



Freeman, M. (2015) 'Up, up and across: Superman, the Second World War and the historical development of transmedia storytelling'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 35 (2): 215-239.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* on 08/08/2014 available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/01439685.2014.941564>

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.
Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

Up, Up and Across: Superman, World War II, and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling

Abstract: Re-contextualising the industrial evolution of transmedia storytelling – itself typically branded a product of contemporary media convergence – this article examines the industrial role of transmedia storytelling during a period of Classical Hollywood. Exploring the roles of licensing, corporate authorship, and cross-industrial relations amidst the cultural context of World War II, the article draws on Superman and the expansions of the character’s storyworld across multiple media during the 1940s and 1950s to assess how the media of comics, radio, cinema, and television can be recognised during this period as convergent industry platforms where transmedia narratives unfolded.

Keywords: Transmedia; Media Convergence; Classical Hollywood; Narrative; Promotion; Superman

Introduction

Transmedia storytelling is perhaps the most aesthetically theorised component of media convergence, and one which has gained significant academic presence over the last decade. Most explicitly theorised by Henry Jenkins, transmedia storytelling is itself the convergence of textual forms and involves the telling of ‘stories that unfold across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the storyworld; a more integrated approach to franchise development.’¹ Transmedia storytelling here has been contextualised most prominently as a product of the contemporary landscape, typically in relation to digital convergences and the horizontal integration of the media conglomerate.

While it is tempting to regard these events as implying a revolutionary shift in production practices, it is important to recognise the extent to which distribution and consumption

models have remained bound to more traditional means of production. This article traces some of the *historical* precedents for transmedia storytelling common to contemporary media franchises, drawing on Superman – ‘a progenitor in the pop folklore of the twentieth century,’² as *The Washington Post* once described the character – and the expansions of the character’s storyworld across media during the early 1940s – as a case study for exploring how the industrial practice of transmedia storytelling occupied a brand- and audience-building strategy during the Classical Hollywood period. In mapping the ways in which DC Comics, owners of the Superman property, engineered the character as a transmediated figure between 1938 and 1942, the article explores the roles of licensing, corporate authorship, cross-promotion and cross-industrial relations amidst the dominant cultural context of World War II, assessing how the media of comics, radio, cinema, and television can be recognised during this period as convergent industrial platforms where transmedia narratives unfolded.

On Paper

Having evolved throughout the twentieth century as an artful mixture of the newspaper comic strip and the pulp magazine, comic books had emerged as a new popular medium by the mid-1930s. DC Comics arose as the industry leader in American comic book publishing after the release of *Action Comics* #1, a comic featuring the debut adventure of Superman. ‘So many legends already are being told about the birth of Superman,’ *The Film Daily* once asserted in 1942, ‘that it is difficult to get to the truth.’³ According to the same report, however, this birth had begun with ‘a pleasant, sociable chap named Harry Donenfeld, a prosperous printer, publisher and distributor of “pulp” magazines.’⁴ ‘It was on [Donenfeld’s] desk that the comic strip character was really born,’ insisted *The Washington Post*.⁵ ‘He was the first man to recognize the appeal of the mighty man when two shy boys from Cleveland, Jerry Siegel and

Joe Shuster, introduced Superman to him.’⁶ Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a pulp writer in the 1920s, founded National Allied Publications in 1935. In 1937, in debt to Donenfeld, Wheeler-Nicholson hired Donenfeld as a partner, publishing *Detective Comics*. Donenfeld and Wheeler-Nicholson formed Detective Comics, Inc. – later to be DC Comics – launching a new title that popularised the period’s comic book industry. *Action Comics* #1, comprising eleven stories, featured the debut adventure of Superman and was published in June 1938.

Triggering a superhero boom, this first edition of *Action Comics* served as an introduction for Superman, a Herculean hero created by writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster. The comic revealed that Superman is the last survivor of a distant planet, sent to Earth in a spaceship as an infant seconds before the planet’s destruction. Found by two passing motorists, the Kents, and raised as journalist Clark Kent, Superman possesses remarkable physical strength and fights a battle for truth and justice, all the while working as a reporter for the Daily Planet. The character proved a success, particularly with children, the demographic that had become most associated with comic books since their inception as ‘funny books.’⁷ With the success of *Action Comics* #1, sales for the comic began to increase, with the first few issues reaching 500,000 sold copies.⁸ Within a year of his first appearance in *Action Comics*, Superman received an eponymously titled bi-monthly comic book, titled *Superman* – the first issue of which was released in June 1939. In 1941, Detective Comics were boasting a monthly circulation of 900,000 sold copies for *Action Comics* and 1,300,000 for *Superman*.⁹ The increase in sales for the latter confirmed suspicions that it was Superman himself, rather than the *Action Comics* publication, which appealed most to its child readership. Indeed, to confirm such suspicions, Harry Donenfeld conducted a newsstand survey in 1940, finding that children were not asking for *Action Comics* at all; instead, they only wanted ‘that magazine with Superman on it.’¹⁰ Detective Comics gained legal ownership of the character,

and Superman graced every cover of *Action Comics* thereafter. Moreover, the character's unanticipated mass popularity made it a deliberate commercial strategy on the part of Detective Comics to rebrand *Action Comics* as an affiliate of the *Superman* comic book.

This rebranding led to an intertwining story that played out across both *Action Comics* and *Superman*, meaning that new story content was presented to those that read both comics, encouraging the consumption of both titles. With *Action Comics* and *Superman* becoming extensions of the same story, narrated across two distinct publications, it becomes possible to conceptualise this example in relation to what later become transmedia storytelling. For Jenkins, transmedia storytelling is the 'integration of multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium.'¹¹ It thus concerns the strategy of building, extending or expanding, rather than contradicting, replacing or repeating, previously narrated story content across an array of media forms. *Action Comics* #1, for example, began with a prologue narrating the origin of Superman, the destruction of his home planet, the sending of the infant to Earth, and finally his later transformation into a superhero. These narrative events took place across the first page of *Action Comics* #1. The second page, meanwhile, illustrated a new adventure for Superman, presenting the hero as he carried a young woman in his arms to safety. Correspondingly, *Superman* #1, published one year later in June 1939, promoted itself as 'the complete story of the daring exploits of the one and only Superman.' This comic book edition featured a transition that shifted from its own distinct narrative events to the second page of *Action Comics* #1, narrating events that explained how Superman had come to save the young woman in the earlier comic, thus intertwining both publications together as threads of a larger narrative tapestry. *Action Comics* #1 was both an autonomous adventure as well as the conclusion to the narrative published in *Superman* #1.

This strategy of interlinking the narratives of multiple comic books would have implications for the means by which Superman would be produced as a transmedia entertainment product during this historical setting. Such a strategy had been a result not borne from writers Siegel and Shuster but instead from corporate ownership. Indeed, reports indicate that staff working at DC Comics during these early years joked that these initials may have stood for ‘Donenfeld Comics’ given his dominance over Superman. In one letter written to writer Jerry Siegel in 1939, Donenfeld, ‘Superman’s foster father,’¹² as *The Washington Post* called him, instructed this interlinking narrative between *Action Comics #1* and *Superman #1*:

We have decided that for the first six pages of the *Superman* book we would like you to take the first page of ‘Superman’ which appears in *Action Comics #1*, and by elaborating on this first page, work up two introductory pages.¹³

A narrative that unfolds and expands across different editions of magazines and comic books had thus been at the core of the economic strategy behind the development of Superman almost from its inception. According to figures published in *The Washington Post*, *Superman* had boosted the sales total of *Action Comics* ‘from 125,000 to 2,000,000 in less than two years,’ at least partially as a result of this particular practice.¹⁴ In an interview published in 1940, Donenfeld correlated his rationale for employing this strategy with DC’s need to sustain attention from its child audience: ‘A kid is the smartest buyer in the world. You can’t fool him. He has a dime, and he spends it with better judgement than any grown person. We need to keep him interested.’¹⁵ As a result, Donenfeld accelerated plans to expand Superman into other media. Donenfeld founded Superman, Inc., an interlocking subsidiary corporation of DC Comics, one devoted to managing all licensing agreements to stem from Superman.

The first had been a Superman newspaper comic strip, which debuted in January 1939 and was appearing in approximately 300 daily newspapers, such as *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*, by 1941. This agreement had seen Donenfeld licence the Superman rights to The McClure Syndicate, a publishing syndicate. In contrast to the arrangements made by most newspaper comic strip syndications at this time, however, Donenfeld insisted that his own staff – that is, original writers Siegel and Shuster – would handle all editorial work on the comic strip. Indeed, since 1920s various corporate connections had intensified in America, with the business of franchising emerging alongside the rise of mass consumer culture. This had seen increased cross-industrial collaborations between cultural industries, with many of which seeking to capitalise on the successes of one another in the face of mass culture. As we shall see, this would afford an authorial model for the way in which DC Comics would produce Superman across media, one wherein the employees of this company crossed over from one medium to another, creating in multiple media. This would afford DC Comics the opportunity to produce transmedia Superman, each text constructed as coherent with the others. The interlinking of two distinct comic book titles – both produced by the same staff – was only the start of a larger transmedia strategy to be utilised by DC Comics.

With regards to comic book publishing, central to this coherence had been a cross-industrial relationship between DC Comics and The McClure Newspaper Syndicate. Heavily involved with The McClure Syndicate – now publishing Superman comic strips – was M. C. Gaines, who had retained an association with Eastern Color Printing, the company that printed Wheeler-Nicholson's books including those of DC Comics. According to his son William M. Gaines, M. C. Gaines did not own 'any part of DC,' but rather 'went into business with Donenfeld, [and] at that time had a rough working arrangement with what is now DC Comics.'¹⁶ Symbiotic working arrangements such as these fortified a convergence between

certain comic book publishers and newspaper syndicators, posing major implications for the means of dispersing characters and entire storyworlds across these cultural industries.

Indeed, this noted cross-industrial relationship between DC Comics and McClure had seen the latter institution occupying a role of distribution rather than one of production over the *Superman* newspaper comic strip. With Donenfeld's employed staff – as before, the team of Siegel and Shuster – working to produce the *Superman* comic strip on behalf of The McClure Syndicate, its content provided a stylistically coherent and narratively interlinked expansion of the fictional storyworld presented in *Action Comics* and *Superman*. In the first week of the newspaper strip, for example, Superman's origin story had been expanded – his home planet given a name, Krypton, whilst readers were presented with new story content concerning the events behind its earlier destruction along with an explanation for Superman's astonishing strength. Names were also given to Superman's parents, Jor-El and Lora, with the Kryptonian name of the hero revealed to be Kal-El. In much the same way as the interlinked narrative shared between *Action Comics* #1 and *Superman* #1 had boosted the readership of the former, the expansive narrative interlinking employed across the newspaper strip had encouraged the wider readership of these newspapers to begin purchasing editions of the comic books – steering these new readers to the comic books. The circulation of this strip was estimated at more than 20 million, a figure that greatly surpassed that of any comic book of the era,¹⁷ with sales figures for both *Action Comics* and *Superman* increasing again upon the publication of the newspaper strip in 1939. The coherence afforded to these Superman comics on account of the cross-industrial relations that developed between two media companies had fortified the business model behind the character's propagation across media, pointing the readers of each publication back and forth across media. Les Daniels, a comics historian, hints as much when declaring that it was 'the comic strip that began Superman's existence as a franchise.'¹⁸

On Air

In 1940, DC Comics claimed overall profits from Superman at \$1,500,000.¹⁹ The character's 'foster father' had obtained a lucrative business model for the production of the character's media texts, one formed on the basis of exploiting the period's increased industrial relations between cultural industries so as to produce Superman in different media, rather than merely licensing its rights for others to produce. As we have seen in relation to the production of the *Superman* newspaper comic strip, preserving stylistic coherence across these different texts had served to boost the sales of the comic books, its authorial consistency encouraging the sustained consumption of multiple texts across multiple media via its transmedia storytelling. Donenfeld, accordingly, 'the man who you might say was in charge of wholesaler relations' noted William Gaines,²⁰ sought to transpose this practice into other industries, employing a similar strategy that would serve to exploit transmedia storytelling as audience-building.

Donenfeld's first dispersal of Superman to non-print media was radio, a truly mass medium by this point. William C. Ackerman, Director of the Reference Department of the Columbia Broadcasting System, after all, insisted slightly later in 1945 that 'more Americans spend more time listening to radio programs than they spend doing anything else, except working and sleeping. This is perhaps the most striking single fact which emerges from the array of data developed over the years to document radio's widespread reach and impact.'²¹ The 1940 Decennial Census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau had provided a country-by-country record of radio ownership, revealing that, as of April 1, 1940, there were 34,854,532 families in the United States and 28,838,203, or 82.8%, of this number owned a radio receiver.²² The percentage of American families owning a radio subsequently rose to 88.9% by 1944, and

then rose again to 90% by 1945.²³ Yet Superman, an ostensibly pulp character, struggled to carve himself a place in media besides comics. Donenfeld had begun pitching Superman to the major radio networks towards the end of 1939, preparing a number of audition tapes with the hope of attracting potential sponsors. These audition tapes were a success amongst the cereal market, which commonly sponsored radio serials targeted toward children. The Hecker H.O. Oats Company picked up the serial, yet despite the character's success in comics, all of the major radio networks ultimately rejected the opportunity to broadcast a radio serial based on Superman. As *Variety* reported in January 1940, '[t]here will be no radio version of the cartoon strip Superman as far as the networks are concerned.'²⁴ Superman, *Variety* continued, was perceived by these major networks as 'a protagonist of too much horror stuff,' with its incorporation of typically violent pulp themes deemed 'far too much to unload on adolescent listeners.'²⁵ After all, in the debut edition of the newspaper comic strip, Superman had been depicted tearing the wings from a plane full of criminals, with the plane crashing in flames.

Such melodramatics, as Less Daniels points out, 'worried Harry Donenfeld: Superman was becoming a very valuable property, one that appealed to a young audience, and the publisher was anxious to avoid any repetition of the censorship problems associated with his early pulp magazines.'²⁶ After all, in 1940, the *New York Times* reported on surveys of children's radio programs taken by the United Parents Associations, which had indicated that child listeners had come to 'look upon the gun-shooting gangster and "horror" radio dramas with increasing disfavor.'²⁷ According to the *New York Times*, at least, the predominant consensus amongst this period's child radio audience was that radio dramas should occupy 'a more educational nature.'²⁸ Henceforth, Superman was forbidden to kill anyone, even a villain. Donenfeld decided that the most appropriate direction for Superman to take during these particular years was to exploit its use of narrative interlinking for promotional purposes whilst transforming

the character into a symbol of war propaganda, one attractive to the largest audience across the breadth of the era's cultural industries. The war would in fact provide one of the strongest sources of cross-industrial collaboration between cultural industries, with its national context uniting audiences together in much the same way as the earlier Great Depression had done. The United States had declared war on Germany on December 11, 1941, five days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, and four days after the United States and Britain had declared war on Japan. The first wartime propaganda film reached cinema screens by November 1939.²⁹ Superman had thus in some ways already been co-opted into the war before America's entry. Helen Scinto, writing in the *New York Times*, suggests that 'after the attacks on Pearl Harbour the adventure [radio] serial went to war in a big way,'³⁰ correlating the cultural context of America's entrance into the Second World War with a hugely popular type of radio programming aimed predominantly at children. Richard Match, also writing for the *New York Times* in 1942, asserted that '[t]he daily adventure serial has been a juvenile best-seller in radio since way back – eleven or twelve years ago – when the earliest of the genre, "Little Orphan Annie," first trod the ethereal boards over a local Chicago station.'³¹ Match's account demonstrates how many children's radio serials – including the imminent *The Adventures of Superman* – would be consumed and indeed shaped at this particular time, further noting that:

Their common formula is physical danger encountered on a hunt – for an enemy base, for a treasure, for a missing "defence plan." Subtle characterizations are avoided. The hero is a simple, modest fellow, all courage, all virtue. His opponent, very often a "master criminal," bent on control over the world or the destruction of the United States, is the epitome of evil.³²

The cultural construction of Superman as a moral, modest defender of Earth – all courage and virtue – was thus first shaped by his radio incarnation, carving the character a new niche that reflected the war-time propaganda of the period. 'The chief conflict over comic books,' one

editorial member of DC Comics argued in 1941, 'is in the adult mind.'³³ Indeed, in a feature published in *The New York Times* in October of that same year, one reporter observed that 'parents who haven't been keeping up with Superman may not be aware of the high moral tone pervading his exploits, or aware that a serious-minded committee, including educators and psychologists, advise on editorial policy.'³⁴ Eschewing the pulp-inspired petty thugs and criminal ganglands of the earlier comic books in favour of larger, more powerful, and often alien villainous forces, *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial made its debut on February 12, 1940, only a few short months after the first propaganda film appeared, and broadcast on the Mutual Broadcasting System, who anticipated the war-time relevance of Superman. Immediately Superman became affiliated with such war-time imagery, with Harry Donenfeld exploiting the propaganda potential of Superman in order to disperse and market the character and his storyworld across media. "Superman is going over there to Germany, Italy and Japan, and he's going to clean them up!" insisted Donenfeld, presiding genius of the Man of Steel.³⁵ He continued: 'I have hopes that he'll bring Hitler and Mussolini to this country and set them down in New York's East Side. He's sweep the world for democracy!'³⁶ Indeed, by 1942 trade papers such as *The Film Daily* were regularly reporting on 'the possible use of the Superman character in national defence.'³⁷ 'The significance of the new radio Superman is not only that he is a reflection of these times,' argued the *New York Times*, 'but that now he is to be a constructive participant in them.'³⁸ Works of propaganda, recuperating optimism and romantic ideals, worked 'to rally patriotism' in the face of enemy perfidy and to 'promise eventual and righteous triumph to a nervous nation.'³⁹ Superman, reframed as an ideal of this righteous triumph, a beacon of hope and strength dressed in the colours of the nation's flag, was optimum propaganda to be dispersed far and wide, across both the country and its media. In some ways, propaganda, a form of communication aimed towards influencing the actions of a mass audience – and, in a more consumerist sense, towards selling new products to mass

consumers – had become a practice of repeating and dispersing information over a variety of media. That is to say that this era’s war propaganda had been afforded through an evolving alignment of media and its massified audiences. Propaganda, in effect, was a form of advertising, enabling media messages to flow more freely across the borders of media. Both the strategies of producing interlinking narratives in the Superman comics as well as the character’s new construction as propaganda had involved many of the same industrial configurations, with both concerning the production of a flow of adjoining content across media – urging those who had purchased Superman already to purchase Superman again.

Radio’s power to connect the nation together with shared messages had fortified its socio-political function as a mouthpiece for the propaganda messages of American’s entry into war. This provided a further alignment of mass audience interests, hinting at the extent to which radio serials such as *The Adventures of Superman* would be consumed as a transmedial form of entertainment, with the medium’s own circulated cultural connectivity coming to enable listeners to make sense of such entertainment according to its presence in other media: ‘We recognize the familiar swoosh of Superman landing, red cape streaming behind him,’ wrote a *New York Times* radio writer.⁴⁰ ‘Though comic books and publicity pictures give us a visual image to start with, radio completes the process by providing the imagination’s animation ... Sparked by the words, the sounds, the intonations, and the silences, the radio creates the landscape for us and the action and the special effects of the heroic world.’⁴¹ In a further commentary, this time in 1946, the *New York Times* reiterated this relationship between war propaganda and a transmedial process of consuming its media messages, aptly noting that ‘if Superman holds an iota of the influence attributed to him by his critics, then his adoption of a new way of life must be regarded as an encouraging augury transcending the radio itself.’⁴²

This process of consuming mass radio as an aural component of a larger, notably connected cultural community would encourage increased cross-industrial relations. Donenfeld would not simply license the radio rights to Superman to a third party, but instead had the radio serial produced through Superman, Inc., appointing his own staff to write the serial, whilst working with an external radio company to co-produce and broadcast the programme. *The Adventures of Superman* had been produced by Robert Maxwell, ‘a former pulp writer who had been put in charge of Superman, Inc.’⁴³ On July 24, 1940, *The Film Daily* casually made reference to Maxwell as the ‘promotional solon for “Superman,”’ with a ‘solon’ used in this context to describe a legislator.⁴⁴ This term is important since it describes the methods in which Donenfeld’s appointed creators at Superman, Inc. worked across a multitude of media, serving to maintain what this article has described as stylistic coherence across different Superman texts produced in these alternate media. Maxwell would occupy a governing-type role over the creation of Superman productions during the course of the next decade, but for now his role was managing the editorial duties on the radio serial. He worked principally alongside George Lowther, ‘who wrote scripts for The Adventures of Superman radio program.’⁴⁵ Lowther left his job in radio to work at Superman, Inc., appointed by Donenfeld to oversee all aspects of *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial as its ‘general director.’⁴⁶

Given the strong degree of authorial ownership employed by Donenfeld and his team at Superman, Inc. over the content and direction of the serial, it was enormously significant that the radio network eventually agreeing to broadcast *The Adventures of Superman* had operated independently. Starring Bud Collyer as the voice of the Man of Steel and Joan Alexander as Lois Lane, *The Adventures of Superman* became a top entry for the Mutual Broadcasting Network, broadcast as a transcribed fifteen-minute thrice-weekly serial. Indeed, despite the major networks’ decisions to reject the serial, *The Adventures of Superman* would become a

hugely popular syndicated broadcast, soon airing on 85 stations across America. The serial was first recorded at WOR in New York, part of the then still loosely affiliated Mutual Broadcasting System. Herman S. Hettinger, writing in the *National Marketing Review* of 1935, assessed the rise of Mutual in his yearly review of radio broadcasting, discussing the network in the context of developments in the radio industry's infrastructure, noting that:

The Mutual Broadcasting System was really inaugurated some months before the beginning of 1935. However, it was not until [1935] that the network became firmly established as a portion of the broadcasting structure. The network is composed of WOR, Newark; WLW, Cincinnati; WGN, Chicago; and CKLW, Detroit-Windsor, and has arrangements whereby additional stations in New England and in several other centres may be added to its facilities when desired. ... WLW retains its connection with the National Broadcasting Company as an affiliated station, though upon a more independent basis than is the case with most affiliates.⁴⁷

Mutual must therefore be understood as remaining independent in a production context and yet simultaneously establishing itself as a dominant radio network that broadcasted to almost as large an audience share as major corporations such as NBC and CBS. Michele Hilmes argues that the independent Mutual Broadcasting System achieved this success by carving out a niche for itself in particular transcription genres, specialising in the form of the recorded transcription series, which, as the *Report on Chain Broadcasting* published in 1940 revealed, was approaching a \$5 million business in 1938 and had reduced the once dominant live transmission to the margins.⁴⁸ Examples of the transcription series included pulp thrillers aimed primarily at a juvenile audience, such as *The Shadow*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Captain Midnight*. *The Adventures of Superman* thus aired alongside such similarly action-orientated serials aimed primarily at the same child demographic consuming the popular comic books.

Thomas V. Powers observes that the independent status of the Mutual Broadcasting Network meant that the ‘the producers of the [Superman] radio serial were given a relatively free hand to shape the show to their liking, and many of their creations were ultimately incorporated into the Superman legend.’⁴⁹ Indeed, with the cultural relevance of Superman as a war-time propaganda symbol carving the character a potent niche across American mass culture – itself accelerating an increased cross-industrial relation between media institutions – DC Comics had constructed a stylistically synchronised, transmedial relationship between the Superman of the comic page and the Superman of the airwaves. *The Adventures of Superman* began contributing many new features to the growing body of the storyworld, positioning itself as a transmedial expansion of the comic strips and comic books in narrative terms. For instance, the earliest editions of *Action Comics* and *Superman* had seen Clark Kent working for George Taylor at the Daily Planet. In the second episode of *The Adventures of Superman*, however – broadcast on February 14, 1940 – Taylor was replaced with Perry White. With this character recognised on radio as the new editor of the Daily Planet, DC subsequently narrated the firing of former boss George Taylor in the comics, as *Superman #7*, published in November 1940, began its narrative with an already established Perry White as the editor of the Daily Planet, thus constructing itself as a transmedial continuation of the radio serial’s narrative.

Similarly, the characterisation of Jimmy Olsen – a figure that, much like Perry White, would become a longstanding staple of the Superman storyworld – was a transmedial construction. The character was introduced in print inside *Action Comics #6* in November 1938. Despite being identified only as ‘an inquisitive office-boy,’ defining elements of characterisation were in place, such as his tenacious curiosity and his trademark bow tie.⁵⁰ This introduction in the comics was followed by a detailed exploration of the character on radio, when on April 15, 1940 *The Adventures of Superman* introduced Jimmy Olsen to Clark Kent, unveiling new

narrative information such as how Jimmy began working at the Daily Planet. The character then reappeared inside the pages of *Superman* #13 in 1941, where the friendship previously developed between Clark and Jimmy on radio came to define the characters' relationships inside the comic. Echoing the interlinking narratives of *Action Comics* #1 and *Superman* #1, both stories connected together with the expansive narrative events of the newspaper comic strip, with the narrative of the radio episode an adjoining stepping stone between the adventures of *Action Comics* #6 and *Superman* #13 – expanding the narratives of both into a larger transmedia storyworld, unfolding across media. Superman also discovered his greatest weakness, kryptonite – a green-glowing radioactive rock from his home planet – in a 1943 radio adventure, six years before it appeared in the *Superman* comic in issue #61 in 1949.⁵¹

Given the interlinking narratives and stylistic coherence exploited, Donenfeld had sought to increase the level of cross-promotion between these different Superman texts. During the early 1940s DC began reserving the final page in the *Superman* comics for a quarter-page advert that promoted Superman in other media. The first had been a call to newspaper editors, but soon the company also advertised the release of *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial, steering the readership of the comics to this new incarnation of the character. Similarly, in terms of cross-promotion, the radio serial was a licensed broadcast, thereby being required to acknowledge its status as such – notably ending episodes with a disclaimer: '*Superman* is a copyrighted feature appearing in *Action Comics* magazines.' This legal disclaimer was followed by a further promotional indication of the character's comic strip syndication, with the serial's narrator reiterating: 'Now listen boys and girls, be sure to follow the adventures of Superman in your local newspaper.' Both the comic books and the radio serial thus ended their respective Superman tales by explicitly telling their audiences where they could find further adventures of the superhero, with the comics advertising the release of their licensed

media texts and these secondary media subsequently steering audiences back to the licensor, thereby increasing the sales of *Action Comics* and the *Superman* comics accumulatively.

Indeed, this accumulative method of gaining new audiences across media – exploiting world-building as audience-building – fused Superman into a much larger audience, forging a closer symbiosis between cultural industries and the institutions within them. In 1944, the *Journal of Educational Sociology* published statistics inside the *New York Times* revealing that ‘the amazing cultural phenomenon of “Superman,” “Dick Tracy,” “Joe Palooka” and their slam bang companions’ had seen monthly comic book sales rise to ‘twenty million copies, read by more than seventy million children and adults, many more of the latter taking precedence.’⁵² Correspondingly, though reports indicate that *The Adventures of Superman* was directed specifically at audiences aged between seven and fourteen – broadcast as part of the period’s ‘children’s radio hour’ between five and six o’clock – a phone survey revealed that 35% of that serial’s listeners were adults.⁵³ The character’s radio construction as an emblem of U.S. propaganda, one boosted publically in earlier cited promotional clippings by Donenfeld, had increased the age of the radio serial’s audience, with its narrative interlinking and stylistically synchronised storyworld pointing this larger, older audience back and forth to the comics.

Another point of cross-industrial collaboration between the two cultural industries concerned the presence of Superman, and its transmedial construction, inside the pages of *Radio Mirror*, for example, a widely read radio magazine aimed at adults. In January 1941 *Radio Mirror* began ‘an exciting new monthly feature’ called ‘Superman in Radio,’ in which ‘for the first time the newest hero of the air comes to you as a thrilling story. Read the daring exploits of Superman, each month on this page – an exclusive Radio Mirror feature. Then tune in to the Superman broadcasts on stations coast to coast.’⁵⁴ The transmedial relationship between this

feature and the radio serial, particularly, was evident. As with the relationship between the interlinking narratives of the earlier comic books and the radio serial, the *Radio Mirror* feature – written by the staff of Superman, Inc. – similarly exploited transmedia storytelling so as to point the readers of *Radio Mirror* to *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial, with the latter production presenting stepping stones to a larger transmedia narrative world that unfolded across comics. One feature, for example, published in the *Radio Mirror* in February 1941, began its monthly adventure by acknowledging its serialised relationship with the daily narrative events of *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial, declaring: ‘When we last saw Superman, he had rescued an unconscious girl from the blazing inferno of the North Star Mining Company.’⁵⁵ Superman, the story continued, ‘disguised as Clark Kent, leaned over the hospital bed of June Anderson, the girl he had saved from flaming death.’⁵⁶ A recently broadcast episode of *The Adventures of Superman*, titled ‘The Stabbing of June Anderson,’ had narrated these particular events, with the story continued in the pages of *Radio Mirror* – providing a clearly correlated audience with a transmedial extension of these narrative events.

The Adventures of Superman achieved a Crossley rating of 5.6 ten weeks after its debut, the highest rating of any thrice-weekly juvenile broadcast on the air at this particular time.⁵⁷ Its interlinked narrative relationship with the stories unfolding across *Action Comics*, *Superman*, and also the *Radio Mirror* feature – each presenting a stylistically coherent presentation of the storyworld – had served to bolster the sales of each concurrent iteration. Once again, this strategy of transmedia storytelling was synonymous with audience-building – steering the larger number of radio listeners and *Radio Mirror* readers across multiple media iterations of the character via the sustained authorial coherence of each of the various Superman iterations. This cross-industrial relation was made considerably easier on account of the independent status of the Mutual Broadcasting System, which permitted Donenfeld, Maxwell and Lowther

to maintain authorial control and construct one stylistically coherent storyworld across two distinct cultural industries. Yet with the character augmented as a symbol of national strength and hope in the continuing struggles of war, Superman had fortified a cross-industrial relation between radio's Mutual Network, print's *Radio Mirror*, and DC Comics. It had been recognised by both of the former that Superman was an indisputable 'audience-puller'⁵⁸ on account of this propaganda-based war-time construction, and any corporate collaborations across media would be in the financial interests of each institution. As had been indicated earlier, this particular period coincided with the rise of war propaganda films in the cinema, a time wherein such features further united audiences in the 'middle-class way in which [they] bound all classes together in the common cause.'⁵⁹ Superman, a symbol of this cause, would continue to inspire a multitude of cultural industries to forge collaborative connections in the name of national unification – a cultural drive that propelled the character to the silver screen.

On Screen

At the dawn of the 1940s, the American film industry would exploit other media in order to maintain a firm understanding of the sorts of products that were appealing to audiences at any particular time. As Tino Balio notes, 'in deciding what to produce in any given year, moguls did not rely on hunches or attempt to foist their personal tastes on the public; rather, studios organised story departments in New York, Hollywood, and London to keep in close contact with Broadway, publishing, and the literary world.'⁶⁰ According to Roger Manvell, in 1939, the year in which *Superman* was first published as a comic-book offspring of *Action Comics*, 'almost half of the population went to the movie theatres each week, and it was recognized by the authorities that national morale depended strongly on this entrenched form of leisure-time occupation.'⁶¹ With the Second World War intensifying dialogues and cultural connectivity

on radio, the war, as Balio continues, ‘ignited a five-year economic boom, pushing box-office revenues and film studio profits to record levels.’⁶² Many studios embarked on a conversion to war-themed productions around 1942, with this emphasis on war films or war propaganda features also accelerating cross-industrial relations between diverse cultural industries.

At the epicentre of this cross-industrial relation had been the developing relationship between the film and radio industries. Whilst Hollywood’s participation in radio programming had occurred throughout the 1930s, the years preceding 1938 had seen Hollywood’s involvement as sporadic when compared to the post-1938 period, which saw Hollywood programming begin to dominate the airwaves. This had been the year of what Michele Hilmes describes as ‘a new prototype, a radio series based on the characters or situations of a successful film.’⁶³ Examples of this included the *Stella Dallas* radio drama, as Hilmes observes, which unlike the many movie adaptations that had been appearing on American radio since the mid-1930s, had marked a clear attempt on the part of the radio industry to profit from the success of Hollywood in a way that extended the narrative of the central characters already consumed on the silver screen. The symbiotic radio series of *Stella Dallas* did not repeat the narrative that had already unfolded in the film version of 1937; instead, it continued this narrative, narrating its next chapter, allowing the audience of the film version to migrate to radio where the story continued. It was a strategy not dissimilar to the interlinking narrative relationship between *Action Comics #1* and *Superman #1*, wherein the story events of the latter expanded upon the former. For Hilmes, ‘after 1938, the appearance of Hollywood talent on radio and vice versa, became so commonplace an event that it became the rule rather than the exception.’⁶⁴

The nation’s entry into war would indeed serve to propel this cross-industrial relationship, with ‘the war-induced prosperity’ encouraging ‘the overall effort to present a united front.’⁶⁵

Despite Hollywood's orientation towards stars at this particular time, the film industry was under pressure to produce both populist products – the sort that kept revenues high – and war-themed propaganda in line with the cultural moment. The decision to co-opt Superman into cinemas had been formed around this particular context – a period, as Thomas Schatz writes, of 'intense debate about the "entertainment value" of war films, with the nation's theatre owners continually lobbying for more escapist fare or at least for more upbeat war-related efforts.'⁶⁶ The Superman films of the 1941-43 era can be contextualised as a broader effort to depict war-related themes through the paradigm of such upbeat and escapist typologies. 1942, as Roger Manvell reiterates, 'was to be one of the richest periods for the war film,'⁶⁷ further massifying and unifying audiences 'across a range of media [with] the image assiduously nurtured in wartime propaganda of the 'good war' and its truly heightened sense of collective moral enterprise.'⁶⁸ War films were often condemned as bad propaganda, for as *DNL* wrote in 1942, 'because they present the war in absurdly romantic terms and their entertainment value is impaired by the conflict in the mind of the audience between the hard facts of real war and its glamorous embellishments on the screen.'⁶⁹ Superman was one such embellishment, flowing across media as part of a larger romantic conception of 'the American way.' These conditions of industrial symbiosis became exploited by Donenfeld and his team at Superman, Inc. in order to further extend the character's stories across media as a transmedial expansion of his fictional storyworld, again acquiring new, often larger audiences before steering that audience back to the existing and concurrent Superman adventures unfolding in other media.

Following its success in comic books and on radio, offers to produce cinematic incarnations of Superman began to appear as early as 1940. The first of these had come from Republic Pictures, the largest and perhaps most influential B-movie studio operating at that time. In April 1940, *The Film Daily* reported that 'although a formal contract had not been signed

between Republic Pictures and Superman, Inc., calling for the production by the former of a 13 chapter serial based upon the comic strip character, “Superman,” it was learned at the week-end that the deal has been agreed upon in principle.’⁷⁰ In a move echoing Donenfeld’s earlier agreement with The McClure Syndicate for the production of the newspaper comic strip, which had seen his original staff oversee this production despite being licensed to a third party organisation, the publisher outlined a similar contract for this proposed film serial. This same report in *The Film Daily* described ‘an unusual contractual clause [that] is reported to reserve to Superman, Inc. the right to cancel, if after the release of the first series, it is found that the serial detracts from the popularity of the Superman radio program or the Superman comic strip appearing in Action Comics Monthly and via syndicates.’⁷¹ This report, particularly, verbalises explicitly the production strategy employed by Superman, Inc. that has been described throughout this chapter – that is, the role of exploiting subsequent Superman productions in other media in order to promote the others, utilising a stylistically synchronised storyworld with interlinked stories as that which boosted other texts. As before, the preservation of particular Superman, Inc. employees, working across different media, had been part of this proposition: ‘A representative of Superman, Inc.’ continued *The Film Daily*, ‘is to have the right to be present on the Republic lot and to okay script and production.’⁷²

Four months following the announcement that DC Comics had finalised a deal with Republic Pictures to produce a live-action Superman movie serial, *Variety* reported that Republic’s serial had since been postponed. The report claimed that the decision to delay the project had resulted from difficulties in clearing scripts with the owners of the comics: ‘unless contracts can be liberalized,’ *Variety* reported, ‘Republic is preparing to drop [the] strip from its new season’s program.’⁷³ The proposed Republic Superman serial was in fact never produced, almost entirely as a consequence of the fact that Donenfeld had demanded artistic approval of

the production but Republic had been unwilling to relinquish control. In September 1940, however, *Variety* reported that DC Comics had again agreed a licensing deal, this time with Fleischer Studio, who was to produce a series of seventeen Superman cartoon shorts, each to be exhibited in cinemas and distributed by Paramount Pictures as part of their double bills.⁷⁴ Fleischer Studio was famous for its Betty Boop and Popeye cartoons, and Paramount Pictures had been distributing the output of the notably independent Fleischer Studio for a number of years. According to *Variety*, Paramount planned ‘to capitalize on the recognition given the Superman cartoon character in mags, radio and syndicated newspaper features.’⁷⁵ The first of these cartoons shorts, titled simply *Superman*, was released into cinemas on September 26, 1941, with a new cartoon short released every month over the course of the next three years.

With the war providing one of the strongest sources of industrial symbiosis between the era’s cultural industries, with its propaganda media products serving to intensify an alignment of mass-audience interests, the Fleischer Superman shorts of this period would be positioned and indeed consumed as a transmedial form of entertainment. An important relationship had begun to emerge between war propaganda material and comic book characters – the latter dispersed across media as emblems of the former. In one review of *Spy Smasher*, a war-themed film serial released in 1942, for example, *The Film Daily* discussed how the serial’s plot – revolving around a masculine hero who is ‘captured in Germany while trying to obtain information about the head of the German spy ring in America’ – was ‘reminiscent of “Superman.”’⁷⁶ The film had been based on the Spy Smasher character appearing in *Whiz Comics*. The outbreak of World War II and its changing socio-political context in America had indeed reconfigured the superhero mythos as its various characters, including Batman and Captain Midnight, became co-opted into the war effort, permeating their stories across media.⁷⁷ The Superman cartoons, similarly, would be synergised as part of the era’s war-time

propaganda, thus paralleling the radio serial, for as Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black point out, ‘in the movie makers’ ceaseless quest for variety and spectacle, the war was a godsend – the studios quickly graft[ing] the war upon their traditional formula pictures.’⁷⁸ Accordingly, the Fleischer cartoon shorts were screened alongside the ‘latest war pictorials.’⁷⁹ The ninth Superman cartoon, for example, titled *Terror on Midway*, was exhibited in September 1942 alongside *The Battle of Midway*, a film capturing the Japanese attack.⁸⁰ Indeed, Marek Wasielewski suggests that the Fleischer Superman was ‘constructed more as a mechanized automaton rather than an organic alien entity,’⁸¹ noting that ‘the Fleischer Superman shorts depict Superman as an industrial war machine explicitly involved in hostilities.’⁸² This is apparent in episodes such as the aforementioned *Terror on Midway*, in which the Japanese are represented as a killer ape, and *Japoteurs*, first exhibited on September 18, 1942, where Superman saves a man from Japanese saboteurs. Superman continued as an ideal poster-boy for war propaganda, with the portrayal of the war as being won by an American-symbolized Man of Steel combatant serving to propagate the character fluently across cultural industries.

By 1943, as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, ‘the comic strip “Superman” had long [become] a sort of institution of the films,’⁸³ and this cultural propagation had once again attracted the largest possible audience. ‘Not the least of the attributes of the Superman shorts is their ability to slake the entertainment thirst of the rising generation, and amuse as well as astonish their elders,’ wrote *The Film Daily* on one review. This particular review assessed the shorts as both ‘juvenile thrillers’ and ‘stimulants to adult credulity,’⁸⁴ thus further highlighting the extent to which the war had increased the average age of Superman audiences. ‘Superman, a by-word among the current generation of Americans, and a “buy” word among the current generation of Americans,’⁸⁵ had not only attracted the largest possible audience, but each of these audiences, which would also continue to be pointed across other iterations of Superman

in different media, further fortified its construction as a (trans)media franchise. Trade papers such as *Variety* addressed Superman specifically in relation to the transmedial coherence and cross-promotional presence of its storyworld. In 1942, *Variety* discussed Superman in terms of the character's 'market tie-ups,' noting that the aforementioned radio serial 'open[ed] up an opportunity for theaters playing Superman shorts, who can try for brief announcements at breakdown time'⁸⁶ – or, as a slightly later *Variety* report stated even more explicitly in 1943, in terms of its 'comic strip stories that will be used in connection with the radio program.'⁸⁷

Central to this connected propagation was indeed cross-industrial relationship and an independent production context that had enabled DC Comics, a comparatively marginalised comic book proprietor, to maintain stylistic coherence in the cartoons, overseeing all creative duties. Max Fleischer, head of Fleischer Studio, for instance, had been branded 'the unknown man of the movies.'⁸⁸ The studio operated in Miami, far outside of Hollywood, and its marginality would afford Superman, Inc. an opportunity to author the licensed Superman cartoons as extension of their own comics – or, as *Los Angeles Times* reviewer Kevin Thomas wrote in August 1944, as 'veritable comic books come alive.'⁸⁹ The stylistic coherence afforded on account of this independence was rigorous. For example, Superman did not fly in the earliest editions of *Action Comics*, instead only leaping tall buildings in a single bound. Yet when the Fleischers suggested incorporating the power of flight – having encountered difficulties in animating a leap as a convincing cinematic image – flight subsequently became a new addition to Superman lore. This change, however, which was adopted in DC Comics' own publications, needed to be approved by Superman, Inc. before it could be implemented. One letter dated February 21, 1941, sent from Robert Maxwell to Max Fleischer, bypassing Paramount altogether, disclosed how additional changes were demanded by the comic book subsidiary so as to preserve stylistic synchronicity across both the comics and the cartoons:

A set of dailies arrived this morning. If there was sufficient time, I'd certainly return them to you for more work ... Superman looks like a different person. We have no complaints about the backgrounds, which are very well handled, but if the material doesn't show a marked improvement, we shall have to make other arrangements to have it done.⁹⁰

In understanding how such cross-industrial collaboration across multiple cultural industries was possible during this particular era, it is crucial to emphasise the independence afforded to secondary B-products along with their conditions of production, exhibition, and consumption. This importance rests on the fact that the creators of B-products, such as cartoon shorts, 'were given more artistic freedom as long as they brought in a marketable film on schedule and within the budget,' thus standing in contrast to the more closely controlled A-class Hollywood studio pictures, where collaboration across different media institutions would be more internally regulated. Since the B-products enabled for greater collaboration amongst both its crew and, in some cases, its licensors across media, this freedom enabled DC Comics to produce Superman productions in ways that presented the more marginalised comic book proprietor with continued creative control. However, there were further industry-related complications that underpinned the production of these Superman cartoons, in turn explaining their synchronisation as transmedial texts. By 1939, the shape of the B-product – in this case, the animated cartoon short – was changing. It was a change that had sprung, in part, at least, from a drastic increase in film budgets. As Thomas Schatz notes:

The deliberate structuring of the major's annual product around the A and B polarities was steadily eroding. In the 1940s the content of B's altered under the influence of World War II; war films had been all but non-existent in the 1930s B. The box office bonanza from 1942 to

1945 caused movie budgets to go up, and the majors were increasingly unwilling to burden their secondary or offbeat product with the B-label.⁹¹

This shift to the perception of A-class pictures had stemmed from the tightening regulations over the block booking of B-products. This alleviation of the block booking system in 1939, which legally stated that studios could not force exhibitors to purchase blocks of shorts, as had typically been the case, meant that many exhibitors were no longer obliged to purchase a studio's B's in order to receive its A's. Considerably larger budgets were thus presented to what was traditionally perceived as B-product, such as cartoon shorts, in order to make such products more appealing to exhibitors, in turn blurring the former divide between an A and B movie. In March 1941, *Variety* reported that 'Paramount will budget the highest amount ever in its history on its 1941-42 shorts-News Reel program,' with twelve Technicolor Superman cartoons part of Paramount's more extensive shift to expensively produced program filler. These particular circumstances had forced the studios to rely on independent producers for additional high-end product, in turn triggering the average budgets for cartoon shorts to rise from approximately \$20,000–\$30,000 each to double or even treble that figure. Many of the earliest Fleischer Superman shorts, for example, were estimated to have cost \$90,000 each.

It was partly these industrial shifts that enabled the Superman cartoons of the early 1940s to function as synchronised transmedial texts. The major studios' need to contract independent studios in order to produce quality shorts and B-pictures meant that DC Comics could license Superman to a more independent production company and in turn retain close managerial control. The independent Fleischer Studio allowed DC Comics to occupy this role of control over the handling of their licensed Superman shorts, meaning that all creative decisions were approved by the comic book publisher. DC Comics had effectively exploited the symbiotic

relationship that the radio industry shared with the cinema, allowing Superman to be steered as textual components of a coherently constructed storyworld across each medium, circularly guiding the vast audiences of the radio serial and the theatrical cartoons back and forth across multiple media. This practice mirrors that of the earlier discussed interlinking between the *Superman* comic strip, the *Superman* comic book, and indeed *Action Comics* – this time, of course, on a larger scale that involved the cinema and the radio being used repeatedly to encourage the consumption of the Superman storyworld via the use of what would only much later be termed transmedia storytelling. The Fleischer cartoons, for instance, featured voices from the cast of the radio serial, with Bud Collyer and Joan Alexander reprising their roles as Superman and Lois Lane respectively. This crossing-borrowing of familiar actors also served to preserve stylistic synchronicity with the radio serial, which itself had remained stylistically coherent as if an adjoining stepping stone between the comic books and newspaper strips.

This strategy had been almost entirely dependent on a collaborative, cross-industrial working arrangement between DC Comics – the Superman proprietor – the Mutual Network, to which Collyer and Alexander were signed, and Fleischer Studio, which – through Paramount’s distribution – promoted the Mutual serial through in-theatre announcements. Such conditions of cross-industrial collaboration, together with the overlapping cultural and socio-political conditions of the period, which had certainly encouraged Superman to flow and permeate across media as a symbol of national resilience in the continuing war, altogether enabled the period’s many Superman productions to be produced in such a way that they functioned commercially and culturally not as licensed *versions* of the character but rather as licensed *extensions* of DC’s publications. Such conditions formed expansive, interlinked, cross-promotional connections between the Superman character and his transmedial storyworld.

Superman, as a branded franchise, had cut across a multitude of media, often simultaneously, acting as a site through which ostensibly non-integrated cultural industries had converged.

At Home

Even so, the post-war era provided something of a problem for DC Comics and Superman. The war had been exploited as that which propelled the saturation of Superman through mass culture, infusing the character across many of the cultural industries, often simultaneously in ways that had configured transmedia storytelling as a strategy for audience-building. As Marek Wasielewski notes, ‘wartime Superman comic books often have aggressive patriotic covers ... [DC Comics] had successfully established a highly profitable brand and they did not wish to change it.’⁹² With the Second World War coming to an end in 1945, Donenfeld and his team at Superman, Inc. would need to rebrand Superman in ways relevant to a mass post-war culture. The late-1940s and 1950s was a hugely transitional period for the American cultural industries, caught as they were in the clutches of broader industrial shifts that saw the decline of the Hollywood studio system and the rise of the television industry. Various cultural and industrial factors must be examined here, which altogether can be understood, as Janet Wasko notes, as leading to the ‘diversification of the film industry, as well as the eventual integration of the film and television industries’⁹³ that would define the industrial infrastructure of any number of conglomerated transmedia entertainments in later decades.

The war may have ended, but its cultural dominance – and Superman’s construction within it – had cemented the character as ‘a progenitor in the pop folklore of the twentieth century.’⁹⁴ *Variety* had hailed the character a ‘prodigy’ when reporting on the overwhelming popularity of Superman throughout the 1940s.⁹⁵ According to *The Film Daily*, similarly, Superman had

‘43,000,000 fans who follow Superman in more than 300 newspapers, on more than 50 radio stations and in three magazines’ by 1945.⁹⁶ What did change in the post-war era, however, were the audience parameters for Superman, with the end of the character’s cultural role as an idealised war-fronted combatant seeing a return to both the more domestic themes of the comics and their original target readership of children. Central to continuing the character’s propagation across other media – forging collaborations with different cultural industries – was television. As the weekly habit of ‘going to the movies’ that had defined America’s pastimes during the past two decades faded, so too did the film industry’s faith in B-movies. As such, television adopted these B-genres, such as crime, science fiction, Westerns, and adventure pictures, ‘taking advantage of the expected shorter running times and fast shooting schedules.’⁹⁷ Superman’s subsequent migration to television screens was thus necessary, since the young pulp audience of the adventure pictures was no longer going to the movies; instead, they were staying at home, watching television. As Thomas Schatz has discussed:

The industry’s box-office decline in the late 1940s was spurred by various developments both at home and overseas. On the home front, the millions of returning servicemen who had fuelled record box-office revenues in 1946 soon began marrying and starting families in the suburbs, far from the industry’s vital downtown theatres. With “suburban migration” and the “baby boom” came commercial television and other shifts in patterns of media consumption, as moviegoing ceased to be a ritual necessity for most Americans.⁹⁸

‘With the coming of television as a major entertainment force,’ Richard Hurst writes, ‘the B film with its philosophies, formats, and impact was absorbed by that medium. The personnel and the formats transferred often intact over to the television screen where the B film as television series and movies maintained a continuing existence.’⁹⁹ It is therefore possible to comprehend this transitional period in media history as itself something of a transmedial

crossover, as specific formats, stories, and intellectual properties had been steered from the movie theatre across to the television screen. The complex industrial alignment that had been formed in the 1940s between the B-film, the war movie, comic book characters, and their pulp-based antecedents had altogether fortified cross-industrial relationships between these respective genres and their audiences, allowing the narratives of such examples to flow more freely across multiple media. *Adventures of Superman*, broadcast on television between September 19, 1952 and April 28, 1958,¹⁰⁰ would also make use of this alignment – constructing its presentation of the storyworld as a pulp-inflected B-product with the recent memories of war ingrained into its textual fabric. As *New York Times* critic Dave Kehr wrote of the early *Adventures of Superman* episodes in 1952, ‘these “Superman” telepix have a dark, cramped feel, and their heavies are not colorful figures like Lex Luthor but cheap crooks in boxy suits and crumpled fedoras.’¹⁰¹ In one episode, for example, a pair of petty thugs discovered Superman’s secret identity and attempted to blackmail him. The episode ended with Superman leaving them to die atop a mountain. ‘This Superman,’ as Kehr wrote, ‘is a complex, conflicted figure, at least as conflicted about his superstatus as any of the explicitly neurotic protagonists now flourishing our cinema screens.’¹⁰² Kehr continued:

Scratch the metaphorical surface a little, and the character might almost be a 30-year-old veteran of World War II, still marked by the horrors he has witnessed, the awful skills in violence he has acquired, and the permanent sense of never quite fitting in with those “normal” folks who did not march off to war.¹⁰³

In this way, *Adventures of Superman* can be contextualised as that which had drawn on the character’s earlier war-based cultural construction in order to maintain a degree of coherence across different iterations of Superman, forging the series as a transmedial extension of that which had come before. In an authorial sense, central to this sustained transmedial

construction had been a continuation of the methods of corporate ownership over the various products and productions of Superman that had been employed since the founding of Superman, Inc. in 1939. On May 16, 1951, for instance, *Variety*'s announcement that Superman would be coming to television emphasised how DC Comics would be actively involved in its funding, development, and production.¹⁰⁴ *Variety* later reported that a 30-year deal for the television rights to *Adventures of Superman* had been completed by the owners of Flamingo Films and Robert Maxwell, who by this time was a vice president at DC Comics.¹⁰⁵ According to *Variety*'s report, Flamingo Films, a company that had begun specialising in the syndication of feature films to local television stations, were to handle distribution, while it was Maxwell's responsibility as producer to 'set up production facilities' and to approve all creative decisions on behalf of DC Comics and its Superman, Inc. subsidiary.¹⁰⁶ Maxwell, also a producer on *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial, had been selected by DC Comics to bring a television series to fruition. The original arrangement saw DC Comics self-financing twenty-six black-and-white telefilms.¹⁰⁷ In July 1951, *Variety* also reported that a \$400,000 budget had been allocated by DC Comics for the production of these telefilms, each to be filmed at the RKO Pathé studios.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Variety*'s review of the debut episode, titled 'Superman on Earth,' firmly positioned DC Comics themselves, rather than the episode's individual writers, as the series author, thus highlighting the extent to which the comic book proprietor had become known as the Superman author across multiple media.¹⁰⁹

This authorial consistency had indeed become a mainstay of the company's production method and must be emphasised as fundamental to the successful building of Superman as a branded transmedia storyworld throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Preceding television's *Adventures of Superman*, furthermore, was *Superman and the Mole Men*, a feature film that was released into theatres on November 23, 1951 – two years before it was then broadcast as

a two-part episode on television as part of *Adventures of Superman*. The feature film had been devised as a pilot for the television series, itself something of a transition across media that evokes the practice of transmedia storytelling. On *Superman and the Mole Men*, Robert Maxwell was responsible for all editorial and creative duties, co-writing and producing this feature along with the remaining twenty-four episodes of the television series' first run, sharing the producing credit with Bernard Luber.¹¹⁰ Gary Grossman notes that 'Luber had been an attorney at Paramount Pictures before turning producer. His experience in film balanced Maxwell's in radio,'¹¹¹ allowing for a collaboration that 'produced a forceful, direct descendent of the Bud Collyer Superman of radio and film.'¹¹² Indeed, the combination of many of the same creative individuals working across multiple Superman productions had become a means of producing Superman in a way that expanded the storyworld *for* other media as opposed to simply replicating it *in* other media – promoting subsequent Superman texts in diverse media as transmedial extensions of the others on account of their preserved coherence and narrative interlinking. As Allan Asherman, a DC Comics historian, observes, Maxwell 'more than anything wanted a television extension of the Superman radio show.'¹¹³

Indeed, as is emphasised throughout this chapter, comic book readers had been previously steered to *The Adventures of Superman* radio serial, and then again towards the release of the theatrical Fleischer cartoons, through advertisements published in the final pages of *Action Comics* and *Superman* comic books. This cross-promotional strategy would be repeated once again for the *Adventures of Superman* television series. 'Superman is on Television,' the text in a comic panel at the end of *Superman* #74 declared.¹¹⁴ 'Yes, America's favorite adventure character comes right into your home in thrilling live action!'¹¹⁵ In effect, no fewer than four ostensibly distinct institutions worked to develop the Superman storyworld across multiple media at the turn of the 1950s, with DC Comics and its Superman, Inc. employees authoring

the television production in ways that invited continuation across multiple texts, steering a particular audience from one media component to the next. The broader cross-industrial relations underpinning these corporate crossover between the publisher of the Superman comics, the broadcaster of the Superman radio serial, the production studio of Flamingo Films, and indeed the medium of television, underscores the corporate convergence and, by extension, transmediality fully emerging on an industrial scale during this historical period.

Underpinning such convergence had been particular transformations in television. Suddenly major film studios, who had by this time begun developing television subsidiaries, struggled to compete on the same level as independent syndication companies such as *Adventures of Superman*'s Flamingo. As Derek Kompare notes, '[by] successfully exploiting the gaps in the networks' interconnections, first-run telefilm syndication continued to grow through the middle of the decade, generating more production, more investment, and more advertising revenue.'¹¹⁶ Accordingly, the major television networks subsequently shifted their focus to the continued development of filmed half-hour series. This, in turn, became a shift that altogether served to define the turn towards media conglomeration at the end of the 1950s.¹¹⁷ Indeed, by 1959, the once hesitant television networks had become deeply entwined with the Hollywood film studios. A number of film studios, record companies, radio networks, and television networks became converged industries. As Christopher Anderson concludes, 'film television series emerged as the dominant product of the Hollywood studios and the dominant form of prime-time programming.'¹¹⁸ These cross-industrial arrangements, together with those examined throughout this article, served as the basis for the turn towards increasingly converged, transmediated systems of media conglomeration during the next fifty years.

Conclusion

This article has sought to examine the means through which transmedia storytelling, an ostensibly contemporary practice, developed as a principle of the increasingly intermingling cultural industries during the 1940s and 1950s. This has required examining the points of cross-industrial relations between many of these industries, configuring the developments in licensing that had emerged earlier as that which facilitated and accelerated collaborations across a range of diverse media institutions during this historical setting. It is between these points of cross-industrial relationships in which the emergence of the contemporary media conglomerate – itself the housing for media franchises and its practice of transmedia storytelling when examined as part of the contemporary media landscape – can be traced. The article has hereby highlighted the importance of re-contextualising how the seemingly separate industrial conditions delineating Hollywood’s past encouraged connections across media, facilitating practices of transmedia storytelling to thrive within a culture of war-time national unity. If audiences had wished to consume the Superman storyworld fully during this period of Classical Hollywood, they were in fact required to act like hunters, to paraphrase Henry Jenkins, gathering story content from a variety of sources as different media forms had specialised in different features, contributing different stories, each building different aspects of the storyworld and its expansive mythology. Such propagation across media, at least with regards to Superman, had been rooted within the conditions of the cultural context. America’s entry into World War II rebranded Superman as an emblem of the nation’s ideals, permeating an array of narratives across the cultural industries and its mass audience, in turn reinforcing the character as a branded commodity circulation of twentieth-century consumer culture. As *Variety* reiterated in 1941, ‘Superman is a super salesman,’ and indeed the propagation of the Superman character across mass culture was crucial to the transmediality of its storyworld.¹¹⁹

Matthew Freeman
7 Weaver Court,
Sutton Coldfield,
West Midlands,
B75 5UE.

-
- ¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, 2006), 334.
- ² Hollywood's Super Holiday, *The Washington Post*, 10 December 1978, 11.
- ³ How Superman Got That Way, *The Film Daily*, 23 January 1942, 10.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁵ The Laugh's on You and Me, *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1940, 19.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 19
- ⁷ See Famous Funnies Here to Stay, *The New York Times*, 24 June 1934, 6.
- ⁸ Mike Benton, *The Comic Book in America: An Illustrated History* (New York, 1989), 23.
- ⁹ Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, 2004), 35.
- ¹⁰ Ron Goulart, *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History* (New York, 2000), 78.
- ¹¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, 2006), 95.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 19.
- ¹³ Harry Donenfeld cited in Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, 2004), 44.
- ¹⁴ The Laugh's on You and Me, *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1940, 19.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ¹⁶ An Interview with William M. Gaines, *The Comics Journal* #81 (May 1983)
<http://classic.tcj.com/interviews/an-interview-with-william-m-gaines-part-one-of-three/>.
- ¹⁷ Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, 2004), 37.
- ¹⁸ Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), p.41.
- ¹⁹ Ron Goulart, *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History* (USA: Collectors Press, 2000), p.74.
- ²⁰ 'An Interview with William M. Gaines,' *The Comics Journal* #81 (May 1983)
<http://classic.tcj.com/interviews/an-interview-with-william-m-gaines-part-one-of-three/>, accessed on 02.11.13.
- ²¹ William C. Ackerman, The Dimensions of American Broadcasting, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:1 (1945), 2.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 2-3.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ 'Superman' Too Heroic For Radio, *Variety*, 24 January 1940, 1.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ²⁶ Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, 2004), 42.
- ²⁷ Children Avoiding Radio Gangsters, *New York Times*, 1 July 1940, 21.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.
- ²⁹ Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York, 1974), 60.
- ³⁰ The Good Old Days on Radio Serials, *New York Times*, 15 October 1989, 34.
- ³¹ Scram, Cinderella!, *New York Times*, 1 November 1942, 12.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 12.
- ³³ Movies – and Superman, *The New York Times*, 12 October 1941, 22.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ³⁵ The Laugh's on You and Me, *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1940, 19.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ³⁷ *The Film Daily*, 25 January 1942, 2.
- ³⁸ On the New Superman, *New York Times*, 28 April 1946, 7.
- ³⁹ Patrick Finney, *Remembering the Road to World War Two: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London, 2011), 3.
- ⁴⁰ The Good Old Days of Radio Serials, *New York Times*, 15 October 1989, 34.

-
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 34.
- ⁴² On the New Superman, *New York Times*, 28 April 1946), 7.
- ⁴³ Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, 2004), 47.
- ⁴⁴ *The Film Daily*, 24 July 1940, 3.
- ⁴⁵ George F. Lowther, Radio, TV Writer, *The Washington Post*, 1 May 1975), 16.
- ⁴⁶ Say Hello to George Lowther, *Radio Mirror*, June 1943, 60.
- ⁴⁷ Herman S. Hettinger, Broadcasting Advertising Trends in 1935, *National Marketing Review*, 1:4 (Spring 1936), 311.
- ⁴⁸ William C. Ackerman, The Dimensions of American Broadcasting, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:1 (Spring 1945), 29-30.
- ⁴⁹ Thomas V. Powers, Superman... in the Media, (2005) *Metropolitan Washington Old Time Radio Club* <http://www.mwotrc.com/rr2005_02/superman.htm>.
- ⁵⁰ See *Action Comics* #6 (Nov 1938), 3.
- ⁵¹ Interestingly, the now famous kryptonite rock was only conceived on radio as a means of continuing the weekly broadcasts when Superman voice actor Bud Collyer fell ill, with the writers placing their hero in a kryptonite coma for several episodes so that Collyer could recover.
- ⁵² 'Superman,' 'Dick Tracey' et al Here to Stay, Educators Find in an Evaluation of Comics, *New York Times*, 15 December 1944, 22.
- ⁵³ Superman on Radio, *Superman Homepage* <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/radio/radio.php?topic=r-radio>.
- ⁵⁴ Superman in Radio, *Radio Mirror*, January 1941, 33.
- ⁵⁵ Superman in Radio, *Radio Mirror*, February 1941, 33.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 33.
- ⁵⁷ Superman on Radio, <<http://www.supermanhomepage.com/radio/radio.php?topic=r-radio>>.
- ⁵⁸ How Superman Got That Way, *The Film Daily*, 23 January 1942, 10.
- ⁵⁹ Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York, 1974), 108.
- ⁶⁰ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley, 1995), 10.
- ⁶¹ Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York, 1974), 59-60.
- ⁶² Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley, 1995), 1.
- ⁶³ Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Illinois, 1999), 70.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.
- ⁶⁵ Thomas Schatz, *American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley, 1999), 3.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.
- ⁶⁷ Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York, 1974), 101.
- ⁶⁸ Patrick Finney, *Remembering the Road to World War Two: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London, 2011), 231.
- ⁶⁹ *DNL* (May 1942), 67.
- ⁷⁰ Superman Deal With Rep. Carries Right to Cancel, *The Film Daily*, 29 April 1940), 11.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 11.
- ⁷² Ibid., 11.
- ⁷³ Republic May Drop Superman Serial Permanently, *Variety*, 16 August 1940), 6.
- ⁷⁴ Fleischer Will Make Superman For Paramount, *Variety*, 3 September 1940), 5.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.
- ⁷⁶ Spy Smasher, *The Film Daily*, 2 April 1942), 16.
- ⁷⁷ The only popular children's radio drama character *not* to have been co-opted into the war was the Lone Ranger, with characters such as Superman, Dick Tracy, Batman, Captain Midnight, The Shadow, and Chick Carter, amongst others, all being exploited as symbols of war propaganda at this time. See Tracy, Superman, et al Go to War, *New York Times*, 21 November 1943, 14.
- ⁷⁸ Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley, 1987), 61.
- ⁷⁹ For an example of listings see *The Washington Post*, 23 May 1942, 18.
- ⁸⁰ See *The Washington Post*, 19 September 1942.
- ⁸¹ Marek Wasielewski, The Amazing Stranger from the Planet Krypton: Industrial Design and the Machine Paradigm in the Fleischer Animated Superman shorts 1941-43, *Film International* 5:2 (March 2007), 10.
- ⁸² Ibid., 12.

-
- ⁸³ Drama and Film, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 May 1943, 9.
- ⁸⁴ Terror on the Midway (Superman Cartoon), *The Film Daily*, 21 August 1942), 8.
- ⁸⁵ The Mechanical Monsters (Superman), *The Film Daily*, 19 December 1941), 6.
- ⁸⁶ Planet? Radio Wave? No – It’s Superman!, *Variety*, 24 June 1942), 12.
- ⁸⁷ Inside Stuff – Radio, *Variety*, 24 February 1943, 30.
- ⁸⁸ Out of the Inkwell, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1939, 4.
- ⁸⁹ Movie Review, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 August 1944, 19.
- ⁹⁰ Robert Maxwell, letter dated 21 February 1941 courtesy of Superman, Inc.
- ⁹¹ Thomas Schatz, *American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley, 1999), 3.
- ⁹² Marek Wasielewski, ‘The Amazing Stranger from the Planet Krypton: Industrial Design and the Machine Paradigm in the Fleischer Animated Superman shorts 1941–43,’ *Film International* (March 2007), Vol. 5, No. 2, p.12.
- ⁹³ Janet Wasko, Hollywood and Television in the 1950s: The Roots of Diversification, in Peter Lev (ed.) *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley, 2003), 146.
- ⁹⁴ Gary Arnold, Hollywood’s Super Holiday, *The Washington Post*, 10 December 1978, 11.
- ⁹⁵ Look How Big He’s Grown!, *Variety*, 26 November 1941, 4.
- ⁹⁶ A Busy Seat Gets a Load of its Chest..., *The Film Daily*, 10 June 1942), 3.
- ⁹⁷ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley, 1995), 350.
- ⁹⁸ Thomas Schatz, *American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley, 1999), 3-4.
- ⁹⁹ Richard Maurice Hurst, *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the Majors* (London, 1979), 65.
- ¹⁰⁰ The episode was broadcast in Los Angeles on KECA, while New York audiences saw it shortly after.
- ¹⁰¹ Dave Kehr, The Adventures of Superman, *The New York Times*, 25 October 1952, 4.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁰⁴ 30 Year Deal For ‘Superman’ TV Pix, *Variety*, 16 May 1951, 30.
- ¹⁰⁵ Spending £400,000 On Series of 26 ‘Superman’ Vidpix, *Variety*, 13 July 1951, 8.
- ¹⁰⁶ 30 Year Deal For ‘Superman’ TV Pix, *Variety*, 16 May 1951, 30.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Adventures of Superman: From Inkwell to Backlot*, Documentary, *Adventures of Superman: The Complete First Season DVD Collection* (Warner Home Video, 2006, ASIN: B000BVYEL4).
- ¹⁰⁸ Spending £400,000 On Series of 26 ‘Superman’ Vidpix, *Variety*, 13 July 1951, 8.
- ¹⁰⁹ Set Syndication Deals ‘Hickok,’ ‘Superman’ Series, *Variety*, 26 May 1954, 64.
- ¹¹⁰ Gary Grossman, *Superman: Serial to Cereal* (New York, 1977), 111.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 110.
- ¹¹³ Allan Asherman, interviewed on *Adventures of Superman: From Inkwell to Backlot*, Documentary, *Adventures of Superman: The Complete First Season DVD Collection* (Warner Home Video, 2006, ASIN: B000BVYEL4).
- ¹¹⁴ *Superman #74* (May 1951), 63
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.
- ¹¹⁶ Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (London, 2005), 51.
- ¹¹⁷ William Boddy, Building the World’s Largest Advertising Medium: CBS and Television, 1940-60, in Tino Balio (ed.), *Hollywood in the Age of Television* (UK, 1990), 76.
- ¹¹⁸ Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Texas, 1994), 7.
- ¹¹⁹ Look How Big He’s Grown!, *Variety*, 26 November 1941, 4.

Matthew Freeman is a Ph.D. Candidate in Culture, Film and Media Studies at the University of Nottingham, and Visiting Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at Birmingham City University. His thesis provides a historicisation of transmedia storytelling, reconceptualising this practice as a product of early twentieth-century mass consumer culture. The current Articles Editor of *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, he is the co-author, with Carlos A. Scolari and Paolo Bertetti, of *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics, and Pulps* (London, 2014).