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Key Words

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Abstract
The thesis examines American teen dramas on Australian television in the period 1992 to 2004. It explores the use of the genre by broadcasters and its uptake by teenagers in an environment where American popular culture has frequently been treated with suspicion and where there are perennial arguments about the Americanisation of youth and their vulnerability to cultural imperialism. The thesis argues concerns about Americanisation and cultural imperialism in relation to youth culture, young people and the media are misplaced. American teen dramas are investigated as an example of the ways imported programs are made to cohere with national logics within the Australian mediasphere (Hartley, 1996). Utilising Yuri Lotman’s (1990) theory of cultural ‘translation’ this thesis argues teen dramas are evidence of dynamic change within the system of television and that this change does not result in a system dominated by imported product, but rather a system that situates foreign programming amongst domestic frames of reference.
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institutions. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: _________________________________

Date: ___________________________________
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Introduction: American Teen Dramas and the Trouble of Cultural Change

This thesis examines American teen dramas on Australian television in the period 1992-2004. It examines the teen drama as a significant development in television itself and reflects upon the ascendant status of American drama programming in Australia. It explores the use of the genre by broadcasters and its uptake by teenagers in an environment where American popular culture has frequently been treated with suspicion and where there are perennial arguments about the ‘Americanisation’ of youth and their vulnerability to cultural imperialism. The thesis attempts to unravel some of the industrial and textual characteristics of a genre exemplified by programs such as Beverly Hills, 90210 (1990-2000), Dawson’s Creek (1998-2003), and Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003). Youth television is inextricably linked to the emergence of the teenager and the development of the youth market (Hall and Whannel, 1994; Davis and Dickinson, 2004); it is emblematic of changes in television’s mode of production and distribution throughout the 1990s. The teen drama demonstrates the legacy of the changes in television programming Caldwell (1995) refers to as “televisuality”, giving primacy to style as a way of reinvigorating broadcast television, and the rise niche audience appeal (Rogers et al., 2002). In the Australian mediasphere, teen dramas have formed a key component of the strategy Network Ten mobilised to gain a foothold in

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1 Throughout this manuscript the terms “America” and “American” are used to refer specifically to the United States of America.
2 Where possible, the dates indicated refer to the period the program screened on Australian television. Due to the difficulties of accessing accurate broadcast schedules this is not always possible. Included as Appendix I is a timeline indicating the teen dramas screened on Australian television throughout the 1990s. This timeline also includes other pertinent related programs such as Melrose Place and The Secret Life of Us, which while not teen dramas, can be considered under the rubric of youth programming. It also recounts the nationalisation of Triple J, a significant event in the development of a youth cultural space in Australia and considered in chapter three.
the Australian broadcast environment and remain indicative of the construction of youthfulness Network Ten capitalises upon.

The teen drama provides a way to investigate the themes of Americanisation, youth and Australian identity by a range of agents including television industry professionals and young audience members themselves. The different purposes and understandings of what teen drama means in this period are used to illuminate questions of national culture, and to explore the role that discourses about Americanisation and the dangers of popular culture play in these understandings. This thesis argues that concerns about Americanisation and cultural imperialism in relation to youth culture, young people and the media are misplaced. Instead, American teen dramas are considered in this thesis as an example of the ways in which imported programs facilitate or assist change in the mediasphere (Hartley, 1996), utilising Lotman’s (1990) notion of ‘translation’. It is argued that teen dramas are evidence of dynamic change within the system of television, and that this change does not result in a system dominated by imported product; rather, it results in a system that situates foreign programming within domestic frames of reference (i.e. translation).

**The Teen Drama**

Spawned from the archetypal *Beverly Hills, 90210*, “quality teen dramas” (Moseley, 2001) focus on the trials and tribulations suffered by young people working their way through adolescence. In the Australian broadcast environment such themes have traditionally been encountered within soap operas such as *Neighbours* (1985- ), *E Street* (1989-1993), *Home and Away* (1988- ) and *Breakers* (1998-9). Cassata (1985) argues that as soap gained legitimacy as a genre in the 1970s, the audience
broadened to the point where, by the 1980s, the number of young people watching was significant enough to cause soap to turn its focus towards young people as central characters. Indeed, while Australia’s first experience with programs centred on young people came in the form of sitcoms such as *Take That* (1957) and *Good Morning, Mr Doubleday* (1969), soap operas such as *Class of ’74* and *Class of ’75* (1974/1975 respectively) and *Glenview High* (1977) followed (Melloy, 1994). Stalwart soaps *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* have always featured young characters prominently.

While domestic children’s dramas\(^3\) and imported teen sitcoms continue to stand alongside domestic soaps as key sites where young people are represented on television, the arrival of *Beverly Hills, 90210* in 1990 broadened and changed this range of sites, extending them into prime time and introducing youth concerns to the hour long drama format. Owen (1997: 72) describes *Beverly Hills, 90210* as a “jolt on the TV landscape…that would eventually transform television”. Produced by Aaron Spelling and built on the success of his prime-time soap operas such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, *Beverly Hills, 90210* introduced the teen ensemble cast and situated young people as a distinct focus. In this way it stands distinct from previous programs centred on schools, such as *Glenview High* in Australia and *Brookside* in the UK, both of which examined frustrations within the education system from the perspective of both students and teachers (Melloy, 1994). What made *Beverly Hills, 90210*...

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\(^3\) Rutherford (2004) makes an interesting argument for the inclusion of such programming in considerations of ‘teen television’ given the common thematic concerns between programs such as *The Girl From Tomorrow* and science-fiction teen dramas such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Roswell*. That these programs deserve greater consideration is suggested by the place children’s dramas occupy industrially with the development of the tween market (viewers aged 8-14), the generally similar appeal to quality these programs employ and Australia’s international success in producing them. Children’s programming occupies a somewhat privileged status in Australia due to the obligations placed upon broadcasters by the licensing authority to screen set numbers of hours of programming per year and the funding provided to support its production.
90210 distinctive was the fact that it did not attempt to appeal to a broad audience by including characters of several ages. Rather, it focused closely on a group of characters who were all of a similar age (Owen, 1997: 73-74). While Jim and Cindy Walsh, parents of central protagonists Brandon and Brenda Walsh, featured in the first four seasons to provide their teenaged children with advice and stern moral lessons where required, they remained very much ancillary to the core youth cast before being sent away on extended holidays and eventually moving to Hong Kong to do business. Privileging teens also sets 90210 apart from preceding programs such as The Brady Bunch and Leave it to Beaver, which, while focussed on young people, used the family as their organising unit.

Formally the teen drama shares with soap opera a similar narrative organisation and “imaginative centre” (Moseley, 2001: 41), with an emphasis on problems of the personal and psychological rather than “proposing the possibility for larger macro-political or societal change” (Davis and Dickinson, 2004: 6). More than a demographic repositioning of soap opera, the teen drama exists as a distinct, if hybridised, genre. Roswell (1999-2002) and Buffy the Vampire Slayer combined elements of science fiction and horror genres and Australia’s Heartbreak High (1994-1999) and Canada’s Degrassi High utilised a social drama approach typical of public broadcasting to construct gritty, ‘realistic’ representations of young people. The teen drama is distinguished from soap opera and its teen sitcom cousin by a more sophisticated approach to its subject matter. Teen drama appeals to notions of quality television often through the mobilisation of edgy humour (Owen, 1999: 25) and the high production values expected of prime time drama. Buffy the Vampire Slayer ties sophisticated scripts and a sensitive approach to its coming of age
discourse with “a glossy visual style, fluid camerawork and artistically choreographed fight sequences” (Moseley, 2001: 42). Similarly, Dawson’s Creek ties together complex language, analytical dialogue and self-referentiality with sweeping cinematics and romantic musical scoring. Its combination of self-consciousness and intense emotion results in an audience address broad enough that both “engagement with the melodramatic and knowing distance can be accommodated” (Moseley, 2001: 43).

Following the success of Beverly Hills, 90210 programs such as Dawson’s Creek, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Roswell featured young people as the principal driving force, absenting parental authority from the text (Banks, 2004: 21) and frequently replacing family structures with social cliques (Owen, 1997; Wolcott, 1999). Teen drama programming often presents young characters as fully functioning sexual and social beings, acting without the restrictions of authority, yet not assuming the responsibilities that accompany adulthood. Roswell took the notion of the absent parent to the extreme by telling the story of a group of alien teenagers stranded on earth, expressing the teenage experience as one of alienation and the overcoming of Otherness. While the teen sitcom is similarly structured around the absence of parental authority (particularly the deletion of the mother in programs such as Sister, Sister and Moesha), the teen drama distinguishes itself by its sophisticated approach. As Hills (2004: 54) points out with reference to Dawson’s Creek, the text employs a ‘therapeutising’ of its teen characters, drawing on hyper-articulation, self-awareness and discourses of therapy4. This imbues in the text a reflexivity, particularly in relation to the depiction of romantic relationships, that forms part of its appeal to

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4 As is discussed later, this ‘therapeutising’ is akin to the strategies White (1992) proposes.
“quality” and bid for cultural value. Further, both Dawson’s Creek and Buffy the Vampire Slayer appeal to quality by stressing links with their creators, teen film auteur Kevin Williamson in the case of Dawson’s Creek, and third-generation television writer and Oscar nominee Joss Whedon (Beercroft, 2001) in the case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Playing on these links with other works, such programs attempt to challenge notions that television is “ephemeral, industrially manufactured, trashy or non-cinematic” and lift themselves above “a devalued ‘teen TV status’ both textually…and intertextually” (Hills, 2004: 54). Such attempts, particularly in the case of Buffy have distanced the program from the label ‘teen TV’ so successfully that the teen elements of the program are often lost in analyses which valorise or eulogise Buffy as “nourishment for our particular adult needs” (Davis and Dickinson, 2004: 5).

To avoid such an approach is not to suggest that it is unnecessary or misguided; indeed this analysis shares with the approach of authors such as Owen (1999) the use of teen dramas as a way to explore broader concerns and shifts in culture. However, this investigation keeps the teen element of teen drama firmly in sight: it examines the genre as an example of the ways television revitalises itself in the face of changes in its audience base and the challenges posed by new technologies (Lury, 2001). This revitalisation demands that not only the mode of television being produced is considered but that questions about the youth audience and the culture of young people are also raised. The extent to which commercial entities mobilise youth culture and the degree to which both television networks and young people embrace elements from foreign cultures and “translate” (Lotman, 1990) them for domestic purposes become central issues.
Davis and Dickinson (2004) writing about teen television more broadly, find some advantage in the case made by Hay (2002) that considerations of genre benefit from an approach that moves beyond understanding sets of textual practice and grasps the role of “genres in relation to ‘overall situations’ and socio-historical ‘contexts’” (Hay, 2002). The result is to consider the significance of generic forms in relation to broader social factors and contexts, accounting for both the impact these have upon genres and the way they themselves are impacted upon by genres. Utilising such an approach, Davis and Dickinson’s collection examines the ways in which the textual, regulatory and consumption conventions of teen television interact, considering the way in which teen television (as a genre) is an “inseparable feature” of the society in which it exists (Davis and Dickinson, 2004: 6).

Adopting a similar approach, this study establishes the teen drama as a specific generic development, located within and reflecting upon shifts in the organising logic of the broadcast television system. Throughout the 1990s American teen dramas functioned as a key delimiter of where and how young people could be seen on, and how they could watch, television. These dramas were crucial to making young people visible in prime time. No longer the domain of afternoon or early evening programming, nor ghettoised to a ‘youth’ slot, American teen dramas gave young people a distinct site for representation on the prime time schedule.

Teen dramas represent only one of a number of genres which were essential for targeting the youth audience⁵, however, they are unique because almost without

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⁵ Also important are magazine, music, reality and comedy programming (Stockbridge, 2000) and action adventure programs such as Stargate SG1 (Franken, 2002).
exception, they were imported from the US. While domestic reality programs and magazine shows\textsuperscript{6} have enjoyed some success, the only truly successful Australian teen drama has been the ABC production of *Heartbreak High*\textsuperscript{7}. Importantly, as is discussed in chapter three of this thesis, the cancellation of *Heartbreak High* by Network Ten in 1996 was the last time an Australian commercial free-to-air station carried a locally made teen drama.

For these reasons, teen dramas are a rich site to gain access to a range of debates concerning young people and the media. This thesis attempts to unravel some of the industrial and textual features of the genre and more specifically, examines the place teen dramas have occupied in the Australian media sphere. It compares the nature, scheduling and reception of American program *Dawson’s Creek* with Australia’s most successful iteration of the genre, *Heartbreak High* as a way to consider questions about the presence of American content on Australian television.

**Televisuality**

This investigation sees the teen drama as a legacy of the industrial moment Caldwell (1995) refers to as “televisuality” when consciously stylistic and spectacular programming emerged as loss-leader television driving a shift away from broad audience targets. Caldwell uses the term “televisuality” to describe the aesthetic sensibility of network television in the 1980s and early 1990s, a “stylisation of performance itself, a display of knowing exhibitionism” (Caldwell, 1995: 6) that


\textsuperscript{7} 1996 saw Ten also produce a single season of teen drama *Sweat*, while *RawFM* (1996) lasted only a single series on the ABC. *Headstart* (2001), a co-production between the ABC and cable provider Foxtel, lasted two seasons due to generally unsuccessful ratings. The dominance of American teen dramas as the predominant form of the genre on Australian television is demonstrated in the timeline included as Appendix I.
came about as a result of a crisis triggered by industrial changes in modes of production, programming practices, the audience and its expectations, and an economic slump. In response to these challenges, television changed its fundamental paradigms, becoming a system “based on an extreme self-consciousness of style” (Caldwell, 1995: 4). Style became a distinguishing feature of good television, expressed in a variety of lavish, excessive and self-conscious modes. Representing quality and hailing attention amongst ever cluttered schedules and against increased alternative mediums, style was mobilised to draw attention to television itself, becoming, Caldwell argues “the signified...of television” (Caldwell, 1995: 5). This is demonstrated in programs that made the most of televisuality, such as Max Headroom (1987), Pee Wee’s Playhouse (1986-1990) and Twin Peaks (1990-1991), but also in the assignation of ‘Special Event’ status to mini-series, program premieres and sporting events as well as the increase in auteur activity in television program and advertising production.

Televisuality exists as a particular moment in television’s history, and many of the programs and genres developed did not last past the period of economic crisis (1989 – 1992). The teen drama is one of the developments to arise in the wake of televisuality as the grand “logic of the niche” (Rogers et al., 2002: 44) came to dominate the media system. The teen drama emerged as audiences fragmented (Moseley, 2001) and the American television market underwent a determined shift in its profit base (Lin, 1995). The emergence of the VCR, cable and the Fox Network shook up the oligopoly the “Big Three” networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) had enjoyed over the American television industry (Lin, 1995: 482) resulting in changes in

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8 The dates included for these programs refer to their production rather than their screening on Australian television.

scheduling strategies and the way networks positioned and addressed their audiences (Caldwell, 1995; see also Rogers et al., 2002). *Beverly Hills, 90210* was an important program in the development of Fox as a successful network in the US (McKinley, 1997: 16; see also Owen, 1997) which achieved viability as a fourth major network by focusing on young people as a specific audience. Fox’s strategies further altered the shape of the American market, breaking down the rigidity of the television season (Dominick et al., 1996). Emulating the Fox model in the early 1990s, then new US network The WB used *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson’s Creek* to position itself as a youth broadcaster. Both *90210* and *Dawson’s Creek* were among the programs used in the repositioning of Australia’s Network Ten as a youth broadcaster in the early 1990s and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was utilised by the Seven Network to create a distinct, after hours, youth slot. Similar changes took place in the UK, where a particular brand of youth television arose with the appointment of Janet Street-Porter as Head of Youth Television at the BBC in 1987. Street-Porter’s appointment led to the creation of the Def II strand that would produce and screen many of the emblematic programs of British youth television up until the abolition of the brand in August of 1995 (Jones, 2001).

Considering the teen drama as one of the legacies of televisuality connects the genre with industrial, economic and cultural shifts. It provides the investigation conducted in this thesis with a firmer base to work from than would an attempt to claim intrinsic connections between the style of youth television and postmodernity. While there is some correlation between many of the ‘defining’ characteristics of postmodernity and young people (Lury, 2001), intrinsic links between youth television and postmodernity are difficult to defend as:
Any systematic look at the history of television soon shows that all of those formal and narrative traits once thought to be unique and defining properties of postmodernism — intertextuality, pastiche, multiple and collaged presentational forms — have also been defining properties of television from its inception (Caldwell, 1995: 22-23).

Aberrant reading is inherent in the nature of television broadcasting and Caldwell suggests the television form has always been “textually messy” (Caldwell, 1995: 23). Further, youth television deserves deeper consideration than merely engaging with the features of its identifiable style. Deeper consideration avoids analyses such as that given to “yoof” TV by Gareth Palmer (1995) who argues the fascination of the genre with style and form seeks to maintain a barrier between the wider world and that of young people. As such, the “stylistic pyrotechnics” (Palmer, 1995: 51) of the genre results in a reduction of everything to relativity, freeing the author of the necessity to defend a considered political or social position. ‘Yoof’ then is “unaware of life beyond the sound-bite and seeks to contain everything in its slim package” (Palmer, 1995: 52). While the emphasis on relativity is “pro-democracy, anti-authoritarian and unthinkably pro-youth” (Palmer, 1995: 52), Palmer argues this is an easy position to occupy and is taken up out of laziness, allowing yoof television to sidestep considered judgement. Palmer’s argument is that yoof television’s overt style makes it ultimately meaningless, but this could be regarded as patronising, suggesting young people exhibit a seeming ignorance of the artisanship of television production itself.

9 “Yoof” identifies the style of youth television, particularly British, produced during the late 1980s by the Def II strand on BBC 2 and programming such as Network 7 on Channel 4 (Jones, 2001). Typical examples are Snub TV, Don’t Forget Your Toothbrush and breakfast television programming such as The Big Breakfast. The phrase itself is a parody of Janet Street-Porter’s ‘estuarine’ English pronunciation.
Reducing youth television to a style labelled “yoof” however does nothing more than consider only the stylistic hallmarks, and it fails to examine both the broader reasons for the rise of youth television and the ideological implications wrought by prescribing the development of these stylistic tropes to youth television itself. Understanding youth television and the teen drama as a product of televisuality situates youth television at the forefront of semiotic change. Televisuality did not affect all genres equally and many of the programs that gained from the exhibitionist stylistic excess emerged as televisual loss-leaders, establishing new forms in television and garnering high prestige despite the fact they drew only small ratings (Caldwell, 1995: 18-20). Such an approach makes visible broader implications of the teen drama for television and the broader cultural and semiotic environment.

**Network Ten**

This investigation pays particular attention to the actions of Network Ten throughout the 1990s as it examines the place of American teen dramas on Australian television. As explored in chapter four, Ten emerged from the “entrepreneurial television” period (O'Regan, 1993) of the 1980s as an underperforming third commercial network. In the early 1990s the network was brought out of receivership by a determined counter programming strategy that saw Ten focus solely on a ‘youth’ audience. American teen dramas and youth programming played a key role in this economic revival that moved the network from the “underdog” (Stockbridge, 2000: 190) status it occupied in the Australian broadcasting environment. Ten’s success can be seen as the result of a sophisticated strategy that utilised teen dramas and other youth content to position the network as youth focussed, a move that resulted in
the creation of a semiotic space where the youth identity could reign supreme. Looking at these strategies and the constitution of this space, the industrial impact of youth dramas can be examined. As is the practice in the Australian commercial television system, Ten blends a high level of American content with domestically produced programming to create a nationally specific television space. Ten’s emphasis on youth programming, however, creates an environment which is unique, locating this programming amongst broader discourses about youth and their place on Australian television.

**Americanisation**

Investigating teen dramas provides an entry into discussions about the presence of American content on Australian television, engaging with notions of cultural imperialism and a preference among Australian young people for American media content (Emmison, 1997). Describing concern about US influence in Australia as “enduring”, Bennet et al. (1999) point to the perennial nature of the discourse of Americanisation in discussions about Australia’s national identity and media use. As a term to voice concern about the willing embrace of American media by Australian people (Bell and Bell, 1993), Americanisation predates cultural imperialism’s rise as a dominant mode to discuss the ‘impact’ of the international trade in text (Emmison, 1997: 324). Early debates about Americanisation in Australia served as forums to discuss the ongoing role for British influence in Australia (White, 1980, 1983; Stratton, 1992), the politics of following in the ethos of American frontiersmen (McLachlan, 1977) and the formation of a distinct, national identity. Americanisation engages concerns about popular culture and modernity (Baudrillard, 1988) as much as it does the sovereignty of nation states (Kuisel, 1993) and the role
of cultural industries in the creation of a distinct national culture (Appleton, 1987; Caughie, 1990; Bell and Bell, 1993).

Americanisation is not only a contested term but one with an unclear meaning (Matthews, 1998: 17). It appears, much like cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991: 3), as a term best constructed out of discourse. In the 1970s and 1980s Americanisation became associated with the rubric of theories united under the broad umbrella of cultural imperialism or media imperialism (Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Tunstall, 1977; Mattelart, 1979; Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1979; Schiller, 1979; Mattelart et al., 1984). A through-line that ties such theories together is the attempt to come to terms with the way in which cultures and nations became relativised (Robertson, 1995) in the face of shifting global alliances and patterns of technological, economic, political, industrial and cultural change. Concerns about Americanisation and cultural imperialism appear as discourses about the resiliency of national cultures in the face of such shifts and new developments in consumption (Kuisel, 1993: 1-4). Television is a key site where the nation is represented and imagined (Hartley, 1987; Dawson, 1990; O'Regan, 1993; Hartley and McKee, 2000), so the presence of international product on television seems to problematise the perceived coherence of the national culture represented, revealing national cultures themselves to be sites of contestation, formed out of “transformative practices” (Schlesinger, 1991: 305).

**Young People**

The perceived preference of young people for American content locates youth as an antagonistic agent in the process of contestation and transformation Schlesinger
describes. Engaging with questions about the impact the cultural origin of media can be seen to have on taste preferences, The Australian Everyday Culture Project observed “a generational shift towards the consumption of cultural commodities originating from America” (Bennett et al., 1999: 202). Across three major areas of media consumption: music, literature and television, the young participants in the survey (aged between 18 and 24 at the time of the research) showed a general preference for products originating from the United States of America when compared to the preferences of older participants. While Emmison (1997) argues such findings are consistent with a general trend in Australia towards embracing American cultural products, Bennet et al.’s (1999) ultimate analysis of the figures points to age differences as a crucial determining factor in cultural taste. Preferences for American content seem disproportionately related to age, with preferences turning from American to Australian content as the audience ages (Bennett et al., 1999: 202).

Discussions about Americanisation, young people and the media all share the common honour of frequently standing as cover for discussions about change. Youth is produced structurally and textually, to serve as a measure against which society can measure its own crises (Giroux, 1997: 35), and take its bearings as to what point of change it has reached (Clarke et al., 1975: 71). Drotner (2000: 150) argues young people are discursively connected to media via this very metaphor of change. Similarly, discussions about Americanisation in Australia (White, 1980, 1983; Bell and Bell, 1998b) and abroad (Kuisel, 1993) have shrouded debates about greater shifts in society, particularly the emergence of mass consumption and consumer culture, increased international links and trade, and a greater fluidity of national
boundaries which came about after World War II. The association of young people with the “youth market” (Hall and Whannel, 1994) and consumption figures such as those presented above by Bennett et al. (1999) have caused discussion about young people’s media use to become a flashpoint for debates about these larger changes. Young people are a semiotic site through which new developments are communicated (Hartley, 1998: 16), and the conflation of national culture with national identity that has dogged debates about Americanisation (White, 1983) contextualises concerns about young people’s use of foreign media as a response within adult society to the emergence and development of new models of belonging and new spaces for the development of citizenship.

The Semiosphere and Translation

This thesis attempts to avoid the moral panics surrounding the popularity of American media product with young Australian audiences, perceived to be a group vulnerable to losing their sense of an Australian national identity (Lamont, 1994; Tulich, 1994; Partridge, 2001). Rather than engaging with concerns about the decline of cultural identity, this study engages with the nexus between Australian young people and American teen drama programming by examining the ways in which such programming has been utilised by Australian television networks to create a relationship with young viewers. It examines the way in which American programming has been engaged to create a sense of youthfulness, mobilising youth identity as distinct.

Looking at the function of American texts in the Australian mediasphere (Hartley, 1996), this thesis adopts Lotman’s (1990) concept of the semiosphere and cross-
cultural communication as translation as a model that avoids falling victim to discourses of Americanisation and cultural imperialism. Lotman argues for a diachronic approach and stresses the role of individual units in the greater semiotic space, which he describes as the semiosphere, “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages” (Lotman, 1990: 123). The semiosphere is the space in which cultures exist, where communication via languages occurs. Lotman’s theory is premised on investigating the function of elements within the larger system, rather than the synchronic approach of Saussure, theorising an understanding of the semiosphere as a precondition for investigation of the process of communication itself.

Lotman’s theory is concerned with the way communication occurs. He proposes a model based on asymmetry, on degrees of mutual untranslatability, understanding source-message-receiver or encoding-text-decoding as too simplistic and premised on often virtually unobtainable situations. For Lotman meaning is not pre-textual, packaged into the text for transfer but rather emerges from the process of communication itself. Lotman proposes a model of communication based on difference and dialogue. This is the process of translation, a process not of direct representation (symmetrical transformation) but of relative interpretation (asymmetrical transformation) (Lotman 1990: 14).

There is a commonality between Lotman’s model of communication and both Hall’s (1980) famous encoding/decoding model and Eco’s (1980) semiotic model for investigating the television message. Both Hall and Eco’s models account for the fact that communication to a mass audience will fundamentally result in aberrant
readings. Hall (1980: 135) suggests while aberrant readings are often understood as failures of the communicative process, they are rather evidence viewers are operating outside of the preferred code broadcasters hold. Rather than an exception, aberrant decoding is inherent to mass media (Eco, 1980; Michaels, 1990a). Lotman’s model is valuable for this investigation because it conceptualises difference between the code applied by sender and receiver as the very practice of communication. It is through this mismatch, what he describes as mutual untranslatability, that communication takes place.

Lotman’s notion of translation provides a method to understand the international trade in texts that examines the function of both foreign texts and the audience as elements in the greater semiotic system. Translation allows exploration of the impact the location of a text within a national culture may play in the meanings ascribed to, and produced from interactions with, foreign texts. Imported texts are translated by readers according to the codes specific to the national semiotic system. Liebes and Katz provide some empirical examples of the impact differing national semiotic systems have on locally specific readings in their study of the cross-cultural reception of Dallas. Studying the reception of the American soap opera with readers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in Israel and the USA, they report that viewers interpreted the same events in episodes according to their own cultural codes of behaviour and relations. The cultural codes of viewers impacted on their translation of the American program such that events were understood according to what was culturally applicable at home, not what the viewers thought was culturally applicable in America. Thus no two groups interpreted the events in the same way, to the extent
that Liebes and Katz suggest it is possible to argue the viewers were essentially watching different programs.

Adopting Lotman’s model of translation provides a useful way to explore the process by which American imported programs are located and given local meaning within the Australian mediasphere. Imports play an important developmental role in the construction of television markets (Tunstall, 1977; O'Regan, 1993; Sinclair et al., 1996). Programming from the United States has long played an important part in the development of the Australian television system (Bell and Bell, 1993: 171-4; O'Regan, 1993). Along with material from Britain, US imports helped facilitate the development of a television system in Australia by providing enough material so that a full schedule of programs could be established. Unlike the large Latin American markets such as Mexico and Brazil where population size and regulatory conditions facilitated the development of a domestic production industry sufficiently viable to challenge the high occurrence of imported US product\(^{10}\), Australia’s television system resembles to a great extent the affiliate system which operates in the United States. Affiliate stations draw a bulk of their programming from a central network, around which they program local news, current (consumer) affairs and a degree of locally produced variety and magazine programming. Similarly, the schedules of Australia’s commercial networks are made up of a number of fixed, domestically produced “bankers”\(^ {11}\) (Pilsworth, 1980: 237) around which a selection of material imported from both American and British sources is placed to fill the schedule.

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\(^{10}\) Even if this challenge is, at best, conceptual (Sinclair, 1996: 51).

\(^{11}\) Such as news programming and other “guaranteed performers” (Pilsworth, 1980: 237). In the Australian market, long running and consistently successful programs including domestic soap operas such as Network Ten’s *Neighbours* and the Nine Network’s version of quiz program *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* could also be considered bankers. These are programs that form the skeleton of a
Lotman’s (1990) concept of the semiosphere allows us to consider the national cultural space as inherently open. The semiosphere describes a semiotic space with permeable boundaries across which ‘foreign’ elements pass by a process of translation. As elements are brought across the boundary into a distinct cultural space they are rewritten with codes that make them comprehensible. Such an idea is useful for considering a national cultural space, particularly a national media space, as it provides an understanding of the way these spaces function in globalised and internationalised markets. Conceiving a national cultural system as a semiosphere means that the boundaries that mark out national spaces as distinct do not serve to prevent access to these spaces by foreign elements. Rather, the boundaries around a national cultural space regulate the way in which elements are brought into it. They can describe the modes by which members inside these boundaries can understand and make sense of new, previously external elements.

As such, ‘national boundaries’ facilitate acts of translation through the application of nationally specific codes and what McHoul and O’Regan (1992) describe as “techniques of uptake”. Techniques of uptake describe the way interested communities designate proper modes of reading to texts in order to limit and control who can access them. This functions to maintain control over the meanings produced from such texts. National boundaries describe the strategies and behaviours that transform foreign elements into national elements, the modes by which agents inside national boundaries can understand and make sense of the appearance of new elements. In a national broadcasting system one of the ways in
which texts are given meaning is through their location within that broader communicative space. Texts are prescribed a place amongst others, fitted into the meaning making system in a way that coheres them with the internal logics of the semiosphere. Such an argument suggests that the broadcasting industry plays a role in the translation of texts and also that the entry of texts into such a system subjects them to reading practices that make them locally meaningful. The overall picture then is not of a space that is under siege from foreign elements, that is at risk from the forced entry of these elements. A central point of this investigation is uncovering the ways in which these ‘foreign’ elements are assigned a place in this system.

Translation provides a sophisticated way to understand the semiotic function of imports in the Australian television system. It is argued here that the importation of foreign programming does not result in a culture dominated by imported product but rather that the functions of the system situate foreign programming within domestic frames of reference. Utilising Lotman’s notion of translation, this investigation looks at the use of American teen dramas as an example of the ways in which imported programs may facilitate or assist change in the mediasphere. It argues that the presence of these programs is not a question necessarily of eroding national identity, but rather demonstrates a mode through which the Australian television market engages with and responds to industrial and economic change. At the same time, examining the teen drama offers a way to access the discourses young people create about themselves as media consumers and examine the role questions of national culture and discourses about Americanisation play in these understandings.
**Research Method**

This study adopts a mixed-mode research approach, drawing from the traditions of cultural studies audience research while keeping abreast of the perspectives offered by mass communication traditions. Nightingale (1993: 157) offers the term “mixed-genre” as a way of considering many of the archetypal projects undertaking audience research from a media and cultural studies perspective (see for example Hobson, 1982; Ang, 1985b; Tulloch and Moran, 1985; Buckingham, 1987; Gillespie, 1995). Such hybridised approaches incorporating textual analysis with accounts of industrial practice and study of audience behaviour problematised both the notion of where the audience is located in the meaning-text-context equation and the ways in which it can be approached as an object of study. Moving beyond concepts of triangulation (Nightingale, 1996: 112), the development of the mixed-genre audience studies tradition offers some indication of the complex interaction and shifting relationship between the elements that contribute to the circulation, proliferation and reception of television texts. Broadly, such an approach involves engaging with the three key points of television, the text, the production processes and industry practices, and audience reception (Buckingham, 1987), but includes consideration of elements such as regulatory systems, measurement technologies, reception contexts and the descriptive, discursive behaviour of the audience.

To discuss the interplay of such factors is to consider the ecology of a television system (Cunningham and Jacka, 1996: 16-21). Cunningham and Jacka stress the interconnectivity of elements within the television system, such that changes in single elements have tangible ramifications across other fields. This draws analysis (particularly economic and industry approaches) away from singular foci and
“toward the relationship between broadcasters and audiences and the general cultural milieu in which television exists” (Cunningham and Jacka, 1996: 17). This milieu includes the patterns of daily life and the rhythms of the context in which the system is located, locating the television system within the greater society. Such a perspective is beneficial for this investigation as it seeks to examine the way in which imported television content is rewritten by its location within this greater milieu. Cunningham and Jacka (1996: 22) describe this as a “middle-range approach”, undertaking research from a position situated between studies of the political economy of television and ethnographically intense, micro-situational reception studies. This middle-range approach considers audience reception within a broader context that also investigates the professional practices of television institutions, such as marketing, scheduling and trade, examining behaviours of the gatekeepers of the system (Sinclair et al., 1996) and the strategic role they play in constructing the broader television environment.

Considering the role of gatekeeping agents seems important in an attempt to understand the functioning of a genre, text or format of programming within a national broadcast system. Chapter two looks at Scott Olson’s (1999) typology of narrative transparency as a model which attempts to understand the success of American (or international) programming in a diversity of international markets. Olson proposes what is essentially a structuralist analysis of transparent texts, arguing there are textual tropes that combine to create an internationally successful text, one that is “narratively transparent”. However, the focus Olson’s typology maintains on the text and the internal features that may predispose it for international success seems also an ultimate limitation of his method. Miller et al. (2001: 14)
argue a more productive and less insular perspective for understanding the circulation of texts can be gained by acknowledging the role “policy, distributional, promotional and exhibitionary protocols” play alongside textual characteristics in situating texts. Such an approach suggests the American media system maintains its success not through the creation of narratively superior texts or more economically efficient market organisation but rather through the successful manipulation of cultural labour markets. While this emphasis on cultural labour management is not pursued in this investigation, their argument highlights a need to consider a range of positions from which to approach the success of texts, to avoid isolating particular aspects as the ultimate descriptors of success.

A mixed-genre, ecological approach also allows the study to take account of both political economy and culturalist perspectives and quantitative and qualitative methodologies, allowing each to act as a checking mechanism for the other. As such, this thesis seems better placed to avoid charges of disciplinary insularity which have been levelled at studies investigating questions of media reception (Jensen, 1987; Evans, 1990; Miller et al., 2001). In a somewhat scathing critique of what he refers to as “interpretivist” studies of audience reception (for example Ang, 1985b; Morley, 1986; Radway, 1987), Evans (1990: 151) criticises proponents of the cultural studies audience tradition for their “relative blindness” to the similarities between their findings and earlier uses and gratification studies, “particularly if the oversight is purposeful” (Evans, 1990: 151). Importantly, however, Evans argues for greater acknowledgement of the overlap between mass communication and media and cultural studies.
More recently, Miller et al. (2001) argue that a blending of disciplinary perspectives provides a wholly more satisfying approach to studying the “material properties and practices of circulation” of products that themselves “travel through time, space and population” (Miller et al., 2001: 2). This investigation attempts to work across disciplines, negotiating a cultural studies and literary approach to examining texts and audience subjectivities with insights provided by mass communication and uses and gratifications perspectives with regard to television scheduling and programming strategies particularly (Eastman et al., 1989; Adams, 1997).

**Design of Study**

This investigation turns first to consider the experience of Americanisation and cultural imperialism in Australia, situating these as discourses through which questions of change in Australian society are negotiated. It looks then more closely at Lotman’s conception of translation, presenting the idea of the semiosphere and outlining Lotman’s structure for examining cultural change. Chapter two turns its attention to the textual specifics of the teen drama, considering Olson’s (1999) argument that the notion of narrative transparency may incline some texts to international success. The notion of narrative transparency is utilised to compare American teen drama *Dawson’s Creek* with Australia’s most successful iteration of the genre, *Heartbreak High*, in a comparison that demonstrates some of the limitations of Olson’s theory for understanding the international success of programs.

To some extent, this component of the research sits a little uneasily in the context of a mixed-mode approach. As is discussed in the chapter, Olson’s theory proves itself ultimately limited as a way to understand the international success of media texts.
The comparative analysis undertaken in the chapter reveals key points of difference between the two programs that contribute to their respective commercial usefulness for Network Ten. The use of these texts on Australian television to mobilise discourses of youthfulness, and the response of teenage viewers to these discourses, are explored in chapter three and four. On reflection, the conclusions drawn in chapter two could have been arrived at without the use of Olson’s theory as a guide for the investigation. The latter two chapters, which consider the use rather than the composition of teen dramas, share stronger theoretical links, however.

Chapter two is not without ground gained, serving as a close consideration of a significant theoretical gesture. Olson’s proposition, that a textual theory can explain the international success of American texts, and that this is related to aesthetic and compositional factors not necessarily unique to the US, is a bold one. His theoretical composition is detailed and one that has gained some particular attention within television and media studies, with an edited version appearing in Allen and Hill’s *The Television Studies Reader* (Olson, 2004). Examining this theory, chapter two considers the claim theories relying principally on the text alone are sufficient to explain international success without returning to the propositions of media and cultural imperialism. The limitations revealed lay the groundwork for the focus carried through the rest of the thesis; that translation is a more fruitful way to explore the appropriation of foreign texts and that scheduling and promotional strategies are especially important. Finally, chapter two resolves a pragmatic issue of how to locate the text within a mixed-genre study when it is produced off-shore, no longer in production (as is the case with *Heartbreak High*), or where the emphasis is not so much on the production of the text but its dissemination and reception.
Chapter three looks at the way in which American teen dramas have been located in the Australian mediasphere examining the way they have been related to broader frames of reference by Network Ten’s techniques of uptake. These techniques describe the way in which Ten frames teen dramas as youth programming, in turn designating the network as a site for youth. Chapter four strengthens the investigation by considering the ways in which discourses of Americanisation feature in young people’s talk about such programming. Broadly, this investigation then divides the field of study into three areas, engaging with the textual nature of the teen dramas; examining the actions of the television institutions that locate American teen dramas within the Australian mediasphere; and considering finally the responses of a range of teenage viewers.

**Transparent Texts**

McKee (2001) recounts the difficulties of selecting programs for analysis, resolving finally to settle on the idea of collective memory as a way of compositing a list of “great” moments in Australian television. This project does not engage with the greatest moments in 1990s youth television, but rather with two specific, recently deceased programs that have made an ‘impact’ on the field. While this investigation considers the archetypal *Beverly Hills, 90210* it is focussed around an interrogation of American teen drama *Dawson’s Creek* and Australian program *Heartbreak High*. Both provide strong contrasting examples to explore the textual, institutional and stylistic distinctions between American and Australian produced teen dramas.
*Dawson’s Creek* demonstrates a maturation of the teen drama genre, reaching a state of self-reflexive hyper-consciousness. At the time the study was undertaken the show stood as the last example of the genre that was scheduled in a valuable prime time slot (Tuesday nights, 8.30pm) on Australian television. Until the coming of *The O.C.* to Network Ten in 2004 (as discussed in chapter three), *Dawson’s Creek* appeared as the last gasp of the prime time teen drama on Australian television. Employing nostalgia, eloquence and the aforementioned self-reflexivity, *Dawson’s Creek* seems to offer potential viewing positions that range beyond that of the ‘teen’, extending clearly into adulthood. With a feminised male lead who bucks the emergent trend in more action oriented teen dramas of renegotiating the male melodramatic hero as a suffering, self-sacrificing, martyr (Banks, 2004), *Dawson’s Creek* opens space for a negotiation of questions of gender also. Further, while beyond the scope of this investigation and ultimately only touched upon briefly here, *Dawson’s Creek* is notable for its mobilisation of an extensive and engaging web-presence (Brooker, 2001; Hills, 2004) that demonstrates not only the role teen drama plays in advancing change across the mediasphere but also the extent to which ‘new’ media developments are constructed on the back of ‘old’ media forms (Caldwell, 2002).

*Dawson’s Creek* is compared with Australian production *Heartbreak High* which represents the most successful Australian version of teen dramas to date. Originally developed for Network Ten, *Heartbreak High* lasted only briefly on the commercial network before it was dropped in response to poor ratings. Subsequently produced by Australia’s government funded public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and sold extensively internationally, *Heartbreak High* adopts a
mode of representation that seems to emulate the public funding environment from which it emerges. Earnest and ‘in your face’, the program purports to portray a realistic version of teenhood. The transition from commercial to public broadcaster and its international success in the face of relative domestic failure is part of what makes Heartbreak High particularly interesting for this investigation.

This comparative analysis initially explores the arguments of Scott Olson (1999) that American cultural products demonstrate particular textual tropes that predispose them to international success. These tropes endow texts with narrative transparency, a characteristic valuable for international success that results in texts appearing not inherently ‘American’ but as open to culturally relevant readings in the receiving country. Olson contends that the difficulty with audience-reception studies is that they allow only limited understandings of the differences between readers in national markets, “ignoring the complex variety of tastes that exist within any market” (Olson, 1999: 50). Searching for a way to explain the ability of American texts to attain success in diversified international markets he proposes a theory that attempts to combine two styles of analysis, narratological study and relatively “rare” (Olson, 1999: 50) studies that compare readings produced by different cultures to ascertain why the American text is so prolific across the mediatised world. Olson works to develop and apply a theory of competitive advantage, translating it to the cultural field, to argue that there are textual reasons for the success of American programs.

Transparency suggests American programs are popular across global markets because they exist as mythotypes; that is they contain mythic elements that enable them to “convey a particular set of affective responses, ones that are conducive to
negating the absolutism of reality” (Olson, 1999: 92). These are narrative structures that exist as a series of elements onto which local cultures impose their own specific plots, characters, setting and interpretive codes. Undertaking a mythotypic analysis (as opposed to mythic ones) (Olson, 1999: 94), Olson identifies ten general attributes that enable American texts to exist as mythotypic; each of these is an attribute of transparency, and the more transparent a text, the greater the ease indigenous audiences are afforded to project “values, beliefs, rites, and rituals into imported media or the use of those devices” (Olson, 1999: 5). Olson argues transparency is reinforced by extratextual materials, such as cross-platform promotion and merchandising, that afford the texts a synergetic presence in the cultural environment.

Examining Olson’s theory, this investigation utilises his typology to compare Dawson’s Creek and Australian teen drama Heartbreak High. Though only Dawson’s Creek was commercially successful in the Australian television market, both enjoyed international success, an achievement that may ultimately be explainable by the degree to which these texts are narratively transparent. This comparison points to some of the limitations of Olson’s theory. The weight Olson’s approach places on the structure of the text itself to explain international success seems to consider the text in isolation from the representational system in which it is situated, particularly in the case of television. To suggest otherwise is not to return to Raymond Williams’ (1975) assertion that the principal text of television is the flow of television itself, rather, it is to argue that there is an authorial role for scheduling and programming, particularly in the utilisation of texts to create a
‘Model Reader’ (Eco, 1979) for the network or station on which the program is screened.

This is a crucial process in the utilisation of television texts to create “relations” (Hartley, 1999a: 493) with the viewer, the practice that transforms them into an audience (Hartley, 1992a, 1999a). Olson’s typology does provide a mode to compare the way *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* position their audiences. Comparative analysis provides a way of examining the degree to which the reader for the text is constructed as either youth or youthful, adopting the modes and behaviours of youth culture. In doing so, the range of freedoms readers are provided with as audience members can be established. Comparing the textualisation of audience positions in *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* enables the texts to be related back to broader discourses organising the mediasphere, providing a more integrated way to account for their success in the domestic market.

**Broadcast Institutions**

This thesis argues that the success of texts is related to the way they are positioned as participants in the Australian mediasphere. The second phase of this investigation moves to examine the way in which Australian television networks have utilised American teen dramas to establish a relationship with their viewers, to textualise a place on Australian television for the youth viewer. Television draws a picture of the audience via a process of quantification; ratings data allows the industry to describe the viewing population as an audience, a tangible commodity they can sell to advertisers (Hartley, 1999a: 493). Viewers are textualised as an audience, drawn into the audience for the network across a number of sites. Significant sites for this study
are the line-up of programs, the gaps between these programming blocks and strategies of promotion for both programs and networks. These are places that work in association with the representations offered by programming to make the audience position of the network appealing to viewers.

Studies of the ‘production’ process have featured heavily in empirical audience research. Investigators such as Buckingham (1987), Tulloch and Moran (1985), and Hobson (1982) have studied the processes of creating soap operas. Principally, this process is examined through interviews with producers, as a way of conceptualising assumptions about the audience that influenced the production of the texts, which are then compared with the responses of the actual audience for the text, or the pleasure or uses the audience derives from the text. The investigation takes account of the role television scheduling plays in the creation of audiences by investigating the way in which Australian television networks have scheduled teen drama programming. Rather than engaging with the way in which producers’ perceptions of the audience influence the constructions they produce, this study examines the way in which these predetermined conceptions of the audience are applied in a broadcast environment.

Privileging young people as characters and building story lines around the transition to adulthood (typically centring on the high-school period) teen dramas offer young people the chance to see themselves, or their peers, represented on television. The scheduling and promotion of these representations, and the particular role it has played in the identity of Australian networks throughout the 1990s, affords young people greater representation in the mediasphere. American teen drama programming played a significant role in Network Ten’s determined counter
programming and youth branding strategies of the 1990s that established it as a distinct place in the Australian television schedule for young people (Stockbridge, 2000; Green, 2001). Further, it was in response to the success of American teen dramas that Ten ultimately commissioned the production of the first two seasons of Heartbreak High (Roache, 1999). Ten has attempted to position itself in the market as a site where young people are afforded a highly visible presence, and where they can gain ‘virtual representation’ (Hartley, 1996: 90). The Seven Network’s persistence with and innovative programming of Buffy the Vampire Slayer also established, with mixed results, a distinct space on its schedule for young people to call their own. To this extent, the role of teen drama as a driver for change in the mediasphere can be examined.

Examining television scheduling is pertinent when engaging with imported texts as the meanings the programs carry and the uses the audience makes of them are determined to a great extent by the programming context they are inserted into. In the absence of satellite spill, the importation of American programming is a conscious effort of the custodians of the Australian television system (Sinclair et al., 1996). The television schedule comprises the architecture of any broadcast service:

Everywhere the specific nature of television is defined by the schedule. The placing of particular programme types in relation to each other and to the predominant patterns of viewing habits; the balance between particular forms of programming; the choice of particular tendencies within those forms: these are the defining characteristics of every broadcast television service (Ellis, 2000b: 131).
In this way the television schedule gives each distinct channel/network/station a brand identity. At its simplest, the schedule is a grid dividing the broadcasting day into slots 30 minutes in duration. The overall schedule for a network is composed of multiple grids, those of each day of the week, each week of the month, and each month of the year, tempered by the behavioural patterns of viewers. The sum total of the schedules on television comprises a picture of the national television market. Thus we can see the schedule as a distillation of a channel’s view of its audience; of the brand identity of a channel; of the past history of a channel and the past history of national broadcasting as a whole (Ellis, 2000b: 134).

The television schedule, and its published accompaniment, the television guide, offer a tangible, researchable model of the history and process of television viewing and, most importantly for this investigation, a model of the audience the network imagines as its own. As Vane and Gross (1994) explain, one of the most fundamental considerations in programming is fitting the program to the available audience. Programs appeal to a specific audience or demographic group and must be placed in a time period where the core viewers are available. Understanding the movements of the audience in domestic life and the domestic formulation of target demographics influence the placement of particular programs. Hence, analysis of the way in which the schedule attempts to move the audience through the night provides an understanding of the way a network imagines its audience.

Paterson (1990: 33) argues the television industry views the audience not as a homogenous mass but as an overlapping series of groups with various interests. This audience has conventionally been considered as a family unit, which “invokes a set
of understandings which inform scheduling and consequently the commissioning of programmes” (Paterson, 1990: 33). Despite its waning existence, notions of the nuclear family still shape television viewing. In the UK this is even institutionalised through the watershed that limits programs deemed not suitable for children to slots after 9pm. In the Australian environment a similar watershed is maintained by classification regulations that perform a social role by shaping the viewing menu to institutionalised understandings of what is acceptable to viewers. Paterson argues that the use of published TV guides reinforces this notion because they allow families to map their viewing onto their own lived schedule (Paterson, 1990: 37-38).

Working alongside the television schedule, continuity and branding material articulate the nature of a TV service’s Model Readers (Eco, 1979). Continuity material serves the dual purpose of defining the nature of the TV network and articulating who it targets as its audience. This dual functionality is used by television networks to articulate the nature of the imagined community they invite their audience to become a part of.

The fragmentation of the audience has challenged this notion of the family as the central unit around which television scheduling is planned. This fragmentation of the audience has resulted in a focus on audience segments (Moseley, 2001), and along with the rise of competing media forms (such as the VCR and video games) and delivery platforms (such as cable), has given rise to alternative modes of television such as niche broadcasting and narrowcasting. These conspiring factors have resulted in the emergence of specific services directed at young people. In the US, the Fox Network (Owen, 1997) and MTV (Pettegrew, 1982; Kaplan, 1987) are classic examples, though newer networks such as The WB and UPN demonstrate the
shift to niche broadcasting resulting from audience fragmentation. In Australia the most pertinent examples alongside Network Ten are cable channels Fox8, Nickelodeon and Channel [V].

Examining the scheduling of the teen drama on Australian television demonstrates some of the changes brought by this fragmentation of the audience, changes Caldwell’s theory of televisuality describes. This study engages with the particular environment American teen dramas are located within by examining the scheduling, branding and continuity material on Network Ten particularly. Textual analysis of this material is combined with interviews with programming staff at a number of Australian free-to-air networks to determine the use of teen dramas to textualise a youth audience, providing a also a way to understand how ‘youth’ is conceived by television networks. In doing so, the role television scheduling and promotion plays as the first step in Lotman’s process of translation becomes evident. Locating programs within specific places in the Australian broadcast environment inscribes these programs with particular, nationally determined discourses. ‘Youth’ emerges as a category not reserved for young people exclusively. TV networks imagine their audience from a psychographic perspective, constructing youth as a discursive identity, one that can be occupied by members of the audience who wish to situate themselves as young. Thus youthfulness is defined by consumer habits and consumption patterns rather than demographic age categories. This allows television networks to mobilise a youth audience with far greater spending power and economic value. Youth as a Model Reader is contextualised as a lifestyle rather than strictly as a demographic category.
Teenage Viewers

The final stage of this project gauges the discursive responses of teenage viewers to the practices that textualise youth and examines their perception of the constructions of young people in American (and comparable Australian) texts. Considering the discourses young people produce when asked to discuss these programs and programming strategies provides a way of examining the practices of translation the audience participates in. Turning away from the effects tradition, the approach adopted here is one that examines the relationship between viewers and the text, rather than identifying variables within the text that prompt behaviour or viewing patterns. Discussion about television, transcribed and analysed for research constitutes a tertiary text, a secondary form of the oral culture produced by the audience in making meaning from television (Fiske, 1989b: 66). Interviews with groups of teenage viewers were undertaken in order to engage young people in discussion of both the television programs under consideration and the greater semiotic environment in which they were situated. The formation of these groups followed the conventions of focus group research as it has been debated in media and cultural studies (Mackay, 1993; Nightingale, 1993; MacGregor and Morrison, 1995; Lunt and Livingstone, 1996; Morrison, 1998).

Group discussions acknowledge the social situatedness of viewers, recognising meaning is “framed by shared cultural formations and practices pre-existent to the individual” (Morley, 1980: 15). For Morley, the focus group functioned to allow the meaning participants made from texts to be related to their broader social orientation. While criticised for over-emphasising the role these external structures play in positioning readers, Morley’s approach remains significant and connects with the
debates Liebes and Katz (1993) raise concerning the socially constructed nature of the knowledge viewers may apply in evaluating programming. The quest for meaning is based to a degree on the debates viewers participate in with others (Morley, 1980; Katz and Liebes, 1985; Fiske, 1989b; Buckingham, 1993), a situation the focus group encourages, though not unproblematically (Morrison, 1998). As Morrison (1998: 6) argues, however, the focus group is an effective way of including the audience within the framework of analysis, and hence, a good method to connect empirical and theoretical threads.

Considering teen dramas amidst broader discussions about television attempts to uncover the ways in which young people make sense of these programs within the larger flow of television. Examining the way questions about national origin arise in discourse young people create about television provides another assessment of the strategies Olson describes. Narrative transparency suggests that despite the visibility of a text’s American origins, the program may remain not only comprehensible but able to be related to the broader lives of young people in other nations. The extent to which this may function in the reception young people make of Dawson’s Creek is uncovered by examining young people’s responses to the representations created. Considering their responses to Heartbreak High further tests the extent to which the structure of the text may be the primary descriptor for international success as Olson’s theory predicts.

Likewise, discourses young people create about teen drama programming reflect the role scheduling and branding play as agents of translation. The recognition and role of national origin, as well as the extent to which the youthfulness of texts is
acknowledged in their responses, point to the translatable role played by these practices. The status of these programs as participants in the creation of a youth cultural space does not suggest that youth culture has been Americanised but rather that its construction with elements that remain American (and perhaps ‘foreign’) is not necessarily a cause for concern amongst young people. In essence then, this project does not seek to talk to young people for the purpose of measuring whether assumptions made previously in the study about programming may be considered ‘accurate’. Rather, it engages the audience as part of the textual system of television, examining the way in which young viewers respond to the strategies of the system.

Indeed, the way young people negotiate around these discourses in responding to such programming demonstrates their own actions as translators. Young people exist at the periphery of the semiosphere, the site where the process of translation takes place most intensively. The boundaries of the semiosphere act as a “filtering membrane”, transforming “foreign texts [so] that they become part of the semiosphere’s internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics” (Lotman, 1990: 137). As a site most in contact with the assaults of foreign cultures, the periphery exists as a site of bilingualism “which as a rule finds literal expression in the language practice of the inhabitants of borderlands between two cultural areas” (Lotman, 1990: 142). These language practices offend against the internal binary logic of the semiosphere; bilingualism identifies the inhabitant as a hybrid of the two cultures, one of “ours” acting as if it was one of “theirs”. The response then usually is to embrace this hybrid while simultaneously opposing their identity. This is the response manifest in the panics about young people becoming “Americanised” (Hebdige, 1988; Drotner, 1992).
The way in which young people describe American teen dramas in relation to broader television viewing and their often critical assessments of the representations offered indicate the ways in which they make sense of programming. It reveals the way in which programming is perceived in relation to, and alongside broader cultural and social factors and suggests an acknowledgment of the cultural values Americanisation mobilises plays a role in the reception of television programming.

**Chapter Outline**

The chapter which follows examines the place and role of American teen dramas on Australian television, searching for a way to understand the presence and functioning of foreign texts in a system which has globalised its production and distribution modes but whose readers remain domestically grounded. It looks at Yuri Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere and his understanding of communication as translation as a way to account for the function of foreign texts in the Australian media system. Examining Lotman’s theories, the chapter engages with ideas of Americanisation, examining concerns about young people’s media use and concerns about their becoming “Americanised”. It suggests Americanisation emerges as a discourse to debate concerns about the Australian national identity in response to the presence of what are considered “foreign” cultural developments and elements. By suggesting that foreign elements are translated by their presence in national sense making systems, Lotman’s notion of the semiosphere allows us to reconsider such claims.

Chapter two examines Olson’s (1999) model of narrative transparency as a way to understand the success of American media in diverse markets. It applies Olson’s
morphology of the mythotype, his typology for uncovering narrative transparency, to 
*Dawson’s Creek* and Australian teen drama *Heartbreak High*, examining the extent to which they may exist as narratively transparent. It goes on to argue that Olson’s concept of narrative transparency would seem to explain the modern shape of Lotman’s primordial law-forming text, and it examines the distinctions between *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* as law-forming and anomalous texts. Ultimately, the chapter arrives at the conclusion that textual descriptions go some of the way to explaining the ability of American texts to function in foreign markets, but that their success needs to be accounted for by examination of the function they play within the broader domestic broadcasting structure.

Chapter three provides an overview of Australia’s Network Ten and its move to become what could be described as a free-to-air narrowcaster. It considers the history of Network Ten and the industrial and economic factors that drove its shift to target young people as a specific audience. The chapter looks at the way in which teen dramas are utilised by Ten to construct an image of young people and constitute them as an audience. It considers Ten’s scheduling and branding strategies, elements that constitute McHoul and O’Regan’s (1992) “techniques of uptake”; the limiting of the varied meanings a text can have by the imposition of discursive structures by an imagined community. This chapter examines the ways in which Ten’s scheduling strategies construct American teen dramas as domestically relevant.

Outlining the processes, methods and analytical techniques used in collecting the audience data, chapter four lays the groundwork for the final component of this investigation that considers the responses of young people to American and
Australian teen dramas. This chapter moves first to consider the discursive responses of young people to the two primary teen dramas under investigation. Perceptions of the ‘realness’ of the texts arise as a predominant discursive mode to engage with these programs, and this chapter examines the way in which the young people in this study negotiated their cultural caché in order to position themselves in relation to these programs. It shifts to examine the way in which young people understand and utilise the discourse of Americanisation to locate themselves within popular culture and justify their own cultural decisions as sophisticated. The students in this study negotiated the question of Americanness, deconstructing the glossy image of the US while also utilising Americanisation as a discourse to talk about the Australian national identity.
Chapter One: Youth, Media and Americanisation

What we need to describe, ultimately, will be the capacity of global broadcasting, and the texts it carries, to encourage new forms of association to arise, and to discover whether these associations require a sharing of meaning or simply common semiotic resources. In short, does TV bring its viewers together, pull them apart, or maintain existing boundaries? (Michaels 1990a).

Introduction

Examining the place and role of American teen dramas on Australian television, this chapter engages with the need to understand the function of foreign texts in a system with globalised production and distribution modes but readers that remain domestically grounded. To be a member of the television audience is to be paradoxically ‘global-while-local’, participating in “the most global (but local) communal (yet individual) and time-consuming practice of making meaning in world history” (Miller et al., 2001: 172). Globalisation highlights the relevance of local and specific elements by recognising their situatedness as components of a larger system (Robertson, 1995). The international trade in text and the development of national media systems on the back of high degrees of imported product makes consideration of the local context of consumption paramount in understandings of the interplay between globalised texts and domestic readers. The mediasphere connects texts produced via inherently globalised production modes with readers whose experiences of such are grounded in the everyday domesticity of their locale. It is
the rhythms of daily life, specific to place (measurable on a national and sub-national scale), that construct the media environment in which audiences engage with texts, and these rhythms shape the engagement they have with texts themselves (Michaels, 1990b: 62; 1990a; McHoul and O'Regan, 1992).

The threat of Americanisation looms particularly large over the consumption of American texts, particularly by young people. It has assumed a status almost as a cultural logic (Jameson, 1991) when discussing the way in which Australian young people engage with the media. While appearing as a discourse about media imperialism (Dorfman et al., 1975; Schiller, 1979; Ang, 1985b), debates about Americanisation have played a part in the negotiation of national identity (Serle, 1967; White, 1980, 1983; Appleton, 1987; Bell, 1998). It functions as a discourse for situating Australia within global frameworks (Bell and Bell, 1993: 1). Particularly apparent in debates about the development of Australia’s national culture, fear about the Americanisation of youth articulate larger fears about shifting global alliances, debates which attempt to come to terms with new modes of community formation and new forms of belonging that have arisen in a globalised mediasphere.

In this sense, the discourse of Americanisation is one that uncovers the tensions of the dominant nation forming narratives (Attwood, 1996; Hartley and McKee, 2000), and the way in which particular groups strive to construct an “official” Australian culture. The interplay of youth and the media has become a particular flash point for these debates; young people’s semiotic status as the boundary dwellers between children and adults (Hartley, 1992c: 31-36) makes them a site where the battles over
the boundaries of this official culture are often played out (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hartley, 1992c). This investigation considers Americanisation discursively, considering the way in which Americanisation problematised the rise of mediated youth culture. While constructed as a debate about national identity, these concerns demonstrate the ways in which new technological, cultural and political developments are negotiated to cohere with domestic logics. This chapter presents Lotman’s theories of translation and the semiosphere to consider the ways in which the Australian broadcasting system utilise foreign media in attracting a youth audience, providing an underlying theoretical model for considering American teen dramas in Australia.

**Brainwashed by Americanisms**

In a Letter to the Editor published in the *Penrith Press* in January 2003, Mr Edgar Penzig from Blackheath (NSW) attacked ‘Americanisms’ as an assault on Australian ears. Penzig points to the implementation of a ‘buddies’ program at the Springwood Public School kindergarten as an example of the Australian public turning away from its heritage and culture in favour of embracing “Americanisms with gusto” (Penzig, 2003):

> We’ve never had “buddies” or a “buddy” in this country’s history. The term is “mates” or “cobbers”. Many Australians must spend too much time every night in front of the idiot box soaking up American soaps or hiring American videos, and therefore being brainwashed with Yankee terms and expressions…It’s bad enough as it is with most of our young people dressed

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12 where students are paired up on orientation day
Exasperated, Penzig’s letter is indicative of the popular concern about the presence of American cultural elements in Australia and their perceived affect on Australian culture. Spread through the media, American culture is seen to threaten the Australian national and cultural identity, its detrimental impact particularly visible in Australian young people who it transforms into cultural buffoons mimicking their foreign cousins. It appears as intimately connected with a suspicious attitude towards mass media and a sense of despair over its impact on vulnerable Australian young people. Penzig’s letter presents Americanisation as a forgone conclusion of the passive consumption of American media by Australians.

A similar discourse appears in an opinion piece by Jane Fynes-Clinton (2003) published in Brisbane’s *The Courier Mail* in July of the same year. Fynes-Clinton recounts how ten years previously she was enamoured with American culture, having spent some time in the US as a child, and not at all worried by the presence of American culture in her home. She was not concerned by the way her daughters would “slip into American accents when playing with their dolls” (Fynes-Clinton, 2003: 17) nor the fact her son wore American branded sports clothing. However, becoming disgruntled at repeated US military aggression and dissatisfied with consecutive administrations, she feels “a desperate need for distance from the Yankee invaders and all their creations” (Fynes-Clinton, 2003: 17). Thus, she issues her own call to arms of sorts, imploring the people of Australia to protest on American Independence Day by dropping American slang “now in common usage
among Australian males under 25”, avoiding American-styled fashions and eateries, and switching off “American television, music and movies”.

Fynes-Clinton’s piece reveals some of the paradoxical attitudes that pervade the cultural logic of the Australian experience of American culture. These attitudes can be mapped into a series of binaries that express the distinction between ‘Americanisation’ and ‘Australianisation’ (table 1.1). The presence of an opposing category of Australianisation problematises claims American content threatens a culture that is necessarily natural and coherent. Australianisation suggests imagining a national culture is an active, and often defensive, process.

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<th>Table 1.1: Binary conceptions I</th>
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<td>Americanisation</td>
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On the one hand, American culture is seen as threatening because it is excessive, insidious, omnipresent and swamping. ‘Americaness’ is contextualised as an invader, encroaching on Australia’s “particular ways of life” (Williams, 1981: 11). These particular ways of life are connected with unique, significant elements of a signifying system, in this case located in the cultural objects of a mass media system (Tomlinson, 1991: 6). The presence of foreign elements is seen to diminish not only the significance of nationally produced cultural objects but also the sovereignty of
particular, official agents to regulate the permissible forms cultural objects and behaviours will take.

On the other hand, American culture is something which can be opposed simply by avoiding media and certain consumer outlets. American culture is sanctioned in some of its forms, enjoyed and embraced by many Australians. Fynes-Clinton acknowledges that many Australians, while concerned about the amount of American entertainment, confess to enjoying many movies and ‘tolerating’ much of its television. Importantly, Americanisation is seen as a feature of youth, it can be grown out of, making it almost a transitional phase through which people pass on their way from childhood to adulthood, ignorance to enlightenment, consumption to critical engagement, alienation to citizenship.

Echoing some of approaches that come under the rubric of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991), these concerns fail to actively conceive the practice or specifics of consumption itself. The assumption is that these ‘foreign’ texts “carry with them their alien ‘American’ origins” and that they are “not meaningful within the Australian context merely because they make cultural sense to some local groups” (Bell and Bell, 1998a: 5), In such a way, Americanisation is seen as a challenge to the uniqueness of Australian national culture – it aligns with the protectionist discourses of cultural imperialism that assert the sovereign rights of particular groups to determine the acceptable patterns of behaviour permissible within a national corpus (Tomlinson, 1991: 6). Part of the difficulty with such assumptions is that they do not account for the impact of the context in which consumption takes place. International product is localised by its presence on Australian television. As
a “vernacular medium” (Bell, 1998: 195), television transforms cultural product, embedding it alongside national product and within national domestic rituals. Bell (1998: 194-5) argues then, that the Australian television culture can be understood as “as a more-or-less coherent process through which the nation is intersubjectively imagined”. The demographic modes of surveillance via which television networks monitor and define their audience (e.g. ratings and market research) represent a continuous redefinition of the shape of the nation, who its participants are and how they are participating in broader activities such as consumption (Bell, 1998: 194). The imagination of the nation as it appears on television undergoes constant and repeated reinterpretation:

Australian television, then, is not imitative of some larger category of American television, but is a creolised and unique realisation of the televisually mediated meanings which only make sense within their projected local spaces and within their particular contexts of reception (Bell, 1998: 194 - original emphasis).

This process of creolisation is not so much discounted as completely absent from the arguments of Americanisation presented above.

Implicit in the concerns of Penzig and Fynes-Clinton is the assumption that national cultures are singular, binding together the many constituents of a nation-state into a whole, despite the status of modern nations as cultural hybrids (Hall, 1992: 297). As Hall (1992: 304) points out, fears of cultural homogenisation are concerns that “globalisation threatens to undermine national identities and the ‘unity’ of national cultures”. This assumption of unity is applied to both the ‘coloniser’ and the ‘colonised’, despite what election results, census data and patterns of migration may
suggest about the plurality of such collectives. Flowing from the assumed unity of national identity is the assumption the same sets of codes are utilised by all members in the collective to make meaning from content, even though the very practices criticised in making the case suggest otherwise.

Culture, particularly as it is frequently employed in the formulation of a national identity, is not a singular entity but a specific set of practices, “possessing strong emotional connotations for those who share in the particular culture” (Smith, 1990: 178). As a cultural artefact, a nation is constituted as a system of cultural representation, as a set of meanings, maintained by narratives that seek to unify the populus as a common constituency that can be distinguished from foreign ‘others’\(^{13}\) (Anderson, 1991; Hall, 1992: 291-6; Attwood, 1996). Attwood (1996: 101) argues the nation is built up through a process of narrative accrual “whereby a corpus of connected and shared narratives constitute something which can be called either a myth, a history, or a tradition”. These narratives create a set of shared myths that connect the present and the past, creating a continuity that seeks to naturalise the coincidental co-location of people and place (Waters, 1995: 134). Nations form as constituent members start to recognise these myths as representing their cultural history, when people start to see:

at least part of their identity in terms of a single communal identity with some considerable historical continuity of union, with major elements of common

\(^{13}\) Kelly and Kaplan (2001) provide a pointed and detailed critique of Anderson’s argument and its uptake. They argue Anderson’s work oversimplifies the processes of nation formation, connecting the rise of nationhood to modernity and relating it to a causal structure or dynamic (namely the rise of print capitalism), an argument which denies the imperial histories of nations and ultimately ties the formation of nation states to arguments of identity. Their view is that Anderson has misread and understood Benjamin and that a dialogical approach to history produces an ultimately more satisfying account of nationhood, restoring complexity to the process of nation formation and recognising postcolonialism as significant in the rise of modern nation states.
culture, and with a sense of geographical location at least for a good part of those who make up the nation (Robertson, 1985: 223).

As with all narratives, these nation building myths favour certain protagonists and events over others such that a dominant narrative is created that naturalises relationships within the cultural space of the nation. This dominant narrative emerges as the true, historical tale of the nation, establishing the basis for national traditions, signifying values and ultimately the precedents for the recreation of the nation in future generations (Attwood, 1996: 103). As is discussed below, the entry of American cultural elements has been seen as a challenge to the established accrued narrative of Australia. American cultural elements entered the Australian market as an alternative to Australian and especially British cultural goods and traditions, signalling a shift away from the historical cultural trajectory.

**Australian Experiences of Americanisation**

White (1980; 1983) traces the term ‘Americanisation’ from its status as an innocuous descriptor for the assimilation of migrants to America through to its adoption in Victorian Britain as a concern about the ‘democratization’ of society. America was criticised for its lack of aristocracy and the term was adopted to voice concern that Britain would go the same way. The declining power of the aristocracy led to fears the middle classes in England would ‘Americanise’ it with their lack of culture. America emerged in much European criticism as an image of industrial barbarism and homogenisation. America was seen as a bleak paradigm for the future, threatening the West as “a country with no past and therefore no real culture, a country ruled by competition, profit and the drive to acquire” (Hebdige, 1988: 52). This lack of history drove Baudrillard’s (1988) fascination with America as an
exemplar of the simulacra, as a culture lacking the history to reflect the significance of its technology, vitality and immanence.

With the general acceptance of democracy amongst Western nations by the 20th Century, fears of Americanisation as the threat ‘of’ democracy had faded away, situating Americanisation as a predominantly cultural phenomenon (White, 1980: 276). The interwar period particularly was a trigger point for concerns about the influence of the United States internationally as European nations came to rely on the US (Paxton, 1990; Kuisel, 1993: 2) and the implications of its expansion economically, politically and culturally arose as a point of concern (Ory, 1990). Americanisation came to represent a complex series of concerns, emerging as a set of discourses implying not so much a threat from America “but a more fundamental concern about the impact of democracy, commerce or technology on popular culture and society generally” (White, 1980: 276).

For French critics particularly, Americanisation served as a discourse that united two interlinked but previously separate concerns: “[o]n the one hand, there was the fear of rejection of foreign domination and on the other hand, there was the fear and rejection of the modernité which America most clearly epitomised” (Ory, 1990: 45). Arising as a concern particularly about the experience of modernity in France (Baudrillard, 1988; Lacorne and Rupnik, 1990), Americanisation brought the nation’s economic ambitions into conflict with the traditions of its cultural identity, threatening to degrade the French way of life (Lacorne and Rupnik, 1990). As Kuisel (1993: 3) argues, American development posed a challenge as French critics attempted to resolve the adoption of American progress without sacrificing the
cultural elements that preserved France’s way of life. In Britain the US was suspiciously held as both the source of “threatening innovations and as a backward province lacking in refinement” (Zeldin, 1990: 36). Britain struggled to adapt or resist an influx of American products that were thought lacking British quality because of their mass produced and standardised nature. British anti-American sentiments during the early part of the 20th Century were ironically emblematised by the promise of Selfridges, the first US department store to open in London, that it would “not be too American in character, that if it showed American zip, it would also have English poise” (Zeldin, 1990: 36).

Particularly from the post-World War Two period onwards, Americanisation crystallised as a similar challenge to the narrative accrual of Australia. Australia was considered, “derivative and provincial” (White, 1978: 3), essentially a transplanted British culture and particularly prior to the Second World War, British cultural traditions provided the model for the developing Australian culture. British cultural influence was carried as the “cultural baggage” (White, 1978: 8) of British immigrants to Australia. The Australian intellectual tradition, while constituted by national concerns, was modelled on British intellectual modes (White, 1978) and the concern about Americanisation was that Australia would lose its connection with the ‘worthy’ “[B]ritish past, which [was] the traditional Australian past” (Attwood, 1996: 105). This British past was disrupted by the Second World War when, as with the UK (Hebdige, 1988), the stationing of American servicemen in Australia facilitated the first extensive contact between Australians and American culture (Stratton, 1993).
The presence of GIs signalled changes in Australia’s cultural orientation, with a shift away from British cultural influence and the rise of new cultural forms. Against a backdrop of wartime rationing, Americans brought a stylish, snappy dress sense and affluence courtesy of their higher pay cheques (Stratton, 1993: 88). America and Americans had become visible as part of Australian society, while at the same time:

- anti-American jealousies and conflicting pro-British or nationalistic ideologies competed for a claim on an Australian society already adapting to the changes in employment, gender relations, and the economics of war (Bell and Bell, 1993: 102).

The combination of American soldiers and American popular culture made ‘Americamania’ a disease and ‘American’ an ambivalent label, connoting “the modern, the glamorous, the classless, the sophisticated, and the new, as well as the philistine, the crass, the excessive, and the exploitative” (Bell and Bell, 1993: 102). America solicited similarly ambivalent attitudes in Britain where Americans were considered hard working and business savvy with a high standard of living while their political practices were held in some contempt (Zeldin, 1990: 36-7). During the war years middle-class Australian publications such as *Women’s Weekly* held a contradictory view, celebrating British royalty and monarchism while at the same time preparing its audience for the:

- new ‘classless society’ where people could choose their job, where ‘freedom’ meant the choice of a range of consumable commodities, where women ‘didn’t have to go out to work’, where domestic labour was easier and more satisfying than ever, where new and exciting products constantly appeared from America and where everyone could participate in glamour and other
privileges formerly enjoyed only by the ruling class (Bell and Bell, 1993: 103).

With the withdrawal of American troops after the war there was a general assumption that Australian life would return to its pre-war reliance on British cultural traditions (Stratton, 1992: 2-3; 1993: 87). Australian popular culture had shifted its orientation towards the United States (White, 1978), however, and new forms of popular entertainment and new modes of consumption emerged.

The development of television was an integral part of both post-War consumption and post-War Austral-American relations (Bell and Bell, 1993: 171). The American administration saw television as a medium to support the development of a burgeoning post-War boom in electronics production and maintain an international stability (Attallah, 1991). Robert E. Lee, a commissioner for America’s Federal Communications Commission in the 1940s described the medium as a tool to “preserve the momentum of post-war internationalism”, suggesting television can “keep idealism in style”, integrating international thinking and stabilising the world (quoted in Attallah, 1991: 67). Further, the development of a television industry was seen as a strategic economic and defence development, as electronics manufacturers in the US were also producing military hardware such as nuclear submarines (Attallah, 1991: 67). Australian Liberal MHR Allan Fairhall extolled TV’s economic potential on the grounds that the new medium was closely linked to modern defence technologies (Bell and Bell, 1993: 171). The links between the industrial-military complex and American media companies as well as the ‘soft imperialism’ of American intentions to use media to extend its economic and ideological markets and influence internationally are central causes for the concern expressed by media
imperialism arguments (Dorfman et al., 1975; Mattelart, 1979; Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1979; Schiller, 1979, 1985).

Americanisation, capitalism and the rise of an Australian consumer culture are inherently linked (Bell and Bell, 1993: 168). Coincidence rather than causality ties the emergence of consumer culture and the development of an Australian television system (Attallah, 1991), the rise of both in Australia inherently linked to the prosperity and global interconnectivity of the post-War period. The links between consumer culture, Americanisation and television are particularly visible in the development of youth culture, as young people were enveloped by these structural shifts through their adoption of American cultural elements and the trappings of an American ‘consumer’ lifestyle.

The Youth Market

Youth in the 1950s were considered a threat to Australian society and the Australian way of life through their “unpatriotic espousal of American consumer goods” (Stratton, 1993: 87). However, as much as the adoption of these elements by young people may have represented a turning away from more established British cultural traditions, it effectively signalled the first recognition of young people as a specific consumer market. The post-war period spread the consumption patterns associated with ‘the teenager’ from the US to both Australia and the UK. New commodities, particularly mass media products such as television, radio and the cinema were developed in part to capitalise on the new spending power working-class youth were thought to posses (Hebdige, 1988: 30). As such, concern about the emergence of distinct youth cultures was part of a broader coming to terms with the move towards
embourgeoisement and a break with pre-war spending patterns brought about by a perceived affluence in the working-class (Murdock and McCron, 1976: 16-17).

The rise of youth culture in association with mass media had the unfortunate impact of conflating “young people” with “youth audience”, and “mass movement” with “mass market” (Hall and Whannel, 1994). The uptake of these new consumer goods by young people found particular expression in the form of spectacular youth cultures, the presence of which seemed to indicate broadly that youth culture represented a distinct break from the adult culture. Subcultural approaches to youth (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Murdock and McCron, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Stratton, 1992, 1993) demonstrated, however, that youth culture was a response to the very class divisions it was thought to destroy. Rather than replacing class-based cultures, the new teenage leisure culture was “laid over the top” (Murdock and McCron, 1976: 17) of traditional class structures. While the impact of class disjuncture is expressed through the consumption of new commodities, the class disjunctions they negotiate are essentially the same. Once again youth reveals itself as a site where change in society is negotiated and this appears to be understood through the adoption of American cultural elements. New consumption patterns and consumer goods made groups of working-class youth visible in Australia as a subculture\(^{14}\) and these young people were labelled folk devils as a way of negotiating broader societal shifts (Stratton, 1992; 1993).

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\(^{14}\) Stratton (1992; 1993) discusses the emergence of groups of young people designated ‘bodgies’ and ‘widgies’ in the 1960s as Australia’s only true subcultural groups. While retrospectively identified and collectively remembered as a folk devil, Stratton argues that these groups were comprised of Australian working-class youths. Rather than necessarily spectacular or exceptional, their behaviour resembled a working-class experience of wealth and the consumer market. That it was recognised as exceptional better describes class tensions and the Australian response to the rise of youth culture than it does specifically subcultural behaviours.
Mass production, commodification and joyful consumption were attached to ideas of decadence (Hebdige, 1988) while “spectacular consumption” was seen to announce the coming of a classless capitalist society (Murdock and McCron, 1976: 17). The emergence of spectacular youth subcultures were seen as representative of a breakdown in the perceived consensus in society, challenging the principle of unity and cohesion that binds the hegemonic group (Hebdige, 1979: 17-18). Clarke et al. (1975) argue that the rise of these spectacular youth cultures in Britain in the 1950s associated youth culture intimately with the rise of leisure technologies, particularly the leisure end of mass communication technologies. Visible youth cultures arose in the UK at the same time as the development of consumer mass markets for leisure and communication products. Hebdige (1988) argues the development of commodities and commercial leisure facilities led to a connection between youth culture and commodity selection that saw young people defined predominantly by the commodities through which they expressed themselves publicly (Hebdige, 1988: 30).

Youth is seen to problematise these developments as the recognition of youth culture in tandem with “mass communication, mass entertainment, mass art and mass culture” (Clarke et al., 1975: 18) associated young people with the leisure elements of mass communication rather than with the business technologies (computers, databanks, information storage and retrieval systems) that actually drove the communication revolution. This was seen to associate youth culture with the means of ‘imitation’ and ‘manipulation’ that these developments supposedly heralded (ibid.: 19), giving rise to notions it was a means for the commercial interests at the heart of these industries to manipulate young people. Often youth culture was seen as a
manifestation of the worst elements of mass communication, the association with leisure products associating youth culture solely with recreation (Clarke et al., 1975: 18-19). Linking youth with the frivolous elements of the expanding communication technologies rather than the business drivers disempowers youth as much as it situates it as a category through which these changes can be understood.

Panics about young people’s media use are naturalised by assertions that young people utilise a “vast array” of media, both “old” (such as books) and “new” (Sachs et al., 1991). Many studies such as Sachs’ (1991) have attempted to account for the relationship between young people and these various technologies by compiling statistics on the “use” of media, the hours spent watching, listening and reading (Roe and Salomousson, 1983; Ritchie, 1995; Johnsson-Smaragdi et al., 1998; Livingstone, 1998; Bennett et al., 1999; Gauntlett and Hill, 1999; Burton, 2000). Young people’s relationship with media is a complex interplay of different technologies and modes of use (Sachs et al., 1991: 16), and as Fornäs argues, young people are as likely to adopt convention, conservatism, fundamentalism, racism or fascism as they are avant-garde innovation. Shoebridge (1995) records a conservative streak in young people, particularly in relation to law-and-order issues and the protection of their society and environment. In contrast, they express a considerable liberalism in their attitude towards the role of women, the legalisation of soft drugs and euthanasia (Shoebridge, 1995: 64).

To return to the list of binary conceptions created earlier (table 1.1), youth culture is paired on the side of Americanisation with consumer culture as an alternative to the authentic, national parent culture (see table 1.2 below). In such a conception, some
of the difficulties of media imperialist arguments emerge, particularly the notion that
the media replace ‘natural’ “authentic” cultures (Tomlinson, 1991: 36). This
problematises youth culture as solely a consumption practice that risks the
replacement of the authentic national culture through the use of predominantly
imported content, a concern that seems present in the panic of Penzig and others
(Lamont, 1994; Partridge, 2001; Dullroy, 2003; Sams, 2003; "Bosses Balk at Rap-
Talk," 2004). To describe youth culture as primarily an act of consumption
disempowers young people, ignoring the extent to which commodities and
consumption practices enable young people to partake in symbolic creativity (Willis,
1990), creating ‘made messages’ out of ‘sent messages’ in a process of identity
formation.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1.2: Binary conceptions II</th>
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<tr>
<td>Americanisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swamping</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Pervasive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Culture</td>
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<td>Mindless consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Culture</td>
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<td>Consumer Culture</td>
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**Examining American Media Flows**

Approaches following the effects model have tended to determine the impact of
American texts almost in isolation (Tan et al., 1987), constructing international
audiences as vulnerable to cultural change through exposure to American media.
The premised effects are often not seen in the empirical work that seeks to demonstrate such theories. Particularly interesting is the study by Payne and Peake (1977) that undertook to investigate the impact of American television in Iceland during the spring of 1968. The arrival of television in Iceland provided a unique situation within which to study the ‘effects’ of television. The first exposure to television in Iceland came in 1956 when a NATO base set up a 50 watt American TV station. This made television available to only a few dozen families until 1961 when the station was licensed to broadcast at 250 watts. As a result, the station could be received by about two-thirds of the Icelandic population who live in the southwest corner. Programming was “typical of the US” (Payne and Peake, 1977: 525) except that it was several years old and the advertisements replaced with military public relations shorts. Icelandic TV began a limited operation in Reykjavik in 1966, resulting in the reduction of the American station to 50 watts again. Some homes, however, could still receive this TV up until the mid 1970s with the development of improved reception devices. Consequently, part of Iceland had US TV only for six years, part had US TV for six years and limited Icelandic TV for one, and part of Iceland had no television at all (Payne and Peake, 1977: 524-525).

Payne and Peak used this unusual situation to test the effects of US television on a foreign culture. They found minimal evidence to support the hypothesis that exposure to US TV produced a favourable attitude towards the US, that watching US TV was not systematically related to obtaining political information, and that whilst within Icelandic culture, US popular culture is considered to be characterised by anger, fear and sadness, these factors were not transmitted “through” the television (Payne and Peake, 1977: 527-530). Whilst the occasion in Payne and Peak’s
example is unique, the effects tradition has a history of examining the impact of foreign television on youth audiences seeking to determine whether there is a shift in attitudes as a result of exposure to (usually American) TV (see for instance Tsai, 1970 in Formosa; Boyd and Najai, 1984 in Saudi Arabia; Tan et al., 1987 in the Phillipines; Davis and Davis, 1995 in Morocco).

While effective in gauging the extent of imported programming, the impact of foreign programming on either the cultural system or the audience is not especially accounted for by studies that infer domination from large scale accounts of industrial flows (Varis, 1974; Tunstall, 1977; Varis et al., 1985; Tunstall and Machin, 1999). The international spread of content outwards from the United States is premised on fairly indisputable arguments of technological, industrial and economic superiority15. The implications of this spread, however, are represented as a shift in foreign industries towards a more commercial orientation. Tunstall (1977; Tunstall and Machin, 1999) argues, with particular concern given to the British media industry, that the spread of American media results in the adoption of American modes by diverse media systems. The result is an implied subservience to the American juggernaut. By this measure, a media system seems to be judged successful when it develops industries large enough to challenge the presence of American content. European film and television development policies are criticised for being too fractured (Tunstall and Machin, 1999: 215, 225) and introspective (ibid.: 215, 223) to overcome the Hollywood presence. While economies of scale are noted as restricting the ability of Europeans to compete with American media imports, the ways in which smaller media systems manage the impact of this seems to be ignored:

15 “The USA was One Decade Ahead of Europe in Spreading Cable” is the subheading above a discussion of the spread of cable across Europe (Tunstall and Machin, 1999: 37).
Across Europe by the late 1990s most of the prime-time slots, especially on the larger audience channels, were occupied by domestically made dramas, soap operas, comedies, game shows, and sports. But this was just during the three or four prime-time hours…there was still a huge amount of Hollywood material in the ‘fringe’ hours just before (such as 4-7 p.m.), and in the hours immediately after prime time (such as 11 p.m.-1 a.m.). Huge amounts of Hollywood material were also scheduled for children, for the daytime home audience generally and at weekends (Tunstall and Machin, 1999: 226).

Problematically for such studies, the real impact of the international shifts they described are contested on a micro level they’re not equipped to consider. In an early study of the patterns of international program flow, Varis (1974: 107) argues: “[t]he real social and political impact of imported programs may be greater than might be inferred from the volume of imported material, because of audience viewing patterns and the placing of foreign programming”. Tunstall (1977: 275) makes a similar assertion, arguing scheduling often means certain domestic programming receives the largest rating shares. Rather than evidence of domination, these activities seem to suggest resistance or adaptation within media industries.

By not considering the function American imports play in the European and British media systems and instead seeing their very presence as a demonstration of domination seems a self-fulfilling argument of ‘colonisation’ and subservience. Identifying the presence of such foreign media elements seems to arouse alarm, a somewhat unproductive response given the quite convincing evidence Tunstall and Machin provide of the extensiveness of American media exports. While Tunstall and Machin’s (1999) work quite effectively traces the presence of American media
in the European and British system, it does not seem to offer many insights as to the implications of the presence of this content nor the way in which programs function within the media systems.

The macro approach applied in political economy assessments by critics such as Schiller (1979; 1985; 1991) and Nordenstrang (1979) and even the revisionist ‘cultural industry’ positions advanced by Miller et al. (2001) and Sinclair et al. (1996) do not address the specifics of the way in which texts are integrated into the local media environment and the way in which the use of foreign texts contribute to the construction of a domestic media system. Understandings of the operation of media systems offered by political economy and cultural industry approaches are effective at tracing the way in which international products appear and gain presence in media configurations. These approaches conceive the text ‘non-aesthetically’: “it [the media text] is a tradable commodity in an international trading environment advantageous to the USA” (O'Regan, 1992: 309) disregarding the cultural value of Hollywood product. The ‘historicised specificity’ approach applied by Miller et al. and apparent in Sinclair et al. provides a good corollary between political economy and textual, screen and cultural studies approaches. Examining the integration of texts into domestic media systems explores the functioning of the mediasphere, the construct that connects specific, localised sites of political meaning\textsuperscript{16} with the broader sites of cultural meaning enacted in the semiosphere.

\textsuperscript{16} These localised sites are both what are described as micro-public spheres (Keane, 1998) and sphericules (Gitlin, 1998; Cunningham, 2002) and the domestic, everyday places where media is consumed and discussed. The final part of this investigation addresses questions about the ‘normal’ media use that takes place in everyday environments, looking at media that is consumed in the home and discussed in social settings such as the school by users who may not participate in the sorts of actively political sites of meaning making that Keane, Gitlin and Cunningham describe. Nonetheless, there is a political overtone to the specific meanings that are made which reflects and interacts with
Understanding the function of media texts in their broadcast environment provides a way to overcome the difficulty posed by the notion that foreign texts carry and perpetrate an ideology of consumption, attempting to naturalise and normalise Western capitalism (Dorfman et al., 1975). As Liebes and Katz (1993: 4) argue:

ideology is not produced through a process of stimulus and response but rather through a process of negotiation between various types of senders and receivers. To understand the messages perceived by viewers of a television program, one cannot be satisfied with abstract generalisations derived from content analysis, however sophisticated.

The assumption that the same messages have the same meanings with many viewers is both false and potentially dangerous (Michaels, 1982: 162). This is a particular limitation of attempts to understand the impact of international program flows through the search for universal elements within the text (Olson, 1999). The analysis of Olson’s textual method in the next chapter demonstrates that the context in which a message is interpreted is a key participant in the meaning produced. Eco (1980) argues it is the context of origination, transmission and reception of media texts which determines their meaning. The mass nature of the audience for media communication results in a system where the communicative code of the transmitter is not shared by all receivers, the result being that aberrant readings are characteristic of television as a mass medium (Eco, 1980: 134). Povlsen’s (1996) study of Beverly Hills, 90210 demonstrates the aberrant nature of media texts, in a study that provides an alternative to some of the difficulties of examining a program for its imperialist nature. Povlsen examines the textuality and reception of 90210 in Denmark,

the broader cultural meanings regulated by the overarching cultural, and in this case specifically national, space of the semiosphere.
following in the footsteps of Ang’s (1985b) influential study of the reception of *Dallas*. Povlsen constructs a model for ironic engagement with the text. While textual analysis indicates the program presents a universe “in which American consumerism becomes desirable as a global ideal” (Povlsen, 1996: 4), often these themes are interpreted through ironic viewing practices. These practices, self-reflexive but not always critical (Povlsen, 1996: 4-5), demonstrate a range of viewing responses to the text, many of which manipulate the seemingly imperialist messages about consumption.

To an extent then, the binaries described above and below may paint too simplistic a picture of the distinctions and relations between America and Australia, locating young people as a mid-point between too-artificially contrived categories. The relationship between Australia and America, and indeed the experience of American content in Australia, is related as much to similarities between the two as it is distinctions. As such, the relationship is one marked by paradox and ambiguity, particularly as a lived experience. Turner (1994) explores the ambiguities that exist in this relationship by considering the pleasures of engaging with American popular culture. This is particularly useful as it demonstrates the complexity and multiplicitous nature of both Americanisation and the intersecting cultural identities involved.

Turner utilises Caughie’s (1990) idea of ‘playing at being American’, the adoption of an ironic knowingness when engaging with American popular culture, to retain a sense of the “power of structures within which cultural identities are produced” (Turner, 1994: 104). Caughie’s argument concerns the relations between audience and text, proposing ironic knowingness as a fundamental audience activity that
relates texts to the local regimes of meaning in which they are encountered. Concerns about “homogenization and the eradication of cultural difference” (Caughie, 1990: 46) are often insensitive to “the specificities of national systems” (Caughie, 1990: 47), moving towards universal theories about audience response that disregard the location of audiences within specific national and sub-national\textsuperscript{17} histories and “localized broadcasting systems” (Caughie, 1990: 47). It is within localised broadcasting systems that ‘foreign’ or American texts attain particular and specific cultural value, and their presence within these systems challenges the “commonsense notion of the colonization of the unconscious or the imaginary […] which informs quite persistent national anxieties about the seductiveness of American popular entertainment” (Caughie, 1990: 48).

Caughie describes the way audiences engage with American texts as an act of play, ironic knowingness that facilitates the participation in the identities offered by American texts. Such a perspective “gives a way of thinking identities as plays of cognition and miscognition, which can account for the pleasures of playing at being, for example, American, without the paternalistic disapproval that goes with the assumption that it is bad for the natives” (Caughie, 1990: 54). Caughie’s perspective challenges the notion of singular and fixed cultural identities, where the addition of or participation in some elements necessarily requires the loss or displacement of others (Caughie, 1990: 55). Turner adopts Caughie’s notion of playing at being American as a way to account for the complexities of the Australian experience of American popular culture. Particularly, Turner finds the multiple patterns of

\textsuperscript{17} This is a point also emphasised in discussions of national content regulations and broadcasting policies that emphasise national orientations over regional or local orientations. Cunningham (Cunningham, 1992b: 38-44) provides a good overview of the issues at play here, pointing also to some of the reasons nationalism prevails in regulatory discussions about Australian media systems.
identification such a perspective provides useful to understand the multivalent status of American popular culture, where “simple accusations of American cultural imperialism cannot adequately explain the cultural politics here [in Australia]” (Turner, 1994: 106). American film investment is encouraged as a driver for the local industry despite a seemingly widespread cultural acknowledgment such investment favours models emphasising American off-shore production. American content and Americana at theme parks such as Warner Bros Movie World offer popular culture indulgence despite the fact “it is undeniable that in film and television production in Australia today the dominance of the American industry is still perceived as a genuine practical problem” (Turner, 1994: 106).

Both Caughie’s notion of playing at being American and Turner’s demonstration of the ambiguities of the Australian-American relation are of particular value for the current study. Caughie’s ironic knowingness of clearly evident in the discussions with young people considered in the latter part of this thesis. In the instances recorded, this ironic knowingness enables young people to construct themselves as sophisticated cultural consumers, utilising the discourse of Americanisation to distinguish themselves from younger consumers. Americanisation emerges in these discussions as a cultural logic utilised to discuss popular culture in Australia. The ironic knowingness employed in these strategies of play serves as a mode of translation, enabling young people to reconcile the ambiguities Turner discusses. Turner discusses a relationship fraught with operational paradoxes but still willingly engaged in by Australians, who also draw from it pleasurable experiences.
Turner’s discussion points also to some of the perspectives provided by Australian media studies regarding American ‘influence’ on Australian film and television production. This is a field marked by a certain emphasis on what could be termed the ‘productively Australian’ – texts, strategies, policies and systems that assertively work to locate, account for or describe the Australian\textsuperscript{18} within Australian broadcasting and culture. Examining the ‘American influence’, such a perspective leans towards strategies of appropriation where Australian production industries acquire, adapt and frequently transcend (Cunningham, 1985) Hollywood genres. Two pertinent examples are Cunningham’s (1985) discussion of \textit{Mad Max} and Morris’ (1988) discussion of \textit{Crocodile Dundee}, both of which examine ‘American influence’ in Australian film making by considering the implications of Australian texts appropriating American elements. Cunningham (1985: 237) argues \textit{Mad Max} masters the techniques of the Hollywood road movie so successfully it transcends the genre. More than merely producing a text lacking cultural specificity, \textit{Mad Max}\textsuperscript{19} so successfully appropriate elements of the Hollywood genre it opens new possibilities for the genre itself. This strategy of appropriation is significant as it produces a text both Australian and American, and significant in its ability to break into the American market. Somewhat similarly, Morris’ discussion of \textit{Crocodile Dundee} emphasises the fact the film is understandable according to American genre and cultural references (representing the frontier myth or reminding Americans of a simpler time) while remaining assertively Australian. As such, Morris argues the film ‘conjoins’ (Morris, 1988: 250) Australian and American audiences, creating a text that comments on the complexity of the Australian-American relationship.

\textsuperscript{18} In this regard, the focus is ‘Australian’ in both national and sub-national orientation – accounting, that is, for national and local identities that spring from, and are tempered by, their origination, location or co-location in Australia.

\textsuperscript{19} And even more so musical \textit{Starstruck} which Cunningham discusses at length as Australianising the musical genre.
These models of appropriation point to the multiple patterns of identity offered by supposedly ‘Australian’ texts.


This is not meant to suggest a parochialism in work considering Australian film and television; none of these works are without acknowledgement or consideration of the
status of Australian television within global frameworks. Indeed both Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham have together and separately published and edited significant collections looking outwards towards the Asian region to re-assess trends in discussing international media flows (Cunningham and Jacka, 1996; Sinclair et al., 1996; Cunningham and Sinclair, 2000) as has Moran (Moran, 1998; Moran and Keane, 2004). Similarly, non-Australian content is considered, particularly individual texts, and the cultural policy debates of the late 1980s turned significant attention to the ‘impact’ of foreign content on Australian television, debating particularly cultural protectionist strategies to ‘resist’ cultural imperialism (see particularly Cunningham, 1990a, b, 1991; 1992a for an overview of the issues and relevant work). Australian television and media studies has been particularly concerned with the national question (Cunningham, 1992b: 39), however, producing an emphasis on the ‘productively Australian’ that this investigation does not share. Unlike the bulk of these studies the principal interest of this investigation is not the construction of an Australian text but the utilisation of imported texts. Further, this investigation focuses on the ‘Australian television’ represented by scheduling and branding strategies, rather than programming specifically. Doing so, it emphasises the role played by Australian television networks in representing Australian television, rather than emphasising the ‘Australianness’ expressed by particular programs.

**Yuri Lotman, Translation and the Semiosphere**

To account for questions of consumption and hybrid, pluralised national identities, drawing together the threads concerning young people, Americanisation and the Australian television system, this investigation adopts Russian semiotician Yuri
Lotman’s (1990) model of communication as translation to consider the use of foreign media texts. Suggesting texts must be interrogated in relation to the way they function within a broader communicative structure, Lotman’s model seems to present an alternative to the approaches of cultural and media imperialism. The broader communicative structure Lotman proposes is the semiosphere, which, much the same way a biosphere is a necessary precondition for the existence of life, is a precondition for the existence of communication (Lotman, 1990: 125). A semiosphere can be seen to take on the shape of a nation-state; it is ruled by binarism and asymmetry, resulting in the creation of a plurality of languages. These pluralised languages fit themselves into a hierarchy with other languages within the nation-state, problematising singular assessments of national and cultural identity.

Lotman’s model of communication stresses the fundamentally aberrant nature of communication practices as well as the value of context. All signs are part of a system of signs; their presence in this system is basic to the structural definition of signs themselves. In addition to looking at the way texts attempt to contain meaning themselves, it is important to interrogate the way texts fit into this broader and more complex structure. The culture in which texts are used affects texts themselves: “[e]ven when different cultures seem to be using the same terms, they fit into a different system” (Eco in Lotman, 1990: xi). For Lotman there are two important elements that must be considered: the operation of the text as a meaning-generating mechanism and the functioning of this meaning-generating mechanism within a broader system of meaning making. Here we approach the twin understandings necessary for the application of Lotman’s model; the way he conceives the process of
communication and his notion of the semiosphere, the site where communication itself takes place.

The semiosphere represents the broader sense making structures in a culture; it is “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of language” (Lotman, 1990: 123) and a way to describe the interaction of ‘foreign’ texts with locally specific systems of meaning making and local codes for interpretation. Rather than analysing only the functioning elements, Lotman argues the entire space in which communication takes place needs to be considered as a single mechanism. It is within the semiosphere that culturally specific meanings are made from the interaction of codes and texts. Lotman’s understanding is especially useful to account for Australia’s experience of Americanisation, which Richard White (1983) argues is particularly “pure”. With the absence of “the ‘natural’ filters” that act on foreign texts such as “great differences in language or standard of living” (White, 1983:108-9), Australia appears as particularly vulnerable as American media products require no obvious recoding (e.g. re-voicing, subtitling) in order to be received in the Australian environment. Lotman’s model allows examination of the way in which American products are reinterpreted by their entry into the Australian cultural space. The semiosphere itself performs a filtering role, translating foreign texts as they are located within broader, locally specific sense-making structures.

Looking at the way in which semiospheres interact and texts are transferred between and across them, Lotman develops a model of communication that is based on a notion of translation. This is a model that privileges creative or asymmetric understanding rather than of the direct recreation of the meaning or message of a
text. Lotman (1990: 4-7, 11-19) argues sender-receiver models, particularly encoding-decoding models that have developed from Saussures’ theory of language, tend to privilege language itself rather than the speech act which comprises communication. As a consequence, the text is reduced to a vessel, or packaging, to transmit the message which itself is seen as pre-textual. The ideal such models assume is that the informational content does not change either qualitatively or quantitatively during the transmission process (Lotman, 1990: 12). ‘Good’ or effective communication accordingly takes place with the transfer of the informational content unchanged. Considering such a model, most communication could be considered ‘bad’ as the ideal is essentially unattainable – in order for the informational content to remain unchanged both addresser and addressee must not only participate in the same natural language but both must also possess a common linguistic history and “an identical dimension of memory” (Lotman, 1990: 13). Instead Lotman (1990: 14) argues the process of passing texts between semiospheres (which can describe the international trade in cultural product) is a process not of direct representation (symmetrical transformation) but rather a process of relative interpretation (asymmetrical transformation).

The codes identified by readers may not be those applied by authors as readers draw relationships between the elements expressed by the codified text and their own code for expression. The gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies between these codes result in a blurring and shading whereby new associations between semantic elements and their codified referents are created. Readers approach texts with a set of relative equivalencies, a code shaped by their presence within a semiotic system, and translate the semiotic material into their nearest ‘native tongue’ equivalents.
Consequently, the process of translation results not necessarily in the reproduction of the original text, but rather in the creation of a new text. Texts removed from their cultural context may cease to be comprehensible (what Olson [1999] describes as “opaque”) or may exist as merely able to be understood from their external semantics. The ‘adoption’ of American cultural elements in foreign markets sometimes encompasses only a naively and superficial understanding of the American roots of these products (Bell and Bell, 1993: 168). Lotman’s model provides a way to examine how texts are made comprehensible by their placement within a communicative structure.

It is proposed here that the readers Lotman locates as agents of translation take the form of both television networks and television viewers, both engaged in measures of translation in the interpretation of American teen dramas. The perception audiences have of programs depends not only on their own competencies as readers but also on the location of product within their domestic media environment. This is a thorny issue that will be addressed more fully as the thesis progresses, however Liebes and Katz (1993) argue that local productions are more likely to be judged on the basis of their perceived reality than imported products, which viewers are more culturally distant from. This is not to suggest that local productions will automatically be judged to be more real. Indeed, American viewers of *Dallas* labelled it unrealistic because they had first hand standards of American reality to judge it against. Some viewers enjoyed the “nowhere-no-time unreality” (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16) of the program, while Israeli viewers took for granted that *Dallas* reflected America or the rich or the modern. The response of the viewer to the program was dependent on their understanding of America, suggesting American programs may exist as
multiple texts, relationally bound to the understanding and perceptions of the America a viewer holds.

Pingree and Hawkins (1981) produce similar findings, concluding American programs prompted more reflection about Australia than they did the US. For the young people in their study, US programming played a greater role in their conceptions of the social reality in Australia than it did for speculation on the situation in America. US programming provided a comparative model for considering life in Australia. The views young people have about the US come from sources external to television itself (Pingree and Hawkins, 1981: 104), demonstrating the impact of context in arguments about the ‘effect’ television may have on worldviews. These findings are echoed in this study, where recognising American accents and locations but dismissing them as part of the form of television indicate a critical and sophisticated awareness of television practices. Similarly, the fact viewers were watching ‘American television’ became a particular point of debate and justification that was used to develop both critical and ironic viewing positions. To be able to identify these distinctions emerged as a necessary viewing practice and failure to do so was often positioned as cause to identify someone who had become ‘Americanised’. That American content could occupy these multiple positions, being a recognisable, dependable and acceptable mode of television while simultaneously signally cultural dupery, points to the multiplicitous nature Tom O’Regan (1992) ascribes to mediated America. As content it draws an identity “based on recognising similarities and differences alike” (O'Regan, 1992: 332); transparent enough to be identifiable, familiar to cross-cultural audiences, meanwhile distinct enough to be distinguished from local identities. The complex patterns of
relation that flow from American texts and the identities they construct make
arguments about media and cultural imperialism fundamentally problematic and
suggest a need to understand the way in which both broadcaster and viewer activities
within local systems of meaning structure engagement with American texts.

The Semiosphere as a Model for Meaning Systems

Hartley (1996) argues that part of the value of the concept of the semiosphere is the
possibility of discussing its operation at the level of a single national or linguistic
culture, at the level of nations, or even at the global level of ‘the species’ (Hartley,
1996: 106). The semiosphere is made up of overlapping layers, organised
asymmetrically, and according to a binarism that creates a plurality of languages.
The result is a greater sphere marked by distinct heterogeneity (Lotman, 1990: 134).
This structure is constantly changing, both in terms of the languages that make up the
space, and the axiological position these languages occupy. Not all languages are
equal within any given culture; there are many that are partial and functionally
specific (Lotman, 1990: 128) fitting into a hierarchy with other languages of a given
era, cultural and people (Lotman, 1977/1971: 18). These languages move and
change at different paces to each other; fashion, for instance moves faster than
architecture. The consequence is a diverse heterogenous mix, with elements
progressing through various ‘movements’ at different times. The consequential
picture is not of a single structure but a series of systems operating together.

The semiosphere enables us to conceptualise pluralised cultural identities as it is
conceivable for individuals to exist simultaneously as members of several
overlapping layers without losing sight of their participation in the larger, ‘universal’
macro entity such as the nation (Hartley, 1996: 106). Appadurai’s (1990) assessment
of the new shape of the global cultural economy bears relation to the arguments
made here. Appadurai’s conceptualisation sees the boundaries between groups
redrawn along lines of self-identity construction, dictated not by a core-periphery
model of product transfer, but rather by the contact of individuals with the various
overlapping ‘scapes’\(^{20}\) that shape the globe (Appadurai, 1990: 296). The “imagined
worlds” (Appadurai, 1990: 299) constructed by peoples are no longer solely
territorially bound. The shape of the global economy and culture is related to
“disjunctions between economy, culture, and politics” (Appadurai, 1990: 296), as
well as the lessening control of, and the determined subversion of, the nation-state as
a site of singularistic sovereignty. Appadurai’s notion of ‘scapes’ and Lotman’s
notion of the semiosphere both provide a way to account for the contradictory
elements of the postmodern subject, which is seen as having a moveable, rather than
fixed identity (Hall, 1992: 277). In the wake of globalisation, identity is increasingly
based on historical rather than biological formations, transformed in relation to the
representations of itself and others around it.

Similarly Lotman’s diachronic approach advocates a temporal assessment of the
history of cultural movements, useful if we are to avoid assertions that
Americanisation is an inevitable occurrence. Communication is dialogic, premised
around turn taking and fluctuations between high and low activity: “[t]he
development of culture is cyclical and like most dynamic processes in nature is
subject to sinusoidal fluctuations. But in a culture’s self-awareness the periods of

\(^{20}\) Appadurai proposes five such scapes, each one relating to the major elements that shape the global
cultural economy: Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, Mediascapes, Sacriscapes, Finanscapes.
least activity are usually recorded as intermissions” (Lotman, 1990: 144). These periods of intermission are not periods of inactivity but rather periods of intense translation, when there has been a lull in the texts (or new texts) arriving and the culture is mastering the translation of foreign texts into domestic languages. This is the period Sinclair et al (1996: 13) discuss when foreign products become “adapted to the local culture, whether for market reasons, for the sake of diversity, or to diminish foreign influence, and new ‘hybrid’ genres are created”.

Mad Max and Crocodile Dundee can be seen to demonstrate the productive output that comes from a national culture after this period of stillness. In transcending the Hollywood genres they have appropriated these texts are not creating a derivative, imitative ‘version’. Rather, they have translated the conventions of the genre in such a way that they make sense in relation to domestic, national references and patterns of meaning. The perspectives offered by Cunningham and Morris are appropriate when discussing what has been labelled above the ‘productively Australian’, considering texts created by Australian production industries. This practice of appropriation is accounted for in the latter phases of Lotman’s model of translation (see O'Regan, 1992).

Notions of translation are also useful for considering the processes by which audiences appropriate imported texts into their repertoire of texts. Particularly influential in discussions considering the reception of television texts in locations where they did not originate are Daniel Miller’s (1992; 1995) studies of the place occupied by The Young and the Restless in Trinidad. Introduced to Trinidad after the success of evening soaps Dynasty and Dallas, The Young and the Restless rose to
prominence within Trinidadian culture, drawing groups together in the afternoon to watch the program and providing Miller with anthropological anecdotes about the restructuring of more ‘traditional’ cultural activities in order to accommodate the program. So too, the program pushed its way into Miller’s study of women and consumption in Trinidad, a fact Miller points to specifically in both his original discussion of the reception of the program and the later revisiting. *The Young and the Restless* became a feature frequently touched upon by participants in Miller’s study to narrate events and happenings in their lives. It provides a point of contrast and a site for comparison with life in Trinidad, though Miller notes (1992: 170; 1995: 217) like Buckingham (1987) that participants maintained a distance from the program, enabling them to indulge in the narrative while retaining the right to critical engagement.

This investigation prefers Lotman’s notion of translation to the model of indigenisation that Miller outlines above. Miller’s examination of the way in which *The Young and the Restless* became part of the lives of Trinidadians is rooted in his anthropological outlook. Translation seems to be more durable for a study interested also in the strategies of television networks in relating imported texts to local regimes of meaning making.

Hartley and McKee (2000) demonstrate the usefulness of Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere for considering the negotiation of an Australian national identity, connecting Lotman’s model with Attwood’s (1996) notion of narrative accrual as a

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21 He describes being “slightly ‘shocked’ in my vicarious sense of propriety, when an important Muslim festival I was viewing was interrupted by three ladies who collectively announced to the assembled group some new development we had missed by taking part in the ceremony” (Miller, 1992: 169).

22 This is a mode maintained by the teenagers in the latter part of the current study also.
way to account for multiple narratives in the accrual of a national myth. Multiple narratives and the plurality of possible identities they enable fit together to map the semiosphere as an asymmetrical system organised into core and periphery areas and dissected by multiple boundaries. The core is the chief site where the dominant culture of the semiosphere is produced. Lotman describes it as the site where the natural language of the culture is produced (Lotman, 1990: 127), where practices of self-description and the creation of norms for the entire space (whether they’re real or ideals) takes place. The periphery is the site where foreign content is engaged, where new elements are created through re-writing and translation. The periphery is a site where diversity is introduced to the semiosphere, threatening the unity and definition created at the core. In response, a grammar is developed at the core to act as a metalanguage of description for the culture (Lotman, 1990: 128), the application of which leads to the “presumption of semioticity” (ibid.: 129), the assertion that certain elements and behaviours and norms are correct while others are not, existing outside of what is recognised as semiotically defined.

The acceptance of behaviours as ‘correct’ is more likely to occur at the core than at the periphery where the norms which represent the core’s ideal may appear more as a contradiction to semiotic reality than a deviation from it. Texts and behaviours produced at the periphery are perceived as ‘incorrect’ by the core and seen as a challenge to the correct behaviour proposed. The core, in enacting self-description, declares entire layers of the semiosphere to be marginal and hence ‘non-existent’, due to their lack of relation to the idealised portrait of the culture described. The intention of this is to present an image of semiotic unity (constituted as a national identity for instance) (Lotman, 1990: 130). The flow of semiosis within the
semiosphere is vertical as well as horizontal, however, and tendencies that flourish at
the periphery will eventually filter to the core, crossing multiple boundaries and
being translated multiple times. As texts cross the multiple internal boundaries they
emerge as a naturalised element of the semiosphere itself.

**Youth as a Site for Translation**

Youth is a particular boundary site, in frequent contact with elements that appear
foreign and whose behaviours frequently contradict the norms of the core. More
than any other group, youth represents the emergent: new forms of community,
identity (national and otherwise) and citizenship (Giroux, 1997: 6). Debates about
youth situate it as a site where changes are registered and disputed, as a lens through
which changes in wider society can be viewed (Giroux, 1997: 44). Images of youth
have been closely associated with ideas about shifts in capitalism and the
organisation of social structures such as class, wealth distribution and consumption
practices (Murdock and McCron, 1976: 10). Youth is a site where the limits of ex-
nominated communities are negotiated and panics about their media use are a way of
patrolling, negotiating and resetting these boundaries. Hartley (1992c) argues binary
logic constructs two term universes in which power is clearly demarcated by the
mutual exclusivity of equivalent-but-opposite terms. These binary oppositions give
shape to subjectivity, determined as a structure of accessed identifications (Hartley,
1992c: 29) negotiated by the opposition between an ex-nominated position and its
distinct opposite. Hartley picks up on Barthes’ (1973) notion of ex-nomination to
explain the way in which ‘adult’ has established itself as a natural, nominal
community, against which the identity of ‘child’ is named. Ex-nomination is the
process whereby a dominant ideology suppresses its own naming in discourse (see
Barthes, 1973: 138 for a discussion of the ideological function of ex-nomination). In doing so, an ex-nominated position becomes the invisible, ideological fact, “the very norm” (Barthes, 1973: 141) against which alternative identities are nominated (Hartley, 1992c: 30). To return to the table of binaries developed throughout the chapter, the position of youth as a nominated site in opposition to adult culture works to further naturalise the presumed authenticity of the national, ‘Australianised’ culture. In fact, “Australianisation” does not need to be named at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.3: Binary conceptions III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americanisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swamping</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Pervasive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Culture</td>
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<td>Mindless consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominated</td>
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</table>

In such a universe, youth exists as a “dirty” (Hartley, 1992c) category, offending the binary distinction between the two categories of child and adult and the associated power and rights assumptions that go along with these. Youth exists only in relation to the binary opposition of ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ (Pilkington, 1994: 27). Youth’s ambiguous relation to its (chronological) categorical precedents and antecedents situates it as an identity used and defined by adults as a way of locating themselves within a changing environment (Grossberg, 1992: 171, 176). Sliding
between the binary oppositions of child/adult, innocence/knowledge, powerlessness/empowerment, youth disrupts the essentialism of these categories (Brooks, 2003: 2). Existing at the transitional point between these two categories, youth simultaneously embodies the attributes of both child and adult but lacks the purity of either. Youth represents the “marginal, ambiguous edges” of the age-group category of subjectivity; a category which itself is neither self-evident nor essential but textually produced (Hartley, 1992c: 29).

In doing so, youth exists as a site where the boundaries of the ex-nominated community are not only challenged but debated; it is a site where the ambiguities of structural positions can be explored. As Hartley discusses, troublesome categories offend not only the binary between acceptable child/adult behaviour, they offend also the boundary between who is considered part of the community (we) and who is excluded as other (they) (Hartley, 1992c: 36). Youth are particularly troublesome because they cannot be totally ‘othered’ as foreign for they are part of the ‘we’ community, once children, soon to be adults. This imbues youth with a somewhat frightening semiotic power. They are a site where the limits of the identity of the ex-nominated community are debated, where change is registered and new meanings are forged. They become a site where “the Australian identity” can be hammered into shape.

As a site through which debates about the shape of society, the introduction of new media forms, and changes in economic and social structures are negotiated, young people play a key role in the translation of texts. They exist at the periphery and boundary spaces of the semiosphere. Their role as translators is particularly evident
when the boundaries of the semiosphere involve real territorial spaces. Making the distinctions spatial reveals the periphery places where young people are frequently found ‘being youthful’. The street particularly has been classically located as a site of young people, where their identity is expressed through spectacular display (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hebdige, 1979, 1988). The classic composition of ‘youth’ as a problem emerged from the ‘social exploitation’ movements in the 19th Century that photographed young people on the street, pointing to the differences between themselves and the burgeoning middle class (Hebdige, 1988: 20). Similarly the identification of working-class youths as ‘larrakin gangs’ in Australia during the 1850s was the result of a battle over the ‘proper’ uses the street could be put to (Stratton, 1993: 89). That young people saw the street as a site for socialising and fun, rather than a conduit from place to place represents a key example of the way in which translation creates new meaning, a process particularly apparent in that most translative of pastimes, skateboarding. Skateboarding represents a creative use of the city, a creative reading of the codes of the city that transgresses the uses approved. Skateboarding constitutes “urban public play” (Karsten and Pel, 2000: 337), a temporary appropriation of public spaces that transforms them, for the moment, into skateboard domains.

There is a correlation between the role young people as translators of physical space and the role they play as translators of cultural space, a correlation that lies partly in suggestions youth can be seen as an avant-garde group (Drotner, 1992), pioneering new media forms and uses (Boëthius, 1995: 48). As a scandalised semiotic category, one established by the core as a site where norms are transgressed (Hartley, 1992c), youth is a site where innovation can be undertaken, where new
modes of production, editing, story telling are tested. These innovations can be abandoned if they prove unsuccessful without challenging the internal grammar established at the core of the semiotic space. If they prove successful they can be consequently brought from the periphery to the centre. Such a perspective is present in Frith’s (1993) assessment of the role of MTV and youth television in the successful spread of cable and satellite services across Europe where attracting young people to these new television technologies was crucial to their successful uptake. The ‘youth strand’ established by Janet Street-Porter on the BBC in the 1980s and 1990s served as a ripe site for experimentation with new forms of programming and scheduling (Jones, 2001; Lury, 2001), and capturing the ‘youth market’ was the stated aim under which Network Ten applied new programming and scheduling strategies in Australia throughout the 1990s (Stockbridge, 2000; Green, 2001). Similarly, discourses about ‘Generation X’ note the way in which appealing to this “lifestyle category” (Sternberg, 1997a) resulted in changes in the production, marketing and utilisation of media and cultural products throughout the 1990s (Owen, 1997). Similarly, John Caldwell (2002) argues youth television, and specifically Dawson’s Creek, has been at the forefront of developing profitable economic models for extending television online, a model Will Brooker (2001) explores.

**Conclusion**

What these examples point to is the way in which youth exists not only as a descriptive category of innovative or new media users, but also as a structural category through which new modes of production, distribution and consumption can be explored. It is a site where debates about the national identity such as those
reflected through the discourse of Americanisation take place. Existing as a site of contested behaviours, the concern over young people’s use of foreign media registers a concern about the development of national identity and the role cultural products play in this process. Lotman’s notions of the semiosphere and translation provides a way to explore the impact of the broadcast environment, the greater semiotic site of viewing, on the ‘foreignness’ of American cultural elements such as the teen drama. Lotman’s model allows Americanisation to be situated not as a descriptor of the loss of cultural identity by young people but as a discourse describing concern about the translation of new cultural elements across the semiosphere. Americanisation exists as a participant in this process of translation, as a way in which the resiliency of the national identity is negotiated.
Chapter Two: Narrative Transparency and the Form of Teen Drama

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined Lotman’s notion of the semiosphere, positioning it as a structure through which an analysis of the place and role of American teen dramas on Australian television is possible. Advancing this argument, this chapter tests Olson’s (1999) theory of narrative transparency, the assertion that the success of American texts can be determined from their structural properties. This chapter uses Olson’s theory as a way to examine the textuality of American teen dramas, looking specifically at Dawson’s Creek. Some of the limitations of Olson’s theory, revealed through comparing the textuality and success of Australian teen drama Heartbreak High, suggest a need to consider industrial and audience strategies to come to grips with the ways American teen dramas are located within the broader sense making system. In pursuit of this, the chapter concludes by examining the mobilisation of differing constructions of youthfulness by the two texts, playing out the binary of youth as problem and youth as fun (Hartley, 1983; Hebdige, 1988). This analysis provides an additional way to consider the strategies positioning American teen dramas for commercial success in the Australian broadcast system, as is pursued in the subsequent chapter.

Olson develops a pragmatic model for narrative transparency\(^2\) to determine the way the structure of American texts contribute to their popularity with international

\(^2\) Olson distinguishes his use of the term transparency from that used in classical film studies, where transparency refers to the realistic illusion or the ‘omniscient Hollywood style’, the notion that the text is presented to the audience without a narrator. Olson’s utilisation of narrative transparency is meant to suggest that the text exists with a narrative that can be read through – the narrative is transparent in that it appears to speak to universal and localised concerns, through it one can see indigenous myths and tales.
audiences. The theory of narrative transparency examines the way some texts are internationally popular because they exhibit certain textual characteristics that enable or aid a diverse range of cultures to read them as indigenous (Olson, 1999: 50), as relating to domestic sense-making schemas. The argument is not so much that certain texts are able to write themselves into other cultures; this risks presuming the sort of arguments indicative of media imperialism. Rather, certain texts are positioned ‘for’ international success because they exhibit particular textual elements that aid cultures including them in local sense-making structures. In this way, Olson’s theory attempts to account for the textual reasons for the success of American programming, rather than relying on political or economic explanations for their success. Further, rather than a close examination of the ways in which local people engage with ‘foreign’ texts (Ang, 1985b; Gillespie, 1995), Olson’s theory looks for the textual qualities that enable them to be taken up by foreign cultures. It is not meant as a theory to describe the superiority or universality of American texts, as Olson argues narratively transparent texts can be produced by other, non-American markets. Instead it is a theory of competitive advantage that argues American texts are internationally popular because they exhibit certain textual elements.

**Narrative Transparency and Mythotypic Texts**

Olson situates his theory of narrative transparency at the nexus of a number of previous approaches he claims seem to offer useful, if incomplete, investigations of the success of American media (Olson, 1999: 6-17). He works from the position that materialist, political economy approaches are insufficient to explain the success of American texts internationally as they tend to absent the text itself from the
investigation. The success of American media is attributed to their domination of larger patterns of distribution. This is the tendency to defer the “moment of the cultural” as Tomlinson (1991: 40) describes it. Such approaches are concerned with international systems, rather than national patterns of sense making. Media imperialist positions are problematic because they fail to account for the extent to which audiences seem to enjoy American texts and the extent to which audiences “implicate” (Bell and Bell, 1993) themselves in the encroaching imperialism. To attribute this implication to patterns of ideological domination denies the potential for pluralised identities and multiple patterns of response. This is similar to a fault Olson finds in the claims of cultural homogenisation voiced by cultivation analysis, which tends towards locating the power for cultural change in media texts, rather than their users. He finds fault also with the alternative, however, suggesting detailed reader-response approaches do not adequately acknowledge the place of American texts within broader sense-making structures.

From these difficulties, Olson proposes a theory that attempts to account for the role of textuality in the international success of American media. Acknowledging there is a reception element to be accounted for when considering the function of international texts within domestic environments, Olson attempts to develop a structural understanding to describe to some extent the ability of American texts to locate themselves easily within multiple national markets. To this end, he proposes a theory based on competitive advantage, developing a pragmatic model for determining “narrative transparency” to uncover the way the semiosis of American texts contribute to their popularity with international audiences. Successful American texts mobilise transparency, the “capability…to seem familiar regardless
of their origin” (Olson, 1999: 18), enabling them to achieve cross-cultural success by mediating a relationship between themselves and a diverse and differentiated international audience. Transparency is enabled by a polysemic understanding of texts, and Olson extrapolates Fiske’s (1989c) assertion that polysemy results from the combination of a series of textual devices that work to exploit the potential ambiguity of meaning. Transparent texts encourage an openness (Eco, 1979: 39) or what Chatman (1978: 41-42) describes as “reading out”, acknowledging audiences infer from texts meanings differentiated in relation to their own “cognition, culture, and background narratives” (Olson, 1999: 19).

This point is important for this study for two reasons. First, such an understanding acknowledges there are multiple meanings possible from any text and second, this approach acknowledges that while viewers are active in their choice of meaning, they are not free to interpret the text any way they choose. The multiple meanings enabled by polysemic understandings of a text are inhibited by the culture in which a text is experienced; the interaction of the text with its cultural environment of reception creates what Morley (1980: 10) refers to as “structured polysemy”. The ambiguity of polysemy is suppressed to a degree by the cultural system in which the text is experienced (Lewis, 1991: 55). The ‘ideological world’ of both production and consumption works to limit the possible meanings available from a text (Fiske, 1989c: 16; Lewis, 1991: 59), meaning both the intentions of corporate design and the audience’s abilities to project meaning into programs need to be considered. This would seem to place some limits on the extent to which a primarily textual theory can account for a program’s success. While texts can encourage or attempt to situate
viewers to adopt positions, the meanings that are made from these texts are also related to the way texts are located within the greater cultural environment.

Transparency enables diverse readings and the potential for texts to be embraced by a range of audiences as if they were indigenous by invoking the mode of address commonly found in myth. However, Olson distances himself from assertions media texts occupy a similar space in modern society as myth itself (cf. Silverstone, 1981; Silverstone, 1988). Myth, he contends, is culturally specific and while useful for analysing interactions between readers and texts within a certain cultural tradition, it is ultimately of limited use in analysing the international success of certain media narratives (Olson, 1999: 89-90). Transparent texts maintain international appeal not by mimicking myth but by existing as mythotypic - making use of narrative structures that inspire the responses enabled by myth (Olson, 1999: 88). A mythotype is a symbol, both locally meaningful to a particular audience but also expressing a universal emotional state (Kozinets et al., 2002).

Olson adopts the affective approach to myth offered by Blumenberg (1985), a German social theorist (Dynes, 1999) who determines the ultimate purpose of myth is to enable people to deny the “absolutism of reality” (Blumenberg, 1985: 4) to resolve the existential angst caused by the belief they lack control over the conditions of their existence. Anxiety about the unknown is resolved by nomenclature, giving frightening elements identity and making them approachable (Blumenberg, 1985: 5-6). Classifying elements in the world creates a sense of order, establishing a sense of causality to events and explaining phenomena (Blumenberg, 1985: 12) but more importantly for Blumenberg, classification and nomenclature work to deny the
absolutism of reality by creating and distributing “a bloc of opaque powerfulness” (Blumenberg, 1985: 14) standing over and opposite cultures. In such a way it creates a “breathing space” by cultivating rational comprehension and the control of specific natural phenomena allowing cultures to deal with the practical side of the challenge of survival (Blumenberg, 1985: xi). Olson claims that “affect is universal,” and that myths promote affect across cultures because they represent and resolve the same “human affective needs” (Olson, 1999: 91). These “manifest resolutions” are Olson’s mythotypes, akin to universal lexical concepts (e.g. I, we, person, big) that find particular, specific expression in all human cultures (Olson, 1999: 91-92) and stimulate the affective responses that myth enables, namely “awe, wonder, purpose, joy and participation” (Olson, 1999: 93).

While this investigation does not share Olson’s affective approach to myth, it seems possible to map Olson’s theory of narrative transparency over an understanding of myth that positions it as a symbolic speech form, able to account for the success of American texts in terms of the way they function to construct an audience and operate within a broader, heterogenous mediasphere. Situating myth as a “historically grounded mode of speech” (Barthes, 1973: 110) it exists as an artificial language, a second order semiological system (Barthes, 1973: 114) that builds on the signs created by first order semiological systems to construct a reflexive metalanguage (Barthes, 1973: 115). Myth is an ever motivated form of speech serving to transform history into nature, to naturalise images and strip them of intent: “what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as motive, but as a reason” (Barthes, 1973: 129). It is a mode of speech that would seem to be more present at the core of
the semiosphere than at the border, a mode used to describe and reiterate the norms of the cultural universe.

Olson (1999: 89-93) sees Barthes’ argument as somewhat useful, particularly for his purposes in disconnecting myth from associations with religious structures and instead locating the way iconic forms of modern and postmodern culture resemble mythologies. Ultimately, however, Olson’ determines that such an approach produces specific cultural analyses, which for his project are unsatisfying. This conclusion seems to misunderstand Barthes’ project in demonstrating the resemblance of modern sign systems to myths; locating myth as a form of language seems to allow the sort of mythotypic investigation Olson desires. Olson’s mythotypic approach offers an alternative to arguments that media texts displace myths, Western or otherwise (Campbell, 1968; Mishra, 1988/89; Vogler, 1998) but in doing so he attempts to prescribe affective behaviours to particular textual modes.

While the role of affect forms the core argument Blumenberg (1985) presents, his assessment of myth does not appear out of step with the understanding championed by Lotman. Blumenberg’s study evaluates the way in which myth utilises “symbolic forms” (Blumenberg, 1985: xi-xii) to allow people to deny “the absolutism of reality”, moving from the purpose of myth to investigate the notion that nomenclature is a fundamental way in which myth is given form (Blumenberg, 1985: 35, 42-43). His understanding of the functioning of myth aligns with understandings of the purpose of myth as a structuring mechanism, a way in which people make sense of the world around them (Blumenberg, 1985: 6, 42).
Similarly, situating myth as a second order semiological system, Lotman’s understanding of myth situates it as a system which enables the world to be understood and spoken about (Lotman, 1990: x). Myth forms one half of Lotman’s binary of primordial text types that contribute to the modern plot text. Myth is the frequent narrative device through which law-forming texts are encountered, texts that function within the semiosphere to construct norms and “create a picture of the world” (Lotman, 1990: 152-3). Engendered by classification and stratification, mythic law-forming texts reduce anomalies and surprises to norms and orderliness. In this sense, Olson’s morphology of the mythotype corresponds roughly with the description Lotman provides of cyclical narratives (Lotman, 1990: see chapter 11, but particularly 151-154), the narrative manifestation of law-forming texts. Applying Lotman’s formation to modern texts, Hartley and McKee (2000: 72) argue law-forming functions can be found in modern drama texts such as soap operas. These are counterposed by texts which do not reduce anomalies but record them, a function played by modern journalism.

Rather than culturally specific myths, Olson argues it is possible to identify and categorise the narrative devices that enable texts to evoke responses akin to myth. This is to produce a morphology of the mythotype, “to systematise the narratolgoical devices and apparatuses of the media from an affective perspective” (Olson, 1999: 94). This is a project which produces a list of ten general attributes that enable texts to exist as mythotypic. Each of these is an attribute of transparency, working to encourage the affective responses of joy, participation, order, awe and wonder, and their particular combination produces texts onto which cultures can project their own “values, beliefs, rites, and rituals” (Olson, 1999: 6). Olson’s ten attributes of
transparency are openendedness, verisimilitude, virtuality, negentropy, circularity, ellipticality, archetypal dramatis personae, inclusion, omnipresence, and production values (Olson, 1999: 94).

Olson’s ten attributes are broken into two groups: eight internal elements that deal with structural relations within narratives and two external elements, omnipresence and production values, that concern the way in which texts are related to their environment (Olson, 1999: 109). Engaging archetypal dramatis personae constructs transparent texts by mobilising characters “whose own situation and personality are closest to the mythotype: those engaged in awe, in choice, in participation” (Olson, 1999: 105). Describing the function of archetypal dramatis personae, however, Olson notes that few archetypal characters transcend cultures, especially “if one wants to avoid Jungian mysticism” (Olson, 1999: 105). To this end, he contends archetypal continuity is fundamentally culturally specific, which works to situate transparent texts within greater cultural traditions.

Openendedness contributes to the mythic nature of texts by encouraging a sense of participation on the part of the audience. Serial and episodic television are leading examples of the openended text, encouraging participation on the part of the viewer, not resolving all narrative threads by the end of an episode, leaving the viewer with the “explicit potential for further narrative recitation at another time in the future” (Olson, 1999: 95) and encouraging polysemy. Participation encouraged by openendedness is furthered by ellipticality, engaging the audience to fill in the time periods skipped, drawing the audience to participate rather than just observe the activity (Olson, 1999: 104).
Openendedness and ellipticality aid the sense by which texts appear as a “psychologically convincing, electronically simulated environment”. The creation and believability of these environments, described by Olson as the creation of virtuality, allows the absolutism of reality to be resisted by constructing a world which is “orderly, dependable, and inviting” (Olson, 1999: 98) that contrasts the chaos, unpredictability and hostility of the ‘real’ environment. Olson brushes by fan theory (paying a debt to the cultural poaching arguments of Jenkins (1992) and de Certeau (1984)) to argue that even when the situation offered by the text is fantastical, it can still appear as virtually real and compelling (Olson, 1999: 97). The virtuality of texts is reinforced by the principal of verisimilitude, the propensity by which Hollywood film conventions convey naturalism. Naturalistic myths appear to convey some “deeper, self-evident, and universal truth about life, something not environmentally natural but cognitively or morally natural” (Olson, 1999: 108).

The compelling reality established by virtuality is furthered by negentropy, a term Olson uses to describe the way texts create orderliness for viewers: “[t]elevision becomes a mechanism for conveying sense and meaning in a world that otherwise appears senseless and meaningless” (Olson, 1999: 98). Often through the conventions of genre, negentropy is enabled by repetition, reducing chaos in the text and creating a world the viewer is familiar with without having to constantly compare it to their own experience (Olson, 1999: 99). Predictability reassures the viewer “that there is order in the world despite the evidence to the contrary that he or she might glean from their unmediated experience” (Olson, 1999: 100). Negentropy is reinforced by circularity, which imbues the events in the text with a sense of
These elements work to enable transparent texts to create a sense of inclusivity: “a major function of myth being the encouragement of participation and acculturation within the culture” (Olson, 1999: 107). Inclusion contributes to the transparency of text by binding viewers over shared experiences, producing the sense they all share the same cultural capital; the viewer is not so much participating in consumption as participating in the ritual of consumption (Olson, 1999: 107). This inclusivity is often further enabled by the extent to which texts possess an omnipresence. The spread of the media experience to the wider environment instils a sense of inclusion and participation in the viewer by extending the engagement with the media beyond the discrete act of viewing (Olson, 1999: 110). Omnipresence enables transparent media texts to create environments for viewers to engage with the text in a wider community. Finally, transparent texts are enabled by production values, particularly high production values, which evoke “perhaps the most elemental and universal of mythotypes” (Olson, 1999: 110), wonder and awe, by capitalising on the law of spectacle. However, finely tuned production values, rather than necessarily excessive ones, can heighten senses of verisimilitude and virtuality (Olson, 1999: 111) and this is the function they play in the two texts examined by this chapter.

**Narrative Transparency and the Teen Drama**

The following analysis applies Olson’s morphology to *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* respectively, exploring the usefulness of such a perspective to account for the textuality of American teen dramas. It compares the narrative purpose and a familiarity by repeatedly restoring the initial equilibrium of the text (Olson, 1999: 100-101).
transparency of *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* to uncover structural differences between the American and Australian teen texts, uncovering the role these may play in their relative success. The key differences between these texts when measured against Olson’s typology are outlined in table 2.1.

This analysis does not move systematically through Olson’s morphology to examine these texts. An initial attempt to do so produced a somewhat fractured analysis that tended to ignore the interplay between elements in encouraging particular mythotypic responses. It also struggled somewhat to effectively account for the way particular elements of the morphology appear to a greater extent than others. A systematic analysis of these texts was made difficult by a certain clumsiness in the way Olson discusses the functioning of the ten attributes. For some attributes, Olson’ describes the way they evoke particular responses related to mythotypes (such as circularity evoking the mythotype of participation and joy). Others he describes as evoking ‘the mythotype’ itself (see for instance his discussion of the function of archetypal dramatis personae pp.105-106). This difficulty emerges from his attempt to elicit concise structural explanations for what are in practice messy and interlaced behavioural responses (namely affect).

Further, to attempt to systematically move through his morphology produces an analysis that appears to treat the text itself as whole and discrete, disconnecting the text and the reasons for success from its status and place within a broader sense-making system. Olson addresses this himself through an extended discussion of what he refers to as the synergistic elements of texts, “ancillary” and support materials such as “merchandising, licensing, intertextuality, and hyperreal
environments” (Olson, 1999: 112 - see Chapter 6). In doing so, he seems to recognise narrativity and textuality cannot be seen as solely responsible for the mythotypic status or international success of a text.

Table 2.1: Comparing the narrative transparency of *Dawson's Creek* and *Heartbreak High*

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dawson's Creek</th>
<th>Heartbreak High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openendedness</td>
<td>Ongoing narrative produced by the endlessly deferred narrative.</td>
<td>Uses Hartley High as central thrust for narrative. Follows students (generally) only as far as graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circularity</td>
<td>Ongoing tension of the endlessly deferred narrative, self-referentiality.</td>
<td>Some structural circularity in the school day format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negentropy</td>
<td>Ongoing tension of the endlessly deferred narrative.</td>
<td>Major characters suffer losses, disrupting the narrative’s redundancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellipsis</td>
<td>Narrative is tied to the school year, overarching storylines maintain the principal of unchronicled growth.</td>
<td>Mix of self-contained and ongoing narratives. Increase in ellipsis as soap elements increased in later seasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtuality</td>
<td>Convincing world supported by extensive extra-narrative elements such as web community.</td>
<td>Plays to the social realist tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verisimilitude</td>
<td>Hollywood filmic tradition.</td>
<td>Purports to be a realistic representation through mobile camera and ‘gritty’ approach. ‘Realistic’ dialogue and improvised presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Nostalgic approach, opportunities for fan participation.</td>
<td>Tight, mobile camerawork. School as a site for the negotiation of teen citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High production values</td>
<td>Location shoots. Shoots on film like drama.</td>
<td>Location shoots. Shoots on film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnipresence</td>
<td>Intertextuality. Extensive web presence, and ancillary products, plays as part of the wider world of youth culture.</td>
<td>Soundtracks. Limited web presence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Dawson’s Creek as Narratively Transparent**

Applying Olson’s morphology, *Dawson’s Creek* appears as clearly narratively transparent. Olson’s theory builds on genre analysis (Olson, 1999: 14, 25, 100-101) and the melodrama and soap opera roots of *Dawson’s Creek* lay much of the groundwork for its narrative transparency. Soap is a particularly transparent genre (Olson, 1999: 153) and one that Olson identifies to illustrate the potential for non-American texts to exist as narratively transparent. Olson points to Australian soap *Neighbours* and the Latin American telenovela as examples of internationally successful transparent texts produced outside of the US: “They [telenovelas] are crafted to domestic demand in Brazil but are amazingly transparent, rendering them universally exportable and comprehensible” (Olson, 2001).

Produced by Columbia Tri-Star Television, *Dawson’s Creek* revolves around the traumas of Dawson Leery and his friends, Joey, Pacey, Jen and Jack as they inhabit the idyllic small town of Capeside, Massachusetts and eventually Boston as they move on to college. The series was created by Kevin Williamson, a teen film auteur, responsible for writing teen horror films such as *Scream* (1996), *Scream 2* (1997), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), *The Faculty* (1998) and *Halloween H20* (1998). These films played a role in reviving the genre in the 1990s and the *Scream* films are notable for their intertextuality, self-referentiality and extensive pop culture references. *Dawson’s Creek* consistently achieved high ratings in its target demographic in the US (Kissell, 2003) where it was in part responsible for the success of fledgling network The WB (Schmuckler, 1998; Teasdale, 1999). In Australia it was a solid performer for Network Ten in five out of its six seasons,
declining during season five before being pushed out of prime-time for its last season in 2003 (Stapleton, 2003).

Openendedness, Circularity and the Endlessly Deferred Narrative
The central narrative thrust concerns the titular Dawson Leery, a self-analytical (Birchall, 2004: 184; Hills, 2004: 58) Spielberg acolyte\(^\text{24}\), and his sometimes requited love for Joey Potter, childhood friend and girl next door. The narrative arc of the series revolves around the shape of their relationship as they and their friends “face the agony and ecstasy of teenage life”, struggling with the challenge of growing up “without growing apart” (Season 1 DVD blurb). Framed as a coming-of-age drama and running the gamut of teen issues such as burgeoning sexuality, relationships with authority (e.g. parents, the law, school), and substance experimentation, the love triangle between Dawson, Joey and Dawson’s best friend Pacey establishes an openended narrative, perennially fuelled by the question of who Joey will choose and buoyed along by various periods they spend together and with others.

Unlike the narrative non-resolution employed by soap operas, this narrative resembles the “endlessly deferred narrative” (Hills, 2004: 57) of the sort often found in cult television (Hills, 2002: 134-5; 2004). An endlessly deferred narrative establishes a self-propelling tension, the satisfactory resolution of which would result in the destruction of the program itself. Soap opera narratives tend to pose a number of relatively unimportant questions to propel the narrative along. The resolution of

\(^{24}\) Dawson professes in the pilot episode “Emotions in Motion” (#100): “See, I believe that all the mysteries of the universe, all the answers to life’s questions can be found in a Spielberg film. It’s a theory I’ve been working on. See, whenever I have a problem all I have to do is look to the right Spielberg movie and the answer is revealed.” Dawson’s status as a wannabe film maker connects him with a longer tradition of representing young people as extremely media conscious and aspirant that emerged during the 1990s as part of the construction of the Generation X youth paradigm (see Cohen and Krugman, 1994; Rushkoff, 1994b, a).
any of these questions opens up a further series of questions, the sum total resulting in an ultimately decentred non-resolved narrative (Hills, 2002: 134). By contrast, cult texts tend to construct a narrative based around a single question or related set of questions, whose resolution would ultimately close the narrative and force the program to conclude or reinvent itself, a practice that is not always successful (Hills, 2002: 135).

Similarly, the narrative tension that drives *Dawson’s Creek* is the ongoing shifting status of Dawson and Joey’s relationship, and the ultimate resolution of this tension, the stabilising of this relationship, would and does result in the conclusion of the series. Hills (2004: 55) argues that the core narrative of the text is driven by the tension between two competing relationship models that conform to those Giddens (1992: 61) identifies: “romantic love” and “pure relationship” (or “confluent love”). Playing these two models off against each other, the text appeals to a sense of quality by avoiding “affirming clichés of teen romance while making romance a matter both of apparent predestination (‘soulmates’) and mature reflexivity (‘talking through ones hopes and fears in and for a relationship’)” (Hills, 2004: 57). The text negotiates between these two models, situating them not so much as mutually exclusive but exploring the potentials and limitations offered by these distinctions. Indeed, Hills (2004: 57) argues the text combines both approaches in the possible union of Dawson and Joey, and the negotiation of this relationship provides the program with “spine and continuity”. Despite the presence of other relationships along the way, the future of Dawson and Joey remains “narratively present and diegetically potent” (Hills, 2004: 57).
By refusing to resolve the question of which union, or type of union, will triumph, *Dawson’s Creek* offers viewers ongoing engagement. The openendedness of this narrative thrust works to construct *Dawson’s Creek* as transparent by imploring the audience to participate in speculation about the text. Will Brooker’s (2001) study of the responses of American and British fans to *Dawson’s Creek* points to the way in which this narrative tension provides a sense of engagement and participation for viewers. Watching and discussing the relationship elements of the text developed a sense of community for female viewers particularly, both British and American. One American viewer summarised their discussion about relationships as “normal girl talk” (Brooker, 2001: 466) considering which of the relationships (Joey and Dawson or Joey and Pacey) should last, their dislike for other characters (Jen), and their desire and lust for actor Joshua Jackson (Pacey). For both the American and the British viewers in Brooker’s study, the program’s romantic themes provide a topic of conversation that binds them together as a community. Brooker reports that of the 27 female American viewers in the study, 23 watched the program with a group of 2-5 people or more, with 25 viewers talking about the program afterwards (Brooker, 2001: 466). Utilising the common themes of “normal girl talk”, *Dawson’s Creek* appears transparent by encouraging the inclusion of its viewers in a community.

The ultimate resolution of *Dawson’s Creek’s* central narrative comes at the conclusion of the series. The sixth and final season is comprised of 24 episodes, with episode #622\(^{25}\) effectively closing the series and the two final episodes ((#623) “All

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\(^{25}\) Episodes of *Dawson’s Creek* are identified by a three digit code; the first digit refers to the season and the next two to the episode number. The majority of first season episodes where named after films, however, this ceased at the conclusion of the season amidst concerns about legal difficulties in syndication and DVD release (“I Hate Jen - Wayne's Episode Guide,” 2001). First season episodes were retitled. The original titles for first season episodes are used here as the titles provide an apt
good things...” (#624 “...must come to an end”) moving forward five years in time to trace the continuing lives of the characters. Episode #622 sees Joey Potter returning from college in Boston to her hometown town of Capeside in order to raise funds and draw together a crew to produce Dawson’s first feature film, a nostalgic piece about his childhood. The film is a simulacrum of the series itself, a coming of age story about an intense teen, his girl next door love, and their friends, all of whom are hyper articulate and self-aware. In a fit of ironic re-articulation this film has already been produced as a short, entitled *Creek Daze*, by Dawson while he was in high school.

Dawson was set to self-finance this film, however, his life savings were lost in a bad stock market investment made by Pacey and this has ruined Dawson’s spirit, much to Joey’s chagrin. As Jen races to secure equipment, Joey enlists characters to fill roles and Pacey smooth talks his way around town to secure backers and funding. Joey is trying to engineer a reconciliation between the two young men, who have ultimately fallen out over their shared love for her, and delivers each of them a note to meet her by a local landmark. Neither knows the other has been invited and unbeknownst to both of them Joey has no intention of showing up, instead achieving a lifelong goal and travelling to France. The episode concludes with the boys reconciling, agreeing to try to rebuild their friendship while Joey is seen walking under the Eiffel Tower, reflecting on the events that have unfolded in a voice-over that concludes, “I can’t swear this is exactly how it happened. But this *is* how it felt” (Joey, episode #622, “Joey Potter and the Capeside Redemption”).

demonstration of the way in which the program utilised intertextuality to situate itself amidst popular culture.
This particularly openended conclusion to the series denies resolution of the central question. It demonstrates the circularity this narrative tension provides the text. As an essentially unresolvable premise, the tension surrounding the relationship of Dawson and Joey provides the text with a constant reference point for the audience to relate to. This conclusion restores the equilibrium of the text; Dawson and Pacey are friends again, and Dawson and Joey are single but the potential for a relationship remains open. Circularity establishes texts as mythotypic by presenting the events represented as eternal (Olson, 1999: 100); no new information is introduced by the repetition of the narrative (Lotman, 1990: 151). The circularity of the narrative has the effect of naturalising the events presented. Repetition and circularity make events appear as if they had a purpose and despite the journey they have undertaken, the protagonists have ultimately returned to their rightful place in the universe.

Olson argues circularity encourages the mythotype of joy in the audience through the notion of the “eternal return” (Olson, 1999: 101). In the context of Dawson’s Creek, circularity functions to naturalise the negotiation of relationships as a central feature of the experience of youth. The version of youth mobilised by Dawson’s Creek places identity politics and the politics of the personal at the heart of the youth experience. To suggest that the “personal is political” (Buckingham, 2000b: 34) is to suggest that the micro-politics of everyday, the activities of identity formation, are contested and negotiated out of struggle (Buckingham, 2000b: 34). Dawson’s Creek naturalises the negotiation of personal politics by placing it at the centre of the narrative thrust. The negotiation of acceptable relationship models is the narrative device that drives the majority of the diegetic decisions in Dawson’s Creek.
Finding and making a relationship work is contextualised as a mode to make sense of the chaos of existence. This is well demonstrated by the events that unfold in episode #216, “Be Careful What You Wish For”. The episode opens on the morning of Dawson’s 16th birthday and we find him suffering a mid-teen crisis. As he tells a tired and not particularly interested Pacey, his life has thus far added up to nothing because he has not been able to sustain his relationship with Joey. His mission for his birthday is to get Joey back. All around him is chaos:

- his best friend Pacey has undergone a reinvention, dropping his status as Dawson’s comedic foil and instead drawing motivation to achieve from his relationship with Andie;
- Dawson and Joey have recently broken up and in the interim Joey has had a relationship with Andie’s brother Jack who has recently admitted to being gay;
- Jen is back on a spiral of substance abuse. Jen had moved to Capeside from New York to live with her grandmother and clean up. Gramps, her grandmother lives next door to Dawson and Jen was Dawson’s first girlfriend, ultimately proving the catalyst for Dawson and Joey to realise their feelings for each other;
- Dawson’s parents are getting a divorce after his mother had an affair.

Amidst all of this, Dawson sees renewing his relationship with Joey as the way to restore order to his world. After commenting that everyone else in his life seems to be moving on, Dawson and Pacey share the following exchange:

Pacey: C’mon, Dawson. You need to stop looking to movies for all the answers to life's questions. Okay? What you need to do is figure out what it is in life that you want and make it happen! Okay? Be definitive!
Dawson: You're right. I need … I need definitive answers. Joey's the answer.
I had her, I lost her, and now I'm going to get her back. How's that for definitive? (Episode #216, “Be Careful What You Wish For”)

While Dawson is ultimately ineffectual in sustaining a relationship with Joey, *Dawson’s Creek* places the pursuit of a functional relationship as central to making sense from the youth experience. This is played out across the entire text. While Hills (2004) argues Dawson and Joey’s relationship negotiates both romantic and pure relationship models, it is fair to argue that Dawson and Pacey inhabit for the course of the series, one side each of this binary. Regardless of which side they occupy on this binary, both are able to negotiate the chaos of youth because of their respective relationships. Questions of family structure, sexual identity, academic performance, relationships with authority, and questions about life direction, futures and occupations can all be navigated with a functional relationship. *Dawson’s Creek* equates the attainment of functional relationship with the transition to adulthood, a transition that will involve moving away from the media as the primary source of socialisation (Arnett, 1995). That the pursuit of a functional relationship can take the central place in the narrative is also a product of the way *Dawson’s Creek* mobilises the youth experience. Young people, permitted a freedom of action but without the responsibilities of adulthood, are free to explore these relationship options.

**Nostalgia: Inclusion, Archetypal Dramatis Personae and Negentropy**
The effect of foregrounding relationships is twofold for the construction of *Dawson’s Creek* as transparent. As noted above, the circular way in which these relationships are explored across the series imbue it with a sense of purpose. Second, locating the negotiation of relationships as the experience of youth employs a nostalgic mode that
provides a space for viewers to participate in coming of age discourses by connecting them with an emotional structure of feeling (Ang, 1985b: 45). This approach is made explicit by Joey’s voiceover in the penultimate episode, which sums up the series with the statement: “It’s true what they say. Time is an unreliable narrator. History gets rewritten in small ways with each passing day. I can’t swear this is exactly how it happened, but this *is* how it felt” (Joey, Episode 622 “Joey Potter and the Capeside Redemption”). This nostalgic mode establishes the text as transparent by making the text inclusive. By connecting with the structure of emotions older viewers are able to participate in this youthful identity, not ‘reliving’ their youth but connecting with a youthful fantasy that enables them to symbolically cast off the responsibilities of adult experience (Birchall, 2004). Chiefly this casting off takes the form of participating in the excess of emotion; there is no need for the measures of reason, responsibility, consequence and priority that come with adulthood – emotional intensity places awakening at the centre of the world experience.

*Dawson’s Creek* mobilises a number of nostalgic strategies to produce this youthful fantasy. Intertextual references to prior youth texts, particularly 1980s films by John Hughes and *Beverly Hills, 90210*, locate *Dawson’s Creek* as the progeny of a longer tradition of youthful representations. First season episodes were initially titled after films including 1980s teen hits *Dirty Dancing* (#102) and *The Breakfast Club* (#107). The latter episode found inspiration in the film of the same name, placing the *Dawson’s Creek* clique in the same situation as the cast of John Hughes’ 1985 hit. Similarly, ‘The Scare’ (episode #109 and the only first season episode not to originally be titled after a film) ‘Escape from Witch Island’ (episode #307) both draw from recent teen horror films such as the *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last*
Summer franchises\textsuperscript{26} and The Blair Witch Project. These connections between the Dawson’s Creek cast and late 80s/early 90s representations of youth are at times explicitly cited in the text, particularly through the group’s own critical self-awareness. Second season episode ‘Reunited’ (#220) features three characters on separate occasions comparing the clique-like nature of the core cast to 1985’s brat pack film St Elmo’s Fire and seminal 1990s American teen drama Beverly Hills, 90210.

By announcing its predecessors and recognising its filmic and televisual history, Dawson’s Creek is able to accommodate the demands of an increasingly aware audience rewarding the cultural capital of particularly aware viewers. Particularly through the ambivalent relationship Dawson’s Creek maintains with its predecessors (Birchall, 2004: 178), aware viewers are engaged as participants in a shared joke as well as being rewarded through the enjoyment of textual play and are invited to recall the experience of watching the original. Acknowledging previous youth texts as antecedents, Dawson’s Creek signals its place as part of a larger cultural system.

In doing so, however, it also positions these previous versions of youth as in some way authentic: the past is invoked in an indirect fashion that imbues the show with “pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (Birchall, 2004: 179).

As a result, Dawson’s Creek mobilises particularly conservative values, referencing programs that themselves nostalgiaically longed for a “media-collage time-warp” of 1950s conservative American values. With the emphasis on the attainment of a

\textsuperscript{26} Both franchises were created by Kevin Williamson.
stable relationship privileging conformity to ideals of a nuclear family, rebellion in
the text takes the form of succeeding rather than failing to do so. Birchall (2004: 183) argues this represents a form of hyper-conformity:

While the references to 1980s’ brat pack films try to indicate that the Dawson’s Creek teens are deeply individual and unafraid to go against the majority, these 1980s’ films represent that individuality as being more invested in American conservatism, not less.

Referencing previous, textual imaginings of youth, Dawson’s Creek generalises the longing for a return to an idealised past nostalgia mobilises. The shared nature of broadcast, mediated experiences means television’s mobilisation of nostalgia “provokes a longing for something general (which often becomes generic), not personal or specific (although this does not foreclose the possibility of very personal identifications and investments)” (Birchall, 2004: 180). The mobilisation of nostalgia in Dawson’s Creek is further generalised by the fact it does not reference nostalgia for a particular period (as Happy Days or The Wonder Years did) but rather evokes the past while set in the present. In this way, the invocation of conservative family values, as discussed above, references to previous teen texts, and the aggrandising and romanticising of the history of its own narrative and characters produce nostalgic longing as an object of desire.

The repeated self-referential rearticulation of the story of Dawson and Joey naturalises this narrative tension as mythotypic, despite the fact it is being played out, it is transformed into something permanent, ongoing and historical. The text denies the characters’ frequent desire to ‘move on’ by its endlessly deferred nature. As
such, Birchall (2004: 181) argues the program participates in “instant” nostalgia, where characters’ anticipation of nostalgia influences their present relationships. This sentimentalising of the present contributes to the nostalgic effect of the text. Instant nostalgia is developed visually through the opening sequence which presents a “document of friendship” (Birchall, 2004: 184) recounting the ‘good times’ the clique have spent. Manipulated to appear as if some was shot on a hand-held camera and with the characters looking directly at the lens, the sequence apes authenticity to locate the viewer as looking at the footage of friends. The presence of all the characters in some frames challenges the notion any one of them could have shot it all, sometimes positioning the viewer behind the camera such that “[i]t could, then, be ‘our’ footage that we are re-viewing” (Birchall, 2004: 183). This manipulation of the viewers’ position creates a sense of inclusion in the text. It encourages audiences to find themselves as participants in the text, promoting the “acculturation [of the text] within the culture” (Olson, 1999: 107). As is argued later, the Dawson’s Creek website furthers this inclusivity, heightening the text’s virtuality and providing opportunities for verisimilitude.

The nostalgia mobilised in Dawson’s Creek through the constant discussion and rumination about a barely departed, but already lost, past locates the text firmly within the tradition of therapeutising texts Mimi White (1992) discusses. Self confession locates characters within the circular narrative developed by the endlessly deferred resolution of the text. As such, the hyper-articulate attempts to separate the threads of their relationships, particularly for Dawson, Pacey and Joey, constitute that very relationship itself; therapeutic modes (self-confession) function as a motivating force for the text’s narrative (c.f. White, 1992: 145-157).
therapeutic mode contributes to the nostalgic nature of the text by relating interactions, through self-confession, to pre-histories.

Mobilising nostalgia, the text constructs television as a common history. Particularly through its construction of nostalgia as a way to experience the present, the longing this nostalgia evokes is provided by the experience of watching itself. For older viewers the text provides a longing then not so much for a lost past but for a teenage past never experienced, “for our teenage viewing and identifications it may have prompted back then” (Birchall, 2004: 184). The characters themselves, anticipating nostalgia through the narration and analysis of their lives, represent the longing audience. They function as archetypal characters longing for a return to their emotional home, even if it is one they have not yet experienced. In this way the calculated nostalgia of the program contributes to its transparency by presenting characters international audiences can identify with. A by-line for the program in Britain was ‘feels like home’, representing the missing element that is longed for. Dawson’s Creek can be configured as an object of desire for viewers in a variety of countries even when their “televisual, textual home might well be America” (Birchall, 2004: 189) given the spread of American visual culture. Echoing both previous studies (Pingree and Hawkins, 1981; Liebes and Katz, 1993; Povlsen, 1996) and the findings of the later parts of this study, Birchall suggests the experience of America that British viewers long for may be different to that of Americans with direct experience of upper-middle-class America: “[T]he non-American young adult is able to desire a non-traumatic teen-age as much as anyone else” (Birchall, 2004: 189).
There is a negentropic element to this nostalgic mode also, as it provides a controlled environment for both adult and youthful viewers to live their teen years. Particularly given the text’s mastery over language, it re-writes teen-hood, putting the viewer in power by eradicating the “inarticulacy and general discomfort” (Birchall, 2004: 185) of the teen experience. Unlike the external world where exploring desire and lust, trialling relationships with various partners and suffering through the angst of longing may cause real heart-ache, disrupt lives or simply be cast off, *Dawson’s Creek* offers viewers a structured environment where these things can be experienced. Also, by placing personal politics and developing a relationship at the centre of the youth experience, the range of variables for engagement is reduced. The chaos of everyday life is denied as emotional fulfilment through conservative relationship building is presented as the foremost concern.

While the mobilisation of youth as an identity category by presenting it as an attractive site for older viewers draws consternation from some authors27 this nostalgic mode makes *Dawson’s Creek* valuable for the Ten Network, which screens the show in Australia, as such an approach to youthfulness broadens the range of participants who can take part in the experience of youth, recasting the television viewing population as differentiated members of Ten’s audience. Adopting elements of melodramatic narrative, American teen dramas are a participant in the process of consumer juvenation that picked up fervour with the writing of the Generation X fiction by marketing and advertising companies (Sternberg, 1997a). American teen dramas contribute to this juvenation of markets by providing advertiser friendly

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27 See for instance Brooks’ (2003) argument that the mobilisation of youth as an identity for older viewers strips youth of agency. Part of the difficulty with this is the suggestion resistive youth cultures develop in liminal spaces. Arguing commercial constructions of youth identity are necessarily disempowering denies that youth participants who do not operate in Brooks’ liminal spaces, those who participate in mainstream culture, lack an authentic youth experience.
content that (pedocratically) trains young viewers to participate in the rituals of media consumption. Programs such as Beverly Hills, 90210 and Dawson’s Creek work to train teenaged and tweenaged viewers in the mores and language of prime time drama, welcoming them into a position of audiencehood. As the viewer ages, so frequently do the characters with the program, moving situations beyond the school setting and out into the world beyond secondary education. Teen dramas equip viewers with the encyclopaedic knowledge (Eco, 1979) they will ultimately need to adapt or mobilise to become fully fledged, discerning, adult viewers.

Ellipticality
The progression of events in the final episode arc (#622-624) demonstrates the text’s use of ellipticality. Setting the events of the final denouement five years in the future acknowledges the virtuality of the text, the sense that it is a wholly consistent and believable world, by mobilising the principal of ‘unchronicled growth’ (Ang, 1985b). Unchronicled growth is encouraged by the openendedness of texts and reinforces the virtuality of the text, contending that events take place between episodes when viewers are not watching. Unchronicled growth engenders texts with a sense of historical time: “it constructs the feeling that the lives of the characters go on during our absence” (Ang, 1985b: 52-3). Beyond the five year ellipsis between episode #622 and the conclusion of the series, Dawson’s Creek employs ellipticality more regularly by matching the progression of the text with its school based setting. As with Beverly Hills, 90210 and Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Dawson’s Creek restricts the season to the school year, with summer holidays taking the protagonists elsewhere (Dawson travels to Philadelphia at the end of season two to visit his mother (#301), Pacey and Joey run away at the end of season three to sail around the world (#323 & #401)). Similarly, episodes usually take place over a single day, and
if over a series of days, the subsequent episode begins with a fresh day. Ellipticality and unchronicled growth contribute to Dawson’s Creek’s mythotypic status by aiding the virtuality and verisimilitude of the text, the sense to which it appears to create a coherent and believable world.

**Production Values**

Similarly, the program’s high production values strengthen the believability of this world by creating a seamless, convincing environment. Dawson’s Creek employs the omniscient style of Hollywood, suppressing the constructed nature of the text to create what Ang (1985b: 38) refers to as the “realistic illusion”. Particularly through motivated editing, the omniscient style works to deny the status of a narrator. Motivated editing make the movements of the camera appear as if they are required in order to record the events that are unfolding before it. The result is a story that acts as if it “speaks of itself” (Ang, 1985b: 38). This style contributes to the virtuality and verisimilitude of the text by producing “the effect of seamlessness, of a continuous flow, with no manufactured joins or edges” (Fiske, 1989c: 27). The viewer is located as a spectator, watching events occur “without any mediation” (Ang, 1985b: 39) effectively eliminating the action of narration.

High production values allow outdoor location shoots, as well as the use of a variety of locations, giving the impression that the action takes place in a convincingly rendered world. Images are lent an authenticity by the presence of natural elements such as light and wind effects, as well as the texture that comes from the depth of field available by shooting on film. Shot-reverse editing enabled by an omniscient style allows characters to be seen in the totality of their location, rather than from the front on view studio shot sitcoms acquire. These filmic elements contribute to the
virtuality and verisimilitude of the text, emphasising the authenticity of the world in which *Dawson’s Creek* takes place.

**Virtuality and Verisimilitude**

The virtuality of the text is further developed by elements of the program’s extensive official website, dawsons creek.com (http://www.dawsons creek.com). To return to Brooker’s (2001) argument considered earlier, the value of dawsons creek.com comes from the way in which it “overflows” the text, creating a wider world for the audience to engage in by extending the narrative and diegetic world of *Dawson’s Creek* beyond the boundaries of the one-hour, broadcast-through-the-television-set experience. Overflowing beyond the televised program, the website is a place where the text meets with elements of its own construction, the activities of writers, producers and fans, as well as elements from the wider world of popular culture. The website extends both the diegetic and non-diegetic world of the text, building and extending the narrative in ways that cannot be accommodated by the experience offered by the television text, as well as linking the text with other elements of popular culture.

The ways in which the *Dawson’s Creek* website contributes to the narrative transparency of the text can be broken down into three key ranges of activity. First, through the provision of ‘characterised’ proliferations of the text, ‘narrativised’ elaborations of the text and ‘backstory’ augmentations (Caldwell, 2002: 258), the website creates a series of elements that reinforce the text’s virtuality. These narrative elaborations and augmentations are achieved through the mobilisation of a number of simulacra sites. From the *Dawson’s Creek* homepage users can access
fictional websites for Capeside High, the school the characters attended, Capeside, their fictional Massachusetts home town, and both Worthington and Boston Bay Colleges, the fictional colleges the characters moved onto after graduation. These sites present “the show’s fictional locale as if it were a real place with a web presence” (Brooker, 2001: 460). Capeside.net features ads for Capeside businesses, community notices (such as the details of bible classes and library opening hours), business listings, school details and places of interest. The college websites feature links to elements such as fictional application guidelines and academic timetables.

The extensive Capeside High site has two faces – a newsletter called Capenet featuring school gossip and news, treating the reader as an enrolled student at the school and offering them reminders about upcoming school events, and information about things such as picking up prom photos and details on where to get a year book. The characters appear in these additional elements as writers, contributing articles and opinions pieces, such as “Pacey’s Rant”, a column ‘written by’ Pacey Witter about a variety of topics, usually paralleling events taking place in the series (such as

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28 http://www.capesidehigh.com
29 http://www.capeside.net
30 http://www.worthingtonuniversity.com
31 http://www.bostonbaycollege.com
32 Such as “Leery’s Fresh Fish”, which Dawson’s parent’s owned, and the “Potter’s B&B”, run by Joey and her sister Bessie. These ads also appear on Capenet, the Capeside High page. Clicking on the latter ad will take the user through to a site advertising the B&B (http://www.capeside.net/potters) offering the user a ‘virtual tour’ that comprise three short video segments from episode #312 “A Weekend In The Country”, room descriptions, reservation prices, a guest book and links back to capeside.net.
33 Capenet closed down when the students graduated and moved onto college, though it remains archived on the website. The interactive elements such as the forum (not mentioned above) that was purported to be run by Eve are no longer available.
his musings on turning 18, the events of which were covered in episode #412) but also featuring, obtuse references, to events in the world outside of the program.\(^{34}\)

The other side of Capeside High is the Capeside Online Yearbook.\(^{35}\) Launched in 2001 when the students were in their final year of high school, the yearbook allowed registered users to create their own page to become part of the “Senior Class of ‘01”. This allowed users to place their details and photo in an online gallery alongside other members of the Dawson’s Creek community, both other users and characters from the program. In addition to more interactive features such as forums and a place users could leave a quote to be remembered by, the Yearbook site linked to a page featuring ‘photos’ from the Capeside High prom. Following the link took users to a gallery of stills from episode #420 “Promicide”.

This multiple purposing of episode content works alongside the extensively crafted simulacra sites to increase the virtuality of the text. The completeness of these elements make them seem real or if not, at least convincing. It is only the repeated appearance of the characters and the fact the all the sites are framed by the Sony Entertainment banner, that gives away their inauthenticity and hints that the community listings are not from an actual tourist promotion.

The virtuality created by the website is furthered by personal web pages for each of the characters\(^{36}\) and Flash driven elements such as the “Dawson’s Desktops”\(^{37}\) and

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\(^{34}\) In what could be considered subtle cross-promotion, Pacey rants about extended advertising during Charmed (another program screened on the WB). While he makes no reference to the station or time the program is screened on, such a rant reinforces the connection between the character and the real world in which the audience exists.

\(^{35}\) [http://www.capesidehigh.com/yearbook](http://www.capesidehigh.com/yearbook)

\(^{36}\) Available by following the link to “Characters Sites” from [http://www.dawsons creek.com](http://www.dawsons creek.com)
“Summer Diaries”\textsuperscript{38}. The Desktops positioned the user as an unseen user, an “invisible hacker” (Caldwell, 2002: 259), providing them with access to a computer desktop for each of the main characters\textsuperscript{39} where they could sift through virtual emails, diaries and essays. The material accessible provides not only more in-depth information about the characters (Frangos, 2001) but also offered viewers access to extensive back-story and character development impossible within the limits of an episode (Caldwell, 2002). More than a file of background info:

by double-clicking on Pacey’s icons we can discover that he failed last semester’s courses, has junked an invitation to consult his personal tutor and is receiving mail from his ex-girlfriend Andie, who offers to “be there for him” while Joey is away for work (Brooker, 2001: 469).

Presenting this material in the form of ‘real’ correspondence increases the perception of the characters as actual people, a virtuality strengthened by the Summer Diaries. Written as characters’ specific journals, these recounted the activities of the characters between seasons, allowing the narrative arc of the series to continue outside of the program itself. Providing an account of the events that occur during the large ellipses of the series, the Summer Diaries strengthen the virtuality of the program by recording the continued lives of the characters. When fans return to the series the subsequent season they have developed as narrative decoders (Caldwell, 2002: 259), prepared to engage with the implications of the events that may have occurred during the period unchronicled by the televised elements of the series itself.

\textsuperscript{37} \url{http://www.dawsonsdesktop.com} – these elements are no longer available. This link currently takes users to a farewell page.

\textsuperscript{38} The summer diaries for season 3 (2000) when they commenced and season 5 (2002) when they ceased are archived here: \url{http://www.dawsonsdesktop.com/diaries/diary_adfs.html}. There is a trailer for the launch of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition of the desktops available by following this link: \url{http://www.spe.sony.com/tv/shows/dawson/desktop/three/}

\textsuperscript{39} Jack’s sister Andie McPhee was a sixth major character for the first four seasons of the program. She left before the third iteration of the desktops (in season four) and a homepage was developed where Andie tracked her trip across Europe.
The virtuality of the text is also reassured by the inclusion these elements encourage, the ways in which they offer the audience member the opportunity to participate in the world of the text. Placing your details in the Capeside Yearbook or purchasing merchandise branded not with the Dawson’s Creek logo but with the logos of Capeside High, Worthington or Boston Bay College, allows the user greater participation in the world created by Dawson’s Creek. Brooker points out that the clothing from Capeside High even comes ‘distressed’, appearing pre-worn, so “not only does the wearer effectively transform herself into a student at Dawson’s school, but it immediately looks as if she and her shirt have an authentic history within the show” (Brooker, 2001: 461). Inclusion is important as it encourages the spectator to feel they are a participant in the spectacle. This achieves encourages participation and “acculturation within the culture” (Olson, 1999: 107), important functions Olson prescribes to myth. Caldwell argues that such products allow fans to enter the diegetic world of the text to access actual ‘artefacts’ demonstrating the program’s existence. Purchasing these products brings diegetic elements of the program into the world of the viewer, and as such, “convergent merchandising augmentations work to narrativise the world of the user rather than vice-versa” (Caldwell, 2002: 260). The application of such an assertion to the merchandising of Dawson’s Creek in turn strengthens Olson’s argument about narrative transparency. These products make possible the extension of the program into the culture of the viewer. Like Disney licensed products, the program creates elements and opportunities for the artefacts of the program to become resources for the lived cultural experience of viewers.
Omnipresence
The website also works to locate Dawson’s Creek as omnipresent, as a launch pad for viewers to engage with a wider range of other media products. The Sony Entertainment banner prominent at the top of every page offers users access to other categories of entertainment. Clicking on one of the seven links takes the user to various versions of the Sony Pictures Digital Entertainment (SPE) directory where they can access trailers for other SPE programs and films, enter competitions and shop online. The “Dawson’s Creek Scoop” newsletter, emailed out to registered users weekly between 1999 and 2003, included amongst the details about upcoming episodes, repeats, trivia, and interviews with cast and crew, a section called “Showbiz Scoop” that promoted upcoming Sony properties, such as music, film and other television programs. Interestingly, the link included in the email directed fans not to a specific website for these programs, films or musical acts but rather the Sony Pictures ‘Spotlight’ site. This site features advertising for a variety of Sony products, further cross-promoting various entertainment properties.

While connecting the user to additional, often unrelated products, these links could also be considered “merchandising augmentations” (Caldwell, 2002: 258) to the program itself. Like the sweatshirts available from the online shop and the interactive elements of the website, moving beyond dawsonscreek.com is a mode of engaging with and being informed about the program between and following the broadcast of episodes. Merchandising augmentations work to narrativise the world of the reader by locating the program within a wider multimedia environment and as a participant in the broader realm of youth culture. It is positioned “as the starting

40 Movies/Television/DVD & Video/Digital Entertainment/Previews and Clips/Win/Shop
41 http://www.sonypictures.com/spotlight
point for further activity rather than as an isolated, self-contained cultural artefact” (Brooker, 2001: 461). Such positioning is important to Brooker’s argument about the ways in which overflow draws into question the notion of experiencing television. Similarly, what Brooker labels as overflow, Caldwell argues draws into question the very nature of what is considered a television text (Caldwell, 2002: 258).

Along with links to official Sony products, Dawson’s Creek Scoop carried a regular link to “Fan Site of the Week”, pointing the user to the work and activities of other fan members of the Dawson’s Creek community. In addition to promoting fan sites, the fan run “Dawson’s Creek Music Guide” was endorsed by and affiliated with the official site in early 1999. The site provides an extensive listing of the music used in each episode, including track details, album details, links to artist websites, audio clips and descriptions of the scenes in which the songs were used. It also provides a ‘statistical breakdown’ of the number of songs used in each episode, details on the theme music, and music used in particular trailers for the program. The ‘statistical breakdown’ mentioned above is joined in a section of ‘specials’ that includes elements such as listings of songs sung by the characters on the show, a listing of music from the original unaired pilot of the program and details about the score. In addition the site includes links to the soundtrack albums and details about how to purchase CDs and DVDs of the program. Endorsing this site allows Sony to include in its repertoire a vast database of material without having to expend the labour to produce it. It is a similar co-option of fan activity that Jenkins (1998) is wary of and admittedly brings with it the same concerns about the appropriation of fan politics.

42 Hhttp://www.dawsonscreemusic.comH
and the privatisation, exploitation and commercial management (and hence limitation) of modes of engaging with popular culture. These questions pervade the entire site as well and it could be argued that the extensive ways in which the official site offers modes and places for fan activity form a strategy designed to exercise control over the freedom fans have to manipulate the commercially produced products.

**Narrative Transparency and International Success**

Following Olson’s argument, the transparent nature of *Dawson’s Creek* would seem to aid its adoption in multiple foreign markets as viewers are able to read the text as culturally relevant. *Dawson’s Creek* constructs a narrative about archetypal characters engaged in a fundamental search for emotional stability. Its production values, ancillary web elements and omnipresence create a convincing, believable world where characters motivated by a fundamental search for emotional fulfilment articulate their experience of youth. Openendedness, circularity and ellipticality mythologise its central narrative, denying its conclusion and giving it an eternal, universal quality as the constituent elements are rearticulated to repeatedly resolve recurring tensions. Naturalising youth and the pursuit of relationship stability serves a negentropic function, relying on a dependable series of motivations and ultimately producing a dependable series of strategies to resolve matters. The text mobilises instant nostalgia to contextualise the ultimate goal, the emotional realisation of youthfulness, as a desired object and lifestyle. The “emotional realism” (Ang, 1985b) of this would seem to be readable cross-culturally with the themes of youth it
mobilises tapping into what has been described as “normal girl talk” and the
nostalgia making the text available to a diverse range of viewers.

This combination of textual elements equips the text for entry into the Australian
market. Tapping into the emotional realism of youth the text narrates a universal
story that is accessible to a diverse range of viewers. These viewers are offered an
orderly representation of a convincing virtual world that opposes the chaos of the real
world in which they are located. The narrative transparency of Dawson’s Creek is
particularly marked when compared with Australian teen drama Heartbreak High.

Heartbreak High: Narrative Transparency and
National Specificity

Produced by Gannon Television, Heartbreak High began life as a spin-off from
Australian film The Heartbreak Kid (1993). While the first season featured cast
from the film, including Alex Dimitriades as its major star, the TV series covered a
broader range of issues, and is better considered an adaptation than a spin-off
(Dorian, 1999; Douglas and McWilliam, 2004). Set in the fictitious Hartley High in
Sydney, the series explored the daily lives of the students and teaching staff of a
diverse, multi-ethnic school.

Especially when compared with Dawson’s Creek, Heartbreak High appears as a
moderately transparent text. While it demonstrates some of Olson’s characteristics,
the text appears heavily and intentionally inflected with Australian discourses.
Despite this, the program was internationally successful, selling to 70 countries and
at one time being produced solely for international markets without a domestic
distribution deal (Gibson, 2001b; Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 152). This international success in the face of relative domestic failure makes the program interesting for comparison with *Dawson’s Creek*. It suggests that while transparency is an influential descriptor of the factors aiding international success, the role of the broader communicative structure and the shape of the national broadcasting system, also needs to be considered. Particularly given its relative domestic failure, the transparency of *Heartbreak High* would not seem enough to understand its international proliferation.

While produced from similar industrial, economic and audience tensions as the American teen drama, *Heartbreak High* emerges from a slightly different tradition of programming compared to *Dawson’s Creek*. Like 1980s soap opera *A Country Practice* (1981-1993), *Heartbreak High* could be aptly described as a “quality soap” (Tulloch and Moran, 1985) negotiating between “the high-cultural production values of the government-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the often narrow commercialism of Australian drama screened on the privately owned networks” (Gibson, 2001a: n.p.). While Network Ten seems not to have been interested in producing soap opera (Dorian, 1999: 55), the producers, Gannon Television, moved from the initial brief the network requested to create something that was more “in your face” than American content such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* (Roache, 1999). The resulting program is better produced than Australian soap operas, with a “slick” style that puts it closer to American drama (Gibson, 2001b). Thematically, however, the program negotiates between entertainment and education, creating what Dorian (1999: 51) describes as a dualistic narrative. Narratives lasting across multiple episodes were created around issues of interest to youth viewers such as drugs, sex,
music and romance and these narratives propelled the series. Alongside this narrative stream, single episodes were used to present ‘educational’ material on harder subjects such as racism and incest. The intention was for the program to combine both education and entertainment while not appearing too preachy (Roache, 1999; "Interview with Ben Gannon," 2005).

Contrasting Australian soap opera and American teen dramas, *Heartbreak High* focuses on social drama subject matter “reminiscent of gritty British-produced drama series” (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 156). The ‘grittiness’ of this social drama approach produces a realist text, reminiscent of Canada’s *Degrassi* series (Dorian, 1999: 51), with unconventionally attractive characters and “often inarticulate, even aggressive, and frequently colloquial, sometimes racist, language” (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 156). This ‘realism’ was supported by an almost exclusive focus on characters from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in the early series. While this focus shifted in the later part of the series, a result it seems of the ‘softening’ of the program that accompanied its move to the ABC (Williams, 1995b, a, 1997; Roache, 1999), the combination of these factors served to promote *Heartbreak High* as representative and relevant to ‘average’ Australian teens (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 156):

This is not to suggest that lower socio-economic groups are the economic average in Australia, but, rather, that this is one way *Heartbreak High* positions itself against the white, middle-class affluence of conventional soap opera suburbs. Consequently, ‘average’ functions as a marker of difference from, for example, *Neighbours’* Erinsborough. In this way, *Heartbreak High*

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43 Simonetti (1994) provides an interesting discussion of the mobilisation of a social realist style in *Degrassi*, comparing the program to *Beverly Hills, 90210* and linking the distinguishing styles to similar arguments about the consequential constructions of youth to those made here.
trades in a form of ‘gritty’ or ‘radical’ chic (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 156-7).

Produced amidst criticism of the extent of Anglo-centric casting on Australian television (see for instance Bell and Australia Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1993; Nugent et al., 1993), Heartbreak High broke with the convention of stressing “Australia’s innocence, harmony and (usually) cultural homogeneity” (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 152). Instead, Heartbreak High, particularly in the early seasons, featured non-Anglo-Australian characters as the central protagonists. Similarly, setting Heartbreak High in a state school attempts to further normalise the representations of youth presented, with approximately 75 percent of Australian young people attending state schools (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 157).

These realist and gritty factors combine to produce an image of youthfulness that differs considerably from that utilised in Dawson’s Creek. The sentimentalism of Dawson’s Creek presents youthfulness as an emotional state. Rather than focussing on the representation of a youthful emotional journey, Heartbreak High instead attempts to create a ‘realistic’ construction of Australian youth. Youthfulness is constructed as a site for citizen building, where difficult questions about identity (sexual, ethnic, gender) and behaviour (multiculturalism, employment, education) are encountered and negotiated. Rather than mobilising an individualistic youthfulness geared towards consumption, Heartbreak High seems to connect youthfulness more directly as the building site of a ‘proper’ nation. This is one that is predominantly working class and actively multicultural. Douglas and McWilliam (2004: 157) argue Heartbreak High’s construction of the ‘everyday’ and the ‘average’ as being populated with “non-Anglo, non-gender specific, non-sexuality-specific adolescents”
who still appeal to the ideal Australian tropes of being hardworking, honest, unassuming irreverent and unpretentious reconfigures the teen identity as nationally valuable; as such, the national character is re-written.

**Production Values**
As discussed above, *Heartbreak High* employed higher production values than mainstream Australian soap operas, attempting to retain some of the filmic look of *The Heartbreak Kid* (Dorian, 1999: 55). Like *Dawson’s Creek*, the program made extensive use of location and outdoor shoots rather than internal sets. A disused high school in Maroubra, an Eastern suburb of Sydney, was acquired to use as the set for Hartley High. The program also used a large number of extras, particularly during the first two seasons. The production values aid the virtuality of the program, helping to establish a rich, believable world for the narrative to take place in. Making use of an actual school offered a variety of authentic looking classrooms and offices, as well as exterior locations such as entries and sporting facilities. As a result, characters and events could be seen in rich, complete looking ‘actual’ spaces. The richness of these spaces was accented by the decision to shoot on film, rather than tape, and on location rather than in multi-camera studios like soap operas such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*.

**Virtuality, Verisimilitude and Inclusion**
The virtuality of the program was further developed by the program’s use of naturalistic language, which encourages the program’s verisimilitude as well. Contrasting the hyper-articulate teens of *Dawson’s Creek*, the young cast of *Heartbreak High* often struggle to express themselves, using vernacular language

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44 It was later replaced by a disused school in Warriewood, just north of Sydney.
and frequently speaking over one another. The result is a naturalistic if somewhat confusing style. Containing and even restricting the language abilities of characters, *Heartbreak High* offers constructions of youth that claim representativeness through mobilising existential and emotional angst. This contrasts the verbosity of *Dawson’s Creek*, which enables its characters with analytical and self-reflexive language. Language is used in *Dawson’s Creek* to externalise and articulate the emotional and existential angst of the experience of teenhood (Birchall, 2004: 185); in *Heartbreak High* restricted language functions as a feature of this emotional and existential angst.

The break up of Anita and Drazic, two of the central characters of the latter seasons of the program (seasons four through six), in episode 192, provides a particularly pointed example of the role naturalistic language plays in the series. Rather than the long, flowing, analytical language used by the characters in *Dawson’s Creek*, Anita and Drazic struggle through their dialogue, looking for the right words to say. The dialogue is circular and reductive. Despite the fact they return to the conversation three times throughout the episode, it never really moves beyond the facts established initially. While Anita does finally admit she has been seeing the young police officer

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45 This verbosity in *Dawson’s Creek* was criticised as an attempt on the part of the writers, particularly series creator Williamson, to relive their youth (see for instance Katz, 1998). The verbosity serves as a challenge to the perceived earnestness of the characterisations and the text’s claims to authentically represent the youth experience.

46 According to the official *Heartbreak High* website, season six includes all the episodes between 171 and 210, the final episode of the series. However, some fan sites and the Internet Movie Database list these episodes as being included in a seventh season. While this discrepancy may be due to fan sites listing the episodes as they were screened locally, the episode guide on the official site is incomplete, at times confusing and seemingly inaccurate. Episodes are sometimes grouped oddly into seasons that don’t match accounts published elsewhere. This may be due to some sites grouping the seasons by broadcast rather than production date or vice-versa. Some of the shortcomings of the official site are discussed below.

47 Anita and Drazic’s dialogue from the episode is transcribed in Appendix II. This is not a full transcript of the episode and it excludes the two other significant storylines concerning Thania, Marco and animal rights and the confusion between Gemma and Lee over Lee’s relationship with Gemma’s wheelchair bound sister Carly. The transcript does not include Drazic’s confrontation with Todd but does include other significant interactions from the episode with Principal Carson and Todd.
Todd when confronted by Drazic, the conversation repeatedly revolves around Drazic pleading for another chance to make the relationship work and Anita resolutely telling him her feelings have changed.

The redundancy and repeated use of “okay” at the end of many of Anita’s sentences suggests actors improvising their lines, which was a common part of the delivery of dialogue on the program (Roache, 1999). Inarticulate, the teens of *Heartbreak High* are crippled by the very teen angst the characters of *Dawson’s Creek* employ analytical language to overcome. The clumsy nature of this dialogue and its struggled delivery imbues the text with an air of authenticity. While Series Producer and Script Writer Chris Roache shies away from acknowledging the program as a ‘realistic’ representation of youth, he does identify this “improvised sort of rough and tumble sort of depiction” (Roache, 1999) as a key feature distinguishing the program from teen dramas such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Dawson’s Creek*. Improvised performances were accented by a mobile camera that moved around the action. The result was an ‘edgy’, ‘shifty’ verite style that framed characters quite tightly, often placing the audience as a hovering observer to the events taking place. This style lent the program an air of immediacy and verisimilitude, encouraging an inclusivity that was furthered by the emphasis the program placed on the experiences of young people.

Like *Dawson’s Creek*, the young people in *Heartbreak High* are the key protagonists in the program’s events. Like the Canadian *Degrassi* series, however, the characters of *Heartbreak High* are also often the key participants in the events depicted in the program. Comparing the representations of youth constructed in *Beverly Hills,*
90210, Simonetti (1994: 41) notes the characters of Degrassi are more likely to suffer the ill effects of the series’ events. While both 90210 and Degrassi deal with similar issues, bad things only happen to minor 90210 characters. Tragedies almost befall the major characters, or they are contained within an extra-diegetic past, meaning the text is stuck in a “conditional tense” where the ‘message’ is conveyed through “what if” narration. As a result, “90210 conveys the unsettling message that heroes, or ‘good people,’ manage to somehow stay out of trouble” (Simonetti, 1994: 41). On Degrassi however, no-one is spared the trials of life, the didactic “purposes” of the text mean that major players are quite likely to experience the traumas, presenting these experiences first-hand to the audience (Simonetti, 1994: 41). As a result, Simonetti argues the message of Degrassi is infused with greater credibility and the “weight of reality” as audiences are presented with the direct implications and consequences of events.

Heartbreak High functions in a similar fashion to Degrassi, including the major characters in the narrative’s traumas to provide the audience with a first-hand experience of matters that heightens the text’s inclusion. When Rose falls pregnant in the first season, viewers are treated to a sustained examination of the implications of teen pregnancy. Rose’s Lebanese father who does not approve of her Vietnamese boyfriend Jack, wants Rose to have an abortion. When she eventually refuses and gives birth, her father forbids Jack to see the child. Jack and Rose contemplate running away and leaving school in order to support themselves. Rose’s pregnancy triggers discussion about abortion, teenage sexuality, the prospects of teenage parents, and gendered responsibilities as well as racism and parental relations.
Like *Degrassi*, viewers are provided with representations of the implications and consequences of events on the characters, giving the story a particular narrative fidelity that heightens both its virtuality and inclusion. Considering the presentation of Rose’s pregnancy, Douglas and McWilliam (2004: 154) argue the text negotiates and develops a particular form of teen citizenship. Utilising the school setting as a site to debate topical issues (rather than a home or social hangout) encourages inclusion as the principal agents in the debate speak in the voice of the program’s intended audience.

**Negentropy**

This is not to suggest that *Dawson’s Creek* does not consider weighty or serious matters through the central protagonists. Jack McPhee’s coming out was presented as a particularly painful event, with his father rejecting him as a son, Jack facing ridicule from students and an English teacher at his school and persecution from the parents of a junior soccer team he was coaching. Andie McPhee, Jack’s sister and a major character in the first two seasons, suffered from depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, impacting on her relationship with family and friends, hindering her performance at school and allowing the program to explore anxieties about academic performance and questions about mental care. Questions about parental relationships and home life were explored through Pacey’s strained relationship with his ever unsatisfied father, Joey’s jailed, absent father who left her in the care of her sister when their mother died and the tense relationship between Gramps and her daughter, Jen’s mother, who exiled Jen to Capeside.

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48 Though they did eventually reconcile.
The traumatic nature of any of these events, however, never threatens the central
characters or the ability of the narrative to restore the fundamental order of the text.
So while Dawson and Andie’s experimentation with alcohol results in some honest
confessions, public humiliation and hangovers, it is guest character Abby who dies
after an alcohol fuelled accident. Andie herself was eventually written out of the
series, moving first to a treatment centre and then eventually leaving with her father
to be treated in Providence, thus containing the threat her ongoing mental instability
may pose to the text’s coherence. The threat Jack’s sexual identity may have posed
to male relationships (Meyer, 2003: 272) was contained by the dialectical
relationship the text developed between he and Jen. This relationship was used to
explore Jack’s sexuality and the storylines concerning Jack and Jen seemed to
diverge from the main narrative, becoming a parallel narrative thread particularly
from the third season onwards. This coincided with the beginning of the relationship
between Joey and Pacey that provided the love triangle that drove the program’s
endlessly deferred narrative. Despite this marginalisation, it was not Jack, but his
gay friend Tobey who suffered physical violence as a result of his sexuality.
Defending its characters from true harm and locating tragedy in minor characters,
*Dawson’s Creek* protects the fundamental order it draws from its endlessly deferred
narrative. The action encourages negentropy by shielding the narrative from events
that deviate from the norm while simultaneously allowing the text to consider these
issues as relevant and pertinent to its audience.

By refusing to make its characters immune to ill events, *Heartbreak High* does not
encourage or maintain such negentropy. Nick Poulos, the central character of the
film *The Heartbreak Kid* and one of the initial central characters of the series, dies at
the conclusion of the first season after being knocked unconscious in a boxing match. His mother died mid-way through the season in a car crash, his aging father quit his job, placing the family under some financial pressure and Nick’s relationship with his girlfriend Jodie was repeatedly rocky. These events are presented as the traumas of growing up, rather than obstacles that may be overcome by the resolution of an episode’s narrative. The order that existed at the beginning of the season or episode is frequently not restored at the end. The result is a text that disrupts rather than encourages negentropy.

Openendedness and Ellipticality
The school setting of *Heartbreak High* impacts upon the program’s openendedness. On the one hand, the school setting limits the potential for the narrative to continue unfettered as characters remain part of the series only as long as they are attending the school. While the characters will undoubtedly continue, the mix of characters and situations cannot be maintained once the school is taken out of the equation. American teen dramas initially set in schools such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Dawson’s Creek* have overcome this limitation by continuing the narrative of the students as they move onto college. These programs focus on a smaller clique of students than *Heartbreak High*, however, locating the source of tension that drives the narrative in the relationships between this smaller group. As Douglas and McWilliam (2004: 158) point out, Australian texts generally have a “conspicuously ambiguous relationship with post-school education,” and tertiary education is a rare destination for Australian television teens. This ambiguous relationship is present in *Heartbreak High*, with many students voicing intentions of pursuing artistic careers (the music industry is a frequently desired
destination). While completing the Higher Schools Certificate\textsuperscript{49} is a repeated theme, the character’s working class roots encourage many to drop out to work or pursue trades. As such, the limitation placed on the narrative by the school setting reduces the mythotypic nature of the text somewhat as it guarantees the closure of narratives at foreseeable points.

On the other hand however, the school setting offers the text continuous opportunities for renewal as it guarantees the introduction of new students. The school functions as an ongoing and repeatedly renewed site of tension. Engaging with teenhood through schooling and utilising the institution itself as a site for the negotiation and development of the teen identity\textsuperscript{50} provides the text with a certain openendedness. The school was revitalised itself when Hartley High closed at the end of the fourth series (episode #130) and the students were moved to the nearby Hartley Heights. While it maintained figurehead status in the show’s title, use of the school setting was reduced somewhat as the program was ‘softened’ when it was moved to the ABC (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 158-159). The school was not abandoned completely, however, its use and importance as a site to explore teen issues was reduced as homes, the beach and cafes became more prominently recurring locales (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 158-159). Rather than a single group of central characters, \textit{Heartbreak High} sustained its narrative by repeatedly introducing new characters, and figure 2.1 uncovers three distinct groups of students spread across the 210 episodes\textsuperscript{51}.

\textsuperscript{49} The HSC is a senior exit exam sat by students in New South Wales in order to gain entry to university.

\textsuperscript{50} As Douglas and McWilliam’s (Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 154) consideration of the debate around Rose’s pregnancy suggest.

\textsuperscript{51} This chart was developed using James Minchin’s “Television Timelines” generator available at \url{http://members.iinet.net.au/~minchin/hbh/}. The timelines are generated using data from the
Archetypal Characters and Circularity

This revitalisation through the repeated introduction of new characters suggests the archetypal nature of Heartbreak High’s characters. Despite the distinctness of the characters created, the young people in Heartbreak High represent youth as a time of

Internet Movie Database and the robust data recorded on the Australian Television Information Archive’s Heartbreak High site (accessible at [http://www.australiantelevision.net/hbh/hbh.html](http://www.australiantelevision.net/hbh/hbh.html))
problems, when authority is challenged and issues are confronted (Hebdige, 1988). While the text attempts to be specific, to represent a particularly multicultural, non-Anglo and working class outlook on the youth experience, the characters in Heartbreak High conform to a long established tradition of constructions of youth. The result is an image of youth not so much as a universal identity, in the way that Dawson’s Creek constructs it as a category of collective longing and wistfulness. Rather, the representations of youth in Heartbreak High suggest a commonality to the urban youth experience. There is a circularity to the troubles that these young people experience, as every group of students who passes through Hartley High/Heights struggles in forming a functional identity while there. Youth is naturalised then as a time when this struggle and negotiation takes place.

**Omnipresence**

Measuring or gauging Heartbreak High’s omnipresence is difficult. In the Australian market, advertising and ancillary products were particularly low. A series of novels were created based on the events of the series and published by Puffin, an imprint of Victorian publishers Penguin. Four soundtracks were released featuring new and emerging Australian artists featured in the series, however, as yet there are no official VCR or DVD releases of the program. The program was not particularly intertextual though music played a significant role in the episodes both setting the mood and as a diegetic tool. As noted above, the pursuit of a music career was a particularly recurring plotline in the program, however the world in which Hartley High/Heights existed was very much its own. The series rarely followed students who pursued lives outside of school. Those who left to pursue a music career were often never seen again unless they gave up their dream and returned to the school.
Two official websites exist for the program, one produced by the ABC and archived on their site since 1999. Produced under the ABC online banner, it offers information on episodes, the cast, characters and a guestbook. The second official website is produced by edit2 and authorised by Gannon Television. It similarly maintains information on the cast and characters, an episode guide, a photo gallery and a message board. As noted above, the episode guide is strangely incomplete and somewhat inconsistent in both its coverage and the accuracy of the details presented (particularly with reference to which season particular episodes are a part of). The website has an aura of incompleteness, suggesting it is a no longer maintained project and yet the website was updated as late as January 2005 with an interview with Series Creator and Executive Producer Ben Gannon.

This interview is included in a “backstage” area that includes interviews with script writers and cast members. This is an exclusive area on the website, accessible only to users who register to become a part of the “Heartbreak High” web community. These registered users are offered access to a unique backroom perspective on the production of the text. Registration however, allows users to participate in the “interactive” area, chatting on the message board, to write questions that will be put to cast members or posed in future interviews, and to take a number of Heartbreak High themed personality tests. These interactive elements offer users some participation in the Heartbreak High community but they do not really serve to extend their narrative engagement with the text in the same fashion that the extensive web presence of Dawson’s Creek offers.
Complementary Narratives about Youth

While the elements of Olson’s typology are identifiable in both *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High*, they appear more likely to encourage the affective responses Olson seeks in *Dawson’s Creek*. *Heartbreak High*’s production values, naturalistic language, camera work and narrative focus create a convincing, virtual world. The camera work and focus on youth issues, particularly the representations of schooling in the early seasons produced an inclusive text, particularly for the program’s core youth audience. Roache (1999) identifies the intended audience as being between 12 and 17, which Ben Gannon, Series Creator and Executive Producer describes as a “core teenage audience” ("Interview with Ben Gannon," 2005). These viewers were provided a voice in the text as the program explored issues perceived to be relevant to their experience of growing up and from a perspective that included them as key participants. The program struggles to extend this participation beyond the text through online content, offering opportunities but not maintaining the extensive links of *Dawson’s Creek*.

The world *Heartbreak High* created could not be said to encourage order or negentropy, however. The central characters were not shielded from ill events and the narrative is driven by disrupting the lives they lead. These constant disruptions challenge the notion the characters will end up where the world intends them. The program seems to match the chaos of the world of the viewer, rather than reassuring them there is purpose and structure to life. Filled with turmoil, the text could not be said to encourage joy, awe or wonder in the same sense as *Dawson’s Creek*. The experience of youth the text would seem to naturalise is one of struggle and trouble, a fact that is cited as a limitation to the text’s domestic success (Williams, 1995b, a;
Dorian, 1999: 57; Douglas and McWilliam, 2004: 159; "Interview with Ben Gannon," 2005). Despite these seeming restrictions in its status as mythotypic, *Heartbreak High* experienced international success, at one point being financed only by international sales.

What emerges from this comparison are vastly differing representations of youthfulness. The key distinctions are outlined in table 2.2 below. *Heartbreak High* produces a construction of youth as trouble, or youth in trouble that contrasts the representation on *Dawson’s Creek* of youth as fun. As a result, *Heartbreak High* presents youth as a time of struggle, where identity formation is attached to questions of civic politics. The school represents institutional discourses against which and within which, representation needs to be struggled for. By contrast *Dawson’s Creek* constructs youth as a period of freedom, of relative safety, when the exploration of identity politics is the fundamental challenge.

**Table 2.2: Representations of youthfulness, comparing *Heartbreak High* and *Dawson’s Creek***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Heartbreak High</em></th>
<th><em>Dawson’s Creek</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth as trouble</td>
<td>Youth as fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic politics</td>
<td>Identity politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social realism</td>
<td>Emotional realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your face</td>
<td>Nostalgic/romantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inarticulate</td>
<td>Hyper-verbose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class aware</td>
<td>Classless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insular</td>
<td>Intertextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed text</td>
<td>Open text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>Commercial broadcaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomalous</td>
<td>Law forming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The contrast between youth as a problematic and troubling time and youth as a time of fun is borne in the contrasting social realist and emotional realist approaches. The problematic experience of youth in *Heartbreak High* is drawn from the tensions produced by restricted expressive capacity, ethnic clashes and the struggle of working class existence. *Dawson’s Creek* on the other hand transcends these challenges by creating an essentially classless and race-less environment. Through exclusion, *Dawson’s Creek* creates a classless and race-less environment which is determinedly occupied by upper-middleclass, white characters. Non-white characters are effectively absent from the text, with the most significant (and I suspect only) non-white character Bodie, the husband of Joey’s older sister and principal caregiver Bessie’s husband written out of the show after a brief first season appearance. *Dawson’s Creek* is not ‘colour-blind’, as Ross (2004) describes *Felicity*, where character ethnicities are not acknowledged as significant defining characteristics yet black and white characters appear unevenly treated and at times separated by the text’s narrative. Rather, *Dawson’s Creek* exists as an exclusively white space. As with the marginalising of non-heterosexual characters developed by the relationship between Jack and Jen, the central characters of the text negotiate the construction of a distinct self-identity within a narrow white, upper-middleclass and predominantly heterosexual space. Here, the text reduces questions of identity formation to the principal task of achieving ‘emotional maturity’ and a successful relationship through the frameworks already discussed. The text reduces the range of identity challenges associated with growing up, providing a simplified experience of youth, utilising nostalgia and romanticism to connect viewers through emotional realism. This results in a perhaps more open text as *Dawson’s Creek* constructs
youth as a reflective identity category accessible to an audience who can participate in the imagination and consumption practices the text offers.

Simonetti (1994) argues in her comparison of *Degrassi* and *Beverly Hills, 90210* that the differences in the representations of youth these two texts construct are related to the different cultures which create them. So, the individualistic and headstrong characters of *90210* are produced by an entrepreneurial culture while the sobering, didactic lessons of *Degrassi* emerge from a fundamentally cautious culture (Simonetti, 1994: 40). In a similar sense, the differing representations of youth offered by *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* can be related to the cultural traditions from which these programs emerge. As a product of the American “culture factory” (Olson, 1999: 65-86) approach, *Dawson’s Creek* emerges from a cultural production mode designed to produce the very transparent texts Olson describes. Olson contextualises the Hollywood production system as a factory geared towards the production of successfully exportable texts. Export revenues are important for the profitability of American texts and, Olson (1999: 83-86) argues, the broad and diverse\(^{52}\) home audience serves as a useful testing ground for texts that need to appeal to audiences from a variety of backgrounds who ultimately, may share little common history. This assertion risks presenting the American populace as a sort of model utopia, and Olson’s analysis risks valorises the middle class as a site where “the greatest similarities between cultures exists” (Olson, 1999: 85). However, it would appear, as suggested by Simonetti (1994) that *Dawson’s Creek* appears as a product designed by a system that emphasises individual action and

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\(^{52}\) Great parts of this audience are also particularly conservative which may help in producing texts that are generally acceptable to a wide variety of viewers.
enterprise – even if this action is the redundant and ever-analytical mode of self-improvement White (1992) describes.

While at its origin, *Heartbreak High* was intended as a similar product, it emerges from a different production culture, one that perhaps emphasises the specific and the unique. Commissioned by the youth focussed Australian broadcaster Network Ten in 1994, *Heartbreak High* was conceived as a locally produced teen drama intended to draw a youth audience to complement the power of its American counterparts *Beverly Hills, 90210, Melrose Place* and *Dawson’s Creek*. While the program centred around ‘typical’ youth drama themes such as romance, sex and relationships, Roache (1999) suggests the serious, earnest and realistic approach of the text was a product of its Australian origins:

I think at the time the management of [Network] Ten wanted something very commercial and as I said *Beverley Hills 90210* was a big hit at that stage. I don’t think you can do that sort of thing exactly in this country because I think we accept from an American sort of format, the glamour sort of romance orientated plots about nothing, but we are sort of a bit cynical of that here. I don’t know whether it is our culture sort of…we are too stitched up or something like that. We will buy it from overseas, but we won’t accept it or [produce it] here.

Ultimately *Heartbreak High* proved too difficult for Ten, who were constantly requesting the program be ‘watered down’ ("Interview with Ben Gannon," 2005). The program had achieved successful international sales in Europe, particularly on public broadcasters in England (BBC) and France (France 2), and when Ten dropped
it the show continued to be produced until the ABC acquired it in 1996. Both these international channels were interested in continuing production of the program after 1999, however, domestic scheduling matters in the UK would have meant an unprofitable delay in production.

In Australia *Heartbreak High* represented the early thrust of a more concerted push towards ABC programming for a youth audience than was seen during the 1980s (Sternberg, 1997b). Both former ABC Head of Television Penny Chapman and current (2003) Head of Programming Marena Manzoufas point to the fact that the youth market (roughly 15-25) is one ABC TV has had little success capturing (Sternberg, 1997b; Manzoufas, 2003). While the ABC is in no doubt the nation’s premier children’s broadcaster (Sternberg, 1997b; Groves, 2002; Sargent, 2003), viewers tend to stray away from ABC TV, returning as they age (Manzoufas, 2003). Music and ‘youth affairs’ programming had been the dominant modes by which ABC TV had attempted to attract the youth viewer. While the broadcaster had some success with locally produced youth drama series such as *Home* (in 1983) about children in a welfare home and the rock music drama *Sweet and Sour* (1984) that followed the adventures of a struggling Sydney rock band (Taylor, 1986), ABC TV’s youth audience had been constructed largely via music television programs (principally *Rock Arena*, *Rockit* and the long running *Countdown* until its axing in 1987) and ‘youth affairs’ programming (Sternberg, 1997b). By ‘youth affairs’, Sternberg refers to programs that address:

> topics and social issues which are relevant to the everyday lives of young people and which intend to provide them with information about these topics and issues, if not explicit strategies for dealing with them (Sternberg, 1997b).
While some youth affairs programs fell to funding cuts during the late 1980s, the mid-1990s saw a return to the production of youth affairs programming at the ABC with *Attitude* and *Wise-Up* in 1993. With its earnest approach, *Heartbreak High* fits into this tradition, helping to raise the status of youth programs on ABC television, paving the way for mid-1990s success such as the irreverent *Race Around the World, Good News Week, Recovery*\(^{53}\) and *Heartbreak High*. The relative success of *Heartbreak High* itself encouraged the production of a series of similar teen dramas on the ABC throughout the 1990s such as *RawFM* (1997), *Love is a Four Letter Word*\(^{54}\) (2001), and *Head Start*\(^{55}\) (2001).

**Textuality, Broadcasters and Translation**

*Heartbreak High’s* fit amidst the youth affairs tradition of the Australian public broadcaster, the ABC, contrasts with *Dawson’s Creek’s* position as a successful text on Australian commercial television. Despite the somewhat closed nature of *Heartbreak High*, the program found a place on public broadcasters both in Australia and internationally. What this would seem to suggest is that the success of a text is related not solely to its textuality but to the way in which the text participates in the surrounding broadcasting environment. Identifying a list of textual reasons that contribute to the international success of *Neighbours*, Crofts (1995) argues these do not construct the text as universally successful. Rather, the “wholesome neighborliness (sic) [and] cozy every day ethos” appear eminently exportable to a

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\(^{53}\) A Saturday morning, magazine styled TV show closely resembling national youth radio broadcaster Triple J.

\(^{54}\) In some ways a thematic and stylistic forebear of Network Ten’s hit of the same year, *The Secret Life of Us.*

\(^{55}\) *Head Start,* also a Gannon production, built closely on the success of *Heartbreak High.* Developed by *Heartbreak High* script producer Chris Roache, it was produced in co-production with cable channel Fox8 as one of the cable channel’s first forays into original, domestic drama production (Crowley, 2002).
range of, predominantly Anglophone countries “familiar with British, if not also with Australian soaps” (Crofts, 1995: 102).

Crofts moves to examine the specific case of Neighbours in Britain, the US and France, noting while Neighbours’ textuality contributed to its success in Britain, some of these elements proved a liability in the US. American critics particularly objected to the “non-exceptional realism” (Crofts, 1995: 108-09, 112) of the text that marked it as particularly foreign in a ‘soapscape’ with a preference for “the exceptional, the non-domestic, the non-suburban” (Crofts, 1995: 109). In addition to differing textual receptions, the international success of Neighbours is related to institutional and cultural factors within importing markets (such as scheduling and the industrial conditions of the importing mediaspere). Examining the interaction of texts with their surrounds provides a more sophisticated mode for understanding the ways in which texts are drawn across the semiosphere, rather than relying on examination of the textuality of programs alone. The next chapter of this thesis looks at the programming and scheduling environment in which American teen dramas and Dawson’s Creek were located, as a way to examine how these texts were included in locally determined patterns of sense making. Examining these issues aims to uncover the role the television industry plays in translating foreign texts.
Chapter Three: Network Ten and the creation of a youth broadcaster

Introduction

As noted in the conclusion of the previous chapter, not only is textuality important in the success of a program, so is its respective ‘fit’ within a broadcasting sphere. Like Heartbreak High, the success of Dawson’s Creek on Australian television and the meanings the program acquires are related to its location in a wider broadcast environment. Examining the interaction between program and broadcast environments provides an insight into the way in which agents draw cultural elements into and across the semiosphere, translating the text through the creation of domestically relevant meanings. This chapter examines the nature of the Australian broadcasting milieu in which American teen dramas were located in the 1990s. It provides an overview Network Ten’s industrial history, pointing to the way the network reconfigured itself as a youth narrowcaster through program selection and industrial discourse. It looks at the way in which Network Ten created a broadcasting environment, articulated through scheduling, promotional and branding activities, that enabled the successful mobilisation of American teen dramas.

Australian television is a site through which the nation is constructed, with the imagined community of the nation used to imagine the audience and vice-versa (Hartley, 1992b: 104; Gitlin, 1994: 332). The placement of foreign programs within the schedule works to indigenise them as they become part of the constant process of re-imagining the nation that television scheduling undertakes (Hartley, 1992a; Bell, 1998: 168). Continuity material furthers this process by explicitly drawing the shape of the community imagined. Stations identifiers (idents), trailers, promotional
advertisements and “non-programming” elements (Meech, 1999), instruct viewers how to watch and highlight the exciting ritual of nationalistic participation coming up (Hartley, 1992a).

The chapter argues that these industrial practices comprise “techniques of uptake” (McHoul and O'Regan, 1992), discursive strategies imagined communities impose to limit the possible meanings of texts. These strategies help to translate texts by prescribing particular reading practices, encouraging readings of texts that reinforce the self-identity of the respective community. As techniques of uptake, continuity and branding material teach viewers the reading practices necessary to interpret programming within the sense-making strategies of the imagined community of the network. Continuity material and the television schedule connect viewers in local communities with material created outside of that community. It brings “the global, national and local together into the home” (Hartley, 1992a: 174) to create viewers, consumers and a community. International texts are related to domestic strategies of meaning to cohere programming to the local community and the identities it offers.

In the case of Network Ten, continuity material functions to frame American teen dramas amongst a repertoire that builds a youthful identity, constructed with reference to Australia and the Australian mediasphere. This youthful identity is set against both the broader images of the audience mobilised by competing networks. While it is argued that Ten moved away from explicit images of the nation in its branding material, this does not signal a disconnection between the network, the audience and the nation. Network Ten constructed a specific space on television for young people, akin to the space Albury (1999) argues was developed by Triple J on
Australian radio in the mid-1990s. The actions taken by Network Ten to program for youth uncover places on television where young people are realised “as national citizens and members of a global community, and as members of a local community and (therefore) as local consumers” (Nixon, 1998: 73). As a youthful consumer, Ten’s audience is distinguished from the specific youth identity mobilised by the ABC. Constructing viewers as both national citizens and locally oriented consumers participating in a globalised market, Network Ten’s actions represent an example of Hartley’s argument that:

> It is in the spaces created by commercial culture, sponsors of highly capitalised innovation in the mediasphere…that the connections between culture, difference, identity and human rights are being visualised and made both appealing and accessible in the era of semiotic self-determination and DIY citizenship (Hartley, 1999b: 162).

Ten’s reconstitution as a youth focussed, free-to-air broadcaster introduced to the Australian mediasphere a new model of conceiving network television. It broadened both the sites for the representation of youth on television and the ways in which youth was constructed. Throughout the 1990s Ten constructed a semiotic space where youth culture rather than national culture was brought to the fore. In this semiotic space American teen dramas functioned not so much as indicators of American culture but rather as indicators of youth culture and the cultural identity of these programs was subsumed by the greater discourses of the network itself. American programming plays a role in the way in which Ten constructs itself as an entity that, rather than merely existing as a broadcaster, offers broader access to a cultural space.
This chapter explores the way Ten created a broadcasting milieu that made the teen drama profitable on Australian television. It considers Ten’s industrial history, locating Ten’s strategies amidst greater shifts in broadcasting. Ten’s emphasis on a youth audience can be seen as a response to the economic, audience and industrial crises that produced the stylistic responses of televisuality. The chapter examines Ten’s mix of programming, looking at the way in which American teen dramas support the narrative of youthfulness Ten mobilises. Consideration of Ten’s scheduling strategies point to the way the network has privileged youth as its principal audience target. These scheduling strategies support Ten’s narrative of youthfulness, enabling the network to program teen drama in prime time. Scheduling teen drama in prime time in turn strengthens Ten’s narrative of youthfulness, a fact reflected by comparing Ten’s scheduling of Dawson’s Creek with the Seven Network’s scheduling of Buffy. Finally, the role branding and continuity material play in supporting this narrative of youthfulness is explored by examining some of Ten’s idents. Examining these three elements demonstrate the role television’s industrial agents play in the process of translation, pointing to the way American teen dramas have been located within the Australian mediasphere.

**Network Ten: Branding (for) Youth**

Ten’s decision to focus on the youth market is significant as it represents a shift in Australian broadcasting against the pattern of audience maximisation strategies that have existed as the norm. It exists as an example of audience aggregation based around a specific lucrative portion. In this sense, Ten’s youth focus can be seen in a similar light to the changes Australia’s SBS underwent subsequent to its establishment as a corporation in 1991. As Lawe Davies (1998: 90) explains, SBS’
re-branding as a multicultural broadcaster rather than an ethnic broadcaster, embodied poignantly in its “The World is an Amazing Place” campaign, was an effort to maximise its audience by aggregating it within distinct identifiable demographic and psychographic indicators. Similarly, Ten’s rebranding as a youth narrowcaster introduced to the Australian mediasphere the idea of the youth audience as a valuable and quantifiable entity. Ten’s turn to specifically targeting the ‘youth’ market gave it form within the Australian mediasphere as a distinct entity, where previously it had been understood as a market segment.

Ten’s shift to a niche broadcasting model was an attempt to salvage a network savaged by the rise and fall of “entrepreneurial television” (O'Regan, 1993: 40-58) in Australia throughout the 1980s. Losing close to $110 million a year by the beginning of the 1990s, Ten was put into receivership by Westpac in September 1991 (Westfield, 2003) after which it was offered initially to Kerry Stokes and then Canadian businessman Izzy Asper. Asper’s CanWest Global Communications Corporation (CanWest) had recently purchased a stake in New Zealand’s loss making TV3 and found in Australia a television industry protected by legislation and with few competitors (Westfield, 2003). CanWest spearheaded a consortium that acquired Ten for about $90/91 million in cash and $150/145 million in debt (Shoebridge, 1997: 66; Westfield, 2003). Since the acquisition in 1992, the CanWest consortium has worked to rebuild what previous owner Frank Lowy described as “the worst house in the street” (Shoebridge, 1997: 66).

Asper’s experience in Canada tuned his approach to television. In a Canadian market pumped by US cable and free-to-air networks (Westfield, 2003) Asper’s
strategy for economic viability was to keep costs down and chase a specific audience (Shoebridge, 1997: 66), avoiding becoming embroiled in bidding wars for sporting events with other networks and instead focusing on the provision of attractive but cheap programming, particularly sitcoms, dramas and soaps (Aguayo, 1997: 66; Westfield, 2003). In Australia, Ten faced the problem of achieving profitability in a commercial free-to-air television market dominated by two of the three players. Ten lacked a foothold in the market. Rather than choosing to compete with the other commercial networks and attempt to divide the market into three, the network sought to target a specific segment of the audience, 16-39 year olds (Stockbridge, 2000). This portion of the audience was increasingly becoming positioned as a veritable gold mine by hype surrounding Generation X and youth culture at the time; it was seen as “an emerging lucrative demographic” (Stockbridge, 2000: 191). Ten lacked the economic resources to compete with Seven and Nine for overall ratings, so instead sought to carve out a niche for itself with this younger market.

Ten’s niche targeting strategy came on the back of similar changes worldwide, the mobilisation of which Rogers et al. (2002) refer to as the triumph of the “grand logic” of the niche. The rise of cable competitors in 1980 (CNN) and 1981 (MTV) challenged the levels of cash present in the American television market. While the incumbent three networks (CBS, NBC, and ABC) drew 92% of prime-time viewers in 1977 (Lin, 1995: 482) this had fallen to only to around a 64/65 share by 1989-1990 (Caldwell, 1995: 11) and had slipped as low as 61% by 1994 (Lin, 1995: 482). This decline in network shares is also attributable to the rise of Fox as a viable fourth broadcaster in the US, reaching profitability in 1989 (Caldwell, 1995: 11; Owen, 1997) by targeting a youth audience. Like Ten in the Australian market, Fox
acquired status in the American market by targeting a youth audience, specifically 18-34 year olds. According to Jamie Kellner, Fox's first CEO (quoted in Owen, 1997: 59), the network was interested in targeting “pinpointed demographic audiences” and selling advertising based on the value rather than the size of this market. As the network became more profitable it expanded into the 18-49 year old market, taking a portion of the profits of ABC (Caldwell, 1995: 11). This does not indicate a shift of strategy, however. The Fox model gains longevity by drawing younger viewers in to replace those who move out as they age, rather than attempting to cater to viewers throughout their entire life.

The audience challenges posed by the emergence of cable options and a fourth commercial network in the US were compounded by the development of the remote control which dealt a further blow to network shares by making it easier for viewers to move away from networks during breaks in programming (Eastman and Newton, 1999). In the UK the emergence of cable and satellite services challenged the ability of incumbent broadcasters to attract a youth audience, an audience successfully mobilised to support the roll-out of cable and satellite services across Europe (Frith, 1993). Reductions in the cost of television technology resulted in the rise of multiple-set households and television changed from an activity the household participated in together (Frith, 1993: 72-73; Borthwick, 1998). VCR technology fragmented the audience further, not only allowing viewing to take place outside of the stream of programming but allowing the audience for a program to remain unmeasured. In tandem, schedules expanded into early morning and late night

56 The potential for these programs to be recorded could take place in a diary ratings system, except that the predominant diary systems record video taped programs as “watching recorded program” and do not enquire as to what the program watched was.
slots, an action allowing new spaces to be opened up for audiences in previously unused segments of the schedule (Frith, 1993; Borthwick, 1998).

This fragmenting period is what Hermann Behrens (as discussed in Rogers et al., 2002) describes as the second phase of television, what he refers to as TVII, a period stretching from 1975-1995. Television during this period responded to, exhibited and enabled the overconsumption of the post-Fordist service economy emerging throughout the 1970s. During this second phase, television “played a decisive part in naturalising the grand logic of niche marketing” (Rogers et al., 2002: 44), promoting consumerist values that emphasised new, fleeting, ephemeral values rather than the more solid values implanted under a Fordist order. Popularity was reconfigured as the quest not for mass viewer numbers but for ‘quality demographics’. Valuable programming was that which attracted segments of the population most valued by advertisers, particularly, 18 to 49 year-olds in urban regions (Rogers et al., 2002: 44).

**Industrial Crisis and Target Markets**

Youth television and the teen drama can be seen as a response to these economic and audience changes. Implementing the “cheap and dirty” strategy CanWest excels at (Canadian Shareowner, 1998: 16), Ten has established itself as one of the “best-valued media companies around” (Morrison, 1999: 42; Ferguson, 2001: 34). Tight budgetary controls lead analysts to estimate its 1996-97 costs as being 30-35 per cent lower than Nine and Seven (Shoebridge, 1998: 47), giving Ten a competitive advantage in terms of the rates it offers to advertisers. As CEO John McAlpine explains “[b]ecause of the way we gear the network in terms of operating costs, we can sell the 16-39 demographic to advertisers a little cheaper than our rivals” (in
Television and advertising institutions have constructed the youth market as desirable because they see them as not yet fully formed consumers (Owen, 1997: 59-63), and a high premium is placed on younger viewers on the assumption they are more impressionable (Dee, 2002: 60). The key features of the perceived value of ‘the youth market’ lie in the assumption that the majority of young people’s income is disposable (Danielsen, 1999) with the group understood to live at home longer (Ritchie, 1995). They are without the ties of children, mortgages and financial responsibility that come with adult life (Fidgeon and Vickery, 1999; Danielsen, 2001) and place a high value on image (Owen, 1997: 59-60). Young viewers are thought impressionable, without established brand loyalties or established purchasing patterns (Harford, 1998: 4). At the same time, the perception of young people as media savvy suggests they engage with a great and wide range of media, providing ample opportunities for brands to communicate their respective identities and values (Dee, 2002: 60).

The discourses surrounding the economic value of the youth market in the 1990s built on the cultural understandings of the youth market established during the post-war period (Hebdige, 1988: 29-30) discussed in chapter one of this investigation. As Sternberg (2001: 309-317) covers quite succinctly, current figures suggest that despite much mythology, young people consume less television than at any other stage in the life cycle. The Australian Broadcast Authority / Office of Film and Literature Classification report *Families and Electronic Entertainment* found that amongst 7-18 year-olds, television consumption was lowest overall for subjects aged 15-17 years (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996: 16). Also, television consumption amongst teenage demographics has declined in recent years (Shoebridge, 1990;
Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996; Light, 1999; Burton, 2000) with slight gains made by
the pay sector (Given, 2000). In 1991 13-17 year-olds viewed an average of 2 hours
39 minutes television per day. By 1998 their viewing had fallen to 2 hours 31
minutes per day (Burton, 2000: 59).

This decline in viewing is one of the reasons there is a premium placed on attracting
the youth market. By prescribing the audience as economically viable, cashed up
and needing to buy, yet hard to reach because it does not watch as much television as
other demographics, the youth audience was considered a “good revenue focus” for
Ten and “another way of being competitive on a low cost basis” (Stockbridge, 2000:
192). By targeting only a portion of the audience, Ten is able to maximise its
expenditure by focussing all its resources on a much smaller target. Ten is concerned
only with the 16-39 year-old age group and so needs only to achieve high ratings in
this demographic, a task they have managed, particularly in the 16-24 year-old
demographic (Flew and Spurgeon, 2000; Green, 2000; Stockbridge, 2000). Writing
on the lucrative nature of this market, Harford (1998) reports that despite their lower
overall ratings score, Seinfeld and The X-Files could command approximately $8000
for a 30-second advertisement in Melbourne. This is just slightly less than the $9000
charged for the Nine Network’s 60 Minutes (ranked 6th overall) or the Seven
Network’s Better Homes and Gardens (ranked 5th overall). Ten’s hallmark was not
being the loser of the commercial television world, it was being the winner in the
demographic labelled ‘youth’ (Simmons, 2002).
Programming for “youth”

Ten’s focus on a ‘youth’ demographic has not been without challenge, particularly from other the commercial television networks who have accused Ten of being locked into the 16-24 market exclusively (Dennis, 1999; Davies, 2000; Fidgeon, 2002). Particularly important to Ten’s economic and industrial model is a fluid or indeterminate conception of the ‘youth market’ itself. Indeed, when asked if 16-39 year-olds could be considered a ‘youth’ audience, Peter Andrews, Network Program Manager at Ten, replied:

Look…no, not necessarily. I wouldn’t call that a youth audience. I would call it, well certainly from Ten’s point of view it’s our focus. So it’s not really a youth audience…I don’t think you need to call a youth audience by demography. [A] youth audience really depends on the nature of programming. I don’t think you need to define it by a certain age limit. Plus it will obviously offend a lot of people who don’t fall into it, certain demographics. So it’s as simple as that (Andrews, 2002).

Marena Manzoufas, Head of Programming at the ABC, concurs suggesting that in terms of scheduling and programming, ‘youth’ is a fluid term (Manzoufas, 2003), an attitude that leads Ian Carroll, former Head of ABC Digital Multi-channelling and one of the architects of the ABC’s short lived youth digital channel Fly TV to suggest that, for the ABC at least, what is defined as ‘youth audience’ “depends on what the issues [presented in or by a program] are, what the outlet is [and] what type of program” is scheduled (Carroll, 2003).
Amorphous constructions of youth\textsuperscript{37} have been seminal to the emergence of ‘youth television’ and the project to devise a form of the youth program that could exist without any real structural base in actual youth (Frith, 1993: 75; Lury, 2001: 16). Youth, Frith argues, is constructed by television such that it requires no other referent; those who watch youth programming comprise, or become, youth. Youth, then, describes not a type of viewer watching a particular program (or program type) but rather “a particular type of viewing behaviour” (Frith, 1993: 75). While a real generation could be identified, and attempts were being made to appeal to it, the aesthetic of youth programming became detached from the original audience and the audience became the future of TV (Lury, 2001: 23).

Indeterminate constructions of ‘youth’ have been central to Ten’s functioning as a broadcaster. In addition to appealing directly to the youth market itself, Ten works to market a youth identity to a television consuming public. Youth is ritualised as a performance (Oswell, 1998: 42-48; Brooks, 2003: 3), as a series of particular behaviours and sensations and constructed as a site for consumption and play. Images of ‘youth as fun’ are inherently connected to ideas of the youth market (Hebdige, 1988: 29-30; Sternberg, 2001: 306) the mobilisation of which establishes youth as an object, as a site for spectacle and desire for the mass audience (Brooks, 2003: 2). Youth is used to encourage people to do away with other identities and allegiances and instead come together as a unified constituency – the audience (Hartley, 1992b: 111). This narrative of youthfulness contrasts with the ‘youth affairs’ approach of the ABC discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than a time

\textsuperscript{37} Frith points to the amorphous notion of youth possessed by TV by quoting Stephen Garrett of Channel 4 in the UK:

The wonderful thing about being Commissioning Editor for Youth Programming is that there’s no such thing as youth programming. I don’t have the vision of a spotty 19-year-old in Nottingham who (sic.) I’m saying, “This is a programme for you!” (Frith, 1993: 69).
of struggle, youth is presented by Ten as a time of playfulness. The following section examines Ten’s programming strategies, looking at the way in which the network’s major programming styles build the particular narrative of youthfulness mobilised. Programming on Ten models the behaviours for the audience, enticing viewers to adopt a youthful identity by participating in Ten’s community.

**Ten’s Programming Strategies**

Ten has focussed on a youth audience by positioning itself as a core site for young people to access popular culture. Youthful programming is combined with scheduling strategies and branding and continuity material that present the network as a youth space on Australian television. Stockbridge (2000) argues the key program elements that attract youth viewers are music programming (especially if it is cross promoted with other network offerings), American dramas, Australian soaps, comedy and playful programming, and reality TV. These five programming elements form the basis of this analysis, which organises Ten’s content into four core programming types which contribute to the narrative of youth Ten constructs.

**Imported Content**

While Stockbridge emphasises the presence of American dramas particularly, Ten’s construction as a youth broadcaster has been aided by a significant proportion of American programming generally. As Ten CEO John McAlpine told the American Chamber of Commerce in his 2003 presentation:

> Until a few years ago, Ten relied heavily on imported programming. We had a great run in the mid-‘90s with the classic US “water cooler” shows such as
Melrose Place and Seinfeld. It was terrific when Hollywood was delivering hits to us (McAlpine, 2003).

High quality, pre-tested American product such as The Nanny, Seinfeld, 90210, Melrose Place, The Simpsons and Dawson’s Creek all worked to build the plank upon which Ten branded itself as a youth broadcaster. Figures from 1999, outlined in table 3.1, point to a high reliance on foreign drama programming during the evening schedule (5pm-midnight) for each of the commercial networks. In the case of Ten, however, these figures indicate a higher reliance on foreign programming overall, with a noticeable split between dramas and ‘foreign light entertainment’ (e.g. sitcoms). Together these make up 46 per cent of the 5pm-midnight programming (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1999: 10).

Table 3.1: Most important categories of programming - 5pm to midnight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seven</th>
<th>Nine</th>
<th>Ten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian</strong></td>
<td>News and current affairs (19 per cent); light entertainment (11 per cent); drama (10 per cent); sport (14 per cent, 20 per cent in Melbourne)</td>
<td>News and current affairs (21 per cent, 24 per cent in Brisbane); light entertainment (16 per cent); sport (12 per cent)</td>
<td>News and current affairs (20 per cent); drama (9 per cent); sport (7 per cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign</strong></td>
<td>Drama (35 per cent)</td>
<td>Drama (31 per cent)</td>
<td>Light entertainment (23 per cent); drama (23 per cent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1999: 10)
The presence of foreign, particularly American, content is a long term feature of the Australian television system. However, Ten’s prime time schedule is marked by a greater presence of American content than the other networks. Links between American content and young people in Australia are drawn from cultural ties that associate mass media and American culture with the youth market, as discussed in chapter one. Demographic studies indicate a preference for American programming that wanes with age (Emmison, 1997; Bennett et al., 1999: 201-225) and American programming is perceived to carry significant cultural caché (Langbroek, 1995). Similarly, Stockbridge argues the success of American programming with the youth market is related to its links with the greater world of popular culture, particularly popular music (Stockbridge, 2000: 199).

**Performative Programming: Music and Reality Television**
The links with popular culture that American content provides are strengthened by Ten’s use of music television. Music television has a long history with youth programming being a seminal form in the development of American and European youth services. Frith (1993) identifies it as a principal tool in the pursuit of the youth market that drove the roll out of cable across Europe. Similarly, both Borthwick (1998) and Lury (2001) cite music television as a seminal form of British youth programming services and Juluri (2002) argues the arrival of music television in post-liberalisation India represented the rise of a recognisable youth culture. Larson et al. (1989: 589) note a gradual shift during adolescence from television viewing to music listening, with the teens in their study reporting increased interest in music related television programs.
Music programming allows Ten to maintain a connection with this competing medium, contextualising the network as a site where youth culture, not just television programming, is available. Ten’s music video program Video Hits is the longest continually running music program on commercial television (Stockbridge, 2002) and the network’s late 1990s magazine program Ground Zero incorporated elements of music programming such as live bands and film clips. The importance of music television to Ten’s construction of youth comes from the performative representations of youth present in this genre. Music programming spectacularises images of youth, presenting youth as a performed identity (Kinder, 1987; Stockbridge, 1987). Youthfulness, in the form of performance, culture and consumption, are put on display through music television.

Reality television performs a similar function, particularly as it is practiced by Ten. The network acquired the Australian rights to the Big Brother, Idol and X-Factor franchises, the first two of which have been strong performers (Lawson, 2002; Davis, 2003; Shoebridge, 2004) for the network. Reality television puts young people on the screen to model the sorts of behaviour that represent youth on Ten. Ten has for the most part strayed away from lifestyle programming, the sort of programming that models patterns of behaviour for older viewers (ways to participate as a citizen – world travel, maintaining your house, managing your health and income). Reality television serves this purpose for Ten. Big Brother brings with it a risqué-ness, and exhibitionist quality that is also found in programming such as Australian Idol, which fuses performance with the dream of celebrity and wider links to popular culture. Ten’s reality programming relies on members of the audience coming onto the screen to perform their youthfulness, by becoming subjects for
voyeurism or adopting the tropes of a ‘live’ musical act. These programs are in one sense reflective of Ten’s viewers, drawing directly on the viewers at home. These viewers are transformed into the sort of people Ten imagines as its audience through selection and screening processes for participation, required behaviours (delivered by the tasks set in Big Brother for instance) and particular attitudes towards consumption (delineated through the rewards offered).

Youth Dramas
Teen dramas, soap operas and what Owen (1997) describes as ‘GenX TV’ have comprised a significant proportion of Ten’s drama content throughout the 1990s. Until the launch of twenty-something Australian drama The Secret Life of Us in 2001 (and not really until the second season of this program in 2002), the majority of Ten’s successful prime time drama programming has been imported American content and reality programming. In addition to long running Australian soap opera Neighbours, programs such as Beverly Hills, 90210, Dawson’s Creek and The O.C. brought to Ten an important cultural caché for younger viewers. These programs provided Ten with affordable drama programming that enabled the network to appear young by privileging images of young people. Network Ten becomes a place on television where young people could be seen. Such a strategy allows young people to see images of themselves given precedence in a medium typically dominated by programs seeking to appeal to all viewers. Harwood (1997) notes a preference in viewers to watch characters of their own age in lead and significant roles, findings confirmed by Keddie and Churchill’s (1999) investigation of young Australian’s perceptions of television characterisations. Privileging images

58 Other significant dramas on Ten include The X-Files and the Law & Order franchise, both of which have provided Ten with significant drama output.
of young people, Ten maps out a space in the Australian television mediasphere where youth are a central feature.

Utilising programs with youthful leads is one element in Ten’s pedocratic regime (Hartley, 1987) that seeks to appeal to a youthful viewer by portraying Ten as youthful itself. This is an appropriation of a similar strategy utilised initially by ABC in the US but more specifically by Fox to appeal to a Generation X teen market. The strategy is one of convincing the audience to watch not because they seek to be like you but rather because you are like them (Ebenkamp, 1999: 4). Teen dramas work to achieve such a regime by constructing an image of Ten’s viewership, describing to a degree the model reader (Eco, 1979) Ten imagines for its text.

As is the tradition with images of young people (Hartley, 1983; Brooks, 2003), the young bodies in teen dramas form not direct models of the reader that Ten seeks but rather the desires of the audience they wish to sell to. Brooks’ (2003) alarmed assessment of the commodification of youth culture rightly identifies the propensity of the ‘youth market’ to construct youth as a “desirable and uncomplicated product” (Brooks, 2003: 4). Youth is fashioned as an aspirational lifestyle marker, mobilised to meet the desires of the entire, diverse, potential audience. The value of imported product is that it segments the market. With the pursuit of the teen consumer in the US, an emphasis on specific audience segments has resulted in programming designed for progressive market segments. The effect is that youth dramas, including teen dramas such as Dawson’s Creek, train viewers in the codes of television viewing. It allows people who are too young for adult drama to learn how
to watch long form dramas. Viewers can step into teen dramas after outgrowing children’s drama, spending a time there before moving on.

**Playful, Irreverent and Controversial Programming**

Important in Ten's narrative of youthfulness is the idea of playfulness, embodied particularly in the idea of an “under 40” audience that is “energetic”:

> That’s very important. We’re very ‘cool’, we’re ‘now’. It’s all those sort of words. I don’t really like to shoebox with singular words, but I think certainly it’s ‘vibrant’, it’s ‘energetic’, it’s…extremely contemporary and also basically a vibrant sort of network (Andrews, 2002).

Important to Ten’s narrative of youthfulness as fun is an emphasis on “entertainment and a slightly light hearted approach” to programming and scheduling (Stockbridge, 2002). This is embodied particularly in Ten’s use of comedy and irreverent programming, borne particularly in two of the network’s early successes, evening discussion program *The Panel* and celebrity game-show-come-cabaret program *Good News Week*, which Ten acquired from the ABC. Both these programs presented analysis of news and current affairs in unconventional styles, the former via a ‘panel’ discussion amongst a group of friends and the latter through a game show format59. These programs both employed satire and criticism to deconstruct and analyse news events, distinguishing them in format, though not necessarily in content, from traditional news programming.

Mobilising this narrative of youthfulness, Ten utilises tactics that appear to run counter to established television institutions, attempting to construct itself in the image of its rebellious, youthful model reader. Like Fox before it and the WB, Ten

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59 *Good News Week* is based on the British program *Have I Got News For You.*
has fielded criticism for the nature of some of the programs it screens. Fox appeared to stretch the limits of acceptability with sensationalist programs such as *Married...with Children* “which was considered overly raunchy at the time…Fox made a name for itself with in-your-face programs that mom and dad hated but the kids loved” (Owen, 1997: 56). Similarly, WB’s *Dawson’s Creek* was criticised for its focus on teenage sex and subplots featuring a sexual relationship between Pacey and his English teacher (Graham, 1997; Bianculli, 1998). In the Australian market Ten has attracted criticism with conservative Senator Brian Harradine leading a campaign in 1997 that resulted in the cancellation of magazine program *Sex/Life* (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1997: 133-134; "TV Sex Show Gives MP Bad Vibrations," 1998), and more recently *The Secret Life of Us* was criticised for its representation of drug and alcohol use (Roberts, 2002; Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2003: 17; Lawson and Ellis, 2003). Ten’s promotional material also has been the subject of complaints, in particular 1997s “Turn Me On” campaign which drew criticism from some older viewers for its sexual allusions (Stockbridge, 2000).

The presence of controversial material despite criticism goes hand-in-hand with Ten’s focus on a youthful audience. American network The WB operate in a similar fashion, defending their decision to produce programs such as *Dawson’s Creek* that raise the ire of some viewers by claiming their primary interest is screening programs that have a “strong connection with their youth audience” (Teasdale, 1999: 32). Stockbridge discusses her perception that Ten’s image as a youth broadcaster subjects it to a greater degree of scrutiny by parents than the other commercial networks, in part because Ten encourages this somewhat controversial image:
Ten does rather like the controversial, sexy sort of show. Ten tends to go for it as more of a big time thing. And that’s partly, I think, because Ten sees it as a thing that a younger audience appreciates; being a bit naughty if you like, pushing the boundaries. Not actually pushing the boundaries but appearing to do so (Stockbridge, 2002).

In this sense, networks such as Ten attempt to configure themselves as they imagine their youth audience: willing to try something new and controversial to build an individual identity. By utilising such a strategy Ten appeals to the audience as a peer.

**Scheduling for Youth – Counter Programming**

Mobilising these core program types, Ten works to present itself as a site where youthful programming exists in the Australian mediasphere. This space is given shape through scheduling strategies, principally Ten’s counter programming. Aside from delivering good quality but relatively cheap programming, part of the Asper approach to broadcasting is providing viewers with an alternative to what was offered by the other networks (Aguayo, 1997: 67). This is an approach based around countering the opposition, a scheduling strategy that allows Ten to stand as the odd network out and, with correct genre choices, able to achieve expected gains by reducing the contest to a proxy two-way competition (Lin, 1995: 486). Rather than a niche target in the multi-channelling sense, this is a narrowcasting approach to broadcasting (Light, 1999: 49). Where possible, Ten aims to provide the youth alternative to the programs offered by the other commercial networks and ratings data is compared against the schedules in a search for the unserved audience (Stockbridge, 2000: 198). This is an effort to attract an audience without competing
directly against Networks Seven and Nine. Ten’s CEO, John McAlpine explains the theory:

We don’t headbutt. Remember, I went through the stage with Ten when we tried to do that. Receivership! So I’m wary about competing unnecessarily. I mean we’re competitive people. But, hopefully, in a smart way. Headbutting in this business is pointless. All it leads to is a desire to be number one. Which is costly. So I think – strategically – we’ve just got to walk around those gorillas. We can carve out a niche.

And so far, so good (Simper, 1999).

Examining Ten’s counter programming strategy treads the line between examining the way Ten mobilises youth as a discourse to maximise its audience and the way in which it exists as a broadcaster specifically interested in attracting young people themselves.

Ten’s scheduling of its news bulletin at 5pm is a longstanding and apparent example of this counter programming strategy. Ten’s news Bulletin is differentiated from the other networks principally by being scheduled an hour earlier and utilising a one hour format. This has variously placed the program up against reruns of imported sitcoms, afternoon game shows and infotainment programs such as Nine’s local magazine program Extra, all of which skew towards the top end of Ten’s target demographic if not older. Running the news at 5pm allows Ten to schedule entertainment programming against the news bulletins and current affairs broadcasts of both Seven and Nine. With a decline in young people viewing traditional news broadcasts (Evans and Sternberg, 2000) and more and more getting their news from alternative sources, youth audiences are more likely to draw news and current affairs
information from irreverent programming such as Ten’s successful Good News Week and The Panel (Evans and Sternberg, 2000).

There is a marked difference between the audience share Ten gained when running its news against those of the other commercial networks and the share gained when it began to run entertainment product in the same slot. Table 3.2, 3.3 and figure 3.1 compare Ten’s share figures for the Brisbane market in the Total People, Men 16-24 and Women 16-24\(^\text{60}\) demographics for the same 6-6:30pm slot (a Friday late in November) in 1991 and 1992. In 1991 Ten ran a half-hour news bulletin against similar competition on Seven and Nine. By 1992 this had been dropped for the hour long news bulletin at 5pm. Against the Seven and Nine news Ten ran Studs, a cheesy dating show imported from the US. Ten’s share gain in 1992 is marked across all the demographics reported but particularly in the Women 16-24 category. In 1991 Seven draws the greatest percentage (72%) of this audience with its news bulletin, but in 1992 Ten draws nearly the same amount (68%) with Studs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total People</th>
<th>Men 16-24</th>
<th>Women 16-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News: (BTQ7 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News: (QTQ9 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Eyewitness News: (TVQ10 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A.C. Nielsen)

\(^{60}\) Figures for the 16-39 audience were not available.
Table 3.3: Share Figures (%) Friday, November 27 1992, Brisbane Market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total People</th>
<th>Men 16-24</th>
<th>Women 16-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News: (BTQ7 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News: (QTQ9 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studs: (TVQ10 18:00 – 18:30)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A.C. Nielsen)

Figure 3.1: Share Figures (%) Comparison, 1991 & 1992, Brisbane Market

Moving its main news bulletin forward to 5pm means Ten commences prime time with entertainment programming while the other commercial networks are tied down with news and current affairs. This strategy kick starts Ten’s evening, as it attempts to consistently provide its core audience with programming that is both attractive and an alternative to the offerings of the other networks. The following brief overview of Ten’s evening schedule points to the way in which Ten attempts to counter program the other networks. Included on the next page (table 3.4) is the prime time schedule, 6-10:30pm for Thursday May 17 2001, to which this analysis refers.
Against news and current affairs programming, Ten opens the night with The Simpsons and Neighbours. While The Simpsons competes with the MTV produced grunge cartoon Daria on the ABC, Daria may suffer a little because it is the last point of a block of ‘children’s programming’ on the ABC that runs from the early afternoon onwards. Daria definitely pitches for an older audience than its preceding programs such as The Saddle Club and Angry Beavers, but it is still located as the capstone of a children’s programming block. The Simpsons by contrast, is the first program of Ten’s evening of youth programming and its appeal with viewers 18-24 and 16-39 leads into Neighbours.

Stripped across the week and long established in its slot, Neighbours makes up an important part of Ten’s schedule and serves as an introduction to the night’s programming. Regularity, tradition and habit are important to the success of TV schedules (Ellis, 2000a: 27) and traditional slots become eventually immovable as they are “rooted in the reification of schedules” (Pilsworth, 1980: 237). Neighbours’ position at 6:30pm is a traditional slot Ten uses to commence the viewing evening. The 6pm slot has been variously filled with other programs such as The Nanny, however, Neighbours’ 6:30pm slot is long standing and solid. It provides a regular appointment for Ten’s youth demographics, with perhaps a greater gender skew towards female viewers.
Like *Neighbours*, *Home and Away* is a longstanding appointment for viewers on the Seven Network. In 2000 Ten conceded this slot to Seven, scheduling the male skewing *Seinfeld* at 7pm rather than competing head-to-head with Seven. Acquiring *Big Brother* in 2001, however, Ten began to contest the slot, screening the daily program at 7pm against *Home and Away*. As demonstrated by the figures in table 3.5 below, *Big Brother* provided apt competition, drawing larger numbers than *Home
and Away in the Total People, People 16-24 year-old and People 25-39 year-old markets.

Table 3.5: Ratings Figures 7pm, Thursday, May 17 2001, Brisbane Market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total People (000’s)</th>
<th>TARP</th>
<th>16-24 (000’s)</th>
<th>TARP</th>
<th>25-39 (000’s)</th>
<th>TARP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Brother</td>
<td>248,419</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>42,346</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>97,279</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home and Away</td>
<td>215,403</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>22,332</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>39,575</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale Of The Century</td>
<td>276,519</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>8,672</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>44,106</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: OzTam)

Ten leveraged the appeal of Big Brother into Dawson’s Creek, screening at 7.30pm during 2001. Dawson’s Creek presented as an alternative to Nine’s lifestyle program Getaway and Seven’s imported naval drama JAG. In this line-up Dawson’s Creek competes for a youth audience against older skewing travel show Getaway. While JAG attracts a male viewer, it challenges Dawson’s Creek for viewers aged 25-39, leaving Dawson’s Creek as the principal draw for viewers 16-24 years-old. This is a change in strategy from the previous year when Dawson’s Creek, as the pinnacle program for the evening at 8:30pm competed against Heartbeat and E.R.

While distinguished from the older skewing Heartbeat, Dawson’s Creek was challenged in this slot by E.R., particularly for the female viewer. Moving Dawson’s Creek to 7:30pm in 2001, Ten ran The X-Files against Heartbeat and E.R. The X-Files was positioned as youth programming through its Generation X appeal and it was scheduled to collect the male viewer who may be unserved by the competition. With The X-Files running into the late night Big Brother Uncut at 9:30pm, Ten has scheduled an entire evening of youth skewing programming. Inspector Morse poses no direct challenge to Ten’s youth viewer. While The NRL Footy Show on Nine may
challenge Ten for the youth viewer, particularly the male youth viewer, the network relies on the hype surrounding *Big Brother* and the promise of risqué content to compete.

This analysis points to the way in which Ten employs a counter programming strategy in its efforts to target youth demographics specifically. Ten’s success is at times challenged by youth skewing or broad appeal programs scheduled by other networks. This is particularly the case with regard to the higher end of Ten’s demographic target (25-39 year-olds) where there is an obvious crossover with the broad 18-54 target of the other commercial networks. Indeed, while Ten’s stated target are viewers aged 16-39, John McAlpine indicated in 2002 that the median age for Ten’s audience was 36.7 years-old (Australian Associated Press, 2002). This is still a younger audience than that drawn by the other commercial networks which enjoyed a median age in the mid-high forties. Importantly, however, Ten’s programming and scheduling strategies appear to offer a line-up of youth oriented programming. Ten’s schedule is filled with programs that skewing towards youth viewers, contrasting the competition. This is particularly apparent in the 7:30-8:30pm slot, where Ten runs *Dawson’s Creek* against lifestyle and ‘adult’ drama.

This youthful appearance is important for the industrial discourse Ten constructs about its audience. Focussing on a youth audience, Ten has effectively taken itself out of the race for the Total People crown Seven and Nine compete for; it needs only to achieve success with viewers aged ‘under 40’. The network’s weekly press releases report its achievements in the 16-39 year-old markets, despite the fact this market is regularly ignored by the other networks who conventionally report their
achievements in the 16-24 year-old, 25-39 year old and 25-54 year-old markets. The function of the 16-39 year-old market as a principal organising tool for Ten’s business practices is emblematised by a press release from the 26th of May, 2003 entitled “An Apology from Ten”. Answering criticism from Seven and Nine that Ten came third (last) in the Total People category the night before, Ten responds:

We could not be happier about it. With Ten continuing to dominate prime time viewing among 16 to 39 year olds (sic), our clients aren’t wasting their money reaching hundreds of thousands of people outside their target markets. … The more advertisers who benefit from Ten’s targeted approach, and the more media and television writers understand how TV is bought and sold, the more uncomfortable out competitors become. Considering the market share we’ve earned in the last two years, we understand their anxiety (Network Ten Limited, 2003).

**A Space for Youth: Buffy vs. Dawson’s Creek**

The network’s choice of programming and its counter programming scheduling strategy situates Ten as a site on Australian television where youth viewers and youthfulness itself is privileged. With an emphasis on only a portion of the total viewing population attracted by this programming, as outlined by press releases such as the one above, youthful content is profitable for Ten. Network Ten emerges as a key site within the Australian mediasphere where youth is actively imagined and represented and where youth identities are foregrounded, privileged and validated. Ten’s expressed counter programming strategy allows it to appear youthful by scheduling in prime time programming which is otherwise marginalised to ‘fringe’ spots on the schedule of other networks. Particularly illustrative are the efforts of the
Seven Network, whose scheduling of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* demonstrates an alternative approach to scheduling teen drama that highlights some of the important elements of the Ten model.

The youth audience at Seven is constructed as a distinct part of the overall audience. *Buffy* first appeared on Seven during the summer schedule of 1997. As is the practice with teen dramas for both Seven and Ten, the program was introduced into the schedule outside of the ratings season “where it won’t do much damage” (Franken, 2002). *Buffy* debuted in December of 1997 between Seven’s game show *Who Dares Wins* (7-7:30pm) and as a lead-in program for *Stargate: SG-1* (8:30-9:30pm). As a lead-in for *Stargate*, *Buffy* became part of a block of action-adventure programming that ran across the summer against various older skewing programs such as *Cybill* and *Can’t Hurry Love*, on Nine as well as its cricketing coverage and then network regular *Burke’s Backyard*. On Ten, *Buffy* encountered sitcoms *The Single Guy* and *Boston Common* both of which pitched to the slightly older end of the 16-39 year-old demographic. Towards the end of *Buffy’s* premiere season, Ten contested its scheduling with more male skewing action-adventure programs *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and the short lived *Team Knight Rider*. *Buffy* continued as summer programming until 1999 where it was moved to the ratings season and placed in what would become its trademark, late night, 10:30pm slot.

Economically, scheduling *Buffy* during the summer season conforms to core scheduling principals of premiering new programs in quiet times (Vane and Gross, 1994: 169) where they are unlikely to do a lot of damage. Summer is traditionally a time Seven shifts away from its principal 25-54 year-old female audience to focus
more specifically on a 16-39 year-old target and so was an ideal time to get this audience to sample *Buffy*. When *Buffy* was moved to the ratings season, Seven replicated traditional strategies for creating a space for youth viewers on television. Attempts to capture youth viewers in Europe drove the expansion of the schedule into “fringe zones” (early mornings and late at night) (Frith, 1993: 73). These are times when young people can watch without the distraction of the family and without impacting greatly upon the ratings success of programs designed with a broader audience in mind. Franken (2002) recounts the development of this late night slot as an ongoing process that began with acquiring classic episodes of *Star Trek* in the early 1990s to program against Nine’s *Star Trek: Next Generation*. Opening up the late night slot, however, involved convincing Seven to drop its late edition news bulletin, the intention being to extend prime time all the way to 11:30pm.

To a degree this has been effective, with late night slots developed across Seven’s week to screen similar programs such as *Buffy* spin-off *Angel*, more melodramatic teen dramas such as *Felicity*, teen drama science-fiction hybrids such as *Mutant X* and *Dark Angel*, as well as the latest in the *Star Trek* line, *Enterprise*. Nine, similarly, has extended its programming later into the evening using the 10:30pm slot for edgier programs such as HBO produced dramas *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under* as well as political drama *The West Wing*. Peter Andrews, Network Program Manager at Ten suggests the network is not concerned in competing for ratings outside of Zone 1 (Andrews, 2002), however, the period when networks charge premium rates for advertising. Ten’s *Late News* screens at 10:30pm and *Sports Tonight* at 11:00pm, scheduled “just before the average young office-worker goes to
bed” ("TV's No-frills Success Story," 1997). As such, *Sports Tonight* effectively closes out the evening’s programming on Ten.

Comparing the scheduling of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with *Dawson’s Creek* or the predominantly melodramatic teen dramas screened on Ten requires noting at the outset, the distinct position *Buffy* maintains within the genre of teen dramas. Former Seven Network programmer David Franken challenges the notion that *Buffy* exists as a ‘teen drama’ *per se*. Indeed, he argues it is a misnomer even to label programs such as *Dawson’s Creek* and *7th Heaven* as teen dramas since:

the programs don’t attract teens, solely, nor are they focussed on teen audiences. On top of that, nor do those teen audiences comprise an extremely significant proportion of their viewing audience. So therefore to characterise them as teens [teen dramas], it’s probably, if you want to characterise something as teen then characterise video programming, not *Buffy*. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is capable of attracting every demo under the age of 55. And has, in its time slot. And in fact on one remarkable little evening earlier this year [2002], *Buffy* actually won the timeslot in women 55+ as well (Franken, 2002).

Rather than as a “teen drama”, Franken likes instead to refer to the program as “young”, appealing to “the young end of [the] under 40” demographic and getting stronger as the demographics get younger (Franken, 2002). This statement reveals a number of discourses about the concept of genre that operates for schedulers. Genres comprise the building blocks of schedules (Pilsworth, 1980) and as Franken’s comments uncover, schedulers seem to situate demographic appeal as a key determinant of a program’s genre. Schedules are tweaked not in terms of directly
targeting a specific demographic but rather in terms of including or increasing programs of a particular genre.

Franken’s comments are akin to those considered earlier disputing the economic value of Ten’s youth audience. Franken views Buffy from a discursive position that works to justify Seven’s scheduling of the program, practices that overrode the teen drama heritage of the program to capitalise on the cult elements\(^\text{61}\) that, while Franken acknowledges limit the program demographically and cripple it somewhat commercially, did enable the program to find a successful home on Seven’s schedule:

That time of night [late evening] is triggered by adventure programming. Under 40, male trended or male acceptable, which are two different things. Like the Buffy’s, the Angel’s, the Mutant X’s. Enterprise to a degree, although it’s a very fragile version (Franken, 2002).

And yet, this slot seems, to an extent, to still be a place where teen drama lies on Seven. It is the slot where Felicity was scheduled as it was taken out of prime time, despite the fact that it damages the 10:30 franchise (Franken, 2002). For a time Buffy became the capstone of a stack of female trended programming including the David E. Kelly double Ally McBeal and The Practice during 2000. It also served as a capstone for Seven’s experiment with “on-the-edge” (Wilmoth, 1999) youth programming in 1999, forming the last piece of a two hour late evening block that began with satirical news and current affairs programs The Late Report and The Big News. For Seven, with an audience target skewing towards 25-54 year-old women,

\(^{61}\) Despite the sophisticated argument Hills (2004) puts forward that Dawson’s Creek resembles, in narrative design at least, a cult program, programs with a science fiction or horror ‘edge’ such as Buffy and Roswell better satisfy the conventional understandings of cult television. Certainly, Franken’s discussion of the misstep taken with Felicity in the late night slot he is discussing suggests a program such as Dawson’s Creek would not qualify as cult for this slot.
teen dramas come to represent youth as distinct from the family viewer. Privileged in the late hours, teen dramas on Seven construct youth as a fringe culture, as cult or fantasy genres.

**Counter Programming: Industrial Discourse as Techniques of Uptake**

In part, the differing treatment of *Buffy* and *Dawson’s Creek* can be viewed as a product of their respective genres. The cult appeal of *Buffy* made it more suited to late night screenings than the melodrama of soap opera *Dawson’s Creek*. However, *Buffy’s* scheduling reveals distinctions in the respective discourses about youth mobilised by Seven and Ten that enable Ten to successfully schedule teen dramas in prime time. As noted above, amidst Seven’s broader audience target the teen drama is located as an effective way to attract a particular portion of the audience. This ‘portion’ of the audience is the principal target Ten pursues, and as such, teen drama programming is more economically and culturally valuable. The way Ten schedules it’s mix of programming supports the network’s discursive construction of youth as a series of ‘fun’ behaviours, a discourse which consequently enables Ten to frame its programming as inherently youthful.

While the four programming types described earlier in this chapter locate Ten as youthful by privileging images of young people on the screen, this content is by no means unique to Network Ten. The ABC has a longer tradition of music programming, a genre frequently used to locate young people on the other commercial channels as well. All three of the commercial networks have screened participatory reality programming, with Seven pre-empting Ten’s *Idol* success with
Popstars, which similarly televised the audition and selection search for pop artists. American content is a stalwart of Australian television and both Seven and Nine have featured Generation X and teen programming. Similarly, Ten has gained success with a number of programs that fall beyond the rubric of ‘youth’ programming and could conceivably find a place on competing networks. Particular examples include the Law and Order franchise and NCIS, a spin-off from naval drama JAG which screens on Seven.

Ten’s counter programming strategy works to contextualise the network’s programming as youthful, however, by presenting it as an alternative to competing offerings and locating it on a network which appears to value a “light hearted approach” (Stockbridge, 2002) and images of youth. Moving the news broadcast to just outside of prime time and scheduling The Simpsons and Neighbours against competing news and current affairs programming, as well as avoiding traditional current affairs programming altogether, seems designed to appeal to an audience using television as a source of entertainment rather than hard information. Contrasting game shows with participatory reality television models participation as energetic and physical, rather than placid and mental. It emphasises the use of the body, encouraging peer acceptance and sometimes risqué behaviour. Preferring teen dramas to lifestyle programming represents the audience as young and the use of satirical commentary suggests playfulness and irreverence.

The appearance of youthfulness is stronger or more apparent in some programs rather than others. Counter programming, however, contrasts Ten’s programming

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62 Admittedly though, Popstars did not offer the audience participation elements of Idol until late in its career, a move that produced lacklustre results.
mix with the competing options, producing a frame of reference that constructs the network as offering a youthful alternative. Ten’s scheduling strategies can be understood as “techniques of uptake” (McHoul and O'Regan, 1992) that work to frame Ten’s programming as particularly ‘youthful’. McHoul and O’Regan argue that through constitutive communicative exchanges, communities work to manage the way practices of cultural consumption serve their ‘interests’. This is achieved through limiting the prospective meanings assigned to the texts that are traded in these exchanges. The strategies applied comprise techniques of uptake, activities to narrow the “bandwidth of any expression’s plurality of readings, setting limits to protect it from intrusion and polysemy” (McHoul and O'Regan, 1992: 9). Patrolling meaning is a process that works to reinforce the self-identity of communities, some of whom, such as the scientific community, go to great lengths to make sure only certain publics can access the body of textual knowledge by establishing particular procedures that determine the construction of a competent reading (McHoul and O'Regan, 1992: 10). Ten’s scheduling practices function as techniques of uptake, encouraging particular readings of Ten’s programming to reinforce the network’s image as youthful.

**Continuity Material and Channel Branding**

In addition to scheduling strategies, Ten’s continuity and branding materials also function as techniques of uptake important to the network’s construction as a youth broadcaster. While Ten has differentiated itself via scheduling and industrial practices, Ten articulates this distinction textually through continuity material and channel branding, elements networks use to engage in discourse with viewers they hope to make their audience. Meech (1996; 1999) notes that promotional videos for
networks -- TV ‘promos’ or ‘idents’\textsuperscript{63} – and branding elements constitute a hybrid form of advertising: “[c]orporate logos/station idents do not occupy paid-for airtime. They are separate from the company’s programmes and…commercials, though they remain an integral part of television’s ‘flow’” (Meech, 1996: 69).

Continuity and branding elements are non-programming matter; the television matter that gives the medium a sense of completeness by covering the gaps between the programs where the medium itself would stick through (Hartley, 1992a: 165). Their role is simultaneously cognitive and affective, they are a hybrid form of advertising; both promotional sign and commodity sign providing the audience with a warranty of reliability (Meech, 1996: 69). Meech relates their function to traditional senses of product branding, while Curry (2004) argues the expansion of channels across the spectrum has reversed the relationship between brands (networks) and products (programs). Rather than guarantors of product quality, the 1990s saw a recontextualisation so that “products had become adjuncts to brands which laid claim to the emotional world of consumers, and in some cases their public spaces as well” (Curry, 2004: 20). As Meech (1996) points out in relation to the efforts of BBC Scotland and the Scottish ITV companies, idents work to highlight the cultural nature of the broadcaster. By associating broadcasting with images of the community, the corporate identity of the broadcaster offers the audience “a sense of belonging that transcends their audiences’ demographic differences, their urban or rural location, and linguistic community” (Meech, 1996: 72).

\textsuperscript{63} Both terms are abbreviations, standing for ‘promotions’ and ‘identifiers’ respectively. Meech’s (1999) concise but informative article \textit{Television clutter -- The British Experience} effectively recounts the particular distinctions between these and other continuity material such as menus, on screen displays and watermarks. The following analysis deals fairly exclusively with idents, the short clips that advertise the network a viewer is watching. The ident has long been a place for innovation in television, particularly in the use of video graphics and animation as the evolution of Channel 4s ‘4’ in the UK demonstrates (Lambie-Nairn, 1997). In many ways the ident is another site where the experience of televisuality can be glimpsed.
In a fragmented, commercial environment, continuity material is a key way in which television networks call their audience into being. Continuity material serves a dual purpose of defining the nature of the TV network and articulating who they target as their audience. Idents particularly play a role in articulating the nature of the Model Reader for the network. Modelling patterns of behaviour and modes of engagement for the viewer, idents draw connections between textual elements and traditions of meaning. They establish network elements as referents for particular experiences, associating personalities, programs or indeed the network itself with behaviours, emotions and sensations for the audience. In such a way, idents create the cultural competencies needed for viewers to become Model Readers, to assume the position of the audience, by making clear the associations between textual elements and participation in the imagined community the network creates.

Ten’s “Yellow” ident from its 2002 “Seriously” campaign tied the colour yellow to engaging in the world around the viewer. The ident proposes a triadic relationship between the colour yellow (one of Ten’s corporate colours), experiences such as thought, surprise, happiness and sensation, and the nature of the network itself. This relationship is offered to the viewer as a way of seeing the world around them. Providing the audience with ready made associations between the network and their world experience, Ten’s “Yellow” ident works to define the similar “encyclopaedic

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64 A transcript of the ident is included as Appendix III. The two colour series of idents Ten utilises appear to borrow from the significant “yellow” branding campaign run by America’s ABC network in 1997/1998. Similarly based around two colours, yellow and black, the ABC campaign broke away from the tradition of 3-D animated logos and ident spots featuring stars to instead “plaster” (Newcomb, 2004: 306) the screen with the networks identifying colour accompanied by a series of ironic tag lines. This campaign was particularly influential in the US in reinvigorating free-to-air branding in a highly cluttered multi-channel environment. The international appropriation of branding elements is not new; the Nine Network’s long lived “Still the One” tagline, for instance, was appropriated from America’s ABC network.
competence” (Eco, 1979: 7) required for the viewer to become the audience. In doing so, idents demonstrate the shape and nature of the discursive environment constructed by the network, functioning as techniques of uptake, to impose limits and conditions on the interpretive possibilities of texts (McHoul and O'Regan, 1992: 8).

The dualistic functions performed by idents reflect back upon each other. Defining the cultural competence of readers demonstrates the composition of the audience, simultaneously proposing models of engagement and in turn shaping the expected interpretation of texts. This semiotic space is an important element in the success of American teen dramas on Australian television. Seven’s construction of a community dominated by family units marginalised youth as either a component of the family audience or as an individual appealed to after the close of programming, when the rest of the family had gone to bed. In such a context youth specific programs like Buffy and Felicity exist as off-season fillers or liabilities moved out of prime time. Ten’s counter programming strategies privilege youthful viewers, creating an industrial environment in which American teen dramas function as prime time product.

Ten also works to construct American teen dramas as youth product, immersing these ‘foreign’ texts in an environment where their national character is not necessarily of supreme consideration. Network Ten constructs itself as a site not so much for national broadcasting but facilitating the engagement with youth culture, where the intersection of media vectors (Wark, 1994) registers not so much a challenge to the interest of the nation but the composition of a new globally aware space.
**Imagining the Medium, Imagining the Nation**

Particularly in Australia, there seems little academic work considering the cultural impact of television networks as they make an effort to brand their imagined communities. There is a longer tradition in the UK of examining channel branding and promotional elements and of reporting on their development in both academic and journalistic spheres (Ellis, 1982; Meech, 1996; Meech, 1999; Brownrigg and Meech, 2002; Curry, 2004). Indeed, the development of Channel 4’s animated ‘4’ by Martin Lambie-Nairn in 1982 began a seeming public fascination with idents in the UK, many of which are recorded on fan sites across the internet\(^{65}\) and the development of new idents frequently draw public announcements. While there exists some fan interest in Australian presentations and idents\(^ {66}\), public discourse concerning channel branding activities seems limited to trade press reports and the discussion of what are considered especially innovative marketing campaigns. Some academic work exists that considers the channel branding activities of Australian networks (Dawson, 1990; Cunningham, 1992b; Hartley, 1992a). However, most of this analysis has not been updated since the early 1990s. While the space is not present to provide an extensive account of the work available (particularly concerning UK developments), this analysis hopes to begin to redress this by providing an overview of the development of branding campaigns in Australia before coming to consider more specifically the distinguishing efforts of Network Ten from the late 1990s onwards.

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\(^{65}\) See particularly the “TV Ark” (\[^{65}\](http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/) ), Transdiffusion Broadcasting System’s “idents” site (\[^{65}\](http://www.transdiffusion.org/ident/index.htm)) and Asa Hicks’ “TV Home” (\[^{65}\](http://www.tvhome.co.uk/index.phtml)).

\(^{66}\) Particularly Brooklyn Hulands extensive and well organised “aus.tv.history” site (\[^{65}\](http://austvhistory.tripod.com/welcome.htm)).
Idents from the early days of broadcasting in Australia showed a fascination with the medium itself. A 1965 ident for Ten’s first channel TEN-10 in Sydney featured pulsing and swirled ‘radio wave’ patterns which linked, interconnected, and crossed over each other to eventually form a rotating Ten logo. By the late 1970s, television branding had moved to explicit articulations of the community of viewers as a nation and worked pedocratically (Hartley, 1987, 1992a) to train viewers how to take on the behaviours expected of citizen status. Dawson (1990) recounts the way a 1977 community service announcement for Ten adopted the ‘ocker’, vernacular, nationalistic and democratic style of advertising pioneered by John Singleton (Cunningham, 1992b: 97). Cunningham argues the Ten campaign serves as an “early prototype” (Cunningham, 1992b: 97-8) for the basic audiovisual grammar that would come to construct the nation in such ‘ocker’ advertising throughout the 1980s.

The explicitness of the imagery constructing Network Ten as the Australian nation continued in its idents throughout the 1980s. A 1984 ident featured checks in Network Ten blue, like little pockets of viewers, sweeping in to make up a map of Australia, over which the Network Ten logo appears. The overall image is of a nation made up of Ten viewers, both brought together and presided over by the Network. A later ident featured beams of silver moving through the stars on the Australian flag to form a silver 10 logo. The formation of this logo was accompanied by the following nationalising jingle:

Ten out of ten Australia,

Australia we give you ten.

We give you ten out of ten Australia,
We give you ten.

Similarly, the Australian map featured as a part of a 1986 Ten ident where it appeared alongside a boxed ‘10’ logo. The two elements formed matching halves of a single logo, unified under the nationalistic banner of “TV Australia”. In both these examples national emblems exist as the facilitator of the Network itself. The Ten logo and the nation are seen as equating each other.

While still very apparent in idents for Seven and Nine (particularly), the role of the nation slipped from Ten’s idents throughout the 1990s. Rather than broadcast beams which have come to replace the radio patterns of early idents, Ten’s early 1990s idents feature flying discs, one for each letter of TEN which had become an acronym for “The Entertainment Network”. The first of this series (1991) features the discs flying atop a cloudy landscape, below which there appears to be nothing. Suddenly we come upon a city mass jutting through the clouds. This is the location of the Ten community, and above this mass the discs perform a series of celebratory movements, whizzing off screen to return with the words “The Entertainment Network” on their tail. “T”, “E” and “N” are snatched from this title to make up the Ten logo. The sense of isolation of the Ten community is maintained in a revised version of this ident from 1993, though the Australian land mass is included to better associate the network with the nation. The sense of place is accentuated by the fact that “The Entertainment Network” has been dropped from the ident, being replaced merely by the sequence with the letters T, E, and N. Unlike a Nine ident from a similar period which stresses the interconnectivity of the cities Nine broadcasts to, Ten creates a fictional city as the location for their community. The discs come in over the Great Australian Bite, where the coastline of South Australia arcs in. There,
perched on the edge of the country, facing nought but Antarctica, sits Ten’s community. The rest of the country is briefly visible but no other cities can be seen.

While the dictums of localism remained important, particularly for the Seven Network, throughout the 1990s, both Ten and Nine moved in directions that attempt to situate the Network itself as the site where the community is imagined. While Nine’s idents have frequently featured images of the nation and distinct city locales, their mobilisation of the nine dots that make up the logo and near consistent use of the “Still the One”\(^{67}\) has served to construct the network itself as the site where the community takes place. This has been enabled particularly by their reliance on the Nine stable of celebrities that gives the network a shape and is presented as the root cause for Nine’s consistent permanence at the top of the ratings tree. Nevertheless, the way Ten has mediated and constructed its relationship with its audience provides a deviation from both the Seven and Nine approaches.

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\(^{67}\) This tagline and indeed much of the appearance of Nine’s 1980s and 1990s ‘Still the One’ idents resemble the campaigns of the ABC Network in the US between 1977 and 1990. See [http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/international/us_abc.html](http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/international/us_abc.html) for stills of these campaigns. This campaign was also adopted by Sky TV for its launch in 1989. The tradition of appropriating campaigns or elements from the US is not limited to the Nine Network, however. Ten’s current “Now, next, later” menu slides that use the Ten logo as a solid dot keeping track of what’s coming up are a direct appropriation of the menu produced by ABC in 2002. Indeed, the ABC’s use of a similar single disc logo makes many comparisons between its slides and Ten’s material apparent. The Seven Network’s ‘five colours’ rebrand undertaken in 1999 in the lead up to the 2000 Olympic games similarly resembles the six colour concept of NBCs peacock logo. Indeed, in the late 1990s NBC made use of a ‘Men in Tights’ series that closely resembled the campaign run by Seven during and immediately after the Olympics. See: [http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/international/us_nbc.html](http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/international/us_nbc.html) for video of the NBC campaign and [http://austvhistory.tripod.com/welcome.htm](http://austvhistory.tripod.com/welcome.htm) for video of the Seven campaign (particularly the October 2001 ‘Long’ video).
Ten as Youth Space: Essence, Location, Community

Moving on from the 1993 “T, E, N” campaign described above, Ten shifted towards presenting the network as a specific lifestyle destination for the audience. Ten’s idents throughout the 1990s situated the audience-community in a ‘non-space’ by dislocating it from images of country-as-nation and reconfiguring the community as located within the network itself. Ten’s strategy appears as an example of the broader task of youth television to dislocate youth from actual referents (Frith, 1993; Lury, 2001), Ten itself becomes the referent for the experience of youth culture. Ten’s idents from 1996 onwards fall into three broad types: those that sum up the ‘essence’ of the Ten audience, those that situate Ten as a location for entertainment and those that situate Ten as a youth community itself. Table 3.6 lists the predominant ident campaigns Ten has run between 1996 and 2004.

**Table 3.6: Ten’s idents 1996-2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence of Ten</th>
<th>Out-sourced 2000 idents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Give Me Ten” (1996)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter “Turn Me On” series – viewers on the couch (1999)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Early “ Seriously” idents – “Seriously: individual” (2001)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Seriously: engaging” (2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yellow/Blue” idents (2002)</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entertainment Location</th>
<th>Content driven “Turn Me On” elements – American content (1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frames and window devices – “Turn Me On” (1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early “Seriously” elements (2001)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Test Facility idents – Summer 2000/2001</td>
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<tr>
<th>Youth Community</th>
<th>Personality driven “Turn Me On” elements – “GNW” (1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“All I need is you” 2003/2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer “video-clip” series – “Summer of Love” 2001/2002</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Superstars of Modern Life” 2002/2003</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Essence of Ten**

Outlining for viewers the shape of the “emotional world” (Curry, 2004) on offer, these idents work to demonstrate the ‘essence’ of Network Ten. Pioneer of many UK branding campaigns, Martin Lambie-Nairn (1997: 30) suggests channel branding conforms to the core principals of product marketing, providing a set of values that motivate choice, creating a unique point of difference with other comparable products and separating the channel from competition. “Essence of Ten” idents worked to describe the nature of the Ten community by directly juxtaposing images, text and audio to signify the values of the Ten community.

Idents from the “Give Me Ten” series overlayed cosmopolitan cityscapes or coffee shops with a series of words delimiting the emotions, behaviours and values dear to the Ten audience-community. Two of these idents are outlined in table 3.7. Both make particular use of a circular shape as a framing device. In the case of the coffee ident, the saucer is the window through which we see the action. In the city ident, the action features around a number of circular shapes, from a mirror reflecting pedestrians and traffic to an arrangement of fruit at a stall. This circular device is always a central element in the action of the scene. At the conclusion of the idents the circular shape is replaced with the Ten logo, highlighting the fact that the embedded element in these locales is Ten itself.
Table 3.7: "Give Me Ten" idents

| Coffee shop | Montage of gentleman reading paper in coffee shop as it bustles in the background. Action is framed in a round, element situated on a notice board. At the conclusion it becomes the saucer for a coffee cup before showing itself as the Ten logo.

Swimming into view over the scene are the words: enhance, believe, respond, define, include, create, experience, think, begin |
| City scape | Series of city shots: clouds on blue sky, pedestrian and motor traffic, skyscrapers.

Repeated image of mirror (as round element above) in a variety of city settings: fruit market, sandstone wall, side of building. Every time it appears, the mirror reflects the street opposite it and the people and traffic moving along it.

Over these images words flash in various groupings, some repeated: construct, respond, decide, activate, believe, experience, define, create, consume, begin, survive, enhance, create, invert, construct.

At the conclusion mirror reappears at the fruit market. It becomes the Ten logo as those passing by turn to look at it. |

The spaces represented in these idents are particularly anonymous. Neither represents a specific region of the country nor do they make use of identifiable landmarks. Rather, they represent a cosmopolitan, inner-city lifestyle. This contrasts some of the specific representations found in idents for the Seven Network from a similar period that attempted to make the network relevant to each constituent community around the nation. The most substantial national campaign featured the tagline “Everyone’s Home on Seven” which was complemented by regionally specific campaigns. So in Queensland, Seven sought to develop an identity for its audience-community based around its location as South East Queensland. Living in “Seven’s Great South East” meant enjoying an outdoors lifestyle in abundant, hue saturated Queensland. Stretching from iconic beaches to mountain ranges and prosperous pineapple farms, Seven’s Queensland was a place young families enjoyed.
the safety and relaxation of barbeques and picnics in the park, cycled through the city by the Brisbane River and stretched out on wide verandahs. It was a lifestyle vastly different to that enjoyed by their southern cousins, who in Sydney lived in a community steeped in civic and architectural history, and in Melbourne whose life by the sea was characterised by the icy waters beating against the cliffs of the 12 apostles. All the while the Seven Brisbane jingle accompanying the promo talked about “our” community, reminding the audience of the experience and qualities of what it was to be a member of the community of “Seven’s Great South East”. In such a way the ident demarcated a space for the audience community to exist, a place identified as South East Queensland.

Similarly, the “Yellow” ident discussed earlier in this chapter works to associate the ‘essence’ of Ten with the experience of the viewer by identifying the sensations Ten offers its audience and pointing to their presence in the viewer’s world. Balancing inclusive and descriptive language, the ident implores the viewer to “Open your eyes; See your world”. This world is filled with yellow which represents: happiness, “the way we feel”, “the way we think”, playfulness, surprise, individuality, laughter, hope, friendship.

**Entertainment Location**

The use of the Ten logo as a framing device for the events presented in the network’s idents not only situates Ten as an essential part of the audience community but contextualises Ten as the device which facilitates the audience’s experience. This idea permeated Ten’s branding throughout the latter part of the decade and forms a unifying motif across idents which situate Ten as an entertainment location. The “Turn Me On” campaigns of 1998 and 1999 emphasised Ten’s American content,
melding scenes from hit shows with images of the network as a source. ‘Turn me on’ the jingle sings as Ten offers the viewer a series of clips showing characters from Seinfeld, Party of Five, Just Shoot Me, Mad About You, and Xena: Warrior Princess dancing, celebrating, kissing and generally having fun. After these, Kramer from Seinfeld stares into the peep-hole of a door, his features extreme and close up as he looks out to the audience at home. A TV frame comes to contain the image as he reclines on a couch, the frame shrinking from full screen to become an element under which the tagline “Turn Me On” materialises.

While such an example quite obviously positions Ten as a site through which access to television content is offered, Ten’s idents from 1999 onwards have repeatedly presented Ten as an interlocutor between the viewer at home and the experience of youthfulness. A series of personality driven idents placed Ten celebrities in a non-space where they frolicked and squabbled with the Ten logo itself. Behind them Ten’s “Turn Me On” tagline flickered and reformed. Divorced from a concrete sense of space, Ten becomes the only referent the audience has to locate where the action is taking place. Ten itself is the site where the entertainment takes place (rather than ‘the Ten studio’ or a specific city space).

This image of Ten as interlocutor between the audience and the entertainment experience was strengthened by the use of the Ten logo as a window in the first series of Ten’s “Seriously” campaigns. The 2000 “Seriously” campaign harked back to the frame concept utilised in both the “Give Me Ten” and “Turn Me On” idents. Replacing the television or picture frame element of the “Turn Me On” idents, the yellow outline of the Ten logo has been utilised as a window both onto the
programming the network offers and the behaviours of members of the Ten community. Used in menu IDs and lineups during 2000 (see figure 3.2), the outline of the Ten logo emerges as the site where media vectors intersect (Wark, 1994) to grant the audience access to entertainment. The network logo as window image represents a core element of Ten’s personality throughout the late 1990/early 2000 period. The concept traded on both Ten’s high proportion of American content and its success with teen TV to represent the network as a conduit to youth content.

Figure 3.2: Ten logo as window to youth culture

Ten as Youth Community
The ‘logo as window’ concept was influential in advancing Ten towards its most recent branding position at the time of writing, situating itself not only as the conduit for and link to youth culture but as a site where youth culture itself is experienced. Ten’s construction as a youth community has particularly been played out in the campaigns operating under Ten’s repeatedly re-imagined “Seriously” tagline. Ten’s “pushbutton” idents and its summer series are two standout elements of the “Seriously” campaigns that demonstrate effectively the image Ten attempts to construct for itself as the location of youth culture.
With the pushbutton motif introduced in 2003, Ten did away with the window concept and instead positioned itself as a location from which a community of youth looked out to the viewer at home. Since 2002, an ongoing motif in Ten’s idents has been the button concept, as seen at the end of the yellow ident noted above. The yellow and the blue of the Ten logo are separated out into two buttons, which appear in the centre of the screen (figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3: The Ten logo as pushbuttons**

In a series of shorter idents that run as bumpers at key cross-over times during the evening, Ten personalities press either the yellow or the blue button, triggering the appearance of the ‘Seriously’ title card and eventually leading to the continuation of the evening’s programming. An element of this is pedocratic; the personality stands in for the audience, emulating the viewer at home turning on the television and

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68 These key crossover times are usually shifts in programming. The advertising break between the conclusion of the 5pm news bulletin and the commencement of *The Simpsons* at 6pm, when the network shifts into prime time, is one such example. Similarly, the 7pm and 8:30pm breaks often feature these idents as they are times when the audience is likely to stray. At these times Ten seeks to both reinforce the participation of the established audience and welcome any incoming audience. These times are also key places for the use of menus to advertise upcoming programming.
enjoying the program\textsuperscript{69}. The inversion of the relationship between the viewer and the network emphasises Ten’s claims to represent the youth audience itself. Rather than looking out to programming, the audience looks out towards the community. The point is driven home by Ten’s “Magic Carpet Ride” ident. The audience is asked “What do you want to be?” as a remix of Steppenwolf’s “Magic Carpet Ride” offers to take the audience\textsuperscript{70} on a magical journey. The audience watches Ten personalities cavort and pose, both individually and with their co-stars as the essential nature of this community is outlined: ‘fun’, ‘strong’, ‘surprising’ as the text tells us, dreamy and fancy filled as the lyrics suggest, and playful, sultry, and entertainment driven as the actions of Ten’s personalities demonstrate\textsuperscript{71}. That the viewer at home is being offered entry into Ten’s community is driven home particularly by the way the screen ripples as long-time personality Bert Newton reaches out to touch it at the conclusion of the ident (illustrated in figures 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6). As the rippling screen indicates, the barrier between the viewer at home and Network Ten is permeable, crossable by the participation in Ten’s audience community.

\textsuperscript{69} In this sense they are akin to a somewhat crude earlier series of “Seriously” idents that offered the viewer at home a view through the Ten logo of audience members on the couch enthusing over Ten programming.

\textsuperscript{70} Identified as that most valuable of semiotic categories, the little girl (Hartley, 1992c).

\textsuperscript{71} Personality driven, the ident builds on the images and ‘essence’ established in the “Yellow” and “Blue” series (it borrows some images from those campaigns as well).
Ten’s disassociation with national space is furthered by locating the action for the most part in a dusty but mostly non-descript room. Unlike Seven’s recent efforts that feature candid shots of the network personalities backstage, preparing for their time in front of the camera, Ten’s ident configures the relationship between the audience, the network and television itself. Some acknowledgment of Ten’s status as a television network is present – the frame element returns and there is a (very) brief shot of a clapper board (illustrated in figure 3.7).

This short segment, illustrated in figures 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10, demonstrates quite clearly the position Ten locates for its audience. The clapper and the frame designate, just briefly, the medium through which Ten communicates with its audience, and this communication takes place not so much in the form of presentation, as seen earlier with the ‘logo as window’ concept, but rather in a form of co-opting. Ten reaches out across the medium of television (represented by the clapper), that permeable
membrane Bert affected above, to touch, or rather kiss, the viewer at home. This act of kissing welcomes the viewer into the Ten community, situating them as female, as “kissee”, whether they like it or not. This sequence takes a miniscule amount of time, particularly the actual kiss to the audience and is a moment that is easily missed. Indeed, it is truly only visible when the frames are pulled apart and laid out one by one. The preferred image is the paternal one, with old man television reaching out to the audience. But it takes place all the same. While the kiss brings the audience onto Ten explicitly, both kissing and Bert’s screen quivering touch, situate Ten as a site of mediation between the public sphere and the semiosphere, a space Hartley (1996: 122-154) describes as the mediasphere.

One of the hallmarks of a democratised mediasphere is the textualisation of the participants in the dialogue it negotiates between “different (and sometimes mutually incomprehensible) cultural domains” (Hartley, 1996: 28). Ten undertakes this textualisation, particularly blurring the lines between the celebrity, the identity and the audience (the ordinary). The “Yellow” ident considered earlier blurs these lines as it openly includes ‘ordinary’ or ‘real’ people amongst Ten personalities. The identities of these personalities themselves are also blurred as they appear out of character, as people, in the idents while appearing in the programming that follows in character. This is not an experience that is negotiated or discussed, the two identities meld into each other. This is one of the reasons Ten’s “Who Do You Want To Be?” ident is more successful than a series of ‘behind the scenes’ idents the Seven Network produced in 2002. ‘Behind the scenes’ style idents draw distinctions

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72 The segment lasts a little over 1/10th of a second, from second 19.4 – 20.7 of the ident.
73 Admittedly, an early iteration of Ten’s “Seriously” campaign featured somewhat similar ‘behind the scene’ style idents in 2001.
between actor, character and community participant. In Ten’s liminal space, participants exist as all three simultaneously.

Figure 3.11: "Summer of Love"

Figure 3.12: "All I Need Is You"

This blurring of character and actor is made particularly apparent in the summer idents Ten has produced in off-ratings periods of 2001/02, 2002/03, and 2003/04. Featuring a musical act (Leah Haywood, GTO, and Guy Sebastian respectively), these idents appear as a hybrid between music video and television promotion. In the first of the series, 2001/02’s “Summer of Love”, Leah Haywood performs (a snippet of) her (then charting) single “Summer of Love” while in the background Ten personalities party on the roof-top set of The Secret Life of Us (figure 3.11 above). Television sets are visible while overhead fireworks go off. The second in the series features a number of Ten stars (an emphasis in all these idents is placed on featuring youthful personalities in upcoming programs) climb out of a VW Kombi van in a park. While they paint the van

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74 Ten’s idents operate in a space that exists between television and the viewer, a space opened up for exploring the youth identity. It is one not necessarily fixed to rigid ideas such as age but one where the identities the network offers can be explored.

75 ‘Preparing’ it for its subsequent role in Ten’s 2002 “Superstars of Summer” promotion.
These idents blur the line between character and personality while positioning Ten itself as a site where communities of young people come together. One step away from the liminal space featured in the “What Do You Want To Be?” ident, Ten personalities in these summer idents are seen as participants in good, honest, youthful activities. Simultaneously mimicking viewer behaviour and modelling audience participation, Ten personalities are in no way engaged in the production of television; they’re just hanging out and having fun. The presence of personalities such as Blair McDonough strengthens the resemblance of the network to their audience as McDonough was, until he came second in 2000s Big Brother and consequently scored a position on Neighbours, just an audience member himself. Big Brother and its sister program Australian Idol take ordinary audience members and make them part of the Network Ten community, a status attainable to any viewer who might like to audition for these programs. However, constructing the on screen members of the Ten community as a close knit group of friends offers the audience participation in a much simpler form: Ten’s community is constructed as the viewer’s own friends.

In part resembling a music video, these summer idents include title and artist credits (an element Seven started to include in some promos and trailers for Home and Away throughout 2002), simultaneously cross-promoting the artist’s own work and broadening the experience of youth culture on Ten (figures 3.13 and 3.14 below). Incorporating popular music into idents (the latest-to-date (June 2004) ident features
the Coldplay track “Don’t Panic”) Ten works to strengthen its status as a site for access to popular youth culture, tapping into the links between music programming and youth television discussed earlier. While Ten’s web venture Scape failed ("Speed Kills In Scape Scrape," 2001; Gettler, 2001; Parks, 2001; Wilson, 2001), Video Hits and these summer idents position Ten as a site where a number of strands of youth culture intersect. This is reinforced by the presence of pop artists Guy Sebastian and 2003 Idol runner-up Shannon Noll and the role as ‘hosts’ on Video Hits taken by Axle Whitehead and Kelly Cavuoto, two unsuccessful Idol contestants. Australian Idol itself sees Ten reaching out and touching the pay TV world, hosted as it is by Andrew G and James Mathieson, two personalities from XYZs cable music station Channel [V].

Similarly, the lines between what is considered national and what is considered foreign are confused, with Ten’s idents blurring the barriers between international stars and product and their Australian counterparts, subsuming all to youth. In such a fashion, Ten functions almost as a youth specific mediasphere (Hartley, 1996), a location where the audience can come into direct contact with broader discourses of representation. Ten becomes a place where discourses about national identity and the impact of content are negotiated, where questions of youth and youth culture coalesce and come into contact with the viewer at home. As the network reaches out
to kiss the audience it makes apparent its role as intermediary and space for the audience, as community.

**Privileging Images of Youth as Fun**

Ten’s idents articulate the same playful, irreverent feel the network strives to achieve through its youthful programming mix and “light hearted approach” (Stockbridge, 2002). Like Ten’s counter programming scheduling strategy, the network’s idents create a semiotic environment that frames content as inherently youthful. Ten’s idents define youthfulness as fun, playful and a time of promise with idents articulating Ten’s ‘essence’ promoting youth as a time of possibility for experience, definition, creativity and consumption. These are activities not only supported by the network but made possible through the network itself, imagined through the use of the circular logo motif. This idea is continued through idents that articulate Ten as a location for the entertainment experience. Ten is presented both as a site where youthful behaviours can be practiced and also a site that provides access to the tools for such youthfulness. Ten’s programming mix suggests these tools are both national and international, and idents locate the network as a site where these elements combine.

The place of the teen drama amidst this image of youthfulness is made explicit by a series of idents Ten ran in early 2004 leading up to the launch of new American teen drama *The O.C.*. *The O.C.* had previously screened on the Nine Network in late 2003, lasting four episodes before Nine pulled it due to poor ratings. One of Ten’s promos for the program played upon this as it announced Ten as the home for teen dramas,
the place “where [they] belong”76. As the titles of previous American teen dramas appear on the screen, a voice over suggests these programs are made for “you”, a juxtaposition between the Ten logo and the word “you” locates the viewer as Ten’s audience. The trailer positions American teen dramas as elements of the common encyclopaedic knowledge of this community (see figures 3.15 to 3.20 below) and The O.C. is located as a current point along that continuum. The O.C.’s arrival on Ten plays into the discourses of the network as a space for youth culture, alluding to the fact that the network is the natural ‘home’ for the program, the place “where it belongs”. The match between the teen drama and Ten’s image of its youthful audience is made both explicit and seemingly natural.

Ten mobilises American teen dramas as part of its construction of youth as fun. As discussed in the previous chapter, this contrasts the image of youth present in Heartbreak High which coheres more with the ABCs youth affairs tradition. The distinction between these two traditions maps roughly onto the binary of primordial text types Lotman (1990: 152-153) outlines. The youth affairs tradition can be read against Lotman’s description of anomalous text types, the text type frequently associated with journalism (Hartley and McKee, 2000: 73). Anomalous texts record one-off events that seem to run counter to the understood logic of the semiosphere.

76 A transcript of this ident is included in Appendix IV.
These texts work to reclaim anomalies for the dominant meaning system. They are contrasted by cyclical, law-forming texts, the common form taken by soap opera (Hartley and McKee, 2000: 73). Where Heartbreak High attempts to realistically portray youthful events and tackle issues pertinent to working class, multicultural Australia\(^7\), Dawson’s Creek through its nostalgic and cyclical mode presents youth as an essentially safe period for emotional exploration. With an emphasis on self-discovery and emotional fulfilment, the text promotes youth as a time for the pursuit

\(^7\) As demonstrated by analysis in the previous chapter, the specificity of these representations does not necessarily limit the text’s ability to be understood internationally.
of fun, the extra-textual elements of the text promoting youthful consumption and the participation in broader youth culture. The nostalgic discourse that runs through *Dawson’s Creek* constructs youth as a recallable set of sensations. *Dawson’s Creek* finds a home on Ten because the image of youth it mobilises enables Ten to associate youth with lifestyle, behavioural and consumption tropes.

**Conclusion: Ten as a Translative Site**

The analysis of Ten’s idents presented here is roughly chronological, though elements of each of the categories appear in all of Ten’s ident campaigns. The last group of idents considered -- those that present Ten as a youth community -- are the most sophisticated, modelling youthful behaviours while also articulating the network’s links with the broader world of popular culture, constructing Ten as a site for the experience of youth on Australian television. The way Ten works to construct itself as a youth community by divorcing images of its community from distinct notions of the nation and instead privileging youth culture parallels the nationalisation of ABC’s youth radio service Triple J. This process similarly involved dislocating the network from a distinct sense of space. Albury (1999) tracks the evolution of Sydney-based 2JJ in the early 1990s from a locally based broadcaster to a nationally positioned youth radio network. A single broadcaster serving a wide mix of regional youth subcultures across the nation, Triple J mobilised ‘subcultural capital’ to establish a nationally inclusive youth identity. Presentation style and music selection distinguish the network from the commercial sector and branded products make Triple J visible as an identity. The network’s support of certain events and products in turn invests these items with subcultural cool, such that the network itself is constructed “as a unifying source of capital, so
that for the national youth audience, the act of listening to the radio becomes an embodiment of subcultural capital” (Albury, 1999: 59).

To maintain this across the nation, however, Triple J denies the fact that Sydney is a key source of the network’s product (Dawson, 1992: 40-42; Albury, 1999: 60) by forsaking the discourses of localness that traditionally drive relations between radio presenters and listeners (Albury, 1999: 60). The network constructs a “non-specific national identity” (ibid.: 60) that situates the network as a site for subcultural participation. The relationship it maintains with viewers invite them into this subcultural community, acknowledging them all as participants irregardless of their physical locale. The entire community is united through running jokes and a conversational style that emphasises the existence of Triple J, rather than specific geographic locations. According to Albury (1999: 64) “Triple J becomes a self-contained, self-referential entity” and listeners are essentially “beamed” through the phone lines, email, website and radio into the Triple J subculture.

Network Ten operates in a similar fashion, constructing a semiotic space on Australian television where ideas of youthfulness and youth cultural elements form the primary binding tools of the community. Rather than mobilising subcultural capital, however, Ten works with elements of mainstream youth culture, creating an environment within the Australian mediasphere where youth culture is experienced. While this discussion has focussed on the way in which Ten distances itself from images of the nation in its idents, the effect is not to strip the network of its national associations. Indeed, the youth community idents considered above emphasise the Australianness of Ten’s community by heavily featuring Australian talent. By
absenting specific images of the nation, however, Ten positions itself a “self-contained, self-referential entity” (Albury, 1999: 64) that functions as a meeting point on Australian television between the audience and youth culture. This is emphasised by Ten’s counter programming strategies. Scheduling strategies are responsive to the behaviours of the national populace and the shape of the national broadcasting environment. Ten’s counter programming strategies work then to open a significant space on Australian television where youth can be practiced.

Privileging a youth identity over a specific national identity, the presence of international content as part of this youth culture is semiotically realised in an unproblematic fashion. The “Seriously” idents marked a move towards a greater Australian presence on Network Ten. While this is a stated aim at Ten (Davies, 2000; McAlpine, 2003), it is not always one the network realises in programming. Ten’s domestic drama production has been struggling since 2003 and the bulk of the network’s domestic production is reality programming such as Big Brother, Australian Idol and The X-Factor and sports broadcasting78. This, along with ‘hosted’ programs (such as Video Hits) and discussion program The Panel provides the network with significant domestic output. However, such programming frequently leaves it to rely on American content for the central 8:30pm-10:30pm prime time slots and without a strong Australian drama presence. The presence of American drama programming is not problematic for the network as Ten screens content that coheres with its version of youth. The programs which succeed on the network are the ones that cohere with its picture of the audience as fun, a fact that works to explain the success of American teen dramas such as Dawson’s Creek.

78 Where Ten holds particular market share as the Australian “Home of Motorsport” and has recently won the rights to the Australian Football League (Australian Rules) broadcasts.
Ten’s brings elements from international youth culture into the Australian mediasphere where they are contextualised by their presence amidst the broader Australian television schedule and the practices of Australian television construction.

The strategies adopted by Ten demonstrate that programming for young people is more sophisticated than merely the canted camera angles and over-active hosts that come to symbolise conceptions of ‘yoof’ programming (Palmer, 1995). As a formal and mainstream expression of televisuality, Ten’s programming and scheduling strategies expose the role youth performs in drawing elements across the semiosphere. Gitlin (1994) sees the rise of niche broadcasting as a fragmentation of global-national cultures into interest groups, parcelling out the dominant culture into separate pursuits akin to the way the magazine market parcels out publications to specific interest groups (Gitlin, 1994: 330). Despite this, however, he argues the impact of niche broadcasting on television is not so much the displacement of consensus narratives in favour of cult culture and the fragmentation of American society into insiders and outsiders (as suggested by Rogers et al., 2002: 45) but rather as the permeation of a centre/periphery model. The shape of television is linked to the cultural shape of the nation with “[h]omogeneity at the cultural centre…complemented by consumer fragmentation on the margins” (Gitlin, 1994: 332). Television is matched to the partitioned nature of everyday existence, with large, free-to-air broadcasters forming a core that keeps the audience “conventionally entertainment-happy” (Gitlin, 1994: 332), while at the periphery consumers pursue their own specific interests. Network Ten exists as a site where niche viewer segments and scheduling strategies, as well as youth programming and style, are made to cohere with the larger logics of broadcast television. Ten exists as a
semiotic space for a specific identity seeking consumer standing alongside but
distinct from the more general audience targeting strategies of networks such as
Nine, Seven and the ABC. As a major Australian free-to-air broadcaster, however,
Ten is closer to the core of the semiosphere than cable channels (such as Fox8 and
Channel [V]) and ‘experimental’ services like the ABC’s FlyTV.
Chapter Four: Americanisation and the Translative Audience

Introduction

The chapter examines translation as a practice of audience behaviour, looking at the way in which viewers relate American teen dramas to their own experience of television. It looks at the way in which audiences negotiate industry strategies that dissolve the foreignness of imported texts, examining their responses to these nationalised (i.e. part of the Australian mediasphere) programs. Considering the discursive responses of teenaged viewers to both *Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High* the chapter examines the degree to which viewers register both the ‘Americanness’ and the youthfulness of teen dramas. It looks at the way in which the constructions offered by teen dramas are made to cohere with the experiences of youth, society and television these viewers possess. American teen dramas, like much American programming, retain an almost natural\(^{79}\) status within the Australian mediasphere. Exploring young people’s responses to these programs, this chapter examines the places ‘Americanness’ arises in the decodings young people make of *Dawson’s Creek*. The interpretations young people make of this program, the ways they approach it and the schemas applied to produce a critique, are compared with their comments about, and discursive responses to, *Heartbreak High*. Arising as a predominant discursive mode to engage with these programs are perceptions of the ‘realness’ of texts, and this chapter examines the ways in which the young people in this study negotiated their cultural caché in order to position themselves in relation to

\(^{79}\) As this thesis has argued, the Australian television system locates American content in such a way that its presence can be seen as inherent to the construction of the Australian television system. The programming contributes to the texture of Australian television. American dramas come to represent “television” dramas against which national, British and other imported product is related. It appears then not as an incursion or addition but as a series of genres, appearing then as a characteristic part of the Australian television system.
these programs. This would seem to uncover practices of translation, as textual elements are accepted, challenged or negotiated through a comparison with local frames of reference important to the viewer.

While this is demonstrated in the following analysis, discussing Dawson’s Creek and Heartbreak High with teenaged Australian viewers revealed more about the function of Americanisation as a discourse to understand and discuss media use than about the way young people think about teen dramas per se. The young people in this study decoded these programs according to questions of genre, quality and content. The American origin of these programs did not appear to play a significant role in the decodings. Americanness, however, became particularly important for these young people when discussion turned to media consumption more generally. Here, the appearance of American programs on Australian television represented Americanisation, and the national origin of programming became a discursive tool to justify their cultural consumption practices as sophisticated. This chapter discusses the importance of genre, cultural competency and ‘realness’ as modes of critique. Genre was particularly important in the decodings young people made of Dawson’s Creek and Heartbreak High, and responses based on genre preference were significantly affected by a participant’s gender. Finally, this chapter considers the functioning of Americanisation as a mode by which young people sought to establish themselves as sophisticated cultural consumers.

Focus group participants

A total of 51 young people (M=26, F=25) at six different schools in Ipswich and Brisbane took part in this project. Table 4.1 below provides a breakdown of the
groups by school and gender. Nine groups were conducted with participants ranging in age from 14 to 17. The sample favours male viewers slightly and the youngest participants, all aged 14, were girls. All nine of the groups were conducted in high schools, with each discussion usually taking place over two successive timetabled periods. While the social networks present in each of the groups were not recorded, participants in each group were familiar with each other, groups usually being drawn from a single class. Participation involved the completion of a short survey recording details of participants media use and attending two discussion sessions based loosely around a set of open-ended questions. The first session involved completing a media use survey and a general discussion about television. Participants also watched some branding material produced by the Seven Network and Network Ten. The second session involved watching and discussing some short excerpts from *Heartbreak High, Dawson’s Creek* and in some cases *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s College, Ipswich</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Edmund’s College, Ipswich</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodcrest College, Springwood</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centenary High School</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenmore High School</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
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The school based setting providing an easy way to locate young people, but repeated attendance seemed a problem for some of the high school participants. In the case of

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80 Australian class periods run, on average, 40 minutes.
the Centenary High group, participants who had previously indicated they would be interested in participating ultimately did not arrive to complete the research. Two sessions were conducted, however, there were only two students who ultimately participated at this school. While it was tempting to abort these sessions, they were completed as a gesture of respect and thanks to the two participants who attended. Literature suggests the optimal size for focus groups is between six and 10 participants (Mackay, 1993; Hansen, 1998: 270), and the dynamic of this group was affected significantly by such small numbers. This was also a case for the second group completed at St Edmund’s, where only four members consistently attended the sessions. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participants were free to partially or fully withdraw at any time without explanation. One member of this group withdrew 15 minutes into the first session, leaving the group which was already under-attended with only four participants. The two groups completed at Kenmore High were organised to make up for the failure of the intended mixed-gender groups at Centenary High. Because they were completed as the timeline for the project ran overtime and with reflection about the amount of data being produced by the project, it was determined to only run one session with each of these groups. The groups did not complete the scheduling exercise or look at the branding material.

Participants watched an excerpt from *Dawson’s Creek* episode #216 “Be Careful What You Wish For,” and *Heartbreak High* episode #192, both discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Each group saw around 20 minutes of each episode. The excerpt from *Dawson’s Creek* opened with Dawson’s neurotic early morning discussion with Pacey about Joey, part of which is transcribed in chapter two. Later in the morning Dawson goes the meet Joey, who is making plans with Pacey to throw Dawson a
surprise birthday party. Dawson and Joey discuss the state of their relationship while walking on the wharf, and Dawson declares his desire to rekindle their relationship. Meanwhile, Pacey’s girlfriend Andie is visiting her psychiatrist. Troubled with issues about controlling her life, Andie is ‘prescribed’ a night without obligation by her psychiatrist.

The *Heartbreak High* excerpt focussed on Drazic and Anita’s break up, and opened with their initial argument and Drazic’s accusations Anita is seeing someone else. Telling Drazic their relationship is over, Anita goes to class where Tania and Marco argue about animal rights. Over the lunch break, Lee goes out to see Carly’s horses while Anita goes to see Todd and Drazic follows her, distraught to find Anita and Todd together. Carly and Lee discuss Gemma, Carly’s over-protective sister, who Lee has had a relationship with. Carly misinterprets Lee’s gestures and tells Gemma the two of them are in a relationship. Gemma warns Carly that Lee is not really interested in her, and the two of them argue about Gemma’s overprotective ways. Enraged, Gemma goes to confront Lee about leading her sister on, where Lee explains that Carly has misunderstood the situation and he wishes to remain friends. Waiting for Todd to return from lunch, Drazic confronts him about his relationship with Anita. He challenges Todd to a fight and when Todd refuses, Drazic tears the windscreen wiper off Todd’s car. Heading back to school Drazic confronts Anita in a classroom which he then trashes. Portions of this episode concerning the Drazic, Anita and Todd triangle are transcribed at Appendix II.

These excerpts were chosen as they both deal with reasonably similar thematic issues, namely the frustrated relationships of the central characters. The excerpt
from *Heartbreak High* seems to include more action and demonstrate the different approaches to the content taken by the programs. The individual scenes in *Dawson’s Creek* are longer in duration, focusing more intently on the conversations the characters are engaged in. *Heartbreak High*, by contrast, features shorter scenes, that include more activity and shorter bursts of conversation.

Researcher inexperience resulted in too many groups being selected, producing an excess of data for thorough consideration as a single component of a mixed-genre study. Ultimately only seven of the nine groups are considered in the analysis that follows. The small group conducted at Centenary High has not been analysed because of obvious difficulties with its composition. Similarly, the second group conducted at Kenmore High has not been considered in this analysis due to the replication of opinions voiced previously. Lunt and Livingstone (1996: 83) suggest that, as a rule of thumb:

> [F]or any given category of people discussing a particular topic there are only so many stories to be told. Hence one should continue to run new groups until the last group has nothing new to add, but merely repeats previous contributions. Whereas in practice this gives the researcher confidence in the findings, this rule makes it difficult to design and to budget for a research project in advance (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996: 83).

This is not to suggest that the opinions considered in the following analysis or indeed in this research generally are representative of the views of Australian young people. Like Schröder, however, I consider these views to be at least typical of young Australians. The following analysis draws on discussion conducted with 44 students (M=23, F=21).
Groups were stratified primarily on the basis of age. Aside from being between 14 and 17 years of age, no other selection criteria were required and no one who volunteered to participate in the project, to whatever extent, was turned away. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 census data was used to draw up an initial pool of prospective schools that included a range of socio-economic positions. While these schools were initially approached to try to ensure a broad range of backgrounds, it is acknowledged that ultimately the project skews towards participants from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. While clearly not a random, representative sample of the community, the group does include a wide range of backgrounds, with five participants from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, including an Indigenous participant, two with Asian (Vietnamese and Indian) heritage, one Samoan and one Maori participant, two claiming New Zealand heritage, two from Hungarian backgrounds and one with South African roots. Participants were selected primarily according to age and gender in an attempt to avoid valorising the margins (see McRobbie and Garber, 1975). As McRobbie and Garber (1975) argue with regard to the place of girls in subcultural theory, an emphasis on exceptional, spectacular (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hebdige, 1979, 1988) or resistive youth renders other behaviour invisible. This project was interested in ‘normal’ viewers, rather than the disadvantaged (Willis, 1977; Willis, 1990; Roe, 1995), marginalised or exceptional (Jenkins, 1992; Gillespie, 1995).

**Groups**

**St Mary’s College, Ipswich – Two Groups**
St Mary’s College is a private, single sex day school in Woodend, Ipswich, Queensland’s oldest provincial city, 40 minutes drive west of Brisbane. In many
ways a satellite city to Brisbane (with a significant population that resides in Ipswich and commutes to work in Brisbane), Ipswich has a marginally higher unemployment rate than Brisbane (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). While St Mary’s is located in Woodend, an upper-middle class suburb, the school draws students from the greater Ipswich region across the socio-economic band but crystallising around middle-class status.

After consultation with the College’s principal, the project was passed to a Grade 9 English teacher with two classes of students studying a media stream. The sessions were held during a double period allocated to the English class while the rest of the class were elsewhere completing an ongoing research activity. The sessions were held in the classroom the English class was usually conducted in, and the students were quite relaxed with the surroundings. These sessions were held on two consecutive Wednesdays and Thursdays. All the students completing these sessions were quite familiar with each other, sharing a number of classes and some socialising outside of class. The dynamic of both groups was positive and discussion flowed freely in both groups, particularly the first. A sporting commitment of some description prevented Rebecca (from group A) from attending the second session and a funeral prevented Emily B (from group B) from attending the second session. Both sessions generated some interesting discussion about questions relating to media representations and female body image as well as speculation about the impact of American culture across popular culture, music particularly.

**St Edmund’s College, Ipswich – Two groups**
Located across the street from St Mary’s, St Edmund’s College is a Christian Brothers run, single sex day school for boys. Two groups were held with students
from the principal’s senior religion class. These students were in Grade 11 and between 15 and 16 years of age.

The first group had two sessions run over two class periods in a vacant science building. The two sessions were conducted on successive Thursdays. The boys were quite relaxed about their surrounds and enjoyed the opportunity to be out of class. At times, these eight students posed a particular challenge for the researcher to keep on topic and to engage in discussion. The sessions became quite rowdy at times with a number of strong personalities not really engaging with the research objectives (particularly Andrew who attempted to derail the sessions a number of times) alternating between making suggestive comments and disengaging completely. While not intimidating other participants, it may have been wise to eject him from the session. He seemed to hold some charismatic sway amongst some participants, however, and the consequences may have been equally unhelpful. The scheduling exercise was attended to with a somewhat ingenuous air of seriousness but at the same time prompted some interesting discussion about what it is that determines who a program is targeted towards. The nature of this group and researcher inexperience, particularly when confronted with the challenging group dynamics, resulted in stilted discussion.

The second group at St Edmund’s featured only four participants, however, those attending seemed at ease with each other. This was a much quieter group than the first, however, the participants struggled somewhat with the purpose of the research project and questions had to be rephrased a number of times in order to elicit responses. Conversation was again stilted, though there were some flowing passages
where students discussed the matters rather than responding to prompts from the moderator. The difficult nature of these groups can perhaps be related to the way they were comprised. While the principal of the college seemed happy for the school to participate in the project, groups were formed with some direct prompting on his part. Some students appeared to participate in order to avoid class and these students seemed somewhat confused by the purposes of the project. Despite discussion with the researcher, these students seemed confused about why someone would study teen dramas, programs which did not appear significant enough to merit much interest.

**Woodcrest College, Springwood – Two groups**

Woodcrest College is a pre-school to grade 12 (final year) public school in a relatively new development between Centenary and Inala, a middle-to-low income community between Ipswich and Brisbane. The school draws from a predominantly middle-class background. In consultation with the Head of the English Department, two groups were drawn from a Grade 10 English class studying a media stream. The student cohort was divided into single sex groups of eight and two sessions were completed with each of these groups. The first sessions were completed with a group of boys, aged between 15 and 16 in a classroom adjoining their usual English class across a double English block on two successive weeks. Coming from a single class and studying media, this group cohered quite well and took to the research project. The conversation was active, particularly in discussion about the programs, with some members showing a sophisticated degree of knowledge about the programs, particularly *Buffy*. Perhaps because of a greater interest in the project as a result of their media study at school, this group formed a better rapport with the researcher. While the participation of some members fluctuated throughout the sessions, these
boys did not display the confrontational behaviour or lack of participation seen in the first group conducted at St Edmund’s. On the whole this discussion was more active and the data more dense than that collected at St Edmund’s.

The second group at Woodcrest was an all girl group from the same class. These sessions were conducted in a small room in the library over a double English period. Again these students were particularly engaged with the project and some members registered an appreciation at being included, particularly as they were collected from class at the commencement of the second session. While not as concerned with questions of the media impact on body image as the younger, female groups at St Mary’s, this group was equally engaged about the impact of what they saw as encroaching American media across broader areas of popular culture.

**Centenary High School – one group**

Centenary High is located in a middle-class suburb in Brisbane’s west. When contacted, the principal referred the project on to the Head of the Film and Television Department who felt this project would provide students with an interesting learning experience. A presentation to the two FTV classes generated some interest in the project, however, this did not eventually translate into group numbers. One group was rescheduled because of low numbers and eventually cancelled after none could be secured. The second ended up with only two participants and, as noted above, was completed out of respect to those two who did attend. A third member was harangued by one of the participants into participating in the second session, but her interest fluctuated throughout the session and she ultimately left early to “complete assessment”. Of the two who did participate, one had a particularly keen interest in the functioning of the Australian television system, having done some work
The second revealed himself to be the brother of a student I taught at in a tutorial at university. This may be the reason for his participation.

Kenmore High School – two groups
Kenmore is a middle class suburb in Brisbane’s just 10km west of the CBD. These sessions were planned late in the project to make up for the failure of the groups at Centenary High. Mixed gender, these sessions were drawn from a Senior (Grade 12) Media Studies course in the school. The school was quite keen to participate in this research project as the class was studying media research methods. A presentation both about the project and a class on media research methods was given by the researcher in appreciation for the school’s assistance. As noted above, these groups completed only one session because of the time constraints put on the project by the cancellation and rescheduling of earlier sessions and emerging replication in the data. The first group produced quite animated debate, stemming in part from the subjects’ participation in formalised media education. While this seemingly resulted in a wider vocabulary with which to voice their opinions about the media, as well as a greater formalised understanding of the way in which the media functioned, it also seemed to imbue some participants with a greater willingness to discuss the alternatives to indoctrination by American media and the functioning of the global media system.

Participation in the second group at Kenmore suffered from competing activities at the school, being rescheduled once because interested students had to attend a dress rehearsal for the school musical. Ultimately, only four participants completed the
session. With the three female participants dominating discussion, the group replicated data recorded elsewhere across the project.

**Rationale**

Unlike studies conducted by McKinley (1997), Jenkins (1992), Hobson (1982) and to some extent both Liebes and Katz (1993) and Ang (1985b), this study was not concerned with drawing together groups of self-identified viewers (such as fans). As discussed previously in this thesis, teen dramas experienced a decline on Australian television from 2002 onwards. In addition, by April 2003 when this phase of the research commenced, production of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had finished and the Australian screening of the final episode was imminent (the final episode screened Monday, 11 August 2003). *Dawson’s Creek* was scoring “unacceptable ratings” (Stapleton, 2003) that would eventually lead to it being pulled from its prime time slot in September. Production of *Heartbreak High* wrapped up in 1998 and the program had been rerun only sporadically since then. All programs had been available on the Foxtel cable service, however, and this provided some viewers in the group with more recent experience of them, particularly of *Heartbreak High*. Excerpts from *Heartbreak High* and *Dawson’s Creek* were screened to provide stimulus for comparison in all groups, and some also watched an excerpt from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

This study embraced these difficulties as a chance to engage the audience not so much in the process of ‘responding’ to the programming but rather to create discourse concerning their perceptions of teen dramas and television. As such, participants were selected for their age primarily, not to gauge their particular involvement with specific programming. This approach hoped also to capitalise on
some of the difficulties Barker (1997b) describes concerning conducting research in school-based settings. Equipping self-identified groups of students with tape recorders and a short list of questions, Barker hoped to collect discussions about television amongst young people free of the “interviewer effect” (Barker, 1997b: 612) produced by adult presence and questioning. To this extent, he reports some success, noting there were moments when the conversation ‘took off’ as if the tape recorder had been forgotten. On the other hand, sometimes the tone was more contrived “and it is clear that the problem, while mitigated, has not been wholly resolved” (Barker, 1997b: 613). While acknowledging there “can be no unmediated subject matter” (Barker, 1997b: 612), Barker’s approach seems premised on the notion that it is possible to capture some sort of ‘authentic’ youth talk about TV.

Rather than grappling with the notion of whether such an ‘authentic’ discourse exists, this investigation sought to actively engage young people in an apparent process of discursive production, asking them to engage with both programming and the research project. This served to overcome the difficulty posed by the artificial viewing environment and the unfamiliarity of some participants with some the programs in question. The decision to conduct the research in high schools was made to ease recruiting participants. Barker’s criticism of the tone adopted by some participants in his research is perhaps also a result of the bias on linguistic ability such research places. It is in response to this bias that MacGregor and Morrison (1995) propose a shift towards providing participants with the opportunity to interact with the texts in question. Arguing for a move towards “editing groups”, MacGregor and Morrison report on a project that teamed discussion about separate pieces of news coverage from the 1991 Gulf War with a practical exercise that allowed
participants to re-edit the material together to produce an ‘ideal’ version of the sort of reporting they wanted to see. Interactive groups enabled facilitators to somewhat circumvent issues pertaining to the participant’s linguistic limitations in that they enable participants to ‘discuss’ or respond to media material in the language of the material itself.

In an attempt to negotiate such issues, this project outlined a much simpler practical activity for participants that involved indicating on a paper schedule the sorts of programs they felt were ‘aimed’ at or ‘pitched’ to viewers their age. Inexperience on the part of the researcher resulted in this activity not being as effectively managed and recorded as possible. However it was useful in provoking debate concerning what it was participants felt identified a program as intended for youthful viewers. It was also particularly useful in familiarising participants with the television schedule and the practice of discussing television in the group setting.

The discussion of programs such as Heartbreak High, Dawson’s Creek and Buffy the Vampire Slayer reveals some of the ways young people register the markers of national origin through their perceptions of ‘Australianness’ or ‘Americanness’. Textual cues such as location, accent and character mannerisms identify the national origin of the programming, however, revealing these does not necessarily reflect the role national origins play in the decoding of texts. Olson argues the transparency that he discusses enables texts to be adopted by a diversity of audiences. His typology, as discussed in chapter two, emphasises the particular role of the text, without considering the role other principal agents play in meaning making within textual systems, a practice Lotman’s model of translation appears positioned to describe.
Transparency and translation would seem to work towards the same goal, however, and they have both been applied here to attempt to understand the way foreign texts attain meaning in the Australian mediasphere and broadcast system. Chapter three described the way Australian broadcasters, and particularly Network Ten, have worked to translate foreign product by relating it to domestic frames of reference. On Ten Dawson’s Creek is situated not necessarily as American content but as youth television by locating it in, and identifying it as a constituent part of, a semiotic environment where youth identity is contextualised as the principal drawcard of an imagined community. Similarly, this analysis is concerned with the way in which young people translate foreign content by relating it to their own domestic frames of reference.

As such, this component of the investigation does not serve as an ‘on the ground’ test of the functioning of Olson’s typology of narrative transparency. Some of the concerns raised in chapter two about narrative transparency are related to a belief that American content assumes a status as a particular form of native programming on Australian television. The exploration of Network Ten’s industrial strategies in the previous chapter builds on this belief and so too does the following analysis, which looks at the ways in which American content is understood as a component of the televisual diet served to young people. This belief is reinforced by the central role genre plays in decoding programs, and the intimate links that lie between genre, content and assessments of quality. More than uncovering their awareness of the textual elements of American programming, this component of the study demonstrates the skill with which young people navigate the Australian broadcast sphere. Making sense of American content, and comfortably discerning the national
origins of programming seemed to have a substantial impact upon the way young people constructed and presented themselves as cultural consumers.

**Factors Shaping Engagement: Realness, Cultural Distance and Genre**

“Sometimes you forget that soapies have to exaggerate stuff, make it more big than real life” – Joan, St Mary’s Group A, on the narrative qualities of soap opera.

Important in the decodings made by the young people in this study was their assessment of the program’s ‘realness’, a term that described both the believability and the quality of the programs considered. Realness expresses both discourses of realism as a gauge of quality (Brunsdon, 1990; Grodal, 2002) and the importance of believability for the engagement of audiences (Ang, 1985b; Olson, 1999). The ‘realness’ employed by participants in this study appears to resemble the ‘genuineness’ Ang (1985b: 32-34) describes as being important for the *Dallas* viewers in her study. Assessments of realness were affected by the cultural distance viewers perceived between themselves and the representations offered by the text and their preference for the program’s genre. Discussing a program’s realness, the believability of the representations was an important mode of critical engagement, and dominated the responses of the young people in this study. Many viewers were challenged by the believability of the representations of youth offered by *Dawson’s Creek*, leading to a wide-spread rejection of the program across the sample. Ang (1985b: 30-33) lays out an important link between perceptions of realism and viewer enjoyment of texts, arguing the ability to imagine both characters and their surrounds
as having a ‘real’ existence forms a necessary precondition for both viewer involvement and their criterion for passing judgement on the quality of a program (Ang, 1985b: 34). Realism and reality are frequently evoked descriptors of the quality of media representations. To describe something as ‘real’ is a way to “describe the relationship between representations and a physical or social ‘reality’ exterior to such representations” (Grodal, 2002: 68). For the viewers in this study, the invocation of ‘real’ as a measure of the quality of the text registers a belief in the coherence of the representations offered. The relationship between the representations in the text and an exterior reality may not satisfy the requirements of an empiricist assessment of realism (Ang, 1985b: 37), however, the expression ‘real’ suggests that the representations cohere with an understanding of exterior experience they find convincing.

Olson suggests a viewer’s perception of reality is enabled by an interplay between virtuality, the sense by which texts appear to create a “psychologically convincing, electronically stimulated environment” (Olson, 1999: 98) and verisimilitude, the propensity for Hollywood film conventions to ‘feel’ real, to convey a sense of the cognitively or morally natural (Olson, 1999: 108). In the schema of narrative transparency, realism would seem to come about through an interplay between the believability of the representativeness offered by the television images and the effect of narrative filmic conventions to suppress the markers of their construction. Virtuality and verisimilitude can be shifted from the structural, textual status Olson ascribes to them and can become reconfigured as reading practices by examining the way ‘realness’ is used to negotiate the fit between teen dramas and the cultural competencies of young viewers. In such a scheme, young people negotiate between
‘realism by perception’ and ‘realism by knowledge’ (Grodal, 2002: 72). While virtuality can be seen to relate to the perceptual salience of the images presented, verisimilitude emerges as a reading practice by which texts are naturalised. Chatman (1978) contextualises verisimilitude as a mobilisation of the “ancient appeal to the probable rather than the actual” (Chatman, 1978: 49), a practice whereby readers fill in the gaps in texts, adjusting the narrative to create a coherent whole even when ordinary life expectations are drawn into question.

The experience of realism does not mean, however, that what is considered real is a true and accurate reflection of an existing world (Ang, 1985b: 38; Grodal, 2002: 68), Ang argues that for many viewers of soap opera what is actually experienced as real is the “structure of feeling” (Ang, 1985b: 45). While it may fail to be empirically real the program convinces the audience of its emotional realism. The application of emotional realism emerges in this study as a mediation of verisimilitude associated with the preference of viewers for particular genres. While some viewers are able to resolve difficulties with the virtuality of Dawson’s Creek, writing over ‘gaps’ in the text as the verisimilitude required for melodrama or soaps, for other viewers, these still provide stumbling blocks to their engagement.

The cultural distance viewers maintain from a text plays a role in the negotiation of the virtuality and realness of a program also, as the work of Liebes and Katz (1993) suggests. The reality of a text is a balance between the way in which a text maintains perceptual specificity and aligns with an audience’s “mental schemas that provide typical and familiar ‘recognizability’” (Grodal, 2002: 67). It is on this ground that the role of a program’s cultural origin frequently arose in the focus groups as a point
affecting the audience’s engagement. The rejection of *Dawson’s Creek* was often tempered by an acknowledgement viewers lacked direct experience of the United States. Thus, while the representations did not necessarily ring true, the program was not rejected outright as being unrealistic. The challenge for *Heartbreak High* is that for some viewers the mediated construction of youth does not match their own direct experience. *Heartbreak High* mobilises a realistic style that relies on the degree to which the audience are able to recognise the program as a reflection of actual experiences. The degree to which young people perceived the texts as ‘real’ and the schemas for understanding the ‘realness’ of texts uncovers discourses about the way the cultural origin of programming is interpreted and negotiated. The negotiation of these representations relied on social and gender positioning as well as program and genre preference, and intersected with the ways in which Americanisation was negotiated as a discourse to establish the cultural sophistication and validity of the choices of the viewer.

**Dawson’s Creek: Male Viewers**

Gendered perceptions of genre emerged as key elements shaping the engagement of male viewers with the teen dramas considered. The male viewers from Woodcrest and both the groups at St Edmund’s rejected the emotional plotting and melodramatic nature of *Dawson’s Creek*. The boys identified the program as soap opera, concluding it was “crap” because of its focus on emotional themes, concern with the questions of identity and slow pace. As Mark from Woodcrest put it:

> The first two [*Dawson’s Creek* and *Heartbreak High*] were crap. The last one [*Buffy*] was still crap but not as crap\(^8\)… *Dawson’s Creek* is, well as we

\(^8\) These boys also watched an excerpt from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. 

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were saying before, it’s a girlie show because it’s too emotional and they take things way too far and because there’s so many issues happening in the episode. It’s not real.

Mark’s notion that Dawson’s Creek and Heartbreak High are “not real” seems related to a gendered rejection of the conventions of soap opera. For these boys, the program appears not as a distinct genre but primarily as a soap. While this investigation has identified the teen drama as a distinct genre with roots in soap opera, these male viewers do not see past these soap opera elements. Female viewers in this study make a similar assessment of the programs, though not as absolutely. While comparing Dawson’s Creek and Heartbreak High to domestic evening soap operas, female viewers also relate the programs to Australian twenty-something drama The Secret Life of Us. That these audience members do not recognise much difference between the teen drama and soap opera does not challenge the distinctness of the genre argued for earlier in this study. Rather, it reinforces the fact genres are intrinsically “constructs or composites of features” (Chatman, 1978: 18) rather than pure absolute categories for classification. Discussing the teen film, Doherty (2002: 10) remarks that genres exist more as “linguistic convenience” than “serviceable organising principals”. Working from the idea of the teen drama as a series of texts identifiable both through their textual characteristics and the role they play as part of the market and broadcast system of television, the claims made for the distinctness of the genre in the opening chapter of this thesis still stand.

The boys deconstruct the genre, complaining it is unrealistic because there are “so many issues happening in the episode”. Tim suggests the programs are “too
predictable”, taking too long to develop narratively and Rikki, who is adamant he dislikes “soapies and things that involve people crying and stuff,” agrees:

**Rikki:** By the first five minutes of any of the soaps you can work out what’s happened and then you try and find problems with it. It’s just boring. It’s the same thing over and over.

Rejecting the conventions of soap opera, these viewers were particularly critical of the virtuality of *Dawson’s Creek*. The boys struggled to accept the age of the actors, declaring that the program looked “blown out of proportion” because the actors “don’t look 16.” Similar comments were made by the boys from both groups at St Edmund’s, both of whom seemed to move quite quickly from the assertion the program was “too emotional” (Tim, St Edmund’s One) to challenging the age of the actors.

The rejection of *Dawson’s Creek* by these male viewers seems related to an acknowledgement of soap opera as a feminine genre. A number of the boys mentioned they were uneasy or uncomfortable watching programs “made to release emotion”. As Nathan from Woodcrest puts it, “guys don’t watch shows where the guys cry and kiss and hug and hang out with these ugly chicks.” Instead, he prefers programs featuring lingerie models and *Baywatch*-esque “chicks jumping and running…Less of the people bitching and more running and jumping and stuff.” While some of the other participants in this session thought Nathan’s comments bordered on the ridiculous, they are somewhat unsurprising given that action-oriented programming featured heavily on this group’s list of preferred programs. Alongside shows such as *24, Law and Order: SVU* and *Jackass*, programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* feature as preferred programs. Both of these
latter programs mix genres, particularly fantasy and soap opera elements, offering different modes of comprehension (cf. Tulloch and Tulloch, 1995: 89). The fantasy and action of a program such as *Buffy* may allow these boys a mode of engagement that permits them to step around the soap opera elements of the story.

Rikki, who throughout the sessions seemed a little resistant to participating in much discussion, pointed out the more *Buffy* moved towards soap opera plotting in the latter seasons, the less he enjoyed the program. It was the “cool special effects [and] action” that attracted him to the program; the more complicated it got, the more he disliked it. While some of the other boys in the group were quite jovial about the attractiveness of star Sarah Michelle Gellar\(^2\) and the inclusion of lesbian subplots, Rikki was adamant it was the move towards melodramatic plotting that reduced his enjoyment of the program: “it was straightforward in the first couple of series, and then it just got more soap like.” In line with their coding of the program as feminine, the viewers from Woodcrest similarly feminised the audience for the program. Mums, sisters and the homosexual brother of one of the participants were all identified as prospective or actual audience members for the program. This rejection and feminisation of *Dawson's Creek* in favour of more action oriented and risqué ‘masculine’ programming resembles the “cultural construction through discourses of gender” identified by Tulloch and Tulloch (1995: 89).

Measuring the representations in the program against their own experience was an important benchmark for the assessments of the texts male viewers made. Criticising

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\(^2\) The female cast of *Charmed* may have played a role in its attraction for some of these viewers too.
as unrealistic the issues on *Dawson’s Creek*, Tom and Will from St Edmund’s challenge the program’s representation of mental illness:

**Will:** Like the chick that goes to the counsellor. She’s complaining because she has to do everything so perfectly. I don’t know anyone who’d do that.

**[Tom: yeah].** Because if something wasn’t that perfect I’d just walk away.

When Matt ventures that his sister suffered from a similar condition and required clinical treatment, both Tom and Will reassess their criticisms, apologising to Matt. While it is fair to suggest Tom and Will did not realise Andie’s condition as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, their quick renegotiation of the program in light of ‘empirical’ evidence demonstrates the negotiation viewers make between perceived and social texts (Michaels, 1990a).

### The Social Text

The lack of positive assessments of *Dawson’s Creek* made by male viewers may be related to the constitution of all-male groups. With the program constructed as a female skewing, emotionally driven, soap opera, some male viewers may have felt pressured to support the swiftly developed group consensus. As well as laying bare some of the difficulties of conducting this sort of research within a group environment, the degree of consensus that develops in the male groups points to the construction of what Michaels (1990a) refers to as the ‘social text’.

It was noted in chapter two of this thesis that Michaels’ (1990a) model of teleported texts would appear to describe an observable process of translation. Michaels’ model positions the television program as a progressive series of texts created throughout the communication process. This model is premised on Eco’s (1980: 134) assertion aberrant readings are characteristic of the way texts are interpreted in mass media.
systems. To account for this, Michaels (1990a: 11) proposes a circular flow of communication that positions meaning production as a continuous and repeated negotiation between the “intrinsic structures of the TV medium...between producers, technologies and audiences”. As with Lotman’s (1990) model, the text is positioned as a meaning generating mechanism that exists in multiple. A new text is created as the program meets the agent (producer, technology or audience). The result looks very similar to Lotman’s model, whereby the text produced from the television program by each of these meetings represents a new iteration of the program based on the particular elements used in both decoding and recoding constituent elements.

Of the eight created texts included in Michaels’ model, it is particularly the creation of perceived and social texts that point to the way in which translation functions as a discursive reading practice by young Australians. The perceived text is an internally coherent text created by viewers based on their own cultural knowledge, reading abilities and competencies (Michaels, 1990a: 16-17). This text remains with the reader, generally invisible to others. It’s constitution can be glimpsed in the creation of the social text, a further version of the program produced through the negotiation of individual meanings with those of a community of viewers. Discussion about television moves towards commonality meanings, where individuals adjust their own interpretations and meanings produced in a practice that sometimes resulting in a complete re-imagining of a program by viewers (Michaels, 1990a: 17). This is not to suggest the formation of a social text privileges a singular meaning but rather that the individual meanings produced by readers are negotiated in relation to a socially constructed middle ground that privileges some meanings over others, “weeding out obviously deviant meanings” (Michaels, 1990a: 17). The social text moves towards
commonality precisely because it is socially produced through the relation of programs to socially accepted and locally relevant frames of reference and understanding. Programs are made sense of through conversations that relate the elements that make them up to socially understood norms and represent them through culturally relevant filters.

**Dawson’s Creek: Female Viewers**

As noted above, the female viewers in this sample similarly challenged the representations of youth presented in *Dawson’s Creek* as unrealistic. The referential, sentimental, analytical and nostalgic language of *Dawson’s Creek* served as a barrier to accepting the representations in the text as realistic. As Lauren and Sarah from Kenmore put it:

**Lauren:** There are no dumb people on that show. They all have this humungous vocabulary and they’re all so smart and they all have so much life experience for 16 year olds.

**Sarah:** Yeah and they have like great come backs too.

**Lauren:** Yeah. They never just stand there going [makes dumbstruck look].

Emily from the second St Mary’s group admitted to once being a *Dawson’s Creek* viewer, though she now struggled to believe the authenticity of the characters. “Who starts talking like that when you’re 16-years-old?” she pondered. Her disbelief in the characters decreased, however, as the characters aged and the discrepancy between the age of the actors and the characters they were playing lessened.

**Emily:** Because, when they were 16 it was so unrealistic because they talk like that. But they talk like that now and they’re like 20 and you sort of think, “Yeah, that’s how 20 year olds talk.”
Fiona from the same group struggled with the way the program emphasised the emotional turmoil of its characters. Like her male counterparts, she thought the teens in *Dawson’s Creek* had “too many problems for 16-year-olds”.

There were three significant differences between male and female responses to *Dawson’s Creek*. First, while critical of the text, female viewers were more likely to concede that the disparity between their expectations and the constructions of youth offered were a product of the soap opera genre. Despite struggling with the age of the actors, female viewers acknowledged this as a legacy of the representation of teenagers on television. Viewers from both groups at St Mary’s discussed critically the representations of teens on *Home and Away*, arguing while the characters were similarly unconvincing, these features could be excused in order to engage with the text. These viewers were similarly more likely to concede the dramatisation of everyday events as a necessary device for the narrative of the text. This was a point Joan and Kelly from the first group at St Mary’s raised:

**Joan:** Sometimes you forget that soapies and stuff have to exaggerate stuff, make it more big than real life.

**Kelly:** Because they’re TV shows. [...] It’d just be like “Well they’re sitting at school, nothing’s happening” and stuff like that. So they’ve got to, have to make it a bit not as realistic as it would be now. To get proper viewing.

Such acceptance suggests familiarity with genre aids in the application of verisimilitude as a reading practice. Understanding, and importantly accepting, the conventions of the genre allows these female viewers to adjust individual discrepancies in the text in order to make the entirety more understandable. This in
itself is not a particularly provocative finding. Access to the codes required to appropriate certain forms of programming may be gendered (Ang, 1985b; Tulloch and Tulloch, 1995). The question it raises, however, is whether the reticence on the part of the male viewers to engage with these programs is because the texts are incomprehensible to them. That is, whether their refusal to engage with the verisimilitude of the text signal a lack of cultural competencies required for understanding soap opera, or a rejection of the text because they understand and discard the genre.

It is beyond the scope of this investigation to tackle this question at any great length. The adamant and somewhat frustrated reiteration by male viewers above that soap operas are boring and repetitive texts designed to elicit feminine responses suggests they understand and consciously reject soap operas more than failing to understand them. The circularity and openendedness of these texts that so frustrated male viewers such as Rikki were accepted as compelling reasons to continue watching by female viewers. Like the female viewers in Brooker’s (2001) study, the unresolved central tension of the text, the endlessly deferred narrative (Hills, 2004) discussed in chapter two, compelled some female viewers to continue watching the text:

**Emily:** Just the storyline. Like you sort of, they don’t leave you in suspense but you want to see. **Kate:** If something’s going to happen] how many times Joey and Dawson will get together.

**Kate:** Yeah. Yeah like if you’re watching an episode you’re like, “Oh yeah.” And then its like, “Next week find out what happened between this person and that person” And you’re like, “Oh, I’d better watch it to find out what happens.”
Emily: Yeah. It’s better now because they’re older, I reckon.

What is particularly interesting about this admission is that while Emily admitted to being a viewer and eventually revealed herself as a fan of the program, she represented her initial engagement with the program as an accident. Emily claims she initially watched the program when “there was nothing else on.” However, she found the storylines and the tension of the plot compelling enough for her to continue watching. This casual stumbling upon the program eventually led her to becoming “sort of…hooked” on it. There is an underlying expression of guilt in her admission to enjoying the program that resonates across the sample, particularly with some of the older girls from Kenmore. As is discussed further shortly, the idea of actively deciding to watch a program such as *Dawson’s Creek* is inflected with a complex series of discourses about self-determination and authentic youth experiences that appear also to be wound up in negotiations of media citizenship and questions of Americanisation.

Emily and Kate’s admission of viewership leads nicely into the second determined distinction between male and female viewers, being simply that female participants were more likely to admit to being viewers of the program, if not fans. Kylie and Megan from Woodcrest seemed to feel bound to defend the program from criticisms it was unrealistic. Typically this defence involved suggesting the representations of teens in the program might be realistic for American viewers. The cultural distance between the viewer and the foreign origin of the program became an important tool for these fans to defend their program. When the girls from Woodcrest challenged the language used in the text, Kylie and Megan responded that it was a marker of the text’s ‘Americanness’. Megan suggested that perhaps the sophisticated language in
Dawson’s Creek may be “realistic to [Americans] but not to people in Australia because we don’t talk like that.” Language depends on where someone is from, she argues, a point Kylie agrees with, saying that language abilities depend “on what sort of background [a person’s] family has, things like that. So it could be [realistic].”

Two points need to be made with reference to male viewers before continuing. First, as has already been indicated by the brief mention of Tom’s experience above, the reticence of male participants to admit to being a viewer of Dawson’s Creek may be more due to the all-male groups conducted than specifically male viewing practices. Tom and Joshua in the mixed group at Kenmore both admitted to being viewers of the programs without seeming to need to hide behind the defences of watching with a female sibling or parent that respondents in the all-male groups frequently employed. These two viewers did, however, distance themselves from the text by admitting to watching it when they were younger. This process of juvenating the audience for Dawson’s Creek and indeed teen dramas more generally is explored below. Second, cultural distance was cited in some of the all-male groups as a way to temper some of the challenges issued against the representations in Dawson’s Creek. It would seem in those instances, particularly in the especially rowdy first group at St Edmund’s, that the question of cultural distance between the viewer and the origin of the text serves as a guarded critical mode for some viewers in these all-male groups to defend the program. Mark pointed out that the representations seemed inaccurate “for Australian young people, I don’t know about America.” The notion that the representations could be authentic for an American audience appeared as a cautionary justification for discrepancies between the lived experience of the viewer and the representations offered. By suggesting that the criticisms may not all be
definite or absolute, some male viewers attempt to adjust the social text being constructed.

Finally, female viewers were more likely to engage with the issues presented in *Dawson’s Creek* than their male counterparts. Participating in the emotional realism of the text, those female viewers who identified as fans seemed particularly drawn to the text because they could relate to the events taking place. Shari, a fan from the first St Mary’s group explains she enjoyed *Dawson’s Creek* because she identified a connection between the issues in the program and her own life experience.

*Shari:* I do, I love it. It’s just, I don’t know. It is also pretty real. Even though we’re seeing America. It’s just like real.

*Interviewer:* In what sense is it real?

*Shari:* Oh like things happening there are things that happen to me. Or not me personally but like what people can relate to.

Shari’s engagement with *Dawson’s Creek* would seem to represent the process of engagement through association rather than identification Gillespie (1995: 148) prescribes to soap opera. For the Punjabi youths in Gillespie’s study, *Neighbours* provided a generational text through which they could negotiate “social experiences and aspirations” (Gillespie, 1995: 149) through relating events in their world to those taking place on the soap and vice versa. While this practice is not as marked in this study as it is in Gillespie’s, the relationships female viewers maintain with American teen dramas such as *Dawson’s Creek* and *The Gilmore Girls* as well as *Heartbreak High* and domestic soap operas such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, provide a site for young people to practice and observe socialisation. Elizabeth from the second group at St Mary’s prescribes such potentials to *The Gilmore Girls*:
**Elizabeth:** On *The Gilmore Girls* there’s like a mother and a daughter relationship type thing. So they fight with their parents and then it comes back to us like fighting with our mums. And like they could help you sort it out by like watching them to see what they did to help it out, like fix their problem.

Female viewers did not seem to marginalise the audiences for whom these programs may offer points of identification or association as much as male viewers. While the boys were reticent to discuss viewers who may identify with *Dawson’s Creek*, female viewers were more open to the idea the program may relate to a viewer’s experience of youth. The girls from the second St Mary’s group pointed out that *Dawson’s Creek* dealt with “teen issues”:

**Joan:** What with the gay, lesbian stuff. Just teen issues like suicide, drugs and alcohol. Other stuff.

**Lindsay:** Like how Jack’s gay and stuff, I guess it would help people who are gay and lesbian and stuff to be more confident, to come out and stuff. I don’t know. It’s inspirational, they can give you confidence.

**Heartbreak High**

On the whole, both male and female viewers were generally more responsive and accepting of *Heartbreak High* than they were *Dawson’s Creek*. There were some, particularly male viewers, for whom the gendered cultural genre preferences discussed above lead them to declare that the two were essentially the same program. However, many of the participants in this study felt that *Heartbreak High* was a more realistic text.
Male viewers tended to fall into two camps. There were some viewers, such as those from Woodcrest College and those from the second group at St Edmund’s who dismissed *Heartbreak High* on the grounds it was a soap opera and just the same as *Dawson’s Creek*, but Australian. The gendered genre preferences revealed in responses to *Dawson’s Creek* above appear inflected with discourses about national cultural preference. Nathan and Mark from Woodcrest labelled *Heartbreak High* “worse” (Nathan) and “really stupid” (Mark) because “it was Australian” (Mark). Emotive descriptors such as ‘dodgy’ were often used by male viewers to describe the distinctions that exist between American and Australian programming. Joshua from Kenmore points out that domestically made programming often appears “dodgy or just doesn’t look right.” Matt from the same group similarly contends that differing production values follow a national distinction, with American programs identifiable as a “higher class” of productions, “with dramatic music and explosions and all that type of stuff that you might not usually get in a less financed Australian TV series.”

However, the rejection of *Heartbreak High* by these boys resembles a national genre distinction. In addition to dismissing the acting as unrealistic, male viewers tended to identify Australian television as being too “day-to-day”, comprising “all emotional” programs and primarily soap operas. They nominate programs such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* as core examples of Australian drama programming, contrasting these “chick shows” with American programs such as *The Sopranos* and *CSI* which feature “more action, murders and solving things” (Nathan, Woodcrest). This is despite the fact that these boys rate Australian comedy as one of their favourite genres of programming, arguing that, with the exception of animated material, Australian comedy programming is always more enjoyable.
In addition to its status as Australian television, these boys particularly find the version of youth presented in *Heartbreak High* lacking when compared to their own experiences. Mark rejects the program as unrealistic “because I, well this school is nothing like that at all. I don’t, I’ve never seen any school that’s like that and it’s just shit.” For these male viewers the schematic realism of the program pales against their own experience. This is particularly brought home by their criticism that the students in *Heartbreak High* do not wear school uniforms, as is the requirement in Queensland schools. This criticism is raised in the second group at St Edmund’s as well, where Matt defends the program by pointing out that the absence of uniforms may be explained by the fact Hartley High is “sort of like Indooroopilly High”, a school in the West of Brisbane that seems to have a folklore status among neighbouring schools as being a mecca for trouble students. This same qualification arises in the group at Woodcrest. Rather than challenging the disbelief some boys have of the representations, however, it appears to ‘other’ the representations offered, moving them one step further away from the experience of the boys in these groups.

Like the challenge posed by the language used in *Dawson’s Creek*, the lack of uniforms and rowdy nature of the school in *Heartbreak High* was a common cause for concern across the sample. For many participants, however, these concerns could be tamed by *Heartbreak High*’s gritty presentation and school setting. These imbued the text with a certain air of authenticity even if it did not ring true to their own (current) experience of high school. Some of the male viewers from the first group at St Edmund’s thought *Heartbreak High* “portrayed their life,” (Nick) focussing on “just what happens in a school room and friends carrying on and doing stupid stuff”
(Tristan). The belief these boys held in the text was helped by the age of the actors, who they felt looked more like teenagers. Similarly, the inarticulate characters and struggled dialogue resonated as realistic with these viewers. As Scott said, “they’re just sort of speaking our language, or they could be”. For some of these viewers, these factors suggested students such as themselves were the designated audience for such a program, reinforcing the findings of Keddie and Churchill (1999) that adolescents show a preference for watching characters their own age. The interest of these viewers was piqued also by the potential for a fight that arose in the episode watched (which was the same one analysed in chapter two).

Many of the female viewers, particularly the younger female viewers in the two groups at St Mary’s, signalled *Heartbreak High* as an authentic representation of youth they could relate to. The girls from the first group at St Mary’s connected the realism of the program to its unconventional characters. These distinguished it from the generic constructions present in many American programs and was signalled as a distinguishing factor of Australian programming.

**Katherine:** You notice how, I reckon Australian soaps are so much different to American soaps because in the American … soaps they’re based on like the teenage girls, the cheerleaders, the geeks and the jocks and the other geeks. And all the geeks are with each other and the jocks are with the cheerleaders. But Australians are so much down to earth, like how much like teenage life is like.

*Heartbreak High* was favoured by these viewers particularly as a text that resonated more closely with their experience of teenage life. Rebecca and Katherine pointed out that the program had served as a useful reference point for them.
Rebecca: Just how to handle different issues when you’re a teen. What ways you can go. You can either go that way or go this way to choose the best road. Just seeing other people go before you, it gives you a better idea about how you can fix that problem.

Katherine: Anita and Draz[ic].

[...] 

Katherine: Draz is probably more realistic to me. Kind of like a drop-out in high school. I’m not sure what grade it was 10, 11, or 12, and his friends still go to school. And they persuade him to come back or I don’t know what he did after that. But then he got a job with his dad and his dad was ripping him off or something. It was pretty realistic.

An initial suspicion at the outset of this analysis was that the emotional realism of Dawson’s Creek would be more compelling than the schematic realism of Heartbreak High. It was anticipated that, as with some of the male viewers above, the experience of youth represented in Heartbreak High did not match the lived experience of the teens, the program would struggle to be accepted as ‘realistic’. This, however, did not prove to be the case, despite the difficulties many viewers had with the constructions in Heartbreak High. It was anticipated the viewers would be challenged by the appeal to ‘normalcy’ in the text. That the representations of Australian schooling would not ring true with them, causing them to challenge the text altogether. This did not prove to be the case and few of the viewers in this study seemed challenged by the confrontational realism Douglas and McWilliam (2004) discuss. If anything it seems this confrontational realism and the unconventional characters were what many of these viewers found compelling in the text.
Aspirational Viewing and Cultural Sophistication

Comparing the discourses constructed around Dawson’s Creek with those produced by Heartbreak High, the relationships these young viewers maintain with American programming become particularly apparent. Particularly interesting is the extent to which the discourses created around these two programs were used by participants to establish themselves as sophisticated cultural consumers. Discussing these programs, participants in this study negotiated questions of media use, Americanisation and self-determination in order to validate their cultural choices. The negotiation of these questions would seem to resemble a process of cultural construction through discourses of authenticity whereby participants made use of Americanisation particularly to construct their experience of youth as an essentially authentic one.

The support for Keddie and Churchill’s (1999) findings noted above is challenged somewhat by the preference of many of the participants in this study for participating in what could be described as ‘aspirational viewing’. Rather than enjoying programs featuring characters their own age, participants in this study indicate a general preference for programs with older characters. Partly, this is due to a preference for adult drama programming such as CSI and The Sopranos. A number of female viewers show particular interest in Australian twenty-something drama The Secret Life of Us, however, suggesting it is an important program because it is about “real stuff, you know, sort of real things that happen…it’s like it sort of shows what’s going to happen when we’re older” (Emily, St Mary’s). Megan, from the Woodcrest group, identifies The Secret Life of Us as a ‘lifestyle’ program for similar reasons.
She feels the program looks “like real life” and is “educational.” This is not to suggest that *The Secret Life of Us* is necessarily realistic, but Megan feels the program provides her with a glimpse of life as she would like to imagine it when she is older.

The viewers in this study frequently prescribe this aspirational viewing behaviour to the audiences for teen dramas. The effect is to ‘age-down’ the audience for these programs. The teen drama is presented as a text for a tween-aged audience who might want to “look up to teenagers as role models” (Matt, Kenmore). This idea resonated with most groups. Tom from Kenmore noted *Dawson’s Creek* used to be a favourite program of his for this very reason.

**Tom:** I like, oh I’m not so much liking it now. I used to like *Dawson’s Creek* very much so when I was in grade 7 because I thought that was what teenagers were. And I thought, “Wow, I can’t wait till I’m older, I’ll have so much drama in my life”.

Anna from the same group concurs, recounting a situation that occurred “a couple of years ago” when some of her friends started to wonder if they should be having sex because some of the characters on *Dawson’s Creek* were doing so.

**Anna:** And it was like all of my friends who hadn’t [had sex], they were like, “Oh, should I be doing this now because the people on *Dawson’s Creek* are doing it?” And it was just stupid.

In such an instance, television may fill the role “of an older sibling or friends you look up to” (Anna, Kenmore). *Heartbreak High* was considered to play a similar

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83 A product of the repeated market fragmentation resulting from the success of the Generation X marketing fiction (Sternberg, 1997a), tween refers to children aged between 8 and 14 (Long, 2003). This market, frequently capitalised on through ‘pester power’, was reportedly worth $A12.6 million in 2002 (Long, 2003).
role for young viewers. Mark from Woodcrest College suggests its draw of this pre-
-teen audience was related to its scheduling just after the “three o’clock till six
o’clock” children’s slot on the ABC. Here, both Michael and Nathan feel it would
draw an audience “who are just becoming teenagers, like 12 year olds, who are just
trying to figure out, you know … what’s the whole thing about” (Michael,
Woodcrest College), though Nathan thinks it is a slightly younger audience who
would “probably want to find out even what high school’s like” (Nathan, Woodcrest
College). These viewers would be ultimately disappointed, however, because high
school is “nothing like what they thought. It’s totally different” (Nathan, Woodcrest
College). Kelly, from the first St Mary’s group recounts a somewhat similar but
more directly ‘educational’ experience.

**Kelly:** At the younger stages of television there were more adolescent shows
on channel 2 [the ABC] like growing up shows teaching things about what
happened to you when you were 13 and you like hit puberty and stuff. And
I’d usually watch that just to give me a brief outline of what was going to
happen to me as I got older. So it does educate you on changes, what’s
happening to you body and stuff.

While this seems to be considered a useful and somewhat normalised part of growing
up, some participants expressed concern at the idea that television could play a
didactic or educational role.

**Fiona:** I don’t know. Like I don’t think that it should teach how to act or
whatever, because I don’t like the idea of someone telling me how I should
act or I should be a certain way…I guess it depends on the show. Because
some of the shows, especially the American soap operas\textsuperscript{84}, they use stereotypes and they over exaggerate it. And it would just be stupid to model yourself after that I reckon.

Echoing the findings of an Australian Broadcasting Authority report into the impact of R classified programs on pay TV (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1994), viewers in this study voiced concern about the detrimental impact of excess media consumption. While a majority of respondents in the ABA study (61 percent) agreed that R-rated material available on pay television could have a bad effect on other adults, 68 percent of respondents indicated that they did not think these programs would have a detrimental effect on themselves (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1994: 37). The girls from Woodcrest College used discourses about excessive television consumption as a way of distinguishing themselves as sophisticated media users. When asked if they knew anybody who watched too much television, Nikki ventured that her brother had, since finishing school, become “full on hooked on TV”. His turn to television has come at the expense of more socially acceptable past times. Nikki claimed her brother “used to be fully into sport and everything”, and excessive television consumption is presented as part of his transition to “dole bludger” status. Nikki offers no further explanation for why her brother watches so much television, suggesting merely that one day “he started watching heaps of TV”.

Stemming from Nikki’s description of her brother as a TV junkie and dole bludger, Kylie from Woodcrest similarly recounted the way her brother had become dependant on television, watching at any available opportunity and unable to “do his homework or anything, he can’t study or anything unless the TV is on”. Kylie

\textsuperscript{84} Here Fiona is referring to daytime soap operas such as \textit{The Bold and the Beautiful} and \textit{Passions}. 

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contrasted her brother’s excessive media consumption with her own ability to “make time” to watch television:

**Kylie:** I don’t know, just you don’t fit TV around your life. It’s like every now and then you sit down and watch it. Like if you’ve got time you sit down.

Similar comments across the group revealed discourses about media management as a strategy of control, but more importantly as a strategy that marked out these viewers as more sophisticated than their peers. This is particularly marked in Megan’s later exhortation that teenagers are particularly ‘vulnerable’ to television.

**Megan:** Teenagers are also most vulnerable and are more likely to watch shows.

**Nikki:** Also, it [the Seven Network] has lots of shows that teenagers and people in our generation watch and they might like to buy stuff.

**Interviewer:** Why do you use the word vulnerable Megan? Vulnerable to what?

**Megan:** Teenagers are more likely to be sucked in and to watch the show. Like if they just see it once or they see an ad about it, they might think ‘Oh, that’s a great show to watch,’ or something and they’ll keep watching it, kind of like happens.

Discussions about ‘television dependant’ siblings serve to distinguish participants in this study from the position of vulnerability while simultaneously enabling them to utilise negative discourses about the media to negotiate matters of power. Similarly, the boys from the second St Edmund’s group credited the media with negative impacts but only on viewers more vulnerable than themselves. At St Edmund’s the particular case was that of a common friend who, upon completing school, took to
watching television rather than finding employment. As the boys discussed their friend they moved quickly and without prompting to debating the question of whether excessive television consumption had resulted in his adoption of an American accent. While Matt was convinced he had acquired an American accent from watching television, Tom was less sure about this friend consuming too much television. Despite this however, Tom did concur with Matt that “fanatics of TV and American films” may adopt an American accent, endorsing Americanisation as a common sense and easily understood discourse. Tom did not need to present any real reasoning to support his assertion that ‘fanatics’ may adopt an American accent. He justified it with a seemingly understood “’cause like they, oh you know”. Will quickly filled in the gaps, suggesting heavy media users might “try to sound more like those people on their favourite show, favourite movie”, confirming Matt’s earlier assertion that watching “too many American movies” can give one an American accent.

Americanisation emerges in such discussions as an ‘Othering’ discourse, which Josh from Kenmore points to:

**Interviewer:** Do you think programs have an influence over people your age?

**Josh:** Um yes, in a way.

**Interviewer:** Who do you think they have an influence over?

**Josh:** Um, brain dead people.

A somewhat implicit acceptance of Americanisation as a common-sense discourse emerging from excessive media use arose consistently as a way to distinguish and justify the cultural choices of the speakers. This is demonstrated by Matt pointing to
the negative effects stemming from consumption of American media as a way of legitimising his own cultural choices. The only programs Matt speaks positively about are the British produced and ABC screened *My Family* and drama stalwart *The Bill*. Constructing American media as a threatening entity validates his discretion as a viewer. While Lauren from Kenmore takes a slightly different approach to the matter, she likewise distances herself from American content as a way of situating herself as a sophisticated consumer:

**Lauren:** I was just wondering, like everyone’s assuming that the alternative is to show more Australian programs [**Josh:** Yeah that’s what I was thinking] and I was just thinking about sort of more foreign programs. I actually like, sometimes even if it’s not something I’d be interested in, it’s fun just to watch a show from a completely different country on SBS. It’s just so different, just completely out of my life. And it’s just interesting to get such a different cultural perspective. And I think, when you look at the shows on mainstream channels like 10, 9 and 7, apart from, you know, American sitcoms, there aren’t really that many programs from other countries, apart from America. Whereas on the SBS you know there are. And I guess they’re largely catering for people that have immigrated and people that want to keep in touch with back home, because we pride ourselves on being a multicultural country, I feel like they should be encouraging us to take in a bit more of other cultures. We were in the German immersion program and I think a lot of us watched, did you watch *Inspector Rex*? [**Tom:** Yeah] I still watch it; that is a great show. It’s replays at the moment but that is a good show. And

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85 A British sitcom developed by producer Fred Barron who is also responsible for American sitcoms such as *The Larry Sanders Show* and *Caroline in the City*. That *My Family* is a British version of an American format escapes Matt.
when I was over in Germany recently they had a lot of other good shows. And I was like, “It’s a pity we don’t get these”.

As Tom suggests:

**Tom:** There’s too many bad American shows. Like because there’s a few good ones but most of them...I could easily say that there aren’t enough shows from other countries. Like, I don’t know, I love the *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* type of movies. And I just love that, I love seeing that scenery. London.

The appeal to European programming and public broadcasting as a more sophisticated choices replicates class discourses present in discussions about Americanisation. Concern over the impact of American popular culture on the development of a distinct Australian national identity resembles broader patterns of ‘concern’ regarding the impact of popular and mass culture (Carey, 1992). While high culture is self-consciously concerned with the development of a national culture, identifying itself as ‘culture’, “popular culture is not as self-conscious, seeing itself essentially as entertainment” (White, 1983: 111).

All from nominally middle-class backgrounds, the young people in this study replicate such class discourses, ascribing the ill effects of Americanisation to an ‘Other’: the vulnerable viewer is a brain dead fanatic, dependant, “full on hooked” on TV. This Other is constructed as fundamentally unproductive; not only have they foregone healthier, more socially acceptable pursuits (namely sport and study), excess consumption of the wrong sorts of television contributes to the creation of a ‘dole bludger’, a vernacularly Australian unproductive cultural dupe and drain on the welfare system. It is against such a construction that Tom launches a defence of his
friend, arguing the fact that he reads a lot of books as evidence of high media use. By attempting to excuse his high television consumption as only one element of his media use, Tom hopes to remove his friend from the maligned position of an unproductive dole bludger such consumption seems to denote.

The construction of this Other demonstrates the predominantly anecdotal nature of Americanisation (Emmison, 1997; Bennett et al., 1999), assigning the ‘Americanised Other’ a status as a folk devil of sorts (Cohen, 1972). This Americanised Other, layered with specifically negative identity traits, connects with long standing panics about young people’s media use (Drotner, 1992) and the way in which young people transgress the clear binaries between national cultures (Hartley, 1992c). The construction of such an Other stems from the culturally determined nature of the mediatised American identity. As O’Regan (1992: 331) argues, this identity is paradoxical, both “generally identical and specifically other.” As such, American texts are both familiar and localised while unique and global. The usefulness of this mediatised identity is that it exists as simultaneously both. Thus, these sophisticated audiences are able to pass through a cultural construction of what is understood as ‘American’ to access discourses of “universality and local resonance” (O’Regan, 1992: 332). At the same time, they can discard offensive elements in order to reconcile this local resonance and universality with their own lived experience. The American identity is customised for the purposes of the reader. Hence these participants can claim they are able to pass through the American identity by measuring a dissonance between their own social reality and that presented in American media (Pingree and Hawkins, 1981) even while the notion of a foreign,
infectious American identity stands as a threat to a younger, vulnerable (and often marginalised) other.

It is credible to suggest the adoption of this position is a product of the quasi-experimental setting this study engaged the students in. All the groups were conducted in school settings and the majority of the groups (five of the seven considered here) are drawn from classes engaged in some form of media studies course or strand. While reflecting the social, political and cultural contexts from which they emerged, media education courses remain tied up in the “ethico-political formation of students” (Morgan, 1996: 16) and increasingly “media education is being bound to ideas of democratisation and citizenship” (Quin and Aparici, 1996: 10). An emphasis on textual demystification (Morgan, 1996: 15)\textsuperscript{86} remains in links between media education and English teaching, a process that tends towards a suspicious approach to the media resulting in courses constructed “in binary terms of ‘text’ and ‘social context,’ of the distorted media images versus authentic experience, of representation against the extra-textual Real” (Morgan, 1996: 15). Such an approach places an emphasis on uncovering ‘stereotypes’ and ‘bias’, contextualising media texts as deceitful and situating the ‘truth’ as the prize while tending towards allowing the notion that the truth is also constructed to slip by (Morgan, 1996: 16). This binary between the media image and the extra-textual Real, between the naïve user and the empowered, rational citizen is played out in the discussions encountered here.

\textsuperscript{86} The emphasis on textual analysis consequently reduces all media experience to manageable texts for ‘pastoral recycling’ (Morgan, 1996: 15-16).
Americanisation emerges, even amongst those implicated (namely young people themselves), as a discourse used to speak about youth. Younger viewers were the ones frequently thought to be vulnerable to TV, American programming and teen dramas. The construction of the Americanised Other can be seen as an iteration of the links between young people’s commodity consumption and the pursuit of an authentic (Grossberg, 1992) self that is “personally determined” (Larson, 1995: 536). Notions of self-determination and identity formation guided the lines drawn between participants and those they felt ‘vulnerable’ to the allure of media, at danger of becoming the Americanised Other. William, from the second St Edmund’s group, draws a connection autonomy and authenticity:

**William:** To an extent I guess [television might offer people behavioural models], if you’re trying to decide what you’re going to do with yourself. If you’re trying to run your life like somebody else I guess. But not if you’re trying to be yourself, trying to deal with something your own way, not somebody else’s.

Similarly, Matt from Kenmore ventures:

**Matt:** It depends like, you can choose to follow TV but there are other things you can follow. Like culture, like skatey or you could turn to God. Or you could turn to the drug culture, but I think that everyone has to be part of something or following something otherwise they don’t feel in place or something.

An interesting distinction exists between these comments. William’s comments about the danger the media poses as a model for behaviour emerged soon after the boys’ discussion about their ‘Americanised’ friend. That said, however, his comments seemed to extend to television generally. The boys in this group did not
seem to give much credence to the notion that television could provide a model for appropriate behaviour, suggesting the programs that might provide some sort of instruction were lifestyle based such as cooking shows and aerobics programs. Discourses of national identity seemed not to enter into this consideration of the influence of television. Discussion progressed in similarly stunted and forced fashion in the first group at St Edmund’s, where Kevin ventured that being influenced by regular consumption was “probably bad, because they’re not doing it they’re own way, sort of thing”.

By contrast, the students at Kenmore connected the search for authentic youth experiences more directly with notions of Americanisation, which functions as a discourse that participants use to situate the inauthentic. Anna from Kenmore points out that ‘American’ style fashion and behaviours provide some teens with a public or group identity, “But when they’re by themselves they can be completely normal and you just wouldn’t know.” Foreshadowing the comments of Matt above, Thomas suggested young people are looking “for something to follow,” particularly in social situations.

**Thomas:** There’ll be one leader of the group… and there’s like a trail of nine other guys going behind them. It usually goes from the least American [at the back] to the most American [at the front]. And I think that once you get to the beginning of the pack this guy is still like the others but he has no-one else to follow except for even bigger people that he’s seen on TV who also have a trail of people behind them. So he’s trying to relate to them and these guys are trying to relate to him and so forth and so forth.
The inauthenticity of the students Tom is here referring to is located in their inability
to discard elements of the American identity, and so the resonance of this identity
lacks a locally specific truth. It is the excesses of the behaviour of these
Americanised teens that seems to offend Thomas, though the ascription of such
excessive behaviour to television and mimicry is a product of the discursive layering
of the vulnerable media user with negative traits.

This discourse of excessive mimicry resulting in inauthentic decision making
emerges in an equally rich narrative which Anna recounts:

Anna: a couple of years ago, I didn’t watch Dawson’s Creek, but all my
friends were like “Oh Dawson’s Creek is the best” and that kind of stuff and I
remember them watching it and someone had lost their virginity or people
had had sex. And they were all, “Oh, I’m their age, why aren’t I having
sex?” You know, they automatically jump to the conclusion they should be
having sex or the reason they’re not is because there’s something wrong with
them.

Anna’s remarks repeat the ideas of Thomas, viewing such inauthentic behaviour as
nonsensical, “And it was like all of my friends who hadn’t, they were like, ‘Oh
should I be doing this now because the people on Dawson’s Creek are doing it?’”

Lauren, in reply, points to the underpinning discourse of inauthenticity in such a
statement. She suggests people should question “basing choices in [their] life on
something [they] see that’s created by the media.” Her ability to question such
actions marks Lauren (and Anna) off as sophisticated because they can identify that
there might be something other than a mediated experience upon which decisions
could be based. Anna’s search for the authentic is inflected with discourses of national identity:

**Anna:** I find that if I can’t imagine it ever actually happening I just can’t get into it, I can’t watch it actually. I like shows like *The Secret Life of Us* because they talk about things that could actually happen and things that people deal with. And sometimes I just like them better.

Here Anna echoes the comments considered earlier by Megan at Woodcrest, who labelled *The Secret Life of Us* a “lifestyle program”. Like Megan, Anna looks to *The Secret Life of Us* aspirationally, as a program that will prepare her for future life. The validity of this program comes from the adult nature of the text. Watching it is a process of preparing to mature. The Australianness of the text signals it as authentic for Anna, however, who can imagine her own future in the events portrayed in the program.

In line with this aspirational viewing mode, some of the younger female participants credited teen drama with educational uses. Rebecca from the first group at St Mary’s makes comments similar to those of Kelly, considered earlier. Rebecca credits *Heartbreak High* with a pedagogical purpose for teens:

**Rebecca:** Just how to handle different issues when you’re a teen. What ways you can go. You can either go that way or go this way to choose the best road. Just seeing other people go before you, it gives you a better idea about how you can fix that problem.

As with Anna’s comments above, however, this argument was inflected with discourses about national origin by some participants. Katherine justifies Rebecca’s statement by differentiating *Heartbreak High* from its American counterparts: “You
notice how, I reckon Australian soaps are so much different to American soaps…Australians [the characters represented] are so much down to earth, like how much like teenage life is like”. The critical distance of the audience from the cultural home of the originating text plays a role here, with Lindsay countering such a suggestion with, “Yeah, but maybe it’s like that to them in America so maybe they [Americans] think they’re [American programs are] down to earth.”

**Conclusion**

Maligning American programming and cultural mores as inauthentic demonstrates the critical, “suspicious eye” (Morgan, 1996) imbued by media education but also the sort of critical stance Grossberg (1992) describes as being the defining logic of postmodernity. Of the four ironic relationships Grossberg describes as guiding principles for navigating this logic, the majority of the opinionated speakers in this study demonstrate a sense of ironic inauthenticity, a celebration of “fleeting moments of temporary investments” (Grossberg, 1992: 227). On the whole, the notion emerged that television was primarily a tool for entertainment, information or time filling purposes. These were acceptable uses of television as long as viewers invest only in the image and not in any of the ideological consequences. They are enjoyable and permissible for this purpose but the notion that they should be invested in any further, as influential behavioural models, for instance, is discarded. Indeed, some viewers (specifically Michael at Woodcrest and Lauren at Kenmore) were keen to point out that the ownership and industrial structure of Australian television meant that even for information (news) or entertainment purposes, investing in anything more than the image was a dangerous path to pursue. Americanisation helps to
justify this position by giving the speakers a fixed set of culturally acceptable
discourses to attach to negative activities.
Conclusion: Translation, National Broadcasting and ‘Foreign’ Texts

This thesis has looked for ways to account for the presence and function of international texts in a domestic broadcast market, arguing the actions of national television systems translate ‘foreign’ programs through discursive techniques of uptake. Rather than being awash with American programs, the Australian broadcast system exists as a dynamic agent of translation, relating imported programs to national cultural logics. The ‘foreignness’ of imported texts is dissolved through scheduling and promotional practices that frame these programs as domestically relevant. The extent to which these programs are translated as part of the domestic mediasphere has an impact upon their success. Translation practices constitute techniques of uptake that promote a coherence between international programming and domestically oriented practices of consumption and identity. American programming, especially American drama programming, is thus translated to become a natural part of the Australian television system.

Translation, Narrative Transparency and the Broadcast System

Utilising Lotman’s model of translation as a way to investigate the interplay between international programming and the domestic Australian broadcast system raises questions about the role broadcast environments play in the production of meaning. The consideration of Olson’s model of narrative transparency in the second chapter of this thesis attempts to point to limitations that appear in text-centric proposals for international success. Comparing the textuality and relative success of Dawson’s Creek and Heartbreak High points to the way broadcasting systems are able to
overcome the relative opacity of some texts. While not altogether opaque, *Heartbreak High* would appear as a less transparent text than *Dawson’s Creek*. The international success of *Heartbreak High*, however, could be related not only to its textuality but also to the fit between this textuality and the respective broadcasting environment in which it was received. In the Australian market, the experience of youthfulness constructed by *Dawson’s Creek* offered Network Ten a greater audience drawcard than *Heartbreak High*. The image of youth as a period of self-awakening and discovery, located within the safety of school, family and peer networks better matched Ten’s image of youth as fun. With its representations of youth as a time of trouble and struggle, *Heartbreak High* resembled the youth affairs tradition mobilised by the ABC in its attempt to draw a youth audience. Youth programming on the ABC has coalesced around content designed to inform and educate young people about social issues, often providing explicit strategies for addressing them (Sternberg, 1997b). Frequently taking the form of youth current affairs programming, the earnest, socially aware and often didactic approach of *Heartbreak High*, like its Canadian cousin *Degrassi High*, conforms to this model of representing youth. Youthfulness as sold in *Dawson’s Creek* and perhaps as sold by the American teen drama itself, is more commercially viable and economically valuable than the sense of national citizenship promoted by *Heartbreak High*. This is the case in the Australian market at least, and investigation of the places, networks, and systems in which *Heartbreak High* was successful internationally would advance this argument extensively.

The analysis in chapter two demonstrates certain limitations in the extent to which Olson’s model accounts for television texts. While he argues for the narrative
transparency of television programs such as *Walker, Texas Ranger* and *Neighbours*, Olson’s typology is developed with particular reference to cinema. It does not seem able to effectively account for the location of a television text within a system of meaning construction. Unlike cinema, the television text is not discrete, either in distribution or reception (Fiske and Hartley, 1978: 85-100; Eco, 1980). This is not to suggest a return to Williams’ (1975) concept of flow, subsuming individual programs to the greater experience of watching broadcasting as a macro-text. Rather, it is to argue for the importance of locating television texts within the greater broadcasting milieu (Cunningham and Jacka, 1996: 16-21). This investigation has argued throughout that the meanings prescribed to, and drawn from, television programs are determined not only by their textuality but also by the way in which they are contextualised as part of a broader repertoire of texts for consumption. Studies of the television text are best undertaken with reference to the strategies and politics of production (Hobson, 1982; Tulloch and Moran, 1985; Gitlin, 1994; Caldwell, 1995; Miller et al., 2001), scheduling practices (Ellis, 2000a), continuity material (Hartley, 1992a), and promotional strategies (Gripsrud, 1995). The meaning television texts acquire comes from an interaction between the text and these elements of the broadcasting environment.

Examining American teen dramas on Australian television, this investigation has argued industrial activities represent creative agents of translation. Exploring the scheduling of *Dawson’s Creek* in Australia, chapter three considers the way in which American teen dramas are included within a system of domestically oriented meaning construction. American content is a constituent part used in drawing together a domestically oriented audience. The composition of a schedule and
promotion of the network’s identity translates American content by both locating it amongst domestic product\textsuperscript{87} and by using it to highlight experiences of domestic identity.

For Network Ten, American teen dramas are constructed and framed as youth texts. This activity marks their Americanness as both a fundamental part of their value and a feature secondary to their place on the network. On the one hand, the American origin of these texts connects the network to international vectors of popular youth culture. American content enables Network Ten to offer its audience a local entry point to a multifarious network of youth culture products. On the other hand, however, the Americanness of \textit{Dawson’s Creek} seems secondary to the role the text plays in demonstrating the youthfulness of the network. With its nostalgic representation of youth culture and location along a continuum of American-produced youth-oriented dramas (such as \textit{Beverly Hills, 90210}, \textit{Melrose Place}, \textit{Party of Five} and continued with \textit{The O.C.}), \textit{Dawson’s Creek} emphasises youthful bodies and experiences. The value of \textit{Dawson’s Creek} for the network is not so much its Americanness as its youthfulness, not so much its cultural origin as the fit between the program and the image of their audience it wishes to construct.

\textbf{Broadcast Systems, Televisuality, and the Australian Television Aesthetic}

Examining continuity and branding strategies as examples of translation, reveals these practices as actions of television production. As Michaels’ (1990a) model of

\textsuperscript{87} And often other product imported from the UK.
the teleported text demonstrates also, the entry of texts into television systems results in the production of texts relevant to that system itself. Creating native tongue equivalents of imported texts and cohering them to domestic frames of reference, translation is a strategy by which the television broadcast itself is created. First, examining the location of programs via techniques of uptake develops a model for exploring the nature of the broadcast system created. The techniques of uptake applied by Network Ten to American teen dramas uncover the strategies of dynamic change operating within the broadcast system. As argued in the introduction to this thesis, the teen drama can be seen as a legacy of the shifts in television Caldwell describes as televisuality. The teen drama represents a ‘mainstreaming’ of the experimentation commonly associated with youth programming (Frith, 1993; Jones, 2001; Lury, 2001; Manzoufas, 2003). While not employing the stylistic legacy of televisuality seen in loss-leader youth programming such as Network 7 (UK) and Recovery (Australia), the teen drama is designed to appeal to the youth identity this style of programming recognised.

American teen dramas signalled the rise of niche broadcasting as a sustainable commercial model for television organisation in Australia. Faced with little market share and an uncompetitive business model, Ten reorganised its business structure in the 1990s so that teen dramas and youth programming became its principal concern. The network’s programming mix was solidified as youthful through branding and scheduling strategies that constructed the Ten audience community through an image of youth as fun. Network Ten’s industrial organisation, branding and scheduling

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88 Michaels’ model is particularly useful as it subjects all programs to the practices that are, in this study, principally reserved for American imports. Arguing for the construction of multiple texts through various stages of the production-distribution-consumption chain (imagined as a wheel), Michaels demonstrates the truly multiplying nature of the broadcast system.
strategies developed a site on Australian television where these programs were commercially viable. In doing so, Ten introduced new modes of audience stratification and capture to the Australian television market. Pursuing the teen consumer, the teen drama provided specific drama content for 16-24-year-old viewers. This content schooled these viewers, and capitalising on aspirational viewing tendencies, younger viewers as well, in how to read long-form dramas. Teen dramas bridge the gap between children’s programming and adult dramas. Viewers can step into teen dramas after outgrowing children’s drama, spending a time before moving on.

Second, this investigation reveals the extent to which American programming assumes a somewhat natural status on Australian television, revealing the nature of an Australian television aesthetic. Australia enjoys a particularly unique broadcast environment, where programming from the three largest English speaking markets is available to construct a broadcast schedule (Franken, 2002). Imported programming has traditionally been a part of the Australian broadcast system, accelerating the development of the system by providing enough content for day long (and eventually longer) schedules. Schedules are matched to the daily movements of the audience and rely heavily on familiarity and regularity. As such, they tend to have a relatively fixed structure.

With a small domestic market, an industry quite reticent to risk money on local productions and favourable pricing scales, American content has a long history on Australian television as drama programming. The production values and presentational modes of American drama signal an expected form for television
drama, against which Australian dramas and non-American-imports represent regional variations. This is not to suggest an ‘Americanised’ mediasphere; the practices of translation that shape the Australian broadcast system result in a space where anticipation about the national origins of programs become genre specific. While drama programming is conventionally understood to be American, evening soap opera, information, lifestyle, reality, and sketch comedy programming is predominantly domestic. These regimes of genre expectations signal the specific yet conventional place American drama programming occupies on Australian television: this place is further defined by the drive through quotas and licensing requirements to require and encourage domestically produced dramas. The Australian nature of these programs frequently functions as an advertising point. This designation of “Australian drama” marks these programs out as distinct or distinguished, conversely signallng that they are aberrant. While references to the United States and “new American drama” are not unheard of, the particular signification of domestic drama as noteworthy because of its cultural origin demonstrates Australia’s implication as a site for the consumption of American cultural product that Bell and Bell (1993) point out.

**Network Ten and the Creation of a Youth Space**

The comparison between Network Ten and Triple J in chapter three raises questions about the commercial construction of youth spaces and the use of commercial media for cultural citizenship this thesis has not had the space to fully address. Albury (1999: 64) suggests radio network Triple J creates a nationally oriented youth specific media space that functions as a “self-contained, self-referential” entity. Such an entity grants young people a presence as citizens of a larger cultural system (the
national mediasphere) while simultaneously providing access to the wider world of youth culture. Triple J establishes a specific site for youth as part of a national mediasphere, recognising this local identity as a valid participant in national sites of identity construction. As discussed in chapter three, Ten acts in a similar fashion. Chapter three presents the notion that Ten may be considered a youth mediasphere, a site where its audience is connected to broader debates about national culture. Amongst the broader Australian mediasphere, Ten would seem to represent something different, however. Mobilising youth culture to offer a specific identity, Ten would also seem akin to a sphericule, a “vibrant, globalised but very specific space of self- and community-making and identity” (Cunningham, 2002: 268).

Cunningham adapts Gitlin’s (1998) argument that the idea of a unitary, definitive public sphere is increasingly more difficult to consider as communities become more polyethnic and communication-saturated. Rather, the singular public sphere fragments communities based on “culture, identity and voluntary belonging rather than based on rights derived from, and obligations to, a state” (Cunningham, 2002: 269).

These sites are sphericules, a microcosm of ‘the’ majority public sphere. They are the sites for the negotiation and communication of specific and localised identities, providing participants with access to tools for identity construction and acting as the main organs of communication between marginalised groups that often lack mainstream representation. While not as politically invested as some of the spaces Cunningham describes, Ten’s actions would seem to perform a similar role for young people. The youth identity is not one that lacks critical mass but significant proportions of Ten’s audience are not yet full national citizens. Youth is positioned
as a sub-identity, produced as an off-shoot of the majority or mainstream identity. As a mainstream site claiming to act on behalf of a community it constructs as youthful, Ten connects its community to larger sites of meaning making. It enables youth to communicate with other participants in the national mediasphere about the limits of youthfulness. Ten’s courting of controversy, particularly over nudity, drug use, sexual permissiveness and acceptable behaviours, raises questions about the performance of youth and the place a youth culture occupies in society.

Furthermore, Ten provides young people with access to the tools to construct themselves as cultural citizens (Hartley, 1999b: 163). Drawing together international vectors (Wark, 1994) of youth culture, Ten is a site where participants can access tools for identity construction. It provides youth with a place where they can “make themselves out of the semiotic and other resources to hand” (Hartley, 1996: 157). Ten, like Triple J and other youth broadcasters such as cable music station Channel V, serves as a commercially constructed space through which young people can access resources for identity construction, exercising semiotic self-determination and DIY citizenship (Hartley, 1999b: 162).

**Americanisation as a Practice of Narrative Accrual**

It seems that teenaged viewers are not necessarily wholly complicit in the acceptance of American programming uncovered by this investigation. Exploring the American teen drama provides access to discourses about Americanisation and the particular role it plays in negotiations of Australian national and cultural identities. As a critical discourse, it provides a way for audiences to maintain a distinctness about
their participation in the Australian television system. Mobilising Americanisation allows viewers to adopt a defensive stance towards the presence of American programming. As a cultural logic in Australia, Americanisation appears as a necessary discourse through which the inherent status of American content on Australian television is negotiated and accepted. The American origin of Dawson’s Creek is both apparent and seemingly unproblematic for teenage viewers. As revealed in chapter four, genre plays a predominant role in the way teenage viewers position themselves in relation to Dawson’s Creek. Recognition of the American origin of the text appears as part of a critical mode of engagement that may perhaps be a product of the practices of the investigation itself. The discussion was clearly geared around ideas of ‘American’ and ‘Australian’ programs and requested comparisons between the two. Whether this dichotomy would have emerged had it not been established at the outset is not known. Nonetheless, consensus across the groups acknowledges Dawson’s Creek as indicative of a certain genre of drama programming; Dawson’s Creek is translated by its location within the mediasphere such that it is recognised as drama programming first, and judged in relation to the enjoyment of the viewer with the genre of teen drama (cf. Tulloch and Tulloch, 1995).

Within debates about the nature of Australian culture, arguments about Americanisation adopt a naturalised connection with concerns about youth culture and the vibrancy and resilience of an Australian national identity. The young people in this study appear to have indeterminate conceptions of what counts as, or represents, the Australian national identity. Predominantly they cite values such as being laid back and relaxed about life. Multiculturalism emerges as an indicative
summation of the Australian way of life, prompting some to suggest Australia has no
distinct identity itself. As Nathan from the male group at Woodcrest put it:

**Nathan:** Australia doesn’t really, I don’t think Australia really has a culture
as such. I mean we’re that multicultural, people come from everywhere
[Michael: There is no “Australian”] there really isn’t an Australian. Like
everyone in the country is Australian but the majority of people have
backgrounds that are like from Asia, or Polynesia or something, somewhere.
And they all have different beliefs and cultures and we’re all just really
different. Like, whereas America almost everyone in America is Christian.
And you can tell by those shows. They’re always thanking God and praying
and stuff. And like America is very patriotic. You can see that just by the
coverage [of the US-Iraq conflict] they’ve shown, whereas Australia,
everyone’s like very different. There isn’t really one type of Australian.

The examples of discernable Australian culture that were given were performative
examples, often including elements of bush mythology (particularly from male
viewers) and emotive lifestyle descriptors, such as “clean” (Sarah, Kenmore) and full
of “nice people” (Kylie, Monica and Amanda, Woodcrest Girls). Larrikin crocodile
handler Steve Irwin and *Home and Away*’s ocker bloke Alf Stuart featured
prominently as examples of ‘Australians’ presented in the media. On the whole, the
viewers consulted in this study felt their lives were not represented on Australian
television, though *Heartbreak High* offered a possible simulacrum for some. This
did not prevent these young people from generally accepting the assertion Australia
is at some risk of being Americanised. Americanisation functions for the young
people in this study as a discourse to position themselves as sophisticated, unique
and critical consumers. As demonstrated in the final chapter, it is not these young
people that regards themselves as being at risk, however, but juvenile, feminised and vulnerable others.

In essence the concerns these young people raise about the Americanisation of others parallel the concerns of Penzig and Fynes-Clinton presented in chapter two. As is suggested throughout the thesis, Americanisation functions as a discourse to discuss youthfulness, to talk about young people and patrol the experience of being young. These teenage viewers adopt this discourse as a way to talk about youth despite their own unproblematic consumption of American content. It functions as a cultural logic describing an imagined ‘America’ positioned as an ever present threat against which the Australian identity needs to be defended. Americanisation functions as a mode of narrative accrual, supporting the construction of an official Australian culture. This is revealed by the ‘ordinary’ nature of the media use which these young people exhibit. With the exception of some extremely veiled references to file sharing in the Woodcrest male group, these students demonstrated unproblematic and mainstream uses of conventional media. Many indicated they did not have or make much time to watch television and preferred to involve themselves in other activities. This is in line with the reported television usage of teenagers (Burton, 2000; Drotner, 2000; Sternberg et al., 2000).

Although this study sought participants who were not self-identified fans of the programs, as discussed in chapter four, normalised or even low-key media use appeared initially as an obstacle to the completion of this project. Especially with some of the male groups at St Edmund’s, the participants had some trouble coming to terms with a research project recording their opinions about television and teen
dramas. Upon greater reflection, however, the low level and everyday commitment of these participants to the media provides a flipside to studies into fan cultures from an active engagement perspective (Ang, 1985b; Jenkins, 1998; Brooker, 2000, 2001, 2002; Hills, 2002). Considering the often exceptional engagement of fans with a particular, specific text, these studies can treat texts as somewhat closed. Here, the term closed refers to the treatment of the text as discrete. Cult and fan loved texts are located amidst, and offer access to, a broad range of other sites for textual engagement (such as conferences, films, and ancillary products). The investigation of fan behaviour necessarily emphasises the use of particular texts, rather than the engagement of viewers in a broadcast environment. By contrast, the ‘ordinary’ media use of the participants in this investigation produced a quite open consideration of the texts in question. That is, the investigation considered the location and use of teen dramas amidst a range of other programs, genres and activities. Broad ranging discussions about a variety of topics, other programs and current event experiences were necessary to draw many of the students into conversation about the texts in question. In this sense, the texts were treated as open, as embedded elements within the broadcast system.

### 5.1: Binaries of youth and cultural identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americanisation</th>
<th>Australianisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Culture</td>
<td>National Culture</td>
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<td>International Product</td>
<td>National Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Identity</td>
<td>Australian Identity</td>
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The ‘ordinary’ media use of these young people problematised the discourse of Americanisation somewhat as well. The binary nature of assessments of both
Americanisation and generationalism that positions young people with Americanisation in opposition to adults and a patriotic or developed sense of national identity risks glorifying young people’s media use as in some way spectacular or different. Even Bennet et al.’s (1999) recognition of an age-based trend towards American products asserts young people’s media use as in some way spectacular or exceptional. This is not to deny that generational differences exist. Instead, it is to problematise the binary opposition that opposes consumption of American content with ‘Australianisation’. This distinction conflates the turn towards American content with a turn away from national domestic identity, rather than national domestic product. While this conflation comes from the location of media products as signifiers of national culture, the turn to American content seems to be based on genre preferences first. This conflation fails to account also for the fact the young people in this study replicate the concerns of Americanisation predominant at the core of the semiosphere, enacting the same processes of identity construction adults at the core are engaged in.

**National Television in a Post-Broadcast Environment**

This thesis has argued the broadcast system and particularly the networks, are vital for the construction of a national mediasphere. It has examined the role networks play in the nationalisation of product (translation), providing Australian audiences with a range of identity positions formulated through a mix of domestic and foreign product. Translation is a key component in the construction of a nationally oriented broadcast stream which provides the conventional experience of television for the majority of the Australian population. Studying the location of the American teen
drama as a microcosm of television, this investigation has emphasised the role played by networks at the expense of other key agents such as regulatory, government and policy bodies, advertisers, program creators, and audiences. This emphasis demonstrates the value of considering aesthetic industrial practices such as branding, scheduling and continuity material to explore the nature of broadcast systems. The television schedule, particularly in its printed form, provides an overview of the texture of the broadcasting system constructed through the interaction between available programs, the daily rhythms of the audience, economic and regulatory policies. Continuity and branding material describe and articulate the imagined communities networks construct. The temporality of this material makes its exploration challenging. Considering this content, however, provides a rich addition to policy, economic and textual approaches to investigating television systems.

The rise of alternative and post-broadcast models of distribution create a tension in understandings of television, as does the rise of Personal Video Recorders that provide greater freedom to deconstruct schedules and time shift. The broadcast stream, characterised in this study as a principal site for the experience of television, is stretched and broken down by the rise of file sharing as a mode to both access and distribute television texts. Peer-to-peer programs such as BitTorrent and the direct delivery of content over the internet challenge the importance of the broadcaster and the nature of the broadcast itself. Extra- and off-broadcast delivery models are not new; DVD and video sales represent well established extra revenue streams for program producers. Alternative distribution technologies place an increased value on the discrete television text, capitalising on the active modes of engagement examined in fan studies. These distribution technologies challenge the established economics
of the broadcast system by reducing the status of networks as the gatekeepers of the
television experience. As the economics of distribution change, networks are
challenged as the connecting site, the intermediary between the audience and the
television text. This challenge comes not necessarily from ‘pirates’ or errant users
but from program producers themselves. This challenge rewrites the national
experience of broadcast television as it is explored in this investigation. For some
viewers, the experience of television may no longer involve encounters with the
translative practices of Australian networks. This is particularly true for viewers fed
up with suffering at the whims of audience maximisation strategies that often result
in erratic scheduling. For these viewers, television may not be associated with
participation within a national system at all.

Television’s role as a live, self-updating reflection of the national culture is at risk if
it becomes a series of independently delivered discrete texts. The rise of alternative
delivery technologies does not signal the demise of broadcast television. It does
suggest a need for television networks, particularly those in markets with a high
degree of imported product such as Australia, to renegotiate their relationship with
the audience. In this negotiation, continuity material, the connective glue and texture
of the national broadcast system, is a readily apparent site where the nature of the
television system can be examined.
Appendix I: Timeline of Youth Dramas in Australia

1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004

Nine

Seven

Ten

ABC

- Nine
- Seven
- Ten
- ABC

- Dark Angel
- Love is a Four Letter Word
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer
- Angel
- Heartbreak High
- Charmed
- Melrose Place
- Beverly Hills, 90210
- Party of Five
- Dawson’s Creek
- Young Americans
- Sweat
- Breakers
- Gross Pointe
- Neighbours
- E-Street
- Heartbreak High
- The Secret Life of Us
- The O.C.
- Attitude and Wise Up
- Head Start
- Raw FM
- Recovery
- Love is a Four Letter Word
- Northwood
- Triple J nationalised
- Degrassi High
- Home and Away
- Felicity
- Charmed
- Smallville
- Roswell
- Neighbours
- The O.C.
- The Gilmore Girls
- Smallville

Year
This timeline tracks significant examples of the teen drama genre in Australia and, while extensive, is not means exhaustive. It does not include short run series such as Byrds of Prey (Seven for three weeks in 2003), Freaks and Geeks (Nine – 2002), Wasteland (Nine – 2003) which were scheduled irregularly in either late night or early morning slots. Likewise, it does not mention tween or children’s series such as Thunderstone (Nine), Beyond Jupiter (Nine), Cybergirl (Ten), Ship to Shore (Nine), Sabrina, the teenage witch (Seven) and the highly successful Saddle Club series on the ABC. 7th Heaven (Ten, 2000-ongoing) which combines conservative family drama with the teen genre has not been included as it’s inconsistent scheduling has made tracking difficult.

Key

- American teen dramas
- Other (Australian and Canadian) teen dramas

The presence of programs such as Melrose Place, Charmed, Love is a Four Letter Word and The Secret Life of Us demonstrate the structured nature of the niche system. These programs are not teen dramas per se, but as drama for ‘young adults’ they are the programs teenaged viewers move to as they age. A stepping stone situation emerges with programs such as The Saddle Club training viewers in the long form dramatic storytelling required to watch Dawson’s Creek, which serves as a feeder of sorts into programming such as Melrose Place.

Angel and Dark Angel are included in this categorisation not because they don’t count as teen dramas but rather because these are programs that move away from the traditional strategy of setting the drama in some way within a school based setting. These programs still deal with matters of coming of age, assuming responsibility and forging a life independent of the support structures of old (family, parents, structured institutions such as schools) and are constructed in a similar fashion to Buffy the Vampire Slayer (of which Angel is a spin off) and Roswell.

Soap operas represent the predominant place on Australian television where representations of young people are found. Importantly however, throughout the 1990s only Home and Away and Neighbours have proven sustainable teen soaps. E-Street was axed in 1993 after a returning to its teen romance orientation and Breakers, while garnering an almost cultish following, failed to prove itself enough for Ten to continue to support it.

The nationalisation of Triple J marked a change in the way in which young people were targeted by the ABC, and was part of the transition from representing the interests of youth principally through ‘youth affairs’ programming to constructing drama and magazine programs for youth.
Action is transcribed in italics and where it occurs during dialogue, also in square brackets. Dialogue in square brackets indicates the second speaker is interjecting.

The improvised nature of *Heartbreak High* meant that characters often did not stop to let others speak and sentences tended to roll over one another.

_Depressed, Drazic waits for Anita outside a classroom at the school. It is morning_

Drazic: You can’t just tell me that it’s over and not give me any explanation.
Anita: Drazic, feelings change. Why do we have to analyse it?
D: Because this doesn’t make sense. Just give me a reason.
A: I didn’t mean to hurt you, okay [she turns to leave]
D: [running round to put himself in front of her again] You already have. Just stop for a second will you?
A: Then I’m sorry.
D: What have I done? Whatever it is I’m sorry. I don’t know what I’ve done. Okay? We can work this out. I can change. I’ll stop doing it.
A: No Drazic, okay; I meant what I said. [she turns to go the other way]
D: [he again runs around to put himself in front of her] I will do whatever you want. I will stop doing whatever you want.
A: And what would be the point of it Drazic? Okay, my feelings have changed. I know that it hurts and I’m sorry [she turns to go the other way]
D: [he again runs around to put himself in front of her] Anita, this is crazy. Jst (sic.). Will you stand still for a second! [exasperated] I said I will do anything you want. What more can I do?
A: There is nothing you can do, okay. It is not about you. It’s about me. Okay, I’ve changed.
[pause]
D: Is there someone else?
[pause]
A: What?
D: Is there someone else?

[pause]
D: Tell me right now [A: Drazic, hey], level with me.
A: It is over, okay. You and I are over. You have to accept it and stop looking for other reasons, okay.
D: We can fix it [A: No]. Stop, talk to me. We can fix it. What is it, you’re not telling me!
A: Drazic stop. It’s over. [she walks away]

Unbeknownst to Drazic, Anita has been seeing a police officer, Todd, who was recently appointed to the school as police liaison officer, and who has been offering self-defence classes. Earlier in the season Todd was the principal officer accusing Drazic of a bag-snatch. Following Anita during a break in classes, Drazic sees her and Todd together. He confronts Todd and challenges him to fight. Todd’s refusal leaves Drazic a little impotent and struggling with his emotions. Returning to the school he charges past Anita, catching her arm and dragging her bodily into an empty classroom despite her struggles and protestations and Thania’s demands he let Anita go.

D [angrily, to Thania]: Get out of it alright. It’s none of your business.
A: Thania just go. Just let go. [Drazic follows Anita very closely as she walks away. Drazic touches her on the arm and she turns on him]. Stop it, okay! What are you doing Drazic?
D: You lied to me.
A: What are you talking about?
D: What am I talking about? I saw you and him together okay so you can just cut the crap.
A: Okay, okay, yes. I, I, I…Drazic I didn’t know how to tell you, okay, ‘cause I didn’t want to hurt you any more than I already had.
D: Didn’t want to hurt me. How could you do this to us? He doesn’t care about you. He’s just messing with your mind.
A: That’s not true. [D: Yes!] Hey, that’s not true, okay! You don’t know him.
D: Are you blind? He is using you. Okay? And I am not going to let him do this to us.
A: Drazic, I can’t change the way I feel.
D: You don’t know what you are feeling. You are so screwed up in the head.
A: That’s not true, okay [D: Yes it is true] I know exactly how I feel [D: You don’t…] D: You don’t see that.
A: Yes I do, okay. And let me tell you one more thing. I don’t care if Todd dumps me tomorrow, you and I are finished. Okay.
D: No
A: No, listen to me. [D: No you listen] Take a look at yourself [D: Take a look at myself]
D: [yelling] Take a look at what you did to me.
A: [yelling] I can’t change that, okay! It’s over.

Anita leaves Drazic in the classroom. Drazic can be heard screaming “Bitch!” and breaking something over the next shot of Drazic’s friend Dennis coming along the veranda. Drazic is knocking over tables, throwing chairs around and breaking art and pottery in the art classroom where he and Anita were arguing. As he breaks things he’s calling himself stupid. “Behind my back, I didn’t even know”, he yells as he breaks something before again calling “Bitch!” “I loved you and you went behind my back.” Dennis comes to the classroom door and, pushing his way through the small group of onlookers gawking in the doorway asks “Drazic, what are you doing?” Getting no answer, Dennis asks again “Drazic, what are you doing, mate?” Drazic answers by throwing a table across the room yelling “Bitch!” through clenched teeth. Dennis’ request for Drazic to calm down is interrupted by the arrival of Principal Carson, who sends the onlookers away and approaches Drazic to attempt to defuse the situation.

Carson: Put that down Bogdon (Drazic’s first name that he never uses)
D: I’m not done sir, [screaming] and my name is Drazic! How many times do I have to tell you? Are you thick!?
C: If you’ve got a problem, put that down and we can discuss it. Okay, Whatever your problem is, we can discuss it.
D: You what the funny thing is sir, I don’t think a chat’s going to do that much.
C: Yeah, well neither is destroying school property. So just stop it now and we can deal with this internally.

D: Deal with it internally? What are you going to do. [C: Look] [yelling] What can you do to me, that can possibly hurt me now?

C: Don’t force me to call the police.

D: Call the police! Yes! Bring them on, I love them. They’re my favourite people. Go and call them now. Why don’t you go and call them, there’s a phone out there. Bring ‘em in.

C: Put the chair down [D: I asked you to bring them right in] Put it down. [Drazic throws the chair at some tables, knocking them over. Carson leaves to call the police].

D: Go and get your little piggy friends.

When the police arrive, Drazic is sitting on a table in the remains of the classroom. Todd and another officer attend.

Todd: Do you think this is going to solve anything?

D: Did you get him [indicating Todd] by luck or did he ask for the job?

T: Are you done here?

D: [Drazic contemplates the question for a moment] Not really, there’s still the windows.

T: It’s not the way to deal with it Drazic.

D: [Yelling, leaping off the table at Todd and being restrained by the other officer] What would you know? You got the girl. Yeah you got her, I didn’t. [to Carson] Ask him what’s been going on with one of your students, hey. Alright [stepping away from the restraining officer]. Isn’t that what you’d call an abuse of power?

C: [Todd steps over to Carson] I don’t care about the history between you two, I just want this sorted out.

T: Well, I don’t think arresting him is the answer.

C: Well, I don’t see what else we can do.

T: Well, it’s up to you to press charges Mr Carson, but if there’s a way to avoid it I’d rather not bring him in. [Todd leaves].
Later, Carson is speaking to Drazic in his office. Drazic is looking out through the Venetian blinds and they cut a shadow across his face reminiscent of film noir.

C: If I’d decided to press charges they could have thrown the book at you.
D: Sir, I think you’re someone who appreciates honesty so to be honest, I couldn’t really give a stuff.
C: You can thank your lucky stars. [pause] Well you’re not getting off scot-free. You’ll pay for what you’ve damaged and I’ll be scheduling you for counselling.
D: What, you’re not even going to suspend me?
C: Oh, to what end. So you can stay at home and feel sorry for yourself?
D: You’ve got no idea what I’m feeling like.
[pause]
C: I wouldn’t presume to know that. But I do know that eventually the hurting stops.
D: [Making a move to leave] Oh save you’re breath. I don’t want to hear your crap. Can I go now?
[pause]
C: Yeah
D: Good.

Later, Drazic sits brooding in the warehouse he shares with two other students. Anita enters.

D: [without looking at her] What are you doing here?
A: It’s taken me a while but I’ve come to a decision and I wanted you to know what I’ve decided.
D: So it’s over with him?
A: [shaking her head] No Drazic, nothing’s changed, okay.
D: So what’d you do, come to rub my nose in it? You know, let it sink in for me.
A: Do you know me at all Drazic?
D: Well I actually thought I did. But it seems things are really different now, you know. I kind of was really suckeried in wasn’t I?
A: Look, despite what you may think I do care about you, okay. I really do. But I care about me and Todd as well. No I do and if I stay at school then none of it is going to work. So I’m leaving, okay?
D: What?
A: Listen to yourself, okay. I come in here and you think that everything is back to the way it was. How long are you going to hurt yourself thinking that Drazic?
D: You can’t just go. I mean we can work. We can sort this out [A: (forcefully) No]. I won’t I wont hassle you anymore.
A: No okay it is over. We are over. [D: No we can’t, it doesn’t have to be] Shut up okay. It is finished and that is it [D: why does it have to be this way?] You are going to get on with your life and so am I.
D: No, just one more chance. You can’t walk out that door. Why can’t we just talk about it. [A: No (she moves to leave)] Stay here. Why can’t we just talk about it?

Anita leaves Drazic’s warehouse apartment and he paces back and forth struggling to come to terms with his emotions about what has happened. Drazic is clenching his fists and jaw, massaging his temples and looks close to tears. He knocks a chair across the room and yells before collapsing on the floor sobbing. While the final credits play we walk with Drazic along the beach. The final shots are of him walking alone along the beach.
Appendix III: Transcript of “Yellow” Ident, Network Ten - 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>String instrumental</td>
<td>Slow zoom in on a woman’s left eye.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice: “Open your eyes.”</td>
<td>Black and white.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“See your world”</td>
<td>Zoom in continues, iris turns yellow quickly. The colour is the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yellow”</td>
<td>as the yellow used in Ten’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yellow is Happiness”</td>
<td>Cut through white screen to a field of sunflowers under a cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scattered sky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hue saturated colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closer shots of sunflowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s the way we feel”</td>
<td>Cut to couple canoodling in a park sitting by a water feature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She is on his lap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are hugging and smiling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cut to the couple kissing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cut to different angle of them kissing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s the way we think”</td>
<td>Cut to black background. Rapid cuts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black and white head shots looking up to the space above their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heads – ‘thinking’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above the heads, are pictures drawn in yellow lines:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head: Female, blonde, curly hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picture: Light bulb, gold fish line drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head: Male, bald.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picture: goldfish filled in. Another fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head: Female, dark hair, waves (head turned to the side and up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picture: Fish (as above), flower – line drawing then filled in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with flare around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is playful”</td>
<td>Cut to Blair McDonough (<em>Big Brother</em> runner up and now <em>Neighbours</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>star) in a sea of yellow balloons. He is black and white, they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“surprising”</td>
<td>Cut to Deborah Mailman (Indigenous actor, core cast of *The Secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life of Us*) outside in the street. Massive bunch of balloons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>behind her. Frame jumps and edges of frame are visible. Mailman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>looks up at the top of frame as the vertical hold slips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“And individual”</td>
<td>Cut to black background. Rove McManus ‘winds up and pitches’,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>baseball style, his fist with which he reaches out to touches the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>screen. This shot is one taken for the “yellow and blue button”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s the stuff…”</td>
<td>Cut to Gretel Killean (BB host) standing against a brick wall. Black and white. She has a large yellow flower behind her ear. The edges of the frame are visible as in the Mailman segment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…you surround…” Opening strains of ‘Yellow’ by Coldplay. Instrumental bridge from the song plays to the end.</td>
<td>Shot of sun rising. Saturated yellow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…yourself with”</td>
<td>Cut to Holly Valance lying on a white floor surrounded by sunflowers. Colour. She is smiling and offering one to the camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Laughter”</td>
<td>Cut to Ryan Moloney (Toadie in Neighbours). Black and white. The frames jump. He stands on the street and turns to the camera with a yellow painted nose on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hope”</td>
<td>Long shot of Sibylla Budd (Gaby The SLOU) in a white room. Black and white. She wears a yellow dress and is holding a glass of something. Cut to close up. Cut to mid shot, she sits on the floor of the space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Friends”</td>
<td>Rove McManus and Sandra Sully (News reader) pose for a picture, smiling, looking off screen to the left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Think”</td>
<td>Yellow screen. Black writing. ‘think’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice: “Yellow”</td>
<td>Cut to mid-shot of Claudia Karvan. Black and white, over black background. She is laughing as bubbles float around her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice: “See”</td>
<td>Cut to black screen. Yellow writing: ‘see’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert Newton: “Yellow”</td>
<td>Bert Newton hamming for the camera. Black and White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice: “Be”</td>
<td>White screen. Black writing: ‘be’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice 2: “Yellow”</td>
<td>White background. Samuel Johnson (core cast of SLOU dancing foolishly for the camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice: “We are”</td>
<td>Black screen. Yellow outline of Ten logo appears. Blue fill plus ‘ten’ appears in the centre of the outline, building the logo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logo remains. Cut to black and white shot of a Abi Tucker (Miranda in SLOU) with hand over face.</td>
<td>Screen goes white. Yellow outline of logo disappears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut to black screen. Blue element of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logo shifts to the right of centre. Yellow outline appears to left of centre (as they appear in the push button idents).</td>
<td>Screen goes white. Yellow outline appears in centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice: “seriously”</td>
<td>Cut to black and white head shot of Johnson standing in front of a brick wall in a laneway. Yellow text: ‘seriously’ appears across the centre of the screen (across his face). Johnson winks and smiles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix IV: Transcript of “The O.C.” Ident, Network Ten - 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male presenter’s voice: “Some shows are just made for”</td>
<td>Centred, white text over black “some shows are just made for”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You”</td>
<td>Ten logo, yellow on black, centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice – breathy: “Melrose”</td>
<td>The O.C. logo at top, orange back ground, darker orange divider, black at the bottom. Fade in - white text on middle orange stripe: “Melrose Place”. Hangs in place, sliding a little off centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice – breathy: “Dawson’s”</td>
<td>Fade in – white text on black bottom half of screen “Dawson’s Creek”. Hangs in place, sliding a little off centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The piano introduction to “California” by Phantom Planet begins to play (The O.C. ’s theme song).</td>
<td>Titles fade out. The O.C. logo unfolds in the top left corner on first orange band – two large white letters ‘O.C.’, with ‘The’ in black in the centre of the ‘.O’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice – less breathy: “Coming to Tuesdays, The O.C.”</td>
<td>Black text fades up from the centre of the ‘C’ out. “Coming soon to Tuesdays” Classification details, right hand side, middle orange stripe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Californiaaaaaa”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice – “new age drama”</td>
<td>Cut to black screen Titles fade in, white text ‘new age drama’ a dot, like a suspended full stop appears Titles fade in, white text ‘same bitchin’ attitude’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice – “same bitchin’ attitude”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male voice – “It’s coming to Ten”</td>
<td>Cut back to orange, orange and black screen. The O.C. logo (as above) unfolds in left hand corner, same place as before. Titles unfold – black text on top orange band emerging from the ‘C’ (as ‘Coming soon to Tuesdays’ did above) ‘is coming’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female voice – stage whisper “Where it belongs”</td>
<td>Bottom right hand corner of black section, white Ten logo unfolds from right. Title below it, white text ‘…where it belongs’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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