As the World Turns

in a Convergence Culture

by

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ABSTRACT

The American daytime serial drama is among the oldest television genres and remains a vital part of the television lineup for ABC and CBS as what this thesis calls an *immersive story world*. However, many within the television industry are now predicting that the genre will fade into obscurity after two decades of declining ratings. This study outlines how the soap opera industry is and could be further adapting to the technological and social changes of a *convergence culture* to maintain and revitalize the genre's relevance for viewers and advertisers alike.

CBS/Procter and Gamble Productions/TeleVest's *As the World Turns* will serve as a case study for these changes. This project examines how the existing fan base plays an active role in gaining and maintaining new fans by researching historical and contemporary examples of social relationships that fans form with other fans and the show itself. In addition to looking at how these fan communities operate, this thesis focuses on how soap operas have adapted and might adapt to alternate revenue models such as product placement, capitalize on their vast content archives, and tell stories through multiple media formats. The study concludes that soap operas should be managed as brands and not ephemeral television content because of their permanence in the television landscape, that fans outside the target advertising demographic should be empowered as proselytizers for the show, and that a transgenerational storytelling approach best utilizes the power of the genre to tell its stories.

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About the Author

Sam Ford is a June 2007 Master of Science candidate in the Program in Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has been a student at MIT since 2005. He previously received a Bachelor of Arts from Western Kentucky University in 2005 with majors in English (writing) from the Department of English, mass communication and news/editorial journalism from the School of Journalism and Broadcasting, and communication studies from the Department of Communication. He also held a minor in film studies. During his four years at WKU from 2001 to 2005, he worked as a professional journalist for the Andy Anderson Corporation, Craig Williams Creative, the Kentucky Associated Press, and the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at WKU.

Ford remains a columnist for *The Ohio County Times-News*, located in Hartford, Ky., and a freelance journalist. During his time at MIT, he has worked with the MIT Convergence Culture Consortium as a researcher, writing white papers and running the consortium's public blog and internal newsletter. The consortium brings together graduate students, MIT faculty, leading academics, and corporate partners from the media industries to discuss the changing technological and social climate of the media. His white papers have included a detailed look at the activities of fan communities, an ethnography of media consumption in a student dormitory, and a case study of tape trading behaviors among pro wrestling fans.

While at WKU, Ford co-taught a freshman seminar for the School of Journalism and Broadcasting students and a special topics media research class on professional wrestling. In Spring 2007, he taught Topics in Comparative Media: American Professional Wrestling for the Program in Comparative Media Studies at MIT.

His essay "Mick Foley: Pro Wrestling and the Contradictions of the Contemporary American Hero" is set to be published in the forthcoming book *Bodies of Discourse: Sports Stars, Media, and the Global Public*, and his essay "Pinning Down Fan Involvement: An Examination of the Multiple Modes of Engagement for Pro Wrestling Fans" is under revision for the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

Ford's previous work on soap operas was presented at the 2007 National Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference on 06 April 2007, and portions of this thesis were presented at MIT at the Media in Transition 5 Conference on 28 April 2007.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to three of the most important women in my life, all of whom have shared my passion for the soap opera genre in general and *As the World Turns* in particular: first, my grandmother, Beulah Hillard, whose longtime love of her "story" fostered a multigenerational family interest in the narrative of *As the World Turns*; my mother, Betty Ford, whose continued active viewing of *ATWT* throughout my childhood and adolescence created a bond with the characters in fictional Oakdale, Ill., that has lasted throughout my life; and my wife, Amanda Ford, who has helped me make *ATWT* part of the regular evening ritual in the Ford household.

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Chapter One:

An Introduction to Immersive Story Worlds and the Soap Opera

My History with Immersive Story Worlds

Growing up an only child with a stay-at-home mom, I spent my childhood days engrossed in what I have come to call *immersive story worlds*. In truth, I began my relationship with popular culture with no more than an antenna connection and a collection of toys. For me, it was G.I. Joe. I have never fancied being a military man and really do not remember too many playground days spent pretending to be a soldier, but the world of G.I. Joe fascinated me nonetheless. The dozens of characters I found for $2.97 apiece at Wal-Mart drove my interest in the alternate military reality these characters inhabited. Every toy included a biography of that character on the back, which I clipped and kept—in alphabetical order no less. I ended up with a group of friends who also collected and kept up with the world of G.I. Joe.

My love for G.I. Joe soon spilled over into the Marvel *G.I. Joe* comic books, where these characters came to life. I read those comics until the covers fell off, hoping to learn everything I could about each character and apply that knowledge to the games I played as well. I soon became engaged with the whole Marvel comic book universe, and I spent most of my $10 weekly allowance following the weekly or monthly adventures of Spider-Man, the X-Men, Hulk, and a slew of other colorful characters. Yet again, I found contemporaries at school who shared my interest in comic books. They wanted to be comic book artists, and I wanted to be a comics writer, so we set about to create a comic book universe of our own.

At the same time, I was becoming familiar with another immersive story world, that of the superstars of the World Wrestling Federation, now known as WWE. My cousins had long

told me the legends of Hulk Hogan and "Macho Man" Randy Savage and The Ultimate Warrior, but I didn't know where to tune in to glimpse into this universe from a syndication window. However, my parents' decision to get a VCR opened me up to a slew of videotapes my cousins mailed to me and the growing collection of wrestling shows available at the local rental shops and convenience stores. Finally, I even convinced my neighbors to let me come over and start watching the Monday night wrestling shows since they had cable television. The Marvel superhero universe and the World Wrestling Federation were my media fascinations, and they both fit into this category I now write about as *immersive story worlds*, a concept I will flesh out over the next several pages.

Enter *As the World Turns*

There was yet another *immersive story world* that I had been involved with as well, one that I was not completely cognizant of being a fan of at first. It was what my grandmother always referred to as "the story" and probably the narrative in which I first came to know a slew of familiar faces, an *immersive story world* that predated my interest in G.I. Joes, super heroes, or professional wrestling. That narrative was Procter & Gamble Productions' *As the World Turns* (*ATWT*), a daily daytime serial drama that has been on the air since 1956. For as long as I can remember, *ATWT* was a part of my weekday afternoon, and the familiar faces of the Hughes family, joined by the evil James Stenbeck, the scheming Dr. John Dixon, the incomparable Lucinda Walsh, the down-to-earth Snyders, the lively Lisa Grimaldi, and a host of other characters were regular parts of my childhood.

I may not have realized that I was immersed in the fictional world of Oakdale, Illinois, until I started wondering what was happening to those characters when the school year began and I was no longer home in the afternoons. By the mid-1990s, I convinced my mom to record

the show so I could watch it when I came home from elementary school every day. In fact, I was a somewhat closeted soap opera viewer all the way through most of high school. By my junior year, though, I had started a night job after school and lost contact with the residents of Oakdale.

By the end of my senior year of high school, I was married. My distance from *ATWT* didn't last, though, and my wife and I were dedicated viewers of the soap opera again a couple of years into college. With so many familiar faces and back stories to remember, it was hard not to get pulled back into the narrative and eventually join fan communities to find out what had happened in the world of *ATWT* while I had been away. My continued interest in this show is closely connected to the social relationships I built around it. The conversations I would join with my mother and grandmother about "the story" have continued over dinner every night with my wife. In the process, I have come to understand soap viewing as a social activity, which helped tremendously in understanding and becoming a part of the fan community built around *ATWT*. As Jennifer Hayward writes, "soaps are ground breaking most of all in the community of viewers they produce."[1]

Because such social viewing practices are built around soap opera narratives and because the meaning and history of these texts rely on the audience's interpretation and memory, the artistry of the soap opera can only be understood through the eyes of the audience, emphasizing Robert C. Allen's concept of a "reader-oriented poetics" for soaps, which establishes that the soap opera text empowers the viewer to construct his or her own meanings.[2] Through that

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[1] Hayward, Jennifer, "Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Soap Opera," *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text Reader* Second Edition, Ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003, 507-521, 520. Originally published in Hayward, Jennifer, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera*, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997.

[2] Allen, Robert C., *Speaking of Soap Operas*, Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1985, 61-95.

audience-driven social approach, then, it is equally as important to understand that soap opera narratives are driven not just by the relationship between viewer and text and among viewers themselves but also by the characters themselves. The strength of this genre lies in relationships, including the relationships characters have with one another, the relationships between these characters and the fans, and the relationships fans build around these texts. Soap operas are hindered by plot-driven storytelling because the permanent nature of the soap opera, with no off-season and 250 original hours of programming each year, emphasizes slow storytelling that examines the emotion and nuances of events rather than just "what happens." Comic books and pro wrestling are personality and character-driven genres as well, and good storytelling is consistently determined by the fan base of each genre as those in which the relationships among characters (and the performances of the actors or artists depicting those characters) are logical, well-written, and fleshed out.

These three narrative types—the daytime serial drama, the pro wrestling world, and the DC and Marvel universes—share a set of similarities I have grouped under this category of *immersive story worlds*. By this term, I mean that these properties have a serial storytelling structure, multiple creative forces which author various parts of the story, a sense of long-term continuity, a deep character backlog, contemporary ties to the media property's complex history, and a sense of permanence. I will examine each of these aspects over the next few pages.

This thesis concentrates particularly on the *immersive story world* of *As the World Turns* and its current status in a shifting media landscape. My interest in this soap opera text is heavily tied to my fascination with this type of *immersive story world* in general, in which one can never truly "master" the material. *Immersive story worlds* provide a space particularly rich for interaction between a text and a vibrant fan community that critiques, energizes, maintains, and

fills in the gaps of that official canon. Further, as Henry Jenkins writes in *Convergence Culture*, the "extension, synergy, and franchising (that) are pushing media industries to embrace convergence" have long been a part of these narrative worlds in one fashion or another, so that these marginalized texts have a lot to offer for informing other media producers.[3] These worlds are unusually ripe for transmedia content, user-generated content, and a wealth of online fan forums. However, they also generate a distinct niche fan environment that is both energized by and suffers from being considered somewhat fringe, even as each has long been a massive cultural phenomenon. In order to understand exactly what is meant by *immersive story worlds*, however, it is important to examine each characteristic of this categorization.

Seriality

All three types of worlds within this category share a strong sense of seriality. While soap operas have best taken advantage of seriality and have made that never-ending unfolding of drama part of their very definition, they are often tied together with telenovelas and other forms of melodrama which do not have the same type of long-term seriality that soaps have. Soap operas can master storylines that unfold over weeks, months, or even years in a way few other texts can.[4] For instance, there is a long-running feud on *As the World Turns* between characters Kim Hughes and Susan Stewart that began after Dr. Stewart slept with Kim's husband Bob—back in 1990. That plot point often creeps up in current storylines and will not be forgotten in the show's history. Similarly, in 2006, the explosively popular Luke and Laura

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[3] Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York UP, 2006, 19.

[4] Several scholars have written about how the seriality of soap operas set them apart from other television forms. See Gledhill, Christine, "Speculation on the Relationship Between Soap Opera and Melodrama," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 14.2 (1992), 103-124; and Wittebols, James H., *The Soap Opera Paradigm: Television Programming and Corporate Priorities*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

supercouple from *General Hospital* in the 1970s were reunited for a short time in storylines,

drawing on 25 years of history for the couple, still portrayed by the same actors. As Robert C.

Allen emphasizes, the impact and meaning of a soap opera is lost in any approach that looks at

an individual episode rather than looking at the soap opera as an ongoing text.[5] Any examination

of an individual episode is automatically going to be taken out of context, if the history leading

up to a particular episode and the future events which that episode anticipates are not taken into

account as well. While this danger of taking individual episodes out-of-context is true of any

ongoing story to a degree, story worlds such as soap operas that generate a massive amount of

serialized narrative are particularly vulnerable to these dangers.

Over time, seriality has become a conscious part of creating *immersive story worlds*, and

strong utilization of quality serial storytelling was not a requirement of any of these media forms

in their infancy but rather the way in which creators constructed these worlds over time.   For

instance, according to Bradford W. Wright in *Comic Book Nation*, Marvel deserves much credit

for creating a loosely cohesive narrative universe.[6] Many comic book stories before that time

were each standalone tales, with the characters returned to a static point at the end of each issue,

from which the next story would drive from as well. Even after the creation of the Marvel

Universe, creators often failed to capitalize on the potential for seriality, and most monthly

installments were isolated stories. However, Marvel titles featured an increasing number of

crossovers and ongoing storylines, not just in the battle between good and evil but in the personal

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[5] In his chapter on establish a reader-oriented poetics, Robert C. Allen writes further about these
issues. Allen, Robert C., *Speaking of Soap Operas*, Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P,
1985, 61-95. Allen describes how an understanding of the artistry of the soap opera is only
possible through the eyes of the audience.
[6] Wright, Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*,
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.

lives of the characters as well—work relationships, romantic entanglements, and supporting family members whose personal dramas were as compelling at times as the main narrative.

One can see how important seriality is particularly in the Marvel Ultimate universe that has become popular in recent years. At the beginning of the decade, Marvel decided to relaunch the stories of several of its characters in contemporary times, telling familiar stories of the origins of Marvel staples like Spider-Man while being able to map out a more coherent continuity. Now that the *Ultimate Spider-Man* title has passed its centennial issue, the new universe is building its own continuity and makes particularly good use of seriality. Most of these series focus on the personal lives of primary characters as much or more than the hero's battle with super-villains, and the various parallel plots involving the personal lives of these characters are woven together so well that the continuity from issue-to-issue is much more developed that comic book titles in previous decades.

The rise of the graphic novel relates closely to these changes. The strength of the Marvel universe is that it has created a more viable archiving system than that of pro wrestling or soap opera, which are still struggling with ways to make previous content readily available for viewers. The popularity of the graphic novel has given fans an easy way to collect and archive their favorite comic book runs, and the format of the graphic novel—grouping together multiple issues from a comic book run—encourages writers to work even harder at developing serial storytelling from issue-to-issue.

Pro wrestling has long used seriality in booking various wrestling feuds. Television shows were used to create storylines to make people want to go to the arenas and pay for a ticket to see the matches that were set up from television interviews and angles. Often, a contested ending between two wrestlers at one show made fans want to return to the arena next month to

see the rematch and the drama continue between two competitors. For instance, at Madison Square Garden in 1981, then WWE Champion Bob Backlund was defending his title against a grappler named Greg "The Hammer" Valentine. During the melee, the referee was accidentally hit and knocked to the mat. The referee saw that Backlund had his challenger pinned and counted the three. Because he still had not recovered from his own fall, the referee did not distinguish which wrestler had scored the pinfall (both men were wearing the same color tights), so when Valentine started celebrating as if he had won the match, the referee handed him the championship belt. Backlund, of course, contested the finish, and the decision was made to have a rematch for the held up title when the WWE returned to Madison Square Garden the next month. In this case, there was both a standalone storyline on that particular card and also an ongoing story that fans would return to see from one month to the next.

However, the WWE and other wrestling organizations have developed the serial format of wrestling over the years much further, especially as the television product became more important in itself rather than just driving fans to watch the wrestlers perform in person. The writers discovered that the way to get fans to tune in from one week to the next and purchase the culminating pay-per-view events was to build ongoing feuds in serial fashion, with each episode always pointing toward the next and each pay-per-view not only producing the climax for some feuds but creating ongoing chapters in others or creating new storylines that would play out in the coming months.

Multiple Creators

All three examples of *immersive story worlds* provided here are too large for any one creator to accomplish. Each of these worlds has been in the control of many writers and producers over the years, with no one creator necessarily being THE defining vision of what this

world means. In each case, there is a sense of the narrative world having a life of its own and being bigger than any particular creative regime. The fact that all three of these narrative worlds have stood the test of time is evidenced in the way they have weathered passing off from one creative team to another. Although Stan Lee is often credited with being a defining force in the initial creation of the modern Marvel Universe, along with Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby and others, many writers, artists, and editors have helped shape the trajectory of these characters through the following decades. Not only have various creative regimes had control of an individual series over the years, there are creative teams working on each title within the Marvel Universe at any one time, meaning that—although Marvel as a content producer has centralized control over the official narrative universe of its characters, there is still a decentralized process of creating the Marvel Universe and fleshing out all its corners, developed through the many creative forces who have passed through the company over what is now almost 50 years.

Soap operas may have a defining creator, such as Irna Phillips and Bill Bell and Agnes Nixon, and the creative vision of each of these people has often helped define the long-term feel for many of these shows. However, the number of writers who work on a show at any one time, from the creative influence of the executive producer to the overall stories of the head writer(s) to the way that is broken down into scenes and dialogue, demonstrates the hundreds of creators who have had an influence on daytime serial stories through the years. Consider how much impact the thousands of actors who have appeared on these shows have had as well, in addition to directors and other creative forces, and there is certainly no clear "author" of any of these soap opera texts. Even if fans have particular writing teams that they have preferred over others or certain periods of a show that they consider "golden eras," there is no single writer who can be seen as the single defining source of a show, especially once it has been on the air for decades.

As for pro wrestling, the fact that wrestling narratives often spilled over from territory to territory and that wrestlers who retain the copyright to their own characters would jump from one show to the other ensures that, in addition to the constant shifting of creative forces within the bookers of any particular wrestling organization, there was also a meta text that fans would follow which branched across every wrestling show in the country. In the regional days of wrestling, fans would follow characters as they moved across the country, being written by a variety of creative forces along the way. Now that the WWE is the major show left in wrestling, there are three WWE divisions, each with their own head writer; and there are still alternative wrestling promotions that often take characters who leave the WWE, like TNA wrestling on Spike TV. In addition, the wrestlers themselves are traditionally known for developing many of their own attributes, and the performance of the audience affects every show as well (and audiences often stray from the intent of the people who scripted the reactions they are "supposed" to have on live shows). It's hard to identify who "creates" the final product of any particular wrestling show, much less the ongoing narratives of the various characters.

Long-Term Continuity

Although fans in all three genres would likely sometimes debate that creators care enough about this category of *immersive story worlds*, there is at least some semblance of long-term continuity in developing these worlds. This is what sets the long-term development of iconic characters apart from these continued story worlds, in that these story worlds are only created if there is some idea of prior stories being relevant to the next one rather than a series of adventures that seem completely removed from the next. Continuity is the way writers are often graded in all three genres. Generally, creators in each genre both praise the creative potential gained by such extensive back stories and also complain about the restraints that history places

on their creative abilities when fans are watching their current content closely with how it

measures up to the history of characters and stories. However, since fans know these story

worlds were around long before the current creative team came along and believe that they will

continue to be around long after they are gone, continuity is often considered the most important

aspect of the product, and they see it as their job to uphold it through amassing their collective

intelligence.

Soap operas—because they are the most blatantly serial of the three—is where continuity

matters most.[7] Certain aspects of the genre have been accepted as defying continuity. For

instance, when the actor portraying a central character leaves the show, recasts are sometimes

accepted as necessary evils. Also, fans accept what has been called the Soap Opera Rapid Aging

Syndrome (SORAS). Often, younger characters are SORASed when there is an actor switch,

advancing their age by a couple of years. These changes are often made in order to get

characters to their teenage years more quickly so that more developed stories can be told with

them, and also so that the variety of issues raised with having a younger actor on set can be

avoided. SORASing also often occurs when a character returns to town. If someone leaves for

college, for instance, he or she often returns a few years older than they should be non-soap

opera aging standards. For instance, Tom Hughes may have been born in 1961, but he somehow

ended up in Vietnam before the end of the war. Various viewers combine their collective

intelligence to construct both when characters first appeared or were born on the show and also

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[7] The importance of this continuity has been documented by many, including former *ATWT* head writer Douglas Marland, who was beloved by a vast majority of the fan community and whose run with *ATWT* is considered another important "era" of the show. *Soap Opera Digest* published Marland's list of "how not to wreck a show," which included "learn the history of the show," "don't *change* a core character," and "build new characters slowly" while making an effort to "tie them in with existing characters." Marland, Douglas, "How Not to Wreck a Show," *Soap Opera Digest*, 27 April 1993, reprinted online at the *Guiding Light* News and Previews fan Web site, http://www.soap-news.com/gl/marland042793.htm.

their apparent current age, comparing this to the age of the actor playing the role, and particularly how the various numbers often do not add up.

Aside from these deviations, however, soap fans expect writers to research the histories of these characters and to write current storylines according to that history. Writers are most often graded with their ability to write characters consistently, both within their own duration with the show and consistent with the long-term history of the show. If characters who have a long history appear in a scene together and do not acknowledge their shared past or if a long-time family member no longer on the show seems to be forgotten by the current writing team altogether, veteran fans are vocal about what they feel is poorly researched writing. Conversely, if writers make subtle references to important stories in a character's past—as long as those comments are relevant to the current story and do not get in the way of contemporary fans' enjoyment of the story—writers are generally praised for having shown some degree of mastery of the text.

Soaps writers are often haunted by this legacy and the fact that the fans collectively have much stronger knowledge of the product than they do. In a Winter 2006 interview with *Soaps In Depth*, *As the World Turns* head writer Jean Passanante complained about the impossible learning curve involved with trying to write characters.[8] Not surprisingly, *ATWT* fans bashed her for having been with the show for years and still not seeming to be able to dedicate the time to learn the history as well as she should.[9] Since these fans are amassing their collective intelligence to understand the continuity of the show for free based solely on their own interest in

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[8] *Soaps In Depth* is a weekly soaps magazine from Bauer Publishing that looks particularly at CBS soaps or ABC soaps in detail. More information on the publication is presented in chapter two.

[9] "Jean Passanante's interview in SID," *ATWT*-Spoilers and Rumors, PGP SoapBox: The Official PGP Message Boards, first post 29 November 2006. Latest post 07 December 2006, http://www.pgpphoto.com:3864/showthread.php?t=21740.

the narrative, they hold the people who are paid to be the gatekeepers for the story world to higher standards.

Pro wrestling has been notoriously lax in its use of continuity, especially with turning characters from good to bad and often having rivals one year as partners the next. However, fans still have long-term memories and try to make sense of the narrative, even when writers drop the ball. The WWE writers do sometimes make very effective use of history, however, especially in creating iconic moments at events that are then drawn upon again and again. The art of slowly building a feud, beginning with subtle hints and then arguments and then a major clash, with several plot twists along the way, is the way legendary characters and matches are created in wrestling, and they are most often successful when the writers have the strongest grasp on maintaining continuity with the characters and the feud.

Comic books have to maintain a somewhat slippery use of continuity. Because the characters cannot age with real time and must somehow be contemporary while also maintaining a degree of timelessness, there have been plenty of contradictions along the way. Particularly because comics are not tied to actors like the pro wrestling and soap opera worlds, there is more opportunities to create alternate universes and several versions of the Marvel Universe being produced simultaneously, for instance, so that there are multiple continuities from the Marvel creative team. Fans are often known for trying to police continuity, and Marvel's interactive section of their comics was known for rewarding readers when they caught continuity slips from the creative team and attempted to come up with their own explanations of how that seemingly discordant event somehow makes sense in the larger Marvel Universe narrative. Marvel writers sometimes tried to emphasize continuity by making random references to old issues, but the best use of continuity comes when writers demonstrate a mastery of the history of the universe and

make reference to prior events when they are germane to the current story. Prolific contemporary Marvel creator Brian Michael Bendis considers maintaining the continuity of the universe both a blessing and a curse, giving him headaches but providing a wealth of inspiration from the past of each character.[10]

In all three genres, fans seem to dislike the blatant rewriting of history within a universe that is supposed to be cohesive even more than the ignoring of history. For instance, fans of *All My Children* were enraged when one of the most bold narratives in the soap opera's history, character Erica Kane's 1973 abortion, was reinterpreted through a storyline in which the fetus had been secretly put into the body of another woman who was not able to have children, so that the landmark aborted fetus of *AMC* past was actually alive after all. While this storyline defied the laws of science more than contradicting the actual stories, fans were upset because they felt this use of history trivialized one of the most important historical narratives in Pine Valley. Daniel R. Coleridge from *TV Guide* wrote when *AMC* head writer Megan McTavish was fired after this series of stories that "McTavish has recently earned the ire of *AMC*'s fans by screwing with the show's history, throwing continuity out the window and assassinating our favorite characters—both literally and figuratively."[11]

Coleridge's outrage echoes the points that DC Comics President Paul Levitz made at the MIT Comparative Media Studies/Convergence Culture Consortium Futures of Entertainment conference in November 2006, in which he talked about the difference between *sincere mistakes*

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[10] "Write Now: State of the Bendis," Interview with Brian Michael Bendis conducted by Danny Fingeroth and transcribed by Steven Tice, *Newsarama*, 23 October 2006, http://www.newsarama.com/TwoMorrows/WriteNow/14/BendisWriteNow14.html.
[11] Coleridge, Daniel R., "*All My Children* Head Writer Fired!" *TV Guide* Editors Blog, 28 February 2007, http://community.tvguide.com/blog-entry/TVGuide-Editors-Blog/Soaps-News/Children-Head-Writer/800010025.

and *insincere mistakes*.[12] *Sincere mistakes* are slips in continuity that fans will forgive and that are attributed to the difficulty with being completely true to such a massive narrative text. *Insincere mistakes* are blatant rewriting or cases in which continuity is not maintained from what fans perceive as a lack of interest in trying to make the current product consistent with its past. In short, if two pro wrestlers are going to fight for the first time in history and the WWE commentator says that they have never teamed on *Monday night RAW* before, it might be a *sincere mistake* if a longtime viewer points out that they have a tape from back in 2001 in which they teamed up in a mid-card match. On the other hand, if the commentators claim a match between two wrestlers has never happened before, and the two had been heated rivals in a long series of matches only a few years before, fans would find this an *insincere mistake* and an attempt to ignore or rewrite history. Fan communities may find *sincere mistakes* annoying, but *insincere mistakes* are even worse for continuity than ignoring history.

Character Backlog

All three story worlds have many more characters in their histories than can be featured at any one time, yet fan activities focus on understanding and cataloguing the wealth of characters in the universe. Each character backlog is indexed and managed in much different ways and for divergent purposes, however. For instance, most soap operas have hundreds or even thousands of characters who formerly appeared on the show. Since most of these daytime serial dramas have been on the air for decades, some of these characters eventually lose any relevance for the contemporary product and are only interesting to fans who are interested in the history of the show. However, a large number of the soaps characters in the backlog are directly

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[12] Levitz, Paul, "Transmedia Properties" Panel featured speaker, along with Michael Lebowitz and Alex Chisholm, MIT Futures of Entertainment Conference, Cambridge, MA, 17 November 2006. Video podcast is available at http://cms.mit.edu/podcasts/C3FOE2006/c3foe06_2006-11-17_session3_transmedia.mov.

relevant to storylines that are still ongoing. Often, brothers and sisters, children, aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, ex-husbands and wives, of current characters are no longer on the cast but must logically be acknowledged in current storylines. For fans, this means that the current official product they are watching on television is only a small part of the whole story world, and there is always the potential for characters who have not been killed (and sometimes even those who have) to return to the show or at least to be mentioned from time-to-time. In other words, the fictional world of Oakdale or Springfield or Genoa City or Salem or Llanview is much bigger than the town itself and its current inhabitants, and fans have that broader view in mind when they question what these various characters would think about storylines or if they will return to the show for the wedding of a relative.

Wrestling's character backlog is more complicated in its relevance, as competitors only have so many years in which they can perform at their physical prime. Legends in wrestling are often still used, either for nostalgia's sake or else as supporting players in the characters of the modern product (whether as commentators or managers or officials who play a part in the current drama, or as returning recurring characters from time-to-time). In wrestling, former competitors are built up as legends and often drawn upon for comparisons with modern stars or to evoke the history of the narrative. The nostalgia for this backlog of characters helps fuel publications, DVD releases, and the WWE 24/7 On Demand product, for instance, which airs "classic" matches featuring these various legends who may now be members of the WWE Hall of Fame. I will return to the WWE 24/7 On Demand business model in particular in the fifth chapter.

The Marvel and DC universes likely have the most expansive character lists of all, and returning characters in these worlds are much more fluid, since these characters are not tied to portrayers. Any super hero or villain from the vast reserve of the history of each universe can be

drawn upon at any time, and some of the best work of contemporary creators have been in restoring the validity of lesser-known characters from the past through current storylines, such as with Bendis' *Alias* or the Marvel *Black Panther* series, or DC's *52*, in which several relatively minor DC characters become the featured cast. As Henry Jenkins writes, this modern revisiting of neglected characters from a comic universe's history in an alternate or contemporary text can reconceptualize characters "to up their 'coolness' factor," while still playing off the knowledge fans have of those characters in the long-standing narrative.[13]

Contemporary Ties to a Deep History

As I have alluded to several times in the previous sections, the art of an *immersive story world* often lies in tying events from the rich pasts of these narrative universes into the contemporary product. Bringing up relevant back story and tying it into the current plights of featured characters highlights what many fans consider the art of creation within *immersive story worlds*. Particularly in the soap opera world, fans both simultaneously praise good use of history on the writers' part and, perhaps more often, use their communal knowledge of history to drive their collective creativity. The fans watch the story unfold each day and then go online to create an historical perspective on a character's action that day, both to rate the writers' use of continuity and also to help flesh out and unpack meanings they see hidden in the text based on knowledge of the characters' past, or else point out the contradictions in characters' current actions or statements based on their histories.

For instance, when the characters of Mike and Katie Kasnoff broke up on *As the World Turns* in November 2006, Mike was indignant that Katie had slept with her ex-husband. Many

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[13] Jenkins, Henry, "Best Contemporary Mainstream Superhero Comics Writer: Brian Michael Bendis," *Beautiful Things in Popular Culture*, Ed. Alan McKee, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007: 15-32.

fans sided with Mike in the fight, pointing out the many times Katie had treated other men this way in prior relationships. Conversely, other fans pointed out Mike's hypocrisy, based on the fact that he reunited with Katie while still married to Jennifer, thus making his moralistic tirade about fidelity somewhat ironic, since the most recent version of his and Katie's relationship began with an infidelity. In December 2006, when *ATWT*'s Craig Montgomery had been shot in the chest and was lying in a hospital bed, telling everyone around him how Dusty Donovan was a terrible human being because he had shot Craig in cold blood and how Craig would never do something so vicious, veteran fans could alert more recent viewers to the fact that Craig had actually shot a man a few years ago in a crime that he was never punished for nor even suspected by the majority of people in town. While the show never gave any blatant evidence of the hypocrisy of either man's claim, the viewers were able to fill in the pieces for each other based on the seemingly endless wealth of material.

What sets these worlds apart is that these histories are so vast that no one person can ever truly master the text. Veteran fans may serve as partial memories, but no one of them can fill in all the pieces of the puzzle. Web sites that provide back stories, or books that attempt to summarize major plot developments over the years, would be impossible for one person to internalize and—even if one could—still only provides a summary and not the rich details of each character and plot. These three worlds are set apart because there can be no expert who can quote almost every comic book or episode or pay-per-view. Not even a Rainman-style memory could recite every villain Spider-Man has faced in order, much less all of the developments of the Marvel universe, nor could they rattle off the results of every episode of *Monday Night RAW* for the past decade.

In the wrestling world, fans are equally as obsessed with filling in backstory, not necessarily always to be directly relevant to the current feuds but to draw comparisons between a feud or match of contemporary competitors with their predecessors. Wrestling fans have major web projects such as Kayfabe Memories,[14] newsletters like *Wrestling as We Liked It*,[15] and a wealth of books from wrestling historians, wrestling journalists, and a growing number of memoirs from wrestling legends, all of whom provide a small piece of the puzzle of the history of the meta pro wrestling text, even if many are unreliable narrators. This act of preservation and navigation of wrestling's deep history has been important to fans both because promoters have often ignored history and also because many major matches in wrestling history are no longer available, since arena shows were rarely taped and weekly television shows in most territories were not valued and often taped over with the next week's show.

For comic books, the massive archive mean more than sales for professional collectors. The backstory fleshes out the histories of characters and their nuances, as well as relationships with supporting characters. There is a feeling that the subtle secrets to a character's history may be hidden in the pages of the archives and that understanding the present requires a reader's own willingness to dig into the past. In newer projects like the Marvel Ultimate universe or other Marvel or DC Universes that provide alternatives to the main universe, there is also a need to read the narratives from the main universe in order to compare the parallel stories. For instance, Bendis' recreation of many of the important Spider-Man plots over the years is a much richer experience for those who have already read and are intimately familiar with the original, thus meaning that Marvel and DC have an even deeper wealth of content if fans want to be able to understand alternative universes within the Marvel and DC worlds to their fullest extent. Of

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[14] *Kayfabe Memories*, http://www.kayfabememories.com/.

[15] *The Wrestling As We Liked It Papers*. http://www.wrestlingclassics.com/wawli/.

course, even if a fan were to collect every extant issue available in digital or tangible form, there would be no way to internalize that amount of material, even for the most ardent fan.

Permanence

Some of the categories listed above may also apply to some novel series, primetime television shows, online worlds, or other narrative universes. However, what these three share that perhaps no other particular media product does is a feeling of permanence. With the amount of time these narrative universes have lasted so far, there is a feeling of fans that these media properties will long outlive the current creative forces in charge of their gatekeeping, that the product will continue to have an audience long after the current fan base is gone, even. This sets these three worlds apart from any other narrative format, since a decade is considered a long run in primetime television and four movies is considered a feat for a film franchise. Since these worlds have been around for decades, it is important to emphasize—as P. David Marshall does when writing about a related phenomenon of "the intertextual commodity"—that this concept has been around for some time and is perhaps just more overt in today's convergence culture.[16]

Some worlds—like *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter*—will likely live on in varying degrees either through descendant series that bear little resemblance to their past with hiatuses in between or else through fan fiction and fan videos, but soap operas, pro wrestling, and the Marvel and DC universes are the only *immersive story worlds* which have been running for decades now, without any hiatus, and with the continuous output being solely at the hands of the official rights holders to the narrative world.

Many comic book characters have produced thousands of issues by now, with some characters having three or four dedicated titles to their individual story within the Marvel and DC

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[16] Marshall, P. David, "The New Intertextual Commodity," *The New Media Book*, Ed. Dan Harries, London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2002, 69-82, 69.

universe, not counting the alternate universes like the ultimate title runs a character may be involved in as well. While fans know that there may be switches in creative forces or major changes in the stories of characters or even certain characters who wax and wane in prominence, there is a semblance that the current narrative world will continue and that the fans' lifetime investment in reading the comics will continue to be rewarded with no risk of sunk cost in a story world that eventually comes to an end. While some have speculated that the Ultimate story world may eventually replace the old Marvel narrative universe, the two worlds are running side-by-side at this point, and fans will only become fully invested in the Marvel Ultimate universe if and when they feel that the wealth of material in that world so far surpasses the confusing original Marvel world that they are willing to make a switch. At this point, though, both worlds are continuing to gain a deeper reserve every month, as fans immerse themselves in both.

The very concept of pro wrestling seems odd, a con game that fans know is a ruse yet watch both for its narrative potential and its athletic exhibition. The fact that this version of professional wrestling is at least a century old now, though, gives fans the feeling that, even if a current promotion folds, pro wrestling will live on. Since pro wrestling's history is tied to actual athletes and careers, no one company comprises all of wrestling history, so fans feel that wrestling will remain a staple of American and international culture for centuries to come. That feeling of permanence drives much of the obsession with archiving "wrestling history."

Soap operas are often called "worlds without end." Now that some shows have been on television every day for more than 50 years, fans often feel that there is or at least should be a permanent niche for these shows. In recent years, with slowly declining ratings, some fans realize that may not be the case. They blame what they see as incompetent marketers and lazy creative regimes as ruining many shows, and they worry about rumors for cancellation for

various shows. Still, even amidst a looming concern that the network might pull the plug, fans

consume the daily text as if there is no chance for this to happening, talking often about the

future as well as the past and seeing these narrative worlds of *One Life to Live* or *The Young and

the Restless* as a permanent part of their lives.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the Marvel or DC universe would still be alive and

well a century from now. There is an increasing fear that Procter and Gamble Productions or

Corday or Bell or a variety of others will decide to pull the plugs within a few years, much less

decades. And what's to keep wrestling from going the way of roller derby or various public

carnival events that—once a staple of popular culture—is either no longer a part of our culture at

all or else an historicized form of popular art? Nevertheless, the fans, performers, and producers

of these shows have participated in these worlds for so long that a looming end does not haunt

them in the same way that the producers of a primetime television series must be thinking about

a semi-distant ending shortly after they have begun.

Procter & Gamble Productions

Since this thesis concentrates specifically on the soap opera world, using *As the World

Turns* as its case study, a brief background of the production history of Procter & Gamble in

general and *ATWT* in particular is in order. Procter & Gamble originally established what

eventually came to be Procter & Gamble Productions in order to find a new way to advertise its

products. Throughout the 1930s, the popularity of soap operas on the radio was established, with

P&G as one of the driving forces in creating these products. The soap opera programming

would air in short blocks, each segment sponsored by a particular household product, with the hope that these dramas could play while women went about their daily housework.[17]

P&G's first major dramatic radio serial was also one of radio's most popular and a program that helped establish the genre, *Ma Perkins*. The show debuted in 1933, sponsored by the P&G product Oxydol and called *Oxydol's Own Ma Perkins*. The show was launched in P&G's home market of Cincinnati, on WLW Radio. The genre took the 15-minute blocks of programming and touted their products as the sponsor that brought the drama to viewers, with a new installment every day. In fact, P&G's efforts in the genre did much to establish the term *soap opera*. *Ma Perkins* remained on the air for a total of 26 years before ending in 1959. By 1937, P&G debuted *The Guiding Light* among four other radio serials. The 15-minute serial became a radio sensation that transitioned onto television in the early 1950s, and the show ran on both radio and television for a while.[18] When it switched to TV in 1951, *GL* was the lowest-rated of the four 15-minute soap operas on the air. By 1953, it was the second-highest rated soap, and it was the number one soap from 1956 until 1958.[19]

As the World Turns debuted in 1956 as the first 30-minute soap opera and redefined the soap opera genre. While the soap took a few months to catch on with viewers, who were used to

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[17] For more on the genre's history on radio, see Edmondson, Madeleine, and David Rounds, *The Soaps: Daytime Serials of Radio and TV*, New York: Stein and Day, 1973. Written from an industry perspective and aimed at casual readers, the book provides a comprehensive history of soaps' development on radio and transfer to television with a few chapters on the rise and decline of radio soap operas.

[18] In January 2007, *Guiding Light* had a show featuring their 70th anniversary that paid tribute to its early popularity on radio, the conversion to television, and the work of Phillips. See Ford, Sam, "*Guiding Light* Celebrates Its 70th Anniversary with a Look Back at Its History on Radio, Television," Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 27 January 2007. http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/01/guiding_light_celebrates_its_7.php.

[19] For more on this time period, see Cassidy, Marsha F., *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s*, Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2005. Cassidy studies the viewing patterns of women during the early days of television and the transfer from radio to television soap operas, focusing significant research on *ATWT* and *GL* creator Irna Phillips.

seeing shows that aired perhaps two 15-minute segments in one day but never 30 continuous

minutes, the show eventually proved that viewers would watch a 30-minute soap opera every

day. After the popularity of *ATWT* began to grow, the 15-minute format disappeared, and no

new soap operas after 1956 were 15 minutes.

By Fall 1958, *ATWT* was the top rated soap opera and went on a streak as the top-rated

soap opera every week from 1959 and throughout the 1960s. While that 12-year streak of being

the top-rated soap every week came to an end in the 1970s, *ATWT* remained the top-rated soap

opera on American television in yearly averages until 1978. In 1975, *ATWT* stopped airing live

and started being taped. Further, videotape editing introduced significant changes to the genre.

Then, in 1976, NBC started the shift to moving its most popular soap operas from 30 minutes a

day to one hour a day, with expanded casts. Now, all but one soap opera is one hour. Increased

competition in daytime and the expansion to an hour for more popular shows led to *ATWT* losing

its ratings lead, and 1978 marked the first year that ABC soap operas ranked most popular, with

All My Children the top show in 1978-1979 and *General Hospital* from the rest of 1979 until

1988. From that point, CBS' *The Young and the Restless* became the most popular show and

remains so to this day, although its rating has dropped along with all the rest of the genre.

While PGP remains tight-lipped about its production realities, and provides little-to-no

public information on its Web site, the division of P&G largely provides the budget for a

production company called TeleVest to produce its programming, which includes both *ATWT*

and *GL*, as well as The People's Choice Awards and a variety of other television and digital

projects. PGP itself chiefly has two employees, head Pat Gentile and Rich Delcore. These two

manage PGP and oversee the operations of TeleVest and are located at the main P&G

headquarters in Cincinnati. TeleVest Daytime Programs is a subsidiary of MediaVest, part of the

Starcom MediaVest Group owned by the Paris-based Publicis Groupe network. The production

company, located in New York City, is an amalgamation of various agencies originally hired

separately to work on PGP programming, now consolidated into one company. That company is

solely responsible for creating PGP programming. TeleVest departments include marketing,

publicity, finance, business affairs, human resources, and the crews for each show. About 300

people work to put together both shows on any given day.

As the World Turns

As the World Turns changed the format of the television soap opera. Under the

supervision of Irna Phillips, one of the "auteurs" of television rarely discussed in "mainstream"

accounts of television history, *ATWT* popularized many of what are now considered defining

elements of the genre. In addition to being the first show airing daily for 30 minutes, the soap

opera featured slow pacing, an emphasis on dialogue, and the now-stereotyped camera angles.[20]

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[20] Marsha Cassidy writes about the importance of Phillips' insistence on creating a form in which women could participate in viewing without needing the visual constantly in Cassidy, Marsha F., *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s.* Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2005. Other scholars have written on the staples of televisual storytelling in soap operas. Bernard Timberg writes that most critics cannot understand the soap opera because they cannot make sense of its use of nonliterary and nonverbal communication forms in Timberg, Bernard, "The Rhetoric of the Camera in Television Soap Opera," *Television: The Critical View,* Fourth Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New York: Oxford UP, 1987, 164-178, 64. Also published in *Journal of American Culture* 6.3, 1983, 76-81. He examines scenes from *All My Children* and *General Hospital* to demonstrate a "rhetoric" based on the show's camera techniques and sound conventions. Jeremy Butler focuses on the style of *ATWT* in particular in Butler, Jeremy, "Notes on the Soap Opera Apparatus: Televisual Style and *As the World Turns*," *Cinema Journal* 25.3 (Spring 1986), 53-70. Butler writes about a lack of work on understanding the visual style of soap opera, focusing on the use of space, editing and the concept of time, and the use of sound through dialogue, music, and noise on soaps, focusing particularly on how time can be manipulated between scenes and episodes but not during them. This aesthetic approach is also taken in portions of Intintoli, Michael James, *Taking Soaps Seriously: The World of* Guiding Light, New York: Praeger, 1984; Geraghty, Christine, "The Aesthetic Experience: Soap Opera," *Television Times: A Reader*, Ed. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, London: Arnold, 1996, 88-97; and Modleski, Tania, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas: Notes on a Feminine Narrative Form," *Film Quarterly* 33.1 (Autumn 1979), 12-21.

For that reason, many soap historians would consider *ATWT* the most significant soap opera in American television history. Throughout its now 50-year run on CBS, *ATWT* has survived important changes—the switch to color, the conversion from live to taped television, the shift to an hour daily format, and fluctuating ideas about what topics the genre should cover, oscillating from family drama to romantic escapist fare to tackling controversial social issues or some combination of the three. The show focuses on a number of families in Oakdale, Ill., outside of Chicago, particularly the Hughes, Stewart, Snyder, Montgomery, and Ryan families.

Today, *ATWT* remains an award-winning soap, often recognized with writing and production awards at the Daytime Emmys. While *Guiding Light* has phased out many of its long-term characters (most characters considered "veterans" on the show today debuted with *Guiding Light* in the late 1970s or early 1980s), *ATWT* has retained not only the greatest number of long-term characters but also many of the actors who have defined those characters. The most impressive acting career may be Helen Wagner's, with her long-time portrayal of Nancy Hughes. Wagner is listed by the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest portrayal of a character by a single actor in history.[21] Wagner spoke the first words on *ATWT*'s debut episode on April 2, 1956, and her character was recently recognized on the April 3, 2006, episode with a lifetime achievement award by her women's club, a show that also served as recognition of Wagner's contributions to *ATWT* over the past 50 years.

Wagner is joined by several cast members who have also been a part of *ATWT* for decades. Don Hastings was the third person to play the role of Bob Hughes, taking the part in 1960. However, he has portrayed Oakdale Memorial's most famous doctor for the past 46 years. That same year, Eileen Fulton originated the role of Lisa Miller (now Lisa Miller Hughes

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[21] See "Longest Time in a Television Role," Guinness World Records Web site, http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/content_pages/record.asp?recordid=52631.

Eldridge Shea Colman McColl Mitchell Grimaldi) and has likewise been on *ATWT* consistently

for the past 46 years. These accomplishments are backed by nine other actors currently on the

show who debuted on *ATWT* 20 years or more ago, some of them starring on the program

consistently without ever leaving the cast. Actors may have left temporarily because of an

illness, a contract dispute, or a film or primetime television role, but most of these stars have

become associated with their characters, portraying them for decades. Marilyn J. Matelski writes

that the ensemble cast is essential to a soap opera because it provides "both continuity and

transition for the audience," in creating a number of long-term figures for the audience to

identify with but no sole focus on a particular character so that the show can move on without

them.[22] With its high number of veteran cast members alongside a talented crew of younger

characters, *ATWT* is particularly poised for transgenerational storytelling.

End of *Days*

     ATWT's sense of "permanence" as a media text might be one of the distinguishing

features of this *immersive story world*, but that promise of an ongoing narrative has been

increasingly brought into question. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, at one point, soaps were

declared "worlds without end." In 1987, Robert C. Allen wrote that "a distinctive feature of the

soap opera text is its presumption of its own immortality [. . .] No one watches a soap opera

with the expectation that one day all of the conflicts and narrative entanglements will be

resolved."[23] However, the guarantee of a show without end is not as reassuring as it once was.

In the late 1990s, PGP cancelled its long-running NBC soap *Another World*, and NBC is taking

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[22] Matelski, Marilyn J., *Soap Operas Worldwide: Cultural and Serial Realities* Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland and Company, 1999, 5.
[23] Allen, Robert C., "Reader-Oriented Criticism," *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Ed. Robert C. Allen, Chapel Hill and London: The U of North Carolina P, 1987, 74-112, 82.

Passions out of its lineup later in 2007,[24] leaving the network with only one remaining soap

opera, *Days of Our Lives*. *Days* has been rumored to be headed for eventual cancellation for

some time now, but the network seems intent on keeping it on the schedule for now.[25] In a 26

January 2007 Bloomberg article by Michael Janofsky, NBC's Jeff Zucker made the assertion that

soap operas are facing "the beginning of the end," based on his canceling *Passions*, a parody-

soap-of-sorts which is both the youngest and the least popular of the nine soap operas currently

on American daytime television.[26] ABC's Brian Frons remains most positive about the genre's

future, particularly because ABC is linked with SOAPnet and owns its own shows, therefore

having a different business model than the other two networks.

Even the rhetoric attributed to CBS Daytime VP Barbara Bloom by Janofsky emphasized

the potential for alternate distribution of soaps, and CBS has the two most popular shows in

overall numbers. The article said Bloom indicated that "soap operas may ultimately disappear

from the networks" but "may still be viewed elsewhere." Echoing Bloom's sentiment, news

broke in late April 2007 that *Passions* would stay alive after its NBC cancellation as original

programming available exclusively on DirecTV. According to *Variety*'s Josef Adalian, NBC

and DirecTV signed a deal for NBC Universal to produce four new episodes per week with a

lower budget.[27] *ATWT* has been on CBS for more than 51 years, but the show's ratings have

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[24] Ford, Sam, "'Less Hitty' Shows and the Cancellation of *Passions*," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 19 January 2007,
http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/01/less_hitty_shows_and_the_cance.php.
[25] Ford, Sam, "End of *DAYS*: What will happen to soap?" MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 30 November 2005,
http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2005/11/end_of_days_what_will_happen_t.php.
[26] Janofsky, Michael, "NBC's Zucker Sees 'Beginning of End' for Network Soap Operas," Bloomberg News, 26 January 2007,
http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aEYKX59PsHN4.
[27] Adalian, Josef, "*Passions* Heads to DirecTV," *Variety* Web site, 24 April 2007,
http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117963754.html?categoryid=14&cs=1.

seen considerable decline in the past two decades.[28] Below is a table outlining the annual

Nielsen ratings for *ATWT* each year data was publicly available:

Year	Average Annual Rating	Year	Average Annual Rating	Year	Average Annual Rating	Year	Average Annual Rating
1956-1957	8.4	1968-1969	13.8	1981-1982	7.4	1993-1994	5.8
1957-1958	8.4	1969-1970	13.6	1982-1983	7.6	1994-1995	5.1
1958-1959	9.8	1970-1971	12.4	1983-1984	7.9	1995-1996	4.4
1959-1960	9.9	1971-1972	11.1	1984-1985	7.1	1996-1997	4.4
1960-1961	10.4	1972-1973	10.6	1985-1986	6.7	1997-1998	4.0
1961-1962	11.9	1973-1974	9.7	1986-1987	7.0	1998-1999	3.8
1962-1963	13.7	1974-1975	10.8	1987-1988	6.6	2000-2001	3.3
1963-1964	15.4	1975-1976	9.4	1988-1989	6.4	2001-2002	3.5
1964-1965	14.5	1976-1977	9.9	1989-1990	5.8	2005-2006	2.7
1965-1966	13.9	1977-1978	8.6	1990-1991	5.7		
1966-1967	12.7	1978-1979	8.2	1991-1992	5.7		
1967-1968	13.6	1979-1980	7.9	1992-1993	5.7		

Compiled from Various Online Sources

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[28] A May 2007 *Variety* article points out that the overall Nielsen ratings for soaps are down 2 percent for the current season, but ratings are down 15 percent among women 18-34, one of the key demographic areas. Adalian, Josef, "Emmys Channel Daytime's Traumas: As the Ratings Turn, Networks Plot New Schemes," *Variety* Web site, 07 May 2007, http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117964403.html.

If the networks and industry insiders are discussing the decline of soaps as inevitable, the danger is that their words will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The rhetoric may be due to culpability. The narratives so often espoused by industry insiders are that women started going into the workforce, that cable choices proliferated, and that the O.J. Simpson trial interrupted the soaps' stories, causing viewers to leave and never return.[29] All these influences can be directly traced through the ratings pattern outlined in the table on the previous page. All have merit, but with the variety of time shifting technologies available to viewers, the truth is that these shows lost their connection with viewers to the point that people no longer considered their immersion in these story worlds to be vital enough to retain. The theme that runs through most of these explanations is a denial of creative errors on the industry's part that might have led to this mass exodus. While the decline is certainly real, the decline for all of television ratings has been noticeable, and the ways in which soap operas have reacted to ratings decline may be as much to blame as those external forces. However, the inevitability argument posits that nothing can be done to reverse this trend, that soap operas are inevitably on a slowly declining path toward eventual extinction.

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[29] Kay Alden points out the significance of the O.J. Simpson trial on the popularity of soap operas by emphasizing that *The Young and the Restless* lost 2 million viewers during the trial, and only 1 million of them ever returned. She said, "Soap opera viewing is a habitual thing. It's a habit. There are people who watched because they always watched, but they would kind of like to break the habit." For fans no longer satisfied with the narratives on their show but who have dedicated so much time as a fan of that show, this is particularly true. These comments were made as part of Alden's colloquium at MIT that I hosted and which is available on audio podcast. See Alden, Kay, "Love May Not Be in the Afternoon Anymore: A Q&A with Soap Opera Writer Kay Alden About How the Genre Is (and/or Should Be) Changing with the Times," MIT Comparative Media Studies Colloquia Series, Cambridge, MA, 02 May 2007, http://cms.mit.edu/news/2007/05/love_may_not_be_in_the_afterno.php.

As the World Turns in a Convergence Culture

In this shifting media landscape, some of these industry voices are declaring the daytime serial drama an endangered television form, at least in terms of remaining on the major network lineups. The factors outlined above play an important role in that declining popularity, but the industry's collective response to this loss of viewers seems to have done nothing to curb this trend but rather may have accelerated it. These shows have attempted a series of short-term strategies to gain more viewers specifically in the 18-to-49 female demographic, but this process is often done by focusing on characters within that age demographic as well, ignoring one of the soap opera's strengths—transgenerational storytelling, and particularly transgenerational storytelling that focuses on characters and relationships more than plot progression. In a broadcasting model, soap operas were strengthened by their ability to draw in viewers from multiple generations through texts that examined the relationships in multigenerational families, but the genre has increasingly targeted young adult females at the exclusion of its older viewers and characters as the television industry has become focused on target demographics. Similarly, these shows are often approaching new media extensions as appealing primarily to teenage and young adult fans, yet the fan discussion boards surrounding shows like *ATWT* reflect viewers from a variety of demographics, even though no specific user statistics are available. In other words, longtime *ATWT* fans from outside the target demographic are important and valued members of the online fan communities surrounding these shows, and their history with these programs make them respected sources to younger fans and sometimes important parts of the viewing experience for these fan groups.

Nevertheless, even if the soap opera industry's emphasis on short-term attempts to generate new young adult viewers has acted contrary to the transgenerational appeal of the show,

these shows have been increasingly experimental in trying to adapt to emerging media strategies. PGP has launched company blogs and discussion boards to interact with their fan community online, experimented with new types of revenue models including product placement, created a Web-based platform to distribute "classic" episodes from now-cancelled PGP shows, and released a variety of transmedia storytelling extensions from the text of the daily show. Since these *immersive story worlds* are particularly vast, soap opera texts are ripe for these types of extensions, and shows are eager to try all they can to reach new viewers because of the continued decline of Nielsen ratings.

These new projects are attempted, however, without a strong understanding of how these various initiatives fit together and without a clear long-term plan for these shows. Many of these experiments show promise, even if they are not always executed perfectly, and these projects as a whole prove that the industry is keen on revitalizing these programs in the modern *convergence culture*. However, the industry often seems to continue its lack of valuing a transgenerational approach to its shows in this approach toward a new business model, threatening that new approaches to soap opera storytelling may be mired with some of the same problems that have plagued the industry for the past several years.

These problems are bound up with a television industry that has still not found a clear way to come to terms with qualitative measures of television viewing. The industry is fueled by impressions, Nielsen ratings which measure whether television sets are tuned into a particular station or not and not the nature of the interaction a viewer has with a television program. Soap operas, at their most powerful, draw a deep engagement with fans because there is so much narrative material for fans to immerse themselves in, and thus soap operas are more likely to have "fans" rather than casual viewers, when compared to many other types of television

programming. This thesis describes potential shifts in the soap opera industry's business model

which would find new ways to value this depth of interaction and to add qualitative factors of

understanding engagement to nuance the current impressions-based television ratings system.

Lynn Liccardo points out that quantitative calculations about soap opera viewership and

demographics, as with all statistics, can be quite misleading, particularly in assumptions made

not only in assessing the data but also in the way questions are posed in the first place.[30] On the

other hand, fans wish to express their deep investment with a show and articulate the ways in

which they—as dedicated viewers—are more valuable to the producers than the casual fans who

are given equal weight when networks, producers, and advertisers look solely at impressions.

Fans would likely be strong supporters of the 2002 Initiative Media/MIT call for granting

attention to viewer *expressions*, which take into account the quality of viewer engagement rather

than just the quantity.[31] Because the very nature of soap opera viewing leads to a more dedicated

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[30] Liccardo, Lynn, "Who Really Watches the Daytime Soaps?" *Soap Opera Weekly*, 30 April 1996, 36-38.

[31] This concept was first presented at the ARF/ESOMAR WAM conference in 2002 and is further examined in Ernest, David, Stacy Lynn Koerner, Henry Jenkins, Sangrita Sheresthova, Brian Theisen, and Alex Chisholm, "Walking the Path: Exploring the Drivers of the Expression," White paper from Interactive Media and the Comparative Media Studies program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003, http://www.icecubedstudios.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/walkingthepathway.pdf. In their project, the research team conducted ethnographies of *American Idol 2* viewers in both college dorms and homes to understand how audiences engage with television shows, particularly their "favorite" programs. Earlier Initaitive research had found that fewer than 10 percent of the viewers of most network shows considered the show they were watching a favorite, while certain "cult" shows were cited by as many as 50 percent of their viewers as favorites. The *expression* was an attempt to create a rudimentary metric that took into account the depth of engagement rather than just the overall number of viewers. According to the official definition, the *expression* is "a conceptual model of understanding the complex relationship between advertising message delivery, media channels, and audience engagement" and is used "as a means of factoring the myriad ways that audiences consume and relate to media, and how such insights can be translated into more effective media measurement techniques," 1.

fan base due to the programs' seriality and frequency, this qualitative approach helps balance and give meaning to overall demographics and statistics.

The business practices examined and the changes in approach suggested in the next few chapters emphasize the need to value the transgenerational appeal of soap opera texts and to develop a long-term approach that manages soap operas as long-term brands rather than as ephemeral programming. As soap operas attempt to redefine themselves in various new media extensions, the shows must realize that their strengths lie both in utilizing new technologies to better understand and to help foster the social consumption of soap opera texts.[32] Further, these shows must understand the aspects of their *immersive story worlds* that make them particularly appealing in a *convergence culture* and to utilize those strengths to their capacity. In short, although the soap opera industry has been in decline, the unique attributes of these story worlds point toward the ways in which these shows might be revitalized and revived in light of new media technologies and new ways for fans to communicate with producers and each other.

Methodology

The approach of this thesis is to draw equally from previous scholarship on television and soap opera, accounts from critics and business reports on the soap opera industry, examples from the text of *ATWT* and its various transmedia extensions, primary interviews with employees within the soap opera industry and soaps experts, as well as the conversations within the soap opera fan community itself. The intent is to acknowledge the strengths of each of these perspectives in illuminating the overall picture of the current state of the soap opera industry and to understand how these "official" and fan voices are in dialogue with one another, or in some cases disconnected. This approach was taken throughout the thesis-writing process, reflected in

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[32] For instance, shows might be written in ways that encourage fan debate rather than clearly privileging one character's perspective over another's.

my choice to have a thesis committee including representatives from the academic world, the fan community, and the soap opera industry. My perspective is that any nuanced understanding of where the soap opera genre has been and where it is headed cannot be gained without acknowledging each of these perspectives. This thesis also fully acknowledges and draws from my own longtime identification as an *ATWT* fan and as a member of the online fan community, admitting both the shortcomings that may come from my perspective within the fandom described here and also the ways in which my research was not just empowered by but dependant on my own participation in the fan community and longtime knowledge of the *ATWT* text.

Outlining the Study

The media environment surrounding *ATWT* has changed significantly since I watched the show with my grandmother and mom. During my tenure in the Program in Comparative Media Studies here at MIT, I have dedicated much of my work to the Convergence Culture Consortium, examining the ways in which new technologies have altered relationships between media producers and consumers, and among consumers themselves. Following my own history with soaps and the realization that my fascination with soap operas is part of this greater desire to immerse myself in these story worlds, I dedicated a significant portion of my independent research while at MIT on how the soap opera genre is adapting to the changing configuration of the relationship between producers and consumers in what we have called a *convergence culture*.

This thesis project culminates two years' worth of work examining how the soap opera industry has transformed one of television's oldest genre forms in response to the variety of changes in the media industries driven by new technologies and new modes of discourse between producers and fans. The project also examines a variety of opportunities that the industry has not

yet capitalized on but that nevertheless could be beneficial to the genre's future. Since I believe

it is important to take particular interest in the media that "sticks to your skin,"[33] this study will

focus on understanding how Procter & Gamble Productions' *ATWT* in particular has adapted to

the current convergence culture that the media industry has entered.

The second chapter will focus on the historical shifts in the ways in which soap opera

producers and consumers have related to one another, focusing on the corresponding extant

literature that focuses on the soap opera fan community. This section includes reviews of

preexisting communicative forms such as one-on-one personal discussions about the show,

official fan clubs, fan mail, and the soap opera press, and how these forums for interaction

continue to exist alongside online fan communities.

The third chapter will look in-depth at one particular online fan community for *ATWT*,

the message board for the show at Michael Gill's Media Domain Web site. As a longstanding

member of that community, I made other posters aware of my thesis project early on and both

followed their discussions and participated actively at times in the community. This chapter will

examine the ways in which this community interacts and also how it positions itself as an open

forum discussing the show, with the constant understanding that the show's producers or actors

could read the comments made in this online public space.

The fourth chapter will focus on how both soap opera fans and producers are looking at

alternate modes of advertising to maximize the profitability of soap operas. Fans often actively

discuss instances of product placement within the show, or else talk about ways in which even

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[33] Jenkins, Henry, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, "The Culture That Sticks to Your Skin,"
Hop on Pop, Ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, Durham: Duke UP, 2002, 3-26.

more prevalent forms of product placement would or would not offend, anger, or disgust them. This discourse on product placement in particular will act as a case study for the chapter.

The fifth chapter focuses on *ATWT*'s greatest asset, its rich history, and how PGP has tried and might further attempt to mine that history. Building on the various ways in which PGP utilizes the history of the show, including 2006's 50th anniversary of *ATWT*, as well as new digital initiatives like PGP Classic Soaps, this chapter focuses both on how PGP is utilizing its archives as well as potential ways the company might best position this deep archive.

The sixth chapter will look at the company's existing attempts at transmedia storytelling and the successes and failures of these various text and video story extensions, which include a character blog, a book released that was part of the narrative world, and a series of Webisodes. This chapter examines how these stories were received, how each form of transmedia storytelling effectively fed back into the main narrative, and also how the show might be able to learn from its first experiments with transmedia storytelling to create more substantial story extensions in the future.

The conclusion of this thesis looks at how *ATWT* is adapting to continued existence in a convergence culture and makes suggestions as to how PGP might reposition the show in an attempt to aim for continuing its 51-year history for decades to come. In light of the planned shift for soap opera *Passions* from NBC to DirecTV and the continued slow downward spiral in the Nielsen ratings for the soap opera genre as a whole, the conclusion recommends a shift in focus to transgenerational storytelling, a way to monetize viewers who exist outside the target demographic,[34] and a commitment on the part of networks and companies to manage daytime

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[34] The verb *monetize* traditionally stands for establishing something as legal tender or converting into currency. Increasingly, the word is also used to mean "establishing a business model for," or "finding a way to derive profit from."

serial dramas like a brand instead of like a primetime show, due to the longstanding performance

of these shows as "stories without end."[35] While no one of these case studies in the next few

chapters indicate a "quick-fix" to help curb the downward ratings trend for the daytime serial

drama, each of these build toward the type of approach and business model that has been

suggested in this introduction.

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[35] More on this concept is available in the Museum of Television and Radio's book *Worlds without End: The Art and History of the Soap Opera*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.

Chapter Two:

Soap Operas and the History of Fan Discussion

The introductory chapter examined how soap operas as *immersive story worlds* create texts particularly apt for the modern *convergence culture*. Specifically, the depth of these narratives create rich environments for new advertising models, new ways to connect the contemporary show to its long history, and a wealth of material for narrative extensions in multiple media forms. However, the power of these texts lies in the social nature in which *immersive story worlds* are consumed. These are texts that cannot be mastered and thus which can only be completely understood through the collective intelligence of the fan community. It comes as no surprise, then, that, as soap opera texts developed through time, that the fan community increasingly found new ways to discuss and debate these texts. These outlets for fan expression and fan conversation helped deepen fan engagement activities surrounding these soap opera texts and create venues for fans to communicate with the gatekeepers of these narrative worlds, culminating in the massive public discussions enabled by Internet discussion boards.

This thesis argues that soap operas should find new ways to value the depth of audience interaction with these texts and the value in social networks created around these texts. Particularly, these outlets act as important venues not only for fan activities surrounding these texts but also for fan proselytizing, as longtime fans help gain and maintain new and lapsed fans. While the third chapter will examine the full implications of this approach by looking at examples from modern Internet discussion boards for *As the World Turns*, this chapter examines the ways in which fans have found ways to express themselves and form communities

surrounding soap opera texts, starting with one-on-one localized discussions with fans and through more proactive responses such as fan mail and fan clubs. This chapter also focuses on the lack of coverage on soaps and room for publishing the voices of soap opera fans in the popular press and how the soap opera press eventually filled that niche. This section concludes with an in-depth look at online fan communities surrounding soap operas and how they have been and might be understood, encouraging an emphasis on valuing the fan community's knowledge and paying more attention to the various ways that online fans interact with the text and one another.

Soap Opera and Fan Discussion

Soaps do not exist in a vacuum, and the show's daily texts can only be completely understood in the context of the community of fans surrounding them. Instead of imagining the audience as a passive sea of eyeballs measured through *impressions*, this approach views soap operas as the central piece and catalyst for a social network of fans. Acting as dynamic social texts, soap operas are created as much by the audience that debates, critiques, and interprets them than through the production team itself.[36] This collective attribution of meaning has been proven to be a strong motivation for viewing the show, whether those discussions take place in conversations between families while the show is on, post-"story" phone calls among friends and relatives, or else at the workplace or on soaps discussion boards. The changing ways that viewers conceive their relationships with these shows creates a shift in soap opera texts are conceived, produced, and received. The public discussions now facilitated by Internet discussion leads not only to new ways for fans to connect but also a new dynamic between consumer and

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[36] The power of the reader is not new ground. For instance, see Barthes, Roland, "The Death of the Author, *Aspen* 5-6 (1967). While Barthes focuses on the solitary reader's ability to "author" the text, the social connectivity of today's media landscape enables much more widespread meaning-making from the audience.

producer that has impacted and could further substantially change the ways in which soap operas operate.

Soaps have always had a close correlation with the daily lives of their viewers. Watching the drama of people's personal lives unfold on a daily basis was seen as a discourse with housewives, inviting them to perceive the characters first on radio and later on television serial dramas as friends and relatives whose daily lives one was privy to. Soaps were driven not just by the actions of characters but also by the reaction to those events as news spreads across the social connections on a show. Much of the scholarship about soap operas has focused on this intended dialogue between the show and the viewer and the intimacy that the visual image accords the viewer with characters. For instance, Bernard Timberg posits that the direct involvement audience members (himself included) feel when watching soaps is aided by the way the episode is filmed, "making (viewers) feel somehow complicit in the ebb and flow of relationships and emotions."[37]

This degree of intimacy and connectedness may have indeed caused soaps characters to feel somehow more "real" than those on other shows, and anecdotal evidence has always pointed toward that being the case. One of my high school teachers recalled visiting with her mother while she was on the phone with an aunt one day, and listening in horror as her mother described a bad situation that one of their friends was going through. Only later did she realize that it wasn't a story about someone who lived on their block but rather about one of the Lowells on *As the World Turns*. The lack of documentation about the power of social connectedness in soaps in these earlier days is not surprising because these discussions happened informally and in

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[37] Timberg, Bernard, "The Rhetoric of the Camera in Television Soap Opera," *Television: The Critical View,* Fourth Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New York: Oxford UP, 1987, 164-178, 64. Also published in *Journal of American Culture* 6.3, 1983, 76-81.

unobservable everyday conversations. Even as the channels through which fans can discuss

soaps have changed, this personal interaction with family and friends over the text of the show

that was at the heart of the social connections surrounding soaps texts from the beginning of the

genre has not, as a more recent essay by Elaine Rapping demonstrates.[38] Because social

connections around soaps were limited to these direct interpersonal relationships in the earliest

days of soaps viewing, soap opera characters may have seemed particularly localized.   These

characters may have seemed like members of the community or the family, and these stories may

very well have seemed to be a personal possession of a small number of viewers who conversed

about them, without a wider forum of discussion for these shows.

Fan Clubs and Fan Letters

The earliest attempts at official connection for soaps, not surprisingly, came through

letter writing to the network and fan clubs. I have found little information about the history of

fan clubs, and my correspondence with the current president of both the *As the World Turns* and

Guiding Light official fan clubs emphasized that there had not been an institutional history

passed down and that she did not know much about the history of the organization prior to her

taking over in 1999.[39]   No matter how long this "official" fan club has been in operation,

evidence indicates that various fan clubs have existed around these shows for some time. The

current *ATWT* Fan Club hosts an annual luncheon with various current and former cast members

and provides members with pen pal lists and various documents about the current creative team

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[38] Rapping, Elayne, "Daytime Utopias: If You Lived in Pine Valley, You'd Be Home," *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, Ed. Henry Jenkins III, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002, 47-66.
[39] Schulman, Mindi, personal e-mail correspondence, 19 December 2006.

behind the show and the names and birthdays of current actors.[40] The fan club also provides two resources to fans that echo the earliest powers that fans employed: a list of people to contact in the press in reaction to soaps,[41] as well as a list of the executive producer, head writer, and contacts for both Procter & Gamble Productions/TeleVest Daytime Programs and the Senior Vice-President of CBS Daytime, all of whom fans might be interested in sending praise or (more likely) complaints.[42]

Other accounts of fan correspondence directed toward soap producers and stars are anecdotal and perhaps colored by the biases of unreliable narrators such as actors themselves, or else historical claims that may nor may not be able to be directly substantiated. For *As the World Turns*, the famous incident that drove a significant amount of fan letters to the show involved what the official historian for the show labeled "the first soap supercouple before the phrase was even coined," the relationship between Jeff Baker and Penny Hughes in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[43] *ATWT* historian Julie Poll, in fact, directly attributes *As the World Turns*' rise to the tops of soaps ratings (where it would reside from 1958 until 1978) as being "propelled" by the romance of these two characters.[44] At the height of popularity for this couple, the actor who portrayed Jeff Baker opted to leave the show, and his character was quickly written off with a car crash. According to a retrospective on the show's 50th anniversary from *TelevisionWeek*, "the on-and-off love story of Penny and Jeff so captivated the nation that CBS was deluged with

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[40] "Join the Official *As the World Turns* Fan Club Today!" The Official *As the World Turns* Fan Club, http://www.officialatwtfanclub.com/join.html.
[41] "Let the Magazines Know What You Think!" The Official *As the World Turns* Fan Club, http://www.officialatwtfanclub.com/magazines.html.
[42] "Where to Write *As the World Turns*, The Official *As the World Turns* Fan Club, http://www.officialatwtfanclub.com/contact.html.
[43] Poll, Julie, "Young Love, First Love: Penny and Jeff," *As the World Turns: The Complete Family Scrapbook*, Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1996, 215.
[44] Ibid.

protest letters when Jeff was killed."[45] The Wikipedia entry on *As the World Turns* points out

that *TV Guide* considered the death of Jeff Baker "the car accident that shook the nation," and the

event was listed among its 100 most shocking events in TV history.[46]

       The only direct historical evidence I tracked down from the time was an August 1962

Time article on the death of Jeff Baker.[47] The author writes that the actor, Mark Rydell, had been

"held to the show by salary and sentiment ($50,000 and 5,000 fan letters a year)" but that his

aspirations to work in primetime television had caused continued problems for those scripting

the show who planned his death.[48] A letter then appeared two weeks later in *Time* responding to

the article, detailing how what the reader identifies as "our group" had "a reception on Penny and

Jeff's wedding day" and was subsequently "suitably attired in black to watch *As the World Turns*

on the day Jeff died."[49] The audience's backlash to Jeff's death has become part of soaps—and

television—lore, although it is somewhat hard to distinguish the actual response from the

hyperbole generated by the industry and fans to promote the width and depth of soap opera

fandom.

       Even harder to distinguish is how much hyperbole is involved in actor accounts of fan

interaction. While the show's producers have long been the target of fan mail protesting and

complaining about certain creative decisions or directions, there has been reported an

equally—or perhaps more—ardent collection of fan mail for actors, who are the most

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[45] Waldman, Allison J., "'World' Turns 50: 'Digital Comfort Food,'" *TelevisionWeek*, 27 March 2006.

[46] "History of *As the World Turns* (1960-1969), Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_As_the_World_Turns_(1960-1969).

[47] "Murder Necessitated," *Time*, 24 August 1962, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,896534,00.html.

[48] Ibid. Rydell went on to be an actor and director on television and in films.

[49] Hayes, Jean (from Oklahoma City), "Watchful Waking," *Time*, 07 September 1962, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,870081-2,00.html.

recognizable components of the show for fans. *As the World Turns*' Eileen Fulton, who has played the character of Lisa for about 45 years now, provides a typical account of what actors remember most and like to tell others about their fan mail. She claims that, shortly after she began with the show in 1960, "it wasn't long before viewers started calling in and sending telegrams from all over the country, declaring, 'If that bitch Lisa marries Bob I'll never watch your show again. I can't stand that conniving little tramp. She's wrong for the Hughes family. Stop her!!'"[50]

Even more dubious than her claims about delusional fans over the years is the hyperbole involved in Fulton's description of fan reaction when she left the show for brief periods of time. At one point, another actress temporarily replaced her. "Phone calls started coming through by the hundreds and letters and telegrams by the thousands, begging for the return of the *real* Lisa. Even the newspapers picked up on it."[51] In an earlier attempt to provide an insider's account of the business, Madeleine and David Rounds describe fan reactions to cancelled or preempted shows, claiming that CBS got "at least 35,000 letters" protesting the cancellation of some of its least popular daytime shows.[52] "The cancellation of a day's episode in order to show some national event—such as an Apollo launching, a presidential funeral, or a Senate hearing—brings an avalanche of protest mail."[53] However, Edmondson and Rounds claim that the majority of mail received by the networks "could be classified as morality mail. Almost anything offends someone, and soap watchers are quick to complain."[54]

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[50] Fulton, Eileen, with Desmond Atholl and Michael Cherikinian, *As My World Still Turns: The Uncensored Memoirs of America's Soap Opera Queen*, New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995, x.
[51] Ibid., 67.
[52] Edmondson, Madeleine and David Rounds, *The Soaps: Daytime Serials of Radio and TV*, New York: Stein and Day, 1973, 195.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

Each of these accounts was either written by people within the industry or dependant upon numbers quoted by the industry. One would guess that these authors may take some degree of creative license to exaggerate the quantity and quality of this viewer passion in order to bolster their own stories and to make more emphatic statements about the emotions that soap opera texts generate. Nevertheless, whether these accounts are completely accurate or not, the fact remains that fan mail has long been a viable and popular form of interaction between producers and consumers in the soap opera industry.

In his examination of the soap opera industry in the early 1980s, Peter Buckman writes about the types of comments that are sent into shows for the producers to read, such as comments sent to *Guiding Light* in 1982, focusing on the fact that the show had slipped to ninth place in the ratings (then five from the bottom). "Do you want to know the reason – Boring!! *GL*, you are boring, boring, boring. The writers must be tapped out."[55] Buckman points out that fan letters are often sent to producers to prove the audience's self-awareness and to attempt to assert some power over the current direction of the show, writing, "The viewers have, if you like, a political sense of their own power, and its limitations. They know that it is on their loyalty that the programme makers rely – and yet [. . .] the older viewers at least are aware that they are not a strong enough market force to have a great influence on the producers.[56] Elana Levine describes the more recent handling of fan mail for *General Hospital* on ABC, pointing out that the show's main way to handle understanding fan responses in the late 1990s, in addition to focus groups, was to have writers' assistants and student interns group the mail and make appropriate reports

[55] Buckman, Peter, *All for Love: A Study in Soap Opera*, Salem, NH: Salem House, 1985 (first published in 1984 in the UK), 188.
[56] Ibid., 189.

on that fan response.[57] Fan mail is considered negative if the audience member says he or she

will quit watching the show, but fan mail is considered positive even if it is criticism when the

viewer does not threaten to quit watching. Levine writes:

> While the system in place to handle audience response is thorough and efficient, it does
> not really account for most viewers' perspectives, as the letters must be neatly classified
> into positive or negative categories and the actual words of audience members are only
> rarely seen by anyone higher in the chain of command than a writer's assistant.[58]

Fulton writes, "Most soap viewers don't realize how much power they have. Enough

letters, telegrams, and phone calls can kill characters and story lines or turn a temporary part

(like Lisa) into a long-term love affair."[59] While she—like Edmondson and Rounds—may be

inclined to exaggerate and—in Fulton's case—to concentrate on some of her stranger fan

interactions over the years, her point about the power that fandom can yield when organized is an

important component of soaps history. The problem of a disconnect in the direction of the

creative team and the most common directions desired by fans can often be overcome when fans

find ways to articulate themselves in ways that the shows' producers understand. However,

these floods of letters were generally not collective action, as there were few ways for soaps fans

to organize themselves. As Buckman emphasizes, producers often ignore that physical fan mail,

perhaps because of its lack of collective engagement. It may be easier to dismiss the singular

desires of fans rather than a large and social collective action.

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[57] It is important to note that this process was a case study of one particular time period for one
specific show. While I am using it here as a point of comparison as to how soap opera fan letters
are received and responded to, this is not necessarily representative of the industry's handling of
fan mail in general.

[58] Levine, Elana, "Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes at
General Hospital," *Television: The Critical View*, Seventh Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New
York: Oxford UP, 2007, 133-149,146. Originally published in *Critical Studies in Media
Communication* 18.1 (March 2001), 66-82.

[59] Fulton, Eileen, with Desmond Atholl and Michael Cherikinian, *As My World Still Turns: The
Uncensored Memoirs of America's Soap Opera Queen*, New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995, 67.

The Soap Opera Press

One factor that changed the way soap operas relate to their fans is the creation of the soap opera press. While soaps were often covered in some degree by *TV Guide* and certain big events might be mentioned in newspapers or magazines, daytime—despite its visibility and popularity—was left behind, even as primetime television programming was granted an increasing amount of attention from serious critics. While there is much less scholarly attention given to the artistry of soaps as compared to the best primetime has to offer, there is also much less serious consideration of soaps in the popular press. This niche is filled somewhat by magazines focusing particularly on soaps that are now a staple of checkout lines in grocery stores. Whereas previous forms of fan communication involved private exchanges (local discussions, fan mail, and fan clubs) and most publications did not regularly report or include reader letters about soap operas, soap opera magazines provided a new forum in which the reception of soap operas could become texts themselves, through official industry news and behind-the-scenes information, official columnists, and fan letters and polls.

Soap Opera Digest was launched in November 1975 as a monthly magazine. In addition to publishing both "official" critiques from staff writers and fan perspectives on the various daytime serial dramas, *SOD* created an annual set of awards, similar to the Daytime Emmy Awards, for daytime serial dramas in 1977. The launch of the magazine also coincides with the height of soaps popularity, when shows switched from a live format to a taped program (thus increasing the quality and reliability of acting and reducing the chance for obvious production errors) and an expansion from 30 minutes to one hour that also caused a doubling of most casts.

SOD became bi-weekly in 1979. News Corp. bought the magazine in 1989 and then launched a sister publication, *Soap Opera Weekly*, as a weekly companion to *SOD*. The

publications were sold to K-III in 1991, which has now changed its name to Primedia. In 1997, *SOD* became a weekly publication as well. The intent of *SOW* when the magazine was first launched, according to fans, was to provide a more nuanced and critical examination of soap opera texts, relying less on an analysis of hair, makeup, style, and the physical attributes of actors and more on analysis and commentary.[60] However, that focus gradually shifted so that much of the material in both *SOD* and *SOW* is similar.

According to *SOW*'s Wikipedia page, the magazine shifted its focus in 2000 "to include coverage of prime-time drama and reality series with soap themes and continuing storylines."[61] In the first half of 2006, *SOD* was listed with a total circulation of 527,925, with 345,640 subscribers and 182,285 newsstand single copy sales, the 58th most popular magazine on the newsstand. *SOW* was listed with a circulation of 239,704, with 101,386 subscribers and138,318 newsstand single copy sales, the 82nd most popular magazine on the stand.[62] These numbers make them the 10th and 11th most popular weekly magazines on the newsstand, behind the various tabloids, *Woman's World*, and *TV Guide*.[63] According to The Millard Group, *SOD*'s subscribers are 83 percent female and 17 percent male with the median age of 50 and median household income of $38,000.[64] *SOW*'s subscribers are listed as 84 percent female and 16

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[60] Liccardo, Lynn, e-mail correspondence, 14 December 2005, Liccardo formerly published in the magazine on occasion before its gradual shift to a less serious critical engagement with soap opera texts.

[61] "*Soap Opera Weekly*," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soap_Opera_Weekly.

[62] "Top 100 ABC Magazines by Average Single Copy Sales," Magazine Publishers of America Web site, http://www.magazine.org/circulation/circulation_trends_and_magazine_handbook/18424.cfm.

[63] This information was part of a media kit by *USA Today* highlighting the performance of *Sports Weekly* and listed ABC Fas-Fax from 30 June 2006 as its source. See "Weekly Magazines," *USA Today* Web Site, http://www.usatoday.com/media_kit/sports_weekly/au_highest_in_newsstand_sales.htm.

[64] "*Soap Opera Digest*," The Millard Group Web site, http://www.millard.com/wb/Primedia/prime_soapd.htm.

percent male with an average age of 50.[65] The shift in using median age in one list and average

age in the other may indicate a desire to have the lowest age possible listed.

Competitor Bauer Publishing runs its own weekly magazine called *Soaps In Depth*,

which focuses on ABC soap operas one week and CBS the next. An April 2006 press release

touted 71,405 subscribers for *CBS Soaps In Depth* and 79,665 subscribers for *ABC Soaps In

Depth*.[66] In the first half of 2006, the ABC version was listed as having 272,672 verified weekly

readers, with 60,760 verified subscribers and 211,912 newsstand sales, while the CBS version

has 249,514 verified weekly readers, with 56,220 verified subscribers and 193,294 newsstand

sales, the 53rd and 57th most popular magazines on the newsstand.[67] There have also been several

other soap opera magazines, now defunct, in the past few decades. These magazines have a

much higher readership than their subscriptions and newsstand sales would indicate, since many

people flip through the issues while in the store without ever purchasing it, trying to find the few

relevant pages about their soap in particular.

The soap opera press provides enough critical information for fans to consider them

relevant and still play a part in the modern interactions between audience members and the

show's creative and marketing staff. However, one cannot take lightly the impact that these

publications have served over the past three decades, even if there is a lack of critical

engagement in these weekly publications. The fact that they are the one source that focuses on

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[65] "*Soap Opera Weekly*," The Millard Group Web site,
http://www.millard.com/wb/Primedia/prime_soapw.htm.

[66] "Worldata Awarded Exclusive List Management of: Bauer Publishing: Over 800,000
Consumer Magazine Subscribers!" Worldata press release, 26 April 2006,
http://www.worldata.com/wdnet8/articles/bauerpublishing.htm. Bauer also publishes such
supermarket line staples as *Woman's World*, *Life & Style Weekly*, and *In Touch*.

[67] This information was part of a media kit by *USA Today* highlighting the performance of *Sports
Weekly* and listed ABC Fas-Fax from 30 June 2006 as its source. See "Weekly Magazines,"
USA Today Web Site,
http://www.usatoday.com/media_kit/sports_weekly/au_highest_in_newsstand_sales.htm.

American soap operas on a consistent basis drives a lot of fan interest in what the magazines include and provides a space through which the shows can send news to fans through interviews and scoops; in return, fans have been able to have their opinions expressed on a national stage, through polls and published letters. These publications might not have completely satisfied the fan community's interest in "official" and fan-produced media about the soap opera industry, but they provided the first forum for such writing nonetheless.

Web-Based Communication Among Soaps Fans

While these previous modes of communication lacked the potential for a large community of fans to build around daily discussion of texts, the Internet created a space where the one-on-one interpersonal model of fan discussion that empowered soap opera viewing could take place on a wider scale. With a forum for a concentrated discussion that was public, the Internet empowered fans with new ways to organize themselves to get the attention of "the powers that be," or TPTB, as fans often abbreviate. As Jennifer Hayward points out, the Internet provided "a more collaborative forum for soaps discussion" than was possible by individual fan letters or other previous modes of communication.[68] Further, the Internet's hybrid of concentrated niche spaces that are nevertheless public gave fans unprecedented ability to create their own texts based on their reception of the show through public commentaries and discussions.

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[68] Hayward, Jennifer, "Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Soap Opera," *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text Reader* Second Edition, Ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003, 507-521, 515. Originally published in Hayward, Jennifer, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera*, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997. Hayward is among the first to include excerpts from online fan interactions surrounding soap texts She writes about the rape storyline of popular *One Life to Live* character Todd Manning in the 1990s as an instance to examine the complicated interaction between producers and consumers.

In my research on pro wrestling fan communities, I have previously outlined five ways in which fans interact with the texts of shows: fan discussion, fan criticism, fan theories, fan performance, and fan community building.[69] This framework applies to soap opera fandom as well. In these online forums, soap fans can simultaneously discuss, critique, theorize, write their own written parodies and alternative storylines, and form a community around these shows, along with the potential for explicit political organization to rally for directions in story, casting, or airtime that they see best.[70] Understanding that soap opera fan communities can serve these and many other functions simultaneously is key in grasping the power of these online forums in the viewing experience, as well as in the social lives of these fans. C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby point out that some work on soaps has attempted to frame all audience interaction with soaps according to one particular theoretical framework, while the diversity of interests and

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[69] Ford, Sam, "Pinning Down Fan Involvement: An Examination of the Multiple Modes of Engagement for Professional Wrestling Fans," in revision, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 2007.

[70] John Fiske writes about the aspects of gossip and oral culture in soap opera fandom in Fiske, John, *Television Culture*, London: Methuen, 1987. He traces the history of scholarship on gossip in women's culture and its intersection with work on soap opera, concluding that soaps work cohesively within this gossip culture by providing daily interaction that can be discussed and debated by viewers. Mary Ellen Brown expands on the role of gossip and women's talk in framing the enjoyment of soap opera, as she finds her own enjoyment of soaps greatly limited until she becomes part of the fan culture and joins discussions about the soaps. Brown, Mary Ellen, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. The development of Brown's work corresponds with Henry Jenkins' seminal *Textual Poachers*, which forms some of the underpinnings of both later scholarship on soap opera fan communities and my own work in the Convergence Culture Consortium, of which Jenkins is the director. See Jenkins, Henry, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1992. Also, see Tulloch, John, "Talking About Television Soap Opera." *Watching Television Audiences: Cultural Theories and Methods*, London: Arnold, 2000, 56-82. Tulloch focuses on how this "women's talk" aspect of both the show and the fan community make stories about important health issues and contemporary social issues particularly intriguing.

interactions surrounding soap texts are much too varied to fit neatly into one overarching explanation.[71]

Robert C. Allen calls the soap opera an *over-coded* narrative form in which "characters, events, situations, and relationships are invested with signifying possibilities greatly in excess of those necessary to their narrative functions."[72] Here, the power granted to the soaps audience becomes evident in understanding and interpreting the spaces of the fictional town, the facial expressions of various characters, and the overwhelming amount of weekly dialogue. As Allen writes, "the spatial worlds of soap operas can be represented as an aggregate of atomistic interiors whose relationship to each other in space is constructed in the mind of the viewer."[73] Nancy K. Baym suggests that Allen's concept of *over-coding* is particularly appropriate in application to online communities, where "viewers watch soap operas in close and distant ways simultaneously" in order to use all these codes.[74] Her point relates to the five categories of interaction around the soap opera text I outlined earlier: fan discussion, fan criticism, fan theories, fan performance, and fan community building. Baym writes specifically about how fans perform through writing synopses of episodes or updates for message boards, becoming storytellers themselves and gaining a following for their performances through their analysis, interpretation, and cynicism.[75] In this way, fans help bolster each others' support of the show so that, even if the show does not meet their expectations, fan discussion and even griping and

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[71] Harrington, C. Lee and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.

[72] Allen, Robert C., *Speaking of Soap Operas*, Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1985, 84.

[73] Ibid., 65.

[74] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000. See also Baym, Nancy K., "Talking About Soaps: Communicative Practices in a Computer-Mediated Fan Culture," *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*, Ed. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 1998, 63.

[75] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000, 85-86.

parodying of the show can actually help keep people with the program through a creative draught.

One aspect of creative generation on the part of the fan community focuses on constructing a cohesive narrative space for the show. On *As the World Turns*, Oakdale is simultaneously considered a small town and the home of several major corporations. Paul Ryan's penthouse shows a skyline view of a few very tall buildings in the middle of Oakdale, even while other residents complain of being in such a small town that you run into your enemies wherever you go. How can the town be both? By never definitively showing us the setting, the creative team requires viewers to make sense of these various comments and settings into a comprehensive Oakdale. Matt Hills defines these spaces implied but never shown as *hyperdiegesis*, "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text," but which still tries to have some sort of internal logic.[76] Of course, as Steven D. Stark points out, the reason these exteriors are never shown has to do with budget and filming, since on-location filming is extremely rare for soaps.[77] Nevertheless, these narrative gaps empower much of the fan energy surrounding *immersive story worlds*, in that the shows raise as many questions as they provide answers, and the fan communities use much of their time to bring up issues of continuity and fleshing out the space in which these shows take place. In chapter six, I will argue that the shows can and should create new tools to tap into this aspect of fan creation by providing spaces that could help turn user-generated content into official content for the story world.

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[76] Hills, Matt, *Fan Cultures*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 137.
[77] Stark, Steven D., *Glued to the Set: The 60 Television Shows and Events That Made Us Who We Are Today*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, 206.

Baym points out, though, that these creative activities on the fans' part also address flaws in continuity on the writers' part and that fan communities particularly focus on the "violation of the truth of the fiction established through prior shows," and particularly on character inconsistency.[78] While aspects of fandom like fan fiction are not popular in most of these soap fan communities, community members often establish followings from other fans through their ability to both find breaks in continuity and also to create potential ways to make sense of those breaks in relation to the history of the show. Some of these community members who gain followings of their own I have written about previously as creating the phenomenon of "fans of fans."[79]

This open-ended process of understanding and analyzing the text of the show fuels much of the fan communities' discussion, even as the other elements of fan communication take place. Baym finds that only 16 percent of the postings in the fan community she studied were "non-interpretive," and each of those threads often contained some interpretive responses, with 53 percent of the responses she studied focusing specifically on character motivation.[80] For instance, in a soap opera love triangle, it is common to have almost as many fans support one side of a relationship as the other.[81] Since the text does not provide answers but only visuals, it is up to fans to debate the meaning that might be implied by images. Audience members will openly bring up their own histories to help explain characters' actions in many cases. If a character on a

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[78] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000, 99.

[79] Ford, Sam, "The Phenomenon of Fans of Fans," Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 05 November 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/11/the_phenomenon_of_fans_of_fans.html.

[80] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000, 71-72.

[81] Producers and writers can help facilitate these types of discussions by providing "shades of gray" scenarios which do not clearly privilege one character's perspective or leave a particular character in the clear moral right.

soap opera is raped or is the victim of domestic abuse, members of the fan community who have

been victims or who have known victims of these atrocities may have the courage to share their

own stories and then use that information to evaluate why characters may act in certain, initially

puzzling ways.

Baym claims that, "in one sense, soap operas are a game in which the text offers clues to

how the plots will unfold and viewers use those clues to unravel the shows' puzzles."[82] If one

accepts the veracity of this statement (which I do), then it becomes easy to see why soap opera

fans might be particularly receptive to transmedia storytelling or alternate reality games.

Although projects like *Oakdale Confidential*, the successful novel based on *ATWT* and used in

the television narrative while also being sold in stores, have only scratched the surface of this

potential, the ability of online fan communities to interpret and communally digest and discuss

the story world of Oakdale indicates that the soap genre might be particularly able to expand its

narrative, due to such a rich and *over-coded* narrative universe for these longtime shows.[83] As

opposed to the more aggressive spoiler behaviors of *Survivor* fan communities in *Convergence

Culture*,[84] Baym points out a particular fan who indicates that the term *spoilers* are a misnomer

because, in a genre where how and why matter much more than what happens, nothing is spoiled

when an upcoming plot is revealed.[85] This particular view ignores the fact that soaps often build

to scenes in which an astonishing truth is revealed or in which a character's return is meant to be

a surprise, though, moments that are certainly dampened considerably by the pervasiveness of

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[82] Ibid., 80.

[83] *Oakdale Confidential* and other transmedia projects from *ATWT* will be examined in greater detail in chapter six.

[84] Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York UP, 2006, 25-58.

[85] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000, 88.

spoilers. Even as soaps are driven more by reaction than action, it is important to keep in mind that this does not mean that the plot is not important.

However, it is also important to realize that a significant portion of soap opera fans are probably not online. Soap operas air on broadcast television, and the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 98.2 percent of households had at least one television set in 2001.[86] Meanwhile, in 2003, 61.8 percent of American households were estimated to have a computer in the home, while 54.7 percent had Internet access in the home. Having a computer and Internet in the home was least prevalent for Americans 65 and older, with 34.7 percent having a computer and 29.4 percent having Internet access.[87] A significant portion of the behaviors and storyline extensions examined in this thesis require an Internet connection, and some even require a broadband Internet connection for streaming video, for which a significant portion of online users do not have access at this point. This study is completed with that limitation in mind. Nevertheless, the Internet provides a significant platform for extending the social networks built around soaps, and a significant number of new soap viewers are joining discussion boards or reading soap opera sites each year, as the consistent introductions of first-time posters in fan forums emphasize.

My Focus on the Online Fan Community

Baym's research provides a solid foundation to build on, but the online world has changed significantly from the discussion groups she studied in the 1990s to the new technologies and forums available in 2007. During the time Baym was studying, online

[86] "Special Edition: 50th Anniversary of 'Wonderful World of Color' TV." U.S. Government Census Bureau Web site, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2004/cb04-ffse04.pdf, 11 March 2004, statistics from 2001, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2004/cb04-ffse04.pdf.

[87] "Households With a Computer and Internet Access by Selected Characteristics: 2003," Table A, *Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2003*, U.S. Government Census Bureau Web site, Table A, http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/p23-208.pdf, October 2005.

discussion groups were still in relative infancy, whereas there are a much wider variety of soap

opera discussion forums today in a variety of formats. A much greater portion of the viewership

has signed on in the past decade, even as the overall number of soaps viewers has declined.

Further, these contemporary discussion groups exist alongside a variety of soap opera Web sites,

blogs, podcasts, videos, and other new media products, both professional and fan-created, that

did not exist in the 1990s.

While the majority of Baym's focus is on how soap opera fan communities are built and

maintained and how they function on a daily basis, I am particularly interested in the perceived

and actual ways that these fan communities interact with each other and the producers of the

show with the explicit hope of making an impact. Through this study, I will incorporate

conversations I observed and occasionally participated in as a fan on Michael Gill's Media

Domain board for *As the World Turns*[88] as well as Procter & Gamble Productions' officially

maintained discussion site for the show, the PGP SoapBox and other online forums.[89] I did not

initiate the conversations included here, even if I responded in a similar vein with other fans

along the way. Further, although I publicly informed members of the fan community about my

study and even pointed the way to various conversations of the community I had quoted in

various Weblog commentaries on the Convergence Culture Consortium Web site for MIT, these

types of conversations were occurring before I ever became an active part of this community,

when I was just lurking.

It is important to consider the public discussions these fans have and the sophistication of

these debates about the fan community's autonomy and political influence on the shows they

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[88] *As the World Turns* Discussion Board, Michael Gill's Media Domain,
http://www.mediadomain.com/cgi-bin/netforum/atwt/a.cgi/1.
[89] PGP Soapbox, http://www.pgpphoto.com:3864/index.php.

watch. These fan communities often have complex conversations, looking at the show not only from their own perspective but also from the mindset of marketers, producers, networks, or actors. The fans also often take into account various economic and cultural factors that may explain why creative decisions were made for a show when criticizing or trying to ascertain the reasons behind a character leaving the show or a storyline changing course. The intent in consulting the expertise of specific discussions from the fan community throughout this study echoes the understanding of the idea of *vernacular theory* as expressed by Thomas McLaughlin.[90] McLaughlin writes about consulting a popular music fanzine for its theoretic questions about "artistic authenticity and the realities of economic life" when the author is reacting to a certain situation that he finds to be "legitimately theoretical practice (that) arises out of an intensely local commitment. It is situation, not distanced and systematic, but it asks a question about the socially constructed terms that define the local, and that is what critical theory does."[91]

Online fan discussions shares close ties with the history of interaction among fans and between fans and producers that have been documented in the past several pages. It is important to emphasize that online discussion groups have not replaced the lively debate fans have always had when watching a show or after the fact in telephone, workplace, or dinner conversations, nor has the rise of online forums brought about the demise of fan clubs, letters written to a show's producers, or the soap opera press. Instead, fans often participate in a number of these activities,

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[90] McLaughlin, Thomas, *Street Smarts and Critical Theory*, Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996.
[91] Ibid., 6.

generating more of the type of *hypersocial* environment as described by Mizuko Ito than a

disconnected media viewing experience that removes fans from social interaction.[92]

Instead of replacing these older modes of conversation, online fan communities make

more explicit and public the type of activities fans have long engaged in while in small groups.

Fans also see these forums as providing extensions to the limits of previous modes of

engagement: a more collective organization in disputing their dislike of particular storylines that

may garner more attention than a letter-writing campaign; a more diverse conversation with

other fans of the show, not limited to the more intimate social circles of previous generations; a

more critical engagement with the show than the more passive nature of the fan clubs allow for;

and a space to provide for themselves the critical responses to the show that they see the soap

opera press as lacking. Along with the rise of online fan communities, not surprisingly, came a

rise in online sites that also provide coverage of soap operas, such as Soapdom,[93] Soap Opera

Network,[94] and Soap Central.[95] However, these sites still tend to be lacking the critical

engagement with backstage politics, shifts in creative teams, and organized understandings of

what is set to happen in coming months on various shows, so fans still largely fill this gap

themselves. In fact, fans on message boards scour various documents from the soap opera press

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[92] Ito, Mizuko, "Technologies of the Childhood Imagination: Media Mixes, Hypersociality, and Recombinant Cultural Form," *SSRC Items and Issues* 4.4 (Winter 2003-2004), 31-34, http://www.ssrc.org/programs/publications_editors/publications/items/online4-4/ito-childhood.pdf. *Hypersociality* is the tendency of cross-platform content to increase social interaction among members of a fan community. The concept is intended to challenge and circumvent previous understandings of media consumption which focused on individual media consumers in isolation. Ito finds that games like *Yu-Gi-Oh* encourages stronger social ties by encouraging fans to share stories and exchange cards. These social bonds not only help in community-formation but also strengthen the bond each fan has with the franchise and the depth of their engagement with related media products.
[93] Soapdom, http://www.soapdom.com.
[94] Soap Opera Network, http://www.soapoperanetwork.com.
[95] Soap Central, http://www.soapcentral.com.

and put the details together to provide a more cohesive, balanced, and comprehensive account of what is coming up and what is happening behind-the-scenes on their favorite shows.[96]

These online sites provide a rich space for fans to organize and debate their existence as a politicized whole and to articulate their interests in where they want "their story" to go. What most producers still fail to realize is that fan criticism is not a sign of anger at the show but rather a deep investment. Even when fans aren't satisfied, it is often their ability to have a space in which they can communally vent, complain, parody, and argue that renews interest in the show, even if the show is not at its most creative. As Baym writes, "the soap opera regularly falls short of what fans would like,"[97] but soap producers have much to gain by the fans' ability to voice complaints because the very act of participating keeps their interest in the program going longer because the fans also entertain each other. Baym identifies humor as especially important here because fan parody empowers fans and often brings enjoyment out of a text that they would otherwise have little to gain from.[98] Baym says that, "by using the show's flaws as material with which to entertain each other, the community becomes amusing enough to hold the participants' attention through the show's lows."[99] When soaps attempt to gain younger viewers with characters the longtime audience is uninterested in or even openly disdain, that hardcore audience can often use online venues to express their communal dislike for certain actors or characters.

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[96] I have not found any subscriber numbers for these discussion boards or extensive user data for the most popular soap opera sites, but the soap opera magazines at grocery store checkouts are likely to get much greater readership (especially if one counts the number of people who read them without ever buying a copy).

[97] Baym, Nancy K., *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, London: Sage, 2000, 97.

[98] Ibid., 107.

[99] Ibid., 113.

The following chapter will examine a few discussions from the Media Domain discussion board centered on *As the World Turns*, to develop a more detailed understanding as to how audiences politicize themselves as a collective group in hopes of influencing the figures who have been put in charge of a show the fan community often sees as theirs. This section includes an examination of how fans discuss the economic and cultural forces that are shaping decisions made by the network and production team for the show, as well as how fans understand their conversation both as within a community and existing in a public forum, in which transcripts of these exchanges are available for some time.

Fans often debate whether writers or actors from the show might be reading their comments, including one situation in which fans debate whether an actor's suicide could in some way have been driven by their own analysis of his declining physical appearance.[100] In the case of PGP SoapBox, these conversations even include exchanges with representatives from the production company that makes the show. In one particular situation mentioned in the previous chapter, negative response to an interview from *As the World Turns* head writer Jean Passanante led to some passionate fans organizing a write-in campaign to call for her replacement.

In the next chapter, I will look at some specific debates within the fan community in hope to tap into the fans' collective articulation of a *vernacular theory*. These examples will help give form to the social dynamic of these networks of fans that empower the new media terrain soap operas—and all television programs—find themselves in. Understanding how these communities are formed and maintained can not only help illuminate the importance of the social network surrounding these media texts but can also help media producers better understand how

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[100] This particular example will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

to shift their storytelling and communication with fans to more effectively utilize new ways of reaching these fan communities that are so ready to engage more deeply with these shows.

This chapter has presented a trajectory in which fans have increasingly sought out ways to gain greater access to a social network which allows them to collectively discuss, critique, perform their own creative writing on, theorize, and build community around these shows. The online fan discussion board provides a particularly strong venue for these deeply engaged activities. Here, the importance of social engagement around these texts becomes more apparent, and the collective intelligence of the fan base in trying to make sense of the *immersive story worlds* presented in these texts is highlighted. The next chapter looks particularly at how fans interact in these narrative worlds, how these social activities draw fans into a deeper engagement with the show, and how these fan communities are built and maintained, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding as to how these transgenerational fan communities can be understood in relation to the show itself and the need for a new business model which values fan proselytizing.

Chapter Three:

Understanding the Fan Culture Around *ATWT*

To understand soap operas from a fan-centered perspective first requires understanding the nature of the online fan communities surrounding soaps. The previous chapter explained the way this fan community has sought to express itself and communicate in various written forms and how the Internet now provides access not only for the most active fans but for more casual fans looking for a social network to help understand these shows. For less passionate or active fans, these communities provide the opportunity to draw on the collective intelligence of longtime viewers and *ATWT* experts to get extra context and meaning from the texts of these shows.

Robert V. Kozinets writes of virtual fan and brand communities that there are four types of posters: *tourists*, who have a passive relationship with both the community and show or brand; *minglers*, who have strong ties with the community but not with show or brand (at least not the current product); *devotees*, strongly attached to the show or brand but not a full member of the community; and *insiders*, those who are devoted to the show or brand and immersed in the community.[101] This taxonomy emphasizes that fans who participate in online communities are not a monolithic group but rather engage in vastly different ways with the text and with the group. Online fan communities are important not just in the lives of their most active contributors but also to the scores of *tourists* who often read the conversations on these fan sites but rarely actually participate, and the soap industry should realize that these communities, by

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[101] Kozinets, Robert V., "E-Tribalized Marketing?: The Strategic Implications of Virtual Communities of Consumption," *European Management Journal* 17.3, 1999, 252-264.

being public and inviting such fan tourism, may have much greater impact than just on those who actively participate in the conversations.

For the industry, these fan communities provide unparalleled insight into the social communities built around the text, the opportunity to view these fans in a natural setting that cannot be obtained from a focus group. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, these fan communities raise questions of the balance between active and casual fans and how representative the online fan community is on the total viewership. These fans are more active than the casual viewer model the Nielsen ratings system is based on, with its focus on impressions without relation to the level of engagement, . The shift to balancing quantitative measurements with qualitative ones like *expressions*, suggested in that first chapter, requires acknowledging and valuing that active engagement, however. Further, the history outlined in the previous chapter indicates that many of the "unique" and "niche" aspects of online fan communities actually echo previous modes of engagement with the text as well, albeit on a much larger scale and in published form. While offline conversations surrounding *ATWT* may not involve extensive parodies or written criticism, the behaviors exhibited in online fan communities mirror many of the social activities surrounding soap operas fans have always engaged in. These basic behaviors include the fan discussion, fan criticism, fan theorizing, and fan performance mentioned in chapter two, with a performative approach including parody and the storytelling involved in recapping events for viewers who missed an episode.

These behaviors certainly pre-date online fan communities. However, what sets these discussion groups apart is that the Internet provided the first opportunity for fans to partake daily in a large community surrounding the text, so the fifth category outlined in the previous chapter—fan community-building—is a behavior that has specifically arisen from the new

technologies which have allowed such communities to build. This chapter will examine that community-building process to a greater degree.

Soap opera producers have a daunting task in coming to understand these behaviors, once private, now that they are both public and taking place on a larger scale. Grant McCracken writes, "There is a vast body of consumer intelligence out there. And we have only begun to plumb its depths [. . .] Lucky executive. All he has to do is read a million posts and he'll have a clearer sense of what the consumer is thinking. [. . .] This magnificent aggregation of consumers and opinions creates a problem."[102] Indeed, these discussion boards can often seem full of noise, especially for the television executive approaching these fan forums with no history in the fan community. McCracken posits a complex adaptive system theory in which the executive can recruit these consumers into a system of feedback that makes more sense. "The players are there, tens of thousands of them offering their opinions for free. We can only imagine what the costs would be if the executive had to find, train, equip, and mobilize this group."[103] He suggests an arrangement where "the best players on the ground" are recruited actively by the company, with various layers of "metalisteners," who can scale up to effectively bring this interaction to the executive level from its origins in the fan community.[104]

Related to McCracken's suggestions, though, is the importance for those exploring the reaction of these fans to be a part of that fan community in an active way and to understand it not as an outsider but as a native. Generally, this means that researchers are best recruited from the fan community rather than trying to become anthropologists studying that community from a distance. Reading online fan communities is an even more daunting task, though, because the

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[102] McCracken, Grant, *Flock and Flow: Predicting and Managing Change in a Dynamic Marketplace*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2006, 139.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 140.

archiving of community threads on most sites remains a major issue, as conversations on the Media Domain site used in many of these examples is complicated because each new thread on the site eliminates older threads, and the URL for a particular thread shifts on a daily basis, likely to save on storage space for these sites.[105] This chapter's examination of the types of communal behaviors that take place in these online fan communities seeks to emphasize why these forums are attractive for fans and, above all, to emphasize why these communities are useful venues for the industry to seek more meaningful feedback and to understand the social behaviors of fan proselytizing and bolstering that take place in these communities. In short, as is emphasized in the second chapter, these discussion boards provide the social glue that helps keep viewers involved in a show. Both the industry and fans can benefit from the collective intelligence gathered here by a multigenerational fan discussion in which participating in the conversation itself helps drive fans to watch the show on a regular basis.

Viewers Older than the Target Demographic

McCracken's suggestions about finding ways to work with online communities does not address the particularly transgenerational nature of soap opera viewing, however. If, as I have already suggested, soap opera producers should find ways to embrace viewers older than the target demographic, and if new media extensions should be designed with a transgenerational audience in mind, how does this reconcile with the fact that most new media projects are designed to appeal to younger viewers exclusively. After all, as I acknowledged in chapter two, many soap opera viewers might not even have a computer or the Internet to participate in these extensions, and this gap is particularly pronounced among Americans 65 and older.

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[105] A large degree of the *vernacular theory* first referenced in the second chapter is lost for good as these particular threads disappear after about a week or so.

First of all, this is why I emphasize throughout this thesis that, while soap opera producers should find new ways to connect with their audiences and encourage social viewing and new types of extensions of the *immersive story worlds* of these soaps, the industry should never make these extensions a requirement for enjoying the text of the show. There are a significant portion of soap opera viewers who lack the technical knowledge, the income, or the desire to participate in these types of extensions, and soap operas should make sure that the daily television show can be enjoyed within itself for those fans who do not wish to become more actively involved.

Although I acknowledge the lack of connectivity among many senior viewers and the need for an experience that does not require active participation in a fan community for all soap opera fans, these concerns may fall victim to a stereotype of viewers outside the target 18-49 female demographic. Even if many fans in this age group are not as adept with the Internet as some younger generations, there is still a significant portion of Americans in this age group using the Internet. To temper the census information I cited in chapter two, while only 29.4 percent of Americans 65 and older use the Internet and only 34.7 percent of them have the computer, 56.6 percent of Americans aged 55-to-64 in that 2003 study were reported as using the Internet at home, while 63.1 percent of them had a computer, numbers that are higher than the 15-to-24 age group.[106] Further, Americans 45-to-54 had a higher percentage of Internet use at home than Americans 25-to-34, and almost all those 45-to-54 in 2003 are now outside the target demographic for soap operas in 2007.[107] Since a portion of the viewership crosses that arbitrary 49-to-50 threshold each year, an increasing number of viewers in the "older" demographic will

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[106] "Households With a Computer and Internet Access by Selected Characteristics: 2003," Table A, *Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2003*, U.S. Government Census Bureau Web site, Table A, http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/p23-208.pdf, October 2005.
[107] Ibid.

have the technical knowledge and potential interest in these types of extensions and online communities of fans. Also, groups like SeniorNet are actively working to educate older adults on how to use computer technologies and the Internet. The group, a volunteer-driven nonprofit organization located in California, hosts an online community for older adults which boasts more than 2 million monthly hits.[108]

As fan *insiders*, again using Kozinets' terminology, these veteran fans are particularly important in the online fan community, even if they are smaller in number. A transgenerational approach to soap opera storytelling and viewership especially privileges these veteran viewers as proselytizers, even if they are fewer in number in online spaces than younger fans. These fans who have watched *ATWT* for all of its 51 years are elders in the dual sense of the meaning, not just older viewers but also authorities in the fan community.

Further, the passive model of television viewing for the elderly is problematic itself. As Karen E. Riggs writes, "Cultural stereotypes about the elderly depict a passive group that is either too tired or too inconsequential to engage in meaningful acts [. . .] Such a portrait is overly general and misses the complexities of late life as it is defined in the lives of Americans, particularly through their involvement with media."[109] Many of the stereotypes about how elderly viewers use television may play into the reasons why older viewers are not as valued by the industry. However, Riggs finds that "even the most stereotypical, tradition-bound uses that older people make of television are not always what they seem to be. Creativity may exist in almost any audience role, and I have found older viewers to be very much in control of their

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[108] "SeniorNet Fact Sheet," SeniorNet Web site, http://www.seniornet.org/php/default.php?PageID=8039.
[109] Riggs, Karen E., *Mature Audiences: Television in the Lives of Elders*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1998, 1.

viewing choices and the purposes they are trying to serve with these."[110] Among those creative

uses may be the social consumption behaviors that I have described throughout this thesis, the

ones that allow older viewers to become experts and proselytizers, as my grandmother often was

for me.

Representation—Fan Communities vs. Nielsen Ratings

However, even if fan communities provide just the type of community-building necessary

for creating a transgenerational fan conversation that draws on the collective intelligence and

perspectives of the fan base as a whole, the issue of representation cannot be ignored. As has

been emphasized throughout this thesis, the Nielsen ratings are still the measure of success for a

show and particularly the 18-49 female demographic. This thesis has suggested the need for

valuing depth of engagement and viewer *expressions* in addition to impressions, and likewise for

understanding fan communities as a gathering of viewers dedicated to one's show that allows

executives to view these fans in a self-selected element that will generate more thorough and

natural responses than a focus group. However, the question remains whether these self-selected

fans in discussion boards can be seen as representative of a show's viewership as a whole and,

more than that, whether the consensus nature of communal discussion might skew these

discussion boards' opinions in a way that viewers who do not participate in online discussions

would not be swayed. These questions rest heavily on how much focus one gives to the social

interaction surrounding the consumption of a media text. For a vast majority of the audience,

this thesis argues, soap operas are texts which facilitate discussions, whether in one-on-one

interpersonal conversation or discussion groups. The importance of studying and understanding

these fan communities are not as apparent looking solely at an impressions-based model that

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[110] Ibid., 2.

invariably casts the viewer as passive but becomes more essential if valuing the depth of

engagement in the ways which many of the business practices outlined in the next few chapters

must. Further, if shows work to more proactively engage with and encourage fan proselytizing,

even empowering fans outside the target demographic, this emphasis on increasing engagement

and encouraging *viral marketing* of the show can lead to increases in impressions as well,

especially if shows take the long-term brand management approach suggested in this thesis.[111]

In the Bloomberg article referenced in the first chapter, TeleVest's Brian Cahill says that

the demise of soaps "may be true of NBC, but it's certainly not true of where we are."[112] Procter

& Gamble Productions has illustrated its continued dedication to *ATWT* and *Guiding Light*.

However, one particular example which took place within the fan community emphasizes this

tension between engagement and impressions and the Nielsen sample in particular. A

conversation between PGP/TeleVest employee Alina Adams, who acted as moderator for the

PGP official SoapBox Fan Discussion Board as part of her duties, and fans on the official

Guiding Light discussion board illuminated some of the gaps in understanding fans engagement

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[111] The term *viral marketing* refers to word-of-mouth campaigns and the spreading of media among users or consumers closely akin to the *proselytizing* behaviors this thesis highlights. In the past few years, companies have explicitly used the term to explain campaigns in which users become the advocates for a show or brand themselves. The term *viral marketing* has often been attributed to Douglas Rushkoff from Rushkoff, Douglas, *Media Virus!: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1994, although the way the term is used now refers to much broader marketing behaviors than Rushkoff was referring to. The term has also been traced back to Richard Brodie's work in Brodie, Richard, *Virus of the Mind: The New Science of the Mind*, Seattle, WA: Integral P, 1995. Brodie originally wrote about the term *profit virus*, referring to the idea of businesses that replicate themselves. Current debate sometimes centers on whether a video created by advertisers and encouraged to be spread can really be considered *viral*. For more on the debate, see Ford, Sam, "Xerox Touts Viral Marketing Drive with New Campaign, Leaving Some to Question What Viral Marketing Is." MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 09 April 2007, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/04/xerox_touts_viral_marketing_dr.php.
[112] Janofsky, Michael, "NBC's Zucker Sees 'Beginning of End' for Network Soap Operas," Bloomberg News, 26 January 2007, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aEYKX59PsHN4.

facing the soap opera industry and, consequently, *ATWT*.[113]

As moderator on the *GL* board, Adams wrote that "a headwriter's job is to make sponsors happy. They're the customers who pay the bills." She also said, "The only way to gauge fan happiness is ratings (message boards, magazine polls and Emmys are nice, but they mean nothing if the numbers aren't there)."[114] Adams was trying to instruct fans complaining on the site that their anger about a particular storyline and discussion of fan reaction to various decisions by the head writer was not fully cognizant of the business realities of the industry. Adams wanted to warn fans of the limited amount of impact they could have on the soap opera industry.

Fans were unsurprisingly upset by Adams' comments, finding that such a process of pleasing the advertisers first was somewhat backward and pointing out instead that first making fans happy should lead to maximized profits for PGP and its sponsors. However, Adams—while later making it clear she was stating her own opinion and not the official beliefs of PGP—went on the defensive against continued fan arguments, pointing out that "the 1000 or so people on this board are a tiny number compared to the overall audience, right?" and suggesting that fans should "try to get as many people as you know to stop watching the show for, say, a week [. . .]

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[113] The thread, entitled "Soap Talk-David Kriezman," is currently available at http://www.pgpphoto.com:3864/showthread.php?t=12496. The first message was posted on 14 February 2006, and was quickly locked by moderators, closing on 15 February 2006, with 64 comments. Moderator Alec wrote, "It isn't the fact that Alina posted her take on the situation, nor is it the fact that other posters are able to post their opinions, that makes this thread sad. It's the fact that this thread was meant to discuss David Kreizman's role on Guiding Light and what he went through to get his job, as specified on SoapTalk yesterday. Since that cannot be discussed, this thread will be closed." The thread has been moved to a section entitled "OK to Delete," which is not available to the main site but still comes up on SoapBox's search function. The thread remains available for those who know the correct search terms or have the URL, but its long-term existence is not likely, considering the section title. It is important to note that most older posts are in the "OK to Delete" section at this point and that the content of this particular post does not appear to have caused it to be moved there.

[114] Ibid.

and then see if it moves the Nielsen needle. That will give you an idea of the sort of numbers TPTB are looking at, versus what we on the boards are looking at."[115]

Again, the fans were outraged, and Adams faced the brunt of the fan anger on the thread, particularly by espousing this sentiment that the fan community's actions would have no impact. The logic of trying to convince fans to boycott the show aside, Adams' point is true enough—the fans on that board alone boycotting the show would likely do nothing to the Nielsen ratings. However, this was true not because of what Adams thought she was saying but rather by pointing out how large of a falsity the Nielsen ratings are. On the *Guiding Light* message boards across the Internet, thousands of fans—all of whom are actively interested in this show—congregate every day to discuss the soap, just as *ATWT* fans do on the corresponding discussion boards for their show. In all, these viewers dwarf the number of *GL* viewers or *ATWT* viewers who are among the Nielsen sample. The fans were well aware of this fact and pointed out that the only reason they would not change the ratings if they quit watching for a week was that the Nielsens were not an accurate reader of true viewing habits and that Adams was just pointing out their inadequacy.[116]

What Adams' comments emphasize is not the futility of active fan engagement but the inadequacy of the Nielsens to truly gauge fan reaction.[117] Are Internet message boards not a viable measurement of a show's success, an organic focus group already talking about the show

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[115] Ibid.

[116] For more on this discussion, see Ford, Sam, "The Most Important Discussion in the Entertainment Industry?" MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 20 February 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/02/the_most_important_discussion.php.

[117] New advertising models in particular are increasingly taking into account the importance of depth of engagement versus overall impressions. For instance, see Stuart Elliott's article about the importance of the "depth of brand experience" in *The New York Times*, in which the Advertising Research Foundation's Chief Research Officer said that engagement "happens inside the consumer, not inside the medium." Elliott, Stuart, "New Rules of Engagement," *The New York Times*, 21 March 2006.

in a public place, free to be observed by representatives of the network and PGP? The gap in understanding may be due to a lack of understanding as to just how important the social network built around these soap opera texts are to the viewing experience.

Community Building

The majority of scholarly writing on the soap opera genre has focused on reader reception, yet a growing number of analysts have looked specifically at the interpersonal social networks that surround these daily dramatic texts. Ellen Seiter writes, "Daytime serials do not end with the broadcast. Women pass on these stories orally. This recapitulation can mean a repossession of the narratives through emphasis, revision, summary, selection and commentary."[118] Now, as a growing number of scholars have pointed out, online forums have accelerated and multiplied those effects. Further, online forums have revealed that, while soap operas may be particularly intended for a female audience, that male soap opera fans (myself included) are involved in this "recapitulation" as well.[119] Understanding the power of soap operas and how the shows are and should be changing due to various social and technological changes in the beginning of the 21st Century requires an acute understanding of how these soap operas function in viewers' lives. As mentioned earlier, the intent of this focus on fan communities in this chapter seeks to provide more insight into how these online communities are formed and maintained in ways that become an important part of the fan experience. By acknowledging the collective nature of these fan communities, the industry must realize the social influence that fans outside the target demographic have on viewers within that

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[118] Seiter, Ellen, "Promise and Contradiction: The Daytime Television Serial," *Film Reader* 5, 1982, 150-163, 162.

[119] No user data is available, and the majority of posters who identify their gender on the discussion boards I have posted on are female, but every one of these groups have several men who are active and respected members of the community.

demographic when viewing soap opera fandom as a social activity rather than a solitary and

passive role. Particularly, since these communities include not just *insiders* but also *tourists* just

passing through and *minglers* who are part of the community but not yet fans of the show, these

community-building behaviors may be key to gaining new audience members. Further, as

devotees who are fans of the show but not as actively involved in the community possibly get

pulled further into the community, they become enabled as *insiders* and *proselytizers* as well,

increasing both the engagement and the number of fan recruiters these shows' brands have.

> Henry Jenkins writes:

> The age of media convergence enables communal, rather than individualistic, modes of
> reception. Not every media consumer interacts within a virtual community yet; some
> simply discuss what they see with their friends, family members, and workmates. But
> few watch television in total silence and isolation. For most of us, television provides
> fodder for so-called water cooler conversations. And, for a growing number of people,
> the water cooler has gone digital. Online forums offer an opportunity for participants to
> share their knowledge and opinions.[120]

Only a small minority of *ATWT* viewers participates in the Media Domain forum used in the

following examples, but several thousand fans participate in one of the many online forums for

the show, and even more are *tourists* on the site.[121] On the other hand, the vast majority of the

soap's viewers likely have some sort of social connection built around the show, so

understanding *ATWT*'s place in people's lives requires a continual awareness that these shows

are not produced in a social vacuum and that, while these interpersonal relationships and online

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[120] Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York UP, 2006, 26.

[121] In the case of writing about the public conversations that take place in the Media Domain forum, it is important to note, as John Edward Campbell does, that "I am less an academic gone native than a native gone academic." While this essay does not include information from my own interaction with the fan community, my own longtime participation as an occasional poster on the Media Domain discussion board has greatly shaped my perceptions and understanding of how such soap opera fan communities operate. See Campbell, John Edward, *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity*, Binghamton, NY: Haworth P, 2004, 25.

communities may be built around the shows, it is as often these social relationships that drive continued interest in the texts during times when the viewers are not particularly engaged with the storylines on the show.

In short, these social connections, particularly membership in an online community, become as important if not more important than the show itself to many of these viewers. Empowering the social connections around a show is of financial interest to Procter & Gamble Productions, since building these communities serves not only to bolster and generate the quantity of viewers but also greatly enhance the depth of the connections these viewers have to the text.[122]

Soap opera fan communities are not so unlike any collective entity in that much energy is spent in policing the group and what is perceived as its common values and culture. Christine Scodari has written at length about the political implications of these online groups.[123] Scodari focuses particularly on how these fans defend their shows against accusations of age and race discrimination, with fan community members accusing those who raise these issues as too political, as if politics and soap opera were mutually exclusive.[124] Scodari's work acknowledges

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[122] Aswin Punathambekar writes of Indian fan communities surrounding the music of A.R. Rahman that "these fan collectives, thus, function as zones of engagement, where individuals, media technologies and institutions, and broader cultural and political forces" come together. Aswin examines these fan communities place in the negotiation of India's place in the modern cultural landscape, but these *ATWT* fan communities are similarly "zones of engagement," where fans debate, deconstruct, and reconceptualize the show's texts and publicly redefine the meaning of the shows. See Punathambekar, Aswin, "Rowdies, Rasikas, Fans: Bollywood, New Media, and Participatory Culture," *Biblio* 10.9-10, September/October 2005.
[123] Scodari, Christine, *Serial Monogamy: Soap Opera, Lifespan, and The Gendered Politics of Fantasy*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2004. Scodari describes her place as at the intersection of political economy, British cultural studies, and U.S. cultural studies approaches to popular texts.
[124] Scodari, Christine, "'No Politics Here': Age and Gender in Soap Opera 'Cyberfandom,'" *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text Reader* Second Edition, Ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003, 497-506. Originally published in *Women's Studies in Communication* 21.2 (Fall 1998), 168-187.

that, while these spaces may empower the voices of female fans, online communities also restrict speech in an effort to maintain the borders of a community.

During my own participation in these online communities, I have seen fans often discuss issues of age, race, gender, and other overtly political discussions. For instance, while the debate surrounding character Luke Snyder's family coming to terms with his homosexuality got heated at times on the Media Domain board, a variety of viewpoints were represented and discussed in great detail. Sometimes members were not tolerant enough of each other's opinions, but no one argued that such a political discussion did not belong on the board. However, on the Media Domain forum, myriad posts explicitly focus on some sense of what is or is not appropriate for the community, policing the borders of proper discourse, as well as who is and is not a community member.

Particularly interesting are posts that are openly hostile to the Media Domain community as a whole. For instance, in January 2006, community member Lynn started a topic called "THIS BOARD IS NO LONGER WORTH COMING TO…IT IS TRASHED!!"[125] Lynn bemoans the lack of quality posters in the fan forum, apparently compared to a previous era of Media Domain, and writes, "Lately all you get on the board is ridicule of the actors, the stories and the writing of our soap and to hear that all the time is not fun." Lynn's posts question the negativity of the Media Domain community toward the show and suggest fans should be more appreciative of the actors and writers who create the daily text around which the community revolves. She writes, "I no longer enjoy coming to this board and no longer will be a part of something that maybe hurting our actors especially the ones that are putting our a lot everyday to

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[125] Lynn, "THIS BOARD IS NO LONGER WORTH COMING TO…IT IS TRASHED!!" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 04 January 2006, started 1:09:23.

entertain us […] I have been using and enjoying this board for many years but I am ready to sap it out of my favorite folder for good" (sic).

While some agreed with Lynn's assessment of too much negativity directed toward the show, the reaction of many posters in response was to defend the community as a whole.   User longtimejackfan follows the dismissal of Lynn with a cry for community solidarity: "To my fellow posters, I see tons of quality posting on this board. I wouldn't want to be part of any other discussion board because I enjoy this one and its posters so much. I enjoy the maturity of many posters when it comes to agreeing to disagree and the many discussions about the soap. I love this board!!! It is so much fun!" [126] Similarly, user alwazatwt emphasizes how Media Domain is set apart from other *ATWT* discussion boards: "MediaDomain is the best ATWT board on the net. There are no taboo topics, and no actor/character is too holy to be insulted."[127] Both of these responses serve to counter Lynn's accusations with rhetoric that both bands the Media Domain community together while simultaneously describing why this board in particular is better than others.

Other posters question Lynn's credibility as a supposed longtime member of the board. Kitty23 writes, "Lynn, if you don't like what is going on here, why don't you start a topic under your name with something that interests you. I didn't find anything on the currently listed topics under your name."[128] Meanwhile, user silver writes, "So what are we supposed to do? Beg you not to leave? Promise to change our ways? If you don't like the tone of MD, if you disparage

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[126] Response posted 05 January 2006, 11:49:53.
[127] Response posted 05 January 2006, 0:45:20.
[128] Response posted 04 January 2006, 17:47:58.

the opinions expressed here, if you are so offended on behalf of a particular actor, then just leave. Seriously, did you think your post would garner you any sympathy?"[129]

These responses emphasize a community pride in the *ATWT* MD fan discussion group, empowered as being not just a fan community of a niche property outside the primetime "mainstream," as most would probably relegate the soap opera to being, but also as one of myriad *ATWT* discussion groups. Douglas Atkin argues in *The Culting of Brands* that people join in these communities to become more individual: "A community of like people implicitly and sometimes explicitly endorses the individual [. . .] It can create an uncritical and even celebratory environment in which the individual can feel confident enough to find and express himself."[130] Soap operas, like comic books and pro wrestling, are considered niche even though their number of fans are quite large, so these properties can have a cult following, even when that involves millions of fans. These soap operas, and particularly the perception of their fan communities, may have less credibility because of the view that soap operas are outside the cultural mainstream, but the popularity of *ATWT* and other soaps are also empowered by their niche status because it leads to more fervent fan support.

On the other hand, viewing fan communities as an uncritical community where the individual can feel free to express himself or herself is problematic, as the following thread demonstrates. A Media Domain controversy broke out in May 2006, based on a post by user Linny predicting how another community member, MaryHatch, was going to react to a plot twist that would be in the next day's show.[131] MaryHatch, one of the most outspoken and well-known

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[129] Response posted 04 January 2006, 15:19:52.
[130] Atkin, Douglas, *The Culting of Brands: When Consumers Become True Believers*, New York: Portfolio, 2004, 5.
[131] Linny, "Because in cyberspace, no one can hear MaryHatch scream…" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 30 May 2006, started 14:52:30.

posters on the board, had written posts complaining about how many pregnant characters on the show eventually utter the words "this baby growing inside me," and previews for the next day's episode included a version of that line from one of the characters. Some in the fan community have wondered whether MaryHatch might be involved in the soap opera industry or else have a variety of connections in the soap opera industry, as she has not incredibly outspoken about the details of her offline life.

User Wally took umbrage with a post dedicated to MaryHatch, writing, "Why should we care about what MaryHatch would like? This isn't MaryHatchdomain. It's MediaDomain. Why do you people worship her so much? Send her private e-mails if you want to send her personal messages or make a website dedicated to her if you want to giggle and gush over her." The community, including MaryHatch, banded together again to dismiss Wally's concerns as both trivial and as confusing the conversational nature of Linny's post with some sort of fan worship of MaryHatch. User Boome responds, "You are seriously bothered that people LIKE MaryHatch? You make it sound as if you are the voice of the downtrodden and MaryHatch were the great, facist dictator breathing down our necks. It isn't MaryHatch worship. It's the fact that she's posted enough for us to know what quirky things bother her" (sic). User dolphina points out that "regular posters get to *know* each other a bit, and a post like Linny's is simply friendly – nothing more," while user Oakdale Oldtimer surmises that Wally is the newest pseudonym of a regular troll on the board: "Ah ha, I thought so: the use of 'fangurls' and the nasty attack approach are always giveaways. Hello, Robert. Kyle. Reader. Wally. Geez, you have more aliases than Sydney Bristow."[132]

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[132] Sydney Bristow was the primary character on the ABC television series *Alias* who worked for the U.S. government by going undercover under various identities in each episode to combat various terrorist activities.

While the *ATWT* Media Domain board united together to defend its honor against the attacks from Lynn and Wally, the response to user Mar0320 in December 2006 led to a much greater community divide. These online communities often pose questions, implicitly or explicitly, as to who is really a "member" of the community and who is not. Mar0320 was a newcomer most well-known for a strong attachment to young *ATWT* star Jennifer Landon (daughter of television acting legend Michael Landon) and Landon's character Gwen Norbeck, about which the board was divided between fans and "haters," particularly those who thought too much screen time had been dedicated to the Gwen character since her first appearance. Mar0320 posted news that there were rumors that something *ATWT*-related might be planned for a *Saturday Night Live* segment, and she supposed that it would be Landon performing the song she recently recorded as part of an *ATWT* storyline.[133]

Negative responses flooded in, such as a post from user Zago that begins "Earth to Mar!" and questions "Is Landon aware of your obsession?"[134] Other comments ranged from CannaLily's "You've only been watching ATWT for five minutes Mar, are you aware the show is full of a LOT of singers and some have even sung on Broadway?" (sic) to dolphina's "Mar, I really don't want to be mean about this. I know you're very young and your over-involvement with the ATWT cast, JL in particular, doesn't seem particularly healthy." Other board members defended Mar against the angry mob and begged her not to let the flames keep her from participating in the Media Domain community.

At the heart of these questions is a focus on creating some sort of criteria that establishes both who is and is not a part of the Media Domain community for *ATWT* and what being a

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[133] Mar0320, "Saturday Night Live-ATWT Related. Don't miss tomorrow 12-9," *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 09 December 2006, started 00:23:42.
[134] Response posted 09 December 2006, 07:48:36.

member of that community should mean. In the case of defending the board against Lynn or accusations of "MaryHatch worship," community members are attempting to create some statement of solidarity that explains both who is and is not part of the Media Domain community and why it is desirable to be a part of the Media Domain community. In the case of the arguments surrounding Mar's posts, questions are raised about rank both in how long one has been posting on this particular discussion board and how long one has watched *ATWT*. Since Mar has only been watching "for five minutes," some community members have not fully accepted her, or her favorite character, as a true part of their show—and their community.

Nevertheless, while policing often leads to disruptions meant to establish the boundaries or *raison d'etre* of the fan community, a variety of bolstering activities on the board are meant to strengthen the personal ties among posters in the community. This may be as simple as inquiring about a regular poster who had not written in some time,[135] or else drawing on the knowledge of longtime viewers in hopes of learning more about the history of characters or storylines. These discussion threads establish a concern for getting to know one another beyond the text of the show. Here, fans voice concerns about the silence of perceived full-time community members when they have not posted for a while, for instance. Some of this type of community-building take place in "off-topic" posts centered around questions like that posed by user KLS in November 2005, asking fellow Media Domain posters what they do when not posting on MD or watching *ATWT*.[136] Viewers share personal stories such as their occupation, their family life, their other favorite television shows, hobbies, and also what drives them to be part of the Media Domain community.

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[135] For instance, the post by user couldwriteit, "OT: where is carjackfan?" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 10 November 2005, started 09:27:11.

[136] KLS, "What Do You Do When Your're Not Watching Soaps or Checking in on This Board?" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 02 November 2005, started 12:07:57.

While some of these discussions do little of the interpretive functions described by Baym, they serve to further facilitate the feeling of community surrounding the discourse on the Media Domain board. Taken together, these community-building activities point out the important social dimensions of these online fan forums that are often quite disconnected from the text of the show itself. The majority of this thesis focuses on fan behaviors that lead to greater engagement with the show, but these community-building behaviors are an important part of the fan community experience and must be kept in mind.

Collective Intelligence and Fan Proselytizing in the Fan Community

This thesis argues particularly for new business models which value the collective intelligence of the fan community. Again, while soap opera fans have always gathered their resources and memories together on the most micro-level, online communities provide a forum for intelligence gathering that is unparalleled among other modes of engagement among audience members. These activities provide the chance for audiences to deepen their engagement and to supplement an understanding of the show's main text by providing background information, challenging characters' motivations and decisions, and linking current events with the show's rich history. The large number of longtime fans, many of whom are outside the target demographic, on these discussion boards play a pivotal role in the intelligence-gathering aspects of these online communities, and they also act as strong proselytizers for the brand by spending a considerable amount of time catching new viewers up on social connections among characters, explaining nuances of a story that the show itself does not dig into, and inviting *tourists* and *minglers* to get more deeply involved with the show. Because of the depth of the *immersive story worlds* created by soap opera texts, these intelligence gathering activities are particularly encouraged among soap opera fan communities, where no one person can

possibly accurately remember the history of a show.

For instance, in November 2005, poster Mandi asked veterans about the strange aging of various longtime characters.[137] As mentioned in the first chapter, soap opera characters often suffer from a disease known within the fan community as SORAS (Soap Opera Rapid Aging Syndrome), in which characters grow up much faster than chronologically possible. User ccgabe writes in disagreement with the age assessment of one of her fellow posters, saying, "Sorry to disagree Aimee but Jen was born in late Oct of 1990 and casey was born March of 1991 so Jen is older. Dusty is supposed to be the same age as Lily and Holden with Paul and Andy a year or two behind. That's the way it was when I first started watching in the mid 80's" (sic).[138]

These posts intend to establish respect for knowledge in relation to the show and a method of drawing on the collective intelligence of the viewers, even when the various accounts do not add up to one objective Truth but are rather negotiated based on the community's collective memory. Posts that draw on the collective intelligence of the fan base often emphasize explicitly how the fans see their own collective knowledge of the show as greatly surpassing that of TIIC (which stands for "The Idiots in Charge," which replaces TPTB at times when the fan community is particularly angry at how a character is being portrayed "out-of-character," or in conflict with the history of that character, which the fans feel they know better than the ephemeral creative teams handling those characters).

Henry Jenkins writes about the *moral economy* that fans use to defend their own fan fiction and open criticism of the official stories in his examination of *Star Trek* fans. Jenkins says:

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[137] Mandi, "Question for Veteran Viewers: Just how old are Dusty and Jenny?" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 04 November 2005, started 08:10:02.
[138] Response posted 04 November 2005, 08:19:41.

> The fans respect the original texts, yet fear that their conceptions of the characters and concepts may be jeopardized by those who wish to exploit them for easy profits, a category that typically includes Paramount and the network but excludes Roddenberry and many of the show's writers. The ideology of fandom involves both a commitment to some degree of conformity to the original program materials as well as a perceived right to evaluate the legitimacy of any use of those materials, either by textual producers or textual consumers.[139]

The historical contexts have changed since Jenkins originally wrote this essay (Roddenberry is no longer alive, and multiple new *Star Trek* series have aired since that time). Further, in soaps, much less autonomy is granted to the show's writers since the text has passed through the hands of so many writing teams. Nevertheless, the concerns that Jenkins observed among *Star Trek* fans as to the exploitation of characters and the fans' "perceived right to evaluate the legitimacy" of the way characters are used is true of soaps fan communities as well.

In the case of soap opera discussion boards, fantasy rewriting of storylines or colorful parody and criticism of the way the current writing team is handling longtime "legacy" characters on the show replaces fan fiction, of which there is little for *ATWT*. However, because fans see themselves as being the true experts on the characters as a collective group, the fan community feels a large degree of ownership over Oakdale and its residents and the right to actively disagree and dispute the way in which creators use the characters, if it does not remain true to the vast majority of the show's history. Here, the fan behaviors described in the second chapter (discussion, criticism, performance, and theorizing) become an important part of the community-building process. These behaviors are greatly aided by the large number of longtime fans who are *insiders* in these fan discussion boards and who are sought out as experts by many less engaged fans when they have specific questions about the history of a character or storyline.

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[139] Jenkins, Henry, "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Television: The Critical View*, Fifth Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New York: Oxford UP, 1994, 470-491, 486. Originally published in *Critical Studies of Mass Communication*, June 1988, 85-107.

Again, understanding how these most active longtime fans are valued in the social consumption

of soaps provides a way in which to value longtime fans as proselytizers to not only *minglers* but

tourists as well.

Another major aspect of the Media Domain community's activities is newsgathering.

Since the soap opera press often neglects to give significant serious journalistic coverage of

behind-the-scenes events and the mainstream press all but ignores soap operas, fans often gather

on the boards to piece together as many tidbits as they can find in order to figure out what will be

happening on the show or what backstage changes might be causing shifts in stories or

characters. Henry Jenkins writes of spoiler activities in fan communities that "spoiling is

collective intelligence in practice."[140] Just as fans use their collective intelligence to reconstruct

the show's past and criticize the authenticity of the current product compared to characters'

histories, fans also gather their resources and compete to prove their authenticity and position

within the community by the authenticity of the spoiler information they collect.

In July 2006, *ATWT* fans were shocked to learn that veteran actor Benjamin Hendrickson,

who had played the role of Hal Munson on the show since 1985—minus a few brief

hiatuses—had passed away at 55. The cause of death was not initially reported but was later

revealed to be suicide. The Media Domain community's reaction was interesting in several

regards. First, the fans "picked up the slack" due to the lack of reporting on the actor's untimely

death by the official journalism world, perhaps due to a lack of interest in the soaps world from

most of the mainstream media. The night before the news was made public, someone posted a

rumor of Hendrickson's death on the Media Domain board, but it had been dismissed on the

board as "a sick rumor" when no further information was made available. The next day, *Soap*

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[140] Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New
York UP, 2006, 28.

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Opera Digest officially broke the story on their Web site, but most of the details were pieced together initially by the fans, who created their own story by aggregating the bits available from several sources. On the day the news broke, fans spent most of their energy addressing their own disbelief. Since soaps tape more than a month ahead of schedule, Hendrickson's character was in the process of playing a central role in scenes where his on-screen daughter was dying of complications from viral pneumonia, so viewers had to watch character Hal's grief while knowing that actor Hendrickson was now dead. Fans quickly created YouTube video tributes to Hendrickson's performances and Hal Munson, flooded his online funeral guestbook to pay their respects, and acted as a bereavement support group through the message boards for one another.

Some mainstream stories pointed out that memories of personal tragedies in Hendrickson's life, such as losing family members to long-term illnesses, may have resurfaced through scenes in which Hal dealt with his daughter's death, and some journalists intimated that this narrative may have contributed to his suicide. The Media Domain community debated the merits of this claim, since the show is taped weeks in advance. On the Media Domain board, MaryHatch revealed that, during his year sabbatical from the show, Hendrickson had to have all his teeth replaced with implants and then had to learn to speak properly again. When he returned to the show, many of the fans had noticed his slurred speech patterns and often questioned or commented on Hendrickson's health and the reason for his speaking difficulties. According to MaryHatch, a close relative of Hendrickson's had said that his preoccupation with his appearance and speech helped drive his depression, not the content of the show, especially when Hendrickson found that some fans were speculating about his health and appearance online.[141]

Debate about Hendrickson's death overtook the usual interpretive posts about the plots on

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[141] For more information, see Ford, Sam, "Fans Debate How They Should React to Actor's Death," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 07 July 2006.

the show itself, as fans debated their own possible role in Hendrickson's depression and engaged in the type of theorizing activities that emphasize the power of *vernacular theory* within the fan base. Fans became cognizant that the public nature of the forum of their community meant that actors themselves could read the posts this community made about them, especially when posts often include critiques of not just acting performances but also actors' appearances. Many of the discussions in the weeks following Hendrickson's death demonstrated the fans' acute awareness of the Media Domain community's placement between an extensive social group and a public forum. The fans debated their own potential culpability in the depression of an actor who many of the fans revered, while others questioned whether these discussions were overstating the power and significance of fan forums.

Longtime fans may also be actively involved in certain online discussion groups in which a greater number of *minglers* might post. For instance, in Summer 2006, *ATWT* began telling the story of the coming out of homosexual teenager Luke Snyder, the member of a central family in the show's narrative. Luke's father Holden was the first to suspect that his son might be hiding that he was gay from the family, and solitary scenes with Luke confirmed to the viewer that Holden's suspicions were correct. The saga, which continues on the show in current storylines, dealt with the reaction of both his parents, his biological father, both of his grandmothers, and various friends and family members, and Luke's subsequent attempts to manage life in mid-America white suburbia as a gay teen. During this storyline, a thread on the Dreamcaps Forum Web site became dedicated to the coming out storyline for *ATWT*.[142]

Although the thread was started and maintained by a few *ATWT* fans who were also

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[142] The thread can be viewed at http://www.dreamcaps.org/forums/index.php?showtopic=27905. The Dreamcaps Forum appears to be one of those sites which keeps long-running discussion threads actively archived.

members of the gay community, *tourists* who only followed the discussion about the show or watched video clips posted online began to be drawn more actively into the discussion as *minglers* and, later, the storyline itself, moving increasingly toward becoming *insiders* themselves. Some of these new fans admitted that they didn't watch the whole show but only record the show to watch the scenes involving Luke, or else became addicted to the video clips that one particular community member posted on a regular basis. Over time, though, many of these fans slowly became familiar with a majority of the cast when various other characters interacted with Luke, so that they became fans of some other actors/characters on the show as well.

The thread slowly morphed into a discussion not just of the Luke storyline but also about how soap operas tell their stories, a recognition that the genre focuses on slow-moving action and dialogue paced out over weeks and months with multiple storylines juggled simultaneously, at least when the show is effectively engaging the audience (another example of the type of *vernacular theory* that fans articulate on a regular basis). Telling this story in this slow manner that only soap operas can allows viewers to get to know the character in a more intimate way, as the posters who write about Luke Snyder prove. Initially, some fans started posting video recaps of Luke's scenes. On 21 February 2006, user J-Wo writes, "okay guys I think I'm officially hooked! Might not have time to watch the whole soap bit will definately watch the clips people post on here. So addictive!" (sic).[143] Posters then began actively encouraging each other to watch not just the Luke storyline but to tune into other stories on the show as well. For instance, on 30 August 2006, user Huey writes, "Can't believe I've been watching a *soap opera* for a couple weeks now. I used to watch the show just for the Luke storyline but now I'm catching

[143] J-Wo, Post #43, "Gay characters/storylines on soaps," Dreamcaps Forums, 21 February 2006, posted 03:51 a.m.

myself being interested in the slasher thing."[144] Since its creation in Summer 2006, the thread

has stretched to 34 pages and remains active in the discussion of Luke's storylines in March

2007.

This Dreamcaps forum thread is an example of what Henry Jenkins and I have previously

written about as surplus audiences and particularly how fans within a niche audience group, like

the gay community in relation to soap opera programming, become proselytizers for the show

among their social group.[145] Many of the members of this online gay community would likely

have never been aware of the *ATWT* storyline in the first place if there were not existing fans of

the show actively posting about the Luke coming out storyline on Dreamcaps. These fans'

continued discussion of the show's storylines has slowly brought other posters on the Dreamcaps

site to become regular *ATWT* viewers as well.

While this thesis argues elsewhere that longtime fans are the most likely resources to help

soap operas recruit new viewers, this example of engaging a surplus audience and their active

community provides another avenue to gain fans. In short, because soap operas are texts

especially empowered by the social networks and fan communities that grew around them,

shows have the best chance of retaining new audience members in the long term by creating texts

that are friendly to the type of community building found in this Dreamcaps Forum thread. With

a social group inside this greater gay community forum dedicated to discussing, providing

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[144] Huey, Post #377, "Gay characters/storylines on soaps," Dreamcaps Forums, 30 August 2006, posted 09:23 p.m.
[145] Ford, Sam, with Henry Jenkins, and Grant McCracken, Parmesh Shahani, Ivan Askwith, Geoffrey Long, and Ilya Vedrashko, "Fanning the Audience's Flames: Ten Ways for Producers to Embrace and Cultivate the Active Participation of Fan Communities," White Paper for MIT Convergence Culture Consortium, January 2006. More on the concept of fan proselytizing was developed in Ford, Sam, with Rachel Shearer and Parmesh Shahani, Joshua Green, and Henry Jenkins, "No Room for Pack Rats: Media Consumption and the College Dorm," White Paper for MIT Convergence Culture Consortium, October 2006.

background to, and bolstering emotional attachment to *ATWT*, the Dreamcaps forum created a group of fans that, while initially only interested in the Luke "coming out" storyline, became focused on the show as a whole. These fans may still all be outside the target demographic, but as they share their newfound love of *ATWT* with their friends and family, they may pull 18-49 females within the fold as well. Understanding these fans not as a surplus but as active proselytizers helps empower the social communities surrounding soap operas to even more actively recruit new viewers to the show.

Collective Action—Faith in Fan Lobbying

One of the performative aspects of discussion boards mentioned in the second chapter is political organization from the fan base to draw on their collective intelligence to articulate the desires of the fan community. This hope of using the written word to influence TPTB has its roots in fan mail and letter-writing to the popular and soap opera press, but online fan communities become the amalgamation of this collective expression. Petitions, organized e-mail and letter-writing campaigns, and threads dedicated to expressing support or more often disappointment or disgust with a creative decision or rumored storyline are a regular part of most fan communities, and fans are keenly aware of the public-ness of their discussions, even if the Benjamin Hendrickson example proved that they may not always think through the full implications of having a "personal" conversation among the community in public.

For example, a rumor broke out in Summer 2006 that the Tom Hughes character might be murdered on *ATWT*. Historically speaking, Hughes may be the most central character on *ATWT*, the son of longtime characters Bob and Lisa who was born on the show (not literally speaking) in May 1961. For the past 45 years, viewers have watched Tom mature from birth through his career as a lawyer and now in his post-district attorney attempts to rebuild a private practice.

Hughes is the only character in television history to be born on a show and to survive in the plot for this duration, with viewers able to watch each step of the character's development. However, the past several years, despite the longtime attachment viewers have to Hughes and his current portrayer Scott Holmes (who has been in the role since 1987), the show has used Tom Hughes only in supporting roles, sometimes with stretches of a month at a time or more without Tom appearing on the show.

When the fan community heard that *ATWT* was planning a serial killer storyline and that a couple of minor and major characters could be killed, several viewers connected it to rumors reported in the soap opera press that a veteran on *ATWT* was unhappy with his/her contract. While some newer fans were not emotionally invested in a supporting actor who rarely appeared in a major scene on the show and others felt that Holmes' role had been diminished to the point that his leaving wouldn't be that big of a deal, many fans expressed anger at the rumor and a feeling that TPTB were neglecting and even mocking the show's history.

While the fans' passion in reacting to this rumor astounded me, particularly in certain audience members' deep support for a character who receives little attention from the text itself, the rumor was ultimately false. While Hughes has received more screen time in the past year than before this fan reaction to his rumored demise, Scott Holmes fans still regularly complain about the actor's lack of prominence in storylines. They endured another bout of fear when the character suffered a heart attack in 2007 and yet another when news was released that his contract would be up in Summer 2007. As of the submission of this thesis, however, Holmes and the Hughes character remain active in Oakdale, Ill.

Some within the industry may debate the value of the online fan communities, but one actress in March 2006 seemed particularly convinced that her fans could make a difference,

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Ellen Dolan, who has portrayed character Margo Hughes on *As the World Turns* since 1989, sent a letter out that started with the official *ATWT* Fan Club explaining her problems with the way her character had been written and female characters more broadly on the PGP soap over the past year or two. Ellen's letter was quickly posted on message boards dedicated to *ATWT* across the Internet and became the talk of the fan community.

In that letter, Dolan pointed to the prior success of the *ATWT* fans and the Fan Club in particular at making a difference, mentioning Trent Dawson, who played fan favorite character Henry Coleman in a recurring role for years, was put on contract after the show's producers were impressed by his being cheered at a fan club annual event. Dolan also made the case that the professional duties had been stripped from her character. Margo was once one of few female detectives on daytime television, but Dolan claimed that soap operas had abandoned their once progressive post of empowering women now that primetime offers more female characters in professional positions.

"Do you remember when Margo was a strong, independent woman and not a sniveling, cat fighting, high school girl craving for a football hero?" she asked, before bringing up other female characters on the show who no longer got significant airtime. She wrote:

> The character is being dismantled. These characters are your characters and I think valuable to the show. I need your support. I need you to help save Margo Hughes! I need you to write and ask for Margo back. I have attached a list of names and addresses for you to write to. Tell them how you feel about this character. Please guys, 'cus I love Margo and I want to keep giving her to you. Not to mention that my kid is only six, I've got many years to go.[146]

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[146] The letter remains available, copied into an archived thread at PGP SoapBox. The thread, entitled "Important!!! Ellen Dolan Mail!!!," is available at http://www.pgpphoto.com:3864/showthread.php?t=13390. The first post was made on 09 March 2006, and the last post in the thread was made on 12 March 2006, with a total of 77 comments. As with the Nielsen vs. fan communities debate referenced earlier in the chapter, this thread is currently under a section entitled "OK to Delete."

Dolan's rhetoric, telling the fans that "these characters are your characters," emphasized the moral economy surrounding these characters that give fans the feeling of some sort of ownership of this story, an ownership that Dolan acknowledges. The conversation illuminated that, while TPTB may "control" the fate of the show, the actors themselves believe that fans have some autonomy to demand changes in the text. Henry Jenkins writes of John Fiske's scholarship that it "depicted a world where consumers and producers confronted each other from positions of unequal power with no guaranteed outcomes, other than the likelihood that both would survive to fight another day. This seems to me a much better description of the current moment than one where corporate media totally dominates."[147] Such a description is particularly fitting for the battles between a soap opera's online fan community and the creators of these shows and the reason why Dolan reached out to the fans with some hope that they could help change the fate of her character. Dolan's letter circulated throughout the many online discussion boards and forums and caused fans to fervently discuss the need for changes in the way Margo was depicted. Subsequently, the Margo Hughes character, while not becoming the major focus of a storyline, was used more in a police capacity and was also utilized more effectively as a mother as well, leading some fans to feel more confident that the opinions of the fan community, in spreading and arguing in support of Dolan's letter through these online forums, could make some degree of difference on a show. Nevertheless, many fans still complained that the Margo Hughes character and her husband Tom never received storylines that focused on them rather than just using them for the support of other characters.

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[147] Jenkins, Henry, "Why Fiske Still Matters," *Flow* 2.6, June 2005, http://jot.communication.utexas.edu/flow/?jot=view&id=801.

Taking Advantage of Fan Engagement

The social networks described here are built around *ATWT* texts. While those within the industry may be correct in that any one of these communities have little control over the Nielsen ratings, the social connectedness and deep engagement that these communities encourage are key parts of a long-term brand-building approach to soap operas that could increase the numbers of viewers over time. The transgenerational composition of these communities, bringing together younger, newer viewers of the show with longtime fan experts, draws on the collective intelligence of the viewership as a whole, shifting from a view of soap opera fans as solitary impressions to an understanding of the ways in which soap opera fandom is tied not only to the show but the interpersonal relationships, both online and offline, that surround the viewing experience. The next three chapters build on the behaviors of these social networks and the importance of deeper fan engagement by looking at ways in which *ATWT* is adapting or might change based on alternate revenue streams, managing its vast archive, and creating transmedia extensions of this immersive story world. However, each of these aspects of a convergence culture business model for PGP is closely tied to the communal consumption patterns and community-building activities surrounding the text of the show that have been outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four:

Not So Nice 'n Easy: Product Placement in Soaps

If soap operas shift to a brand-management strategy that gives greater value to depth of fan engagement and the social activities surrounding the consumption of the official texts of these shows, new revenue sources become more plausible. The deeper engagement that the *immersive story worlds* of soap operas encourage also lead to revenue models that value engagement in a way that commercials based on Nielsen ratings do not. Companies like P&G invented the soap opera, originally radio dramas meant particularly to sell the soaps that sponsored the shows. Today, Procter & Gamble remains the only soap company still actively involved in the production of soap operas, so *ATWT* and *GL* are the only two shows that remain literally "soap operas." Amid the discussions about the declining ratings of soap operas over a several-year period, however, PGP has talked very little publicly about alternate revenue streams for their shows. This lack of public discussion reflects the particularly internal nature of *ATWT*'s production companies. Neither TeleVest nor PGP has a public Web site, other than the CBS network sites for the two soap operas and the PGP Soapbox fan forum officially sponsored by the show, and a variety of other official blogs and sites dealing with specific PGP entities.

However, fan forums are often actively discussing alternate revenue streams for these shows, as fans think about ways to help keep the shows profitable to assure they will remain on the air for years to come, displaying the type of *vernacular theory* from the fan community described in previous chapters. Most prevalent among these discussions is talk of product placement, both in reaction to placement visible during the show and also in discussion of what

the company could, should, or should not do in terms of integrating products and brands into *ATWT*. This chapter examines this discourse related to product placement and how *ATWT* might best capitalize on more skillfully using product placement as a revenue stream for the show, including both deals with outside companies and in-kind product placement deals from within P&G.

Product Placement

While the first forms of product placement can be found in literature, product placement in broadcast was launched simultaneously with commercial radio content, particularly driven by corporate sponsorship that involved prominent product mentions on the air.[148] Nowhere in radio drama was the product more closely married to the show than in the soap opera, however, a genre in which product placement was part of its name. Meanwhile, the influence of product placement infiltrated Hollywood around the same time soap operas were being popularized on the radio.[149] It came as no surprise, then, that product placement and direct sponsorship were a prominent part of the origins of commercial television as well.[150] Shows like Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theater*[151] and *Philco Television Playhouse*[152] were staples of early primetime television. Meanwhile, Scott Donaton writes about P&G's central role in using its daytime shows as platforms for household products, mentioning *ATWT* in particular and emphasizing that

[148] Barnouw, Eric, *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate*, New York: Oxford UP, 1978.
[149] Galician, Mary-Lou and Peter G. Bourdeau, "The Evolution of Product Placements in Hollywood Cinema," *Handbook of Product Placement in the Mass Media: New Strategies in Marketing Theory, Practice, Trends, and Ethics*, Ed. Mary-Lou Galician, Binghamton, NY: Haworth P, 2004, 17.
[150] Barnouw, Eric, *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate*, New York: Oxford UP, 1978.
[151] For more information, see Williams, Mark, "*The Milton Berle Show*," The Museum of Broadcast Communications Web site, http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/M/htmlM/miltonberle/miltonberle.htm.
[152] For more information, see Aldridge, Henry B., "*Philco Television Playhouse*," The Museum of Broadcast Communications Web site, http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/P/htmlP/philcotelevi/philcotelevi.htm.

the soaps were important parts of the launch of such central P&G products as Tide detergent and Crest toothpaste.[153] However, Ruth Rosen writes in 1986, "When soap companies produced their own programs, they dictated much of the content and even integrated their products into the storyline. In contrast, no brand names appear on today's soaps. Nor do soap products dominate the commercials."[154] This change was driven by the television industry rather than government regulation, as the commercial break with multiple sponsors limited the impact that advertisers could have over the content of television programs at a time when television studios were trying to develop their reputation.

While the 30-second spot led to the diminishment of editorial influence by sponsors in most cases and a separation of advertising and content, viewers increasingly became savvy at skipping commercial breaks. Whether having a chat before the show returns, leaving the room during the commercials, or using the introduction of various ad-skipping technologies, viewers found a variety of ways to ignore the sponsors' messages. William Uricchio writes, "The growing abundance of televisual material, the ability to time shift and zip through advertisements introduced by the VCR, or the ability to zap ads in real-time television thanks to the remote control, all inexorably altered the notion of the televisual."[155] The autonomy these technologies granted to viewers time shifting and skipping commercials cannot be understated. For instance, Paul Levinson writes that the VCR "endowed television with much of the navigational qualities long cherished in the book, and recently available in radio by virtue of its symbiosis with

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[153] Donaton, Scott, *Madison & Vine: Why the Entertainment and Advertising Industries Must Converge to Survive*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004, 45.

[154] Rosen, Ruth, "Soap Operas: Search for Yesterday," *Watching Television: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture*, Ed. Todd Gitlin, New York: Pantheon, 1986, 42-67, 53.

[155] Uricchio, William, "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Ed. Lynn Spigel and Jen Olsson, Durham: Duke UP, 2004, 163-182, 168.

recorded music."[156] Now, in return, the modern television environment has incorporated a variety of experimental advertising forms, such as a return to sponsored television shows, product placement, and product integration, to retain a viable economic model surrounding these new technologies enabling and making obvious these ad-skipping behaviors. It should be noted that, while American television is an open market for product placement, many international television markets have restrictions on commercial content within the main text of a show, and extensive use of product placement might raise significant questions, depending on what markets a particular soap opera is distributed in outside the U.S.

Product Placement vs. Product Integration

In May 2006, the Writers Guild of America East released a statement asking for writers and other creative talents working in the television industry to have more autonomy in the use of product integration. According to a story by Jon Lafayette in *TelevisionWeek*, the writers particularly emphasized the need to "be able to protect their work so that product integration demands did not interrupt the storytelling and drive away the audiences that advertisers seek and which ultimately pay for the programs."[157] Lafayette also interviewed the president of the WGA West, Patrick Verrone, who had already been active in protecting the rights of writers in relation to product integration. Verrone said, "It's one thing to have a bottle of Poland Spring on a table. It's another to have writers write and actors speak about its refreshing goodness and have a whacky neighbor, who this week is in the water business, stock the product."[158]

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[156] Levinson, Paul, "Remedial Media; Views via VCR and Window," *The Soft Edge of Natural History and Future of the Information Revolution*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 104-114, 110.
[157] Lafayette, Jon, "Writers Want Say in Product Integration Deals: WGA East Says Issue Distinct from Placement." *TelevisionWeek*, 17 May 2006, http://www.tvweek.com/news.cms?newsId=10025.
[158] Ibid.

This distinction between product integration and product placement is key in a discussion about product placement in soap operas. Some television programs allow for product integration, using the WGA distinction, more than others. Particularly, it seems that reality television shows or sporting events are not as badly hurt by the extensive use of sponsor names because it doesn't seem as absurd. Both are already controlled environments and in fact gain their narrative drive from that contrived situation, whether a game or a reality competition. However, in fictional dramatic or comedy series, product integration can easily destroy the viewer's suspension of disbelief in a way that detracts from viewer involvement and the perceived artistry of a show.

Alec Austin led a study on product placement for the MIT Convergence Culture Consortium, focusing on the unofficial agreement, or *implicit contract*, that exists between producers and consumers of a television program. Austin distinguishes between products with audio components directly linked into the plot and visual background product placement, which leads to a greater sense of realism within the story when used organically.[159] Research indicates that, while audio product placement might garner more audience attention, such use often angers and frustrates the audience instead of bolstering their interest in a product.[160]

Existing Attempts at Product Placement for *ATWT*

One of the most remembered attempts at product placement for *ATWT* was also, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most hated. If one accepts Russell's premise that the most memorable attempts at product placement are often simultaneously the most disruptive for the audience, then

[159] Austin, Alec, with Henry Jenkins, Stacy Wood, David Edery, and Parmesh Shahani, "Selling Creatively: Product Placement in the New Media Landscape," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium White Paper, Spring 2006.
[160] Russell, Cristel Antonia, "Investigating the Effectiveness of Product Placements in Television Shows: The Role of Modality and Plot Connection Congruence on Brand Memory and Attitude," *Journal of Consumer Research*, December 2002, 313.

placement recall is not a good measure of success in product placement in this case. The storyline unfolded in May 2005, between character Margo Hughes and her mother-in-law, Lisa Grimaldi. Margo, a redhead, is at work at her police desk when she notices a gray hair. Her mother-in-law suggests Nice 'n Easy hair coloring in a nauseatingly blatant on-air reference, and a later scene displayed the happy results. While there was some attempt to use the Nice 'n Easy product integration for humor, viewers and columnists did not find the disruptive audio references to the hair product amusing in the least.

With the blatant audio references to the product, the use of Nice 'n Easy can be distinguished as product integration rather than placement, as mentions of the product got in the way of the progression of the show's plot. In her online "Two Scoops" column on Soap Central, Jennifer Biller wrote, "And how about Margo using Nice 'n Easy to touch up her roots during her hair emergency? This shameless product placement is getting out of control. There are already enough commercials eating up the hour we're supposed to be getting the show. Please, I'm begging, stop wasting precious plot time plugging products."[161]

Biller links the Nice 'n Easy integration with another character buying her future grandson a baby gift with the Kohl's logo on the gift. While Biller links the two examples of product placement together, her anger is primarily directed at the integration example, which leads to a backlash against other forms of product placement as well. In this case, however, the use of a Kohl's box for a baby gift would be a strong example of organic product placement, while the Nice 'n Easy integration disrupted the viewer experience to the point that people still remember and point to that particular episode as an example of the evils of product placement.

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[161] Biller, Jennifer, "Two Scoops: Oakdale Justice, Product Placements and Fabulous '50s," Soap Central Web site, 09 May 2005, http://www.soapcentral.com/atwt/scoop.php?section=twoscoops&year=2005&date=050509.

However, Biller's column also raises another important component of product placement to keep in mind. She writes of the Kohl's gift, "So, Barbara shops at Kohls. Who knew? I pictured her as a Nordstrom/Neiman Marcus kind of gal."[162] While Biller's comments are tongue-in-cheek, the point should not be forgotten: even organic background product placement must be considered in relation to the plot and characters of the show if it is to add to the authenticity of the fictional world and not disrupt the narrative and thus anger the viewer. For instance, a bag from a store on the show should be one that would reasonably be available in Oakdale, Ill., or the surrounding area, and Biller is quite right that the personality of the character must be taken into account, as to where that person would reasonably shop.

The viewer's need for authenticity and a lack of disruption of the immersive narrative world in which *ATWT* takes place points to the importance of a strong creative editorial control in creating the most advantageous forms of product placement, the kind of creative control for which the WGA argues. While I think writers should work with networks, production companies, and advertisers to pursue these organic product placements and thus create substantial alternative revenue streams for a show, it would be a fatal error to leave the creative forces behind the show out of the decision-making process. Viewers do not hate product placement in most cases, just blatant, shameless, and poorly executed product placement.

An alternative to the Nice 'n Easy fiasco for *ATWT* would be a situation in which a popular couple on the show, Dusty Donovan and Lucy Montgomery, were hiding out in a warehouse. The warehouse was stocked with giant cardboard boxes displaying the Bounty logo. While that product placement was somewhat more natural, some viewers were still angered

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[162] Ibid.

when the boxes were actively used in a couple of scenes, drawing more blatant attention to Bounty.

No one seemed to complain about a late February and early-March 2007 use of Tums, however. The scene was Oakdale's Al's Diner, a popular destination for characters on the show. A Tums display was set up next to the counter, and the logo was visible in the background during several scenes that played out in Al's. Since the idea of selling Tums at the counter of a greasy spoon doesn't seem that out-of-the-ordinary, and the characters never had any interaction with the brand or mentioned Tums verbally, the placement seemed organic. Fans noticed and discussed the Tums in the forum, but no one seemed particularly outraged. The difference might have been that the warehouse scenes were designed to make the Bounty boxes a focused object in some scenes, while the Tums display at Al's always remained in the background.

Fan Discussion of Product Placement

As indicated in the previous section, fans are not only the market for daytime advertisements but are also vocal judges as to what is and is not acceptable for product placement within the show. In December 2005, a thread on the Media Domain board was dedicated particularly to product placement in soaps, led by poster MaryHatch.[163] Everyone who posted on the thread was in agreement that product placement could be executed effectively and naturally and could be a viable way for the soap opera genre to survive and even thrive long-term. Several of the posters pointed out that product placement in soaps would be especially easy, since most of the action either takes place in semi-public spaces like restaurants, hospitals, shopping spaces, or the workplace, or else private homes. Most of the fan discussion on this

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[163] See my first writing about this discussion at Ford, Sam, "Soap fans and product placement discussion," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 21 December 2005, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2005/12/soap_fans_and_product_placemen.php.

board centered not on whether product placement should be incorporated into soaps but rather how product placement can be most effectively handled on these shows. Some posters discussed the issues with transforming the local Java into a Starbucks or other potential forms of product integration that would add to the realism of the show, create an alternate revenue stream, and not ultimately interfere with the plot or characters of *ATWT* but rather enhance the realism of the setting in a reasonably small town an hour or less outside Chicago.

In February 2006, the same board had a mini-discussion focused on another product placement example involving Margo Hughes, this one much more palatable for the majority of viewers than the Nice 'n Easy fiasco.[164] Hughes came home into her kitchen with a bag of groceries, filled with Procter & Gamble products. Only a few astute viewers even picked up on the fact that the majority of the items in her grocery bag were P&G, but the script called for her to be unloading her groceries while dialogue took place, and the types of items used were completely plausible for a trip to the grocery. The items were never referenced directly in the dialogue, so the scene felt natural—especially compared to the "Brand X" products used too often in daytime television that detract from the realism of the show.

Since the fans live in a branded world, a reminder that the Hughes family lives in that same branded world lends extra authenticity to the show, so that the product placement actually adds to the fictional narrative rather than detracting from it. A few fans chimed in who said they were sickened to see P&G products on the show, but the majority of posters in the thread said they found the placement natural and did not feel it disrupted the show.

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[164] See my first writing about this discussion at Ford, Sam, "Product Placement and Soaps," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 20 February 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/02/product_placement_and_soaps.php.

Public Service Announcements as Product Placement

One particularly interesting example of product placement came in October 2005, when a public service announcement regarding AIDS in Africa was woven into the plot of the show, similar to the integration of a product into the text. In this case, it was a reminder that, while viewers skip commercials, many also skip the PSAs made by soap opera characters, often related to the storylines currently taking place on *ATWT*.

PSAs have a regular history on *ATWT*, as with many soap operas. One of the longtime characters on the show, Lucinda Walsh, was diagnosed with breast cancer, so the show frequently featured PSAs at the end of the program covering the preventative measures and regular checkups which viewers should undertake to combat breast cancer. Meanwhile, Jennifer Landon, who portrayed a teenage character who smoked and worked two jobs while pregnant, ended several episodes with a PSA urging viewers to visit a Web site that details the dangers of not taking proper care of one's body while pregnant.

However, the placement of a PSA about the dangers of AIDS in Africa took place in the middle of the show, between scenes involving the characters of Dr. Bob and Kim Hughes. Kim, who runs the major Oakdale television station, joined her husband, the chief of staff of Oakdale Memorial, at the hospital. She explained to Bob that she had stopped by the hospital because she wanted to work on a PSA for her station and needed a medical expert for the spot, clearly indicating her husband. She went on to tell Bob that she was concerned about the continuing epidemic of AIDS in Africa and said she had some statistics he could cite to the listeners, reading them off for Bob. He replied by saying that the numbers startled him and that, for the price of a cup of coffee, most Americans could probably make a real effort into testing and prevention

education for these countries. Kim said, "Now, if I could only get you to come down to our station and say that on television. That's exactly what our viewers need to hear."

The self-reflexivity of the scene and its integration in the middle of the plot made it much more memorable in the eyes of the viewer, and because of the altruistic nature of the spot, rather than the commercial nature of product integration, viewers did not seem angered in the least. While PSAs and commercials differ in their end goal, often selling an idea or social action rather than a product, both suffer the danger of being skipped by viewers, so it is not surprising to see soap operas work to use some of the same placements into shows for PSA placement as well as product placement. However, the show's creators must always be cognizant that viewers will be willing to accept more blatant placement for these non-commercial announcements than they would for a brand name or product inserted in the dialogue in such a blatant form.

ATWT **and Tyson Chicken**

In Fall 2005, Colleen Zenk-Pinter appeared in advertisements for Tyson Chicken not as herself, but as the Oakdale resident Barbara Ryan, whom she has portrayed since 1978. Not only did she appear in character but the commercial was also filmed on the set of *ATWT*, in the kitchen of her aunt Kim of the historic core Hughes family. At that point, Barbara was a particularly villainous character, having suffered a series of personal and professional tragedies that had led to a series of extreme actions on her part, and the commercial played with the text of the show. Since it only aired during the daytime lineup, the Tyson commercial was aimed particularly at existing *ATWT* viewers who would be familiar with Barbara's action. Barbara walks into Bob and Kim Hughes' kitchen, on her cell phone, and says, "What did I do today? Well, I took the kids to school, foiled a kidnapping attempt, took my son to his psychiatrist,

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picked up the dry cleaning, divorced my eighth husband, went to lunch and played bridge, recovered from the explosion, went to the grocery store, and sabotaged a fashion show. You?"

The second commercial was even more sensational, with the same set-up but different dialogue in Barbara's one-sided telephone dialogue. Again, Barbara strolls into the kitchen, pleasant smile on her face, and (in one long breath) matter-of-factly tells of her recent actions. While, in the first commercial, the mundane was interspersed with the ludicrous in explaining one day's schedule, the second commercial emphasizes the most "soapy" of her actions over the past year. Barbara says, "What have I been up to lately? Well, I flew out of a second-story courtroom window, confessed to a murder that I didn't commit, foiled an attempt to brainwash my son, sent my enemies to a Swiss spa and aged them 40 years, and crashed my car into a mental institution? And you?"

No Tyson product appears in the commercial, but both end with the Tyson logo at the bottom and the punch line, the Tyson slogan at the time: "Powered by Tyson." After all, if the protein in Tyson chicken gives Barbara Ryan the power to be so evil, imagine what it can do for the lives of everyday viewers. Fans accepted and even celebrated the 30-second spots, while the fan community has commented on almost no other traditional commercial. Because the commercial was exclusively aired during CBS' daytime lineup and particularly during *ATWT*, and the 30-second shot was taped on set with only one actor who was already in costume for the show and by an actor skilled in "getting it right" in one shot, as most soap opera vets have to be, the commercial likely took little to produce. Yet the commercial engaged with fans like no other 30-second spot has, was tied to the text of the show, and both parodied and poked fun at genre conventions while also celebrating them. For *ATWT* viewers in the online fan community discussions, the commercial became a must-see, and viewers were encouraging others not to

fast-forward through the commercials without stopping on the Tyson ad. For these viewers,

Tyson now seemed like a product which "gets" what the soap opera and its audience is really

like, rather than a frozen food company trying to hock its products at stereotypical housewives.

P&G has not tried a similar approach with any of its own products, and no other deals have been

made since this Tyson project two years ago, but the response from the fan community seemed

positive enough that the show would have good reason to try similar advertising models in the

future.

Shouldn't They Be Better at This? Improving Product Placement on *ATWT*

Starting in 2004, the popular press picked up on the ways in which product placement

was being tested out by networks through soap operas, such as with the integration of Butterball

branding in the Thanksgiving scenes on *ATWT*.[165] *Wall Street Journal* reporter Brooks Barnes

wrote in January 2005 that "soap operas, a carry-over from radio that started on TV a half-

century ago as platforms to sell detergent, are also serving as guinea pigs for networks to test

how far they can go with product plugs before viewers revolt. Soap audiences are notoriously

obsessive about their favorite programs, so feedback is swift to arrive."[166] Some television

executives have overstated the power soaps have to sell to their viewers, almost eliminating any

idea of viewer autonomy whatsoever. For instance, take this statement from Fox Television

Studios President Angela Shapiro Mathes: "If a character is eating Lay's Potato Chips, the

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[165] Steinberg, Brian and Suzanne Vranica, "Commercial TV: The Disappearing Line Between Programs and Advertising," *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, December 2004, http://wsjclassroomedition.com/archive/04dec/advt_placement.htm.
[166] Barnes, Brooks, "A Good Soap Script Includes Love, Tears and Frosted Flakes," *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 January 2005, http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB110592534087227573,00.html.

audience goes out and buys them. That's how much fans want to identify with their favorite characters."[167]

Nevertheless, even if soap fans were initially viewed as "guinea pigs," natural product placement can be well accepted by viewers. For active soap opera viewers who engage in fan communities and spend a significant portion of time watching, analyzing, and recalling the histories of the stories and characters on *ATWT*, product placement may be particularly effective for brand recall.[168]   The key, however, is creating an environment between the network, the producers, and the writers in which working in product references is organic, natural to the show and the product, and involves proper compensation to the writing team in some form for the added work involved. Tackling these issues is not easy. Writers must consider whether a product has been written or displayed in a positive light if a company is paying for that time. On the other hand, the writers must also worry about not angering fans by making the product placement distract from the narrative.[169] Fans are explicitly aware of how these texts are constructed and the tensions between quality storytelling and the show's bottom line, and producers must acknowledge the fans' agency in analyzing the production behind these narratives.

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[167] Quote from Albiniak, Paige, "The Place To Place a Product," *Broadcasting & Cable*, 14 February 2005,
http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/CA503566.html?display=Special+Report.

[168] Some studies show that loyal viewers watching programs which are more likely to inspire close viewing lead to greater product recall. See Ernst, David, Stacy Lynn Koerner, Henry Jenkins, Sangrita Shresthova, Brian Theisen, and Alex Chisholm, "Walking the Path: Exploring the Drivers of the Expression," White Paper from Interactive Media and the Comparative Media Studies program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005.
http://www.icecubedstudios.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/walkingthepathway.pdf.

[169] Henry Jenkins describes the voting scandal in *American Idol 2* in which AT&T's prominent placement on the show backfired. For more information, see Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Intersect*, New York: New York UP, 2006, 87-92.

CBS Senior Vice-President of Daytime Barbara Bloom said that the network would grant some degree of leeway to P&G in placing its own products within the show, knowing that the company has done moderate amounts of organic product placement of its own brands from time-to-time.[170] However, the network is actively involved in outside product placement projects. On the other hand, *ATWT*'s writing team was not particularly adept with handling these product placements, as was visible from the clumsy handling of the Nice 'n Easy product. *ATWT* head writer Jean Passanante indicated that the writing team was not pleased with the entire process involved with the Nice 'n Easy placement.[171] Further, the lack of connection between the mother company's innovations with branding and PGP's use of placing branding indicates a possible corporate disconnect between P&G's innovations with branding and its PGP division. Elana Levine points out that losing a quarter of their audience from the early 1990s to the end of the decade has led to a related drop in budget. For the show she examines, *General Hospital*, the elimination of remote location shoots has been joined by a reduction in clothing budget so that the 1997 clothing budget was estimated to be the same as the 1986 budget, while the clothing had tripled in cost.[172]

The best chance for these shows to move forward with more effective use of product placement is to iron out the differences between the creative team, the producers, the advertisers, and the networks to create a streamlined way to integrate both P&G products and other relevant products into organic product placements on the show, without interfering with the creative autonomy of the narrative. Viewers are actively interested in seeing the shows remain profitable,

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[170] Bloom, Barbara, personal telephone interview, 18 July 2006.
[171] Passanante, Jean, personal interview, 23 March 2006.
[172] Levine, Elana, "Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes at *General Hospital*," *Television: The Critical View*, Seventh Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New York: Oxford UP, 2007, 133-149,136-137. Originally published in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18.1 (March 2001), 66-82.

since higher profits mean better sets, more funding for the cast, and a greater chance for the continuation of these "narratives without end." Several scholars, journalists, and critics have noted "the ironic echo of earlier broadcast advertising practices in the new world of digital television," as William Boddy phrases it, in an attempt to counter the diminishing power of the 30-second spot.[173] With shows whose texts encourage more engaged and social viewing, soap operas are uniquely primed to take advantage of these new revenue streams, especially if shows pay keen awareness to the concerns and desires of their fan base that these fans are already actively discussing and debating online. Of all the aspects of engaging with a convergence culture, one would think Procter & Gamble would be able to get a strong grasp on product placement in particular, considering the history of the soap opera genre itself.

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[173] Boddy, William, "Interactive Television and Advertising Form in Contemporary U.S. Television," *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Ed. Lynn Spigel and Jen Olsson, Durham: Duke UP, 2004, 113-132, 127.

Chapter Five:

Utilizing *ATWT*'s Archives in a Long Tail Economy

The strongest attribute of the *ATWT* narrative is its longevity, and the transgenerational nature of the *ATWT* fan base. This thesis has argued throughout that soap operas should embrace the aspects of their brand that set these shows apart as *immersive story worlds* and encourage a more engaged viewership that can lead to new revenue models and methods of empowering fan proselytizing behaviors that might help expand the overall viewership of these shows. Of particular importance in these activities is the rich history these programs have. If *ATWT* would consider the value of its longtime viewers in relation to their standing as experts who can gain and maintain younger viewers, then the history of the show becomes particularly important. The issues of continuity, character backlog, and complex history detailed in the introduction of this thesis becomes particularly important in a shift from lowest-common-denominator television to the type of engagement viewing encouraged by digital media and the long tail model, in which fans pull in media that interests them rather than having it pushed onto them. Alongside the new profit potential that product placement may give soap operas in relation to their more engaged viewership, the deep archive of *ATWT* might provide further revenue potential if the show can figure out how to correctly leverage and monetize that history.

Since *ATWT* has been on the air for more than 51 years now, the show has legions of former viewers from previous generations that may not be as interested in the contemporary product but might watch the shows from their past if they could be reached and marketed to and especially if material could be packaged and contextualized in meaningful ways, rather than just

airing every episode from the archive in its entirety. The potential value in this archive leads to a logical business model which directly integrates the available content from more than 50 years on the air. This chapter looks at how PGP is currently utilizing its vast soap opera archive, how viewers hang on to that history, and ways in which viewers adapt to a lack of "classic" *ATWT* content from PGP. In an environment in which new media technologies allow a variety of new distribution opportunities for archived content, *ATWT*'s massive content archive presents new possibilities for ancillary revenue streams. This chapter draws on Chris Anderson's influential long tail business model to examine how soap operas can more effectively position their archives for greater commercial use. World Wrestling Entertainment's 24/7 video-on-demand brand is referenced as a particularly appropriate model for PGP in how to create a system to give fans access to the archive of an *immersive story world*.

The Long Tail

Chris Anderson's influential long tail theory surmises that "the future of entertainment is in the millions of niche markets at the shallow end of the bitstream," originating in an influential editorial which appeared in a 2004 edition of *Wired*, for which Anderson is the editor-in-chief.[174] This quote basically means that, while physical retailers can only fit the most popular content into their stores, the much longer "rest" of the content (the long tail) is more profitable than the most popular content, if taken as a whole. Businesses such as Amazon and Netflix work as models for this long tail theory, which Anderson further explained and promoted the idea through his blog[175] and book.[176] The majority of media content in the archives is only of niche

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[174] Anderson, Chris, "The Long Tail," *Wired*, 12.10 (October 2004), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html.
[175] Anderson, Chris, The Long Tail Weblog, http://longtail.typepad.com/the_long_tail/.
[176] Anderson, Chris, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*, London: Random House Business Books, 2006.

interest, and most of these media products have traditionally not seen any form of continued distribution because there is scarcity of space on broadcast television lineups, video rental shelves, commercial radio airwaves, and bookstore displays. However, with new online distribution forms that allow for digitally stored content or a central warehouse that releases content, this long tail of niche content becomes marketable for the first time, and the 90 percent of content that previously would not have any distribution whatsoever will be more popular than the 10 percent that used to be the whole of the archive market.

The long tail becomes possible to exploit through digital distribution systems and thus opens up niche content to new revenue streams and distribution possibilities. This is where former and current fans of *ATWT*, and the soap opera genre, come into play. These fans form a small but dedicated market for this content that would justify a business model being built around digitizing and cleaning up that content archive and finding various ways to release that content to fans.

Making Sense of the Content Mountain

ATWT aired for 30 minutes per day from 1956 until the mid-1970s, when it switched to one hour per day. In that case, the show has aired more content in a year than most primetime shows air in an entire series run. If all of that content were archived and available for use, the show would have a tremendous wealth of footage to draw from. Of course, that archive does not completely exist. For many years, the shows aired live every day, and footage from the early years of *ATWT* is likely scarce. Few know exactly what does exist in the archive, however, because PGP has done little to publicly utilize that available footage, other than occasional flashback clips that have aired on the show in video montages or anniversary episodes.

However, if even a fraction of that content had been archived, and assuming that content from the past 25 years has been archived without interruption, the show has a wealth of footage available. While ratings today are lower than in previous decades, much of the footage available in that archive aired with higher ratings than the show airing today. As explained in the first chapter, the proliferation of television viewing choices, the rise of women in the workforce, and the O.J. Simpson trial have all contributed to these changes, but the fact remains that most soap operas may have more prodigal children who could potentially be part of a market for this archive content than current viewers. Further, since there is no syndication and no off-season, many of these popular episodes only aired once, never to be seen again, unless a viewer happened to archive the episode and add it to his/her tape collection.

The only utilization of the *ATWT* tape library aside from international syndication and flashbacks within the text of the show was a short-term deal with the Web site Soap City, where episodes could be viewed on a pay-per-download basis, supplemented by occasional "classic" shows. *ATWT* episodes were available on SoapCity for a couple of years, starting in 2003. While several shows have signed distribution deals with Disney-owned cable channel SOAPnet to air classic episodes or time shift episodes to show the day's daytime shows in primetime, *ATWT* has never appeared on SOAPnet. Meanwhile, the cable channel supplements its time-shifting of popular soap operas with airing some classic soap opera content. Currently, though, more of their lineup is currently devoted to "primetime soaps" such as *Dallas*, *The O.C.*, and *Beverly Hills 90210*, as well as original series such as *General Hospital: Night Shift*.[177] The fan community surrounding SOAPnet consistently debates the balance between incorporating

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[177] See Ford, Sam, "*General Hospital: Night Shift* Could Be Fascinating Case Study in Cross-Show Storytelling," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 10 March 2007, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/03/general_hospital_night_shift_c.php.

original and primetime shows with the soap operas that the original SOAPnet lineup were built around and particularly whether these primetime shows are really "soap operas."[178] SOAPnet is interested in drawing a substantial 18-49 female audience, and shows like *AW* may be a little too "long tail" to be a long-term staple for a fairly popular linear cable narrative, especially since the airing of these classic soaps were primarily shows that have since been cancelled, rather than classic episodes of soap opera franchises still in operation.

P&G Classic Soaps Channel

One product that has been made available through Procter & Gamble is the P&G Classic Soaps Channel launched through AOL and available through the AOL Video player.[179] The channel capitalizes on the wealth of content P&G has in its archives from shows that are no longer on the air, such as *Search for Tomorrow*, *Another World*, *The Edge of Night*, and *Texas*, a spin-off of *Another World*. While former fans—or contemporary fans looking back to the old content—may be well served with the Classic Soaps offerings, the show offers little for fans of *ATWT* and *Guiding Light*. The only content featured on P&G Classic Soaps of great interest to fans of these shows is behind-the-scenes footage, promotional trailers, and other products aimed at the contemporary product, which make no use of the archive. The network also features an

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[178] For more on the debate, see Ford, Sam, "Is Serial Programming a Format or a Genre? Slippery Language in the Popular Press," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 09 January 2007, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/01/is_serial_programming_a_format.php; Liccardo, Lynn, "The Different Types of Soap Opera Fans," Helium Web site, http://www.helium.com/tm/89327; and Ford, Sam, "SOAPnet Leaves Some Ardent Fans Feeling Betrayed, Questioning the Brand Identity of the Network," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 09 April 2007, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/04/soapnet_leaves_some_ardent_fan.php.
[179] P&G Classic Soaps, http://video.aol.com/video-category/dawn-released/2317.

original digital exclusive story called *Released*, presented by Dawn, which tells the story of a mother-and-daughter team saving birds caught in a deadly oil spill.[180]

On the other hand, PGP has launched a corresponding PGP Classic Soaps Blog which makes much better use of looking at the show's history, including content-related posts sharing pictures and stories from intriguing moments from the past and occasionally tying them into current storylines, as well as features from outside the fictional world such as catching up with former *ATWT* and *GL* actors.[181] The posts are written by an anonymous PGP employee, most of them to announce news or update fans on the current whereabouts of former PGP actors. The blog does not contain a significant amount of conversation, although there are occasionally comments posted by fans. PGP Classic Soaps has developed some brand awareness among soap fans. With enough episodes being digitized and improved for distribution from cancelled series like *Another World* (*AW* aired on SOAPnet, as one of the only P&G shows the cable network carried, but the show has recently been eliminated from the schedule), one would think the company is preparing its *ATWT* archive for these distribution channels as well, but fans are not quite sure why the content is not being made available elsewhere.

A Continued Interest in History

While the few flashbacks and the random episodes from Soap City constitute the historical offerings from *ATWT*, discussing that history and relating it to today's show is a vibrant part of the fan discussion experience. Consequently, when writers work in logical extensions of that narrative world—such as mentioning characters who are no longer on the show who should be mentioned at certain times—the fans are excited by the reference, applaud the writers for remembering history and maintaining the continuity of the story world, and fill in

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[180] Dawn *Released*, http://video.aol.com/video-category/dawn-released/2317.

[181] PGP Classic Soaps Blog, http://pgpclassicsoaps.blogspot.com/.

newer viewers on who the character referenced indeed was. In that case, when Emma Snyder is out of town and they explain she's visiting daughter Iva and son-in-law Jason, or when a relative from out-of-town sends their well wishes along because he or she cannot attend a funeral or wedding, fans are appreciative. Correspondingly, when that history is ignored, fans are angered, primarily for the break in continuity that Baym and others have noted.

Much fan activity is directed toward tying back-story into the contemporary product, but some posts are blatantly focusing on *ATWT* of yesteryear, with no ties to the current product. For instance, on the Media Domain board in November 2005, user Oakdale Oldtimer wrote about finding a copy of a letter she sent to TPTB in 1996 complaining about a character on the show, a model named Zoe, who had primarily been put on the show because of her looks and also to add a minority character.[182] However, most *ATWT* viewers could not stand Zoe, both because she had no ties to the history of the show and also because both character and actress were deemed terrible by the fan community. Oakdale Oldtimer relates that she sent a list of "The Top Ten Ways that Zoe could Be Written Out of the Show" and that she sent a cross-stitched wall hanging along with it entitled "It's the Relationships, Stupid," based on the Clinton administration economy tagline. Apparently, the head writers were fired soon thereafter and Oakdale Oldtimer received an anonymous package in the mail with the word "stupid" cut out of her wall hanging inside.

Consequently, user Mrs. Ben Harris writes:

It seems that 20 or 25 years ago they wrote more stories with corporate intigue, Lucinda was a villian with layers, people had deliciously covert affairs with secret meetings and sly glances instead of just smacking a spouse in the face with the new lover. […] Maybe it's just my selective memory, but the stories were written to appeal to an

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[182] Oakdale Oldtimer, "If you were watching in '96…" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 13 November 2005, started 10:59:16.

intelligent, thinking audience. (sic)[183]

Mrs. Ben Harris' nostalgia for a former era of the show illustrates the strong desire to view

content from that era and a potential way to get former *ATWT* viewers "back into the fold," at

least in actively viewing old content, as well as giving newer fans a way to see these same

characters in scenes and stories from the past, considering how many veteran actors and longtime

characters *ATWT* features.[184]

As the World Turns on YouTube

Yet there is a way to see quite a bit of classic *As the World Turns* content: YouTube.

While PGP/TeleVest have been tight-lipped about their plans for releasing *ATWT* content in any

new form, viewers have not been concerned about copyright issues enough to keep from posting

the archived content and sharing it with other *ATWT* fans, especially since the company is doing

little with the content thus far. A search for the various tags that clips from the show may be

marked with retrieves thousands of clips, both excerpts from the past couple of years as well as

chunks of episodes from the past, music videos in tribute to the deceased Benjamin Hendrickson

or favorite characters or couples from the show, and a variety of other "classic" scenes that

haven't seen official distribution in decades.

Some of the most active *ATWT* YouTube posters, like OakdaleHistorian, have clips that

have been viewed thousands of times. The most popular views are of Luke Snyder's coming out,

the tribute to Benjamin Hendrickson, old versions of the *ATWT* entrance, and various major plot

points from the history of the show. Further, fans on the discussion forums often post links to

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[183] Mrs. Ben Harris, "Are the stories today less sophisticated than in years past?" *As the World Turns* Forum, Michael Gill's Media Domain, 04 January 2006, started 13:06:09.

[184] For more on how brands and entertainment content play on a narrative universe's history and the long-term commitment to narrative worlds, see the discussion of the *Star Wars* franchise in Brown, Stephen, Robert V. Kozinets, and John F. Sherry, Jr., "Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning," *Journal of Marketing* 16 (July 2003), 19-33.

YouTube videos that are relevant to current discussions or that they have just discovered. As

Kim Bjarkman writes:

> Media fandoms work toward this common end to the extent that members feel they have a 'shared culture' to defend and preserve. By treating culturally derided texts as collectibles, fans attach value where dominant society may assign none, seeking legitimacy for texts dismissed as trivial, trashy, bizarre, or altogether forgettable by mainstream audiences.[185]

While PGP has neglected to take advantage of the long tail interest in *ATWT* up to this point,

fans are doing all they can to fill the void themselves from their own tape archives, and PGP has

not seemed to have reacted to the posting of that content from their archives.

WWE 24/7 On Demand as Model

Professional wrestling is often considered a soap opera for men, and the WWE writing

team has actively looked for soap opera writers to help the company better organize its

storytelling and continuity.[186] Because both pro wrestling and soap operas are niche *immersive*

story worlds, aspects of the way WWE creates its long tail business model could be potentially

instructive to the *ATWT* creative team. Wrestling content similarly has no off-season, airs

several hours a week, and only has one-time airing, with limited future distribution for shows

that often do very well in the ratings in that first airing.

The WWE has created a multi-pronged approach to filling the interest in its archive,

starting with the WWE 24/7 On Demand product. With 35,000 current subscribers, WWE 24/7

On Demand is available on several cable systems across the country, allowing viewers to pay $6

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[185] Bjarkman, Kim, "To Have and to Hold: The Video Collector's Relationship with an Ethereal Medium," *Television: The Critical View*, Seventh Edition, Ed. Horace Newcomb, New York: Oxford UP, 2007, 530-559, 537. Originally published in *Television & New Media* 5.3 (August 2004), 197-216.
[186] While I have often seen rumors in the wrestling fan community that WWE has expressed interest in writers from the soap opera industry, I have talked to people within the company directly about that interest since the WWE has known I was working on this soap opera project.

to $8 a month for 20 hours worth of archived content that is made available for certain periods of time. WWE has purchased the tape libraries of several of its former competitors and now owns the runs of several different shows. Similar to P&G's situation, much of the archives were not saved from the early days, yet WWE has started airing certain series from its content archive in sequential order to give fans the chance to follow the weekly storylines and has also packaged the content together in interesting ways.

Further, while 35,000 subscribers may not generate enough profit short-term to justify the amount of money it took to purchase content and transform and remaster it in digital form, the WWE has released a variety of DVDs based on this content. The plan has been to use 24/7, the DVDs as well as books and merchandise to help reach wrestling's "lapsed fans," with the belief that marketing former characters could help draw former fans into the contemporary product, while also getting current fans hooked to learning more about the company's past.[187]

The key, said WWE's Tom Barreca, was repackaging the long tail content by giving it new value through historicizing and contextualizing that content.[188] The WWE brought in several fans to go through its video library and tag content, not just for what show it was on, but also what personalities were involved, what greater storyline the match was a part of, what type of match it was, and a variety of other tags, to create a searchable, tagged database to both help the company organize the content internally and prepare for a day when users may be able to search the archive themselves to find something in particular on-demand. Barreca said, "Bringing an acute sensitivity to cataloguing the archive may ultimately be the most important or

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[187] Meltzer, Dave, *The Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, 27 June 2005, p. 10.
[188] Barreca, Tom, personal telephone interview, 06 December 2006.

exciting thing we've done for the McMahon family since I came here, and it will be much more important in the VOD business than in the linear channel business."[189]

ATWT and Contextualization: Potential New Models of Using the Archive

This chapter will conclude with a brief look at ways _ATWT_ might utilize and distribute content from its archive. One can easily envision how this WWE 24/7 approach could work well for the content from the _As the World Turns_ archive as well. Viewers would have interest enough in following the show on a consistent basis from eras in which every episode remains available, so that those episodes could be distributed in sequential order. On the other hand, viewers would be further interested in watching packaged content that had added relevance as well.

For instance, one could imagine _ATWT_ releasing a series of quasi-documentaries looking into the history of a particular longtime character on the show. Even from earlier eras where regular content was not available, a series of pivotal scenes could be used to construct a coherent visual history of a certain character's trajectory that could be released as a series through whatever distribution platform PGP might use. With so many characters who have been on the show for decades, played by the same actor, the ability to construct and market content grouped and given extra meaning in this way could be particularly beneficial and attractive to consumers who might not be interested in walking through the vast archive without a guide but certainly welcome to following the history of the show if given the proper contextual information.

Further, content might be packaged in meta-form, such as a series looking in-depth at the acting performances of particular soap stars who went on to greater mainstream fame. _ATWT_ has helped launch the careers of Julianne Moore, Meg Ryan, Parker Posey, James van der Beek,

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[189] Ibid.

James Earl Jones, Jason Biggs, John Wesley Shipp, Stephen Weber, Thomas Gibson, William Fichtner, Larry Bryggman, and many others, so putting together a series of content featuring their *ATWT* scenes could be significant, especially for actors like Moore and Ryan who were significant parts of *ATWT* during their tenure with the show. While some of these scenes have been used for "before they were stars" clips, a lengthy series looking in-depth at their characters and performances on *ATWT* has never been attempted.

Soaps might also benefit from packaging series based on storylines. The issue always becomes, when dealing with a show that interweaves all its stories together and with episodes that features five storylines per day or so on average, how that content can be recontextualized, but creating a series that could be distributed looking solely at one storyline as it played out over several months could provide an effective way to repackage the show's content while also providing viewers with a new way to look at stories they have seen before when they played out over an extended period of time.

Finally, shows could be repackaged to correspond with the content of the contemporary product. As opposed to shows like *Another World* and *Search for Tomorrow*, *ATWT* and *GL* are still on the air. In order to both satisfy viewers' desire for continuity and to exploit its archive, the show could more regularly work historical references into the text and then make the clips or shows or storylines that the contemporary show referenced available in some other format, providing an incentive for viewers to engage with the historical content and a way to provide greater continuity while also giving recent *ATWT* converts a chance to "catch up" and learn what the references mean. While fans have often discussed the need for more acknowledgment of history, however, producers have never publicly indicated a business model that might make it more profitable to acknowledge and utilize this history.

Potential Models of Distribution

While the market for television series on DVD has exploded, soap operas will likely never be released in full-season sets, simply because there is too much content—approximately 250 episodes per year. However, providing context around the content and grouping that content in relation to characters, actors, storylines, or ties to the contemporary show might give PGP/TeleVest effective ways to market one of their most valuable resources, the show's archives. Since their deal with CBS was merely for first-run distribution only, *ATWT* has everything to gain from using its archive to a greater degree, and the company could distribute that content through its AOL Classic Soaps channel, video-on-demand, DVD, and a variety of other platforms.

At this point, however, while the company's attempts to explore ways to utilize its archive through products like AOL Classic Soaps indicate a willingness to experiment, PGP/TeleVest have remained strangely silent about plans to use the potentially more profitable *ATWT* and *GL* archives. In the meantime, viewers are using YouTube to distribute historical content themselves and message boards to retain a strong and longstanding interest in the history of the show. At this point, the Classic Soaps blog occasionally brings up the show's history, and *ATWT* did market a scrapbook on the history of the show back in 1996,[190] as well as the short-lived Soap City offerings, but there have been few other attempts to utilize the show's greatest strength. To remain relevant in a convergence culture, one would think that PGP must make its content archive a central component of its ongoing business model. Further, forming these new business models might help provide alternate forms of distribution for soap operas in the future,

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[190] Poll, Julie, *As the World Turns: The Complete Family Scrapbook*, Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1996.

such as *Passions*' planned distribution through DirecTV after its NBC cancellation later this year.

Finding creative ways to use the archives and tie them to the contemporary soap opera product emphasizes that longtime soap fans, even those over the age of 49, will be increasingly willing to engage with new media products as older viewers become more adept at using the Web and more connected into online fan communities where the collective intelligence of fans helps overcome any technological difficulties members may have. Further, the WWE 24/7 On Demand potential model for using a show's history indicates ways in which contextualization can help tie the past to the present in meaningful ways, taking greater advantage of the soap opera as *immersive story world* and encouraging even more ways of interacting with the soap opera as an overall brand. Further, just as newer fans can get more deeply engaged by consuming archived content, lapsed fans might get drawn back in to the contemporary product through that archived content. However, these approaches only have value with a business model that acknowledges and encourages deeper engagement and a transgenerational fan base.

Chapter Six:

From *Oakdale Confidential* to *L.A. Diaries*: Transmedia Storytelling for *ATWT*

As digital technologies become increasingly important in the lives of consumers, most television producers are looking at how to utilize various new platforms to aid in telling a story. In the MIT Convergence Culture Consortium, based on the terminology used by Dr. Henry Jenkins, we call this type of narrative *transmedia storytelling*, which uses multiple platforms to aid in telling a central narrative. *Immersive story worlds* like the text of a soap opera are particularly ripe for transmedia storytelling because of the depth of the narrative world, with more characters and history than could ever be fully exploited through one product. This transmedia storytelling approach is a category that includes, but is not limited to, Carolyn Handler Miller's concept of cross-media productions, which she describes as "designed from the ground up to 'live' simultaneously on multiple platforms, at least one of which is interactive."[191] Because *ATWT* existed primarily as a one-media property which constructed an *immersive story world* through the course of decades of daily content, however, does not mean that the narrative is not ripe for transmedia storytelling because the world was not constructed "from the ground up" to be told in multiple media forms, but rather that a variety of transmedia storytelling approaches exist.

As has been mentioned in previous chapters, a significant portion of soap opera fans are likely not online, especially among the demographic over 65. In addition, many viewers who are online may not have access to a broadband Internet connection capable of the type of online

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[191] Handler Miller, Carolyn, "Cross-Media Productions," *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*, Burlington, MA: Focal P, 2004, 275-303, 276.

video used in some of the examples in this chapter. However, it is misguided to believe that a transgenerational approach to soap opera storytelling cannot have an online component as well, since there are a significant number of older viewers actively involved as *insiders* in soap opera fan communities. These transmedia extensions are intended not just to draw in younger viewers who are likely most adept with using new media technologies but are believed to be attractive to other audiences as well. However, even as transmedia texts provide the chance to engage deeper with a text and take advantage of the type of deep involvement in soap opera texts mentioned in the previous chapters, it is essential that soap operas retain a business model focused primarily on the main television show and which never requires viewers to take part in storyline extensions that they may not have the knowledge, time, technology, or money to participate in.

Nevertheless, while five hours of television per week is a substantial amount of space to fill, the stories that can be told with the 30 to 40 characters on the cast at any one time always leads to the neglect of certain characters or stories, and the stories are also limited to the characters who an actor is currently on the cast to play on the screen. This chapter examines how *ATWT* has utilized transmedia storytelling thus far to dig deeper into that narrative world and invite audiences to engage with the fictional world of Oakdale across multiple storytelling platforms. After looking at the existing ways in which the creative forces behind *ATWT* have utilized multiple media forms to tell a cohesive story, this chapter will further examine how those models may serve as a learning tool for the construction of even more compelling and successful transmedia stories in the future.

Transmedia Storytelling vs. Cross-Platform Distribution

The definition of *transmedia* sounds simple enough, but it is important to distinguish *transmedia storytelling* from *crossplatform distribution*. Crossplatform distribution involves

using multiple media forms to distribute essentially the same content, such as an online stream of clips from the show on CBS Daytime's Web site. While such a form of crossplatform distribution provides clips from the text in a new media form, this is a collection of content from the main television show and not original programming meant to add new meaning to the show.

For instance, *ATWT* began podcasting its show in January 2006, following on the heels of the launch of *Guiding Light* into podcasting several weeks before. David Segal's September 2006 *Washington Post* story detailed the process through which *ATWT*'s sister show, *GL*, created its podcast.[192] The audio version of the show, with occasional voiceovers to explain relevant information, is 25 minutes per day, compared to 39 minutes of actual show content for the television version. The irony is that soap operas are now thriving in audio form when they began in audio form as well, which may explain why the dialogue-heavy genre works particularly well in audio form. The product is intriguing and provides yet another way to reach fans who may not have the time to sit down in front of the television for 40 minutes a day to watch the show, but the podcast is not a form of transmedia storytelling but rather another way to distribute the same narrative.[193]

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[192] Segal, David, "Soap Gets in Your Ears: Is That Organ Music Coming from Your iPod? Must Be *Guiding Light*," *The Washington Post*, 21 September 2006, C-1, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/20/AR2006092002008.html.

[193] Other soap operas have launched podcast, online streaming, iTunes downloads, and other forms of crossplatform distribution. See Ford, Sam, "Passions Ready to Launch on iTunes," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 16 August 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/08/passions_ready_to_launch_on_it.php; Ford, Sam, "*All My Children* to Debut Video Podcast," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 01 September 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/09/all_my_children_to_debut_video.php; and Ford, Sam, *Passions* Now Streaming on NBC Web Site," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 10 November 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/09/all_my_children_to_debut_video.php.

Informational and Interactive Extensions

In his Master's thesis, fellow C3 media analyst Ivan Askwith provides a set of terms to help describe the various sorts of extensions that media properties may officially offer for their texts. Among these categories are *informational extensions*, which provide more knowledge both about the text and also about the making of that text.[194] P. David Marshall describes these types of extensions as the "proliferation of information about the making of the film or cultural commodity."[195] For instance, *As the World Turns* launched an online reality show called *InTurn* through CBS innertube in summer 2006.[196] The show brought together eight young actors vying for a 13-week on-air role on *As the World Turns*, with veterans from the show teaching and assessing the potential cast members' acting abilities. Through a total of 24 online episodes, viewers had the chance to vote and eliminate cast members, until the remaining three choices were featured in cameo appearances on the show, with the whole television audience getting the chance to choose their favorite. The promotion for the show included mentions during *As the World Turns*, as well as a blog from the online show's producer.[197] While this project was interactive and a transmedia extension of the show, the extension was not part of the narrative from the story world but rather a reality show based on the production of a soap opera, and the show provided not only interaction with a part of *ATWT* but also what Askwith would call an *industrial informational extension*, providing a look at how a show is constructed and what it takes to be a soap opera actor.

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[194] Askwith, Ivan, "The Rules of Engagement: Understanding Television as an Engagement Medium," Master's thesis, Comparative Media Studies program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007. These are the terms Askwith was using as of the submission of this thesis.
[195] Marshall, P. David, "The New Intertextual Commodity," *The New Media Book*, Ed. Dan Harries, London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2002, 69-81, 77.
[196] *InTurn* on CBS.com, http://www.cbs.com/originals/inturn/.
[197] *InTurn* Blog, http://www.cbs.com/originals/inturn/blog.shtml.

Reaction to the *InTurn* project was divided in the fan community, with some fans enjoying the chance to watch how *ATWT* is produced and what it is like to be an actor. The fans on the Media Domain board emphasized how the show did not overlap or contradict what was happening on the main text of the show and how it provided a good marketing tool to reach out to those who might not initially be interested in *ATWT* but who might be fans of reality television. Another camp of posters were angry that the show was spending its time and energy on a reality show instead of investing further resources in improving the show itself. These fans seemed to find transmedia extensions outside the story world wholly uninteresting.

InTurn would also fall into Askwith's category of *interactive extensions*, which would also include contests like Daytime Dollars, in which *ATWT* viewers were given a code at some point during every episode for the chance to win $500 per day. The promotion ran several months, announcing the day's code at the top of one of the commercial breaks every day, and the announcement was moved to different points in the episode each day to try and keep people paying attention to the show. Daytime Dollars was followed by the See It, Text It, Win It Sweepstakes, which posed a trivia question every week for fans to text in the answer to, for the chance to win $5,000.

On the Media Domain message board, user Kimberly Walsh asked what people thought about these various contests and if other fans thought it was a good idea for the company to be doing these promotions.[198] "Personally I'd prefer them writing better story and stop trying to get me to play games. I'm too busy." User gallyn said she didn't mind promotions from the networks since they've always had contests like these but rather that she wished TIIC (the idiots in charge)

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[198] See Ford, Sam, "Are Interactive Contests Meaningful Communication or Cheap Gimmicks? A Question Posed from a Fan Message Board," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 19 December 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/12/are_interactive_contests_meani.php.

"would put as much thought into the writing as they do these promotions/gimmicks. *Then* we'd be unbeatable."

Similarly, user Rosebud1 said that she was not offended by the promotions since "the forte of the decision makers is promotion & marketing, not storytelling & it shows." This user writes that the problem is that soaps "rely on gimmicks & short lived concepts w/little thought to long-term goals or gains that may, or may not, come from these marketing ideas. They don't understand the concept of loyal, lifelong fans, or their importance to the overall success of a soap." Rosebud1 wrote that this doesn't have to be an either/or situation but that the time spent on these gimmicks does draw attention to the fact that marketers seem to have more focus on short-term fixes and gimmicks than what really draws people in: the story. "It isn't as though they would be presenting better told stories, be true to the show's history or suddenly 'get' what the audience wants if these gimmicks didn't exist."

Non-*ATWT interactive extensions* include the *Days of Our Lives* contest that allowed viewers to choose the name of a baby soon to be born to one of the show's most popular characters,[199] as well as a SOAPnet initiative to create a Fantasy Soap League, akin to fantasy football.[200] These projects are intriguing for their various forms of interactivity, just as the transmedia involved in *InTurn* is likewise fascinating, but a majority of members of the Media Domain community were uninterested in extending their passion for the main narrative text into these ancillary products simply because they were did not add anything new to the narrative.

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[199] Ford, Sam, "Name That *DAYS* Baby: A Low-Investment Stab at Interactivity," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 05 December 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/12/name_that_days_baby_a_lowinves.php.
[200] Ford, Sam, "Replacing Touchdowns and Field Goals with Amnesia and Love Affairs: The Fantasy Soap League," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 03 December 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/12/replacing_touchdowns_and_field.php.

The most interesting of these *interactive extensions*, however, launched in late March 2007. Brad and Katie, two characters on *ATWT* who host a show called *Oakdale Now* on the local television station WOAK-9, decided to have a contest where viewers would write in explaining why Brad and Katie should come to their home and help them complete their least favorite household chore that they had been putting off. Brad and Katie can then choose one of the entries for a cash prize and would also go to their home to do the chore, with the cameras rolling. The twist, though, is that the contest was actually opened to *ATWT* viewers, with the winning essay getting a $5,000 cash prize and a visit from Brad and Katie to do the promised chore, with the actors actually coming out to the winning fan's home in character. The show aired their doing the chore as a segment filmed for their *Oakdale Now* show, making one of the fans—and their home—part of the narrative world. As opposed to the other interactive forms of content, this *Oakdale Now* contest invited viewers to become part of the narrative in a more creative way.[201]

Character E-Mails and Blogs

The first attempts at using the Internet to further storytelling for the show came with initiatives like a 2001 extension in which viewers could read e-mails from character Abigail directed at her boyfriend Adam Hughes, her mother, and other characters on the show, through a cross-promotion with the Web site Soap City. In 2006, centered on the text of Luke Snyder's "coming out," Luke launched an online blog. The blog was woven into the story, as Luke's father suspected that something was bothering his son and hacked into his computer, finding his way into Luke's blog. Holden, not really understanding what a blog was and the difference between that and a computer journal, later explains to Jack what he read on Luke's blog and how

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[201] "Win a Day with Brad and Katie," ATWT Essay Contest on CBS Web Page, http://www.oakdale.now.com.

he was not sure if he had invaded Luke's privacy or not. The post, which detailed a secret Luke was hiding from his parents but not revealing what that secret was, was then put up through Blogger. The same day the episode ran mentioning the blog, Luke's blog went live through Blogger. Throughout the first phases of the coming out story, Luke updated his blog every day, corresponding with what was happening on the show. The blog made no overt reference to *ATWT*, and the only direct connection promoting the blog was from a moderator on the PGP Soapbox discussion board, linking to the blog in one of her posts.

The blog attracted comments from several people who did not seem to realize that Luke Snyder was a fictional character and who apparently just stumbled upon his blog and started reacting to his troubles, but a variety of *ATWT* fans also found his page and joined in on the fun, taking the roles of different characters. Some fans started commenting as Luke's friends from school, while others adapted the role of various characters from *ATWT*, including characters no longer on the show, such as Luke's biological grandmother, one of Luke's uncles, and several other characters from the story world who are not currently on screen.

However, neither of these initiatives added any substantial new content back into the show. No significant observations could be made regarding the narrative or the character through reading this ancillary content, even though some attempt was made to weave the character's blog into the text of the show. Fans enjoyed both finding the blog and then commenting and interacting with the character, but it soon became clear that there was no storytelling connection between the blog's author and the team writing the storyline on the show. With no new information revealed through the blog and no substantial new observations made regarding Luke's feelings and thoughts about keeping his secret, the project lost steam after several weeks.

Oakdale Confidential

The plans for *Oakdale Confidential* were announced in early 2006. The announcement of a novel that would in some way be related to the show directed a lot of speculation from fans as to who or what would be the driving force behind this book. Fans speculated on whether the television plot would in some way hinge on the contents of the book, so that the television show would promote the book but also require reading the book to understand the full implications of what the book means for characters on the show. The show was initially tight-lipped about what *Oakdale Confidential* would be, and the Amazon page had no information about its contents for a long time, making fans all the more determined to get to the bottom of what *Oakdale Confidential* would be.

ATWT storylines were featured in paperback romance novels, and the show launched not only the aforementioned scrapbook but also a trivia book based on Oakdale history, but neither were attempts to link the book faithfully to the show's text. In 2002, PGP launched *Lorelei's Guiding Light: An Intimate Diary*, the published diary of a character from *GL*. The content of the book was based on all the storylines in the show, examined solely from that character's perspective. ABC soap opera *One Life to Live* published a book in 2005, in which a character on the show, Marcy Walsh, wrote a book called *The Killing Club*, which was released as an actual book as well. The book outlined a series of fictional murders. However, when murders start taking place to fellow members of *OLTL*'s Llanview in the ways Marcy describes in her book, *The Killing Club* becomes a precursor to what will happen next on the show. Michael Malone, a member of the show's writing team, wrote the book and the way in which the novel and the show's storylines worked together drove fan interest in the transmedia text. While many soaps have had novels released based on the storylines from the show or explaining the history of the

show, these recent books are unique because of their focus on coming from within the narrative world. The only other precursor would be *Hidden Passions*, the 2000 book that provided the back-story of the characters on NBC soap opera *Passions*, which had launched the year before in 1999. The book was written by character Tabitha Lenox, a 300-year-old witch on the show.

What made *Oakdale Confidential* different when it appeared was that the author was anonymous. The book was a fictional account using several characters from the story world but in a fictional situation. In other words, the book was a work of fiction within the text but using the names and families of some real people in Oakdale. On the program, when the book was published, various characters were upset about the way they are portrayed in print, and the search was on to determine which character on the show authored *Oakdale Confidential*. The book included several factual discrepancies that regular viewers were using to construct who might plausibly be the author.

However, the television writers and the book's author did not sync perfectly with each other, and it is important to realize that the book was written by someone with the company but not on the writing team of the show and that there was not substantial collaboration between the two creative forces. That hindered the quality of the project, and some of the factual inaccuracies were not utilized as part of the storyline and thus did not appear to be deliberate. These inaccuracies hindered longtime fans' ability to enjoy the book. Further, the lack of coordination between the book's author, Alina Adams, and the show's writers meant that the connections between the project were too loose to make for the degree of meaningful connections needed to make a project like this work to its full capacity.[202]

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[202] Adams is first mentioned in chapter two for her duties as a moderator on the PGP Soapbox site.

However, because this type of project had few predecessors, the experiment was intriguing and instructive as to what does and doesn't work for future transmedia projects. For PGP, *Oakdale Confidential* was a cautious dipping of the toes in the water that proved that there is substantial market interest in this type of project that might even lead to a better coordinated and more earnest attempt the second time around. Further, the book included an Amazon blog from the anonymous author as well. When character Katie Peretti Kasnoff was eventually revealed to be the blog's author, she continued writing the blog on a semi-regular basis, commenting on what was happening in her story at the time.[203] The blog was ill-conceived, both because (as opposed to Luke Snyder's blog) it was unclear who Katie's audience was supposed to be during the time period she was writing the blog, openly admitting she was "anonymous" while no one else on the show knew that she was the author yet and also because, before it was revealed to the viewer/reader who "anonymous" was, Peretti knew things about other people on the blog that her character could not have possibly known.

Adams, the book's real author, kept a blog after the book's publishing about *Oakdale Confidential*.[204] She wrote responses to various criticisms from the fan community of her work, explaining that "Oakdale's characters simply have too much past history for it all to be compressed into a novel. As a result, it was decided that any past events which were not relevant to the plot at hand wouldn't be included."[205] While her argument may make some degree of logical sense, fans were not happy that it was used to change the relationship of characters in their pasts or to gloss over inaccuracies in people's families (including the complete exclusion of

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[203] Oakdale Confidential's Blog, http://www.amazon.com/gp/blog/id/A3LD6WLF78LOS7/ref=cm_blog_pg_first/002-2478177-4040843?ie=UTF8&%2AVersion%2A=1&%2Aentries%2A=0.

[204] Oakdale Confidential Author's Site, http://www.oakdaleconfidential.com/blog/.

[205] Adams, Alina, "Truth and 'Truthiness,'" *Oakdale Confidential* Author's Site, http://www.oakdaleconfidential.com/blog/2006/04/truth-and-truthiness.html.

one of the children of a main character in the book). While fans may not have bought her argument, having Adams discuss these sorts of issues openly in a blog indicated some willingness to engage with the audience about the project and both what worked and what did not.   Adams explained that "some of the 'mistakes' in the book are deliberate," reflecting the desired world of the author rather than the reality.

Although the book was well received among the fans, its success received little attention in the mainstream press. ABC's *Lost* launched a similar novel-from-the-story-world shortly after *Oakdale Confidential*. *Bad Twin* was not a replica experiment, as its tie-ins to the actual show were subtler, but it was very similar.   *Bad Twin* may have had a better overall Amazon performance, but it was never ranked on the *New York Times* list's top 10. *Oakdale Confidential* stayed at number three on the *New York Times* bestseller list for two weeks in a row and made it as high as number five on Amazon's seller list. While both books were ultimately questioned regarding a lack of continuity, both were ambitious experiments at transmedia storytelling that proved a market exists for such narrative extensions.

Later in 2006, the show released *Oakdale Confidential: Secrets Revealed*, a reprinted version of the book with a new chapter inserted. The reprint became perhaps an even greater narrative catalyst than the initial book. With Peretti openly acknowledging having authored the book, she decided to get revenge on her ex-husband for what she sees as ruining her current marriage, she writes what would--in the real world--be sure libel. On the show, Lucinda—the book's publisher—hounded Katie on several fronts about getting her copy out, and the pressure of the book's release played an important part in major decisions made by the character. Her notes about her sleeping with her ex-husband were used to get the writing process started for the insert of the book in its re-release, as well as a way for her to sort through feelings about her one

night stand, and her husband discovered the affair when he's trying to print off her pages for Lucinda, who demanded to have them immediately since the book needed to go to press and Katie had been dragging the deadline. The discovery caused Mike to move out and Katie, in her frustration, to write a scathing extra chapter about her ex-husband, which she tried to stop from going to press, only too late. After that point, the audience saw characters around the mall where the book is being sold (and a couple of too obvious decisions to purchase it). On the whole, though, the promotion and integration of the book into the show surrounding the release of the reprint was better executed.

As of 25 November 2006, shortly after the book was released a second time, the re-release was ranked 625 on Amazon, while the original version was ranked 3,751. While the book's integration into the show and the ultimate execution of the storyline may have been lacking, the experiment proved the audience was receptive to such transmedia storylines and pointed the way to a variety of changes that could be made in future transmedia storytelling attempts.

L.A. Diaries

Following up on the reality show *InTurn* on CBS innertube, *As the World Turns* partnered with fellow CBS soap opera *The Young and the Restless* to produce a transmedia Webisode series called *L.A. Diaries*, which was released in March 2007.[206] While ABC Daytime has positioned its relationship with corporate sister SOAPnet to launch the narrative extension of *General Hospital*, entitled *General Hospital: Night Shift*, as a primetime series featuring younger characters from the main show in Fall 2007, *As the World Turns* and other CBS Daytime dramas

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[206] Daytime Digital: *L.A. Diaries* on CBS, http://www.cbs.com/daytime/specials/la_diaries/.

are looking to innertube as the primary forum for transmedia storytelling in video form.[207]

The *L.A. Diaries* project, branded "Daytime Digital," took an interesting and innovative approach in how to use a Webisode. The series lasted five weeks and is a flashback looking into the time period after *ATWT*'s Alison Stewart left the show in 2005 and before *Y&R*'s Amber arrived in town in Fall 2006. According to the story, the women met in a dive bar in Venice, Calif. The two became friends and eventually started performing in Internet pornography to help pay the bills. The short-term series was particularly instructive as to how a transmedia property can provide viewers with new information and can be integrated into the narrative without detracting from those who cannot access or are not interested in watching the transmedia extension. *L.A. Diaries* was successful in that it provides:

1.) Cross-show appeal. *L.A. Diaries* did what had occasionally been attempted with the main shows themselves. It became a space to tell a crossover story between two long-running shows. *The Young and the Restless* had crossed over with *As the World Turns* before, but it was a one-time appearance, when *Y&R* attorney Michael Baldwin was called into Oakdale to help out in a custody case. Since Genoa City, Wisc., is reasonably close to Oakdale, Ill., in the fictional world of soaps, the two worlds could indeed have some crossover. *L.A. Diaries* expanded on what has been a long-standing soap tradition of an occasional meeting of two narrative worlds.

2.) Tight focus. These Webisodes expanded on exploring the crossover of characters from two different shows because it puts them in a special situation, outside of Oakdale and Genoa City, that allowed fans of either show to watch and not be bogged down with such a

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[207] For more information, see Ford, Sam, "*General Hospital: Night Shift* Could Be Fascinating Case Study in Cross-Show Storytelling," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 10 March 2007, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2007/03/general_hospital_night_shift_c.php. Since both series are on television, this project would technically not be a transmedia extension but rather a same-media extension.

learning curve in trying to figure out who all the characters are. By focusing on *Y&R*'s Amber Moore and *ATWT*'s Alison Stewart and their exploits in Los Angeles, this approach delved further into the storytelling potential in a crossover than having a character pop up for a onetime appearance on another show.

3.) Reintroducing characters. In this case, both Amber and Alison had been off the canvas. Alison left town two years prior to *L.A. Diaries* with her boyfriend Aaron to help care for his mother in Seattle. Around the time the transmedia project was set to launch, *ATWT* viewers learned that Alison and Aaron had broken up, according to a conversation between Alison's mother and sister, foreshadowing Alison's solo exploits with her new friend in this series. To further complicate things, Amber was formerly a character on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, played by the same actress, from 1997 until 2005, which is set in L.A. She showed up on *Y&R* in November 2006, making her a crossover character before even appearing in *L.A. Diaries*, but viewers who knew her from *B&B* did not know where she had been in the interim. *L.A. Diaries* presented a chance to explore what Amber had been doing while she was between these two shows. Meanwhile, Alison Stewart left Oakdale in 2005, last portrayed by Jessica Dunphy, and with Marnie Schulenberg now in the role. *L.A. Diaries* not only gave new viewers the chance to see Alison and older viewers the chance to learn where Alison has been, but it also gave Schulenberg the chance to bond with the audience as the new version of Alison before she ever debuted on the main show. Taking over as a recast can often be hard, and previous actress Dunphy was well liked in the role, so *L.A. Diaries* was a way to overcome that barrier.

4.) Launching a new storyline. *ATWT* was going in quite a different direction with the Alison character, who was now coping with a drug addiction funded by her pornography career, and *L.A. Diaries* acted as a chance to fill viewers in on how and why Alison's life has changed to

help explain why she was vastly different when she showed back up on *ATWT*.

5.) Crossovers with the main show. *L.A. Diaries* kicked off with Alison showing up on *Y&R*. Amber went to Las Vegas, and Alison showed up as her old best friend from L.A. for one episode, as the girls pulled a con to make a man think he had married Amber in a drunken stupor. (Alison actually dressed up as that man and used his ID to really marry Amber.) During that one appearance, it was never acknowledged she was the same Alison as from *ATWT* since viewers would not havce recognized Schulenberg, but that led to the beginning of *L.A. Diaries*. Emily, Alison's sister, set out on a quest to find her sister after finding out what she had been up to in L.A. and made an appearance of her own on *Y&R* on 27 March 2007.

While viewers questioned the depth and/or subject matter of *L.A. Diaries*, the way the Webisode series was positioned in relation to the main narrative provides a particularly good illustration of how transmedia projects can be structured in relation to soap opera texts. No numbers have been made public regarding the popularity of the Webisodes, but the series demonstrated a new method of introducing back-story for a new character or providing contextualization for the return of an old character who may have had some major changes in his/her life since he/she was last on *ATWT*.

Future Transmedia Storytelling Possibilities

The remainder of the chapter will examine potential new directions for the *ATWT* team in extending the text in multiple media forms. While these transmedia storytelling extensions act as potential guides for future narratives, based both on their successes and their mistakes, these projects are likely only the beginning for soap opera narrative extensions. Character blogs and e-mails proved that there was interest from both producers and consumers to create transmedia storytelling texts that deepened the ability to engage with the *ATWT* text, and *Oakdale*

Confidential proved how profitable creating narrative extensions could be for a niche property that nonetheless has an involved fan base, such as a soap opera. Further, *L.A. Diaries* proves that TPTB at *ATWT* are attempting to learn from their successes and failures to create more compelling and better-utilized transmedia extensions.

Most importantly, these transmedia texts must provide valuable new information and insights for their audience while not detracting from those who do not participate in these transmedia extensions. As Henry Jenkins writes, "Going in deep has to remain an option—something readers choose to do—and not the only way to derive pleasure from media franchises."[208] Consequently, each media product, including the transmedia extension, should be self-contained enough to be enjoyable as a standalone project but gain much greater meaning in conjunction with the whole. On the other hand, Jenkins warns that "redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty."[209] Also as important, however, is the need for more significant connections between the authors of transmedia content and the writing team of the *ATWT* show in all future transmedia extensions, to ensure not only that these transmedia projects have only the necessary amount of redundancy but also that they maintain a high level of continuity and relevance.

Future transmedia extensions might find ways to create texts, audio, or video scenes that feature characters neglected on the main text, such as older characters who are primarily used in supporting roles on the show but who could receive extra emphasis in transmedia storytelling extensions. In the case of using actors for audio or video, there are substantial production

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[208] Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York UP, 2006, 130.
[209] Ibid., 96.

hurdles to climb, especially with veteran contracted cast members who receive high per-appearance guarantees. Text-only ancillary content is less problematic, but writers are reluctant to use any storytelling method to mention characters not currently on the show in fear that viewers might mistakenly believe that the actor who portrayed that character is returning to the show.[210] Nevertheless, fans want to know how a grandmother reacts when her grandson is arrested and other transgenerational questions that the main narrative may lack the time to cover. These transmedia storytelling extensions might be able to address these questions.

Another potential transmedia extension that might further capitalize on deepening the viewer engagement in the *immersive story world* of Oakdale could be an online version of Oakdale's *The City Times* newspaper. *The City Times* and other news publications in the fictional town have played a role in various storylines through the years, so most audience members are aware of the newspaper's existence within the narrative world. Other shows have attempted projects of this sort in the past, such as *Passions'* *Tabloid Truth* Web site[211] and *Guiding Light*'s *Springfield Burns*.[212]

Similar extensions have also been conceived for DC Comics' series *52*,[213] a weekly comic book that features a Web site for Metropolis' newspaper, *The Daily Planet*, which follows the stories as they happen between issues of *52*. According to DC Comics' Director of Creative

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[210] Passanante, Jean, personal interview, 23 March 2006.

[211] Ford, Sam, "*Passions* Tabloid Providing Great Transmedia Storytelling Opportunities," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 29 October 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/10/passions_tabloid_providing_gre_1.php.

[212] Ford, Sam, "Springfield Burns Another *GL* Cross-Media Project, but with Transmedia Storytelling Potential," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 01 October 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/10/springfield_burns_getting_anot.php.

[213] Ford, Sam, "Online Newspaper for DC Comics Series," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/06/online_newspaper_for_dc_comics.php.

Services, Ron Perazza, the project was a mixture of editorial, creative, and marketing to help

promote the *52* comic book series. He said:

> The idea behind the site was that it would run right along with the series; meaning, it
> would be within the fiction as much as it could and be updated at least weekly, along with
> the comic [. . .] We still have coffee with the editors to talk about what's coming up,
> but we also read the scripts and black & white versions of the comics so we can stay
> ahead of the series. We don't want the site to just rehash what people are reading in the
> comics. We want it to be an additive experience.[214]

Perazza said that the intent of the transmedia project was that both the series and the Web site

"functioned symbiotically not parasitically [. . .] Neither the book nor the site should depend on

the other in order to exist."[215] The CW Network show *Smallville*, also based on a DC Comics

franchise, Superman, featured an online version of a newspaper for the show's town which

allowed readers to write in letters to the editor that would be published as if they were Smallville

residents.[216]

Although both come from the world of comic books,[217] these two examples are included

because they could be particularly instructive as to how a newspaper site for *The City Times*

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[214] Perazza, Ron, E-mail correspondence, 27 November 2006.

[215] Perazza, Ron, E-mail correspondence, 30 November 2006.

[216] No quantitative numbers of users for these transmedia projects have been released.

[217] As an aside, PGP partnered with DC Comics rival Marvel to create a crossover between the Marvel universe and *Guiding Light*, including Marvel characters converging on fictional Springfield and a fantasy episode of *Guiding Light* where a primary character was a super heroine named, appropriately, The Guiding Light. For more information, see Ford, Sam, "Soap Opera/Comic Book Crossover?!?" MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 24 September 2006. http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/09/soap_operacomic_superhero_cros.php; Ford, Sam, "*Guiding Light* Episode to Feature Marvel Crossover," MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 28 October 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/10/guiding_light_episode_to_featu.php; Ford, Sam, "A Firsthand Account and Reader Reaction to Marvel Comics/*Guiding Light* Crossover, MIT Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 09 November 2006, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/11/a_firsthand_account_and_reader.php.

might be integrated with the text of *As the World Turns*.[218] First, the newspaper format would avoid one of the main problems encountered by *Oakdale Confidential*, in that the creative process for getting a book prepared for publication and in writing a television show were hard to synchronize. Author Adams said, "The book had to be written far in advance (about six months) of the show. A shorter gap would have made it possible to tie-in more details between the book and the show."[219] Conversely, a newspaper site for the story could update the text between daily episodes and planned alongside production of the show.

While the *Smallville* example provides some degree of autonomy to the fan community, *The City Times Online Edition* could invite the fan community to be the journalists for the newspaper, writing stories, in AP style, that cover major events happening in town, in the way the newspaper would legitimately cover them, as well as flesh out the narrative world of Oakdale. For instance, regular stories about the county and city governments, feature stories about minor characters who appear in episodes of the shows, stories that highlight where or what characters are up to who are no longer shown on screen, et cetera, could all be incorporated into the newspaper, and the newspaper could be incorporated back into the text. This extension would help expand and build on the *hyperdiegesis* of Oakdale described in the second chapter. If a particular fan journalist were to gain popularity on the site, that journalist could be referenced on the text of the show, with one of the characters reading his/her story about corruption in the

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[218] Another interesting crossover between the world of comic books and the world of soap opera would be the six-part comic book series based on the soap opera *The Edge of Night*, released by The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service and containing health pamphlets inside, for which current DC Comics President Paul Levitz was one of the writers. The North Carolina State University Libraries lists these comic books as "undated." "Guide to the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension Service Publications, 1916-2006, Collection Number UA 102.200," North Carolina State University Libraries Web site, http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/findingaids/xml/ua102_200.xml.
[219] Adams, Alina, e-mail correspondence, 10 May 2006.

county water department, etc. In other words, the transmedia extension could be used not just to expand the narrative world of this daily text but to also invite the viewers/readers to actively participate in constructing some official part of this narrative world.[220] While fan fiction has not been a major part of soap opera fandom, fan journalism that becomes an official part of the text might help generate fan interest, and employees of PGP can act as editors for the publication.

A product like *The City Times Online Edition* could provide a nice balance to efforts that continue to improve on the Luke Snyder character blog, *Oakdale Confidential*, and *L.A. Diaries*. The shows existing experiments of character-written material, books from the narrative world, and Webisode extensions have begun to demonstrate how these various forms of storytelling can be used more effectively to give background to, deeper engagement with, and greater meaning to the text of the main show, and the various examples presented here demonstrate the *ATWT* team's earliest attempts to create this transmedia approach to telling its stories.

Just as previous chapters suggested that soap operas create a new business model that incorporates and values the qualitative measures of engagement that their shows engender through product placement and exploiting the content archive, this chapter has argued that fans are interested in narrative extensions that deepen their participation in these *immersive story worlds*. Again, these transmedia extensions are best understood within a social consumption model, in which viewers actively engage and discuss with each other surrounding these texts and how they fit together. These transmedia texts cannot become essential to the viewering experience and thus not allow for more passive viewers to still enjoy the show, but finding ways

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[220] This type of project would not only provide a meaningful outlet for user-generated content but could also coincide with the fact that almost every soap opera has a branded newspaper on the show that sometimes shows up in scenes. Rather than using that paper as just a prop, or else a place of employment for some of the characters in town, this type of transmedia project could provide an interesting way to utilize fan creativity.

to value the deeper engagement of active fans may help create a more passionate fan base that will proselytize for the brand. Further, a transmedia business model should not assume that older viewers cannot participate and should take the same transgenerational approach I have encouraged throughout this thesis. These texts cannot as easily encourage the social consumption that surrounds soap operas if transmedia extensions are seen to be directed toward only one demographic of the fan base.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion: *ATWT* as Brand, Transgenerational Storytelling, and Fan Proselytizers

As the World Turns and parent company Procter & Gamble Productions, through TeleVest, have shown an increasing interest in keeping the soap opera relevant in the modern media convergence culture. Owning the two oldest American daytime soap operas still on the air, PGP has sought to redefine the way its soaps tell stories to help one of television's oldest genres remain vibrant in a digital age. This thesis has demonstrated how the soap opera must artfully engage in creating new revenue streams such as product placement without insulting the intelligence and tastes of its viewers, embrace and contextualize its deep content archive to take advantage of the show's rich history, and make increasingly greater use of the myriad transmedia storytelling opportunities available to creative teams in the modern digital age.

Most important, however, is that the producers of *ATWT* keep their ear to the fan community and realize that these shows are consumed as part of various social networks, including a variety of online fan discussion forums, such as the Media Domain forum used in many examples here. These fan communities are transgenerational, and fans outside the target demographic may be instrumental in gaining and retaining viewers in a way that has not previously been recognized from a model which looks at television viewing as a non-social activity. This concluding section emphasizes the arguments made throughout this text: that, above all, *ATWT* must redefine its relationship to its fans and to the long-term planning of the show's content in order to be best poised to continue working with its fan community. Overall, this thesis concludes that PGP, TeleVest, and the *ATWT* team must emphasize transgenerational

storytelling, empower fans outside the target demographic as proselytizers, and ultimately

manage the show as a brand in order to ensure the continued long-term viability of *As the World

Turns* as a fixture of daytime television.

Transgenerational Storytelling and Stories Without End

Many long-standing television forms have not completely grasped the idea that one of the

most important selling tools they have is exactly what sets them apart from the more ephemeral

primetime fare: longevity. This category includes any type of program with deep archives but

particularly daytime serial drama. These programs have been on for years, without an end in

sight, making them special in a television industry of constant changes and cancellations. The

formats of these programs are meant to instill in viewers the sense that, even if the program hits a

down time, its longevity and format will cause it to rebound and remain a part of the television

landscape for years to come. In this way, while primetime programs are often accused of

"jumping the shark," taking a dip in quality that the show will never recover from, daytime serial

dramas have "jumped the shark" and back again several times over the many years they have

been on the air.[221] *As the World Turns* and *Guiding Light* have been on the air for more than 50

years apiece now, making PGP's programming renowned for its longevity.

Chapter five outlined the ways in which World Wrestling Entertainment, another brand

renowned for its continued longevity, has found a way to position its history as a major aspect of

its continued business model moving forward. Further, the chapter argued that the business

model for WWE 24/7 could greatly inform PGP as well, as they find a way to leverage one of

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[221] The phrase "jump the shark" came from the episode of *Happy Days* in which "The Fonz" rode
his motorcycle over a tank of sharks, a moment that many fans agree indicated a dip in the
quality of the show that it never rebounded from. The Web site Jump the Shark includes a forum
to debate whether various shows have hit that point. See the debate on whether *ATWT* has
"jumped the shark," or rather how many times it has, at
http://www.jumptheshark.com/topic/world-turns-general-comments/119.

their greatest strengths: their vast archives. For soap operas, that history has even more direct relevance, however, because age does not cause a soap opera character to become less relevant in the way that age causes a pro wrestler to be past his or her physical performance prime.

How can soaps take advantage of their transgenerational appeal, though, leveraging their past in a way that it can directly relate to the contemporary product? The answer may come in what the industry calls legacy characters, those characters that I outlined in first chapter who have been on the show for many years, whom generations of viewers have seen. With as many veteran actors as *ATWT* has on its cast, the show is better primed than any other in daytime television to take advantage of a transgenerational storytelling style and make the number of high-paid veteran actors on contract become an asset rather than an anchor to the bottom line.

For instance, when these characters are involved in storylines that incorporate their histories, a variety of ancillary products could be launched, such as a quasi-documentary of their character's past, important scenes that relate back into the current storyline, and a book, magazine, or Web site that details their rich history in direct relation to a storyline that involves that character. Further, when a legacy character from years past returns to the show, this could coincide with a DVD release or on-demand series that documents that character's past to refresh the minds of longtime viewers and help newer viewers catch up on the character's history with others on the show. A Webisode series could document some of the back-story as to where that character has been in the interim. The key, though, is that the creative team who writes the show itself must be central in these projects, and these projects would have to feed into the way that character's return is handled.

There has been a lot of talk in the soap fan communities and the industry in the past year about legacy characters and how their return can generate buzz for shows once again. However,

many of these legacy characters are not in the 18-49 female age demographic that soap operas

target. Former *Young and the Restless* head writer Kay Alden, now a consultant for ABC

Daytime, writes:

> Having spent over 32 years writing a daytime drama, I can testify to the validity of
> utilizing the collective show history as both a means of keeping alive the fundamental
> vision of a daytime show, and also what should be an excellent means of drawing old
> viewers back to the fold. However, whenever stories of this nature were discussed in our
> meetings, most often there was the argument [. . .] that these characters are outside the
> crucial demographic.[222]

What many television programs seem to fail to grasp, however, is that viewers often enjoy

watching characters who are not in their own age demographic, so a transgenerational approach

to telling a story does not turn the target demographic away, at least those active fans most

interested in the show.

Most soap operas today concentrate on finding new viewers by either trying to appeal to

casual fans or else stealing viewers from other soap operas, resulting in a dwindling pool of

potential audience members as the viewership of the genre as a whole slowly drops. On the

other hand, these shows used to have millions more viewers a decade ago and especially two

decades ago. Appealing to those prodigal viewers, the "lapsed fans" who have moved away

from *ATWT* but would still recognize and perhaps even care about some of the longtime faces of

the show—these legacy characters—could help bring those fans back to the show, and through

the process of transgenerational storytelling, get them interested in newer characters as well.

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[222] Alden, Kay, comment on Ford, Sam, "Legacy Characters and Rich History: How Soap Operas
Must Capitalize on Their History (and Pay Attention to the Lessons of the WWE)," MIT
Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog, 03 November 2006,
http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2006/11/legacy_characters_and_rich_his.php.

A History of Quick Fixes

Soaps have been trying to fix the ratings problems for the past two decades. As cable channels proliferated and choices grew exponentially, soaps slowly lost viewership. The response was to try to appeal directly to the target demographic by attracting them into the shows in a variety of ways, to think about how to increase numbers by next week. In her *Mystery Scene* article about how soaps incorporate murder mysteries into the plot, Alina Adams asks, "How can a genre whose ratings are shrinking as their audience dies off (or, as in the case of many modern women, enters the workforce) attract younger viewers for whom the thrill-a-minute sensibility of *E.R.* is all they know? Is telling more shocking, action-packed mystery stories the answer?"[223] Jason Mittell writes, for instance, how the increasing complexity of primetime television has involved marrying the serial storytelling style of daytime dramas to episodic primetime television and various longstanding primetime genres.[224] Yet, as primetime becomes more empowered by borrowing seriality from daytime television, daytime is not going to gain new permanent fans by emulating thrill-a-minute television.[225] All these quick fixes, even if they led to some momentary jumps in ratings from time-to-time over the years, have seen an overall trend of sliding numbers. These quick fixes included colorful cross-promotions or short-term stories that lasted a day or a week, intending to draw viewers in for a sweeps rating period. Often, these would include plot-driven suspenseful moments that may attract new viewers for the week but which seem to have no prolonged draw, as the people tune right back out.

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[223] Adams, Alina, "Death in the Afternoon: Soap Operas Turn to Crime," *Mystery Scene* 88, Winter 2005, 44-47, 47. See the reference to Adams' work as a moderator on the PGP Soapbox site in chapter two and to her work as author of *Oakdale Confidential* in chapter six.
[224] Mittell, Jason, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (Fall 2006), 29-40, 32.
[225] The relationship between contemporary serialized primetime television and the daytime serial drama would be worthy of a thesis in its own regard and is a ripe area for significant future research.

The era of quick fixes needs to end for the genre to survive, and networks and producers alike have to think about these shows as permanent brands rather than just weekly programming. The question needs to be how shows can tell good stories now that will lead to increased viewership in two years and do everything within that time to improve the storytelling, make shows more inclusive of the whole case, embrace the history, and empower grassroots marketers to draw more viewers back in. That takes a lot of time and a long-term vision, though.

The problem with a long-term approach is that it takes a while to get results. Just as with increasing the population of a city, sustainable growth in soaps does not just mean adding new viewers but rather finding methods of gaining new viewers who are more likely to continue watching the show. The approach of hotshotting storylines has often led to temporary quick-fix jumps in the ratings, but those ratings drop right back. All these temporary spikes have been momentary glitches in an overall ratings graph that has consistently trended downward for decades.

Fan Proselytizers

Transgenerational storytelling has one major drawback, in that it encourages viewership from a variety of fans outside the target demographic, which may mean little to the audience who really counts: advertisers. Women over the age of 49 and male viewers in general are not who PGP is trying to sell. However, what has also been established is that minimizing the role of *ATWT*'s history to attract the young adult female target demographic does not work. One would suspect that a major cause of this direct appeal not working is due to the fact that soap operas are not particularly appealing to adults who have no history with the show and no social consumption built around that show. With low production values compared to primetime shows, complicated relationships among casts of 40 characters, and a dialogue-heavy format with a five-

hour weekly commitment to viewing, these shows are a major gamble if there is no history with the characters and no social structure in place which encourages continued viewing. As Charlotte Brunsdon writes, "To millions of fans production values are clearly not the point—or at least not the main point [. . .] It is partly a ritual pleasure, which offers reassurance in its familiarity and regularity."[226] To achieve this, though, the soap opera has to become a familiar part of fans' lives, and the low production values are a barrier to potential adult viewers who have no connection to the text and no social construct urging them to get involved with Oakdale and its familiar faces.

That is one reason why online fan communities become so important. As highlighted in the second and third chapters, these communities form social spaces through which fans often stay interested in the show even during a period in which the particular storylines occurring at the time are of little interest to the viewer. Many times, fans state on the message boards that they are disinterested in the show but continue watching every day just to participate in the discussion about the show afterward and that the entertaining comments and discussions based around the show's mistakes as well as its successes actually keeps them involved. While many in the soap industry bemoan the fans' constant criticism and complaining, these fan parodies and complaints may well be a strong reason why those fans stick with the show—that they have a community built around the text that they lose when they no longer watch the show, and this community makes the show continue to be entertaining precisely because the fans have a space in which they can complain about the show.

This approach not only explains how to value online fan communities, but also how to place importance on the viewers outside the target demographic. If many of the show's most

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[226] Brunsdon, Charlotte, "Writing about Soap Opera," *Television Mythologies: Stars, Shows & Signs*, Ed. Len Masterman, London: Comedia Publishing, 1984, 82-87, 86.

faithful viewers currently in the target demographic started watching because their mother or grandmother watched the show when they were growing up, this is an indication that mother and grandmother were and perhaps remain an important part of the viewing experience for these fans. Researcher Mary Ann Cooper is quoted in a 2006 *TelevisionWeek* calling *ATWT* "digital comfort food" and writing that "people remember growing up with *As the World Turns*, watching the show while Grandma was baking cookies or Mom was folding the laundry. Today, when they tune in, they're reminded of those times at home with their loved ones."[227]

When soap operas switched to a series of quick fixes to try to retain viewers, often at the exclusion of transgenerational storytelling, the attention on the target demographic lessened the relationship of longtime fans with these shows. However, losing those longtime fans also lost the social ties and proselytizers for the target demographic and the next generation of soap opera fans. It stands to reason that, if many viewers started watching because of mothers and grandmothers, that fewer mothers and grandmothers means fewer members of the next generation of fans as well.

In other words, monetizing these non-target soap opera fans requires looking at a third-party strategy of gaining and retaining viewers. In terms of advertisers, these fans may be of little value directly, but their social ties and proselytizing abilities are key to reaching and sustaining viewership from 18-49 females. In the current niche television environment, focusing on target demographics makes sense, but not for shows that have transgenerational appeal. Ironically, by focusing so completely on the target demographic they intended to reach, *ATWT* and other soap operas may have lost significant viewership from the same demographic because of the erosion caused to the social ties around soap opera viewership. The only way to gain

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[227] Waldman, Allison J., "*World* Turns 50: 'Digital Comfort Food," *TelevisionWeek*, 19 December 2006, http://www.tvweek.com/article.cms?articleId=29572.

those viewers back and foster a new generation of *ATWT* fans for the target demographic is to

gain back the trust and interest of long-term fans and create the type of product that will lead to

positive viral marketing for the show and a sustained social infrastructure around the text that

will gain and retain viewers.

Soap Operas as Brands

The phrase "not your mother's soap opera" does not work well for fans in this genre.

This phrase may never have been overtly used, but the implication has been in place when the

show's history was sacrificed at times to new characters meant to appeal to the target

demographic with little connection to *ATWT*'s past. In most of these cases, though, managing

these shows as one would a primetime show and trying to come up with a short-term way to

increase viewership among the desired demographic proved to do nothing to curb the downward

ratings trend and the continued loss of cultural and financial significance for soap operas. As

Grant McCracken writes, "meaning-mismanagement is expensive."[228] In describing the switch

from broadcasting consensus narratives to *narrowcasting* niche products, David Marc writes of

the conceptualizing of target demographics that "narrowcasters eschew the commercial carpet

bombing of broadcasting strategy in favor of surgical demographic strikes. Viewers are sorted

and flattered with various suggestions of inside respects for their special identities of age, sex,

race, leisure pursuit, and so on."[229] While every other television industry seems to make its name

off target marketing and niche audiences according to age/sex demographics, soap operas are in

danger when being conceptualized in this way because they are, by their nature, best as a

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[228] McCracken, Grant, *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management*, Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana UP, 181.
[229] Marc, David, "What Was Broadcasting?" *Television: A Critical View*, Fifth Edition, New York: Oxford UP, 1994, 629-648, 640. Originally published in Marc, David, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture, Revised Edition*, Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1984.

transgenerational narrative. Soap operas may be able to continue thriving in a narrowcasting

environment, but the niche audience these shows appeal to may not be able to be broken down so

neatly by age/sex. Similarly, Grant McCracken writes:

> Segmenting demographically often tears through the cultural map. It splits where we
> should lump and lumps where we should split. Psychographic and lifestyle segmentation
> can have the same limitation. People may look like "young moderns" or "affluent empty
> nesters" from the outside, but this is almost certainly not the way they see themselves.
> This outsider's perspective seals the observer away from understanding the cultural
> meanings the customer cares about and the segments they establish in the marketplace.[230]

The power of soap operas lies in their transgenerational storytelling and ties to the past, yet the

target demographic fever of primetime television has infected these shows, as well as the

episodic nature of most primetime fare. Rather than rely on the genre's strengths, soap operas

have consistently gone for quick fixes and direct appeals to the target demographic, reflecting a

need to raise the ratings in two weeks.

This thesis argues an approach that focuses instead on managing the soap opera as a

brand rather than as a primetime television show would. In some ways, these shows that have

been on the air for decades have more in common with brand management than in putting

together a successful primetime series, precisely because these shows are "worlds without end."

With the announcement of the cancellation of *Passions* in the summer of 2007, most people were

not surprised and still considered *Passions* a relatively new soap, yet it had been on the air since

1999, an eight-year run that would have been considered an abnormally successful survival rate

in primetime. The key is that soap operas build audiences slowly and retain those audiences over

time when they are managed successfully, yet the current mindset and nature of networks,

advertisers, and producers emphasize a short-term focus.

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[230] McCracken, 183.

When the networks refuse to give soap operas more than a short-term contract renewal and the shows set their goal to spike ratings in a target demographic for a particular week, the genre will have a hard time escaping its current continued downward trend. Only by putting long-term goals in place to raise the ratings of the show two or three years ahead can a soap opera realistically build its audience back up. This requires the type of long-term planning that seems foreign to current industry thinking and a way of valuing the non-target demographic that goes against the logic of directly appealing to 18-49 females. Particularly, the key in managing the show as a brand is to put some thought into what makes one soap opera unique from another and developing a distinct feel and focus that sets *ATWT* apart as a brand from the other daytime serial dramas.[231] As soaps formulate these long-term strategies for a sustainable business model, creating new ways of understanding and valuing the depth of fans' engagement becomes evens more pressing, especially as soap operas incorporate new media forms and a transmedia approach to storytelling that cannot be measured by television ratings alone.

As the World Turns in a Convergence Culture

This thesis has outlined how the social relationship between *As the World Turns* and its fans has transformed over time and how central those social networks surrounding the text are to the reason why viewers watch and stay involved in these *immersive story worlds* over decades. This concluding chapter has again emphasized that, above all, soap operas need to change their mode of operations to focus on transgenerational storytelling, utilizing legacy characters, managing the shows as long-term brands rather than ephemeral television content, and empowering and monetizing viewers outside the target demographic to help gain and retain new

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[231] For more on this concept, see Liccardo, Lynn, "The Different Types of Soap Opera Fans," Helium Web site, http://www.helium.com/tm/89327.

and prodigal viewers through the creation of a long-term plan and a more open discourse with these fan communities, as well as older viewers.

For fans, the approach taken here is intended to find new ways to acknowledge and value the different ways that fans engage with soap opera texts. The categories introduced in the second chapter (fan discussion, fan criticism, fan performance, fan theorizing, and fan community building) emphasizes that fans engage with soap opera texts in a variety of ways, just as the borrowed terminology from Rob Kozinets emphasizes that online communities contain various types of users. This thesis strives to give voice to many of the fan debates and discussions that might otherwise have been lost in the archives of these discussion groups, while examining how those fan perspectives relate to industry practices. This thesis was particularly intended to acknowledge and celebrate the *vernacular theory* of the soap opera fan base and acknowledge how important the contributions and creativity of the fan community are to the enjoyment many fans derive from the text itself. Soap operas cannot be separated from the social networks they are produced for, and these communities are actively involved in making meaning for the shows they consume.

This thesis hopes to encourage more active use of *vernacular theory* and industry perspectives in soap opera scholarship and to extend the scope of soap opera scholarship into the variety of new storytelling, advertising, and distribution modes available in the current age of *convergence culture*. In particular, I have sought to give greater nuance to understanding how social interaction around media texts are an important part of the consumption process, and I have introduced the new concept of *immersive story worlds* to explain how and why some media texts generate a greater deal of audience engagement.

For the industry, this thesis suggests that *ATWT* more effectively utilize alternate revenue streams like product placement, new ways to capitalize on its vast archives, and take a transmedia storytelling approach to fleshing out the *immersive story world* that the show's text has constructed over the past 51 years. None of these activities on their own will curb the increasing ratings decline described in the introduction, but they are all part of a shifting business model that recognizes and embraces fan engagement rather than just overall impressions. Considering that this deep engagement is one of the most unique aspects of the soap opera as an *immersive story world*, each of these shows would do well to look toward a business model that emphasizes those strengths. Further, by managing each show as a brand rather than as a short-term television show, these shows can find ways to build new models to work with fans and encourage new ways for those viewers to active engage with the narrative. This requires looking at *ATWT* much less as another soap produced for daytime television than as a unique brand of its own, separate from the other daytime serial dramas. As massive as the texts of each of these shows are, they are a "genre" in themselves.

This type of approach relies on PGP adopting a collaborative mindset to work with its viewers and to empower them as proselytizers in order to help reach new and lapsed fans. Soap operas, more than any other type of fictional television programming, are dependant on the social relationships that are built around them and the long-term relationship that fans build not only with the show and its characters but also around the show and its characters. Only by fully understanding and working with those social relationships can soap operas continue to thrive and reverse the downward ratings trend described here. The *immersive story worlds* celebrated in the introduction are defined, above all, by their permanence, but fans and industry executives alike are increasingly ambivalent about the long-term future of soap operas like *ATWT*. The approach

emphasized in this thesis is intended to revitalize this concept of "worlds without end" that has long been vital to the soap opera.

The need for a transgenerational approach to build a long-term brand might be best articulated by *ATWT* creator Irna Phillips, who is often quoted as saying, "As the world turns, we know the bleakness of winter, the promise of spring, the fullness of summer and the harvest of autumn. Follow those seasons with the Hughes, Lowell and Stewart families as they brave the elements in Oakdale, U.S.A."[232] For much of television's history, the narrative that Phillips envisioned has remained relevant for generations of fans and creators, and the show and its characters remain important in the lives of millions of fans to this day. As the soap opera industry lost its footing due to the external forces described in the first chapter, these shows often strayed from the history, tradition, and emotion Phillips' quote emphasizes. Now that new media technologies, new ways of understanding audience engagement, and changing modes of discourse among fans and between fans and producers arise, however, soap operas must return to that idea of a permanent *immersive story world* and a world that will always continue turning.

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[232] Quoted in Wagner, Helen, "Introduction," *As the World Turns: The Complete Family Scrapbook*, By Julie Poll, Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1996, 7-8, 8.