with "quality" due to their positioning within the text of the series. *Arrested Development's* "noble struggle" against "profit-mongering networks and non-appreciative audiences," large ensemble case, blue-chip demographics (Thompson 1996:14) and "liberal" viewpoint (Feuer 1985:56) all serve as markers of "quality," but the most notable of these is the heavy use of intertextual referents within the series (Thompson 1996:15; Feuer 1985:44-45). While *Arrested Development* uses intertext to satirize social and cultural issues, as well as its own position on the Fox network, it does not necessarily follow that such satire serves a subversive function. As Feuer argues, using media references as parodies or in-jokes positioned at a particular "in-the-know" demographic does not necessarily imply a "cultural stance" against the television industry as much as indicate an awareness of television's "low-culture status" (Feuer 1985:49). Yet where *Arrested Development* does differ from Feuer's analysis is that she implies that such satire presumes the viewer "hates TV"; *Arrested Development's* humour depends on a thoroughgoing knowledge of television that does not imply casual viewership either of *Arrested Development* or the numerous programmes it references textually, visually, and aurally. *Arrested*

*Development's* humour depends on viewers with exactly this type of knowledge, with intertextual references to both current programmes, such as *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, October 3, 2004-present; Cherry Productions/ABC Studios) or *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, September 13, 1996-May 16, 2005; Worldwide Pants), older shows such as *Family Ties*, *The Andy Griffith Show* (CBS, October 3, 1960-April 1, 1968; CBS Paramount), or *Happy Days*<sup>126</sup> (ABC, January 15, 1974-July 12, 1984; Miller-Milkis-Boyett Productions); and cultural products such as the soft-core series of videos *Girls Gone Wild* (1998-present; Mantra Films Inc), satirized within the show as a video series called *Girls With Low Self-Esteem*.<sup>127</sup> The focus on television, past and present, reasserts the importance of television in its genesis; its status as a DVD text encourages high engagement, as a single viewing is insufficient to unpack its dense textuality.

*Arrested Development* was conceived by Mitch Hurwitz to be a satire of wealth, class, politics, and consumption, with a particular focus on the corporate scandals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as Enron, WorldCom, and Adelphia Communications (O'Connell 2004). Hurwitz asserts that: "The politics of the times have set the stage for these shows and themes. We've seen the rich getting richer by cheating and the rest of us getting \$600 checks in the mail." He further claims that the family-owned Adelphia Communications and its subsequent demise into scandal was the inspiration for the show (Poniewozik 2003). According to producer (and narrator) Ron Howard, it was also intended to serve as a satire of the basic tropes of unscripted television. "I thought we could take this video technology and a docu-reality approach to a half-hour comedy and do something that would be visually

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<sup>126</sup> The main connection to *Happy Days* will be addressed in greater depth in my analysis of the episode "Motherboy XXX," but the show made numerous references outside of that episode to Henry Winkler's (playing lawyer Barry Zuckerkorn) past role as Arthur Fonzarelli as well as replacing him with Scott Baio (as new attorney Bob Loblaw) in the third season. This is a subtle reference to Scott Baio being brought into the final seasons of *Happy Days* to appeal to a younger demographic.

<sup>127</sup> The creator of these exploitation videos was played by Zach Braff, who played sensitive doctor John Dorian on the NBC series *Scrubs* (NBC, October 2, 2001-May 8, 2008/ABC, January 6, 2009-March 17, 2010; ABC Studios). Jason Bateman appeared on *Scrubs* later that year ("My Big Bird" [5.8]), completing the crossover between the two series and could have served, as will be addressed in greater depth below, as promotion for the failing *Arrested Development*, as well as providing an inversion of the character types they occupied within *Arrested Development*.

different, that would allow for a wider range and type of jokes—visual, editorial, musical, in addition to what sitcoms usually offer” (Smith 2004:E26). This planned hybridity is another example of how, as Mills writes, the sitcom genre abandoned the more “obvious conventions” in favour of “the formal characteristics of other, distinct genres” (Mills 2004:68). Yet this hybridity extends further than the mix of documentary and sitcom genres to the way it interacts with commercial content, as well as very obviously positioning the series as better (higher quality) than unscripted series.

The basic premise of the show is the unfolding crises and issues of the Bluth family: George Sr (Jeffrey Tambor), the owner and CEO of the Bluth Company, a real estate empire that started as a single banana stand and branched out into building homes; his wife Lucille (Jessica Walter); and his children George Oscar Bluth (Will Arnett), known as Gob, in an obvious play on John Ellis (Jeb) Bush; twins Michael (Jason Bateman) and Lindsey (Portia di Rossi), Lindsey’s husband Tobias Funke (David Cross) and their daughter Maeby (Alia Shawkat); and Byron (Tony Hale), known as Buster. Michael is the only member of the family to work for his father and invests all his time and energy into making the company successful; he and his son George Michael (Michael Cera) reside in the only Bluth model home in the United States, located in Balboa County, California. It is completely isolated, as the audience sees in exterior shots. In order to maintain the home in pristine condition, Michael and George Michael live in the attic. Gob is a professional magician, Lindsey invests all her time on nominally liberal social causes,<sup>128</sup> and Buster is a permanent student who has gained little practical knowledge through his education.<sup>129</sup>

Unlike the typical half-hour sitcom, *Arrested Development* is a single-camera comedy that uses a variety of settings, as well as incorporating still shots, archive and historical footage (often specifically doctored actual footage to incorporate a

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<sup>128</sup> An example of her “social” causes includes a group called HOOP, which stands for “Hands Off Our Penises,” an anti-circumcision movement (“Pilot” [1.1]). This stands in contrast to George Sr’s conversion of Judaism while in prison (“Storming the Castle” [1.9]).

<sup>129</sup> For instance, despite having just taken classes in cartography, when the family is trying to escape the Security and Exchange Commission via boat, Buster incorrectly identifies the “blue stuff” on the map as land (“Pilot” [1.1]).

character<sup>130</sup>), and verbal and filmic callbacks to previous episodes. There is no laugh track. Each episode starts with expository narration (“this is the story of a wealthy family who lost everything”) over photos and videos of each character, and ends with “On the next *Arrested Development*.” While the “next” portion would normally contain a preview of the next episode of the series, within *Arrested Development*, it instead serves as a continuation or coda to the current episode. This is one way in which the commercial or promotional material is incorporated within the text, blurring the lines between the two. Ron Howard narrates both the ending and the closing exposition, as well as providing commentary on the action of each episode. Although the conceit plays with the concept that this is filmed footage with the narration added “postproduction,” there are rare occurrences in which the characters will respond to something the narrator has said.<sup>131</sup>

Much of the action of the show takes place in the Bluth “model home”; a fake home meant to draw buyers in, but is merely a set for the real homes that will eventually be built. It clearly sets up a connection between the Bluth home and the Bluth family. Nothing within the model home is real; the fruit is fake, the television is made of cardboard, and the construction of the home itself is shoddy; it is not meant to actually be livable. In one memorable instance, the foundation of the home crumbles and starts to sink into the ground just as first cousins George Michael and Maeby kiss (“Righteous Brothers” [2.18]). The Bluths are as far from a “model family” as the house is to being a real home. The Bluths represent what Christopher Lasch refers to as the “new elite,” or what is commonly known as the *nouveaux riches*: “As the new elite discard the outlook of the old bourgeoisie, it identifies itself not with the work ethic responsibilities of wealth but with the ethic of leisure, hedonism, and self-fulfillment. ...It has surrounded people with ‘symbolically mediated information’ and substituted images of reality for reality itself” (Lasch 1979:221). Much as *Arrested Development* uses a “reality” aesthetic without making

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<sup>130</sup> “Motherboy XXX” features a doctored version of the Lynndie England Abu Ghraib prison photos featuring Gob and his wife (Amy Poehler). Poehler’s position as “Gob’s wife” (Gob claims he can’t remember her name) also serves as an in-joke; Arnett and Poehler are married.

<sup>131</sup> The episode “Altar Egos” (1.16) features the character of Gob responding to the narrator’s assertion that Gob had not consummated his quickie marriage with a “Yes, I did.”

the series a mockumentary, the model home is both a set to draw in buyers, as well as the set for the series itself, to draw in viewers.

The Bluth family fits this description fairly well, and their “home” underlines the family’s prizing of “images of reality” over reality itself. Further, certain storylines are layered and doubled with a cinematic or televisual equivalent within the storyline, much as the product placement within the show borrows from its televisual forebears, as mentioned above. As per example, Maeby and George Michael’s illicit feelings for one another is mirrored in a French film they watch called *Les Cousins Dangereux*; its Hollywood adaptation, George Michael complains, “cheats” by making one cousin adopted. This “adaptation” is mirrored again in the plot when it is revealed that Maeby is not related to George Michael because her mother is adopted. This final revelation leads Lindsey, Maeby’s mother, to attempt to seduce her twin brother in the final episode (“Development Arrested” [3.13]).<sup>132</sup> Other instances of doubling include the Bluth model home in Iraq that houses five Saddam Hussein impersonators; the end of the episode suggests the real Hussein was not on trial, but merely his look-alike, which mirrored the final episode of the second series, when George Bluth Sr. attempted to evade jail time by stealing the identity of his identical twin, Oscar, leaving him to serve his prison sentence (“Righteous Brothers” [2.18]).

These modes of presentation also mirror its modes of production and its inherent hybridity. As Thompson writes, *Arrested Development* represented “one of the most televisually dense” programmes when it aired (2003-2006), featuring the “look of observational documentary...accentuated by still photos and flashbacks” (Thompson 2007:71), in which the viewer was privy to not only the current events of the programme, but the Bluths’ past. The Bluths were clearly in the public eye

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<sup>132</sup> By inverting the title of the series for the final episode title, the title itself can refer to the cancellation of the series (that is, it is no longer in development); however, the use of the term “arrested” seems intentionally to speak to the episode’s coda, in which Maeby meets with Ron Howard to pitch a series based on her family, to which Howard replies “I see it more as a film.” *Arrested Development* was in development as a film as of 2010, thus indicating that while its television development has been arrested, the story would continue elsewhere. Further, in 2011, it was announced that production on the series would recommence on Netflix as a short-run series in 2013 to build anticipation for the film (Flint 2011).



long before the scandals the series focuses on, including George Sr's failed infomercial for a deep fryer called "The Cornballer" ("Bringing Up Buster" [1.3]; "Amigos!" [2.3]) and his filming of his sons as children for a series of videos called *Boyfighter*s ("Making a Stand" [3.7]). The "borrowing" of observational documentary style that Thompson argues is part of the aesthetic of *Arrested Development* (Thompson 2007:71), while violating that same style through the camera's involvement in an impossible range of activities, the lack of consciousness shown by the characters that a camera is involved, and the generic hybridity of "reality television" aesthetics with that of the sitcom that Mills terms *comedy verité* (Mills 2004:65), mirrors the generic shifts in the documentary form itself. As John Corner writes, the documentary form is not "a neat and stable set of discrete categories" but rather "a changing and increasingly hybridized set of practices, forms, and functions, one in which both cultural and commodity value lie most often in the right blend of the familiar and the new, of fulfilled expectation and shock" (Corner 2002:255). The comedy verité aesthetic of *Arrested Development* allows it to blend (and subvert) familiar tropes of sitcoms, with the closed-door reality genre of *The Real World* (MTV, May 21, 1992-present; Bunim/Murray Productions) or *Big Brother*. While satirizing both, it also depends on viewer knowledge to unpack the density of its intertextual referents. It further destabilizes the generic conventions of sitcoms in the United States, which, as Mills writes, have been "criticized for [their] simplistic use of stereotypes, outmoded representations, and an apparent failure to engage with social or political developments" (Mills 2004:63). With its focus on the financial scandals of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as an extended storyline in the second and third seasons in which the Bluths are accused of "light treason" due to potential business dealings with Saddam Hussein, it doesn't fit within the idea of sitcoms' failure to address social or political developments. One of the most pointed examples involved a trip to the Bluth model home in Iraq, in which Gob accidentally starts an anti-Bush riot during his Christian-themed magic show (he sets fire to a bush), and all the streets that the three brothers travel in Iraq are given names such as Halliburton Drive and Cheney Expressway ("Exit Strategy" [3.12]).

The show itself struggled in the ratings; its highest average viewing numbers were only 6.5 million viewers (Keller 2006). Its episode order was reduced from 22 episodes to 18 in the second series, and from 22 to 13 in the third series before being cancelled. The reduction in episodes ordered was mirrored within the text as a Bluth Company client reducing their order of Bluth homes from 22 to 18 houses (“Sword of Destiny” [2.17])—another referent that depends on viewer knowledge of the relationship between the series and the network for its humour. The episodes analyzed within this chapter depend on the same knowledge.

The standout moment in “Motherboy XXX” is a scene set at a Burger King, in which the aspiring actor Tobias Funke meets with his former acting coach, Carl Weathers, whom he thinks might have a part for him in a movie. “I’m trying to get them to underwrite a new TV project I’m working on. Get some money in exchange for setting a scene here at Burger King,” Weathers tells him. The end of the episode features the required “Promotional consideration provided by” tag,<sup>133</sup> indicating the actual “TV project” being underwritten by Burger King is *Arrested Development*. Tobias agrees that it’s fine as long as “you don’t draw attention to it.” Behind Tobias is a poster for Burger King’s new Tendercrisp Chicken Sandwich. The rest of the conversation focuses primarily on the merits of Burger King; especially their delicious food and free drink refills. Even the narrator agrees that Burger King is indeed a “wonderful restaurant” (2.13).

This scene serves as an over-the-top parody of the notion of product placement on American television, but if the idea behind this scene was intended to poke fun at Burger King’s involvement of the show, or to discomfit their sponsor, it failed. Deanna Zammit, on Adwatch.com, commented: “Letting the audience in on the gag spoils the placement not a fire-grilled ounce. The irreverent nod to product placement works both for the show and for BK, whose lead ad agency, Crispin Porter + Bogusky, created the chain’s Self-Consciously Quirky Brand of Humor” (Zammit 2005). The ad campaign for Burger King during this period featured a

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<sup>133</sup> Federal regulations require that any money paid to place a product must be indicated by this tag, usually during the ending credits.

plastic-headed character named The King who would appear in bed with potential customers, offering them food, or be found to be dancing around hills with Darius Rucker, former lead singer of Hootie and the Blowfish. *Arrested Development's* “wink and nod” approach to this placement was of a piece with the irony-saturated youth market Burger King was targeting with that campaign. The original title of the episode was the “Tendercrisp Chicken Comedy Half-Hour,” the name of the sandwich Burger King was promoting at the time, similar to early television’s incorporation of the sponsors’ name into or programme or episode titles, such as *Philco Television Playhouse* (NBC, October 3, 1948-October 2, 1955; Fred Coe Productions) or the aforementioned *Gilmore Girls* episode “I Get a Sidekick Out of You” (6.19).



**Figure 3: Multilayered publicity for Burger King.**

Thus, it represents a mutual beneficial agreement to both the show and the sponsor. Further, there is a noticeable “break” within the episode itself—after a lingering exterior shot of the Burger King restaurant, the rest of the scene could have been an advertisement for Burger King, particularly as its tone matched that of Burger King’s then-current advertising campaign. It is structurally similar to the “situ-mercials”

(Steinberg 2004:B11)—that is, an advertisement featuring characters from a series played during the airing of said series—such as the Aquafina commercial featuring the Gilmore girls. It also reflects the position of *Arrested Development* as a struggling series. Steven Melnick, senior marketing executive at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, asserts that the product placement was necessary: “We needed as much support for the show as we could get” (McDowell 2005) particularly given *Arrested Development*’s status as a low-rated sitcom that lacked the broader appeal of shows such as *Friends* or *Seinfeld* (NBC, July 5, 1989-May 14, 1998; Castle Rock Entertainment/West Shapiro).

That being said, product placement was used regularly in both *Friends* and *Seinfeld*, meaning that willingness does not always equal desperation. Indeed, Paul Kerr argued, in his analysis of drama at MTM, “quality” television seeks to tempt audiences back to television, as well as corporate sponsors that would help said programming secure the “relative autonomy that only non-corporate capital could acquire” (Kerr 1985:132) even if it meant giving sponsors more control. MTM programmes did receive major corporate sponsorship, something which its then-president Grant Tinker approved of; he argued for a return to the sponsorship system to improve the quality of programmes. This Tinker set against the focus on Nielsen ratings by networks, which he thought attracted “hysterical competition and concomitant lowest common denominator programming” (Kerr 1985:136).

Thus, Burger King’s support, seen in that perspective, could have worked as a factor in keeping the series on the air, despite its low Nielsen ratings. For that, they were amply rewarded. Burger King’s placement continues to make its presence felt throughout the episode; it is either visually or aurally placed twice more in the 22-minute episode. Although the other two placements do not represent as much of a textual break as the first, its timing at three separate points is structurally similar to when advertising breaks would occur within the programme.

What sets *Arrested Development* and “Motherboy XXX” apart is in the programme’s carefully constructed use of intertext; not just the text of the programme, but on a promotional and industrial level. “Motherboy XXX” manages to layer several different historical, political, and media texts over itself. Tobias, in his meeting with Carl Weathers, insists that he will not sell out his family for a role in

the television show *Weathers* is directing (a fake *Cops* [Fox, March 11, 1989-present; Barbour Langley Productions] type show called *Scandalmakers*), nor would he “go reality,” while *Arrested Development* uses documentary and docusoap aesthetics quite purposefully. The title “Motherboy” is the name of the annual mother/son dinner dance Lucille and Buster attend each year; it is later revealed to also be the name of a fictional rock band that “used to rock pretty hard in the 70s,” going on to assert: “We are legally obligated to make that distinction.” This is a direct swipe at the 1990s band Arrested Development, who sued the show for copyright infringement, claiming that some Fox executives actually thought the show was a reality show about the band. The triple X in the title is supposed to represent Roman numeral thirty but also represent the old adult film rating system in the United States; this ambiguity is intentionally supposed to underscore the Oedipal tensions inherent in the dance itself as well as between Buster and his mother, Lucille.<sup>134</sup> In a later scene, Gob, Michael, and Buster meet their lawyer, Barry (Henry Winkler) on the dock, thinking they have located the seal that bit off Buster’s hand. Instead, what has been located was a shark that bit off the seal’s flipper (which had a tracking device), leaving it, in Gob’s words, to be “swimming around in a circle, freaking out his whole family.” The shark’s actions not only serve as an extended and obvious metaphor for the helpless Buster, but the dead shark itself is jumped when Barry leaps over it saying: “And I skipped breakfast, so I’m off to Burger King”; this scene is immediately followed by a commercial break. Further, showing Henry Winkler, best known for his role as Arthur Fonzarelli (“The Fonz”) on *Happy Days*, jumping over a

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<sup>134</sup> Incest remained a theme throughout the series, from Buster’s relationship with his mother’s friend, also named Lucille and of the same age as his mother, to the episode “Family Ties” (3.11), which guest-starred Jason Bateman’s sister Justine as a prostitute who had serviced both George Sr. and Gob and that Michael believes is a long-lost sister named Nellie. Further, not only does the title of the episode serve as a reference to Justine Bateman’s own sitcom, *Family Ties*, but the *Family Ties* theme song would briefly play each time she appeared on screen. These musical intertexts were frequent within the series. “Exit Strategy” [3.12] played a snippet of the *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, September 20, 1999-present; Wolf Films/NBC Universal Television Studios/USA Television) theme whenever actor Richard Belzer appeared on screen; “Good Grief” [2.4] featured “Christmas Time is Here” from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (CBS, December 9, 1965; Lee Mendelson Film Productions/Bill Melender Productions/United Features Syndicate). Each time a character was sad or disappointed, the theme would play as the character walked away, slumped and head down, much like Charlie Brown’s own walk within the animated special. It fits in well with Ron Howard’s contention that music was a vital component to the intertext of the series (Thompson 2007:70).

shark represents an intertextual reference to the *Happy Days* episode “Hollywood (Part 3)” (5.2) in which The Fonz jumps over a shark on water skis. This moment has been identified as the moment when *Happy Days* “peaked” and started to go downhill in terms of quality. It led to the creation, in 1997, of a website called *Jump the Shark*, where users can vote whether their favorite shows have “jumped the shark,”<sup>135</sup> including marriages, birth, recasting, special guest stars, and character death. By literally “jumping the shark,” *Arrested Development* attempts to elude critique through this particular reference. It further serves, as Mimi White contends, as an example of television serving as an advertisement for itself on a promotional, branding, and most importantly, textual level. This “interprogram referentiality” that *Arrested Development* specializes in thus “cross-fertilizes audiences” and locates flow at the episode level (White 1986:53).

For *Arrested Development* as a published DVD text, this use of intertext for both contemporary sociopolitical issues, and explicitly commercial content positions *Arrested Development* as representing the “aggregate experience of television over time, rather than individual texts” (White 1986:53). As Hurwitz (Fresh Air 2005) asserts and Thompson (Thompson 2007:61) affirms, *Arrested Development* is a strong case for published, tangible text in the DVD format, as the temporality of broadcast does not allow the viewer to parse all of these dense referents at work within the series. Yet, while Kompare argues that DVD seeks to transcend the “stigma” of broadcast (Kompare 2006:349), the use of product placement within “Motherboy XXX” reinserts it—transcending the transcendibility, so to speak. It thus moves closer to, as stated earlier, Hills’ contention that the DVD format valorises the commercial value of only selected texts. While *Arrested Development* may reward “close reading,” and, indeed, be positioned as an “object of value” because of it, these “reading tactics...can be made to fit with commercial strategies of branding and value generation”; these same “reading tactics” thus position viewers (and academics) “into complicity with the commercial and valorising systems” that “reinforce hierarchies of ‘quality’ TV” (Hills 2007:49).

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<sup>135</sup> Jump the Shark FAQ. Available at: [www.jumptheshark.com/help.jspa](http://www.jumptheshark.com/help.jspa). The website was bought by *TV Guide* in 2006 and is now incorporated within its website.

Indeed, such obvious commercial placement can brand the viewer as more sophisticated; a reinforcing mechanism for its use. Further, while commercial placement is thus nullified within the DVD format, other promotional elements remain regardless of how it is viewed, thereby reasserting its relationship to its broadcast roots.

This is not to imply that “Motherboy XXX” represents an anomalous use of product placement within the series. The episode “The Immaculate Election” (2.14) features a subplot built around the Roomba vacuum cleaner—a product that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, appeared on other programmes within the same period, thus representing its own kind of brand flow as a cross-promotion for the product that bears a resemblance to John Caldwell’s example of Liz Taylor appearing on several NBC programmes within the same night (Caldwell 2004:50). In this episode, Buster’s affair with Lupe, his mother’s maid, is discovered. When Lucille fires her and buys a Roomba to replace her, Buster is then discovered in a compromising position with the Roomba, justifying his actions by claiming that he is part machine due to the mechanical hook that replaced his hand.

The episode “SOBs”(3.09) also makes heavy use of intertext and intratext and openly acknowledges its own compromises. It also stands out as the only episode that retains the original Fox promo of the show at the start of the episode on DVD. Subtlety, however, is abandoned, as the episode proceeds to parody almost every possible ratings stunt: shooting live, 3-D animation, special celebrity guest stars, and character death. The notion of likability is addressed more explicitly, as Michael suggests that Lindsey act like a proper housewife and Gob get a job, in order to come across as more “relatable” to their colleagues (a stand in for the viewer). If they don’t, they won’t survive the “next few weeks”; that is, the timetable for *Arrested Development’s* cancellation. Lucille Bluth refers to this as “selling out,” especially in regards to Lindsey acting like a housewife, saying “we’re not desperate.” The word “housewife” and “desperate” are used in conjunction with one another several times throughout the episode, a direct reference to their immediate competition on the

ABC network: *Desperate Housewives*.<sup>136</sup> They discuss whether the Home Builders Association (HBO) would help them out, and indicate that, no, “it’s Showtime,” mirroring the real-life efforts of the show to be picked up by the cable channels HBO and Showtime.<sup>137</sup> The special guests stars, with the exception of the appearances of Ben Stiller and Judge Reinhold, both of whom had already or would appear on the series after this episode,<sup>138</sup> were associated with television: Richard Belzer (*Law and Order: SVU*), Zach Braff (*Scrubs*), John Larroquette (*Night Court*), Andy Dick (*News Radio* [NBC, March 21, 1995-May 4, 1999; Brillstein Entertainment Partners]), and Andy Richter (*Quintuplets* [Fox, June 16, 2004-January 12, 2005; Imagine Entertainment/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television]). Andy Richter is the only one of the guest stars to play a significant role in the episode; the other guest stars are shown only as walk-ons, underscoring their use as a stunt. Richter is actually used in a variety of ways; he plays himself and his fictional quintuplet brothers, a reference to his own failed sitcom (also created by Imagine Entertainment), *Quintuplets*; “Donnie” Richter, when discussing his brother Andy’s acting career, is indirectly commenting on *Arrested Development* itself: “Can’t seem to attract a real audience, but I love the SOB anyway.” While it’s true of Andy Richter’s career that none of his sitcoms have lasted more than two seasons<sup>139</sup>; it also is a meta-statement on *Arrested Development*, whose ratings were never consistent, and whose characters could be considered SOBs in the conventional sense of the word.

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<sup>136</sup> Marc Cherry, creator and producer of *Desperate Housewives*, had worked with Mitch Hurwitz on *Golden Girls* (NBC, September 14, 1985-May 9, 1992; Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions/Touchstone Television) and appeared in the episode “Righteous Brothers” (2.18), yelling “It’s a satire!” at Christian protestors outside his home, mirroring yet again the response by some advocacy groups toward *Arrested Development*, including the aforementioned Parent’s Television Council, which gave *Arrested Development* a “red light” for every category except violence.

<sup>137</sup> *Arrested Development* did in fact receive an offer to continue the series on Showtime; ABC also expressed interest, but Hurwitz declined, citing fears of a decrease in quality, as well as exhaustion and wanting to spend more time with his family. The compensation package was also not in line with what he was expecting; had it been, Hurwitz claimed, “I would have happily abandoned the fans’ need for quality. But as it turns out, there wasn’t” (Adalian 2006).

<sup>138</sup> Ben Stiller appeared as rival magician Tony Wonder in the episode “Sword of Destiny” (2.17). Judge Reinhold would appear as himself in the episode following this one, “Fakin’ It” (3.10), an episode also notable for the appearance of failed *American Idol* contestant William Hung. This represents another cross-promotional moment, as *American Idol* is also a Fox property.

<sup>139</sup> Besides *Quintuplets*, Richter also starred in *Andy Richter Controls the Universe* (Fox, March 19, 2002-January 12, 2003; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television/Paramount Television) and *Andy Barker, PI* (NBC, March 15, 2007-April 14, 2007; Red Pulley Productions/Conaco/NBC Universal Television).



One could argue that satirizing rating stunts is in fact just another rating stunt. After all, the show was in fact “desperate” to survive, and pushed the satire of that desperation to absurd extremes within the episode. It acknowledges every network and audience criticism; the characters are unlikable,<sup>140</sup> the show is rife with references that only a select group of viewers understand,<sup>141</sup> and that it presents, in the Narrator’s own words “complex situation[s] without...easy solution[s]” instead of “clear-cut situation[s] with the promise of comedy.” The narrator exhorts the viewer several times to “tell your friends” about how hilarious the show is, and the web address for SaveOurBluths.com flashes across the screen as he does. Yet, near the end of the episode, when one elderly party attendee chokes to death, Andy Richter refuses to emcee the Bluth’s legal defense fundraiser, and the guests are served raw chicken and given gift bags with notes that read “I know where you live,” Michael delivers a speech, nominally about his father:

I was going to say that you don’t know who my father really is and that what has happened to us is a great injustice, that we were never really given a fair chance. But that’s not the truth. We’ve been given plenty of chances. And maybe the Bluths just aren’t worth saving; maybe we’re not that likable, you know.

The honesty and lack of desperation works, and they end the episode with several checks for their legal defense fund. The speech, a thinly veiled metaphor for show itself, is easily read by the other Bluths as another “stunt,” and Michael is praised for his ability to play the game. In this instance, too, Michael is easily read as a stand-in for Hurwitz, accepting his inevitable cancellation.

At the end of the episode, even more so than in “Motherboy XXX,” the televisual illusion has completely broken down. Although the actors are still playing the Bluths, the final line of the episode is Jason Bateman saying: “Let’s wait for the west coast feed”; that is, the ratings from the Pacific time zone, which would air the

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<sup>140</sup> While the unrelatability of the characters was a defining feature of the entire programme, “SOBs” takes this one step further by George Sr. accidentally confessing to Michael that he was the infamous “Muffin Man,” mentioned earlier in the episode, who was responsible for the fatal poisoning of several teachers in the 1970s.

<sup>141</sup> This is underscored by Tobias calling George Michael a regular “Freddy Johnson,” member of a fictional Village People-type band, and then admitting he doesn’t understand his own reference.

show last. “SOBs,” with its included promotional material, rating stunts, and “live” final scene, represent an episode that addressed both the text of the series and the context within which it is produced, the examination of which Caldwell argue is vital to analysis of television material (Caldwell 2003:133). The episode serves as a deconstruction of and a reflection on the text of the series as well as production practices. It serves as an excellent example of the issues around the shift from “economies of scale” to “economies of scope” (Caldwell 2003:136). While it won several Emmys<sup>142</sup> in its three-year run, was consistently critically lauded, and could boast guest stars from Liza Minelli to Charlize Theron—both of whom satirized their own public personas and careers—it could neither garner sufficient viewing numbers nor appeal to a broad demographic of viewers. Within this episode, however, it did use its comedy verité aesthetic to capture the “reality” of the struggles of the actors, writers, and producers to save the series from cancellation. As Gary Edgerton and Kyle Nicholas argue about the current state of television:

Never before has TV networking been so intimately linked to the process of genre formation, subject to delicate negotiation that occurs between the industry and its business and creative personnel, the programming they produce, and the consumptive and identity-building behavior of audiences that network executives carefully target (Edgerton and Nicholas 2008:247).

Indeed, as they further argue, this “intimate” linkage is part of the branding process of niche series like *Arrested Development*. It is niche forms like the hybridized space in which *Arrested Development* has situated itself that “actively pursues intensity” (of audience involvement) among selected groups in order to “situate products within them” (Curtin 1996:197), even if that product happens to be a television series.

It further represents, much like “Motherboy XXX,” an attempt to recreate the broadcast experience within the published DVD, particularly the original television promo at the start of the episode. Rather than the usual opening, which is the

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<sup>142</sup> *Arrested Development* was nominated 22 times total for its three seasons, with 6 wins, as well a Golden Globe, Television Critics Association award, and a WGA award, among others.

opening credits, the episode starts with “Tonight on Fox”—and lists all the stunts the episode will proceed to engage in.



**Figure 4: The Original Fox promo, included on the DVD.**

Thus, its original broadcast roots are again reasserted with the inclusion of this promotional material on the DVD. Even more so than “Motherboy XXX,” and despite the exclusion of the commercials, “SOBs” retains broadcast flow and reminds the viewer, despite how or when the series is viewed, that they are watching a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox production.

It also positions *Arrested Development* as a halfway point between the fairly consistent use of broadcast flow, in Williams’ original sense of it, in *Gilmore Girls*, and that of the dispersed, multiplatform use of flow in series such as *Heroes*, addressed in the next chapter. Not only do particular episodes attempt to or actually recreate an essence of the television broadcast experience within the DVD format, but it also gestures at other platforms, in which the text can be discussed, promoted, or experienced. As mentioned earlier, the Narrator exhorts the viewer to “tell your friends” how good the series is, while the web address for a fan-created website (“Save Our Bluths”) flashes several times on the screen. The title of the episode is

multiply coded as an insult directed at the Bluth family, the name of the fundraiser the family plans for its legal defense fund, and an advertisement for the dedicated website. Previous to this, Fox's *Arrested Development* website included multimedia elements about the show, such as the Bluth family tree, actor biographies, and outtakes from the first season, as well as those that existed within the narrative world of the series, including a Bluth Company newsletter. Directed at Bluth Company investors, it shares the narrative feature of the series itself, in allowing the viewer-user to read internal material from the Bluth company.

*Arrested Development*, ratings aside, did have support; the show was a co-production of Imagine Entertainment and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Thus it was not only an “in-house” production (as *Heroes* was for NBC Universal), but Imagine was also responsible for one of Fox's highest rated shows, *24* (Fox, November 6, 2001-May 24, 2010; Imagine Entertainment/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox). It almost certainly benefited from *24*'s success, garnering two additional seasons despite its ratings. Unlike a series like *Heroes*, *Arrested Development*'s timing may have been too early to benefit from the “economies of scope” (Caldwell 2003:136) it was positioned in—including online promotion and distribution, DVR ratings, and alternate distribution. Amanda Lotz speculates on whether the ultimate fate of *Arrested Development* would have changed if the broadcast networks' relationship with iTunes distribution had emerged earlier (Lotz 2007:234). Content from Fox did not debut on iTunes until May 2006 (AppleInsider Staff 2006), too late to benefit *Arrested Development* as, for example, iTunes distribution aided *The Office: An American Workplace* in its eventual success (Gay 2006:B21).<sup>143</sup>

Its influence is still felt, particularly its use of foregrounded placement, within other situation comedies. *The Office: An American Workplace*, which fits more easily into the mockumentary, comedy verité aesthetic, set two episodes at Chili's restaurant. “The Dundies” (2.1) was notable for an interview with a Chili's employee reiterating their drink service policy when the character of Pam Beesley (Jenna

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<sup>143</sup> As stated earlier, *Arrested Development* has eventually benefitted from “economies of scope,” with new episodes being filmed and distributed and a film version of the series in production, driven in no small part, as will be discussed in the *Firefly* case study, by brisk sales of the series on DVD.

Fischer) got drunk finishing off her coworkers' drinks. This disclaimer was requested by the chain itself over fears such a plot would reflect badly on them<sup>144</sup>; they had script approval, actual employees integrated into the episode, and staff on set during filming (MacArthur 2005). "The Client" featured Regional Manager Michael Scott (Steve Carell) and an unnamed client (Tim Meadows) joyfully singing the Chili's theme song while conducting business within the restaurant; indeed, Michael claims to have written an article for a business journal about the advisability of conducting business within Chili's. The series *30 Rock* (NBC, October 11, 2006-present; Broadway Video/Little Stranger/NBC Studios), which is a series about the making of and backstage issues of producing a live comedy series and uses the comedy verité aesthetic in a similar fashion to *Arrested Development*, has made such liberal use of product placement across multiple episodes<sup>145</sup> that Tina Fey released a statement in February 2009 claiming that a placement of the McDonald's McFlurry milkshake within the programme was not in fact a paid placement (Mitovich 2009).

*Arrested Development* thus stands as the median, as well as an initial test, of many of the economic and textual transitions within American broadcast programming in the new millennium. Its lack of success within the television medium is due in part to its hybrid form, not only in terms of the text, but its relationship to the economic structure of broadcast television. While series like *Heroes*, as will be addressed in the next chapter, successfully made use of multiplatform and the reconstituted sponsorship and product placement models from 2006 onward, *Arrested Development* debuted too early in the process of these models being developed and integrated into broadcast's economic model. Its hybridized use of product placement and multiple platforms, particularly DVD, indicates the direction of these shifts without benefiting from them to the same degree.

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<sup>144</sup> "The Dundies" [commentary track].

<sup>145</sup> See "Jack-Tor" (1.5), which mirrors "Motherboy XXX" as characters debate the merits and demerits of product placement of a General Electric oven in *The Girly Show With Tracy Jordan* (the show within *30 Rock*), while having a discussion on the deliciousness of Snapple, and "Somebody to Love" (2.6), in which Tina Fey directly addresses the camera after a Verizon placement and asks "Can we have our money now?"

As the continued rise of obvious, if satirical use of placement indicates, *Arrested Development's* status as a "quality" (if highly niche) programme, valorises to a great extent this reemergence of a strong sponsor-programme relationship. It thus, as Grainge argues, allows branding (and placement) to not only serve as a "marketing mechanism" but also allows it to "becom[e] its own source of generative identity and spectacle" (Grainge 2006:129). The use of satiric address in *Arrested Development's* placement and promotion becomes a way to brand both programme and viewer as sophisticated, but its most important contribution is making such practices acceptable to a prized demographic.

These blends of old and new models of distribution and economics will be addressed in greater depth within the discussion of the multiple platform brand flows of *Heroes*.

### **A Giant Leap: The Multiplatform Brand Flows of *Heroes***

As addressed in Chapter two, the increasing penetration of advanced ad-skipping technology into American homes, as well as concerns over “advertising clutter” that could exhaust the viewer and may well work against the marketing of the product in question, the American television and advertising industries engaged in a series of circular debates between 2001 and 2008 within their publications of how to address these issues on an industrial level. Product placement and integration has been represented in these publications as a way to not only to deal with these perceived changes and issues, but fosters a particular attachment to a brand, through integrating it with particular shows. If *Gilmore Girls*’ genesis as being initially funded by advertisers affects what products are placed within the programme, *Heroes* provides another new twist on an old system: the single sponsor, to help fund and disseminate the programmes, and its products, across multiple platforms.

That is the main thrust of this chapter; to examine how the NBC show *Heroes* and its use of product placement across multiple platforms represents one response by networks and advertisers to these particular debates and reconfigures how brand flow operates across multiple platforms. Not only is the series employing the “second shift aesthetics” (Caldwell 2003:135) or, additionally “multiplexing,” which represents networks bringing “viewer-users” back to the programme by “further engag[ing] and activat[ing] the text” (Caldwell 2004:50), but the products integrated within the text are pulled into the available world of *Heroes* alternate platform’s textual world, particularly Nissan branded cars. As Henry Jenkins writes: “Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their framework and structure shifted by the introduction of new technology” (Jenkins 2006:3-4). How these products are used within *Heroes* storylines and its interaction with characters and platform goes beyond simple placement to make the product another character within the show. The implications of such a high-level of integration will be examined in greater depth below.

As Henry Jenkin's *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992), as well as John Fiske's *Television Culture* (Fiske 2006) argued, viewers can choose to engage with television texts on a more intense level, reconstituting, remixing, or re-envisioning plots, stories, and characters through fan-created fiction, videos, and music. *Heroes* as a text provides many points of entry for this type of activity. The consistently increasing and diverse ensemble cast, including characters from and events set in India, Japan, the Ukraine, Ireland, England, and Honduras, among others, is a rare instance of a prime-time programme that works outside of a solely American context. While an analysis of fan activity is not the focus of this case study, it is important to note these possibilities because of the ways in which the promotional apparatus of the network utilized these types of convergences for the series. *Heroes* represents an example of Caldwell's contention that the networks have responded to the fragmentation of US television by expanding the boundaries of the series "brand" (Caldwell 2003:131). In the case of *Heroes*, this extension extends not just to the text itself, but to the advertising and product placement agreements that support the series. *Heroes* employs an older model of ad-supported television (namely, the single-sponsorship model of early American television), both within the terrestrial television series and across multiple platforms.

Paul Grainge asserted that branding is "linked to key transformations and developments within contemporary culture industries" (Grainge 2007:8-9), particularly with the increased alternate viewing modes discussed in Chapter two. As Lury argued that brands serve as "marks of flow" (Lury 2004:13) across multiple iterations, Grainge too examines how branding "has assumed the pose of entertainment" while the entertainment industries have "increasingly assumed the function and status of a brand" (Grainge 2007:25). Even more so than in *Gilmore Girls*, *Heroes* conflates the product and the character within all potential outlets for the series.

To that end, within this case study, after providing a brief review of the development and industrial context of the series, including the position of NBC as a network from 2004 to *Heroes* debut in 2006, I will provide an analysis of an episode that aired on broadcast television, and one of the web episodes (known hereafter as



“webisodes”) that aired in the summer of 2008. I have chosen to examine one of these webisodes because of the ways in which they position themselves as a part of the text and context of television’s commodity form; that is, they are structurally similar to the programme itself both in the quality of video and in the use of product placement. In this way, the webisodes replicate, as Caldwell argued, the first-shift uses of flow in a second-shift context. Caldwell attacks the credibility of viewing digital media as a “break” with traditional media. The convergence of the Internet and television, for him, does not just represent cynical corporate synergy or a postmodern aesthetic, but rather an example of how the television industry is using said media to “leverage cultural capital,” increase “visibility,” and provide financial benefit. The use of product placement across these multiple platforms within programmes such as *Heroes*, with their high production values, is a mix of the “branding strategies and discourses of distinction” that Caldwell contends helps networks “position and value their respective conglomerates in the capital markets” (Caldwell 2003:131). Distinction and value, as will be addressed below, were particularly necessary to NBC during the years that *Heroes* first debuted. Further, it calls to mind Mimi White’s intersection between Williams’s flow and global media flows (White 2002:94) and Jeffrey Sconce’s contention that television in the past 20 years has created ever-more complex “narrative universes” (Sconce 2004:96). Further, Jonathan Gray’s analysis of “paratexts” will be employed within this examination, as well as *Heroes* positioning as a “quality” and “cult” programme will also inform this analysis, particularly the way it is positioned as “mainstream cult” (Hills 2010:67-73). Finally, if, as Arvidsson argues, brands represent a “hypersocialized, deterritorialized factories” (Arvidsson 2006:82), then the level of control the NBC network sought over viewer interaction—that is, simultaneously “inviting them in” and conscripting their activities (D. Johnson 2007)—takes on a deeper resonance.

*Heroes* represents an in-house production for NBC Universal and was developed with a focus on how it could be both promoted and told, textually, across multiple platforms. In an interview with creator Tim Kring and producers Damon Lindhoff and Jesse Alexander, they argue that what during the analog era would

have been considered “soulless...cross promotion” is, in the digital era, “transmedia storytelling” (Kushner 2008). That is, the multiple platforms not only promote a series, but are used to build and expand the world of the series—not just within the television medium, but on numerous official adjunctive websites, including the Primatech Paper website (the company within the series that serves as a front for experiments on individual heroes), a “Create Your Hero” contest for mobile phones, as well as character blogs, wikis, comic books, and a full-length novel about a subplot between the character of Hiro (Masi Oka) and a waitress named Charlie Andrews (Jayma Mays) (Wallington 2008). Each sponsorship represents a mutually beneficial contract between content and sponsor: Cisco Systems’ sponsorship of the Primatech Paper website, which used a Cisco brand interface to allow viewer-users to “spy” on the company, allowed Cisco to promote their new line of surveillance cameras. Sprint sponsored the majority of the mobile phone content, as well as the online episodes (explored in greater depth below). In 2007, NBC posted a \$50 million profit from this type of online advertising revenue (Kushner 2008).

An article in *Advertising Age* noted that while *Heroes*, in its first season, accounted for more than half of the videos watched on NBC.com, it was not in fact the first NBC show that could claim online adjunctive viewing as a vital component to its success. That honour went to another NBC show, *The Office: An American Workplace*, which was touted as being the first beneficiary of providing multiple delivery systems in order to increase broadcast viewership (Whitney 2007:S7; Gay 2006:B1). It is perhaps then not surprising that NBC, of the five broadcast networks, was the network that most enthusiastically embraced the new Nielsen rating system, the C3, which included time-shifted viewing within its numbers for the first time in 2007 (Steinberg 2007:1, 34). After an unprecedentedly long run as the top network in the 1980s and 1990s, the NBC network struggled to regain its old position at the top after the shows that fueled its rise, such as *Friends* and *Seinfeld*, were retired. It could either be more experimental in its programming and distribution decisions or continue to search for the same kinds of shows that initially made it succeed. While Amanda Lotz argued that part of NBC’s struggles were due to their attempts to recreate their earlier success in the 1980s, which

featured family-friendly programming with broad appeal (Lotz 2007:271), in an environment in which media was fragmented and niche oriented, Kevin Sandler argues that NBC negotiated such changes by both increasing their level of reality programming, employing different launching strategies, using on-screen talent for cross-promotion, and most importantly for the purposes of this analysis, increasing promotion across multiple platforms and the level of product integration within their programmes. As he writes:

Alternative media competition, increasing production costs, a declining international marketplace, a weak off-net syndication landscape, and digital video recorders...like TiVo have fundamentally rewritten broadcast television. Situated in a context of falling ratings, a growing cultural conservatism under a Bush White House, and fears of Federal Communication Commission (FCC) indecency fines in the wake of the Janet Jackson/Justin Timberlake Super Bowl incident, bottom-line-obsessed and risk-adverse media conglomerates have forced their broadcast subsidiaries to rethink their methods for doing business (Sandler 2007:293).

David Baldwin, the executive vice-president of the Showtime network, praised NBC as being at the “forefront” of multiplatform initiatives, such as its “TV 360°” website as well as the joint venture with News Corporation that would eventually be known as Hulu (Atkinson 2007:S1-S2). John Wells, on the other hand, claims that high levels of product integration are far more common for networks that are struggling in the ratings (Levin 2006).

*Heroes* certainly represents this particular strategy. The same article singles out the show for praise; Shari Anne Brill, vice-president and director of programming at Carat USA, claims that “its creators and writers have done a fabulous job of extending the mythology of the show through various video points: TV programming, a digital comic book, blogs...cellphones” and “streams on NBC.com for free with pre-roll ad breaks” (Levin 2006). This is evident even within the cinematography; the show is based on a “comic-book” palette, much like the 1990 film *Dick Tracy* (June 15, 1990; Touchstone Pictures/Silver Screen Partners IV/Mulholland Productions). The colour of the show is highly saturated, and each

episode title consistently appears as “written” across some element within a scene, as if it is a panel. This is vertically integrated with the official NBC *Heroes* page, which provides an interactive comic book that fills in the gaps between episodes or provides additional character development. Each of these online comic books features an ad for Nissan as its opening panel, as well as integrating Nissan within the story. This follows a trend that DC and Marvel comic books initiated in 2006 to integrate product placement within all of their comic book lines (Steinberg 2006). The product placement within *Heroes* is so prevalent that it merits its own page on the *Heroes* wiki; product placement spans all four series of the show (*Heroes* wiki, “Product Placement”). This product and story integration is the way in which *Heroes* serves as “transmedia storytelling,” which by Jenkin’s definition, “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (Jenkins 2006:96). In terms of the arc of the series, *Heroes* has a three-fold multiplatform strategy: the television series, in which episodes generally follow three to four separate storylines per episode; the comic books, which provide one-off or multiple issue arcs following one character; and the webisodes, which often feature characters not seen within the central television narrative. While there are exceptions,<sup>146</sup> *Heroes* has followed this pattern fairly closely, tailoring content to whichever medium in which it is presented.

That being said, promotion is not just about selling but “advancing and developing a text” (Gray 2010:5). In what Gray terms *paratexts*, the meaning of a series is no longer only located within the text, but extends across multiple platform and iterations—whether online or through DVD extras. These paratexts can serve to aid the audience’s “speculative consumption” of the television text as “entryway paratexts” or extend the narrative universe (“in media res” paratexts) (Gray 2010:25), as well as “resuscitates” the auteur function within television, thus acting as another marker of quality (Gray 2010:113). Yet their positioning as both promotion and text is the grey area that lead to the 2007 Writer’s Guild of America

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<sup>146</sup> For example, the character Hana Gitelman (Stana Katic) was introduced in the comics and briefly appeared in series one (“Unexpected” [1.16] and “Five Years Gone” [1.19]); the rest of her story played out solely in the comics.

(WGA) strike, which will be addressed below.

Nissan represents the most important product relationship within the show. The series premiere was presented with limited commercial interruption, thanks to the single sponsorship of Nissan. According to Amanda Lotz, this follows a trend within both broadcast and cable programmes toward single sponsorship of particular episodes within a series. Within the cable environment, this has allowed shows such as *The Shield* (FX, March 12, 2002-November 25, 2008; Barn Productions/Fox Television/Sony Pictures Television) and *Nip/Tuck* to debut their season premieres without any commercial interruption at all. Lotz writes:

[S]ponsorship situations in which the advertiser chooses not to disrupt the show for brand messages allow for the creation of narratives of some distinction. Magazine-format advertising requires story construction that can be interrupted, and the practicalities of maintaining audiences require writers to manufacture plots with points of climax before the prescribed commercial breaks. Sponsorship, by contrast, can eliminate the need for such interventions (Lotz 2007:174).

Indeed, single sponsorship has been used for event programming, such as broadcast debuts of what might be considered historically important or sensitive films, such as *Schindler's List* (December 15, 1993; Universal Pictures/Amblin Entertainment) or *Saving Private Ryan* (July 24, 1998; Amblin Entertainment/Dreamworks SKG/Mark Gordon Productions). Thus, not only does single sponsorship allow for the uninterrupted storytelling Lotz points out above, but carries particular associations with event-status programming.

The “distinction” Lotz claims such sponsorship can bring is similar to Derek Kompare’s analysis of the tangibility of television through its “publication” on DVD, which eliminates much of what associates these stories with television—namely, the advertising breaks—and thus positions the show as a quality programming by disassociating it from its televisual roots (Kompare 2006:349), as addressed in the previous chapter. Further, the positioning of *Heroes* as what Matt Hills calls “mainstream cult”—that is, series that contain elements of both mainstream

television (such as narrative drive, “high gloss” production, and an ensemble cast) and cult (fantastic premise and a “detailed hyperdiegetic world about which the cult audience can amass textual knowledge” [Hills 2010:71])—provides a space in which discourses of quality and those of cult television intersect. Indeed, Roberta Pearson explicitly draws the two together, citing numerous critics and viewers who have marked “cult series” with the added designation of quality (Pearson 2010:5-6). It is within these definitions—“cult as quality” or “mainstream cult” that *Heroes* has positioned both itself and its paratexts. It has explicitly branded itself and its associated products as such across multiple platforms.

As stated earlier, it is arguable that the most important sponsorship relation for their series is with Nissan. For *Heroes*, Nissan not only served as the single sponsor for the debut, as mentioned above; they also subsidized the distribution of the premiere episode free of charge on iTunes three weeks before it debuted on broadcast,<sup>147</sup> previewed the show in cinemas, and distributed gift cards for the iTunes downloads to theater patrons (Lafayette 2006). In return, the Nissan model Versa was heavily promoted through the first series; in the second season, the model Rogue was also added, specifically for the character of Claire Bennet (Hayden Panettiere), a high school cheerleader with self-healing power. In an example of negative placement, *Heroes* was sued after the airing of the pilot episode for the unpaid placement of the In-Sink-Erator garbage disposal. In order to test her cell regenerative ability, Claire Bennett stuck her hand in the disposal (“Genesis” [1.1]). The makers of the In-Sink-Erator felt that the use of their product to pulverize a hand reflected badly on their product and could potentially harm sales (Edwards 2006). Regardless of whether this would be the case, it is clear that advertisers do believe that placement, paid or unpaid, has a marked effect on their revenues. It also an assumption, on the part of the advertisers, that the placement will be noticed, thereby undermining its integrated nature.

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<sup>147</sup> The relationship between NBC and iTunes, as discussed earlier, was initially highly beneficially in promoting NBC properties. NBC programming represented 40% of the revenue iTunes generated in program content. This arrangement later soured, however, when NBC Universal demanded that the price per new episode of NBC series be raised from \$1.99 to \$4.99, Apple refused and NBC cancelled the deal (“NBC ends iTunes deal” 2007). NBC programming has since been reinstated on iTunes, with programmes offered at the original \$1.99 price.

In “One Giant Leap” [1.3], the most obvious placements are limited to Hiro, Ando Masahashi (James Kyson Lee), and Claire Bennett (Hayden Panettiere), particularly Hiro and Ando. While *Gilmore Girls* mostly specialized in the verbal placement within episodes, *Heroes*’ first season presented a character that represented a vocal and central mouthpiece for Nissan’s integration into the world of the show: Hiro Nakamura. Nissan is the only make of car featured within the programme, thereby undermining one argument for product placement, that it represents “verisimilitude” (Avery and Ferraro 2000:217). While this argument generally indicates that brands exist in the real world and so to not show brands would not be true to a portrayal of the contemporary American society, Nissan is nearly the only car displayed in the *Heroes* universe, which decidedly does not reflect contemporary reality. Hiro’s name itself reflects his connection with the company; Nakamura is the last name of the chief executive officer for Nissan, tying Hiro implicitly to the product. According to Tim Kring, the creator of *Heroes*, this was done as a show of thanks for Nissan’s unstinting support for the show; Nissan’s sponsorship is also an in-joke within the cast itself.<sup>148</sup>

Most importantly, the character of Hiro allows the show to create an “inter-textual link” with Nissan, both simplistically and on a deeper level. The virtues and special features of the Versa discussed by Hiro and his best friend Ando within the show across several episodes, including its comfort and uniqueness (“One Giant Leap [1.3]), the ease of finding it within a parking garage (“Hiros” [1.5]), and its ability to get through a gun battle without a scratch on it (“Unexpected” [1.16]). In the second episode (“Don’t Look Back” [1.2]), Hiro discovers the “9<sup>th</sup> Wonder” comic book at a newsstand in New York City, featuring his leap in space and time as the main storyline, as well as what has yet to occur in his story.<sup>149</sup> In this episode, Hiro uses the book as a template for what he’ll do next, which includes flying to Los Angeles and renting a car for a drive to Las Vegas. In this way, Hiro works as both

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<sup>148</sup> Producer Greg Beeman mentioning that they had wanted a right-handed car for the character Elle Bishop (Kristen Bell) to drive in scenes set in Ireland; actor Greg Grunberg responded with: “but Nissan doesn’t make one.” In: “Fight or Flight” [Commentary track].

<sup>149</sup> The artist and writer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder comic book series is also another evolved human, Isaac Mendez (Santiago Cabrera), who can paint the future under the influence of heroin.

spokesperson and consumer. If, as previously claimed by one of the series' producers, the multiple platform initiative help "lure" (Kushner 2006) viewers into buying the featured products, Hiro thus provides a model for how the viewer should react, or, as Derek Johnson argues, serves as an example of "good" fan behaviour (D. Johnson 2007:76).

The multiple platforms throughout which the transmedia text of *Heroes* flows exist not only extramurally in online comics, videos, and interactive games, but within the television series itself. Hiro's actions, whether it's driving to Las Vegas or the type of car he should do it in, are informed by a separate platform that reveals his actions. The 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder comic book integrates Nissan both online and in the television series. Ando uses the Internet to download web videos of another character (super-strong exotic dancer Niki Sanders [Ali Larter]) onto his iPod—it is the idea of meeting Niki, who lives in Las Vegas, that prompts Ando to travel with Hiro. Thus the product-placed iPod shows its capacity to not only access and transfer content across multiple platforms, but also to connect two disparate individuals within the story and play a role in advancing the plot. For Hiro, the comic book specifies a very particular car—the Nissan Versa—and Hiro will not accept any substitute.

Hiro: Nissan Versa. Nissan Versa.

Car Rental Clerk: That's a popular choice. Let me check to see if we still have any left.

Hiro: Nissan –

Ando: Hiro! (subtitled) We've got a connecting flight leaving for New York.

Hiro: (subtitled) We're not flying.

Ando: (subtitled) Why not?

Hiro: (subtitled) It says we rent a car. (Hiro opens the comic book and shows the panels to Ando.)

Ando: Eh? (subtitled) We drive all the way?

Hiro: (subtitled) Yes. In a Nissan Versa.

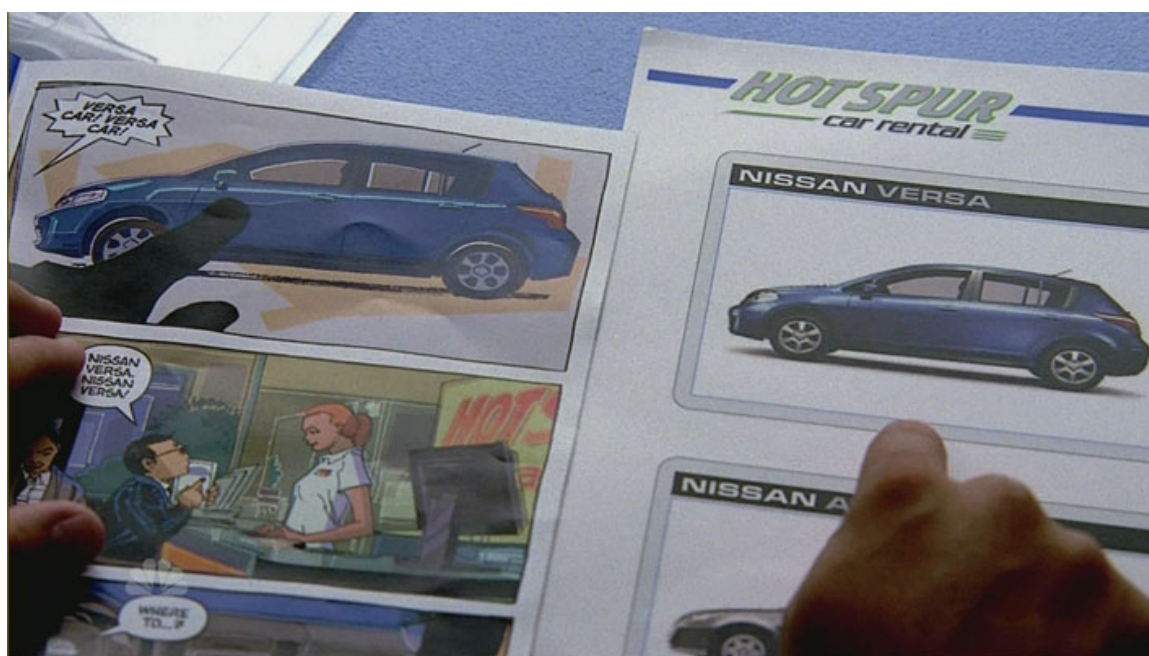
Ando: Ah, Hiro, (subtitled) Do you know how long that's going to take? Suppose she doesn't have that exact car?

Car Rental Clerk: You're in luck. We have one left.

Hiro: (subtitled) It's our destiny.



These moments essentially render the Versa as a “third character” within these scenes. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly common for publications writing about the practice of product placement or integration to refer to the placed products as characters, underscoring the idea that said products high involvement in the storylines transubstantiate the products into something beyond themselves (James 2004; Levin 2006; Clifford 2008). This scene in particular highlights the consumption relationship that is expected through the use of placement. As Hiro says, the Nissan Versa is “our destiny,” having been told by the comic book.



**Figure 5: Hiro, following directions.**

Nissan’s presence is not limited to the television medium. NBC and Nissan are part of a recent trend of providing television episodes for “free” online. I’ll be examining in more depth at the end of this chapter the implications of online content, but the current model on the NBC (among others) website is a quid pro quo; the viewer must watch a Nissan ad to get to the episode.<sup>150</sup> This extends to the other multimedia available on the site. On the *Heroes* page, they provide online

<sup>150</sup> Significantly, these episodes are only available to users with a United States IP address, although this is not indicated anywhere on the *Heroes* page.

interactive graphic novels (also available in PDF format for downloading and presumably saving); the interactive graphic novels themselves are technologically structured to replicate the DVD viewing experience, such as providing clickable “Easter eggs” within the file for the savvy viewer-user. They also provided graphic novels as videos in animated format. As these graphic novels narratively “fill in the blanks” in either character or plot development, they are technically part of the narrative of the show, and Nissan is also placed within these.<sup>151</sup> The online versions feature an opening panel that is a Nissan ad; the Nissan is in motion, as people stand to the side, astonished. Nissan becomes another “superhero,” a vehicular evolutionary “9<sup>th</sup> Wonder” (the title of the graphic novels online, as well as within the text of the televisual version of the show).

Further, in 2009, NBC.com introduced an interactive function known as iStory<sup>152</sup>: “You are the main character of an evolving interactive story. Meet the characters from Evolutions and the show, shape the rest of the *Heroes* story, and experience the *Heroes* universe first-hand!”<sup>153</sup> Thus *Heroes* and Nissan allow the user to share in the *Hero(ic)* experience in a network-controlled context, even as they delineate them by whether they were online characters or television ones. While other series within or near the examined period have included metatextual elements that refer to fan practices, particularly fan fiction,<sup>154</sup> *Heroes* appropriates

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<sup>151</sup> That being said, the comic book that Hiro uses within the text of the show is not available as one of the online comic books, as Hiro’s version covers the events that are occurring within the episode itself.

<sup>152</sup> While NBC.com explains that the “I” in iStory stands for interactive, the combination of a lower case I with another word mirrors that of another *Heroes* sponsor, Apple. As mentioned below, the Apple iPod is heavily featured in storylines from the first and second seasons; NBC is also planning to release Apple iPhone applications specifically related to both *Heroes* and *The Office* in 2009 (Libonati 2009).

<sup>153</sup> *Heroes*, Season Three—Evolutions iStory. Available at: <http://www.nbc.com/Heroes/iStory/>

<sup>154</sup> “Superstar” (4.17), from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was an episode that focused on an alternative universe in which a minor character becomes the star of the show, a “Mary Sue”; that is, a character who can do everything that the other characters could do, and more, as well as being universally loved by all the characters (Larbalestier 2002:227-238). *Supernatural* explicitly addressed fan-created fiction, when the series’ main characters, Dean and Sam Winchester, find that they are the subject of a series of novels, called *Supernatural*, that detail their adventures thus far and have garnered a small fanbase (“The Monster at the End of This Book” [4.18]). They discover, to their horror, fan fiction commonly referred to as “Wincest,” with the brothers as a romantic pair. The show goes further, featuring a Wincest author in 3 subsequent episodes: one in which she is used to send a message to the brothers (“Sympathy for the Devil [5.1]); one set at a *Supernatural* fan convention that

and contains such activities within the iStory application, as it does within the 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder comic book for Hiro. As part of the marketing strategy NBC employed during the first season, a short spoof video was released to YouTube, called “Zeroes” as part of a network-wide initiative to use viral videos to extend the brands of shows. None of these contained any reference to NBC or when the related series would air, in order to “build up credibility” with potential viewers (Adalian 2007).

With the more engaged audiences in TVIII, these types of strategies discussed above become a way to monetize said engagement. That is, “[g]enre hybridization, serialized narrative form, and product tie-ins—arose as a means to stimulate the profitable overconsumption of fans” (D. Johnson 2007:62). Viewer labour on the part of the show, Johnson argues, doesn’t actually upset the power binary between producers and viewers. He writes:

Ultimately, because multiplatforming enables closer proximity between the spaces of consumption, narrative and labor, the potential for intense audience investment is increased, potentially conflicting with executive and corporate interests. This is not to suggest pure fan resistance, however, as that same proximity often enables the industry to manage such challenges—contrary to popular claims about the newfound power of fans over producers (D. Johnson 2007:63).

The fake viral video and the interactive iStory application may thus cultivate involvement with the *Heroes*’ brand, but it is on network’s terms (Grainge 2007:29; Lury 2004:7). Caldwell also argues that the industry does use these paratexts to “intensify the quality demographics” by “animating an existing audience via consumer activity” though these ancillary paratexts (Caldwell 2006:118).

Further, the associations of products within this show with characters of superheroic stature, I argue, mirrors the creation of meaning that occurs with celebrity endorsements. Grant McCracken describes the creation of meaning in

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prominently features parodies of live-action role-playing, academic conferences, and ancillary product sales (“The Real Ghostbusters” [5.9]); and one in which she uses a spell to make Sam Winchester fall in love with her, bringing her fan fiction to life, so to speak (“Season 7, Time for a Wedding” [7.8]).

celebrity endorsements of products as a three-stage process. Stage one is the culturally encoded meaning of the ad with respect to the celebrity associated with it, as most celebrities (he notes a few exceptions) are encoded with particular meanings based on the roles they have played (whether fictional or in reality). The celebrity then transfers said meaning and associations to the product they are endorsing, and in stage three, these meanings are transferred to the consumer. As McCracken asserts:

Consumers are constantly canvassing the object world for goods with useful meanings. They use them to furnish certain aspects of the self and the world. The object world...gives them access to workable ideas of gender, class, age, personality, and lifestyle, in addition to cultural principles of great number and variety. The material world of consumer goods offers a vast inventory of possible selves and thinkable worlds (McCracken 2005:10).

This is similar to Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's contention that consumers seek to build an "intelligible universe" through the goods they consume (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:63), as was seen in *Gilmore Girls*. Advertisers have very particular associations they want the consumer to make when faced with the meaning the celebrity provides (McCracken 2005:109); within *Heroes*, they seem to be seeking to build the same kind of "intelligible" consumption-based universe for their characters, particularly Hiro, and thus allow the viewer to draw the associations of the product with "evolved" and "heroic" individuals. *Heroes* does provide, with its large ensemble cast, a "vast inventory of possible selves and thinkable worlds" (McCracken 2005:109; the aforementioned iStory, as an interactive game, even allows the viewer-user to shape this particular world, at least within the network's parameters, in order to assimilate them into acceptable, authored modes of textual consumption (D. Johnson 2007:64).

No regular cast member on *Heroes* could be considered a celebrity prior to the show, so the meaning created by an individual's association to the Nissan (among other) brands is not explicitly tied to star image. McCracken refers to celebrities as "superconsumers," and this is that meaning that I'm interested in. Nissan seeks to create an association not with the actor, but the character in a very

particular way. Earlier, I discussed the graphic novel's use of the Nissan in the opening panel as another "9<sup>th</sup> Wonder"; this completes the circuit of meaning. On the Nissan site, the Versa is called "the next generation of small car,"<sup>155</sup> tying it textually with the *Heroes* "next evolutionary step" storylines.

The other storylines in "One Giant Leap" do feature additional placed products. Mohinder Suresh (Sendil Ramamurthy), the son of a man who has written a book about evolved humans and genetics, tries, on his Dell laptop, to decode his father's work. When he throws the laptop across the room in frustration, the laptop suffers no ill effects—indeed, it yields up one secret: an address book hidden inside the computer. Claire Bennett snarks about one of her fellow cheerleaders, Jackie Wilcox (Danielle Savre), who has taken credit for a daring rescue of a man from a burning train (Claire was actually the "hero" who did it), that Jackie had already told everyone to "set their TiVos" to catch Jackie being interviewed on the local news. These featured products are not given the visual and aural prominence that the Nissan Versa enjoys across multiple platforms within the episode itself—the comic book, the rental car company catalogue, and the episode—mirroring its multiple platform placement outside of the individual episodes and terrestrial series.

Indeed, it is not enough to include product placement or integration to support a show financially. In an increasingly diversified media market, any show that wishes to survive a season or longer must find a way to brand itself in conjunction with the product it integrates; for example, Tylenol's sponsorship of *Survivor* as part of their "Push Through the Pain" ad campaign (Lotz 2007:175). In Amanda Lotz's examination of NBC's "dominant decades," she claims that NBC had positioned itself, during its second wave of popularity in the mid-1990s, to appeal to a particular demographic; the demographic termed *slumpies* ("socially-liberal, urban-minded professionals") by Ron Becker (Becker 2006:184-215). Lotz goes on to point out the problematic nature of the urban environment of these mid-1990s programmes: "the network repeatedly told stories about young, affluent white suburbanites who lived in worlds curiously devoid of people different from

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<sup>155</sup> Nissan Versa home page. Available at: <http://www.nissanusa.com/versa/>

themselves” (Lotz 2007:271). While *Heroes* does attempt to redress the “whiteness” issue by incorporating African American, Japanese, Indian, and Latino characters (amongst others) within the narrative of the show, the fact that they are connected only because they are “special” or “evolved” does not wholly redress the aforementioned issue of representation, nor are the products placed within the programme—Apple iPods, laptops, surveillance cameras, and Nissan cars—affordable to a large portion of potential viewers. In a uses and gratifications analysis of whether audiences display a particular affinity for a network, Lin et al found that “internet adopters make greater use of media channels than non-users” and therefore “this upscale target should not be abandoned in favor of downscale ‘broadcast-only’ audiences” (Lin, Atkin, and Abelman 2002:30). Clearly, the placements used within *Heroes* are aimed at the “upscale target” Lin et al identified.

It is clear, however, from the iconography of the show itself that it does aspire to global storylines and representations. Each episode starts with a rising planet Earth, with “Previously...” written across the screen. After a teaser, of varying lengths from episode to episode, the title sequence consists of the same globe turning into the eclipsed sun that seemingly imbued the characters with their powers in the first episode, with the word *Heroes* written across it. This same “iconic” eclipse appears on the DVD box set for the first series, as well as in the interactive graphic novels. That being said, *Heroes* setting is, in the main, contemporary America. In the first series, the majority of the action occurred in New York City, Las Vegas, Nevada, or Odessa, Texas, with excursions into Japan and India, two countries intimately connected with US industry. The second series added Montreal, Ireland, Honduras and various other South and Central American locations, Odessa, Ukraine, and California to the mix, and the third series included Paris, France, Berlin, Germany, and Africa. This is *Heroes*’ attempt at a global-wide story, something that their opening sequence and storylines suggested but did not implement with the first series. The second series also introduced a character, Monica Dawson (Dana Davis), struggling to survive in post-Katrina New Orleans, faced with the loss of both parents and educational opportunities. In her introductory episode, news footage of the aftermath of Katrina plays over her face

(“The Kindness of Strangers” [2.4]). This seems to be *Heroes* striving for social relevance within in the narrative; however, the real social relevance is that this character’s story never significantly overlapped with any of the others, stranding her in the greater narrative arc much as the residents of New Orleans were stranded in the weeks and months following the devastation (Giroux 2006). It is only when she is brought to New York to have her powers “tested” that she begins to interact with the larger storyline, only to be taken back to New Orleans and given a product-placed iPod (“The Line” [2.6]).



**Figure 6: iPod as a training device.**

It’s a synergistic placement; Monica’s power is “muscle mimicry”; the video iPod has been loaded with videos that will help her develop her “amazing” skills, thus positioning the iPod as a key tool in making its users “amazing” as well. Monica uses what she has learned, thanks to the iPod, to attempt to clean up the crime and devastation of New Orleans. Yet, after New Orleans faded from news coverage, Monica’s storyline was given less screen time, and after the second series of the show, there have been no reappearances of this character within the terrestrial

television story. While the iPod had been used in series one in a way to tie two disparate character stories together, thereby also underscoring the ability of the product to cross international borders, it does not serve the same function within Monica's story.

These are just a few examples of how *Heroes* has worked at "defining the contours of what the brand can mean," so that "consumers are free to produce the shared meanings and social relations that the branded good will help create in their life" (Arvidsson 2005:245). Of all the various characters within the show, however, Hiro, as stated above, serves as the primary link between viewer, product, and story within *Heroes*. He is a comic book reader and well-versed in the language of fan culture and comic culture, which serves as an escape from life as a low-level functionary in a company (Yamagato Industries) that allows for no separate identity from the corporate identity; this is later shifted to Hiro's wish to do something besides run a corporation when it is revealed he is the scion of Yamagato Industries. His low-echelon position was a way for his father to teach Hiro responsibility and allow him to mature before taking over the company ("Distractions" [1.14]).

When he first discovers his powers, he tries to convince Ando, over drinks, that he is like "Spock" ("Genesis [1.1]), tying him in culturally with the original NBC science-fiction series, *Star Trek* (NBC, September 8, 1966-June 3, 1969; Desilu Productions/Paramount Television/Norway Corporation), which has a multinational cultural cachet (Davies and Pearson 2007:209-223). This points to Hiro's and *Heroes*' aspirations to be afforded the same status. When he is later arrested in New York City on suspicion of murder, he repeats the word "Spock" to identify himself, and gives the iconic Vulcan sign to the police officers ("Don't Look Back" [1.2]); the words "Spock" and "Nissan Versa" are the only ones he knows in English at that juncture. When Hiro moves forward in time and space during the first episode and ends up in New York City, his first act is to buy a comic book from a local stand; on the cover is his own arrival in New York, with what will become his catchphrase: "Yatta!" ("We did it!" in Japanese), and his entire conversation and adventure with Ando in the Japanese bar recapitulated within its pages ("Don't Look Back" [1.2]).



The important point regarding Hiro is that he is an identifiable spokesperson for both Nissan and for the show itself. Masi Oka, a computer programmer turned actor (much as Hiro is a programmer turned superhero) who plays Hiro, carried the bulk of the initial publicity work for the show, including interviews on talk shows and a cross-promotional appearance on the Aaron Sorkin-produced series *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (NBC, September 18, 2006-June 28, 2007; Shoe Money Productions/Warner Brothers), also on NBC (“The Harriet Dinner” [1.13]). He is only the most extreme example of the shows’ casting of little or unknown actors for regulars on the show<sup>156</sup>; this allows them to represent *Heroes* as their primary associative text, in the same way as McCracken illuminated above. Oka, in interviews, carried Hiro’s characterization (innocent, geeky, sweet) into the interview process, and Hiro was given a great deal of screen time in the first season.

Set against the regular cast members, *Heroes* as a show strives to further associate itself with other film and television texts through the use of the associative properties of its guest stars. To complete the *Star Trek* circuit, George Takei appears as Hiro’s father Kaito in the first series; in a knowing nod, Kaito Nakamura’s license plate on his car was NCC-1701, the registry number for the USS Enterprise in the original series. In the second series, Nichelle Nichols, who played Lieutenant Uhura on *Star Trek*, joined the cast as Nana Dawson, grandmother of Monica. Together with Hiro’s fan response to the show (mentioned not only within the show, but numerous references on “Hiro’s blog” an online adjunct during the first season of the show, including Hiro’s use of “stardates” to date the blog), it provides another historical link to *Star Trek*.

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<sup>156</sup> The “little known” actors on the show do carry some associative properties that could have drawn in certain viewers. Masi Oka had a small recurring role as Franklyn the laboratory technician during the first two seasons of *Scrubs*; Greg Grunberg (Matt Parkman) and David Anders (Takezo Kensei/Adam Munroe) played Eric Weiss and Julian Sark, respectively, on *Alias*; Adrian Pasdar (Nathan Petrelli) was the star of the cult show *Profit* (Fox, April 8-April 26, 1996; Greenwalt/McNamara Productions/Stephen J. Cannell Productions); Leonard Roberts (D. L. Hawkins) played Forrest Gates in season 4 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; and Milo Ventigimilia (Peter Petrelli) played Jess Mariano on *Gilmore Girls*. With the exception of Roberts, who shifted from playing a soldier on *Buffy* to a wrongly accused criminal on *Heroes*, Grunberg, Anders, Pasdar, and Ventigimilia’s characters within *Heroes* are similarly constructed to their previous roles, particularly Ventigimilia, who, in both series, plays a misunderstood rebel.

Other guest stars illuminate this, although they bring a different cachet with them. The mastermind Daniel Linderman, mentioned often in the first half of the first series but never seen, finally appeared in episode 18, played by Malcolm McDowell, picked in particular by creator Tim Kring because of the associations McDowell brings after playing characters such as Caligula, and, most famously, Alex DeLarge in *A Clockwork Orange*.<sup>157</sup> Kring's reason was that "After 17 episodes of building this guy up, we knew we needed an actor with a certain weight...And Malcolm certainly has weight" (Jensen 2007). Casting Christopher Eccleston as Claude, whose power was invisibility, could also be read as an attempt to cash in on a particular cultural icon that has recently re-migrated to the United States.<sup>158</sup> This becomes more clear when Claude's first word of dialogue is: "fantastic"; a nod to that word's repeated use by Eccleston during his incarnation as the Ninth Doctor in Russell T. Davies's *Doctor Who*. As with McDowell and Takei, Eccleston is placed as a product in his own right; all three stand in a marked difference to the regular cast in that they have already been encoded with particular media and cultural meanings that the show appears to use as both character shorthand and a potential lure for new viewers. Together with the (nearly) single-sponsorship of the series by Nissan, this use of the special guest star is yet another example of *Heroes*' cross-promotional tactics ranging from the earliest television tactics to the most recent. They further point to *Heroes*' positioning as a mainstream cult property, in the ways in which it uses its guest stars as a draw for a very particular kind of viewer.

*Heroes* model for branding itself and interacting with fan culture is part of the larger development that Henry Jenkins argues represents the new face of convergence culture. Jenkins argues that convergence is not just a "technological process" of media producers spawning content across "multiple media functions" but rather the connections that media consumers make (are "encouraged" to make) of connecting these different media contents. This is achieved, he argues, in the

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<sup>157</sup> Blogs too numerous to list and spanning numerous science-fiction fandoms all made reference to "ultraviolence" in regards to McDowell's casting.

<sup>158</sup> The current incarnation of *Doctor Who* airs in the United States on the satellite channel BBC America. It represents the first time the show has aired on a large scale since the original version stopped production in 1989, when *Doctor Who* aired on PBS, the public broadcasting station ("Are US PBS Stations Losing *Doctor Who*?" 2004).

consumers' minds and social interactions regarding the media product rather than through the particular "appliances" with which they consume the media in question. This "participatory culture" empowers the consumer as joining the media producer to create meaning; further, this collective process, the social network created by the media product, has the power to influence not only the media industry, but politics, law (especially in regards to fair use and copyright), military operations, and religion (Jenkins 2006:3-4). Albert Muñiz and Thomas O'Guinn agree; they push for a greater theorizing of what they term "brand communities": "members of these consumer communities enact consumption practices, influence product development, interpret the meaning of the brand (to users and nonusers alike), and otherwise fold within what used to be the corporate marketing agenda" (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2005:64). These brand communities are similar to what Jenkins terms *knowledge communities* and share many features with those gathered around cult television. That is, they define brand communities as undergoing a legitimating process similar to that of certain television fandoms—testing the knowledge of the brand to make sure the user is using it for the "right reasons." "Brand communities are generally open social organizations...but...they do have status hierarchies" (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001:419). That is, they may interact with the brand on their own terms, but still "reproduce relations of power and authority" (Jancovich and Hunt 2004:28).

Further, these communities can potentially be utilized in a marketing context, if producers tread carefully. Jenkins differentiates between what he terms "cultural convergence" and media convergence; that is, fans using different media simultaneously—the aforementioned "participatory culture" vs. producer's marketing across multiple platforms and providing viewers-users with structured interactivity, which is what *Heroes* multiplatform initiatives are seeking (Jenkins 2006:243). Indeed, *Heroes* is positioned as a television show that very explicitly positions itself as a starting point for further interaction rather than "an isolated self-contained cultural artefact" (Jenkins 2006:243).

For Jenkins, this works both ways: corporate and consumer convergence influence one another. Media corporations spawn their products across multiple

delivery channels (such as television, Internet, DVD, and iPods); consumers use these new technologies to gain power over their media. Not only in terms of viewing processes, but in the communities they create. These communities, as Jenkins discussed in greater depth in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992), have always managed to assert some level of re-interpretation over the text through the mode of fan-fiction and other fan creations, including filk music and videos. The current model of convergence, however, allows greater interaction between producer and consumer, and helps these consumers influence content.

Industry insiders use the term “extension” to refer to their efforts to expand the potential markets by moving content across different delivery systems, “synergy” to refer to the economic opportunities represented by their ability to own and control all these manifestations, and “franchise” to refer to their coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content under these new conditions. Extension, synergy, and franchising are pushing media industry to embrace convergence (Jenkins 2006:19).

*Heroes*, as a product, uses all three of these elements to promote itself; it is by no means the first or only show to do so. Yet as a genre show, it is positioned to appeal to technologically adept viewers who can use the same elements that the show takes advantage of—the Internet—to do the promotional heavy lifting. While the term *promotional* in regards to Internet content will be discussed further below, the technologically enabled viewer, and the implications of that demographic, as discussed in chapter two, does fit in with NBC’s goals—both old and new. First, NBC has sought and delivered upscale audiences to advertisers. This dates back to Brandon Tartikoff’s time as entertainment president at NBC, where he was credited with moving NBC’s key demographic from “Kmart” to “Saks Fifth Avenue” (Tartikoff and Leerhsen 1993:12) in the 1980s. As Lotz writes: “NBC’s ability to deliver viewers most highly prized by advertisers was closely tied to its ability to create distinctive programming to take certain content and scheduling risks, and it remained a key determinant of the networks cultural production” (Lotz 2007:264). While NBC struggled in the 2004-2005 season with the aforementioned loss of long-standing hits such as *Frasier* and *Friends* (Sandler 2007:291-307), *Heroes*

represented an upsurge in both viewing numbers and critical respect, at least for its first series. It also was at the forefront, as discussed throughout this chapter, of media convergence, of which affluent viewer-users would have greater opportunity, due to the cost of equipment and access, to participate in. Rather than democratizing television through these alternate platforms, *Heroes* is still positioned, regardless of delivery system, to the original demographics NBC sought under Tartikoff.

That being said, Derek Johnson argues that, in the eyes of the network, “the fan serves not as an invited guest, but rather as domestic help, invited in so as to perform labor” (D. Johnson 2007:78). Johnson’s argument concludes that while “mutliplatforming allows...audience entry into new cultural spaces,” it is an “ambiguous” positioning—that is, it is “both empowering and exploiting them” (D. Johnson 2007:78). Despite this ambiguity, viewers could still assert influence, simply by not watching, easily read in the 15% drop-off in ratings from series one to series two. Tim Kring, the creator of the show, issued an apology in *Entertainment Weekly* to the fans for the missteps in series two. He explicated the five major points in which the show had gone wrong creatively, including slow pace, overly long storylines, improperly introduced new characters, bad romantic chemistry, and lack of establishing any dramatic stakes. “The message is that we've heard the complaints—and we're doing something about it” (Jensen 2007). Yet throughout *Heroes’* final three series, it never regained the critical respect or viewing numbers of its first series.

Despite the ability of NBC to disseminate and promote *Heroes* across multiple platforms, the key figure, within this analyzed period, still remained the Nielsen rating system. Indeed, while each broadcast network noted the increased use of alternative viewing modes, such as viewing online, DVD sales, and time-shifting used DVRs, it was not until 2007, as discussed in Chapter two, that such adjunctive viewing started to drive network decisions. While earlier examples of, as per example, DVD sales garnering a renewal for *Family Guy* in 2003, or the C3 ratings incorporating DVR viewing into Nielsen numbers in 2007 (Guthrie 2007:26), the real shifts occurred after 2008, such as the renewal of *Dollhouse*, which was driven by both DVR viewing and (potential) DVD sales (Gorman 2009).

Nonetheless, the same relationship between the text and its advertising context existed within the webisodes. “Going Postal” was one of the series of webisodes; it was released in three parts of approximately three minutes each chronicling the adventures of postal worker Echo DeMille (Kiko Ellsworth), as he discovers his powers while first being chased by a dog and then is discovered by members of a secret organization that wishes to recruit and study him. The final shot of the first episode features a lingering shot of sponsor Sprint’s new touch phone.



**Figure 7: The clear picture....**

The webisodes were also preceded by an advertisement for Sprint, which mocked the practice of product placement. There is something of a confusion of meaning at work within the webisodes, due to the issues around the writer's strike. As addressed earlier, one of the main points of contention was whether online content constitute promotion or additional text. "Going Postal" integrated both a Sprint phone and a Nissan Versa within nine minutes; it also integrated one character from the terrestrial version of the series within the webisodes. They were structured both as a second-shift text as well as promotional material for Sprint, Nissan, and the series itself; as addressed earlier, despite the term *integration* and what it implies in terms of how the product is placed, each of these products call attention to themselves regardless of the platform. It is a further example of Caldwell's contention that second-shift programming used the same economic and textual models, fitted for the new platform (Caldwell 2003). "Going Postal," among the other webisodes for *Heroes* ("Destiny," "The Recruit," "Hard Knox," and "Nowhere Man") focused more intently on a single character or a single arc; each episode ranges between three and five minutes—with approximately three to five episodes devoted to character and story. Thus, its length, its status as both a story adjunct and promotional material for the series, and the product integration employed within the text positions it within a gray area between text and commercial both for the placed products and the series itself. The length of these webisodes is similar to that of a commercial break. They are thus situated to act as both an entryway paratext and an in media res paratext (Gray 2010:25), in that they can both promote the series and add dimensions to the existing terrestrial television narratives. At this second level, the line between webisodes as promotional material and webisodes as "second shift" narratives becomes further blurred.

Further, it points to the increased blurriness between text and commercials on broadcast television. The NBC network was singled out for praise for a recent commercial that featured a *Saturday Night Live* character extolling the virtues of Pepsi, written not by the advertising agency but by *Saturday Night Live* executive

producer Lorne Michaels, hearkening back to what was referred to as “vignettes”: “short commercials surround[ing] a short bit of content at the beginning and the end” (Friedman 2009) or what is referred to by some within the advertising and entertainment industries as “situ-mercials” (Steinberg 2004:B11), much like the Aquafina commercial for *Gilmore Girls*.

*Heroes* did not air webisodes until 2008, but other NBC-produced series, such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Office: An American Workplace* were asked to provide webisodes of their shows in 2006 and 2007. This content, however, was put into place without an agreed-upon economic model, either current or predictive, for what the Internet can provide in terms of value-added or actual revenues, between writers, actors, and studios. Although web content has potentially raised the profile of *Heroes*, among other series, this lack of knowledge of the potential of the Internet led to a WGA strike that halted the 2007/2008 season. As John Caldwell argued, the industry’s “instabilities” in terms of rising product costs, the heightened obsolescence of technology, and most importantly for this analysis, labour relations, serve as a larger threat to network economics than even the introduction of cable television in the 1970s (Caldwell 2003:45).

The strike began on November 5, 2007. At issue was the notion of residuals on internet- and new technology-based content, from DVD extras to downloadable episodes on iTunes or free content available online. Neither actors, writers, nor production crews received any compensation for this work, as it was classed as promotional material and thus covered under their existing contracts. The studios, on the other hand, were reluctant to commit to a percentage of money from these new technological elements, as they had not yet mined the complete cost-benefit profile of Internet and new media technology. Further, in 1985, the WGA agreed to a cut in residuals for the then-new video market, to 0.03% of profits; in the current economy, with DVDs, this amounts to about 4 cents per DVD sold. They wanted to raise that to 0.06% and include new media, in particular, downloading to unconventional mediums, such as iPods and mobile phones, within that compensation matrix. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers



(AMPTP) claimed that web- and new media content was promotional and had no profit margin, and turned down the request (Furey 2007).

The same tools the networks used to promote these series were thus appropriated by the WGA to mobilize fan communities and garner support among viewers through strike updates, blogging, and posting strike (and fake “corporate exposure”) videos on YouTube, and taking the media to task for negative portrayals of the striking workers. Joss Whedon used the blog whedonesque.com to provide updates and counteract what he felt were negative portrayals in venues such as the *New York Times*, in which they referred to the writer’s strike as having “All the trappings of a union protest...But instead of hard hats and work boots, those at the barricades wore arty glasses and fancy scarves” (Cipely, Carr, Barnes 2007). He responded with:

Oh my God. Arty glasses and fancy scarves. That is so cute! My head is aflame with images of writers in ruffled collars, silk pantaloons and ribbons upon their buckled shoes. A towering powdered wig upon David Fury’s head, and Drew Goddard in his yellow stockings (cross-gartered, needless to say). Such popinjays, we! The entire writers’ guild as Leslie Howard in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Delicious. Except this is exactly the problem. The easiest tactic is for people to paint writers as namby pamby arty scarfy posers, because it’s what most people think even when we’re not striking. Writing is largely not considered work. Art in general is not considered work. Work is a thing you physically labor at, or at the very least, hate. Art is fun. (And Hollywood writers are overpaid, scarf-wearing dainties.) It’s an easy argument to make. And a hard one to dispute (“More Joss Strike Talk” 2007).

As addressed earlier, Whedon’s response was to release a web-only musical; a collaborative effort among actors, writers, and production crew that was meant to represent a potential economic model for production and dissemination of web content (Vary 2008). The WGA strike captains started a website called United Hollywood to keep strikers and supporters informed, as well as promoting the “Pencils 2 Media Moguls” campaign, in which fans could buy a box of pencils to send to AMPTP in support of the strike, as well as banners and icons for use on blogs and

forums, such as “Pencils Down Means Pencils Down,” “I support the WGA strike,” and specialized show related ones such as “Office Fans Support the Writers.”

It was thus not only the studios that were capable of capitalizing on the technologically sophisticated and engaged viewer-user; writers and writer-producers also sought the support of these same viewers. “Inviting the audience into closer relations with the text and its production...served the interest and goals of a television industry reorganizing itself around multiplatforming” (D. Johnson 2007:68); in this instance, rather than keeping viewers within the branded multiplatform universe of a series, the WGA sought to mobilize these same engaged viewers as an adjunct union, so to speak. That being said, while the strike was resolved on February 12, 2008, with agreed-upon concessions on both sides, it is difficult to measure how much of an influence the fans had on the AMPTP, regardless of the WGA’s insistence that viewers and fans were necessary. It is more likely that the “make-goods” and returned investments to advertisers figured more heavily on the strike; that is, they announced that they would demand their money back before mid-December, as the strike means that those who have contracted for first-run programmes were not, in fact, getting what they paid for (Consoli 2007). In December 2007, NBC elected to return \$10 million in advertisers’ investments; they could thus resell the time after the strike’s resolution (Guthrie 2007:4, 29).

*Heroes*, an expensive show to produce, both in terms of cast size and in special effects and other production costs, finished a shortened second season in December 2007, and did not return to broadcast until the following season, although NBC did team up with Nissan and Sprint to provide the aforementioned webisodes of the series to “build anticipation” for the third season (Goetzl 2008), thus positioning them as promotional material. With an unexpected 10-month hiatus between seasons, a show’s brand identity and multiplatform capabilities became vitally important. Yet despite the resolution of the strike and classification of these webisodes as television text, they still served a promotional function for the series and the placed products. John Fiske argues that it is important to differentiate between programme and text; the programme operates as a “stable entity” to be commodified and sold, while the text itself is open to multiple readings (Fiske

2006:17). But where to you locate a dispersed text such as *Heroes*? The programme, the texts, and the advertisements are dispersed across multiple platforms, which should thus provide multiple entry points for engagement and even potential counter-readings. Yet for its surface messiness, its disparate flows, it seems clear that the network itself operates as a metaphorical dam that relocates viewer engagement into the area that will provide the most profit for the network. As John Caldwell argues that “*The question of audience can no longer be isolated from the issue of television’s industrial base, since television now creates and sanctions specific rituals for viewers, ones inextricably tied to new video production and home entertainment technologies*” (italics in original) (Caldwell 1995:203); said rituals, since they are “creat[ed] and sanction[ed]” by the industry, have thusly been used to objectify and market to these particular audience members.

Kompare argues that examinations of the technology of, around, and about television tends to be marginalized in analysis because television’s main purpose has been to sell audiences to advertisers, rather than selling products to viewers (Kompare 2006:337). Yet, at the most basic level, the reason television has sold audiences to advertisers is to aid in both supporting the programming on its own side; for the advertisers, they most certainly wish to sell products to viewers. The convergence of producers and viewers, of media and technology, provides new venues in which to do both. *Heroes*, and NBC itself, have successfully made use of these new venues and, in many ways, contained and professionalized (Cubitt 1991:18), these platforms to extend their properties on their terms, to address the viewer with the series and products featured therein in nearly every point of entry.

The final case study of this work will thus examine a series which debuted four years prior to *Heroes: Firefly*. Both are generically defined as science fiction, and both series’ brands flowed beyond the boundaries of the television medium. Both made extensive use of product placement within the text. It is at that point, however, where *Firefly* and *Heroes* diverge. These points of divergence are the main thrust of final case study.

## Objects in Space: Charting Boundaries and Searching for Control in a Changing Television Universe

This work has thus far addressed the technological and programmatic changes within the American broadcast television system from 2001 to 2008. Particularly, it is the ways in which brand flow has operated within each of these programmes—from fairly traditional to dispersed and reaggregated. Yet none of these programmes are purely one or the other; that is, while flow is used in a fairly standard fashion in *Gilmore Girls*—text written to the advertising breaks, serving to help the viewer tap into “consumerism proper” (Caldwell 2003:136-137), and existing entirely within the television medium—the “situ-mercial” (Steinberg 2004:B11) featuring Rory and Lorelai shares features with the dispersed flows of *Heroes* as well as the product placement as advertising break in *Arrested Development*.

The final case study perhaps represents the least pure category of all. *Firefly* utilizes each of the flows that *Gilmore Girls*, *Arrested Development*, and *Heroes* do, while featuring the highest level of product integration. The product placed within *Firefly* is the ultimate in achieved placement: it is both ubiquitous and (nearly) unnoticeable in that ubiquity. It is woven into the central narrative of the extant episodes, as well as crossing multiple platforms as the products did in *Heroes*. The central difference in *Firefly*, however, is that the products placed in *Firefly* are from a single company: a fictional corporation called Blue Sun.

This chapter will thus examine, after providing a brief background on the production and distribution of the series, how this product is worked within the central storyline of the series *Firefly*, and what its use says about the practices of advanced branding. Drawing on the work of Naomi Klein and Celia Lury, among others, I will examine how *Firefly* incorporates critiques through the Blue Sun placement, of advanced branding, globalization, corporate-sponsored education, and centralized government. It is positioned, like *Heroes*, as conscripting viewer-users into promotional activity for the series, who themselves worked across

multiple platforms and evinced a level of sophistication with television economics in order to first rescue the series from cancellation, and then attempt to aid it in moving the series to a different medium. Unlike the rest of the series examined within this work, it didn't last a full season; it also represented an odd fit for the Fox network. Thus, I will also touch on how *Firefly* was initially promoted by Fox, and its status as a Whedon property rather than a Fox property, and what that meant for the series' success or failure.

*Firefly* debuted on September 20, 2002, on the Fox television network, the third series to be developed by Joss Whedon and the first to have no antecedent; that is, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which debuted March 10, 1997, had first been introduced as a film in 1992 and was revised and re-imagined for television and *Angel* was a spin-off in which two of the three initial main characters had first been introduced on *Buffy*. The difficulties in launching a new programme on what has been called the "Friday Night Death Slot"<sup>159</sup> was compounded by a last-minute replacement of the pilot.<sup>160</sup> Gail Berman, Fox's entertainment president, claimed that the original two-hour pilot had "too much backstory." Further, as of the start of September 2002, Fox had not provided advertisers with a tape of a completed episode, which made it more difficult for any of the advertising time to be sold for the series (Frutkin 2002). The Fox network also aired the episodes out of filmed order.<sup>161</sup> There was a particular logic to the shift; a review of which episodes were chosen to air shows that the ones high on humour and action ("The Train Job [1.2]; "Jaynestown" [1.7]; and "Our Mrs. Reynolds [1.6]) were among the first four episodes aired. The preview

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<sup>159</sup> "Friday Night Death Slot" refers to the high cancellation rate of series that have debuted and aired on a Friday night. It is considered to be a difficult slot because the key demographics (viewers age 18 to 34) are expected to be out on a Friday, and the chance of pre-emption for sporting events is much higher. See: Friday Night Death Slot. TV Tropes. Available at:

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FridayNightDeathSlot>

<sup>160</sup> Pilot replacement had also occurred with *Heroes*; the original pilot featured a story about a terrorist, Amid Halebi, whose superpower was being able to emit radiation from his hands and was involved in a plot to attack New York City again. This was considered too controversial, and was eliminated from the pilot; other elements were either condensed, revised, or redistributed to other episode (TVAddict 2006).

<sup>161</sup> To avoid confusion, when referencing an episode, I will refer to the episode number as that which was originally intended and restored when the series was released on DVD, rather than the order in which they were aired.

promotional advertisements foreshadowed this strategy—focusing on the more spectacular effects, gun fights, and one-liners, as well as describing the characters as “space cowboy” or “space hooker”—all under the tag “Out There? Oh, It’s Out There!” While such a promotional campaign and scheduling strategy was in line with Fox’s own “edgy” brand (Kimmel 2004; Grego 2008:2, 32), it thus violated what was associated with Whedon-branded programmes—strong continuity, feminist themes, consistent characterization, and sharp dialogue—particularly the paired issues of continuity and characterization. To air in the wrong order a programme that depends on seriality to establish these elements runs the risk of confusing and potentially alienating the audience, as both plot and characterization can thus be seen as sloppy, redundant, or nonexistent. Despite the following expected from fans of Whedon’s previous work, and the fact that *Firefly* represented an in-house 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox programme airing on the Fox Network, its ratings remained low and the show was cancelled on December 20, 2002, after 11 of its 14 filmed episodes had aired.

*Firefly* held the generic definition of a space western, much as *Star Wars* (May 25, 1977; Lucasfilm) and its subsequent sequels and prequels. An opening narration to the series included in the broadcast explained the background of the diagesis of *Firefly*: Earth had been “used up” by a large population upsurge, and was thus abandoned for a new galaxy. New planets were “terraformed” for human life and united under a central government, and a war ensued. Within the diagesis of *Firefly*, however, the losing side, known as either Independents or, derogatorily, as Browncoats (based on the nearly identical brown coats they wore) (“The Train Job” [1.2]) were attempting to fight centralized control rather than support an outmoded economic and social system based on slave labour, as will become more clear in the episode analyses below. Set in the 25<sup>th</sup> century, the world of *Firefly* blends an American and Chinese government known as the Alliance of Allied Planets. There is a clear economic and social/class divide between the centrally located planets and what are called “border” planets; the central planets have technology, money, and bureaucracy. The border planets have limited resources and are prone to abuses by

opportunists<sup>162</sup> or colonists.<sup>163</sup> Others are left to their own devices despite economic or environmental problems. In the episode “The Train Job” [1.2], the environmental consequences of the mining industry of Paradiso (a place that inevitably suggests its opposite—Inferno—particularly as flames occasionally burst from the ground) has caused each individual living there to develop a degenerative bone and muscle disease, even if they work outside the industry. In “Jaynestown,” Magistrate Higgins (Gregory Itzin) keeps his indentured workers in poverty and despair “so’s we can pass them savings to you-the-customer” (1.7). “Trash” features a robbery of a man, Durren Haymer (Dwier Brown), who was a collector of “Earth That Was” artifacts; during the war, he bombed areas rich in these artifacts in order to claim them for himself, a type of war profiteering (1.11).

Thus, *Firefly*’s text was able to incorporate critiques of globalization, advanced branding, and to some extent, notions of empire. I am using the term *empire* in the sense that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri defined it: Imperialism represents an extension of nation-states’ own sovereignty across borders, whereas empire is defined as a “decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt and Negri 2000:xii). It is the project of neo-liberal globalization, with an American constitutional base, according to Hardt and Negri, which differs the old European imperialism from this new notion of empire. The text of *Firefly* supports this definition; as Mal defines the Alliance: “Unite the planets under one rule so everyone can be interfered with or ignored equally” (“The Train Job” [1.2]). This point is made several times within the text of *Firefly*; any planets on the borders of the universe are left to their own devices unless it benefits the central authority. The border planets are generally more rural, less technologically enabled, and often prone to harsh or unlivable conditions. Both English and Mandarin

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<sup>162</sup> The first episode features a woman named Patience who has used whatever means at her disposal to not “part with money [she] don’t have to”; as a consequence, she owns the majority of the planet she inhabits (“Serenity” [1.1]).

<sup>163</sup> Although never explicitly referred to as a “colonist,” the episode “Heart of Gold” features an antagonist named Rance Burgess (Frederic Lehne), who is both rich and (apparently) fundamentalist Christian. On his planet, most live in poverty while he makes a profit and attempts to control those who disagree with him or offend his morals (“Heart of Gold” [1.13]).

Chinese are the official languages and are both spoken within the series<sup>164</sup>; this cuts across social and class boundaries.

The main focus of the series involves nine characters aboard a spaceship. This microcosmic society is a mixture of passengers and crew members: Captain Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan Fillion), First Mate Zoe Washburne (Gina Torres), pilot Hoban “Wash” Washburne (Alan Tudyk), mechanic Kaylee Frye (Jewel Staite), and muscle/mercenary Jayne Cobb (Adam Baldwin). The crew has varying levels of involvement (Kaylee and Wash mostly by association) with criminal activity that provides fuel, food, and other necessary amenities. It is clear that such activity is often politically motivated; that is, to “stick a thorn in the paw of the Alliance,” “tickles” Mal (“Safe” [1.5]), who lost social and spiritual direction in the wake of his side’s defeat. The trajectory of the series begins when the ship takes on passengers: a priest known as Shepherd Derrial Book (Ron Glass), a physician named Simon Tam (Sean Maher), and Simon’s troubled, fugitive sister River Tam (Summer Glau). Inara Serra (Morena Baccarin) occupies a liminal space; she is a long-term renter of one of the ship’s shuttles, but it is difficult to categorize her as either crew or passenger. She is known as a Companion (that is, prostitute), a legal and well-regarded position within the diagesis of the show. She has connections through her profession with high-level members of the central planets that allow her to help crew members out of legal trouble (“The Train Job” [1.2]) or provide much-needed assistance, like medical equipment (“War Stories” [1.10]). Although she is neither in the psychiatric nor religious profession, she also at times functions as counselor or spiritual/moral guide to various crew and passengers (“Serenity” [1.1]; “Out of Gas” [1.8]). All share a desire to exist outside society and thereby outside of control.

The series focuses more generally on the adventures of the crew and passengers of this ship. Various storylines included allusions to both Book’s (“Safe” [1.5]; “War Stories” [1.10]; “Objects in Space” [1.14]) and Mal’s (“Our Mrs. Reynolds” [1.6]) mysterious pasts; the effect of the War of Independence on Mal and Zoe (“Serenity” [1.1]; “The Message” [1.12]); issues in and around Zoe and Wash’s

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<sup>164</sup> Chinese was primarily used in the series for either terms of endearment or for swear words not allowed on American broadcast television.



marriage (“War Stories” [1.10]; “Heart of Gold” [1.13]); Kaylee’s infatuation with Simon (“Serenity” [1.1]; “Safe” [1.5]; “The Message” [1.12]), the unspoken sexual and emotional tension between Mal and Inara (“Out of Gas” [1.8]; “Heart of Gold” [1.13]); and Jayne’s violence and self-interest in his interaction with passengers and crew (“Serenity” [1.1]; “Ariel” [1.8]). Within the available episodes, however, the common thread running through is the shared story of Simon and River Tam. For the purposes of this case study, I too will focus on this story thread. In particular, it is River’s relationship and response to the product placement of the goods of a fake corporation called Blue Sun within the series that will comprise my analysis. While less explicit within the film *Serenity*, I will also briefly touch on how the use and non-use of product placement operates within that context and how this placed product shifts across multiple platforms.

In terms of the series itself, the lack of real products integrated into the text, and *Firefly*’s status, similar to *Arrested Development*, as a DVD text, and the use of viewer-users and the industry extending the world of the series across multiple platforms open up the possibility of a “brokerage” (Corner 1999:13), of industry and viewers working cooperatively, rather than one or the other maintaining the majority of the power over the text. Whether these possibilities reached their full potential (that is, viewers/writers/producers as co-creators) or whether they merely provided free labour (D. Johnson 2007:77) ends up as a somewhat unanswerable question, or rather, the answer shifts in relation to who is being asked. Jonathan Gray’s analysis of Whedon’s author persona with regards to his interactions with fans is instructive. Gray claims that within interviews, Whedon positions himself as both fan and creator, as author and reader and thus, in essence, “kills himself as author”—along with other television authors such as Jane Espenson, Rob Thomas, or Eric Kripke<sup>165</sup>—and instead serves as “mediators

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<sup>165</sup> While not discussed in Gray’s account, Eric Kripke seemingly writes himself into the text of his series *Supernatural*, as the character of Chuck Shurley, author of the *Supernatural* book series. Chuck mirrors Kripke’s own insertion by writing himself into his books, similar to, as mentioned in the series, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* (Vonnegut 1973). Not only is Chuck soon revealed as a prophet of the Lord, writing the “Gospel of Winchester” (“The Monster at the End of This Book”

between the industry and audiences” as well as functioning as a “discursive entity used by the industry to communicate messages about its texts to audiences, by the creative personnel often conflated into the image of the author(s) to communicate their own messages to audiences, and by audiences to communicate messages both to each other and to the industry” (Gray 2010:113). While Whedon may position himself as responsive to fans, he also must be responsive to the networks, producers, and potential advertisers. That being said, the positioning of Whedon as author/reader and creator/fan, can serve to, in many instances, exonerate him from blame for narrative missteps or faulty execution. If, as Robert Thompson argues, one marker of a quality programme is undergoing a “noble struggle” against “profit-mongering networks and unappreciative audiences” (Thompson 1997:14), the fraught nature of each Whedon-created series (*Buffy*: cancelled by the WB over licensing fees; *Angel*: moved around the schedule and cancelled despite being the second highest-rated WB series among 18-49-year-old viewers; *Firefly*: see above; and *Dollhouse*, whose narrative of network struggle mirrors that of *Firefly*), then Whedon himself can thus be viewed as a quality brand.<sup>166</sup> His outspoken arguments in favour of the WGA strike, active support of Equality Now (a human rights organization that “works for the protection and promotion of human rights of women around the world” [Equality Now “About”]), and his campaign against “torture porn” (Whedon 2007) also have given Whedon a certain cachet among fans (not to argue that this is Whedon’s reason for the aforementioned actions). Thus, the evocation of his name for each televised promo for *Firefly*, as well as the promotional material for the later DVD release and film, would carry its own resonances beyond the series or network.

*Firefly* was not picked up by another network, but the popularity of the series when it was released on DVD lead to Universal studios agreeing to produce a film

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[4.18]], but the episode “Swan Song” (5.22) suggests that Chuck might in fact be God. Taken with Chuck’s earlier comments in the same episode, regarding how the “fans will always bitch,” Kripke’s response would thusly put the author above the fan quite significantly.

<sup>166</sup> For an analysis of the positioning of Russell T. Davies, Phil Collinson, and Stephen Moffat as both fans and producers of *Doctor Who*, see Hills, who argues that the “new Who carries a fan-cultural, egalitarian approach to authorship,” as opposed to the auteur-based discourses around US quality television (2010:30).

that served as a continuation of the television story.<sup>167</sup> The last episode of *Firefly* to air on a US network was its pilot episode, “Serenity” [1.1]. The name was derived from the name of the ship upon which the majority of the action of the series was centered, and later served as the name for the feature film that served as a continuation of the story that abruptly ended after 14 episodes. The word, in both English and Chinese, was made into a logo painted on the side of the ship that introduces the feature film, put on a badge worn and distributed by fans of the show in order to help publicize the film, and used within the studio’s own marketing materials. The film itself did not garner blockbuster numbers,<sup>168</sup> but subsequently, fans have mobilized worldwide to provide screenings scheduled on director/creator Joss Whedon’s birthday in June, as well as various times throughout the year, in order to raise money for Equality Now.<sup>169</sup>

In their analysis of the shifts in the conceptions of the culture industry in the wake of globalization, Scott Lash and Celia Lury sought to examine the “mediation of things,” or, as they term it, the “thingification” of culture, in which brands become humanized and humans become branded; for example, Nike shoes become humanized (or fetishized) in their own Niketown, while Michael Jordan is turned into Air Jordan (Lash and Lury 2007:124). This “thingification” is an important element of the interaction between the placed products and the individuals within the world of *Firefly*, as will become apparent below.

For the purposes of this work, what made both the show and film different was the lack of any real-world product placement; that is, neither *Firefly* (series) nor *Serenity* (film) contained any products that existed within American 21<sup>st</sup> century society. This, of course, was made easier by setting the world of the series within a 25<sup>th</sup> century society; that, however, does not preclude the presence of recognized 21<sup>st</sup> century products from appearing and, by their presence, attesting to the

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<sup>167</sup> For coverage of the fan efforts, see Russell (2005) and Chonin (2005:E1).

<sup>168</sup> *Serenity*’s total worldwide gross was \$38,869,464; its domestic opening weekend, with a wide release in 2,189 theaters, was \$10,086,680, positioning it as only the second highest grossing movie for the week of September 30, 2005. Available at:

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=serenity.htm>

<sup>169</sup> Since 2006, these *Serenity* screenings have raised more than \$160,000 in donations for Equality Now for these screenings. Available at: <http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com>

longevity of the brand.<sup>170</sup> Yet the products they did place, that is, food, drinks, t-shirts, and trash with the logo for the fictional corporation Blue Sun, in fact served as a critique on the practice itself because of the corporation's position within the storyline of the series *Firefly*, as well as a culmination of the placement itself. That is, if the purpose, on the part of the sponsoring corporation, is to incorporate a product within a series to the extent that it is an integral part of the story in order to influence behaviour (Russell and Stern 2006:7-18; Russell 2002:306-318), Blue Sun products did indeed achieve that within the series. Indeed, they were responsible, as will be seen in the episode analyses below, for educating River. As Arvidsson writes:

Brand management moves on a continuum from the highly structured brandscape or branded community where the whole environment serves to guide the consumer in a certain direction; via the 'politics of product placement', where a looser structure of expectations is created by inserting the brand into particular milieus; to, on the opposite extreme, the simple saturation of the life-world, paralleled by forms of overall macro surveillance, like trend-scouting or data-mining (Arvidsson 2006:95).

Blue Sun products indeed managed what no real world product has yet—"simple saturation of the life-world" of *Firefly*. They face no competition within the diagenesis of *Firefly* because they are the only "sponsor" and perhaps the only existing corporation within the world of *Firefly* itself. The story of River Tam could not be told without Blue Sun products, representing a high level of integration.

This storyline was not directly addressed with the film *Serenity*; it was instead addressed within the graphic novel series *Serenity: Those Left Behind*, which served as a narrative bridge between the television series and the film. In the graphic novels, it was revealed that Blue Sun and the Alliance government worked

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<sup>170</sup> See, as per example, the film *Minority Report* (June 21, 2002; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation/Dreamworks SKG/Cruise/Wagner Productions), set in 2054, but featuring product placements such as American Express, Aquafina, Ben and Jerry's, Burger King, Gap, Guinness, Nokia, and Pepsi, to name a few; *Total Recall* (June 1, 1990; Carolco Pictures/Tristar Pictures), set in 2084, which included placements of Hilton Hotels, Pepsi, and Killians Red beer, among others; *Demolition Man* (October 8, 1993; Silver Pictures), set in 2032, where every restaurant is a Taco Bell and every car is made by General Motors; and *The Fifth Element* (May 7, 1997; Gaumont Film Company), set in a mid 23<sup>rd</sup> century that still has Coca-Cola and McDonalds.

in concert with one another. As Lury writes: “[T]he rise of the brand is linked to the privatization of the economic functions of the state” (Lury 2004:10). Lury’s assertion fits in well with *Those Left Behind*’s storyline, in that it makes it explicit that power is thus shared between the centralized government and this large corporation. If brands are the “core meaning of the modern corporation” (Klein 2002:5), then a government-condoned corporation responsible for training “genius” children as assassins and its ubiquity within the diagnosis of *Firefly* makes clear that the Blue Sun brand has not only “intervened in the existing code” of a targeted community (Twitchell 1996:13) or “sponsor[ed] culture,” but has in fact become the culture (Klein 2002:30). That is, “[W]hat is ultimately branded in advertising is not the object but the consumer” (Twitchell 1996:110). If Rory and Lorelai served as metonyms for the placed products and appropriate consumption within *Gilmore Girls*, the Bluths’ valorized it through both the DVD format and its satirical stance, and Hiro Nakamura transubstantiated it by helping make the Nissan Versa another character within the series, than River Tam, as consumed and objectified by the “sponsor” Blue Sun, represents an embodied “culture jam”—both branded and the anti-brand.

### **Shindig**

This episode begins in a bar, over a game of pool and a discussion of slavery. Indeed, such a discussion informs how the concerns of the episode’s narrative will unfold. Mal listens to his opponent explain how to prepare a ship for the rapid traffic of human slaves: “Stronger locks, thicker doors, keep everybody where they’re s’posed to be. Don’t even need more rations.” Mal responds by stealing the man’s wallet, justifying the theft to Inara as appropriate since it was “earned...with the sweat of their slave-trading brows” [1.4]. Not only does this serve to more clearly situate the show’s protagonists as anti-slavery,<sup>171</sup> it also underlines Mal’s particular moral

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<sup>171</sup> Given Whedon’s contention that the inspiration for *Firefly* was his reading of *The Killer Angels* (Shaara 1996), a fictionalized account of the Battle of Gettysburg, and the structural similarities between the succeeded Southern States, and the Browncoats in *Firefly* (Whedon 2005:8), it was important to make this distinction, given the economic base of the southern United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was slavery.

code; that is, playing Robin Hood. He never explicitly states he disagrees with these men; it is his actions that indicate his ethics.

This represents one of the central themes of this episode: actions speak louder than words. Further, that words themselves can be fundamentally distrustful. Much like the second episode I'll be analyzing, "Ariel," the majority of episode is set amid the society of a central planet. Within the context of an exclusive dinner dance, Mal acts the role of a gentleman in order to secure an illegal smuggling job from a man who is a titled member of that society. Kaylee, who spends the majority of her time in jumpsuits and other attire appropriate for working in the dirt and grease of an engine room, dresses in an overly frilly dress to play the role of a lady. Rejected by the upper-class women at the party, she ends up in a group of fascinated men talking about engines. She is the least able within this context to "playact" as the others do. Mal is slightly more successful; he secures the smuggling job and dances adequately with Inara, only to revert to form by punching Inara's escort, exclaiming that "I guess this is my kind of party after all." Said escort, Atherton Wing (Edward Atterton), is socially smooth and flattering when necessary, but responds to Mal's violence by challenging him to a duel. As a mark of the "old money" that Wing represents, it is a swordfight. Given the fact that it was Wing's referring to Inara as a "whore" that prompted the violent response in Mal, any phallogocentric interpretations of "swordfight" are most likely intentional. Within this episode, and the series itself, it is only Inara who can most easily move between worlds, men, and society with seeming ease and comfort. Much like commercial messages themselves, her demeanor and comments represent a space for a variety of interpretations.

Indeed, the parallels between Inara and River are not difficult to make. They both attend "academies" that train them to be of use; in Inara's case, music, art, and language education are necessary components to her profession, in that such education is meant to make Inara a more attractive commodity. If, as Pierre Bourdieu argues, consumption is a stage-in-process that "presupposes practice or explicit mastery of a cipher or code" (Bourdieu 1987:2), than Inara's high-level education both codifies her and serves as an explicit marker of how she should be consumed. When the ship *Serenity* and its crew are threatened by a manipulative

criminal named Saffron (Christine Hendricks), Inara's mastery is able to decipher Saffron's true intentions because they were educated in the same way: "She had training. As in Companion. As in Academy" ("Our Mrs. Reynolds [1.6]). While Saffron uses this training for confidence games, Inara's education is supposed to be in service to a client. Thus, Inara is as branded and commodified by the Alliance as River is—she serves as an "open-ended" site whose meaning shifts depending on the needs of the purchaser (Lury 2004:46-47). There is truly only one demographic that is favoured, however; that of the upper middle class. She is a commodity only available to a favoured group.

That being said, if Inara is one "face" of the Alliance brand, that thus "rel[ies] upon the participation of the consumer," it is also true that she is capable of "plac[ing] severe limits on interactions with them" (Lury 2004:137). In this episode, she informs Wing that his behaviour towards her has earned him a "black mark in the client registry...[n]o Companion is ever going to contract with you again." This is the point in which Inara and River diverge in their shared "object-ivity": Inara is an "intermediary" between product (the ruling corporate/governmental structure) and user (the client) of which Lury's "face-to-profile" model represents a good fit. River, as will be addressed in greater depth below, cannot be controlled within the brand boundaries.

River also represents a human commodity. When she is introduced, she is a thing; she is literally frozen, boxed, and shipped. It is clear that this is an intentional introduction; as River's story unfolds, she too has been commodified and objectified as part of an experiment to train "genius" children to be psychic assassins. It extends further than that; she is referred to as a "witch" ("Safe" [1.5]) and "a gift" ("Serenity" [1.1]), as well as the subject of numerous queries with regards to *what* she is and what she is capable of. The government (and by extension, Blue Sun) considers her a "precious commodity" ("Serenity" [1.1]). In the final episode of the series, River claims (and nearly convinces the antagonist of the episode) that she has actually

become the ship *Serenity*. River's object-ification<sup>172</sup> and liminal quality allows this to actually be considered a possibility. The title of the episode itself, "Objects in Space" positions River as one of the objects in question; a highly trained psychic assassin who sees a gun as a tree branch: "It's just an object. It doesn't mean what you think..." ("Objects in Space" [1.14]). By "object-ifying" herself as the ship by the end of the episode, she thus takes control of her own object-ification to avoid being manipulated by what's been done to her by others. As Celia Lury explains it: "[T]he object-ivity of the brand emerges out of relations between its parts, or rather its products (or services), and in the organization of a controlled relation to its environment—that is, to markets, competitors, the state, consumption, and everyday life" (Lury 2004:2). That is, it is not just the object that is being branded, but rather its very relationship to consumers and societies attempted to be managed by its creators.<sup>173</sup> The fact that within the text of *Firefly*, River Tam, a product of a corporate-sponsored school, is nearly impossible to manage, means she would be considered an embarrassment to the Blue Sun brand, particularly if product placements are intended to serve as "testimonials" for a product, providing a "halo effect" for the item being placed (Berger 2004:70). In this way, River represents the ultimate in "culture jamming": "the practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their messages" (Klein 2002:280).

Further, as I will examine more closely in my discussion of the episode "Ariel," River does not necessarily, as Alyson Buckman argues, exist or act within a linear time frame (Buckman 2008:44). In this way, River's behaviour is similar to what Barry Lowe refers to as the approaching "post-linearity" of multimedia, including television, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as aided by new technologies and viewers who use these technologies to assert some degree of control (Lowe 1996), much as John Fiske (Fiske 2006:101) and Henry Jenkins (2006) have argued. Similar to these

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<sup>172</sup> The grammatical splitting within this word is from Lury (2004); it useful for emphasizing the "objectness" of brands, goods, and services.

<sup>173</sup> Whedon's next television series, *Dollhouse*, addresses this even more explicitly; certain humans are divested of their personalities and imprinted with others at the request of wealthy clientele, developed and funded by a corporation named Rossum (deliberating echoing Karel Capek's *RUR*). The correspondences of River's story to the premise of *Dollhouse* are suggested in a fake Rossum advertisement, which featured a blue sun rising over the earth (Rossum Corporation Channel 2009).



technologies, River uses the same “circular or fluid structure for the information [she] store[s] and deliver[s]” (Fiske 2006:101). Within this episode, River rip the labels off of Blue Sun products, muttering:

There it is, there it is. It’s always there if you look for it. Everybody sees and nobody sees it...These are the ones that take you! Little ones in the corner that you almost don’t see. But they’re the ones that reach in and do it. They’re the ones with teeth and you have to smash them!...A million things, and the little ends of the roots go everywhere and when you brush your teeth or all the little blue things are there but no one says it because, because sometimes they’re afraid. And then they come...

Such a monologue is particularly applicable to the practice of product placement; in the past decade, it indeed is “always there if you look for it,” but seeks to be unobtrusive enough to be both seen and unseen. River does in fact “see” the product and attempts to reduce it to its essentials, to make these specifically branded products a “mystery,” in Book’s words, much as the corporation’s actions towards her have made a mysterious (and potentially dangerous) figure to the rest of the small society of Serenity. She is only partially successful—the Blue Sun logo is stamped on the top of each can, meaning while the particular product is rendered mysterious, the corporation that produced it cannot be erased. Thus the company’s slogan—“Live Life With Blue Sun” (“The Message [1.13])—is not just their desire but in fact a testament to the corporation’s ubiquity. It is also clear that, if in fact River “post-linearity” resembles the viewer-user’s response to multimedia flows of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she is taking an active stance within this episode to respond to the overwhelming presence of these products within her world.

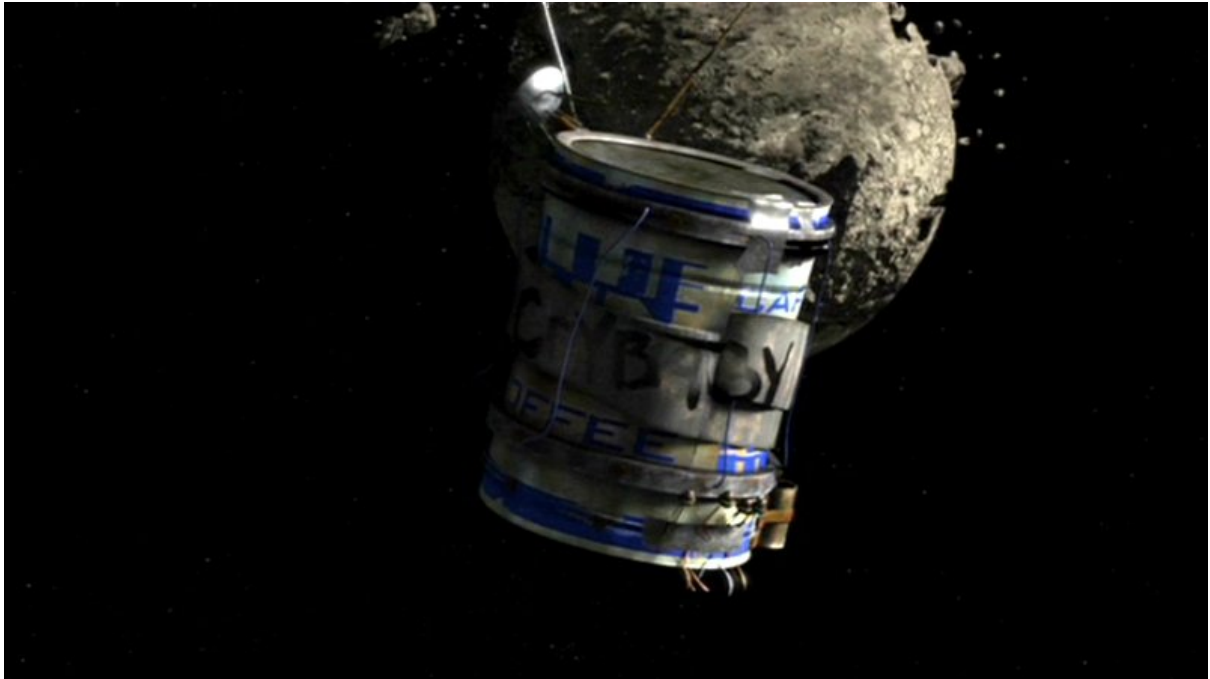


**Figure 1. River removing labels; Blue Sun's logo is present on top of the cans.**

Buckman further argues, in her analysis of River, that it is the societally patterned way of viewing River (or any “hysterical” female) that keeps those around her from making sense of her behaviour (Buckman 2008). In particular, her brother, as an Alliance-trained surgeon, is thus quick to label River’s actions as mentally ill or out of control. I would further argue, to tie this vital scene with the episode’s focus on role-playing, that it is in fact River’s capacity to “see” the messages behind the labels that makes her actions difficult to understand by others. That is not to imply that she is incapable of playing a part. When River encounters Badger (Mark Sheppard), the criminal who sent Mal to the party to line up the smuggling operation and then took over the ship to make sure Mal did not attempt to escape the duel (as Badger has ties to the community that Mal does not), she easily slips into the accent of Badger’s home planet. Badger is amused and charmed at her disparaging attitude toward him, thereby nullifying the danger to herself and her brother. River is thus capable of a variety of responses to the endless messages she receives.

**Ariel**

Several episodes of *Firefly* attested to the ubiquity of the Blue Sun Corporation with the diagesis of the series, as indicated above. “Serenity” [1.1] featured coffee cans, refitted as “cry babies”<sup>174</sup> that were clearly marked with the Blue Sun logo.



**Figure 2. The Blue Sun “Crybaby.”**

It also appeared in that same episode on a storage facility in the Eavesdown Docks on the planet Persephone. The episode “The Message” (1.12) features a Blue Sun cola advertisement playing on a monitor; the one-off character, Tracey (Jonathan Woodward), also is shown to have a Blue Sun tattoo on his shoulder, perhaps signaling that he was, as proven through the events on the episode, not to be trusted, as he is literally branded with the dominant economic power. Although the film did not deal explicitly with the Blue Sun story line, its logo appears twice on beverages, and an advertisement for a product called “Fruity Oaty Bars” features a blue sun. As was indicated in the previous analysis, the food products the crew

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<sup>174</sup> “Cry babies” were defined as useless objects fitted with technology that would mimic a ship distress signal; these were used to evade Alliance authority both in the episode “Serenity” (1.1) and the film *Serenity*.

consume are all manufactured by Blue Sun. “Ariel” adds yet another product to their line; the neuro-imager Simon uses to scan his sister’s brain in the episode carries a Blue Sun label.



**Figure 3. Blue Sun’s diversified products; the logo is clear on the scan.**

Given the diversity of products and the story that unfolds within this episode, Blue Sun seems to fit quite well into William Gibson’s “megacorporation”; that is, a horizontally and vertically integrated company diversified across multiple product areas, with enough economic power to supersede governmental control and flout legal restrictions (Gibson 1984). According to Whedon, Blue Sun was intended to be viewed as a cross between Coca-Cola and Microsoft.<sup>175</sup> Further, the sun can appear “blue” after volcanic explosions, forest fires, or dust storms, due to the dust, smoke, and other particulates. Such a phenomenon is fairly common in China, again tying together the governmental and corporate relationship between China and the United States within the world of *Firefly*.

<sup>175</sup> “Serenity” [commentary track]. *Firefly: The Complete Series*.

The main thrust of the episode involves Simon enlisting the crew to break into an Alliance hospital on the planet Ariel. He wants to access the appropriate medical equipment to figure out what has been done to his sister so he can best treat her. The payment for the job will be stealing monetarily valuable medicine from the hospital itself to sell on the black market. After procuring identification tags and the appropriate uniforms, Wash and Kaylee raid a junkyard and manage to salvage and rebuild an ambulance ship, and Simon teaches and continually tests Mal, Jayne, and Zoe on the appropriate medical terms. Simon and River are injected with drugs to simulate death and snuck into the hospital. Again the emphasis is on playing parts: Mal, Zoe, and Jayne must impersonate paramedics, while River and Simon literally play dead. When Simon is able to view River's brain on the neuro-imager, he discover that this corporation-sponsored school had sliced into her brain several times in order to "strip her amygdale; she feels everything, she can't not."

Although the pilot episode (and River's own behaviour and memories) gestured toward the Blue Sun Corporation as being a less-than-benign corporation, it is within this episode that it becomes clear that they both supersede the government and are not above murder to maintain control and recapture River. Nor is River herself above violence when faced even with something as seemingly benign as the company's logo. At the start of the episode, she slices Jayne with a knife, right across the Blue Sun logo on his t-shirt, saying "He looks better in red."



**Figure 4. Jayne’s logo marks him out for violence and betrayal.**

Jayne’s wearing of this t-shirt further foreshadowed Jayne’s betrayal of River and Simon to the government within the same episode; an action which Buckman reads as a manifestation of River’s psychic abilities as well as her actions and reactions existing outside of linear time. That is, she is avenging a future betrayal through her actions (Buckman 2008:44). This does not, however, take into account that River’s action precipitated the betrayal itself.

This episode is also notable for representing the ultimate in brand management: blue-gloved agents of the Blue Sun corporation appear to silence anyone who had contact with River. This is achieved with a small blue light that emits a pulse that causes some kind of cerebral hemorrhage. Those who are exposed to it bleed from eyes, ears, mouth, and nose (that is, all sensory organs) before they die. Since the majority of those killed by these blue-gloved men within the episode were government employees, there is a clear inference that the power of the Blue Sun corporation had superseded that of the government itself. As Naomi Klein writes, in her analysis of the rise of brands in the 1990s and beyond: “Financial self-interest in business is nothing new, nor is it in itself destructive. What is new is the

reach and scope of these megacorporations' financial self-interest, and the potential global consequences, in both international and local terms" (Klein 2002:174). It is also in line with Robert McChesney analysis of "deregulation," which he claims is a misleading term. He argues that it is in fact differently regulated; governmental regulations that work primarily in the interest of corporations rather than citizens (McChesney 2004:19-20). A corporation that has the power to train children to be assassins, kill government employees, and diversify their corporations across multiple areas would arguably have benefited from initial governmental support, much as the current telecommunications industries within the United States have benefited from corporation-friendly legislation, including the lifting of ownership restrictions caps on media outlets (newspapers, radio stations, television networks) that allowed the development of the Fox network (Kimmel 2004) and later the WB, UPN, and the CW (Curtin and Shattuc 2010:26-27).

While the text of *Firefly* remains limited to the 14 extant episodes and one feature film, the idea that the corporation itself had some sort of ultimate goal in their training of brilliant children to be assassins was foreshadowed in the lengths these agents went to within the existing television text as well as within the graphic novels (Whedon and Matthew 2005) that served as a bridge text between the series and the film, which made a more explicit connection between the Blue Sun Corporation and the Alliance government, and set up the main plot of *Serenity*.

This story line was not continued to the same extent within the feature film. The main thrust of the plot of *Serenity* was the pursuit of River by a government operative before she can recall or disseminate any governmental secrets, but only after Blue Sun was unable to capture the Tams (Whedon and Matthew 2005). The government, known as the Alliance, is in fact an alliance between China and the United States; as the figure below shows, the current flags of these two countries were blended to create the "Alliance" flag.



**Figure 5: The Alliance Flag**

This is significant point in terms of the political concerns of the series and film; the United States and China are currently entangled on several economic levels (Klugman 2004). In something of a reversal from the text of the series, much of River's mental illness is attributed to her psychic awareness of a governmental programme that cost the lives of millions and was responsible for turning a select group of individuals into the ultimate consumers: the cannibalistic Reavers. Once the secret is exposed and the government (not the corporation) is weakened, River regains some level of mental balance. Although not as deeply explained in the feature film, it does engage with some similar concerns to the series. Not only are River's killer instincts triggered by subliminal messages within a commercial (which prominently features a blue sun), but the crew of Serenity uses the equipment of a "hacker" by the name of Mr. Universe (David Krumholtz) (whose motto is "You can't stop the signal") to disseminate the government secret, captured on film, to the entire universe. This too falls under the definition of culture jamming; as Norman Cowie defines it: "Media piracy sets out to take apart mass-media texts, and recombine their signifying elements..., all in the spirit of producing new and unexpected meanings and pleasures for readers who are already fluent in the modes of address of mass culture" (Cowie 2000:319). To Cowie, media piracy questions issues of "cultural ownership, First Amendment freedoms, and political authority";



most importantly, with regards to the texts of *Firefly* and *Serenity*: “In an age when corporations invoke the First Amendment to protect their right to sell anything to anyone in any place at any time, media piracy ask about protection for citizens who wish to speak back using the same language” (Cowie 2000:320).

With the announcement of the cancellation of the series, the viewers it did have used the multiple entry points that NBC used to promote *Heroes* to convince the Fox network to reconsider, including cards, sending objects, developing websites, and exchanging downloads or discs, prosthetizing the series to non-viewers. These efforts were initially unsuccessful; it was not until the releases of the series on DVD in December 2003—that is, when the flow text had been successfully converted to published text and therefore existed as a tangible property (Kompere 2006:343), that these efforts began to succeed. The fan-produced documentary *Done the Impossible* (July 28, 2006; *Done the Impossible*) clearly indicates a sophistication with the economic realities of broadcast television on the part of these viewers. The biggest and most successful initiatives of the grassroots campaign for *Firefly* was buying one or more copies of the DVD box set. The sale numbers of the DVD represented the tipping point that convinced Universal Studios to produce the feature film (Russell 2005; Chonin 2005:E1).

Further, in a structurally similar move to providing a preview of *Heroes*' pilot episode within cinemas and offering gift cards for downloading the pilot off of iTunes (Friedman 2006; Lafayette 2006), Universal held a series of sold-out screenings in major cities, including San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, four months before the actual release date, as well as offering prizes to those who brought in the most new viewers (Jensen 2005:20). All featured a filmed thank you to the Browncoats from Whedon for their efforts—some screenings were also introduced by cast members, thus blurring the borders of the television and film text. It further stands as an example of the use of DVDs to develop a “new commodity relation” between viewers and producers (Kompere 2006:335). Both the DVD release of the series making *Firefly* tangible and its transit to a separate platform (film) thus allows *Firefly* to transcend its broadcast roots and its associated

flow—making *Firefly* an object as well, rather than a moment within the endless flow of television.

*Firefly's* text, particularly through River Tam, represents a thoroughgoing, multi-episode critique of product placement, advanced branding, and corporate control. *Firefly* fans, as well, exercised social and economic power, through both promotional efforts and through their own purchases, in helping transit the series to a different medium.

That being said, the question of fan influence is relevant to *Firefly*. Chapter five touched on whether fan efforts influenced the outcome of the writer's strike, as the WGA claimed, or if looming "give-backs" networks needed to make to advertisers exerted stronger pressure. In this case, was *Firefly* transitioned to *Serenity* because of a built-in audience responsive to the Whedon brand, or because this same audience was willing to purchase goods and provide free promotional labour?

I would argue that there is no reasonable way to separate these elements. Much as River "feels everything" because of her interaction with and colonization by the Blue Sun brand, all of these elements inform both *Firefly's* diegetic world, the broadcast context, and the series's afterlife. As Lury writes: "The organization, coordination, and integration of probabilistic, global, and transductive relations between products are what comprise the brand" (Lury 2004:155). River thus stands as a literalization of *Firefly's* difficulties in integrating Brand Whedon, Brand *Firefly*, and Brand Fox; these multiple and competing brand flows represent their own culture jam, in that the signal-to-noise ratio between these brand flows, minus the boundaries NBC had placed around *Heroes*, turned them into a deluge that ultimately sank the series.

### **Brand New Day? New Technology, Same Old Story**

In her analysis of whether network television could be effectively branded in an “era of mass-less media,” Eleanor Baird argues that, despite the fact that viewers are time-shifting and place-shifting their viewing, and have more of a relationship with a show’s brand than a channel’s brand, broadcast networks can have a “meta-brand” just as cable networks do. “The live broadcast TV ‘product’ should be the core of any successful TV branding, not content or websites...television is a live, audio and visual community experience that the web or DVR cannot duplicate” (Baird 2007). This is true, Baird asserts, even if the broadcast channel chooses to programme for a “niche with broad appeal,” such as Fox’s focus on reality series, to use Baird’s own example.

In line with the concepts Baird sketches in her article, I have attempted to examine the branding strategies of niche programmes on American television from 2001 to 2008, with product placement as one of ways in which brand flow operated within such programmes. Such an analysis necessarily engages with the debates surrounding the American commercial television system, including its advertising model, as well as those around quality and cult television, particularly how they can operate as their own brand to target a particular demographic. How this brand flow was affected by the increased adoption of the DVD format and the development and increased penetration of the DVR<sup>176</sup> were examined both in an analysis of trade publications as a way to gauge the entertainment and advertising industries responses to these new formats and technologies and through a series of case studies that showed how certain series responded to these shifts.

I sought to contextualize the practice itself within a theoretical examination of branding; in particular, the works of Paul Grainge, Celia Lury, Eleanor Baird, and Adam Arvidsson, with Williams’s flow model and its relationship to branding as a undergirding theoretical structure. Both the DVR and the DVD represented not an entirely new model or interaction with the text but rather a technological step-up

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<sup>176</sup> This includes both the set-top box DVRs, such as TiVo, and the licensed software included within cable and satellite set tops.

from the remote control and video cassette recorder and its associated format. The changes in broadcast that these earlier technology gestured at was made manifest, however, by the introduction of the DVR and DVD. What did, however, seem to cause the most debate in the later years of the examined period, was the availability of broadcast programmes online; both the television and the advertising industries debated on the most appropriate way to transfer the ad-supported model onto a new platform. In spite of the increase in product placement and the debated redundancy of the 30-second advertisement on American television, I argued that it does not undermine flow on either an industrial or theoretical level. Williams himself saw American television in 1974 as “a kind of sequence in which the advertisements are integral rather than as a programme interrupted by advertisements” (Williams 2003:66). The introduction of the technological step-up that the DVR represented allowed networks and advertisers to make this the normative practice rather than the exception.

Hence it was subsequently necessary to examine how these two industries, advertising and broadcast television, addressed the reintroduction of product placement and the emergence of the DVD format and adoption of DVR technology. From the period of 2001 to 2008, these industries’ relationship to the technology and to one another underwent material shifts; while broadcast executives professed fear and loathing for DVR technologies and praised the DVD format as helping re-energize television economics, the advertising industry had few words for DVDs, and spanned the gamut of reaction from concern to excitement for DVR technology. Some viewed it as an opportunity to revise an outmoded selling system, the May upfronts, which, by 2008, the trades were claiming had undergone a power shift in the favor of the advertisers (Steinberg 2007:1, 34; Atkinson 2007:S6-S15; Hoffman 2008:58; Guthrie 2008:12-13). Some viewed DVRs as an opportunity to improve the quality of advertising, narrowly target consumers, and eliminate competition and advertising clutter. They were similarly divided on the issue of product placement; while the majority of articles from the perspective of television and advertising executives were pleased with the results of the practice and were happy to have an adjunctive source of advertising income and the ability to be able to tap into the

aforementioned associative properties of the placement, a few found it to be bad practice: lazy, stop-gap, and treading on the edges of viewer patience. There was a great deal of avowal on the part of both industries that technologies such as DVRs were empowering the viewer to demand better programming and advertisements.

By the end of the examined period, many of these same individuals had incorporated the changes within their business plans, had integrated and started to capitalize on what these new technologies and formats could do to improve their own business model. Rather than truly serving as an “empowering” technology for viewers, DVRs were quickly co-opted by these executives, as well as their own creators and developers, to simply be another venue in which to expose users to programmes and ads tailored to their demographic. Further, the pattern of their adoption and the ways in which they were targeted to consumers underscored many of the class concerns at work within American society. The “empowerment” of these formats and technology were thus only available to those who had enough capital to already be in a position of authority, and often meant little more than said viewers serving as “free labor” for the television networks (D. Johnson 2007).

The case studies within this work focused on how these industrial changes affected the flow of ads and programmes, situated at a textual level. The chosen programmes could be comfortably situated within a “quality” or “cult” brand; the implications of such branding and how that affected which products were placed in these series comprised my analysis. I started with an analysis of the series *Gilmore Girls*, due to the fact that it was developed partly under the auspices of the Alliance for Family Entertainment (AFE), a consortium of advertisers. It thus represented a more traditional version of the brand flow between advertising and text, while gesturing at later developments on broadcast television. In particular, it was its use of product placement and advertising in a way that blurred the distinction between programme text and advertising text, particularly the “situ-mercial” featuring Lorelai and Rory as well as in-text placements that mirrored the extra-diagetic use of the characters within the text itself.

The comedy verité aesthetic and its positioning as a “DVD text” informed the analysis of *Arrested Development*. Derek Kompare’s analysis of DVD as both

transitioning broadcast flow into a published model as well as serving to “transcend” (Kompore 2006:343) its broadcast roots was problematized by *Arrested Development* incorporation of the markers of its broadcast genesis, despite how it is viewed, on a textual level, as well as the ability of the DVD format to inscribe certain series with the marker of quality at the expense of the other series (Hills 2007). The format also served a “valourising” function for the advertising and promotional material incorporated within the text of the series, using satire as part of the “politics of commercial obviousness” (Grainge 2007:111) through which they addressed the audience. Finally, its engagement with the “world” (White 1984) of television through its heavily intertextual text as well as retaining the promotional and advertising functions that initially supported it within the DVD format thus blends broadcast flow with the DVD publishing model. It did not eschew its broadcast roots within this format, and thereby is situated as a halfway point between *Gilmore Girls*’ broadcast flow and the reaggregated flows of *Heroes*.

Debuting last among the examined series within this work, *Heroes* provides an index of the potential direction that networks and advertisers could reposition brand flow in the current era. *Heroes* repurposed older broadcast models of the programme/advertising mix within the newer context of multiplatform delivery. It is not the first series to do so, as was clear from John Caldwell’s analysis of *Homicide: Life on the Street* (Caldwell 2003:136-137) or Caldwell’s and Will Brooker’s examination of *Dawson’s Creek* (Caldwell 2004:51; Brooker 2004:569-580), but does represent a more thorough-going example of “tangential, cyclical flows” (Caldwell 2003:136) in the ways in which both programme text and advertising flowed beyond the boundaries of the terrestrial programme while still remaining within the diegetic world of *Heroes*. Indeed, while Caldwell argues that event-status programming (a rubric in which *Heroes* fits in quite well, including its [near] single- sponsorship by Nissan) both the product placement and the text of *Heroes* recall an earlier model of television/advertising economic and recalls Caldwell’s analysis of Williams’ conception of flow as being “‘boundless’ and without borders” (Caldwell 1995:163). Yet, as was clear throughout my examination of *Heroes*, this borderless-

ness was only a seeming—NBC Universal sought to control the multiple points of entry across these platforms for the viewer-user.

Finally, *Firefly's* text encompassed many of the contradictions and issues around the current economic situation within broadcast television through the integration of a fictional product that managed to be a central part of the storyline, as well as a mixture of studio-controlled and viewer-aided transit of the text and its associated products across multiple platforms. The fictional product's high integration into the storyline allowed *Firefly* to critique the practice itself; it further represented the issues of “competing” brand flows between Whedon as brand and the Fox network brand.

Each of these case studies represented a different approach to branding; in the case of *Heroes*, a property of NBC Universal studios, a great deal of its success can also be attributed to creative use of the Internet and alternative programming models outside of terrestrial television. *Arrested Development* initially aired slightly too early to benefit from these new practices, but found new televisual life through an alternative platform (Netflix's streaming service). As for *Gilmore Girls*, its positioning on the WB netlet in some ways allowed more latitude; it was a critical if not commercial success, and appealed to a family demographic within that niche.

Each show aired between 2001 and 2008 and represent three of the five broadcast networks on American television: NBC, Fox, and The CW; this in no way implies that CBS and ABC do not engage in product placement or other branding practices. Les Moonves, president of the CBS network, represents one of the biggest proponents of the practice among television executives, looking beyond reality programming to product integration within sitcoms, dramas, police procedurals, and other genres (Donaton 2004:67-71). The April 29, 2009, episode of *Lost*, a series that normally does not include product placement, had opening titles that featured the Starship Enterprise flying through the “O” in *Lost*, a cross-promotion for producer JJ Abrams's *Star Trek* (May 8, 2009; Paramount Pictures/Spyglass Entertainment/Bad Robot) reset, opening the following weekend (“*Lost* goes warp speed” 2009). The increased blurring of the line between advertising and programming is thus posited by individuals such as Moonves, Steve Heyer, CEO of

Coca-Cola, and *Advertising Age's* Scott Donaton (that is, television, corporate, and advertising creators and executives) as both positive and necessary for the survival of television in the wake of DVR technology in particular.

Indeed, despite the increased debate within the trade journals on how DVD, DVRs, and the Internet are making the commercial break redundant, and the subsequent scramble for an alternate funding model, not only does it remain viable, along with the associated flow that aids the viewer in continued interaction with television texts, but the alternate models—product placement, situ-commercials, and second-shift texts widening the boundaries of the television text—can utilize brand flow within the text in a structurally similar way to its relationship to the commercial break itself.

My goal here has been to map some of the pathways and roadblocks to these advertising and programming shifts in American television and to examine the individual branding practices of a particular type of television programme; that is, those that are already branded as quality or cult properties. It was clear that the tension between viewer control and monetizing and funding programming if and when the advertising model changes has led to an increase in product placement using whatever means are at the disposal of the advertising and television industries. As of the end of the examined period, despite the circular debates around the practice itself, it continues to serve as standard operating procedure.

My focus has necessarily been narrowed to “free” broadcast television in the United States, as broadcast remains as the programme text that reaches the largest cross-section of the American viewing public. Additional research on its use on pay satellite or cable programmes, such as the advertising agency drama *Mad Men*, would also be an intriguing area of study. *Variety* flagged up *Mad Men* in particular for the way in which it blended texts and advertisements (Flaherty 2008:6). It fits well with the idea suggested by the trades to develop programmes in “placement-friendly” (Madden 2008:12; Eggerton, Grossman, and Weprin 2007:8) industries. It also blurs the line between series and advertisements with short spots prior to commercial breaks that provide trivia about products within the show and/or their contemporary version. *Variety* has dubbed this “Madvertising” (Flaherty 2008:6)



and it represents another kind of “situ-mercial” and DVR-busting initiative on the part of programmers. The impact of the practice on the viewer and the viewer’s own perspective on the practice is an area that would benefit from further research as well as how flow operates within this context. The transnational transit of programmes such as *Life on Mars* (BBC One, January 9, 2006-April 10, 2007; BBC Wales/Kudos Film and Television/Monastic Productions [UK]; ABC, October 9, 2008-April 1, 2009; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox/ABC Studios [US]) and *The Office* (BBC Two/BBC One, July 9, 2001-December 27, 2003; BBC) merits further examination. As programmes developed without advertising or paid product placement, their American incarnations are, particularly in the case of *The Office: An American Workplace*, fertile ground for the practice.

A related concern is the recent statement from culture secretary Andy Burnham banning product placement on British television (Turner 2009), in both the wake of the financial difficulties of stations such as ITV (who referred to the ban as “perverse” [Turner 2009]) and the European Union’s relaxation of the rules against product placement on television (“EU agrees to allow” 2007) is another area that deserves attention. While ITV operates on a commercial model like the US network system, the BBC and several European Union networks are run on the public service model. It further needs examination in the way in which the US response to the perceived threats to the economic structure of television is repurposed on a global level and across multiple systems. The partnership between NBC Universal and News Corporation to create Hulu.com as a “You Tube Killer” (Klaassan, Atkinson, Halliday, and Bulik 2007:S16) was touched on briefly within this work, but warrants further examination from an industrial, social, and political-economic standpoint, particularly how flow operates as a “first-shift” aesthetic in an online environment. The popularity of *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog* (among other Internet programmes, such as *The Guild*) as an alternative programme and distribution model, especially as *Dr. Horrible* contained no advertising breaks, but used a television-quality aesthetic, would be a fruitful area of further study. As indicated in the introduction to this work, effects-based research has been done from the perspective of practitioners and marketing researchers, but more

television and political economic research needs to be implemented as the practice continues to rise.

In this work, I have attempted to capture a moment of potential change, revision, and indecision in the American television system. As Robert McChesney writes, it is important to “shed light on how the media system works in the United States and to provide a basis for citizens to play a more active role in shaping the policies upon which that system is built” (McChesney 2004:7). The impact of DVR technology, the DVD format, and the implications of the branding practice of broadcast networks to address that perceived impact, is vital to understanding the contemporary American media system. As addressed throughout this work, broadcast networks have used strategies such as building audiences through VOD channels (*Friday Night Lights*), renewing series based on DVD sales (*Family Guy*, *Dollhouse*), and utilizing “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins 2006) to target technologically sophisticated viewers (*Heroes*). All of these represent (relatively) recent outlets to expand both a series and a network brand to the most sought-after audience. That being said, the reapplication of older models of sponsorship and advertising as a response to these changes, the conscription of these alternate platforms into the textual and promotional functions of American broadcast networks, and the focus on a limited demographic (that is, young people with money) indicates that little really has changed on the structural level. These “changes,” then, remain as cosmetic gloss on an entrenched system.

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"Sword of Destiny." Episode 15, Season 2; original airdate: March 27, 2005.

### *Bones*

"The Bones That Foam." Episode 16, Season 4; original airdate: March 12, 2009.

"Bones on the Blue Line." Episode 15, Season 5; original airdate: April 1, 2010.

### *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

"Superstar." Episode 17, Season 4; original airdate: April 4, 2000.

### *Firefly*

"Ariel." Episode 9, Season 1; original airdate: November 15, 2002.

"Heart of Gold." Episode 13, Season 1; original airdate: none.

"Jaynestown." Episode 7, Season 1; original airdate: October 18, 2002.

"Objects in Space." Episode 13, Season 1; original airdate: December 13, 2002.

"Out of Gas." Episode 8, Season 1; original airdate: October 25, 2002.

"Safe." Episode 5, Season 1; original airdate: November 8, 2002.

"Serenity." Episode 1, Season 1; original airdate: December 20, 2002.

"Shindig." Episode 4, Season 1; original airdate: November 1, 2002.

"The Train Job." Episode 2, Season 1; original airdate: September 20, 2002.

"Trash." Episode 11, Season 1; original airdate: none

"The Message." Episode 12, Season 1; original airdate: none.

"War Stories." Episode 10, Season 1; original airdate: December 6, 2002.

### *Gilmore Girls*

"A House Is Not a Home." Episode 22, Season 5; original airdate: May 17, 2005.

"Always a Godmother, Never a God." Episode 4, Season 6; original airdate: October 4, 2005.

"An Affair to Remember." Episode 6, Season 4; original airdate: October 28, 2003.

"Bon Voyage." Episode 22, Season 7; original airdate: May 15, 2007.

"But I'm a Gilmore!" Episode 19, Season 5; original airdate: April 26, 2005.

"Christopher Returns." Episode 15, Season 1; original airdate: March 1, 2001.

"Come Home." Episode 12, Season 5; original airdate: February 1, 2005.

"Fight Face." Episode 2, Season 6; original airdate: September 20, 2005.

"Friday Night's Alright For Fighting," Episode 13, Season 6; original airdate: January 31, 2006.

"Hammers and Veils." Episode 2, Season 2; original airdate: October 9, 2001.

"Help Wanted." Episode 20, Season 2; original airdate: May 7, 2002.

"He's Slippin' 'Em Bread...Dig?" Episode 10, Season 6; original airdate: November 22, 2005.

"I Get a Sidekick Out of You." Episode 19, Season 6; original airdate: April 18, 2006.

"I Jump, You Jump, Jack." *Gilmore Girls*, Episode 7, Season 5; original airdate: November 1, 2004.

"I Solemnly Swear." Episode 11, Season 3; original airdate: January 21, 2003.

"Keg! Max!" Episode 19, Season 3; original airdate: April 29, 2003.

"Kill Me Now." Episode 3, Season 1; original airdate: October 9, 2000.

"Let Me Hear Your Balalaikas Ringing Out." Episode 8, Season 6; original airdate: November 11, 2005.

"Live and Let Diorama." Episode 18, Season 5; original airdate: April 19, 2005.

"Presenting Lorelai Gilmore." Episode 6, Season 2; original airdate: November 6, 2001.

"Raincoats and Recipes." Episode 22, Season 4; original airdate: May 18, 2004.

"Red Light on the Wedding Night," Episode 3, Season 2; original airdate: October 16, 2001.

"Rory's Birthday Parties." Episode 6, Season 1; original airdate: November 9, 2000.

"Say Goodbye to Daisy Miller." Episode 1, Season 5; original airdate: September 21, 2004.

"Say Goodnight, Gracie," Episode 20, Season 3; original airdate: May 6, 2003.

"Scene in a Mall." Episode 15, Season 4; original airdate: February 24, 2004.

"Swan Song." Episode 14, Season 3; original airdate: February 11, 2003.

"The Incredible Shrinking Lorelais." Episode 14, Season 4; original airdate: February 17, 2004.

"The Nanny and the Professor." Episode 10, Season 4; original airdate: January 20, 2004.

"The Party's Over." Episode 8, Season 5; original airdate: November 9, 2004.

"The Prodigal Daughter Returns." Episode 9, Season 6; original airdate: November 18, 2005.

"The UnGraduate." Episode 3, Season 6; original airdate: September 27, 2005.

"Those Are Strings, Pinocchio." Episode 22, Season 3; original airdate: May 20, 2003.

"Twenty-One Is the Loneliest Number." Episode 7, Season 6; original airdate: October 25, 2005.

"Unto the Breach." Episode 21, Season 7; original airdate: May 8, 2007.

"Wedding Bell Blues." Episode 13, Season 5; original airdate: February 8, 2005.

"Welcome to the Dollhouse." Episode 6, Season 6; original airdate: October 18, 2005.

"We've Got Magic to Do," Episode 5, Season 6; original airdate: October 11, 2005.

"Written in the Stars." Episode 3, Season 5; original airdate: October 5, 2004.

### *Happy Days*

"Hollywood (Part 3)." *Happy Days*, Episode 2, Season 5; original airdate: September 20, 1977.

### *Heroes*

"Don't Look Back." Episode 2, Season 1; original airdate: October 2, 2006.

"Fight or Flight" [Commentary]. *Heroes*, Episode 5, Season 2; original airdate: October 22, 2007.

"Genesis." *Heroes*, Episode 1, Season 1; original airdate: September 25, 2006.

"Going Postal" [webisodes]; original airdates: July 14, 2008; July 21, 2008; and July 28, 2008.

"Hiros." Episode 5, Season 1; original airdate: October 23, 2006.

"One Giant Leap." Episode 3, Season 1; original airdate: October 9, 2006.

"The Kindness of Strangers." Episode 4, Season 2; original airdate: October 15, 2007.

"The Line." Episode 6, Season 2; original airdate: October 29, 2007.

"Unexpected." Episode 16, Season 1; original airdate: February 19, 2007.

### *The Office: An American Workplace*

"The Client." Episode 7, Season 2; original airdate: November 8, 2005.

"The Dundies." Episode 1, Season 2; original airdate: September 20, 2005.

"The Dundies" [Commentary track], *The Office* Season 2 (US/NBC Version); 2006.

### *Scrubs*

"My Big Bird." Episode 8, Season 5; original airdate: January 24, 2006.

### *Supernatural*

"Changing Channels." Episode 8, Season 5; original airdate: November 5, 2009.

"Hollywood Babylon." Episode 18, Season 2; original airdate: April 26, 2007.

"Season 7, Time for a Wedding!" Episode 8, Season 7; original airdate: November 11, 2011.

"Swan Song." Episode 22, Season 5; original airdate: May 13, 2010.

"Sympathy for the Devil." Episode 1, Season 5; original airdate: September 10, 2009.

"The Monster at the End of This Book." Episode 18, Season 4; original airdate: April 2, 2009.

"The Real Ghostbusters." Episode 9, Season 5; original airdate: November 12, 2009.

"The French Mistake." Episode 15, Season 6; original airdate: February 25, 2011.

### *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*

"The Harriet Dinner: Part 1." *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, Episode 13, Season 1; original airdate: January 29, 2007.

### *30 Rock*

"Jack-Tor." Episode 5, Season 1; original airdate: November 16, 2006.

"Somebody to Love." Episode 6, Season 2; original airdate: November 15, 2007.



*Veronica Mars*

“Not Pictured.” Episode 22, Season 2; original airdate: May 9, 2006.

### **Online Resources**

Television Without Pity

[www.televisionwithoutpity.com](http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com)

Striped Wall: A Screenshot Collective

<http://www.strippedwall.com/>

Home of the Nutty (Screenshot site)

<http://homeofthenutty.com/>