series shares a similar aesthetic and format with its precursor makes it equally easy to overlook a more significant commonality: a dedication to interaction with the fan community – and to particular innovations in that area, which could eventually represent a game-changer for both web and TV series.

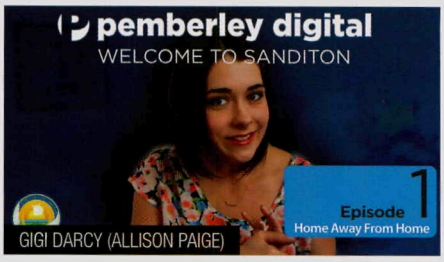
'There are two basic audiences,' states Biff Van Cleve, CEO of storytelling platform Theatrics.com. 'Those who passively watch the content and those who actively create.' And it's that second audience category that Theatrics, which is realising its first major entertainment partnership with Pemberley's *Welcome to Sanditon*, is galvanising. To be sure, *LBD* already saw dynamic community-building across multiple social media networks that, in true transmedia fashion, tended to blur the line between the fictive and the real (even the company name 'Pemberley Digital' is a business entity within the storyworld that's been constructed). But what if viewers could go beyond posting text in response to character dialogue and story events? What if they could deepen their participation by publishing media content at once more robust and original?

Jay Bushman, *LBD*'s transmedia producer and now the executive producer and co-showrunner of *Sanditon*, was quick to see the potential in engaging fans through a platform that allows them to upload their own videos starring characters that they would conceive.

I'd recommend Theatrics to any creators who have a strong sense of community with their audience and who aren't afraid to give them a little bit of ownership of the storyworld they've created. [Its value] crosses multiple genres/audience/demos/etc. But the key thing that I think a project needs in order to use Theatrics effectively is a large, varied and complex storyworld.

Yet how to make sure that audience-uploaded material doesn't spin out of control and lead to a fragmented or diluted media property? That's where the producers' active, imaginative and strategic use of Theatrics enters the picture. By posting 'calls-to-action', the showrunners prompt the audience through questions designed to elicit thoughtful replies that help flesh out and enrich the narrative setting and peripheral characters. Audience members then post their video responses, which essentially become part of the canon.

'In addition to the opportunity to perform,' Van Cleve clarifies, 'all users can share, comment and rate all content; they can



also follow performers they like. And these actions earn points towards the leaderboard and badges as in other gamified experiences.'

The trendy term 'gamified' can make one pause, though. In fact, in an earlier era, or through a more cynical lens, one might be tempted to call the creation of audience-funded media simply the latest advance in fan exploitation. Such a stance, however, does not adequately take into account where participatory culture has been heading generally, or how media publishers might meaningfully collaborate with those audience segments *already* predisposed to generating new content. Margaret Dunlap, also an executive producer and co-showrunner for *Sanditon*, makes this same point differently:

Although there wasn't a lot of video interaction on The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, when we did ask fans to make their own videos, the response was always very strong. So for us, Theatrics was a way for us to facilitate and encourage what our fans were already doing. If we didn't have fans who wanted to engage, the platform itself wouldn't have suddenly turned them into vloggers.*

Bushman concurs, while stressing the artfulness of what fans have contributed so far:

We've seen segments of the audience really latch on to the creativity that Theatrics provides them. One group of players has banded together to tell their own complex, multi-character story that plays out over several weeks. There's a certain segment of the audience that, once they feel like the creators have given them permission, and once they have had some time to get used to the dynamics of the platform, will just take the ball and run.

Dunlap offers additional examples:

We had one fan make her own cooking demo video in the same style as one of the characters from the show. We had another video where two fans got together and staged a call to the help desk of a fictional company established in The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The way they're expanding, integrating and remixing the world of* Welcome to Sanditon *and Pemberley Digital is just awesome.*

The Development of Binge Watching

LIZ GIUFFRE

Watching a string of episodes of your favourite series back-to-back used to be called 'marathoning'; the term conjured images of DVD box sets, catch-ups with friends, or even just a fantastic way to spend a long weekend. These days, it's called 'binge watching'. The term gained traction most notably with the recent Netflix-only release of the fourth *Arrested Development* season, as all fifteen episodes were released simultaneously rather than, um, episodically. The producer/distributor's choice led to reports of fans planning parties filled with No-Doz and lots of couch time, and the release schedule filled the Twittersphere and other associated second screens with recommendations for watching, understanding and perhaps resisting the binge compulsion.

Interestingly, binge watching has been noted as something of an issue for traditional broadcasters. In one of the first of the new round of press reports on bingeing from January this year, *New York Times* reporter Brian Stelter framed the problem clearly:

Kevin Reilly, the Fox Entertainment chairman, whose network has already canceled two of the three shows it introduced last fall, alluded to this problem [of bingeing] at a news conference earlier this month. 'If I bumped into one more person that was doing a "Breaking Bad" marathon in the middle of our fall launch …,' he said, trailing off as reporters laughed.

What stories like this overlook is that binge watching, or at least timeshifting, has been around for decades. We know that Video was meant to kill the Radio Star (because we could watch and listen when we wanted rather than when a broadcaster decided), but it's interesting to see just how similar current discussions are to the commentaries of excitement and trepidation around the time of

home video's rise in the 1980s. For example, in an overview of the then-new technology's impact in Australia as of 1991, Tom O'Regan called the VCR 'a force for decentralisation at the consumer level. It is at the level of the individual, the family, the household or the clan unit that the exercise of greater choice in and personalising of TV viewing is exercised.' Framing the VCR in terms of a power struggle over time and exposure of programming, he continued,

compare [the VCR timeshift] to the monopoly over audio-visual entertainment enjoyed by broadcast TV, where it was once possible for TV to proclaim itself through the well-known injunction to 'give the people what they need, not what they want'. In such circumstances all the viewer could do was choose not to watch. But with the VCR, audiences could watch something else – and did so.

If this narrative sounds familiar, it should. Bingeing does take away the 'watch our stuff at the pace we decide, or don't watch at all' power that broadcasters once had, and it also lets audiences decide what the nature of serials should be. There's no agony of waiting until next week to resolve the cliffhanger – just the agony of zombie-ing the next day at work after watching 'just one more' episode of *The West Wing* on a school night. The metaphor of the binge is similar to food here: you can end up with a satisfied, slightly gluttonous feeling, or a bit sick from pleasure overload.

The rise in binge watching (or at least the rise in industry interest in the practice of bingeing) *can* be seen as really positive. If audiences are willing to spend hours (or days) on end watching programs back-to-back, it proves they are interested in screen culture in a way that perhaps still isn't acknowledged enough. This is particularly important when considering the television binge, as it shows that television is clearly more than just a passive domestic film cousin or YouTube stopgap. It's one thing to cancel dinner plans on a Wednesday night because you don't want to miss the latest episode of *Mad Men*; it's quite another to block out an entire weekend because you're so keen to see the series proper (perhaps more than once). Television is, as binge watching shows, still (and maybe more than ever) a form audiences actively engage in – a 'cool' medium, as Marshall McLuhan would have put it.

The popularity of television binge watching also helps to justify arguments for quality personnel, increased budgets and artistic kudos to be afforded to the small screen. The success of reality and lifestyle programming in local broadcast ratings might at first make aspiring television writers, composers and actors seem like endangered species in the contemporary television landscape. However, binge watching proves that audiences still value a series that develops, that is detailed, that is nuanced and that is composed carefully with a clear narrative. We don't always need to phone in to vote for an ending or listen to a judge to tell us what we thought of a performance or character.

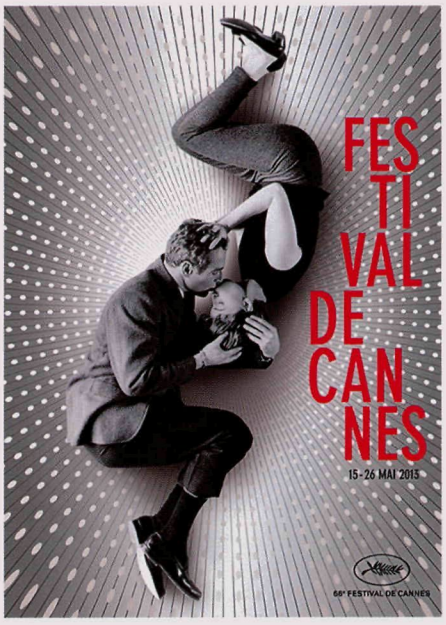
Returning to history repeating, O'Regan's advice for the potential of the VCR's timeshift / audience-led screen time can also give us more ideas about how bingeing might affect our screen diets in the future. In particular, O'Regan noted how material that may have 'lost' its audience could be found again, as he remarked on the 'development of nostalgia collections in VCR shops'. Binge watching is not just for contemporary series, but can be equally satisfying for older series, particularly as many are released with extras, commentaries and restorations that improve sound and image quality. There's the *Star Wars* revisionism that George Lucas explores with each new format (will he eventually give Luke a different father in a new 'director's cut'?), but also a chance to reconsider the way new stories are being told. Binge watching is not just re-running, but rather getting lost in a show with the same passion that literature fans have long been losing entire weekends and sensible weeknights with. Now to just move away from the negative connotations of 'binge' – maybe 'celebration watching' would be better.

Cannes (Down) Under Wraps

TARA JUDAH

Baz Luhrmann's ambitious screen adaptation of F Scott Fitzgerald's literary classic *The Great Gatsby* (2013) officially opened the 66th Cannes Film Festival. Suitably opulent for such a prestigious event, dripping in cinematic excess – beyond the screen and into the auditorium in 3D – *Gatsby* successfully whetted the appetites of its eager, accredited audience.

Screening out of competition, Fitzgerald's story of Gatsby's failed American dream, veiled by Luhrmann's party-popping spectacle, was the only 'Australian' feature film to screen this year at Cannes. A co-production with the US, *Gatsby*'s visible Australian



content consists only of Isla Fisher's and Joel Edgerton's attempts at American accents. Following last year's selection of *The Sapphires* (Wayne Blair, 2012) – also screening out of competition – Australian cinema in the international arena now seems less about quirky suburban lives and more about big-screen spectacle.

Outside of Luhrmann's striking kinetic visual style, the second greatest Australian spectacle at Cannes was his twice–leading lady, Nicole Kidman (*Moulin Rouge!*, 2001; *Australia*, 2008). Kidman proudly announced that, although she'd been asked many times in past years to serve on the main jury at Cannes, she had always declined. She further stated that the invitation to join *this* jury, with specific reference to jury president Steven Spielberg, was the invitation she'd been waiting to accept. Perhaps we'll see a collaboration between the two find its way into pre-production in 2014 … Their fellow jurors included actors Daniel Auteuil, Christoph Waltz and Vidya Balan and directors Naomi Kawase, Ang Lee, Cristian Mungiu and Lynne Ramsay.

New Zealand director Jane Campion had a significant role this year as president of the Short Films and Cinéfondation jury. Finding herself on both sides of the panel, Campion also received an award – the Carrosse d'Or (Golden Coach) prize, a tribute from La Société des Réalisateurs de Films (Film Directors' Society). The Carrosse d'Or is an award given to a director from the international community to acknowledge the innovative qualities, courage and independent nature of his or her filmmaking.