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***Lost* logos: Channel 4 and the branding of American event television**

In March 2007, the UK satellite television provider Sky unveiled a national media campaign carrying two banner statements: ‘Don’t Lose Lost’ and ‘Get Jack Back’. Appealing directly to the loyal audience of the imported American dramas *Lost* and *24* (Imagine Entertainment, 2001-) - both shown on Sky One having been poached from British terrestrial rivals Channel 4 and BBC 2 - the advertorial campaign was a defensive salvo in a dispute between Sky and Virgin Media over the latter’s decision to drop key Sky channels from its digital cable service. While cast in the business press as a struggle of will between corporate owners Rupert Murdoch and Richard Branson, the carriage dispute also revealed two different approaches to media marketing, Sky seeking leverage in the pay television market by enticing viewers through the acquisition of popular shows, Virgin Media seeking to emphasize the technological benefits of its cable package.¹ The different priorities given to ‘content’ and ‘technology’ were duly emblazoned on the transit vans installing digital pay-television in British towns and cities. In a mobile public relations battle, Sky vehicles were adorned with characters from its flagship programmes (from the hapless face of Homer Simpson to the brooding cast of *Lost*) whilst Virgin’s fleet advertised broadband capacity as part of ‘the real deal’. Not for the first time, American television became linked to calculated branding strategies in the British media market, the whereabouts of the latest in ‘must-see’ viewing becoming, for Sky at least, both promotional tool and bargaining chip.

Of all the recent imported hits to which Sky had acquired the rights, *Lost* had the most valuable combination of brand equity and hype. Not only was the show a global phenomenon, becoming the fastest-ever selling American television series since its launch on ABC in 2004, it also functioned as a multi-purpose franchise. Sold to over 200 countries worldwide, the series was designed to travel across a range of ancillary markets and media platforms. Together with the array of books, toys, trading cards and merchandise commonly associated with high-budget products from the American entertainment industry, *Lost* was made to translate across technological formats. In developments keenly observed by the entertainment and marketing trade press, original content for the series was produced for i-Pods and mobile phones, extending the transmedia world developed through websites, alternative reality games and Internet podcasts and blogs. Typifying the new migratory patterns of industrial texts, *Lost* was a signal form of ‘convergence television’, which John Caldwell associates with the growing impetus to ‘calculate, amass, repackage, and transport the entertainment product across the borders of both new technologies and media forms.’² According to the *Los Angeles Times*, ‘What’s happening with *Lost* is a harbinger of the changing nature of TV watching itself, dividing its followers into two groups: the loyal audience that tunes in every week and the fans who devour every bit of information made available to them on the Internet, books and magazines.’³

For Sky, *Lost* was an emblematic property. Most immediately, it was a blockbusting TV serial that generated audience loyalty and could motivate Sky subscriptions. At the same

time, *Lost* was a media brand that met the best ambitions of ‘content streaming’ in the digital age.⁴ It was perhaps inevitable, in these two respects, that Sky would outbid Channel 4 for the British rights to screen the third series of *Lost*. Paying nearly £1 million an episode, Sky began showing *Lost* in November 2006 after a marketing campaign that reconfirmed the fragile hold that terrestrial channels had on event or ‘appointment’ television nurtured as such. Against the visual iconography of an impending island storm, the posters for the third series would state triumphantly, ‘Lost: Now Found on Sky One’.

This essay concerns the UK promotion and branding of *Lost* before its Sky acquisition. For many television scholars, branding has become the defining industrial practice of the multi-channel era, which Catherine Johnson maps along two lines of development borne out in the relation between corporations like Sky and Channel 4 and media content such as *Lost*. She writes:

First, the branding of television networks enables them to compete effectively in an increasingly crowded marketplace by creating strong, distinctive and loyal relationships with viewers. Second, television programmes themselves can act as brands that can be profitably exploited across a range of different media platforms in order to increase profits for the owner of the associated trade mark.⁵

Johnson argues that branding should be viewed ‘not simply as a logo or set of values, but as a set of relations between producers, writers, networks, texts and viewers, that emerges in the branding of networks and in the branding of programmes.’⁶ If, as she suggests, we must begin to examine how network and programme brands function together, this means

accounting for the way that programmes can contribute to the brand equity of more than one corporation in the international television marketplace. I want in this essay to develop Johnson's analysis, considering the particular entwining of channel/programme branding that framed the early history of *Lost* in the UK market. Examining the identity of Channel 4 as the original brand home of *Lost*, I focus in particular on the 'promotional surround' of the series when launched on British terrestrial screens, analyzing the assorted textual ephemera (commissioned trailers, series sponsorships, channel promos and idents) which helped position and domesticate *Lost* for British audiences before the renewal rights were surrendered to Sky. Concentrating on the promotion of *Lost* for those tuning in to Channel 4 every week, I explore the specific co-creation of channel/programme branding within televisual marketing strategies. Whilst critical attention has focused on the viral marketing of *Lost* on the Internet, I want to concentrate on the kinds of promotional work that remain central to everyday viewing, and that are directly aimed at terrestrial viewers who watch in real time.⁷

Channel 4 and the lure of American entertainment imports

That Channel 4 should find *Lost* an attractive proposition is hardly surprising given the corporation's historical, and sometimes controversial, relation to imported US programming. From its inception in 1982, Channel 4 has drawn upon American imports to support its programming schedule. This has included sitcoms such as *Cheers* (Charles/Burrows/Charles Productions, 1982-1993), *Roseanne* (Carsey-Werner Company, 1988-1997) and *Friends* (Warner Bros. Television, 1992-2004), comedy dramas like *Ally*

McBeal (20th Century Fox Television, 1997-2002), *Sex and the City* (Darren Star Productions, 1998-2004) and *Ugly Betty* (Touchstone Television, 2006-), and serials such as *Hill Street Blues* (MTM Enterprises, 1981-1987), *ER* (Constant c Productions, 1994-), *The West Wing* (John Wells Productions, 1999-2006), *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-2005) and *The Sopranos* (Chase Films, 1999-2007). Using American material has proved highly successful in attracting younger, more affluent audiences, but this strategy has been criticized by those who find in it the abdication of Channel 4's public service responsibilities. Established with a parliamentary remit to provide innovative programming not found on other British channels, and expected to commission the majority of its programmes from independent television producers from the UK, Channel 4 has found the use of American imports historically problematic, inviting splenetic attacks by the likes of departing ITV boss, Charles Allen, who excoriated the channel at the Edinburgh Television Festival in 2006 for being dominated by 'reality, lifestyle, US acquisitions and shock docs'.⁸

Such criticism, periodically levelled, has not precluded Channel 4 from using American imports as a scheduling cornerstone. Ever since the 1990 Broadcasting Act, which allowed Channel 4 to sell its own advertising for the first time, emphasis has been placed on popular programming able to attract both upmarket and youth audiences. Indeed, a key legacy of Michael Grade, who steered Channel 4 between 1988 and 1997, was the reduction of experimental minority output and the acceleration of soap operas and American entertainment imports able to generate the markets sought after by advertisers. While advertising-funded, Channel 4 is also externally regulated, and this hybrid mode of

public service broadcasting has occasionally led bodies such as the Independent Television Commission to force Channel 4 to use more domestic productions. However, there is no doubting the importance of American programmes to Channel 4's survival and market success, helping it to achieve 10 per cent of the total audience share by 2001, rivalling BBC 2 (11.1 per cent) and outperforming Sky (6 per cent), Channel 4's two immediate competitors.⁹

By the end of Michael Jackson's tenure (1997-2001), Grade's successor as Chief Executive, American programming had become central to the brand identity of Channel 4, especially significant in helping the corporation position itself for the future of digital television. With the intensified competition of the multi-channel environment, Jackson helped instigate a period of rapid commercial expansion at Channel 4, designed, according to Georgina Born, 'to increase and diversify the revenue streams coming into Channel 4 in order to cushion the main public service channel from future budget shortfalls.'¹⁰ Seeking to develop new multi-revenue business models - following the example of Sky with its combination of digital platforms and premium subscription channels - Channel 4 launched the youth-oriented digital channel E4 in 2001.¹¹ Pursuing the lucrative youth market by screening first-run American imports, E4 helped consolidate the channel's self-declared identity 'as the home of cutting-edge entertainment'. With top US series increasingly sold with free-to-air and pay television rights bundled together, E4 was a calculated brand extension; it became a strategic means of fending off Sky in the competitive market for American imports, and of protecting the

main channel from the accusation that US television was being used to define the 'cutting edge' at the expense of British fare.

Although American imports have caused problems with the regulator, they have nevertheless been at the forefront of Channel 4's efforts to clarify what it stands for, playing an important part in giving definition to the channel as somewhere 'for viewers who expect to be challenged, provoked and entertained by new ideas and new talent.'¹² As June Dromgoole, the controller of Channel 4 acquisitions, said in 2004: 'Channel 4 has become known as the home of top US programming. It's a point of distinction that has been carefully nurtured over many years by hand-picking the best shows to suit the Channel audience and brand.'¹³ This sense of distinction has been notably developed through the channel's use of comedy and drama series from the American network HBO. Here, we return to Catherine Johnson's observation that programmes can contribute to the brand equity of more than one corporation. Specifically, Johnson explores how 'quality' dramas such as *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under* have helped construct not only the brand identity of HBO but also that of Channel 4 as they have been sold and repackaged abroad. She writes: 'In many ways, the brand values of HBO are shared by Channel 4. As with HBO, Channel 4 has a commitment to screen the kinds of television programming not found elsewhere on British television. As with HBO, Channel 4 has a remit for creativity and innovation in its programming.'¹⁴ There is an undoubted kinship in the brand identity of HBO and Channel 4. This does not mean to say, however, that Channel 4 has limited itself to HBO as a source of programming content. As Paul Rixon points out, broadcasters like Channel 4 are involved in a constant process of acquiring

and assimilating American shows into British television schedules, Channel 4 looking with increasing interest to the output of ABC by the mid-2000s.¹⁵

Anticipating gaps in its schedule left by the end of *Friends*, *Frasier* (Grub Street Productions, 1993-2004) and *Sex and the City* (Darren Star Productions, 1998-2004), Channel 4 bet on the success of two prospective ABC hits in 2004 - *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives* (Cherry Alley Productions, 2004-). Outbidding terrestrial rival Five, Channel 4 signed a deal at the June trade previews that gave it exclusive UK rights to both programmes, to be screened in the year after their domestic launch. Justifying their considerable hype, and to the relief of ABC executives, both shows would become central to the ratings success of the beleaguered American network, the first series of *Lost* averaging 16 million viewers in the US, appealing to the key 18-49 year old demographic. This gave a much needed boost to ABC's network identity. After a long period of stagnation and a number of limp rebranding initiatives following its takeover by Disney in 1996 - typified by a campaign that associated ABC with the colour yellow - it was original programming that ultimately fired the revival of ABC as a network brand, its rejuvenation in the mid-2000s driven by the success of the island drama that Disney Chief Executive Michael Eisner had initially, and infamously, dismissed.

In market terms, *Lost* would become an indicative franchise in the changing landscape of American television, designed by its makers as something to watch but also as something to inhabit and explore. Mindful of its digital television strategies, Channel 4 spared no expense promoting *Lost* as a brand event. Similar to the domestic launch of the series on

ABC, Channel 4 ran a major marketing campaign, spending over £1 million on posters, billboards, trailers and new media advertising. As a measure of the programme's significance, the marketing budget for *Lost* was second only to that reserved for the launch of the corporation's new digital channel More4. Compared with the promotion of other acquired serials, including *Desperate Housewives*, the campaign for *Lost* was one of the most expensive of its kind. It was also one of the most experimental. For instance, Channel 4 became the first European television advertiser to purchase billboard space within a virtual Internet game. Describing the appearance of *Lost* clips within the role-playing game *Anarchy Online*, Channel 4's director of network marketing, Polly Cochrane, said: 'It's partly to drive word of mouth – and doing something cool in this space means it's going to be seen by a younger audience.'¹⁶ In the lexicon of brand marketing, online strategies helped establish 'buzz' over 'hype' amongst a core target niche, enabling the 'infectious chatter that spreads from consumer to consumer about something of genuine interest to them.'¹⁷ Just as important as the actual effects of this approach, however, was the message sent to others in the television industry about the competence and creativity of Channel 4 as a brand home. With Internet marketing 'nice to do but not essential', Cochrane summarized the channel's multimedia approach to *Lost* with a telling rationalization of self-promotion: 'It's good for the show, it's good for the department and it's good for the Channel 4 brand.'¹⁸

On certain terms, *Lost* enabled Channel 4 to display its marketing prowess. However, the series also came with its own promotional challenges; internally, it was perceived as a harder sell than the glossy, and more openly seductive, *Desperate Housewives*. In a

competitive television environment where audiences may only commit to two or three drama series at a time, Channel 4 had to think how best to attract people to a serialized mystery of indeterminate genre, a ‘thriller’ based on having more questions than answers. Channel 4’s broad response, like that of ABC, was to devise a promotional strategy that could foster, and then sustain, depth of curiosity about *Lost*. As programme-maker and trademark owner, ABC developed this approach by expanding the range of ancillary texts exploring the show’s mythology, fostering audience loyalty by transforming the series into a content ‘experience’ freed from the constraints of its own ‘network-hosted logic’.¹⁹ These platform strategies helped redefine the parameters of *Lost* as a television text, including the traditional marketing/merchandising techniques used to transform entertainment commodities into franchise phenomena.²⁰ Like ABC, Channel 4 would exploit the ancillary and interactive potential of the series, releasing a companion book called *The Lost Chronicles* and developing its own *Lost* website with links to downloadable videos, episodes and radio shows. Experimenting with multimedia content/marketing, Channel 4 sought to position *Lost* in the UK by creating ‘a rich environment around the programme [so that] it feels part of a 360 degree space’.²¹ However, not being a rights-owning producer (such as ABC) or a distribution-controlling platform owner (such as Sky), Channel 4 also sought to develop and strengthen its brand value as an ‘aggregator of content’, developing marketing strategies in relation to *Lost* that made the channel stand out as a television carrier.²² It is in this particular context of industrial pressure and need that we might analyze how *Lost* was sold to British television audiences, how it was framed, or rather refracted, through the prism of Channel 4’s own promotional imperatives.

The promotional surround of *Lost*

Analyzing the role that domestic broadcasters play in helping British audiences to consume, understand and experience American programmes, Paul Rixon looks at the various means by which imported shows are inserted into British schedules, and are potentially changed in their viewing and reception as a result. He suggests that broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 draw upon their particular understanding of domestic audiences and the British television environment to 'actively mediate' the use and experience of American programmes. This process of mediation can take one of a number of forms: by means of a channel re-editing a programme or re-ordering a series for particular scheduling requirements, by changing a programme's relation to the ratio and structure of advertising breaks, by changing the time at which a programme is broadcast on British television, or by altering the context or 'narrative image' through which a programme is formally marketed.²³ It is the last of these that interests me in considering the assimilation of *Lost* on British television screens.

Specifically, I want to consider how elements of television's promotional flow - trailers, sponsorships, idents - helped frame the series in relation to the branding strategies of Channel 4, in particular its association with quality popular television.

As I have mentioned, Channel 4 developed awareness of *Lost* through a range of multimedia strategies, adapting many of the viral and ancillary marketing approaches used by ABC. Differing from the American network, however, was an elliptical trailer

made by Channel 4 that choreographed the ‘pre-image’ of *Lost* for British viewers. Directed jointly by the fashion and advertising photographer David LaChapelle (known for his music video collaborations with artists such as Moby and for his fashion ads for companies like H&M) and Channel 4’s creative director, Brett Foraker, the trailer was a signature promotional text designed to create a particular understanding of *Lost* and the channel on which it was to be shown. Shot on location in Hawaii in March 2005, it featured cast members of *Lost* dancing, as if in a daze, in front of the wreckage of an aircraft. In atmosphere, the trailer was a cross between a music video and a perfume commercial; set to ambient dance music, it involved a beach of beautiful people performing a series of apparently meaningful, but wholly unexplained, gestures and gyrations. Certain individuals danced together (Jack [Matthew Fox] and Kate [Evangeline Lilly], Kate and Sawyer [Josh Holloway], Boone [Ian Somerhalder] and Claire [Emilie de Ravin], Sayid [Naveen Andrews] and Shannon [Maggie Grace], Sun [Yunjin Kim] and Jin [Daniel Dae Kim]), some danced or walked alone (Charlie [Dominic Monaghan], Hurley [Jorge Garcia]), and others were shown conducting as if the entire performance were some kind of symphony (Locke [Terry O’Quinn], Walt [Malcolm David Kelley]). Most wore torn or bedraggled evening wear that would not feature in the series itself, Locke dressed in a white dinner jacket, Sawyer in a waistcoat, Kate and Sun in evening gowns. The trailer’s high concept style re-imagined imagistic features of *Lost* in ways that could appeal to Channel 4’s core audience of young, affluent viewers.²⁴ First shown on E4 in the months leading up to the terrestrial launch of the programme on 10th August 2005, the trailer could also be seen on the main channel, on

Channel 4's *Lost* website, and in cinemas before Hollywood blockbusters such as *War of the Worlds*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Wedding Crashers*.

In marketing terms, the trailer was designed as a hybrid cultural text - a promotional object but also a self-standing visual entertainment. Rather than advertise *Lost* through edited sequences of narrative and character action, Channel 4 developed a conceptual mood for its latest American acquisition. This marked a departure from ABC. As a major network promoting what it hoped would become a mainstream hit, ABC was inclined to use 'show and tell' trailer rhetoric to launch the first series. As a publisher broadcaster with a reputation for being, in its own words, 'a place of individual authorship, a consistent source of surprise, invention and brainfood',²⁵ Channel 4 approached *Lost* somewhat differently, promoting the show through reading protocols attuned to its younger and 'cooler' audience, and in line with the channel's reputation for high calibre American programming. In audience terms, while ABC looked to the core 18-49 demographic, Channel 4 addressed *Lost* to young, urban adults aged between 16 and 34. With its brand identity forged in the early 2000s on the back of American dramas such as *ER*, *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, Channel 4 framed *Lost* in ways that drew upon its association with quality US imports. It developed a style of advertising that one American fan, discussing Channel 4's trailer on the online forum www.tvsquad.com, called 'very HBO-ish, not something I could see shown on American networks'.²⁶ The reference to HBO here is telling. According to Catherine Johnson, HBO has established itself as a premium brand by distinguishing itself from American network television, using the discourse of high popular culture (or 'high pop') to offer 'something more than

television, more than mass culture, while providing it paradoxically through television, as television.’²⁷ This marketing sleight of hand is exemplified in the brand slogan ‘It’s not TV. It’s HBO.’ While Channel 4 is a public broadcaster rather than a niche cable operator, it has staked its identity on a similar idea of programming difference and distinction. Consistent with the ‘core values’ that Channel 4 has routinely ascribed to itself in marketing talk since the Jackson era, it promoted *Lost* as if it were an HBO product, a show that finessed the corporation’s brand association with ‘innovative’, ‘contemporary’ and ‘smart’ US programming. This was most apparent in the enigmatic and expressive design of its trailer.

On first viewing, it was not apparent that Channel 4’s trailer for *Lost* was a trailer at all; this only became clear when the ‘4’ logo appeared at the end with the words ‘*Lost* - coming soon.’ Two versions of the trailer were cut, both deliberately oblique in advertising *Lost* as a series. The first used the Portishead song *Numb* as the accompanying music track. This choice was suggestive of the way Channel 4 sought to encode those elements of *Lost* that met its own brand image, reflecting itself in programming that was positioned as trendy, innovative and otherwise ‘cinematic’ in feel. Describing the propensity for pop songs to be used as stock music within contemporary British television, Kevin Donnelly suggests that instrumental or ‘image-friendly music’, in particular electronic dance, has become a staple within British trailers, programmes, continuity segments and montage sequences aspiring towards a concept of the cinematic. Such music, he writes, ‘is premised upon “atmosphere” and the construction of soundscapes in a similar manner to the way film composers and sound designers

construct film soundtracks.²⁸ In terms of budget and production value, *Lost* was, from the outset, more cinematic than televisual in style, the first episode costing upwards of \$12 million, the most expensive pilot in television history. Channel 4 sought to accentuate this quality by turning its promotional trailer for *Lost* into a proto-cinematic event, an ancillary video text that would eventually appear as a bonus feature on the UK DVD box-set of *Lost*'s second series.

If the trailer was designed to pique interest among key taste constituencies, a second version would provide more direct and suggestive clues about the character-driven focus of the show. Instead of using *Numb*, the second trailer used a chorus of personal secrets (voiced by the principal *Lost* characters) to accompany the same dance sequence. The so-called 'voice-over version' went as follows: 'All of us have a secret. One of us is a hero; one of us is a fraud; one of us is a junkie; one of us is a cop; one of us is a saint; one of us is a sinner; one of us is a martyr; one of us is a murderer; all of us are guilty; all of us are lost.' This trailer established the show's proposed appeal as a serial mystery, but restrained from giving away anything else about genre or story. Both trailers were designed to deepen audience curiosity about *Lost*, most immediately for those with no prior familiarity with the programme, but also for those potentially acquainted with the show through spoilers, Internet discussion and residual hype from the US. Channel 4 took a particular approach in its spot advertising of *Lost*, developing the show's pre-image through trailers that established the meaning of the show (and its promotion) as a talking point. In one sense, this applied strategies used by ABC in helping to establish the programme as a 'water-cooler' event. At the same time, the commissioned trailer bore the

promotional hallmarks of Channel 4, using a fashion-inspired piece of commercial art to project the broadcaster's relation to quality American imports. As a promotional text, the trailer was a striking example of the way that Channel 4 made attempts to mediate the identity and experience of *Lost* for a particular sub-set of British viewers - to make connections between the programme and the Channel 4 brand.

The terrestrial scheduling of *Lost* further developed these connections. Having advertised *Lost* through trailers that accentuated its proto-cinematic quality, the launch episode was scheduled around a midweek *Big Brother* eviction. Unlike much of Channel 4's HBO programming, which often contains graphic language, sex and violence, *Lost* was suitable for a pre-watershed audience.²⁹ As such, the first episode was aired on a Wednesday night at 8.30pm just before *Big Brother*. (This was similar to ABC, which aired *Lost* on Wednesdays at 8pm). A second instalment was then shown at 10 p.m., directly after *Big Brother*'s surprise eviction. This would become the programme's 'strand' slot in the Channel 4 schedule, a time often reserved for American imports such as, previously, *Desperate Housewives*. As Channel 4's largest single ratings generator, *Big Brother* (Bazal, 2000-) enabled *Lost* to maximize its audience, schedulers designing a double-bill of event television. This was seen in the trade press as a 'brilliant' execution, the debut episode of *Lost* drawing 6.1 million viewers (an audience share of 26.8 percent), the second instalment attracting 5.9 million (an audience share of 29.6 per cent). This beat all competitors in both slots, and was a record audience for the launch of a US import, outdoing *Desperate Housewives* (4.6 million) and exceeding the previous record audience held by *ER* (5 million).³⁰

Wrapping *Lost* around *Big Brother* became a significant tactic in positioning the show. Unlike Channel 4's sometimes erratic scheduling and promotion of shows like *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under* - often moving them between different time slots late in the evening - *Lost* was offered up as a more dedicated form of 'appointment' television. While the promotional trailer framed the pre-image of the series through high pop aesthetics, appealing to the channel's 'cool' and 'quality' demographic, the scheduling of *Lost* was designed with a mind to capturing the loyalty of an audience attuned to the interactive pleasures of reality television, and who may well have memories of the desert island reality show, *Survivor* (Mark Burnett Productions, 2000-), used by ABC chairman Lloyd Braun to pitch the series to senior Disney executives.³¹ In a series of ways, Channel 4 sought to aggregate niche taste cultures for its latest brand property, providing different discursive and scheduling frames for *Lost* as quality/popular television.

These frames were refined by the sponsorship credits that accompanied *Lost* as a series, one of a number of American imports on British screens to be sponsored by the telephone enquiry service 118-118. With the relaxation of television sponsorship rules by the regulator Ofcom in 2005, sponsorship messages and their related 'break bumpers' (sponsor-produced texts that signal the movement between programme and ad break) became more elaborate and creative in the mid-to-late 2000s. 118-118 was a notable example of the tailored forms of sponsorship designed to integrate itself into the experience, expectation and ritual of watching a show. Rather than append its corporate name to a particular programme or channel - such as Cadbury's sponsorship of

Coronation Street on ITV or the film sponsorships of Stella Artois on Channel 4 - 118-118 associated itself with a genre type: quality television drama. By sponsoring *ER* and *The Sopranos* on Channel 4, *Prison Break* (Rat Entertainment, 2005-) on Channel 5, and *Lost* on Channel 4 and later Sky, 118-118 became a generic badge in the British television landscape. Unlike Stella Artois, however, which sought to equate its brand (a 'reassuringly expensive' beer) with the cultural prestige of quality film (its rhetoric of sponsorship referencing European art cinema) 118-118 developed a retro sensibility attuned to the taste culture of a young and media-savvy target market. Unconcerned with projecting images of cultural distinction, two moustachioed figures from the 1970s performed a range of visual gags and parodies that would differ between ad segments and that would often gesture towards programme content. For example, 118-118's sponsorship of the second series of *Prison Break* featured a host of breakout gags, while its sponsorship of the third series of *Lost* on Sky would relate specifically to the island drama, the two figures performing different jokes on a tropical beach, searching for hotels, cinema listings, train times, spas, and so on. Coding the genre of quality drama, the commercial sponsorship also reinforced the ironic form of address favoured by Channel 4 (and especially E4) in promoting popular television serials.

The 118-118 sponsorships were one of a number of texts that would circulate beyond and below *Lost* as a television event. John Caldwell outlines the growing significance of such texts in the multi-channel environment, considering how 'secondary' or 'tertiary' production texts such as channel idents, sponsorships, promotional videos, making-of documentaries, and TV-web synergies persistently migrate towards 'primary' textual

status. In particular, Caldwell draws attention to those elements of television's promotional flow that have become industry-authored forms of content in their own right. Together with commissioned trailers and series sponsorships, we can point finally in this context to the marketing work that Channel 4 has undertaken on its own behalf, a significant factor in the analysis of the promotional surround of *Lost* and the entwining of channel/programme branding. Creating texts that address both production and viewer cultures, Channel 4 promos have regularly used actors and images drawn from its popular American imports, the corporation presenting a range of US shows (formally belonging to the stables of NBC, HBO and ABC) as the key to its own brand value and meaning as a television channel.

According to John Ellis, 'The brand of all generalist channels lies in the schedule and how that schedule is known by their client audiences.'³² Of all the terrestrial channels, Channel 4 has made its schedule a point of brand articulation. From the mid-2000s, this was borne out in a series of channel promotions featuring stars of its schedule responding to an inferred off-screen question, for example, 'What was your first car?' 'What is your favourite drink?' 'Where were you happiest?' 'What is the best way to your heart?' Providing a montage of frank and comic answers, these sequences have featured presenters like Davina McCall (*Big Brother*), Jon Snow (*Channel 4 News*) and Jimmy Carr (*8 out of 10 Cats*), protagonists of lifestyle shows and documentaries like Gordon Ramsay (*Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*) and Jamie Oliver (*Jamie's School Dinners*), and actors from American programmes including *ER*, *The West Wing*, *Six Feet Under*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Ugly Betty* and *Lost*. In the case of *Lost*, Mathew Fox, Evangeline

Lily, Josh Holloway, Dominic Monaghan, and Naveen Andrews all appeared in Channel 4 branding during the British airing of Series One and Two. These appearances were unsurprising given the importance of the global television market to American programme-makers and the inclination of Buena Vista International Television (the Disney-owned distributor of *Lost*) to send its stars to Europe to generate free publicity for the show. Interesting in this case, however, is the role that cast members of an American network show assumed in the promotion of a British television company, highlighting the reciprocal marketing relation that takes place *between* programme and channel brands.

The purpose of these quirky channel promotions was to cultivate Channel 4's 'brand relationship' with its client audience, to produce, in marketing parlance, 'a memorable sensory experience that ties in with the positioning of the company, product or service.'³³ For Channel 4, this meant defining its identity in and between a diverse range of programmes and people, using a format that developed a fond and cheeky familiarity with the channel 'family'. This was accompanied by the production of distinctive channel idents. Having abandoned what Mark Brownrigg and Peter Meech call the 'fanfare' style of television ident in 1996, Channel 4 moved decisively towards customized 'funfair' idents in the late 1990s and early 2000s.³⁴ From 2004, this would include a striking ensemble of idents projecting the '4' logo in panoramic and geographically dispersed scenes. Collectively known as 'Atlas', these idents 'recaptured the essence of the original nine piece figure 4 and displayed it in a wide variety of three dimensional locations including a council estate, bowling green, Tokyo Street, panorama of electricity pylons, Trafalgar Square, diner and a television viewer's living room.'³⁵ With expanding variety,

and accompanied by different ambient music in each case, Atlas idents appeared before scheduled programmes and would sometimes even correspond with their content or genre. For example, the council estate ident would frequently appear before the working class drama *Shameless* (Company Pictures, 2004-) (also sponsored by 118-118), while an ident of flitting alien lightships would come before programmes like the hoax reality show *Space Cadets* (Zeppotron, 2005). Reinforcing the significance of American imports, a number of idents would correspond, atmospherically, with key Channel 4 American comedy and drama series, a skyline ident evoking the title sequence of *Sex and the City*, a motel ident summoning the backdrop of *My Name is Earl* (20th Century Fox Television, 2005-).

Reflecting the coastal scenery of its latest American import, it is perhaps no surprise that a 'rock' ident should appear towards the end of Channel 4's airing of the second series of *Lost*. Similar to the other Atlas idents, 'rock' amalgamated live action plates and digital technology to create a playful dimensionality - the camera panned a rugged coastline to reveal the figure 4 as a rock formation jutting into the sea. Although using images of the British coastline, the sapphire colour of the sea and the tree-topped cliff-face would suggest other island geographies. In distinguishing itself as a television carrier, the 'rock' ident became a mark of Channel 4's brand relation with *Lost*, part of an ensemble of logos that would denote the landscape of Channel 4's terrestrial identity in the present as well as in the past. Even as *Lost* was spirited away to Sky One, the rock ident would continue to appear on the main channel, becoming a visual reminder of the show's one-time place in the Channel 4 family - a programme introduced to UK audiences and

nurtured by Channel 4 before leaving for the moneyed charms of pay television. In a multi-channel environment defined by competition for audience loyalty, and where networks fight for recognition among viewers and the producing communities who sell them shows, idents and channel promos have become a proliferating sub-genre within television culture; as John Caldwell suggests, idents have become a form of textual production that, along with trailers and other promotional fare, ‘stand simultaneously as corporate strategies, as forms of cultural and economic capital integral to media professional communities, and as the means by which contemporary media industries work to rationalize their operations in an era of great institutional instability.’³⁶ While Channel 4’s idents and promos were fleeting and fun, the corporation’s integration of *Lost* within its own marketing efforts was hardly frivolous; it became a means of expressing the channel’s ‘attitude’ as an aggregator of content at a time when other channels and television providers were beginning to encroach on its status as a natural brand home for quality US imports.

Watching the first two seasons of *Lost* in Britain was a brand experience at many levels; it was framed by the logos of the programme itself as a global television franchise but also by the domesticating logos of the channel on which *Lost* was scheduled, screened and sponsored. It has been my argument that the textual ephemera surrounding the British airing of *Lost* - from customized trailers to the weekly use of break bumpers and channel promos and idents - played an important early role shaping the narrative image of the programme in the UK. Specifically, *Lost* was positioned less as a mainstream prime-time serial, as in the United States, than as an example of quality popular television growing

out of the intensified competition between Channel 4, Five and Sky to stake market territory via the acquisition/assimilation of the best new American comedy and drama series. With the prohibitive cost of renewing both *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives* in 2006, Channel 4 decided to replace *Lost* with another ABC hit, *Ugly Betty*. This decision was unsurprising given the escalating cost of *Lost* episodes and the ratings slip that Channel 4 experienced during its airing of the second season - audiences for *Lost* dropping from 4.1 million (a 21 per cent share) to 2.8 million (a 16 per cent share). Nevertheless, *Lost* remained a core and sought-after television brand, Sky One paying £40 million to bring *Lost* to the satellite broadcaster.

This switch did not significantly alter the programme's narrative image in Britain. It did coincide with a dramatic reduction in the time lapse between the US and British airing of the series, however. Combating pirated downloads threatening its global distribution operation, Disney and ABC made increasing efforts to transport its product quickly overseas.³⁷ In 2007, it began sending digital files of *Lost* to BSkyB the day after its airing in the US. Like something borne of the Dharma initiative, these files were transmitted through a data line under the Atlantic Ocean, enabling *Lost* to be converted into the European television format and broadcast in the UK just four days later. In key respects, Sky maintained the same marketing and scheduling strategy as Channel 4 in positioning the series, making small adjustments by moving *Lost* to a Sunday 10pm slot, and accentuating the programme's spread across digital media platforms. Different, however, was the near-synchronous transatlantic viewing of the third series for those in Britain who could afford the subscription fee.³⁸ While audience figures dropped to 1.2 million

for *Lost*'s debut on Sky, these were still seen as solid ratings. Vindicating the satellite provider's decision to poach the show from Channel 4, the third series of *Lost* offered, at the same time, a portent of the new global temporalities of event television in the age of digital.

Notes

¹ See Nichola Dobson, 'Brand loyalty vs. show loyalty, the strange case of Virgin vs. Sky,' *Flow* 5:10 (2007).

² John Caldwell, 'Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration,' in Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium on Transition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p.50.

³ Maria Elena Fernandez, 'ABC's *Lost* is easy to find, and not just on TV,' *Los Angeles Times*, 3 January 2006, E1.

⁴ Sky One's programming chief, Michael Woolfe, explained: 'Today's audiences demand more quality and flexibility than ever before, so we are intending to use various digital platforms to make *Lost* available to our customers when and how they want'. See Mimi Turner, 'Sky One; Let's Get Lost,' *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 October 2006. On the development of 'content streaming' as a media principle, see Simone Murray, 'Brand loyalties: rethinking content within global corporate media,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 27:3 (2005): 415-435.

⁵ Catherine Johnson, 'Tele-branding in TVIII: the network as brand and the programme as brand,' *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 5:1 (2007), p. 8.

⁶ Johnson, p. 20.

⁷ This resonates with Michael Svennevig's suggestion that 'it is clear that people continue to value TV as medium precisely because it is not the Internet in the sense that it is pre-produced for specific purposes, and designed to deliver ready-made benefits to the audience.' Michael Svennevig, 'Television Audience Research – UK,' in Douglas Gomery and Luke Hockley, eds., *Television Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), p. 83.

⁸ Cited in Stuart Jeffries, 'Where did it all go wrong?' *Guardian (Review)*, 22 March 2007, p. 7.

⁹ See John Sedgewick, 'The economics of television – UK,' in Gomery and Hockley, pp.1-5, and Sylvia Harvey, 'Channel Four and the redefining of public service broadcasting,' in Michele Hilmes, ed., *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp.50-54.

¹⁰ Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television: Channel Four and the commercialization of public service broadcasting in the UK,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 25:6 (2003), p. 780.

¹¹ This followed on from the launch of FilmFour in 1998 and paved the way for More4 in 2005 and Channel 4 + 1 in 2007.

¹² *Channel Four Television Corporation: Report and Financial Statements* (London: Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2000), p. 8.

¹³ Cited in Paul Rixon, *American Television on British Screens* (London: Palgrave, 2006) p. 97.

¹⁴ Johnson, p.12.

¹⁵ Rixon, pp. 83-105.

¹⁶ Steven Brook, 'Channel 4 launches 1m campaign for *Lost*,' *Guardian Unlimited*, 25 January 2005.

¹⁷ David Lewis and Darren Bridger, *The Soul of the New Consumer* (London: Nicolas Brealey, 2001), p. 104. Theorizing a new marketing environment defined by consumers who are more active and informed than ever before, Lewis and Bridger write: 'cynical New Consumers who pay little attention to expensively created hype are strongly influenced by street-level gossip or buzz. Once persuaded by buzz, however, New Consumers are far more receptive and willing to be persuaded by hype' (p. 111).

¹⁸ Brook

¹⁹ Caldwell, p. 49.

²⁰ Describing the way that ancillary texts such as Internet games and 'mobisodes' were developed in creative partnership between studio marketers and series producers - both seeking to extend the promotional-cum-narrative environment of *Lost* on new platform technologies - ABC's senior vice president of marketing, Mike Benson, commented: 'I actually look at marketing more like developing content for the show . . . while we can hype and sell, I'd rather tell a story than sell a story.' Cited in Fernandez.

²¹ Brook.

²² Georgina Born coins the phrase 'aggregator of content', relating it to Channel 4's 'vulnerable position in the new broadcasting chain.' Born, pp. 788-9.

²³ Rixon, p.126

²⁴ The extra-diegetic display of this high concept trailer would change aspects of the programme's narrative. While characters were dressed differently, it was especially noticeable to fans that Claire was not pregnant. In a glossier application of his photographic style, LaChappelle would also shoot the *Desperate Housewives* campaign for Channel 4.

²⁵ *Channel Four Television Corporation: Report and Financial Statements*, p.8

²⁶ <http://www.tvsquad.com/2006/09/22/very-weird-lost-promo-video/>

²⁷ Johnson, p. 10.

²⁸ K.J. Donnelly, 'Tracking British television: pop music as stock soundtrack to the small screen,' *Popular Music*, 21:3 (2002), p. 337.

²⁹ The 'watershed' describes the 9pm boundary in the British television schedule before which 'adult' scenes of sex and violence are not shown by the major terrestrial channels.

³⁰ Chris Tryhon, 'Channel 4 equals ratings high,' *Guardian Unlimited*, 15 August 2005;

Claire Simpson, 'Lost and BB top ratings,' *The Bookseller*, 19 August 2005, p.10;

Maggie Brown, 'Channel 4 finds mass audience with American Lost,' *The Stage*, 18 August 2005, p. 13.

³¹ According to insider accounts, Braun pitched *Lost* to skeptical Disney executives as a cross between *Survivor* and the Tom Hanks movie *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000).

See James B. Stewart, *DisneyWar* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 485.

³² John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television In the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 166.

³³ See B. Schmitt and A. Simonson, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Branding, Identity and Image* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). On branding and the entertainment industry, see Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2008).

³⁴ Mark Brownrigg and Peter Meech, 'From Fanfare to Funfair: the changing sound world of UK television idents,' *Popular Music* 21:3 (2002):345-355.

³⁵ See Christine Fanthome, 'Creating an iconic brand – an account of the history, development, context and significance of Channel 4's idents,' *Journal of Media Practice*, 8:3 (2007): 255-71. Like the UK *Lost* trailer, the Atlas idents were designed by Channel 4 creative director Brett Foraker in collaboration with, in this case, Russell Appleford of the visual digital effects company The Moving Picture Company.

³⁶ John Caldwell, 'Critical industrial practice: branding, repurposing, and the migratory patterns of industrial texts,' *Television & New Media*, 7:2 (2006), p. 102.

³⁷ Aaron O. Patrick, 'The race to get TV shows overseas,' *Wall Street Journal*, 28 March 2007.

³⁸ While a four day lag is still significant, especially for those eager to participate in online fan discussion, it compares to the normal lapse of 3-12 months between a programme's broadcast in the US and appearance in the UK.