DIGITAL SPRAY: Channel 4, innovation and youth programming in the age of new technologies

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'Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award."

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an analysis of youth television, digital content and Channel 4-as-public service broadcaster and has three primary aims.

Firstly, the thesis aims to provide a series of "forgotten histories", offering a corrective to pre-existing narratives surrounding Channel 4, extensively utilising untapped resources (the Channel 4 Press Packs), along with a collection of digital archive materials. This is done in order to re-evaluate the broadcaster's purpose, strategies and programming at a vital moment in its history, using these neglected moments to interrogate Channel 4's current relationship with youth audiences and content.

Secondly, the thesis aims to reframe Channel 4's history through the lens of its youth provision, as the targeting of this demographic was seen as the "least worst" way of balancing its role as public service publisher and commercial corporation. This choice is discussed regarding the long-term impact upon Channel 4's identity and strategy, whilst offering a nuanced conceptualisation of what constitutes "youth" and how Channel 4 addressed it.

Lastly, I aim to introduce a series of original conceptual frameworks in order to illustrate Channel 4's longstanding lack of consistency in terms of commissioning, promotion and organisational strategy, culminating in the use of the term *spray*. *Spray* encapsulates both the post-broadcast fluidity within British broadcasting, as well as Channel 4's chaotic and transitory strategic choices as it grapples with its historical identity and purpose.

This thesis highlights the contradictory nature of Channel 4, with its opposing remit obligations of public service innovation and commercial viability, with the disparity between its promotional rhetoric and the production reality being pronounced. Through discussion of critically ignored content and programming strands, "forgotten histories" are produced in order to understand contemporary broadcasting, whilst extrapolating its future direction. The thesis also articulates the uneven and variable impact of new media consumption practices, promotional strategies and technological innovation upon both Channel 4 and its current (and future) audiences through the deployment of original conceptual frameworks and extensive analysis of Channel 4's multiplatform/digital policy.

DISSEMINATION

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<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>

CONTENTS

Introduction: Remembering forgotten histories – Channel 4's relationship with youth, public service and its own sense of identity becoming lost in the *spray*

Thesis rationale

> Over time, the most powerful versions of history are reconfirmed, they become sedimented down, pressed into new narratives and accounts. These always involve taken-for-granted assumptions which in turn shape the relationship of television's legislators, trainees, practitioners and historians in an imaginary past and an even more speculative future. (Branston 1998, p.51)

The above quote articulates a truism and a key issue in the production of televisual histories – that they are context-sensitive and that they are often positioned in a fashion that paints the object of study in a particular and subjective manner.   This positioning is often based on the accepted theoretical or historical wisdom of that particular moment. What makes matters even more problematic is that the scribes behind these histories are often the ones most closely affiliated with the object of study, with their interpretations of the data coloured by the association. These histories are often memorable for what may have been omitted than for what has been included, with the representation of archives and the production of critical writing being subject to the desire of the object of study to present itself and its history in a specific fashion. It is therefore obvious that in the course of such constructions, certain "alternative" histories or moments are often "forgotten" by those empowered to weave such dialogue, as they are either considered anathema to dominant discourses or not considered worthy of inclusion.

What I will discuss throughout this research are important forgotten moments within Channel 4's history, in order to produce an alternative counter-history. This "forgotten history" will highlight Channel 4's long-standing, iterative and unsuccessful search for a coherent identity since 1982, whilst highlighting moments which problematise pre-existing narratives concerning the broadcaster. The histories that this thesis will produce are completed in order to

re-evaluate the broadcaster's purpose, strategies and programming at a vital moment in its history, just over 30 years from its inception. It will discuss and compare various critically neglected moments and examples of youth-oriented programming which reveal Channel 4's long-term struggles within the British broadcasting environment. I will argue that these moments and programming, as part of a forgotten history of Channel 4, are vital in illustrating how and why Channel 4 has evolved into its current form and position in the digital televisual marketplace.

This thesis will provide a re-interpretation and re-framing of the Channel 4 narrative, in particular through the lens of "youth", as a reflection of the broadcasters' grappling with having to balance a public service-oriented remit within an increasingly commercial broadcasting environment. The thesis articulates how targeting the "neglected" or "minority" youth demographic, along with programming associated with this audience, was seen by Channel 4 as the "least worst" method by which to achieve the balancing act imposed upon it. This balance between public service, experimentation and particularly "innovation", against commercialism and pragmatism is something that is key to all discussions concerning Channel 4, given its status as a hybrid broadcaster-publisher. I will argue however that this youth focus gradually compromised Channel 4's ideals whilst bringing the long-term viability of *Channel 4-as-channel* into question, as well as the purpose and function of the *channel* (rather than *Channel 4-as-broadcaster/network*) in a multichannel, multiplatform environment. In addition, I will also question how these definitions, such as "youth", "innovation" and "quality", changed over time and shifted in accordance with the need for Channel 4 to simultaneously fulfil its evolving remit and the needs of the televisual marketplace.

Finally, the thesis will illustrate the overall lack of coherence pertaining to

Channel 4-as-institution throughout its history, in order to illustrate the consistency of Channel 4's inconsistency, using the term *spray*. I would term *spray* as the efforts of broadcasters, specifically Channel 4, to cover as many bases as possible in terms of potential appeal to youth audiences. Rather than the notions of "flow", outlined by Raymond Williams (1974) or "overflow", discussed by Will Brooker (2001) in relation to the manner in which (teen) television texts were exploited across a range of media platforms, Channel 4's stranding strategies in order to capture youth audiences are examples of *spray*. *Spray* can be seen through the efforts of the broadcaster to attract a wide and varied selection of particularly valuable demographics, with youth, in its many varieties, being one such audience. This strategy however differs from *flow* or *overflow* in that it does not appear coherent, consistent or concerted. Instead, it is defined by its fluidity along with its transient/reactionary nature to wider political and policy-based contexts, as well as the actions of its competitors.

Comparisons can also be drawn between *spray* and John Caldwell's (2003) "second-shift aesthetics", in that they both seek to understand how broadcasting was affected by the rise in importance of digital environments and production practices. Indeed, Caldwell himself uses Williams's *flow* as well as Browne's *supertext* in to be theories affiliated with (pre-digital) "first-shift aesthetics" (p.133), whilst his work in this instance "seeks to consider the ways that long-standing strategies in television and broadcasting - programming, syndication, licensing, branding, and flows - have emerged as textual engines that prefigure the design of new media forms." (p.131). In essence, his "second-shift aesthetics" tracks how televisual institutions endeavour to "adapt and overhaul the means and goals of programming, in order to succeed in far more volatile media markets" (p.135), utilising "first-shift" strategies in new media spaces, as part of a calculated design. However, the crucial word here is "design", suggesting a level of control, forethought and long-term planning,

which is absent from the concept of *spray* and Channel 4's dealings with "new media forms" and deployment of its digital strategy, evident in the disparity between its use of promotion and its commissioning of content. *Spray* is, in short, an encapsulation of the difficulties faced by Channel 4 in its grappling with its remit in the digital, multichannel, multiplatform era of British television, from Michael Jackson's time at the broadcaster onwards. This was rather than a steady adaptation to rapid industrial and cultural change, as Caldwell's work suggests in relation to American broadcasting vis-a-vis digital. *Spray* was also a consequence of the minority audience group (youth) upon which Channel 4 had chosen to focus its energies, in Channel 4's attempts to address that group's rapidly changing nature.

Issues of method

Information about such moments of television history is often difficult to locate and the content linked to them almost impossible to witness, with only the most profitable and sanitised parts of history being made easily available. This raises a host of questions relating to the viability of producing counter-histories, as well as around the materials that can be utilised to construct them. Certain histories cannot be articulated due to patchiness of archives and pertinent materials that would be needed to produce them. This means that the potential for alternative narratives is stymied, particularly in the digital age, by the junking of ephemera either seen as potentially harmful to broadcasters' brand images, irrelevant or taking up much-needed bandwidth. Such a mindset allows for the forgetting of early digital broadcasting history, with the removal of such materials acting as a disavowal of it by broadcasters. This leads to the production of a history more notable for its programming absences and historical gaps, characterised by a lack of the more problematic and jarring moments of flux, fluidity and uncertainty. These moments should be seized upon by historians, as they represent an opportunity to utilise disregarded and disparaged artefacts, data

and materials to provide nuanced narratives that run counter to the officially sanctioned versions.

As John Corner (2003) discusses in his work on the historiography of television, the issues concerning such work often centre around what can be said (in an original fashion) about the archive materials actually available, particularly when such (inextensive) materials have often been "pre-selected" (p.277), leading to the problem of trying to deviate beyond the set nature of such material. However, he raises the point (p.273) that it is always worth examining which materials are made available to scrutinise and which are not (and why), as this shapes the nature of the work produced. Lacey (2006, p.7) expands on this in terms of how broadcasters consider the process of saving (and exploiting) their archives, suggesting that:

> Archiving television programmes was a haphazard business (...) driven more by the internal demands of the broadcasters than any clear curatorial policy aimed at preserving material for posterity.

Arguably, there is the danger of producing versions of history that are just as partial as the "official" versions, over-correcting oversights and absences by seizing upon historical moments or a selection of televisual case-studies which have been neglected, often dictated by their unavailability within conventional archives, but which provide vital insights regarding the institution that broadcast them and the time period they appeared in. However, it would be remiss to elide or further neglect these moments, as previous histories (and indeed, as the broadcasters themselves) have done, as they provide genuinely alternative perspectives upon broadcasters, historical time-periods and various types of programming. These moments and materials subsequently inform and build a narrative which ties into and supports the goals of this research, creating an account of Channel 4's early digital endeavours and long-standing appeals to youth, highlighting a version of (online and broadcast) history that would otherwise be forgotten.

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Such histories can be retrieved and pieced together via the use of digital ephemera and artefacts. These materials highlight how Channel 4 branded and perceived its content, which can be set against the reality of how it executed its policies and strategies. As Messenger-Davies (2010, p.38) perceptively suggests, "...to preserve television as a medium for future scrutiny, it is not enough to preserve individual programmes; *we need to preserve its essential structures too.*" (Emphasis added). The utility of tools such as the Wayback Machine (http://archive.org/web/web.php), which operates "outside the entanglements of national governments and funding agencies" (Urrichio 2009a, p.143), is to potentially preserve these "essential structures" and moments of media history that would otherwise go unremarked or be supplanted in favour of official rhetoric and corporate narratives that showcase broadcasting institutions and their programming policy in the best possible light. However, the production of media histories utilising new media research tools is not without its own set of issues, which partially involves the preservation of the "essential structures" mentioned above. As Schneider and Foot (2004, p.115) highlight, web content is inherently ephemeral and transient in that it is constantly changing and evolving by design and by its nature as "performance media" (like television and radio). This makes it extremely difficult to capture accurately. As has been mentioned, the Wayback Machine performs this capturing function, however Brügger (2009, p.127) suggests that there are issues with this process, mentioning that:

> The archived web document (on the Wayback Machine) is not only incomplete, but is also 'too complete'; something that was not on the live web at the same time, the content of two webpages or website sections, is now combined in the archive and it is difficult to determine what the website was actually like at a given point in time.

With the problem being that the Wayback Machine, in an effort to produce a working snapshot of a specific space at a particular time, may well produce an

artefact that never actually existed in that form, leading to problems in producing accurate historical work. Ankerson (2012) suggests that "web historians" should follow the lead of media and broadcast historians in terms of using their methodological approaches, as a template for studying the web in order to create a new media historiography. However, she continues the themes raised by Schneider & Foot and Brügger, pointing out that:

> Web archives that include only preserved (often partially preserved) digital files without proper contextualization will leave future web historians with the inverse problem to that faced by broadcast historians. *While broadcast historians have only had access to the extensive internal and external communications surrounding the audiovisual program, web historians will find themselves with partial access to digital files and scant evidence of the behind-the-scenes communications detailing the how-and-why of cultural production.* (p.391 – Emphasis added)

This is particularly pronounced when web historians and media researchers have to rely upon officially-sanctioned archives and materials. However, as both Uricchio (2009) and Schneider & Foot (2004) point out, there is now a greater imperative for there to be crossover between the role of the researcher and that of the archivist, with "new archival practices (… redefining) the archive from social agent to social practice" (Uricchio 2009, p.144), with researchers becoming more heavily involved in the production, propagation and maintenance of archive materials (Schneider & Foot 2004, p.119). Such practices are becoming apparent in unofficial spaces online (such as YouTube and torrent sites for video content, TV-Ark for screengrabs, industry and fan-blogs providing background context), which begin to fill in the gaps left by a partial preservation of digital content by official bodies.

This thesis, as well as utilising digital, "accidental" archives in order to piece together Channel 4's latter-day operations, will look to achieve its goal of producing fresh insights via a previously inaccessible resource: Channel 4 press packs from 1982 to 2004. These will be examined to determine the

promotion and scheduling of Channel 4's early programming strategies used to appeal to youth. These materials will allow for an analysis of other unheralded content, as well as a tracking of Channel 4's commitment to various types of programming, which in tandem with the use of materials from the trade press (such as *Broadcast*, *Televisual* and *Television*) and newspaper archives (via Nexis), provide vital contextual information and allow for counter-narratives to be created.

In addition, the combination of "old" and "new" media archives, as well as official and unofficial materials, allows for methodologically fresh research. Indeed, the methodology for this thesis ties into recent movements within academia towards what Huhtamo & Parikka (2011) have dubbed "media archaeology". Unsurprisingly, this involves uncovering discarded or forgotten materials in order to both grasp a more nuanced sense of the past, whilst allowing the researcher to make sense of the present media environment, using research tools of the future to do so.

When a combination of accidental archives such as YouTube, in conjunction with tools like the Wayback Machine and resources like the official Channel 4 press packs are used in conjunction with one another, then these moments of forgotten history, "invisible television" (mentioned below) and experimental failures can be discussed and placed within a more nuanced, alternative history. Channel 4's failures and inconsistencies, rather than the officially sanctioned histories which accentuate and emphasise the broadcaster's successes, illustrate an alternative and more complex version of its history. These include the moments of experimentation and innovation - things which are supposed to make up the DNA of broadcasters like Channel 4 - which were either poorly conceived, poorly marketed or introduced too early or far too late. The moments of flux that have been made unavailable by

broadcasters or ignored by media historians articulate, in the most vital fashion, moments of media history that showcase uncertainty and confusion. These are the moments between new media prominence and old media decay, as well as between the notions of broadcasting and new media networks and platforms. Such moments provide the opportunity to fill the gaps in existing scholarship surrounding Channel 4 specifically, as well as producing original material concerned with British television more generally.

Literature review

In order to execute these aims, the project will draw upon scholarship concerned with genre, broadcasting history, media and memory, new media and convergence, branding and promotional cultures, audiences and spectatorship theory, archives and archiving and social media. Such a broad array of themes and theories is necessary in order to extrapolate Channel 4's position within the wider televisual environment, placing the institution in the proper historical contexts in order to divine its potential future. Given that this project deals with "forgotten histories", the periods and programming that I wish to discuss often possess little in the way of critical writing upon them. My work therefore seeks to build upon and re-contextualise the often limited or dated pre-existing scholarship in the periods and fields within which this thesis operates.

The work of American theorists such as John Caldwell (2003, 2005) and Henry Jenkins (2004, 2006), usefully covers the industrial and the audience-oriented elements of convergence culture and its impacts respectively. Caldwell's (2003) "second-screen aesthetics", as was mentioned earlier, operates as an extremely useful pont of comparison to *spray*, as he discusses American television's attempts to cope with industrial and technological change, whilst outlining the impacts of such change on production and scheduling strategy. However, more recent research by Sharon Ross (2008) and Amanda

Lotz (2007a), which tracks institutional strategies for coping within the "post-network", "post-television" landscape, is extremely instructive on both thematic and methodological levels. Their research, rooted in the context of American television production, distribution and reception, provides a potential framework that can be further elaborated upon and adapted for a specifically British milieu, offering a synthesis of (para)textual analysis and critical history concerned with youth television and the spaces designed to house and promote it.

In the UK instance, Will Brooker (2001), Karen Lury (2001) and Davis & Dickinson's edited collection (2004) are key texts that either productively discuss the dispersed and "overflowing" nature of youth television texts (in the case of Brooker) or provide a useful insight into the genesis and development of youth television (in the cases of Lury and Davis & Dickinson). Brooker's work is useful in that it offers an opportunity to rework and update a concept, as was mentioned earlier with *spray*, into something that more accurately describes the textual and promotional strategies of British broadcasters, particularly Channel 4. Lury's work, on the other hand, is an extremely instructive work which combines historical insight into 1980s and 1990s youth televisual forms with theoretical rigour, touching upon themes and ideas that operate as a partial template for my own thesis. However, this research, although extremely useful, is also extremely dated and, with the exception of Lury's research, focussed around American textual forms.

Equally pertinent to my research would be the recent work of James Bennett, as well as the work completed by Brett Mills, Frances Bonner and Perry & Coward. Bennett's past (2008a, 2008b) and more recent (2012) research has focussed on the BBC and the independent production community, providing insights relating to the impact of new technologies on public service broadcasting. This research has interrogated the long-term impact of

multiplatform commissioning and content upon the televisual, developing research that balances between industry and academia. The ideas of "ordinary", "lost" and "invisible" television are each covered by Bonner (2003), Perry & Coward (2011) and Mills (2011) respectively, who discuss genres and forms of television that have often been neglected and elided within televisual histories. Such oversights have occurred either due to their perceived lack of cultural value (with some televisual forms, such as drama, comedy and documentary, being prioritised over others) or due to a paucity of readily available materials necessary to provide a more accurate, nuanced history. This work provides insight both to discourses of quality and economics, as well as to the importance of (digital) archiving practices in order to produce accurate/counter-histories and alternative narratives.

Such research therefore provides the rationale for producing chapters that work to provide histories previously forgotten, which are focussed on Channel 4's youthful fringe programming and scheduling experiments, utilising its discarded and disregarded ephemera to do so. In addition, the work of John Corner (2003) is extremely useful in terms of understanding the practices and methodological concerns involved in producing media histories (along with how a "lack" subsequently shapes how narratives can be produced), whilst Megan Ankerson's (2012) work on web histories articulates the difficulties in new media historiography, suggesting that new media researchers should follow the lead of broadcast historians in terms of method, offering a useful template for this work.

Indeed, recent developments within academia look to be displaying a recognition regarding the importance of utilising archive materials to produce more effective and nuanced historical research. "The History of Forgotten Television Drama in the UK", an AHRC research project announced in 2013 and undertaken by Lez Cooke and John Hill at Royal Holloway, offers up an

example of contemporary and comparable research to the aims of this thesis, providing solutions to the perceived gaps in television history and providing alternative histories in the process.

Chapter overview

The structure of this thesis is a chronological and thematically iterative reflection of Channel 4's strategy to appeal to youth audiences through various programming. In the process, it will examine various promotional and scheduling strategies that were deployed in order to attract this "marginalised" demographic. This structure will also reflect how Channel 4 steadily evolved its aims, identity and its relationship with both public service broadcasting and commercial imperatives. Each chapter will highlight the problematic balancing act the broadcaster faced due to its status and its strategic choices.

The opening chapter summarises the contrasts between promises, institutional rhetoric and Channel 4's agreed remit, with the actual operation, programming strategies and realities of operating in a gradually shifting televisual marketplace, with an increasing dissonance between rhetoric and practice illustrated post-1990 Broadcasting Act. Subsequently, a more pronounced shift by Channel 4 towards a youth focus, which this thesis aims to track through a series of case study "strands" chapters, is discussed. This is in order to track more pronounced attempts by Channel 4 to bridge between the public service aspects of its remit and the necessity to be profitable within a competitive marketplace, post-1990 Broadcasting Act, with the tracking of this balancing act being key to the aims of this thesis. Following this is a brief case study, focussing upon imported content, which provides an early example of Channel 4's stranding and zoning strategies, along with its attempts to balance between its disparate drives. It discusses how this content was subsequently re-purposed for youth audiences and held up as evidence of "innovation" or

"quality" programming, whilst simultaneously (in the case of genre television) being ill-deployed and erratically promoted. The case study culminates in a discussion of the intensified focus upon the building of brand identity for both Channel 4 and its programming through the increasing experimentation with digital promotion and online spaces, foreshadowing more extensive work on the topic in later chapters.

Following this chapter, the thesis then moves onto one of its primary aims: constructing "forgotten histories", which will be executed via a series of three "strands" chapters (continuing the themes raised in the opening chapter, along with providing further examples of strands other than the imports example featured within this chapter). The purpose of these chapters is to provide both "forgotten histories" of neglected programming and eras of Channel 4, as well as to re-articulate and re-frame existing histories of Channel 4 through the lens of youth, whilst examining the balance of its remit and its commitment to notions of "innovation". Each of these three strands chapters illustrate different conceptualisations of the youth audience by Channel 4 within distinct parts of its schedule. They each utilised content that had different purposes and fulfilled different elements of Channel 4's mission. The public service elements are covered within chapters on late night experimental TV and educational broadcasting, whilst the more commercial side of Channel 4 is tracked through the chapter discussing weekend lifestyle programming (following up on the commercial imports mentioned within the first chapter) . However, such definitions and demarcations are not necessarily that straightforward, with ostensibly commercial content often serving a public service function and vice-versa. These chapters are important in that they allow us to identify the broadcaster's actions and strategies over forgotten or neglected periods, foreshadowing Channel 4's contemporary endeavours and engagement with youth. They also provide fresh insight into how and why the broadcaster has

reached its current position, illustrating Channel 4's gradual evolution.

The second chapter examines Channel 4's late-night provision for cult, youth audiences, further expanding upon themes expressed within the case study discussed within the first chapter. Such a study is necessary, given the paucity of critical writing on this type of programming but also this particular historical moment which displays Channel 4's shift from analogue to digital distribution and content production. This case study covers vital discussions concerning Channel 4's usage of cult, experimental and 'trashy' programming within post-watershed scheduling to attract youth audiences. It places such programming in contrast with the quality imported programming discussed in the previous chapter, bringing into sharp focus the balancing act concerning Channel 4's desires and imperatives. These programming experiments and televisual ephemera, which I call *paratelevision*, articulate wider issues concerning Channel 4's positioning, strategy and sense of identity in the 90s. Channel 4's usage of new media spaces and user-generated content (UGC), along with their interrelationship with audiences/users which would lead the way for future Channel 4 initiatives, are also highlighted here.

The third chapter examines Channel 4's use of weekend daytime scheduling as a vital youth zone, highlighting Channel 4's increasing "lifestyling" of both televisual and new media spaces. Like the previous chapter, it fills gaps in historical and critical research surrounding this moment, which is particularly pertinent in that it showcases an increasing commerciality and focus upon branding by Channel 4 which would permeate throughout all the broadcaster's dealings in the twenty-first century. It operates as a contrast to the late-night chapter in that the music and lifestyle-centric content (via the 4Music zone/strand) was what supplanted experimental content, showing the more commercial relationship Channel 4 had with youth demographics. This chapter

provides a historical overview of youth/teen provision within weekend schedules, culminating in an extended analysis of the T4 branded youth strand and its featured programming, discussing the changing nature of televisual genre along the way. It also highlights Channel 4's increased reliance upon the exploitation and re-purposing of its archives and its talent, with an overt shift towards commercialisation, sponsorship and cheap entertainment, comparing this creative stagnation to another televisual youth brand that followed a similar journey: MTV. This culminates in an extended discussion of branding that foreshadows later chapters and Channel 4's reliance upon promotion in order to show innovation, rather than innovative content.

The fourth chapter examines Channel 4's educational provision for youth audiences, once again covering areas that have been lacking within academic research, whilst continuing to highlight Channel 4's problematic relationship with youth and its remit. Broken into three main sections - education, schools and learning - in order to demarcate between and add nuance to Channel 4's educative provision for youth over time, the chapter targets the issues core to Channel 4's situation as hybrid PSB/commercial publisher. It tracks the channel's gradual re-framing of what constituted educative provision, whilst displaying Channel 4's gradual culling of traditional education programming in favour of new media and interactive solutions which could be more flexible and potentially profitable. The final section, covering latter-day educational provision within the primarily non-televisual arena, showcases the potential such educational 'projects' could have for the fulfilment of latter-day public service. It also displays Channel 4's desire to innovate with multiplatform commissions which would also be seen within non-educational commissions across Channel 4's suite of channel-brands. However, it also highlights Channel 4's lack of long-term strategy and concerted commitment to public-service content, which was shown by the killing off of initiatives and

commissions which had little televisual presence or potential for commercial exploitation. Channel 4's balancing act subsequently compromised the coherence and quality of execution of both strategy and multiplatform commissions, raising issues that resurface in future programming to be covered in the seventh chapter.

Connecting these strands chapters with the final chapter is chapter five, an examination of Channel 4's digital youth channel, E4, which is compared with the BBC's own attempt at multichannel youth provision, BBC3 (latterly Three). This chapter is a bridge. Firstly, in terms of the thesis itself it bridges between the strands and final chapter covering digital platforms. Secondly, it highlights a moment of flux in broadcasting history between terrestrial and multichannel, as well as between televisual (old media) and digital (new media) content. The examples of E4 and BBC Three are used to highlight differing modes of youth provision, alternate perceptions of public service and varying institutional enthusiasms for new media provision. Comparisons between two broadcasters who are public-service oriented, show how they remained competitive and relevant within a multichannel environment in a similar, yet distinct fashion. This chapter outlines Channel 4's designing of E4-as-template regarding youth programming, commissioning and branding strategies, along with the cultivation of audiences and understanding of their consumption practices which would latterly be implemented by the Channel 4-as-channel itself. E4, like Channel 4's strands and zones, acted as an extended and uncertain experiment for what Channel 4-as-network was trying to achieve with Channel 4-as-channel, which is discussed in detail in the seventh chapter.

The sixth and final chapter examines present-day Channel 4, elaborating on elements raised throughout the thesis which highlighted Channel 4's strategic testing of programming, promotion and distribution practices. This

chapter offers a critical analysis of Channel 4's usage and development of video on-demand (VOD), social media and second-screen viewing, as well as its continued adherence to archive exploitation. However, through a series of case studies focussing on contemporary Channel 4 programming, which offer a critical examination of Channel 4 policy and strategy in terms of youth content and promotion, comparisons and parallels will be drawn between present-day Channel 4 operations and those experiments discussed in the earlier strands. The key argument throughout suggests that Channel 4's contemporary strategy is not one of experiment or risk-taking, but rather recycling and rebranding, with the innovation that the channel prides itself on being generated through its embrace of multi-platform promotional campaigns, rather than the pushing of formal televisual boundaries. The chapter also seeks to track the shift away from both Channel 4-as-broadcaster, as well as Channel 4-as-public-service-broadcaster, towards that of an aggregator-network that drifts across spaces, neglecting and renegotiating its remit at frequent intervals.

However, this thesis will begin by offering a brief outline of Channel 4's historical purpose and remit, subsequently laying out the series of key themes and debates which will recur throughout this thesis, beginning a process which tracks fluidic Channel 4 strategy in terms of policy, programming and promotion from its inception to the present-day.

Chapter 1: Youth and innovation at Channel 4 – The pre-history of *spray*

This chapter will be split into two main sections. The first will begin by briefly sketching out Channel 4's initial role and purpose, as an innovation-embracing, public service-obligated, youthfully-oriented alternative to both the BBC and ITV broadcasting services in the 1980s, tracking its gradual shift towards more commercially-oriented goals in the 90s, due to changing institutional, industrial, legislative and economic contexts.

An examination of dominant trends and themes within British television from the 1990s onwards will subsequently be undertaken. This will be followed up by a summary of how such programming was presented within a fragmentary and niche-oriented schedule which aimed to cater for a 'youthful' audience. Such a shift belied a growing reliance within television more generally on audience research and demographic targeting, articulating the problematic nature of conceptualising audience groups (and trying to appeal to them with appropriate content). It will also showcase the series of key debates that will run throughout this thesis, setting the scene for subsequent chapters. These include the highlighting of institutional tensions for Channel 4 in bridging between the public service intentions that lead to its inception and the competitive television marketplace which became an increasing concern from the 90s onwards, along with Channel 4's attempts at defining and catering for 'youth', as well as interpreting its goals of "innovation" in a number of ways.

The second section of this chapter will examine some of the strategies and themes outlined in the first with a case study of Channel 4's deployment of imported content, particularly within early evening scheduling. This was an example of the broadcaster endeavouring to provide an counter-programming alternative for previously neglected youthful audiences. whilst engaging in a

series of rebranding and repurposing exercises in order to refresh such content. The emphasis in this instance being on re-branding and promotion, exploiting older archive content and renewing it, in order for Channel 4 to fulfil its remit goals of innovation, experimentation and public service. These 'quality' imports propagated a version of public service whilst also providing the necessary commerciality, offering up another example of Channel 4's attempts to bridge the gap between public service and ratings success, as well as between innovative, boundary-pushing content and risk-free programming.

It will subsequently proceed to examine the sense of 'fit' and success of particular imports within early evening scheduling, which will also investigate issues of genre along with perceptions of both youth audiences and American television. It will culminate in a brief examination of Channel 4's treatment of science-fiction/fantasy series and how it often equated such material with 'teen TV' as part of a strategy to compete with BBC2's early evening youth zone, *DEF II* (1988-94). Two series which illustrate Channel 4's ill-advised attempt to conflate adult, serious sci-fi/fantasy series with teen TV were *Buffy* spin-off *Angel* (1999-2004) and the space-opera *Babylon 5* (1994-98). The section will also look at how Channel 4's erratic scheduling failed to maximise the potential of imported content, as the channel struggled between its obligation towards allowing innovative, homegrown content to flourish and to guarantee ratings success with imports.

However, the main thrust of this section will track how imported content went from a vital element of Channel 4's prime-time strategies that enabled it to create a discourse of 'quality' around the Channel 4 brand in the 90s, towards something that could be used as 'filler' in parts of the schedule designated for youth viewing, such as the Sunday youth zone T4. Channel 4's subsequent increased use of multi-media and exploration of digital spaces and platforms in

order to better promote and exploit imported content will also be investigated, whilst comparing Channel 4's strategy to American cable/network attempts. Two key case study examples that illustrate this shifting strategy, foreshadowing Channel 4's future digital endeavours, are *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) and *Lost* (2004-10). The former was a series that went from prime-time to Sunday morning, but allowed Channel 4 to create a template for future digital lifestyle/youth brands, whilst the promotion of the latter changed how Channel 4 operated in digital spaces and displayed the growing importance Channel 4 placed on innovation within digital platforms and their youthful users.

'Quality', 'innovation' and 'youth' – Pulling the strands together to solve "the Channel 4 problem"

Harvey (1994, p.124) argues that the germinal Channel 4 had two interrelated purposes upon its introduction; "to introduce stylistic and content innovations into British television and to introduce new industrial structures for the production of programmes". To summarise, it was a commissioner rather than a producer of programming, designed to operate as a "publisher" broadcaster, modelled after literary publishing houses (Bonner & Aston 2003, p.7). The initial impact that Channel 4, under its first Chief Executive Jeremy Isaacs, made upon British television may have been negligible in terms of garnering large audience figures for its programmes, but substantial in terms of developing the potential shapes that television could take, themes it could cover and audiences it could address. Indeed, its essential difference and 'alienness', particularly in comparison to the preexisting BBC and ITV services, was a potential hurdle for audiences to initially overcome and eventually adapt to (Stoddart 1992, p.3). It also served as encouragement for these more well-established televisual providers to try and adapt and evolve their services in order to incorporate Channel 4's innovations in youth audience address and style. Future Chief Executive Michael Jackson confirms this when he suggested that much of what appeared on the channel was later "reconstituted and reconceptualised" by the

competition ("Channel 4: Foresight & Afterwords", 1992, p.16). In the case of its industrial impact, Channel 4's introduction to British television was a means with which to disrupt the status quo of the BBC and ITV (Potter 1989, Harvey 1994, Crisell 1997) as a comfortable and staid duopoly, in its commitments to diversity and difference, along with innovation and experiment.

Up until the 1980s, public service broadcasting was the dominant model for television within Europe, providing a vital resource for the participation of citizens in the democratic process. However, the 1990s, with the 1990 Broadcasting Act in particular, proved to be a turning point in the overall conception of the media. Indeed, Murdock (2000, pp.118-123) describes a shift from an idea of "broadcasting" towards one of "television", moving from the principles of serving the public on a national scale, towards serving the whims of consumers within a global market. This was part of a more general shift, especially within British media policy first sketched out by the Conservative government in the 80s and 90s and fleshed out further by the Labour government, towards a free market ideology of competition and de-regulation (Smith 2006) and commercialisation (Syvertson 2003, Chalaby & Segell 1999). These policies were rationalised by a modernising governmental push towards digitalisation of the media, particularly in the later 90s (Born 2003), placing control in the hands of the companies who have been developing and subsequently implementing these technologies. As Chalaby & Segell (1999, p. 360) crucially point out, the companies in question were primarily commercially oriented, subsequently influencing the direction in which these technologies would be used.

This situation led to a loss of control and wresting of dominance from the terrestrial television providers such as the BBC and Channel 4 to a wider broadcasting network. This was primarily perpetuated through the satellite

television provider Sky and its competitors, such as BSB (British Satellite Broadcasting), which merged with Sky in 1990, along with cable TV/telephony providers. Although the BBC, as part of a consortium, endeavoured to counter these developments and regain some control via its involvement with the Freeview digital terrestrial platform - itself developed from the ill-fated ITV Digital platform in 2002. The additional governmental policies of deregulation of media ownership, allowing foreign interests to own and control the new satellite and cable markets (Murdock 2000) and creation of the unified communications regulator OFCOM in 2003, meant that the previously comfortable arrangement between public service-oriented terrestrial broadcasters was being shaken up (Petley in Gomery & Hockley 2006, p.43). These policy developments and changes in structure recognised the shift away from "scarcity" in broadcasting towards "choice" and also allowed Labour to smooth the path towards free open markets (Smith 2006, p.929). However, the disruption to terrestrial broadcasters was partially self-inflicted, through processes of change and rationalisation throughout the 90s.

In practical terms, the composition and shapes of British broadcasters in the 90s were significantly different from where these televisual institutions had been in previous decades, thanks in no small part to the Act's emphasis on both "competition" and "quality". In order to achieve a consistency of "quality" in order to compete in the television marketplace, a process of standardisation and greater professionalisation at Channel 4 in particular was required and subsequently achieved throughout the late 80s and throughout the 90s, causing changes in what was commissioned and how it was subsequently deployed.

The regimentation of scheduling and commissioning practices is described by John Ellis (2002, p.148) as British television's (and Channel 4's in particular) shift from "offer-led" to "demand-led" television and scheduling. From

broadcasters trying to fit the misshapen and uneven work of key producers or independent commissions into a schedule, to the channel stating exactly what it wanted from either the independent sector or its production units, leading to content that would fit the needs and requirements of an increasingly rigid schedule and its potential audiences. This increased compartmentalisation of the schedule was predicated upon the targeting of specific demographic groups seen as valuable to the broadcaster. However, this was often to the detriment to audiences not seen as "valuable", which were often ill-served by this new, tightly-targeted focus (Ellis 2002, p.145). This contrasted sharply with the initial Channel 4 remit to accommodate those who were not being catered for by other broadcasters, or the BBC's commitment towards universalism. The schedule, in this case, now "creates the demand for programmes" through demographic targeting (Ellis 2002, p.142), which in turn serve the needs of that particular timeslot and demographic, whilst competing for the latter with broadcasters who are chasing similar audiences. Such a rationale would subsequently have a significant impact on the type of programming that would find a home on British screens, whilst displaying evidence of an increasingly market and ratings-led programming ideology. This malleable and fluid approach to providing a televisual experience for audiences can again be summed up by Ellis who surmises that:

> ...scheduling is about managing the ever-present nature of television. It uses the immediate past as its most powerful referent in attempting to define the immediate future. (2002, p.144)

From the late 80s onwards, Channel 4 endeavoured to provide a greater sense of coherence and consistency in the channel's overall output with a measure of predictability being introduced within a schedule that had formerly lacked a sense of order and rigidity under previous management. The schedule subsequently had distinct segmentation and demarcation imposed within it, with one instance of this being the increased prevalence of programming 'strands'

and scheduling 'zones', along with seasons of programming. The science-themed *Equinox* (1986-2007) was one such example (Potter 2008, pp.170-75), with the documentary strand *Cutting Edge* (1990-2009), along with *Late Licence* (1993-6) occupying the late-night "zone" with thematically-organised content, being other representatives of this shift. BBC2's *DEF II* (1988-94), under the guidance of Janet Street-Porter, was an example of collected programming that appealed to distinct and youthful audience demographics, which was something that Channel 4 endeavoured to accomplish and evolved further throughout the 90s (which will be covered within subsequent chapters). These generically and thematically organised bundles of programming were placed within particular areas of the schedule throughout the year, allowing the viewer to have a greater, if not exactly precise, idea regarding the type of programming they could expect to find.

The use of strands were a means by which to organise the schedule, but also gave producers an idea of the types of programming that were desired by the channel, which constituted a development from Channel 4's earlier, looser scheduling practices. Stranding (and zoning) is an industry term, describing a process of bundling together thematically similar programming, such as science-oriented (*Equinox*) or educational content (*Channel 4 Schools*), into persistent, consistent slots within the schedule in order to retain specific audience groups (Deans 1999). As Ellis (2002, p.158) once again points out, Channel 4 commissioner Stuart Cosgrove was responsible for introducing "zones" into Channel 4 schedules, which were subsequently places where the channel could experiment with content. Different strands were placed at different fixed zones within the schedule, each of which operated in a particular fashion and offered distinctively different output. Examples of this in operation would be the post-Breakfast slot in the mornings or the 6pm slot that was utilised by other broadcasters for early evening news bulletins. These strands,

along with a gradual reliance upon content that could be redeployed elsewhere (such as American imports, discussed further below), gave Channel 4 a greater structure and balance, as well a means by which to expand audiences and therefore market share. However, their use had the potential to negatively impact upon levels of innovation, creativity and diversity espoused by the channel's early operations, through this repetition and greater structural rigidity (or at least, cause a reconceptualisation of how the channel perceived such terms). In addition, this 'niche-ing' of the schedule, mimicking cable and satellite channel practices, had the effect of fragmenting and fracturing Channel 4's brand identity during this period.

Channel 4's brand identity, via the programming that helped generate it, altered perceptibly with increasing rapidity throughout the 1990s. This is commensurate with swift turnover of commissioning staff within all departments, as well as the importation of particular 'quality' programming. Threads and themed seasons on animation (*Animate TV*, 1990 -), extreme or controversial television and film ("*Banned*", April 1991), short filmmaking (*The Shooting Gallery*, 1995 -), gender & sexuality (*Queer Street*, August 1998) and late-night content (*Late Licence*, 1993; *4Later*, 1999-2001), were chronologically bundled closely together. This programme-bundling (or stranding) was often an attempt by various commissioners to leave his or her mark upon the channel and its brand identity. Unfortunately, many of these strands were often short-lived. Many of the above strands and zones were hidden in the depths of the post-watershed/late night schedule, with such content not being designed for a mainstream audience. Such thematically organised programming is also associated with the (self-styled) contrary spirit of Channel 4 itself: as a boundary-pushing 'innovator', as well as a provocateur. This content also highlighted Channel 4's need to be seen to cater for specialist audiences as it did in the past. In particular, programming along the lines of gender, sexuality

and alternative lifestyle choices, which it was obligated to do, represented the masthead of many seasons and strands. With the branding and presentation of this material, the channel was also hedging its bets and looking to reach wider youthful demographics through this provocative mode of address, along with the ostensible "minority groups" at which such programming was being aimed at.

The riskier and less commercially-oriented content that could be witnessed within these various strands and zones had to be balanced out with content that was safer; thematically, economically and with regard to audience appeal. The intrinsic flexibility of factual entertainment formats provided terrestrial and satellite broadcasters with economic and creative latitude, as these could be made to satisfy programming requirements and quotas whilst remaining relatively cheap - a key feature in order to remain competitive and solvent within the marketplace. Established formats and successful formulas represented a reduction of risk, as they could be tweaked and reworked to fit the needs of various youthful demographics. This is something that British broadcasters in general progressively favoured, given the gradual turn towards an increasingly populist programming ethos (Cooke 2003) since the process of digitisation within television in the 90s (Murdock 2000, Deuze 2007).

Channel 4's ideals pertaining to innovation related more to elaboration upon televisual forms. Increasingly, the aim appeared to be to produce unseen formats, novel marketing and varied distribution, rather than actual programmed content that pushed boundaries thematically or aesthetically. Arguably, this is even more the case in the contemporary context, where "television" is developed outside of the medium, with the televisual having lesser prominence. In this instance, importance is not just placed in the source text itself, but rather in how it can be re-worked and re-interpreted by both audiences and those who are in charge of promoting these texts (which is something that is discussed at

length within the final chapter). This undoubtedly began with Channel 4's initial steps into new media and multiplatform usage with *Big Brother* (2001-10) and continues in the latter instance with such youth drama series as *Skins* (2007-2013). Crucially, in the case of its contemporary educational/schools provision (via 4Learning), Channel 4 has abandoned the traditional televisual text altogether in favour of multiplatform projects (more of which in later chapters). The core text itself could be seen either as a catalyst for these kinds of elaboration which would ensure a sense of brand loyalty (in the case of *Skins*), or as content that could be recycled or elaborated upon by the channel itself in order to maximise its "use-value" (as *Big Brother* was). Texts that allowed for or encouraged these kinds of practices could be held up as evidence of "innovation", both in terms of new or different production practice, as well as reception/consumption practices. Such practices were useful as a means to defend the channel against criticism that it had lost sight of its purpose, as well as its remit obligations, which were defined in the 2003 Communications Act as requiring "innovation" and "experimentation" to be woven into the fabric of the form and content of what it transmitted.

However, this raises a troubling question, which Cooke (2003, p.193) unpacks further in his work: is British programming of high quality, cultural value, social resonance and creativity being sacrificed due to the "market-led broadcasting environment"? It is certainly true that broadcasters often turned to programmes sourced from elsewhere or content which expected (fan and youth) audiences to further create or work on these texts in order to receive a satisfactory experience. Equally, content which endeavoured to replicate past successes, through a desire to avoid risk, via an endless recycling and refining of existing ideas and formats which can subsequently be sold to other televisual markets across the globe was also prevalent within schedules (Moran 1998, Potter 2008, Steemers 2004). This usage of and reliance upon formats, along

with the long-standing use of imported content, highlights a distinct schism in programming policy for those who purport to possess public service ideals. It also serves as a continuation of a debate outlined earlier; between notions and genres of "quality" programming (such as drama, comedy, animation) and populist "trashy" forms such as what Bonner (2003, pp.22-23) outlines as Americanised "infotainment" or simply "factual entertainment" (Moseley 2003, p.104). Dovey (2000, p. 83) develops these descriptors to their doomily logical conclusion as "trash" or "lowest common denominator TV", which is certainly an accusation that can be levelled at reality formats that have appeared on Channel 4, such as *Big Brother* and its spin-offs. The work of Cardwell (2005) neatly skewers this debate between "quality" and "trash" by discussing how "quality television" texts, such as drama series like *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000) and *Teachers* (2001-04), can actually be of dubious thematic/narrative merit thanks to their close association with soap opera tropes, whilst her later (2007) work tries to make the distinction between "quality" and "good" television – highlighting that they are, in actual fact, not one and the same.   However, the "quality" argument was often a ploy that was rooted in economics and profit, rather than an altruistic concern to provide the "best", in the public service sense, possible programming for audiences. It is important to note however, that regardless of broadcasters' best intentions, the need to be economically viable was increasingly taking a toll on such lofty ideals. Ideals such as providing public service content (or content that provided "public value") and the need to furnish diverse and marginal audiences with appropriate materials. In addition, it should also be noted that, like terms such as "innovation" and "youth", "quality" is an amorphous descriptor that shifts and evolves over time depending on industrial and cultural contexts, more effective in terms of understanding promotional strategy rather than content itself.

The various youth programming slots, zones and strands that were

scheduled and transmitted by Channel 4 (investigated in greater detail within the following chapters), correspond to British broadcasters' varied conceptualisations of what constituted "youth" or a youthful address. Enclaves were subsequently designed within the schedule, which were particularly prominent in the Michael Jackson era of Channel 4, in order to secure various youthful audiences via programming that was thematically associated (historically speaking) with youth interests. This approach didn't seek to serve a terribly sophisticated conceptualisation of youth tastes, often being organised around the themes of sex, drugs and music. An example of this *in extremis* would be *The Word* (1990-95), a late night series originated by Charlie Parsons that encapsulated this unrefined approach to youth programming. However, it also grabbed the attention of the desired demographic through its pushing at the boundaries of taste. This programme and formula also had spiritual successors. *The Girlie Show* (1996-97) replaced *The Word* – both in timeslot and sensibility - whilst Channel 4 latterly relied upon import programming such as *South Park* (1997 -) and *Jackass* (2000-02) to appeal to this (mostly male) youth demographic. Such content did however raise another age-old issue connected to Channel 4 content –the potential for complaints and (negative) publicity on the grounds of taste and decency (Vale 1997).

This process of compartmentalisation was an example of 'niche-ing' the schedule, or as Deans (1999) puts it "vertical zoning", attracting specific demographics through the deployment of thematically focussed content. This was evidence of Channel 4 being influenced by the branding and scheduling practices of specialised cable and satellite channels (such as MTV), who were beginning to encroach upon Channel 4's youth audiences. However, this overwhelming desire to reach youth audiences can be seen as an early example of *spray* (although this phenomena more accurately describes a later, digital-centric era of Channel 4). *Spray*, as mentioned within the introduction of

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this thesis, was the encapsulation of Channel 4's efforts (in this instance) to cast its net wide in terms of attempting to appeal to youth audiences. Channel 4's (and indeed other broadcasters, like the BBC) early zoning and stranding experiments, in order to capture youth audiences, are examples of *spray*. *Spray* can be seen through the efforts of the broadcaster to attract a wide and varied selection of valuable "youth" demographics. *Spray* differs from Williams' (1974) *flow* or Brooker's (2001) *overflow*, as well as Caldwell's (2003) "second-screen aesthetics", in that it is defined by rapid and reactionary impulses, rather than carefully planned and stable strategising, to wider political and policy-based contexts, as well as the actions of its competitors. It summed up the difficulties faced by Channel 4 caused by its choice to focus upon "youth" as a viable means by which to consistently satisfy its remit. Its fluidic strategy and the addressing of an audience which was difficult to define and subsequently address consistently or effectively lead to issues for Channel 4, illustrated within later chapters. With that said, Channel 4's stranding and zoning experiments sometimes offered up a varied selection of diverse programming and thematically esoteric content which often pushed aesthetic and formal boundaries, as part of Channel 4's attempt to creatively interpret its remit.

However, this strategy was often to the detriment of other audience groups. As Ellis (2002, p.145) has observed, when the act of "competitive scheduling" is engaged in, it is inevitable that other, less potentially profitable demographics are neglected. It is also worth noting that when Michael Jackson and Tim Gardam (director of programmes) arrived at the channel, a point was made to attempt to clear away any programming with limited youth appeal, as well as a focus upon the need to discover new ways to reach youth audiences (Potter 2008, pp.236-238). Furthermore, this ostensibly edgy, risk-taking sensibility, which was considered necessary in successfully appealing to the lucrative youth demographic, was offset by extremely conservative and frugal

budgeting for these slots. Reliance upon programming formulae, such as formatted entertainment and imported American content, as a means by which to consolidate audience share, was a further dilution of risk but also diluted Channel 4's 'otherness' compared to alternative broadcasters.

There also did not appear to be a single, unified notion of what exactly constituted the tastes and preferences of the "youth audience", or indeed who such an audience was other than a series of demographics, resulting in programming that espoused "youthfulness" or had a "youthful" tone, something that was not demographic-specific. This is certainly an accusation that can be levelled at a multitude of music-oriented programming, which was often either classified by broadcasters as "youth" programming, thanks to the use of contemporary musical artists and bands, or conflated with youth programming. In short, they were seen as one as the same, in a somewhat simplistic understanding that this was what this demographic wanted (Smith 1994).

This perspective is borne out by research carried out by the IBA, the precursor to the ITC and latterly OFCOM, from the late 70s and throughout the 80s. It is something that similarly preoccupies Rachel Moseley's (2007) research into television drama for teens throughout the same period. The IBA's research, primarily correspondence between the IBA and the ITV companies, along with research reports studying teenagers and children, showcases their apparent issues with conceptualising these audiences and their tastes. A example of this lies within the March 1987 IBA report "Youth and Television: Some Patterns of Behaviour, Appreciation and Attitudes". The report displays the issues with the sophistication and accuracy of said conceptualisations, with it stating that "ambiguities attend any attempt to define a clearcut group termed 'youth'" (1987, p.2). Earlier research, as well as the 1987 report, endeavoured to move beyond simplistic (and often dubious in terms of accuracy) metrics

such as audience figures. This was in order to garner a more nuanced appreciation of youth audiences via such measurements as patterns of "audience appreciation" and preferences, as well as showing an increased awareness of the difference between children and teenagers. However, much of this work on taste broke down into somewhat simplistic binaries – comedy and action shows were "good", news and current affairs was "bad/boring", whilst sport was interesting for male audiences. It can be summarised from this research that "youth" as a group is unsurprisingly heterogeneous, with idiosyncratic tastes, often liking programming that it was not "expected" to like. It was also suggested that this audience group was not terribly enamoured or spent concerted time with the medium of television itself (pre-Channel 4), which subsequently increased the difficulty involved in conceptualising their tastes and preferences. This difficulty in understanding youth audiences and their tastes is something that extends into the present day, despite the increased sophistication of contemporary audience research.

Nowhere was this difficulty, in terms of understanding youth, as well as scheduling content for an *idea* of youth audiences rather than *actual* youth audiences, more apparent than in Channel 4's embrace of imported programming to target such audiences, which will now be used as a brief case-study example to also illustrate Channel 4's attempted use of commercially-oriented material to fulfil its public-service remit.

Innovation through imports? How Channel 4's process of repositioning, repurposing and rebranding led to a rethinking of youth programming policy for digital environments

> ...imported programmes change their meaning and become part of the British cultural context because of these assimilation processes. This essentially means that American television programmes in Britain have become different themselves: assimilated into the British system, they become part of the general emphasis on public service broadcasting and therefore seem removed from their commercial origin. (Weissmann 2009a, p.42)

> …imports also offer a much-needed alternative to domestic productions, as they help enliven the schedule, and sometimes even attract up-market viewers. While it could be argued that most broadcasters could fill their entire schedule with domestic productions, if so demanded, the resulting quality and range would be limited…Bought in programmes, therefore, offer diversity: in terms of style, genre, production values and culture. (Rixon 2007 p.101)

Channel 4 and Cecil Korer (Commissioning Editor for Entertainment until 1984/85) initially bought particular imports to the channel in an attempt to confer the brand identity and overall essence of this programming to Channel 4, which would, in turn, contribute to its branding and remit-oriented endeavours, as well as attempting to (as Weissmann suggests) reposition them away from their "commercial origin". Indeed, imports were also utilised as a quick way to build a channel's brand identity, which is something that is brought up in Fanthome's (2003) overview of Channel 5's 1997 launch and initial operating period, whilst as Rixon (in the quote at the start of this section) notes, such content operated as an "alternative", which was a driving force of Channel 4 in its early period.

It was important, given Channel 4's status as commissioner-publisher of programming, for the broadcaster to transmit selected content that fulfilled its mandate and conveyed a brand identity that had specific demographic appeal, whilst conforming to its public service requirements. The rather amorphous descriptor of 'quality' allowed it to choose a diverse range of bought-in content, justifying its transmission in a variety of ways through Channel 4's self-promotion mechanisms (press packs). The equally vague term 'cult' was also deployed to promote certain programming (something that is expanded upon within the late-night chapter). These justifications were not always consistent or compelling however, with the use of 'cult' often being attached to vintage imports, or for genre programming. Upon closer inspection, both discourses (of 'quality' and 'cult') can be unpacked to uncover how Channel 4's promotion of such programming often altered over time, adjusting to fit the perceived tastes of youth audiences, whilst its perception of such content's utility was certainly

fluid.

The utility of this programming to a new broadcaster is self-evident, particularly one with Channel 4's early remit of innovation and diversity. Channel 4's early use of MTM's roster of programming (such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Hill Street Blues*), although not guaranteeing ratings success, allowed for flexibility in audience address, repositioning these texts for youthful audiences via promotion. In addition, the formal innovation within this programming allowed Channel 4 to justify their purchase and repeated (re)deployment throughout the schedules. The tag of 'quality' associated with these imported MTM productions provided a rebuttal to arguments pertaining to a perceived shift away from Channel 4's initial remit obligations, although as Johnson (2007, p.12) observes in relation to the broadcaster's relationship with such content:

> Imported US programming has been a part of Channel 4's schedules from its inception, including drama and comedy series such as Cheers, Roseanne and Hill Street Blues. However, as a central part of Channel 4's raison dˆetre was to boost the independent television production sector in the UK, *foreign imports have historically been problematic for the channel*. (Emphasis added)

This suggests that despite such material being vital in bolstering Channel 4's scheules and establishing an association with "quality", there was the danger that it neglected (or failed to promote) its drive towards innovative, experimental home-grown commissions, which represented its public service obligations, in favour of more commercially-viable and ratings-oriented content.

In terms of the continual re-use of imports, Derek Kompare's (2005) research interestingly repositions the repeat within American television as an opportunity for creativity, or "repetition as innovation" (p.170), rather than a cheap and easy schedule-filler. The former rationale, rather than the latter, could be used as a defence for Channel 4 scheduling and procurement policy

within the late 80s and early 90s. The "innovation" that Kompare discusses refers more to the *deployment* of programming by American cable channels in comparison to their network counterparts, rather than the content itself. Although as Kompare (p.171) insists, these channels didn't merely "run" this content, "they strip it, promote it, repackage it and recombine it". This creativity in the re-presentation of content, imported or otherwise, was something that could be evidenced during the post-1990 Broadcasting Act period for Channel 4. It raises interesting questions concerning the nature of Channel 4's practices of "innovation", along with how it chose to interpret its remit after shifts in the legislative and broadcasting environment, causing a greater imperative towards commercial viability. Imports (and using them in order to appeal to "minority" youth audiences) were a safe way in which to bridge the gap between the channel's mandate for public service and its need for profitability, although their use arguably elided Channel 4's imperative to take risks and support British independent production.

The process of counter-programming imports against other broadcasters' schedules (providing the "alternative"), along with stripping (utilising specific series in the same slot across the weekly schedule), which was increasingly utilised throughout 90s-era Channel 4, was an extremely useful way to draw attention to the channel, as well as a means by which the channel could define itself against its terrestrial competition. As time passed, this strategy evolved into competition with BBC2 for the same audiences in this scheduling slot. This meant that these channels were often mimicking each others' youth-oriented output, with import procurement and content commissioning often appearing reactive, rather than as part of a cogent, structured long-term strategy. Rixon, in his discussions of BBC2 (and its *DEF II* strand) points out that;

> As more 'quality' American productions appeared from the 1980s onwards, so these were used by BBC2 to target certain niche audiences, for example with the development of the 6–7pm slot which aimed to attract a

youth market…Such a timeslot, throughout the following 15 years, has often been filled by a number of American programmes (…) that have managed to attract a young male audience (2007, p.107)

This can be seen in the use of niche 'teen TV' along with genre programming, such as horror/sci-fi, with the two channels having comparable schedules at any one time throughout the late 80s and 90s. Even after the BBC cancelled the dedicated *DEF II* strand in the early 90s, BBC2 continued to show youth/cult programming in the early evening weekday slot (Johnson 2005a, p.125). Replication of procurement strategy can be seen on numerous occasions, with BBC2 transmitting *The X-Files* (1993-2002)*, Buffy* and *Star Trek*, Channel 4 had *Dark Skies* (1996-97)*, Angel* and *Babylon 5* as competition. The issue, however, was in the promotion and deployment of this niche and youth content, with both Channel 4 and BBC2 finding it difficult to consistently promote and target programming defined as 'cult' or 'youth'. As Jancovich and Hunt (2004, p.27) pertinently point out:

> …the problem is that cult TV is defined not by any feature shared by the shows themselves, but rather by the ways in which they are appropriated by specific groups. There is no single quality that defines a cult text…

Channel 4 appeared more comfortable dealing with sitcom or drama imports, mainly as they could be straightforwardly subsumed within the promotional discourses of 'popular' and 'quality'. However, when it came to more niche television – television either of a critically maligned genre (science fiction, horror, fantasy) or of hybridised genres (increasingly prevalent throughout 90s television) – the channel found scheduling and promoting them in a consistent and accurate fashion to be troublesome. Programming which could be placed under the banner of 'cult TV' was as potentially difficult to successfully schedule and promote as the term 'cult TV' was to conceptualise, as Jancovich and Hunt mention above.

These issues are unpacked further by Catherine Johnson (2005a, pp.124-129) who discusses "telefantasy" series broadcast on UK television

throughout the 90s. She mentions the issues in scheduling and promotion of such programming on both BBC2 and Channel 4, along with the clashes between this hybridic, cult content and the role and purpose of public service providers. What is most interesting, and relevant to this chapter's purpose, is the latter's classification of the former as "youth programming". As Hill and Calcutt (2001, p.3) complain in reference to two of Joss Whedon's more well-known works;

> Neither BBC2 or Channel 4 perceive imported cult TV as suitable for primetime, preferring to rely on UK factual, lifestyle and drama to attract their niche adult audience. By classifying *Buffy* and *Angel* as children's programming UK terrestrial TV is unable to respond to the expectations of fans, who are predominantly 16-35 year old primetime viewers. Clearly UK TV is out of step with cult TV and its fans.

They continue by suggesting that cult TV (or "telefantasy") series are ill-regarded by terrestrial broadcasters, with regular scheduling and promotion of them not being a priority, with these series often not receiving a sustained or consistent run within the schedules (p.4). The work of Catherine Johnson (2010, pp.142-43) is once again instructive here, as she postulates that there were two types of cult TV pre-*X-Files.* Either American network shows like *Star Trek* that garnered a cult audience in syndication, or cable shows like *Mystery Science Theatre* (1988-99) produced for niche audiences, with the processes of fandom and fan loyalty being key to both types' success. These two types are equally evident in Channel 4's strategies in terms of its use of imports – cult audiences for its vintage imports and niche audiences for its 'quality imports'. Arguably, such terms act either as obfuscatory rhetoric, used to mask such programming's actual role in schedules, or as evidence of broadcaster uncertainty regarding the content's best possible application. Both terms have been used in tandem with a desire to reach youth audiences, although the usage of such terms and the treatment of the programming that it was attached to was hugely uneven. The use of language, along with the scheduling and promotional strategies of Channel 4 within its press materials in relation to two

key shows which highlight Channel 4's problematic relationship with both "cult" and "youth": *Babylon 5* and *Angel*.

Babylon 5, despite initially being heralded as an award-winning series within Channel 4's promotional materials and positioned as 'quality' television (Channel 4 Corporation 1994b, p.32), was initially placed in the early evening youth slot of the schedules, but was subsequently repositioned around them at regular intervals during its time shown on Channel 4 (from 1994-1997). This included operating as a lead-in to 'alternative' and 'cult' materials that could be witnessed within Channel 4's late-night programming strands (such as 4Later, discussed in a following chapter), and away from its early promotional positioning as 'quality' television. This series of scheduling shifts, from early evening to Sunday morning and eventually late-night mirrors American network scheduling practices, where series are often rapidly shunted around schedules in order to discover their optimum position. However, in the case of *B5*, this sequence of scheduling shifts was not necessarily strategic or designed to maximise the series' effectivity amongst various demographics, but instead suggested that schedulers nor the channel itself did not know how to promote it, nor get the most out of it. The confusion over its 'optimum position' within Channel 4 schedules, spread to a confusion over the genre which *Babylon 5* belonged to (science-fiction), which Channel 4 conflated with youth. Channel 4 disregarded the issue that this *specific* series lacked any intrinsic (or potential) youth appeal which other imported series (and indeed other sci-fi series) broadcast by Channel 4 had possessed previously. *Babylon 5* fell victim, in this instance, of Channel 4's drive towards repurposing and reshaping its imported content for the desired youth audience, regardless of the level of fit between such content, its scheduling slot and the audience itself.

Angel on the other hand, like its predecessor *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

(featured within BBC2's early evening youth slot)*,* sat rather uncomfortably within the 'teen TV' bracket, whilst its generic placement within fantasy meant that broadcasters were reluctant to class it as 'quality' drama and schedule it accordingly. It appears that the mere purchasing of this youth-oriented programming was seen as enough to be fulfilling Channel 4's mandate of providing alternative (quality) content to under-represented audiences (youth). It is also apparent that little consideration or long-term strategy was put in place regarding how best to use this content, or whether it was appropriate or best used for the scheduling zones marked out for youth audiences. Its consistent movement around the schedules, from prestigious Friday evening scheduling to an eventual Sunday night graveyard slot (11.15pm-1am, Sunday 3rd December 2000) where the channel subsequently played double-bills of episodes that would not be suitable at any point other than post-watershed, mirrored Channel 4's treatment of *Babylon 5* and cult content generally. However, this meant that the series often acted as a lead-in to the late-night 4Later strand, with the extreme content and 'cult' labelling making it a suitable fit. This also meant that fan-audiences of *Angel* would have to scour the schedules in order to find out when exactly it would be screened, with the lack of scheduling consistency (similar to BBC2 and *Buffy*) often upsetting the audience demographic the channel was seeking to court (Hill and Calcutt 2001).

Angel along with *Babylon 5* are instructive examples of Channel 4's attempts at rebranding 'quality' imports through scheduling and promotion – what was quality could also potentially be 'youth' or 'cult' (or both). In these instances, the scheduling and promotion of both series emphasised different textual and thematic elements in order to fit the part of the schedule that was often demarcated as a 'youth' slot (early evening). When scheduled elsewhere (such as late-night), the 'cult', 'risque' elements of these texts were emphasised. This is an example of Channel 4 trying and often failing to work out how to best

use this content *as it went along*, rather than integrating these programmes into a coherent strategy. Such strategies, as was highlighted by Hill and Calcutt (2001), were not well-received by the fan-audiences of such content. However, the channel was to find new ways of exploiting and recycling its 'legacy' imports as time went on, as they performed a vital role in the evolving brand identity of Channel 4 beyond televisual spaces, as Johnson (2007, pp.7-8) highlights:

> …in the era of TVIII branding emerges as a powerful and commercially important strategy in two different ways. 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. (Johnson 2007, pp.7-8)

When Michael Jackson and Tim Gardam (director of programmes) came to Channel 4 in the late 90s, they made commitments to innovation, decreased reliance on imported programming, a greater presence in and preparation for a digital environment, along with an increased emphasis on homegrown commissioning (Brookes 1997). However, this is not to say that Channel 4's long-standing affiliation with American imports was to cease at this crucial juncture for the channel. Indeed, imports would prove to be just as vital in re-articulating its (increasingly youth-focussed) brand identity within an increasingly fractured media marketplace, as Rixon (2007, p.108) confrims when he suggests that:

> Increasingly many small broadcasters, such as Channel 4, C5 and SkyOne, use American programmes to help and support in the creation of their brand identity…In recent years, especially for smaller channels such as Channel 4 and C5, American programmes have become an important part of their brand image…American programmes rather than eroding the identity of a channel (…) are now often used to provide some of its distinctiveness in relation to competing channels.

As Grainge (2009, p.99) re-iterates in relation to the Jackson era, "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" (Emphasis added). This allowed Channel 4 to go after "the lucrative youth market" by screening this quality content on its digital youth channel, E4. Such a strategy was important in re-enforcing Channel 4's affiliation with quality programming in a digital context (as will be discussed in later chapters). Equally important was the type of content it chose to buy in, with Johnson (2007, pp.12-13) discussing how Channel 4 often procured HBO programming in order to profit by association with the latter's reputation for creative, cutting-edge and innovative output, which is something the former strove for. In this instance, there was a sense of brand complementarity between the two, with HBO's content often being a good fit with the brand identity Channel 4 was striving to achieve.

Channel 4 wasn't the only broadcaster endeavouring to cement their reputation and identity through this use of American programming. Their terrestrial rival Channel 5 (latterly Five) established at the tail-end of the 90's, along with satellite channel Sky One (which specialised in 'entertainment'), were also competing with Channel 4 for the pick of the 'quality' imports. However, as Michael Jackson worked to establish his own interpretation of the Channel 4 remit and brand (through non-televisual enterprises), it was how this programming was promoted and disseminated, particularly in new media spaces, that was of increasing pertinence, along with this content's potential re-usability.

Dawson's Creek, the teen drama series created by filmmaker Kevin Williamson (responsible for the *Scream* film franchise) and sourced from the WB network in the USA, is an interesting example of Channel 4's increasing shift towards maximisation of imported youth television's use-value. It also demonstrates a continuation of the promotional balancing act between 'quality'/authorship and emphasis on commercial and ratings success. In the

1998 "Spring and Summer Nights and Seasons" press pack (Channel 4

Corporation 1998a), under the "US Drama and Comedy" section, the passage

mentions that "the channel emphasises quality rather than quantity with the

three hottest hits of the US season", highlighting *Friends* (1994-2004), the

dramedy *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) and the animated "bizarre cult hit" *South

Park* (1997 -) as proponents of either ratings success, innovation/quality and

determinedly niche content respectively (1998a, p.3). The final sentence reads**:**

> And in a much earlier slot, the channel exclusively premieres the number
> one drama among American teenagers, *Dawson's Creek*, a provocative
> story of teenagers in a Boston suburb as they awkwardly -but-
> enthusiastically come of age. (Channel 4 Corporation 1998a, p.3)

This statement imparts the information that the series will be utilised within the

early evening schedules, that it is ratings-winning 'teen TV' in the US and that it

fits with Channel 4's own mandate of the time: to aim at youth audiences

through challenging, risqué content. An extended overview of the series is

provided within the pack, raising issues of authorship as a marker of quality.

However, an intertextual link to cinema is also provided in its creators' other

career as a filmmaker, along with the lead character Dawson's cinematic

preoccupations and the innumerable self-aware, ironic visual and narrative

references to film within the series proper.

The series began transmission on Saturday 2ⁿᵈ May 1998 in the 7-8pm

slot. It was preceded by *Friends,* a consistent mainstay of the Channel 4

schedules in the 6.30-7pm slot. Combined with extensive coverage within the

press packs, strong support for the series was displayed by Channel 4, giving it

opportunities to succeed and garner a substantial youth audience. At the end of

the month however, the channel decided to give the series an additional push

within a different part of the schedule. On Sunday 31ˢᵗ May at 12.45-1.40pm,

viewers were given "another chance to catch yesterday's episode". This was

the first week that the channel decided to screen the series in both the Saturday

evening and Sunday lunchtime slots, the latter operating as a pre-existing space for youth content and repeated imports (including the aforementioned *Babylon 5*). Interestingly, on Sunday 10th October 1999, a selection of imports and teen TV pilots were broadcast under the banner of T4. Such use of pilot episodes - particularly US pilots - was symbolic of new beginnings and new meanings for this programming, setting in motion an association with recycling that imported content would continue to retain from this point onwards (further covered within the T4 chapter).

Channel 4 also saw fit to move the series into a late-night screening, as it had with *Babylon 5* (and as it would with *Angel*), with the episode "The Scare" being broadcast at 11.15-12.05am on Saturday 31st October 1998, being marketed as "a special Halloween episode". *Dawson's Creek* draws parallels here with previous imports shunted into late-night by dint of their content being inappropriate elsewhere, but in this instance is promoted as innovatively thematic scheduling. Given Kevin Williamson's affiliation with the horror genre (*Scream*), this was a more effective and convincing scheduling ploy that could fit with the overall *Dawson's Creek* brand, which aimed to operate beyond the restrictive definition of "teen television". Indeed, when the following series was promoted, it raises various issues concerning genre and audiences:

> The *smash hit drama* Dawson's Creek (early-March) returns for a second series, following the changing relationships and coming-of-age concerns of a group of teenagers in the small coastal town of Capeside, Massachusetts. This new series introduces three new characters who are sure to ruffle *the emotional feathers* of Dawson Leery (JAMES VAN DER BEEK) and his close-knit community. *Written by Kevin Williamson, (creator of Scream and I Know What You Did Last Summer) Dawson's Creek has touched a nerve with teenagers the world over.* (Channel 4 Corporation 1999a, p.9 - Emphasis added)

This small paragraph combines "smash hit drama" with references to quality through authorial control, as well as links to cinema, whilst also raising ideas of 'soapiness' ("emotional feathers"), suggesting that the series is a generic and

thematic hybrid that can be enjoyed by multiple audiences, dedicated fan audiences included. This 'genre blending' is something that Wee (2008) raises in relation to many WB network texts, including *Buffy* and *Dawson's Creek*, suggesting a marker of 'quality television'. It was also a method of brand differentiation, defining and demarcating a selection of thematically and aesthetically similar content at discerning youth demographics.

It is in the digital provision for more dedicated audiences that is of most interest here though. Sony Pictures created dawsonscreek.com (as well as capeside.net) as a space where audiences could further explore the *Dawson's Creek* text and express their fandom of it. The functionality of the site is detailed by Brooker (2001, p.461), who suggests that "…the internet visitor to dawsonscreek.com is offered e-postcards for mailing to friends, bulletin boards to discuss plot developments between episodes and online merchandising such as *Dawson's Creek* bucket hats and t-shirts.", with a focus upon commerce and the purchasing of 'identity' through official merchandise being immediately apparent. However, it was designed to operate beyond a simple commercial function, as Bandy (2007, p.14) explains:

> The synergy between TV shows and their companion Web sites serves multiple functions. Show Web sites can provide users with information about a show, give them ways to interact with the show, and foster their investment in the show's stories and characters. Underlying these functions, the site producers are trying to create a flow between the show, its Web site, and back again. Sony Pictures Entertainment does this with *Dawson's Creek* by offering users numerous features and original content related to the show.

As both Brooker and Bandy go on to explain, the online arm of the televisual text should be seen as a means by which to expand on and diversify the experience of the core brand, with the broadcast show "apparently intended to serve as the starting point for further activity rather than as an isolated, self-contained cultural artefact" (Brooker 2001, p.461). Valerie Wee's (2004) extended research on the WB youth network (launched in 1992) which was

responsible for a slew of teen TV texts throughout the 90s, provides further context. This 'post-network' strategy of 'synergy' and crossover/'hyper-intertextuality' was part of wider industrial shifts towards conglomeration and consolidation to exploit global markets, with online spaces being vital in disseminating branded content to international audiences (2004, p.95).

The Channel 4 "microsite" for *Dawson's Creek* is essentially a pale facsimile of the official American site, although it did allow for a modicum of interactivity through forums set up to discuss the show, its stars and other lifestyle elements, such as fashion and music. This somewhat tokenistic online functionality would be something of a feature for Channel 4's roster of import shows, with little sense of innovation in terms of using online spaces to do anything different or groundbreaking, up until its procurement of ABC's *Lost* in 2005. Similar to *Dawson's Creek* in that neither scheduling nor conventional old-media promotion were not immediately prioritised by Channel 4 in relation to new import series, *Lost* showed a marked shift by the channel which propagated '*Lost*-as-brand' across a range of media platforms. This was recognition by Channel 4 that it needed to entice its desired youth demographic towards its bespoke new media spaces. Rather than to suffer the fate of other, less fortunate imported series in regards to promotion or scheduling (such as *The Sopranos* or *Alias*), *Lost* was designed to operate both as 'appointment viewing' and 'digital destination', combining both old and new media ideologies. As Grainge (2009, p.96) suggests, it operated as "a multi-purpose franchise… made to translate across technological formats".

However, this is not to neglect the importance of television as a medium for reaching audiences. As Gillen (2011, p.71) suggests, the scheduling of imported content forms a large part in the reception and perception of such programming, stating that:

> Once the rights to a series like *Lost* are acquired by an international channel or cable/satellite provider, it controls how the series is promoted and scheduled, once again demonstrating that scheduling is often the industrial factor that most dramatically shapes reception. In the U.K. *Lost* was impacted positively by its…acquisition by Channel 4 as it was scheduled alongside a roster of U.S. series…that gave it a quality TV patina.

Although Grainge, once again, adds nuance to this, by suggesting how *Lost*'s scheduling on Channel 4:

> was designed with a mind to capturing the loyalty of an audience attuned to the interactive pleasures of reality television…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. (2009, p.107)

This suggests that Channel 4's usage of formatted entertainment, such as *Big Brother* and a range of homegrown lifestyle programming and imported series, such as MTV's *The Osbournes* and *Jackass*, performed multiple functions. Their increasingly in-built interactivity (text voting, microsite games), used in order to attract youth audiences, was a way to prepare those audiences for imported programme-brands that encouraged a similar or even greater level of audience interactivity and fan-work.

However, scheduling was not the only way to understand *Lost*-as-programme-brand. Promotion, branding and the expansion of the narrative into non-televisual spaces which encouraged interactivity, as *Dawson's Creek* tried to do, albeit in a somewhat limited and crude fashion, were all necessary elements in making *Lost* on Channel 4 successful. Online spaces endeavoured to maximise the use-value of televisual texts. Whereas previously rescheduling and repeating programming was a key way to freshen up and re-brand imports, like *Dawson's* migration from Saturday night to Sunday morning on T4, online added another potential level of textuality to the programme brand. It also allowed for additional bespoke content to be created and provided value to Channel 4-as-(digital)-brand. Channel 4's commitment to these new digital

spaces can be witnessed in relation to *Lost*, as discussed within their 2005 Annual Report, which states:

> Channel 4's online services provide background information for hundreds of television programmes each year, from education to entertainment. *On what was probably the most sophisticated site ever devised to support a TV programme*, aficionados of Channel 4's hugely popular drama series *Lost* were able to interact with characters from the series through a bespoke game and dig deeper into the mysteries of the plot by accessing a dedicated website. (Channel 4 Corporation 2005b, p.21 – Emphasis added)

The site (*Lost Untold*) was Channel 4's expensive and extensive cross-platform promotional push for *Lost*, which subsequently won the "Campaign Digital Award" in September 2006, followed by the "AOP Online Publishing Award" in October of the same year (Channel 4 Corporation 2006, p.30). *Lost* represented a moment in Channel 4 history that reflected a shift away from traditional promotional methodologies, such as within the paper press packs which were phased out in 2004. Instead, the promotional push was buttressed by poster and press campaigns, 'microsites' within the Channel 4 online portfolio of websites, which were increasingly prevalent as a means to promote the programme-brands (along with Channel 4 itself), as well as with innovative television promos and trailers. The trailers themselves subsequently pushed at the boundaries of what could be considered televisual promotion (Gillen 2011, Grainge 2009). Promotion was an area in which the channel deigned to hold true to its original mandate, ironically innovating in the arena of being commercial and selling product - including itself as the product.

With *Lost Untold*, Channel 4 constructed an elaborate digital tease, in order to generate viewer interest in *Lost*-as-brand prior to the broadcasting of the pilot episode. Through the use of The Wayback Machine, July 17th 2005 is the first available date that the *Lost* microsite can be seen on channel4.com (Channel 4 Corporation 2005a), with the site comprised of the words "NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS" and a link to a trailer. On August 5th 2005

however, this has changed a little. The trailer link still remains, but there is also a teaser link, suggesting that "YOU ARE ONE CLICK AWAY FROM GETTING LOST", leading to a *Lost* intro. The following day (August 6th), this space has been expanded with a new link, asking "ARE YOU A SURVIVOR?", which leads to a page featuring the *Lost* logo and two further links: "I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE..." and "I AM NEW TO THIS...". The former link leads to an interactive and image heavy site, which allows the user to acquaint themselves further with key members of the *Lost* cast – although this is done in a rather oblique fashion. It is created like a puzzle, with no answers being immediately obvious or forthcoming, which creates a sense of mystery around the narrative and the brand. The latter link however, shifts the user to a representation of an airport arrivals board. Clicking on it highlights a Sydney flight and then proceeds to display a series of events to the user prior to a plane crash (tying into the actual *Lost* narrative). It follows up with a series of fake TV news bulletins outlining the details of a plane going missing, further creating a sense of curiosity and mystery around the narrative, as well as foreshadowing the elaborate, dense narrative world of the series. Finally, on August 10th 2005, there are two Web Archive snapshots. The first is almost identical to the others, but with the link now reading "LOST UNTOLD: STEP INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS", with the second snapshot, taken later that day, now depicts the full *Lost* microsite, complete with elements that would be expected of such a space - character and episode guides, galleries and forums.

Judging from the elaborate construction of *Lost Untold*, it is evident that Channel 4 wished to create buzz around the *Lost* brand, putting time, effort and no little budget into creating mystique and excitement around it, encouraging users to engage, interact and discuss. It endeavoured to build a compelling and detailed narrative universe, further adding to the mystique of the brand by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, through the online promotional

spaces that it was responsible for. However, it is worth examining the consequences for the programme-as-brand, which links into and contributes to the identity of the channel that initially bought it, when that content is subsequently broadcast by another channel. This is something that occurred frequently throughout the 2000s, with Five taking numerous imported series off the hands of Channel 4 (*Alias*, *Angel*, *Dawson's Creek*). Five subsequently made these series part of their own prime time scheduling and branding strategy, mimicking Channel 4's 80s and 90s reputation as a home for 'quality' imports. *Lost* also moved away from Channel 4, with Sky One outbidding the broadcaster for the rights after two seasons. The move subsequently caused friction within fan viewing communities as the series shifted from free-to-air. It also provoked tension between cable/satellite providers in the UK, who subsequently undertook branding strategies based around differentiation of their services, along with the sense of exclusivity that exploiting a programme brand like *Lost* gave them within the environs of pay-TV (Dobson 2007).

Lost Untold would set the tone for promotional innovation for future Channel 4 imported content, as well as home-grown commissions (as will be demonstrated within the final chapter). The treatment of such content in a scheduling sense however, as has been mentioned here, suggests that Channel 4 sees such material in a pragmatic manner – there to be redeployed for various purposes and for various youthful audiences until its use-value has been exhausted. For Channel 4, imports were interchangeable and could be moulded and reshaped for a variety of purposes. This repositioning, rebranding and shifting scheduling however was often to the detriment of fan-audiences dedicated to particular genreric content (sci-fi, fantasy) in the 90s. These audiences received programming that was not only heavily edited, but which jumped around the schedules, making consistent commitment to such content (as well to Channel 4 itself) a problem. Such actions belied the lack of

sustained, consistent planning and strategic thinking by Channel 4 concerning such content and its audiences. However, as can be seen within the *Lost* and *Dawson's Creek* examples, audience interactions with programme-brands within non-televisual spaces would become increasingly important to the channel.

Conclusion

A key issue relating to Channel 4's attempts to appeal to youth audiences, is that of achieving balance, bridging a gap between market demands, remit obligations and its own strategic choices. Specifically, reaching a difficult-to-placate group with content that appeals to it thematically, aesthetically and which (latterly) encourages interactivity. Achieving this balance whilst remaining both true to the parent channel's core brand values along with governmental policy pertaining to notions of public service, attempting to bridge the gaps between its promises and what it could realistically achieve. would be something that would cause Channel 4 consistent problems. This raises a series of questions that this research will endeavour to tackle in the following chapters. These primarily revolve around whether or not programming that was being produced for these scheduling zones and programming strands (and latterly for digital channels such as E4 and BBC3), was being produced for an *idea* of what the youth demographic is *supposed to be or should be* (rather than who these audiences actually were or what they wanted). These chapters will look at whether these strands and zones were fulfilling a function more akin to the spirit of Channel 4's origins (experimental, innovative, educational, public service), or its post 1990 Act reality (commercial, compromised, formatted/standardised). As Lury (2001, p. 22) postulated in reference to earlier forms of youth television, rather than producers trying to attract a specific audience with television texts:

> (…) the form and content of youth programming became detached from

> its original audience and developed as an aesthetic that would be
> adapted by many other television programmes (…)

Over the course of these next chapters, an examination of a series of scheduling strategies will be undertaken, detailing the iterative experiments of Channel 4 across its history and a variety of scheduling points. Such an endeavour is undertaken in order to investigate how successful and coherent the aforementioned balancing acts and attempts to reach youth audiences were (and how these attempts evolved over time). Importantly, they will endeavour to question Lury's assertion; that youth programming had become a standardised form, a "look" or recyclable format/strategy. These chapters will track Channel 4's struggle to stay true to its experimental, innovative and risk-taking origins, gauging the success of little-discussed threads, strands and zones designed for youth demographics, whilst placing these attempts within the contexts of the broadcaster's desire to stay solvent. They will also track Channel 4's increasing emphasis upon the importance of digital spaces, of relationships with audiences and with content that moved beyond the televisual in greater detail. The second chapter will now proceed to investigate the content and audiences of a neglected and little-discussed part of television schedules: late-night.

Chapter 2: "Do not sleep" - Channel 4's late-night experiments in *paratelevision* showcased its balancing act between innovation and exploitation

This chapter will examine how late-night (as scheduling slot) was utilised as an experiment by C4 to "mainstream" cult media (Hills 2004, 2010). The practice involved testing cult and niche programming's suitability for wider audiences, either on the main C4 channel itself or within new programming strands or digital outlets. More importantly, such practices allowed C4 to examine the usefulness of new media platforms, along with the activities encouraged within them, for mainstream audiences. The ideas of 'cult' and 'trash' will be also discussed vis-a-vis 'quality' and 'mainstream', in order to question not only their meaning and utility, but also their usefulness and viability. Importantly, the relationship between 'cult' and C4's late-night zone 4Later will be examined with regard to the latter's use of the former as a bridge between Channel 4's commercial imperatives and its need for innovation, diversity and experimentalism.

The chapter also offers up a much needed historical overview of British late-night television's origins, making an explicit link between this part of the schedule and youth audiences, as broadcasters endeavoured to discover new ways of appealing to such demographic groups. It outlines how Channel 4 deployed various strands throughout the late 80s and 90s, such as *Late Licence* (1993-96), *Shooting Gallery* (1995 -) and *Dope Sheet* (1997-99), along with specific youth-oriented programming like *The Tube* (1982-87), *Network 7* (1987-88) and *The Word* (1990-95). These acted as a series of exploratory templates, both thematic and aesthetic, that subsequently lead to a bespoke zone being created in the schedule. This scheduling zone was designed to cater specifically for cult cultures and youth audiences willing to stay up later or returning from evenings out, leading this part of the schedule to be dubbed (in the press) as "post-pub" programming.

Following this, the chapter is broken into three sections which add nuance and specificity regarding the type of content featured within C4's late night schedules. The first section examines the history of experimental television featured on Channel 4, tying into its remit to transmit content unseen elsewhere on British schedules which pushed aesthetic and thematic boundaries. However, this section highlights the often problematic nature of such material for Channel 4, whose often confrontational and resolutely uncommercial nature clashed with the increasingly important commercial imperatives of the broadcaster, culminating with an analysis of the satirist Chris Morris's short-lived *Jam* (2000).

The second section discusses public-access television and early user-generated content. These topics foreshadow the important role of audiences in shaping what would appear upon a multitude of screens and spaces controlled by Channel 4, with *The Adam & Joe Show* (1996-2001) operating as an ideal synthesis for C4 between cult culture, cheap content and populist modes of address. However, it questions the nature of control and the limits of such access within British broadcasting, with amateur production and audience participation being controlled and moderated by commercial concerns, in the context of Channel 4.

The final section is a discussion of *paratelevision*, an adaptation of Jeffrey Sconce's (1995) "paracinema". It will go on to articulate the interrelationship between cult culture and the mainstream, particularly practices of appropriation and re-appropriation, mentioning various late-night textual examples. The discussion culminates in an extended analysis of 4Later in conjunction with its role as a repository for *paratelevision*. More importantly, the section will also highlight how 4Later represented C4's last concerted attempt at

experimentation to attract youth audiences through its schedules.

"24 hour party people" - The origins of British late-night television

> The youth audience...proved particularly difficult to pin down. Initially, programmes aimed at this audience were scheduled in early evening slots (6-7.30pm) only to be confined later to night-time viewing (10pm-3.30am) (Lury 2001, p,20)

Lury (2001, pp.19-20) ascribes the reasoning behind the increasing shift towards youth by broadcasters being due to the pressing need to fill a 24 hour schedule. New media technologies, developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, particularly the video recorder, allowed for and encouraged alternative viewing habits. This meant that programming could be watched at alternative times or entirely different material could be viewed if scheduled content wasn't to the viewers' tastes. These time-shifting practices were most pronounced amongst youth audiences. Lury (p.20) also highlights how terrestrial broadcasters "extend(ed) and develop(ed) their schedules" in response to the knowledge that "different audiences were now understood to watch at different times and for different reasons". The provision of late-night content and shift towards round-the-clock broadcasting was partially undertaken by regional ITV companies, such as Granada and LWT, in the 1980s. Such strategy was in response to the IBA's threat of creating a separate franchise to supply programming for this slot (Vale 1987, Rawsthorn 1987).

Between 1986 and 1988, numerous attempts were made to provide a solution for the late-night timeslot, with varying degrees of success, including Channel 4's initial foray into late-night programming, *NIGHTIME* (1987). This explicitly responded to ITV companies' own specialised late-night schedule that came into being around the same time - with LWT's *Night Network* (1987-89) and Granada's *NIGHT TIME* (1988-1995) being two prominent examples. LWT's attempt was particularly noticeable for its bespoke branding, interstitials

and junctions, marking it out as separate from the ITV networked programming, whilst echoing similar graphical presentation and modes of address that were being deployed on Channel 4's *Network 7*, another LWT creation. *Night Network* itself ran from 1-4am on Fridays and Saturdays, 1-3am on Sundays. However, due to issues with advertising ("Lack of ads kills LWT's youth show", 1989), poor distribution on the ITV network (it was never broadcast nationally), along with inadequate understanding and inaccurate collation of audience figures (Douglas 1989), it was shut down in March 1989.

Channel 4's attempt shared similarities with *Night Network*, with the press materials stating that "Nightime has its own on-air identity with special graphics and captions rather than an announcer*"* (Channel 4 Corporation 1987a, p.34), setting it apart from the main channel and superficially introducing the notion of 'a channel within a channel'. Although new programming had been commissioned specifically for the slot, it didn't push boundaries or innovate meaningfully in terms of aesthetics or form, with talk shows (*Don't Miss Wax*, 1987-88) and discussion-oriented programming (*After Dark,* 1987-91) featuring within it. Other programming featured within the strand, particularly film content, whilst tying into C4's preoccupation with cinema, was thinly-veiled recycling and re-branding of C4 archive content. This was a recurring theme of all terrestrial late-night scheduling, given that it represented a cheap way to fill extended schedules, whilst also foreshadowing future C4 strategy.

Throughout the 90s, the post-Watershed part of the schedule was seen by C4 as a means to re-emphasise its early commitments to elements of programming, producers and audiences that had historically been under-served. In this instance, animation and short film were both rewarded with strands and series that dwelt within late-night weeknight schedules, with *Dope Sheet* (1997-1999) and *The Shooting Gallery* (1995 -) being examples of this.

The Word (1990-95) was another example of programming that was used to fill this timezone, although like the 80s youth music show *The Tube* (also affiliated with late-night), the programme began life in an early evening slot and was re-tooled to suit the purposes of the night-time schedules. It is no accident that Charlie Parsons gave the production company that produced the show the moniker of 24 Hour Productions (latterly Planet 24), in a sly nod in recognition of the channel's needs for a greater quantity of content that could fill the spaces that had opened up within the schedule (Potter 2008).   The series followed in the footsteps of earlier talkshows and magazine programmes that attempted to push boundaries and challenge expectation. *The Word* took to this task *in extremis*, deliberately endeavouring to garner publicity for the channel, much of it adverse (Lawson 1995, Khan 1995).

Such programming, followed by tonally-similar series such as *Eurotrash* (1993-2007) and *The Girlie Show* (1996-97) pushed thematic and taste-based boundaries within what were formally staid formats (the magazine show, the talk show). This was in order to reach a specific youthful audience, namely the 'post-pub' male demographic. However, this programming strategy was one of diminishing returns, partially for the recognition that boundaries could only be pushed so far before regulatory action was taken, but mostly down to the nature of youth programming itself. Such formats had a "built-in redundancy" (Lawson 1995), given that they were often purported to represent the cutting-edge of youth television, rapid replacement by a new or tweaked format was inevitable in order for the form to remain fresh. However, as Datar (1998) points out, this version of "yoof TV" was not only tired and derivative, it also wasn't reaching youth audiences effectively. Indeed, it was representative of television being produced for an idea of "youthfulness" rather than for a specific notion of a target audience, following format patterns and aesthetic strategies that were previously successful, rather than pushing boundaries.

Late Licence (1993-96) was an early, yet non-bespoke attempt to solve the late-night 'conundrum'. It was also an attempt to repurpose and re-brand material within the Channel 4 library, following in the footsteps of *NIGHTIME*. To achieve this, this content was presented by a rotating coterie of "celebrity" presenters and comedians affiliated with youth culture (something that will be discussed further in the T4 strands chapter). Personalities such as Eddie Izzard, Paula Yates and Mark Lamaar showcased their talents, not for the first time on C4, in order to connect with yet another youthful demographic. *Late Licence* acted as an early template for what eventually became 4Later, whilst also setting the branding agenda and tone for such strands as 4Music and T4. It operated as a presenter-led trawl through the C4 programming archives, re-presenting retro material and ephemera through the lens of irony. The use of the time-slot also assumed that a particular type of youthful viewer would enjoy this re-branding, in a blunt attempt to manufacture a veneer of cool or cult exclusivity to otherwise unremarkable material. Bill Hilary, Commissioning Editor (Youth) outlined the strand as "... a chance to show some of the programmes from Channel 4's library that have enduring popularity" **(**Channel 4 Corporation 1993a, p.48). Interestingly, C4's additional description of the strand via the press materials sets the tone for later attempts to follow, whilst outlining the likely viewing practices of those who were likely to watch such content:

> Starting tonight, and continuing each Friday and Saturday night until 18 December. Channel 4 will offer insomniacs the chance to catch up on a *cult collection of music, film and entertainment programmes from the Channel 4 library*, linked together each weekend by a choice celebrity or two. (Channel 4 Corporation 1993a, p.48 - Emphasis added)

The use of the term "cult" in televisual terms is suggestive of niche content that has limited appeal, but also small, dedicated viewerships that make the effort to watch it (Jancovich and Hunt 2004). Such content could be televisual or filmic ephemera, with TV series from the 60s and 70s, animation, exploitation films or

series which provide commentary upon popular culture itself all being examples. The latter could conceivably be conceptualised as *meta-paratelevision:* TV that is aware of and discusses cultural trash and detritus, whilst also adhering to the aforementioned aesthetic of such programming. Such terminology ('cult', 'trash') would prove to be insistent in relation to much late-night content, which had the effect of setting such material apart from the rest of the schedules, as well as setting it against 'quality' materials broadcast within the prime-time schedules. These definitions also had the effect of marginalising any other generic signifiers, as well as such materials' other purposes and functions, such as that of experimentation. Ironically, *Late Licence* was a true experiment, as the commissioner in question had little idea whether or not the strand would be watched and had no means by which to measure how many were watching (Slot 1993). This also echoed the ITV companies' early failed attempts with such programming, with such experiments proving short-lived, as well as unsuccessful and unpalatable with audiences.

None of the above examples were a tailor-made, bespoke solution to the issue of late-night scheduling, which became more pressing when Channel 4 removed the "Close" from its schedule and broadcast continuously from the beginning of 1997 onwards. Late-night was increasingly the only place where material such as alternative animation and short-form filmmaking could be shown without alienating daytime and prime-time audiences. In addition, the slot operated as a potential space where C4's long held commitment to such genres and the potential audiences for them could be adequately fulfilled. 4Later represented an attempt to combine such programming as part of a loose zone, comprised of interstitial clips and junctions, interactivity and twists on formatted entertainment. The zone operated on the premise that audiences who would be up at that time would appreciate such material collected together under a 'brand enclosure', endeavouring to provide something different with a

sustained, cohesive cult aesthetic. However, despite the fact that a zone was created to house such programming, this did not mean that 4Later transmitted content consistently. It sprawled across the schedule from Thursday to Sunday, leading to a problem familiar to early viewers of Channel 4 - in homage to the channel's chaotic 1980s scheduling practices - content was not always scheduled on the same days or times (on a week by week or series by series basis).

The following three sections will look to examine examples of programming that did end up within this post-watershed, late-night slot. They will articulate, with varying degrees of acuity, Channel 4's balancing act between commercial success and innovative, diverse material, showcasing what exactly was sacrificed in the process of evolving Channel 4's brand and programming identity towards the turn of the century.

Experimental television, Chris Morris and excess

> In broadcasting, experiment is perhaps more about the structures of the medium than the creation of specific texts (Ellis 2007, p.136)

The above quote relates to Ellis's discussion of *Visions* (1982-85), a series dedicated to showcasing non-mainstream films and filmmakers. Ellis emphasises C4's scheduling of this content, which he kindly refers to as "experimental", but in reality was haphazard, giving it little chance to become a "recognised micro-brand" (Ellis 2007, p.144) within the schedule. This also emphasises, even in the early years of Channel 4, how content was subservient to the needs of the schedule, the latter itself often being the place at which any experimentation could happen. Given that *Visions* was frequently lost within the depths of late-night, the association of experimental or risqué content with graveyard scheduling was established early on at Channel 4, with the *Eleventh Hour* (1982-88) strand being an example of this. It included content that

showcased Channel 4's ostensible commitment to cultural and ethnic diversity (in relation to youth audiences), with documentary/workshop programming such as *Framed Youth* (1983, broadcast in December 1986), which discussed LGBT issues and used available technologies innovatively (winning the BFI Grierson Award for Best Documentary in 1983), being broadcast post-11pm. Such scheduling also guaranteed a limited audience, with those who watched such programming doing so deliberately out of dedication to the subject matter.

Channel 4's mandate to showcase content underrepresented by other terrestrial channels was also expressed through Animate! Projects. Animate!, in conjunction with the British Arts Council, had been working with Channel 4 since 1990, the latter acting as exhibitor for work created through the former. The project was an example of C4's impulse to promote creativity and innovation through the endeavour of independent companies or individual filmmakers. Animate! allowed individual pieces of animation to be broadcast on C4, either as part of blocks (such as the *Beyond Dope Sheet* special in 1999, part of 4Later) or scattered throughout the late night schedule. However, post-4Later, the amount of animation and aesthetically or thematically challenging content was greatly reduced, as the channel shifted direction towards more easily repurposable materials. This was due in part to expense in the case of animation and lack of re-use value and 'quality' in the case of much other late-night content.

Following *Late Licence*'s short-lived attempts to fill the void of the late night schedule, as well as following up the aforementioned Animate! and *Visions*, were two strands commissioned in the mid 90s. Once again, these showcased the channel's requirement to provide innovative and experimental material. They also represented the channel's intention to create, in Stuart Cosgrove and Nicky Wood's words (C4 Commissioner for Indie Film and Video and

Programme Buyer for C4 respectively) a "channel within a channel" (*The Shooting Gallery* press booklet, 1995, p.2). Channel 4's intention was to provide a thematically or generically organised block of programming within the schedule, that catered for specific youthful niche audiences. *The Shooting Gallery,* a strand concerned with the showcasing of short film, was described as "...represent(ing) the apex of creativity and collectively present(ing) an eruption of counter culture ideas and stories that explode off the screen" (Channel 4 Corporation 1995e, p.1), suggesting a space for independent or student filmmakers to have their voices heard without going through "development hell". The strand was also described as an "all-night cinema club", further suggesting a sense of exclusivity and association with cult cultural practices (Channel 4 Corporation 1995c, p.41). *Dope Sheet,* an animation-centric strand, ran for three series, ending in 1999 and was intermittently deployed within the 4Later zone. Series such as *Onedottv* (2001)*,* along with *Mirrorball* (1999-2000), also operated in a similar vein, highlighting animated experimentalism through the innovative use of new technologies.

However, experimentalism wasn't just restricted to animation and short-film within late-night scheduling. Other televisual forms were being stretched and tweaked in order to push at the boundaries of genre and aesthetics, leading to an often uneasy and queasy experience for audiences. An example of this wooziness at work within the late-night time-slot was Chris Morris's comedic experiment, *Jam* (and also *Jaaaaam*).

Jam/Jaaaaam **(2000)**

Chris Morris's previous comedic and satiric excursions were characterised by their willingness to push generic boundaries to breaking point, such as news media within *The Day Today* (1994) and current affairs/documentary forms within *Brass Eye* (1997-2001). The highlighting of tropes used within such texts

was excessively amplified for comedic effect. An extensive focus upon the visual, with computer graphics in particular being forefronted within both series, was in order to articulate the innate meaninglessness of visual signs within the genres. Excess, as has been mentioned by both Sconce (1995) and Eco (1987), is a key element of what makes cult media (and television in this instance) recognisable as such. Focussing upon the overriding visual aesthetic presented throughout *Brass Eye*, a process of graphic extravagance and excess is at work, especially throughout the credits sequence, but also through the graphical representations of facts and figures within the programme. However, *Brass Eye*'s employment of this technique and usage of graphics acts as an ironic, satiric critique of other televisual products, in an example of what Collins (1997, pp.196-197) refers to as a "hyperconscious re-articulation of media culture by media culture". Such a statement easily describes much of the cult programming contained within Channel 4's late-night zone. *Brass Eye* highlighted both the draining of meaning from visual representations of information and showcased the inherently superfluous and distracting nature of them.

Within both *Jam* and *Jaaaaam* (2000), the use of a distinct and unsettling aesthetic operated in order to create thematically and formally experimental texts. The flow of dissonant and surreal imagery, along with sound, harked back to earlier challenging and experimental programming featured on Channel 4. Morris's modus operandi of confrontational satire, particularly apparent within *Brass Eye* and continuing here, also acted as a point of contention. It was particularly acute, given C4's balancing act between its remit of innovation, experimentation and diversity and its commercial concerns to produce ratings-led, sellable content. With *Jam* and indeed most of Morris's work being distinctly non-commercial and confrontational in its tackling of various taboo themes, concerned in the main with sex, drugs and bodily function, it tipped the

balance too far in one direction for C4's liking (as will be seen below).

The sense of excess within *Jam* also meant an additional pushing of the limits of what could generically be recognised as comedy, leading to Channel 4's problems concerning how best to brand and market the programme. The series itself was a combination of thematic elements and sketches taken from the BBC radio series *Blue Jam* (1997-99), with audio-visual distortion and grime that pushed it into the realm of the experimental. It also embodied the tenets of remix culture, as this series was essentially a re-versioning or visual re-imagining of the radio show, with *Jaaaaam* being a remix of a remix.

Indeed, as Mills (2007, p.188) observes:

Jam (and its remix, *Jaaaaam*) can be seen as experimenting with the aesthetics of comedy, (constituting) another assault on the assumption that factual and fictional television must have distinct and distinctive identities...*Jam*'s visual style is unlike anything else seen on television...more akin to the extreme fringes of art cinema...(with) sequences...(bleeding into) an undistinguished mass...

However, Mills also suggests that there are limits to *Jam/Jaaaaam*'s experimental mandate, which is still essentially bound by "conventional" comedy aesthetics (2007, p.189). Such daring aesthetic strategy and melding of genre, in conjunction with Morris's own somewhat uneasy relationship with Channel 4 (Lawson 2000), meant that this experimentalism was to suffer a scheduling fate similar to a programme mentioned by John Ellis earlier – *Visions*. Channel 4's own sense of flux in the late 90s, regarding its brand identity and programming strategy, also exacerbated the situation.

What is perhaps most intriguing about the series is the complete disregard shown to it within Channel 4's own press materials. However, given C4's previously negative experiences with *Brass Eye*, a sense of caution and reticence is inevitable. The first episode was broadcast on 23rd March 2000, but

the C4 schedule for that week shows no mention of a new work by Morris, neither was there the usual fanfare contained within the "Additional Information" section of the press pack whenever a new series is announced. All that is shown for 10pm (roughly the subsequent scheduled slot for the series) on that date is…"TBA" (Channel 4 Corporation 2000b, p.25). The following week does however show a listing (30th March, 10.30pm), described in Morris-esque terms which leave potential audiences in little doubt regarding the content.

> ***jam 2/6*** *"… A jilted man wreaks revenge on his ex-girlfriend by firing himself into her face through a woodshredder ... a disease called "the gush" makes porn stars ejaculate to death ... a woman bribes a plumber to fix her dead baby ...features AMELIA BULLMORE. DAVID CANN. JULIA DAVIS. KEVIN ELDON and MARK HEAP. They were kept for three months in a basement with only milk and weapons. All facial expressions are real. CHRIS MORRIS: "It's a fucked-up lullaby - halfway through it you'll fall asleep with a grin in your stomach and the most disgusting look on your face."* (Channel 4 Corporation 2000c, p.28)

> ***jam 4/6 (13th April 2000)*** *"The concussed horror that is jam continues its six-week run. Featuring AMELIA BULLMORE, DAVID CANN, JULIA DAVIS, KEVIN ELDON and MARK HEAP.* (Channel 4 Corporation 2000d, p.28)

> ***jam 5/6 (20th April 2000)*** *"Part five in the series that seems to dredge our nightmares and turns them into twisted jokes. Featuring AMELIA BULLMORE, DAVID CANN, JULIA DAVIS, KEVIN ELDON and MARK HEAP.* (Channel 4 Corporation 2000e, p.28)

Jaaaaam (the remixed edition of *Jam*) is even more difficult to locate within the schedules.

> ***4LATER: jaaaaam (29th April 2000)*** *"4Later presents an even woozier version of CHRIS MORRIS's jam"* (Channel 4 Corporation 2000f, p.10)

It is only after examining the Saturday night (29th April 2000) and Sunday morning (30th April 2000) schedules, that *Jaaaaam* can be located within 4Later zone, broadcast at 12.10am. Like *Jam*, no mention or additional promotion is provided within the press materials. Its containment within the confines of 4Later suggests that the mere broadcasting of challenging material, regardless of timeslot, is sufficient in order to satisfy Channel 4's remit obligations, if not fans of Morris's work. After this initial run, *Jaaaaam* was swiftly crammed into

the recesses of the schedule and never re-broadcast, signalling a scaling-back of further experimental, boundary-pushing content by C4, either in the late-night slot or anywhere else within its schedules. It also signalled an increasing shift towards a more conservatively populist, less risky (and risque) programming and commissioning strategy within late-night (and arguably across the rest of C4's schedules), from the turn of the century onwards.

Public access television, early UGC and the abortive takeover of mainstream TV by fans

Takeover TV (1995) followed in the footsteps of the imported *Manhattan Cable* (1991), a programme that was dedicated to showcasing the 'best' and 'worst' of public access cable television in the USA (Wareham 1995). It also paralleled the BBC's *Video Nation* (1994-2001), which was a rather more restrained and low-key version of public access ("Risque Business", 1995). American public access programming, as outlined by Linder (1999), was often utilised to give voices to local communities and acted as "a resource for local civic organisations" and philanthropic groups (1999, p.39). However, the lure of public access was that it represented "uncensored television" that allowed for a varied selection of programming and diverse production agencies (1999, p.38). The UK variants on the other hand, generated by World of Wonder, who subsequently went on to produce *The Adam and Joe Show* (1996-2001), were geared more to fit in with the channel's late night strategy throughout the 90s. Such strategy primarily consisted of commissioning low-budget, low-risk, low-brow content, representing an extreme representation of the uncensored television discussed by Linder (Pearson 1995).

However, *Takeover TV* was limited in the function of "public access" by both its nature and intent. As it operated as a series transmitted by a public service broadcaster, it differed from the American televisual examples of entire niche cable channels being devoted to showcasing submissions from the

general public and amateur media producers. Instead, *Takeover TV* was a half-hour anthology show, operating as a compilation of submissions. As Rees (1996) points out, thanks to its shortened nature, there was a sense of editing and curation at work, where the best submissions were cherry-picked and broadcast. A process of "quality control" was operating within *Takeover TV*, which would not be the case with US public access TV. Additionally, many contributors to *Takeover TV* were literate in televisual practices, making many submissions self-aware and contrived, rather than earnest ("Risque Business", 1995). Operating counter to conventional "clip shows", such as the UK examples *You've Been Framed* (1990-) and *Harry Hill's TV Burp* (2001-12), the material here is consciously, rather than accidentally, generated to produce comedic entertainment. As Rees (1996, p.10) continues, "*Takeover TV* is, to all intents and purposes, a sketch show pooling the work of talented unrecognised comedians", rather than an opportunity for ordinary people to get their voices heard. The show acted as a surreptitious test-bed for untried talent, rather than a space for democratic media production. Content featured by the programme was often provocative and went out of its way to amuse and entertain, rather than operate under any auspices of public service. However, despite the enthusiasm for the under-exploited potential of public access shown by certain commissioners, such as Fenton Bailey (Wareham 1995), *Takeover TV*'s output was, by its very nature, uneven. In addition, the thematic preoccupations of many submissions lead to Channel 4 getting "cold feet" regarding the presentation of the concept (Wareham 1995).

The Adam and Joe Show grew out of *Takeover TV.* The programmes shared a production company (World of Wonder), with Adam Buxton and Joe Cornish being involved in presentation and performing duties on *Takeover TV.* This lead to an initial four episode series of *The Adam & Joe Show* broadcast in 1996. As Didcock (1996) observes, it fitted perfectly with much "youthful" late-

night programming, being "loud, vulgar and…a little juvenile" as well as being preoccupied with popular culture itself. Indeed, its tone drew parallels to content generated by another well-known youth-oriented station - MTV. However, the main element which made it recognisable as late-night content was its lack of budget (£35k per episode in the first series - Rampton 1996), along with its creativity with limited resources, emphasising its home-made, DIY aesthetic.

Adam Buxton himself (in Rampton 1996) described the show as "a TV version of a fanzine" - placing it firmly in the arena of fandom and cult culture - content for fans of popular culture made *by* them. *Adam & Joe* blended elements of earlier 80s and 90s magazine shows, such as *Network 7,* along with comedy sketch shows popularised throughout the latter part of the 90s (Connolly 1997). In short, it resembled something closer to the democratic aims of public access television, particularly in comparison to earlier attempts at the public access style, whilst potentially having a wider appeal to a certain youthful audience demographic. *Adam & Joe* superficially offered up a British example of US public access television. In reality, it operated as a parody of the form, as well as a postmodernist and self-aware dialogue on the nature of television itself, particularly its formal codes and conventions. It also fit perfectly into the late-night programming ethos in place at C4: ephemeral in nature, ironic in address, obsessed with the minutiae of popular culture and cheap to produce. Importantly, the show managed to straddle both a level of mainstream popularity - scheduled before the 4Later block, it lasted numerous series and the channel felt confident to commission spin-off shows such as *Adam & Joe's American Animation Adventure* (2001) - as well as cult fandom.

The show therefore represented Channel 4's overall goal for many future late-night or youth television commissions. John Caldwell's (1995) work,

specifically his focus on "trash TV" and "visual clutter", is useful, up to a point, in relation to Buxton and Cornish's programme. The American programming focussed upon in Caldwell's chapter (on *Pee Wee Herman* and MTV – pp.193-222) encapsulates the "junk-store" aesthetic through the sheer amount of visual excess deployed, with the televisual frame filled with objects, graphics and noise. This particular aesthetic description works in regards to various 4Later and other late-night content, particularly *The Adam and Joe Show.* In it, pop culture clutter is purposely scattered around sets in order to articulate both the fan-presenters' closeness to specific youth audiences familiar with the popular culture objects under discussion, whilst emphasising their own fannish affection for such ephemera.

The *Adam & Joe Show*, along with other content on 4Later, could be more effectively and productively discussed as examples of fan production and user-generated content. The links to C4's online spaces created a proto-YouTube environment within the 4Later zone itself, particularly within its links and junctions. The earlier example of *Takeover TV,* along with *The Adam & Joe Show* and 4Later itself was a space for (prominent) fan cultural production, highlighting a selection of deliberately amateurish, low-budget works that were often user-generated. Buxton and Cornish's recreations of famous filmic moments using figures and toys were an example of fan-collector production, whilst *Takeover* TV, along with the 4Later block, compiled ephemera and clips together to in order to form thematically organised programming. Such content highlighted the work of young filmmakers, whilst in the case of 4Later, the ideas and opinions of the Channel 4 audience were represented via interstitials and idents for such programming.

This use of late-night, short-form fan-generated content certainly acted as a test bed for experimentation and risky material which Channel 4 may have

been unsure of, regarding whether it would succeed as a full-fledged, higher budgeted production. More pertinently, it also acted as a way of balancing Channel 4's increased usage of more commercially-oriented formats and imports. This allowed the channel to gain plaudits for innovation whilst encouraging amateur content creators to submit material – something that would prove vital in building the identity and aesthetic of the 4Later zone.

Paratelevision, inglorious ricketiness and how 4Later's *spray* across the C4 schedule was a step too far for the channel

> Channel 4 reclaims night-time television...From Thursday to Sunday, 4Later will keep you up at night with its heady mix of weird, hilarious, outrageous and terrifying television...*it's the TV that night people want to see.* (Channel 4 Corporation 1998d, p.4 - Emphasis added)

> *4Later (is) a proving ground for new ideas*...4Later instantly settled into the schedule as a natural home for the outrageous and the alternative voices that mark out Channel 4 from its competitors... (Channel 4 Corporation 1998e, p.9 - Emphasis added)

As Stevan Keane, the first of the two 4Later/Nighttime commissioning editors (Darren Bender being the second) suggests, the strand/zone was "about ideas, not budgets" and the purpose of 4Later wasn't to be slickly entertaining, but rather to be distinctive (McDermott 1999, p.12). Keane's words ring true (echoing the sentiment expressed within the 1998 C4 annual report) in the sense that the zone constituted a television laboratory, where experiments in both content and form could be undertaken with minimal risk, as the economic and ratings stakes were so low. Indeed, the budgets for 4Later lead to content lacking polish and professionalism, although this slightly ramshackle aesthetic and amateurishness arguably encouraged fan-producers to submit videos and other fan-work of comparable quality. 4Later's "look" was perhaps inevitable given that £6000 per hour of programming was allotted for the zone (Aston 2001b).

There was a distinct contrast between C4's late-night output and its focus

throughout the 90s on 'quality' imports (such as *Friends* and *E.R.*) and entertainment formats popularised towards the end of that decade, such as *Big Brother*. Imported series, via expensive cinematic production values, operated to distract the audience from the fact that they were watching television, encouraging a sense of immersion within complex characterisation and narratives (Cardwell 2007, McCabe and Akass 2007). However, late-night content had a somewhat different purpose and effect. Material on 4Later often drew attention to its very televisuality (Caldwell 1995), namely the production apparatus and conventions of television themselves, often seeking to subvert them once highlighted. Such a strategy had two distinct functions. It operated as an example of postmodern reflexivity common to 90s cult television practice, bringing audiences closer to the text, whilst deliberately lowering audience expectations by drawing attention to the cheapness and 'ricketiness' of the production.

If "paracinema" (Sconce 1995) was preoccupied and organised around the presentation of cinematic ephemera and detritus that had been ignored or reviled by popular culture and academia, then 4Later represented something similar: *paratelevision*. 4Later was a strand that concerned itself with the discussion and re-articulation of such filmic and televisual ephemera in an intertextual fashion (Eco 1987). The rationale for doing so was because mainstream terrestrial TV, mirroring Hollywood and art cinema in this instance, wouldn't broadcast nor had any interest in such materials, particularly in prime-time. Programming such as *Vids* and *Explotica*, whose interests were explicitly focussed upon the critique and analysis of "cult cinema", were representative of this anti-mainstream mandate. 4Later's content also resembled Eco's (1984) "neo-television", in that it acted as a postmodern simulation that referred to other television and niche popular culture, rather than "the real world". However, it ties more closely to Mills' (2010) and Leggott's (2010)

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conceptualisations of "invisible" television, in that it hasn't been deemed worthy of critical study, due to its lack of thematic and aesthetic distinction. 4Later, although "invisible" to mainstream audiences and academics, was important to Channel 4's future direction and address of youth markets. It offered an alternative way of reaching 'fannish' youth audiences, pushing the pertinence of new media technologies and user-generated content, whilst still offering a chance of relative commercial success to Channel 4 itself. It offered a "third way", between commerce and public-service innovation: the key balancing act for Channel 4. Late-night (and 4Later) therefore acted as a potential bridge to a viable production rationale and aesthetic for digital channels (like E4) and other youth strands (such as T4).

However, the broadcasting of 'cult' content on terrestrial television, however alternative, diverse or innovative it may be, acted as an potential encroachment of the mainstream on cult cultures. With that said, programming which focussed upon this culture, such as *The Adam and Joe Show, Vids* and *Bits*, was often presented by fans of it. Given that these were fans with superlative cultural or subcultural capital, then this encroachment acts more like potential empowerment for niche communities and 'taste cultures'. Pearson (2010, p.8) usefully points out that, "audiences, their activities, and the industry's exploitation thereof should be...central to any conception of cult television", suggesting that a level of appropriation of fan-work or alternative cultural forms by mainstream broadcasters is inevitable.   This commodifies and repurposes the subversive or shocking power and aesthetic of cult media in order to push the boundaries of what is acceptable on mainstream television, inuring audiences to experimental content. Such elements can subsequently be incorporated into safer, mainstream productions in order to give them a veneer of subcultural capital and a chance for acceptability within fan cultures. These practices tie loosely into Hills's (2004, 2010) term of "mainstreaming cult",

although this term refers more to the manner in which mainstream texts increasingly encourage the extra-textual activities associated with cult texts (vidding, fan-fiction, cosplay) to secure loyalty to the televisual brand, whilst generating promotional materials that can be deployed within new media spaces.

Within 4Later, a reverse of the above appropriation was at work. Certain programming within the 4Later strand existed as edgier versions or more risqué re-articulations of past or recent programming ideas. *Bits* (1999-2001) was a feminised spin on the traditionally masculine gaming subculture, acting as a hybrid text which combined *Gamesmaster* (1992-98) and *The Girlie Show* (1996-97). *Vids*, on the other hand, built upon early evening series like Johnny Vaughn's *Moviewatch* (1993-98) and Jonathan Ross' *Incredibly Strange Film Show* (1988-89), adding surreal comedy sketches with profane analysis of esoteric, arcane and obscene VHS/DVD releases. Both examples provide lip-service to minority interests and audiences by utilising presenters that emphasise a sense of difference to what may be expected from shows of this ilk. *Bits* had an all-female presenting team, whilst *Vids* employed a Scottish and Welsh duo. Indeed, the representation of difference and marginalisation within the presentational aspects of the programming and the content, was key to the demarcation of this zone from the rest of Channel 4.

In the case of 4Later, the edginess and excess often synonymous with cult media wasn't visual, although the strand was purposely and necessarily ramshackle and busy, akin to earlier youth culture programming such as *Network 7* and *Club X,* but was instead more thematic. Issues that Channel 4 had dealt with in the past with varying levels of seriousness and rigour, such as sexuality and gender, were ubiquitous within *4Later* content. The later scheduling gave programme-makers free reign to be as uninhibited as possible

when presenting these topics. Such content, as well as pushing thematic boundaries, also tried to push the boundaries of form and genre, particularly regarding what was expected from comedy programming, review shows and documentary. Chris Morris's *Jam/Jaaaaam*, Ideal World's *Bits* and *Vids* and series such as *Disinfo Nation/Disinformation* (2000-01) and *Troma's Edge TV* (2000-01) were all examples of content that would receive a decidedly mixed reception if they were featured in prime-time.

There was an inconsistency of tone within such programming, to coincide with C4's commissioning and branding inconsistencies, which was consistent with the notion of *spray* (outlined below). On the one hand, similar to many 90s shows, a distinctly ironic and reflexive address to cult audiences abounded within shows like *Vids, Bits, Adam & Joe and Eurotrash*. The latter two were not 4Later shows, but like *The Word* and other early late-night content, they shared a similar anarchic spirit and tone, along with similar thematic preoccupations. However, on the other hand, such self-consciously cult material clashed with the more serious factual programming series, such as *Exploitica, Disinfo Nation* and *Dope Sheet*, which despite their focus on risque or extreme elements of alternative or marginal (sub)cultures, were presented in a more straightforward manner. The unifying notion that linked all this content together is what it is not (or couldn't be defined as): 'quality'. 4Later operated defiantly against Channel 4's shift towards factual entertainment formats and expensive American imports in an attempted embrace of the channel's early rebellious and experimental spirit.

4Later's, like the earlier *Late Licence*'s, self-identification and branding as a 'cult' zone set against the mainstream is as problematic as all of C4's marquee import programming being labelled under the banner of 'quality'. These two labels act in ostensible opposition to one another, with one

suggesting limited appeal, problematic themes and an idiosyncratic aesthetic and the other connoting expensive content aimed at the mainstream. However, Johnson (2005b) suggests that the two opposing terms can be meshed together, when programming operating as cult TV for cult audiences can also be described as "quality TV", thanks to various generic markers affiliated with "quality television". Such terms are flexible, malleable and inconsistent, with their usefulness variable, context-specific and historically contingent. Because of this lack of definitional rigidity, texts that may not ordinarily fall under the banner of either 'cult' or 'quality' could potentially switch over into either description. Hills's (2004) discussion of the teen drama series *Dawson's Creek* and Johnson's (2005b) work on *The X-Files* outline this definitional difficulty in a nuanced fashion. A potential result of this is that 'cult' and its association with elitist fan discourse, is dissipated by the dissemination of its ideologies and its aesthetic throughout 'quality' and non-quality productions, relieving it of its power and salience as useful descriptor of particular material. Opposing the impulses displayed by critics and broadcasters, who endeavoured to define 'quality' and canons of "quality television", 4Later instead acted as a purposeful space where 'trash', ephemeral or cult television content could be pooled. Whilst 'quality' can be defined generically as a set of aesthetic and thematic values that aspire to the status of 'art' (or art cinema), 'trash' can be positioned as its antithesis, whilst being equally as problematic a descriptor. This is mainly due to such content often having wildly variable production values, problematic thematic concerns and a distinctly DIY ethos, making it difficult to describe and pin down.

Indeed, 4Later's 'trash' aesthetic is an example of *spray,* in both the jumble-sale, cobbled together aesthetic of many programmes, as well as the scattergun scheduling and commissioning of the content itself. The often ramshackle nature of the programming contained within this zone was in-

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keeping with a consciously 'cult' aesthetic, prevalent within previous attempts at late-night programming and scheduling, that itself ties into the notion of *spray*. The zone and its scattered commissioning, programming and all-round aesthetic ethos, represented an interesting manifestation of the overall programming ideologies and brand identity at work within C4 at the time. 4Later's content was designed for casual viewing, but also endeavoured to propagate cultures of fandom who were increasingly situated online. A dedicated space was provided in order for "The Collective" to discuss 4Later's programming and other elements of cult culture. Intentional, rather than accidental viewing of 4Later content was seemingly a priority, although its erratic scheduling often made this impossible. Disappointingly, 4Later produced very little content that was subsequently transplanted elsewhere in the schedule (or even on the newly devised digital outlet, E4). This content often didn't achieve commissioning beyond a single series, with each of these commissions representing a failed experiment in terms of producing re-purposable product, thanks to their style and tone that set them apart as distinctive (as well as un-commercial). Furthermore, the sense of flux, conflicting modes of address, encouragement of audience participation, emphasis upon self-referentiality and the use of a chaotic aesthetic expressed within 4Later were all indicative of Channel 4's overall uncertainty regarding its purpose. Such confusion was caused by an increasingly multi-media marketplace that provided greater choice, along with an increased awareness of (and focus upon) niche markets, although these industrial contexts impacted upon British broadcasting as a whole.

As promised, 4Later did operate as a test-bed for new ideas, although these ideas were often under-developed and under-marketed. Despite many shows getting at least one series commission, it was evident that there was little in the way of consistent or concerted long-term strategy in place. The late night

zone was a space for experimentation and loosened inhibition, with such

creativity having to take place due to the limited budgets, which was aimed

vaguely at the befuddled and youthful "night people" mentioned in the press

materials. Rather than a space where fresh, innovative content could be

funnelled back usefully in the direction of either the main channel or the new

digital outlets (like E4), 4Later was a place where its particular type of

innovation and difference were not valued highly, with the fruits of its labours

seldom repurposed elsewhere by C4.

Conclusion

> Part of a new-look 4-Music zone on Wednesday nights, award-winning DJ
> JO WHILEY returns to host a third series of her award-winning music-
> based discussion show, providing viewers with a sharp and distinctive
> review of all that's hot and happening in the industry (Channel 4
> Corporation 1999b, p.2)

Jo Whiley (1998-2000) represented an early precursor to the 4Music zone.

Initially positioned within a late-night slot, its arrival was trumpeted by the press

materials through a lengthy 4 page advertorial/interview from Conrad Williams

(Channel 4 Corporation 1998b, pp.11-14). It is worth emphasising the

importance of a particular production company to the development of the

4Music strand: At It Productions. They produced a number of other

programmes for this Wednesday night slot and subsequently took responsibility

for the production of the T4 zone from C4 itself. The above press pack quote

outlines the germinal strand of music programming that would eventually lead to

the 4Music cable channel, along with the numerous 4Music events that would

subsequently be broadcast within T4. Unlike previous isolated music

programming (like *The Tube*), this zone represented a concerted attempt, like

4Later, to attract a specifically youthful audience through content designed to

appeal to them. This zone propagated the long-held conflation of youth markets

with music programming by television broadcasting, whilst providing alternatives

to existing programming around at the time on either terrestrial stations (BBC,

ITV) or on music video outlets such as MTV.

It is interesting to observe the relative fortunes of two strands introduced at similar points in C4 history. Both occupied late-night positions within the C4 schedule and aimed at similar youthful audiences, yet one died through neglect, budgetary cuts and a loss of leadership after Darren Bender's exit in 2001, as well as the proposed changes to the amount of content and budget for the 4Later strand – from 250 hours to 75 (Aston 2001b). The other, conversely, diversified to the point where it is now affiliated with not only its own cable channel, but also all C4 music events. This development of and shift in C4 production strategy towards lifestyle destinations, rather than hubs that showcase innovation/experimentation, demonstrated C4's and UK broadcasting's perception of youth programming and its potential forms. The latter strategy, where music is perceived as a key element of the lifestyles defined by its presumed target audience, was seen as a more effective means by which to reach audiences. It suggests that (challenging) content is useful, but the production of spaces that can facilitate a connection with a range of youth audiences constitutes a more solid long-term strategy. This may be true in terms of ratings, yet it represents a dismal neglect of the channel's mandate for innovation, risk-taking and experimentation, the three things that 4Later encapsulated.

However, the content contained within 4Later did not possess mainstream or mass-market appeal – something that the channel was looking to attain given the increased multi-channel competition – and therefore could not be repurposed elsewhere in the schedule. In short, despite its cheapness, such content subsequently represented poor value for the channel, even taking into consideration its usefulness as a totem for the channel's historical 'difference' from terrestrial broadcasters. The 4Music strand subsequently represented a

safer option, one that could be developed further into a brand with widespread appeal and crucially, one with a closer connotation to 'quality' programming and respectability, in comparison to 4Later's 'trashy' aesthetic and thematic extremism. 4Music would subsequently be closely associated with another important C4 youth strand: T4, which was utilised to attract a range of youth audiences whilst articulating the balancing act of public service and overt commercialism.

The late-night programming and 4Later zone articulated the sense of flux (and indeed *spray*) endemic within Channel 4 within the late 90s/early 00s at the time of Michael Jackson's tenure. This historical moment is particularly pertinent as it sets up the shape of the channel in terms of its relationship to new media, audiences, independent producers and the multi-channel environment. Crucially, it marks the shift from televisual scarcity to multi-media plenitude and choice. In addition, it also marks the failing of the channel to truly commit to experimentation and diversity of content, with the late-night 'experiment' representing perhaps the last concerted effort by the channel (with the exception of its educational projects articulated within a subsequent chapter) to broadcast content truly alternative to that which could be witnessed on other terrestrial channels.

Instead, the channel found a more appealing, more effective and safer mode by which to appeal to youth audiences, both within late-night and within other parts of the schedule. This was achieved through music programming, new media forms and celebrity culture, all of which were included within T4, a Sunday morning zone for young people, which was introduced the same year as 4Later and discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: T(4) and toast – How C4's Sunday breakfast selection showed an appetite for celebrity, lifestyle content and consolidation through recycling

This chapter follows up on the late-night chapter's mention of 4Music, examining youth music programming through a discussion of Channel 4's weekend scheduling zone, T4. However, T4's role, whilst closely related to the 4Music strand, will be discussed in terms of its (and Channel 4's more generally) predilection for re-purposing archive content and reliance on lifestyle series. I will illustrate how T4 experimented with varying modes of promotion and promotional content, rather than innovative programming, in order to reach various youth demographics.

Given that T4 started life as Sunday morning television, a historical overview of terrestrial weekend morning television needs to be undertaken, outlining key Saturday morning TV texts, along with their aesthetic, branding and scheduling strategies. Along with its relationship with 4Music, T4 will also be discussed in comparison to MTV, the first niche channel devoted to youth and music programming. Parallels can be drawn with MTV's deployment of music videos throughout the 80s and 90s (and latterly lifestyle and formatted programming within the 00s), to T4's own shifting identity. I will discuss how it moved from a children's zone that provided a counter-programming terrestrial alternative to existing Sunday morning programming, to a post-post-pub zone that acted as 'Meh TV' for a much less specifically defined youth audience. 'Meh TV' (in the context of T4) can be conceptualised as a selection of undemanding 'comfort viewing' that exploited C4's archive of successful imported programming, as well as an appreciation of youthful viewing strategies. However, I will highlight how, despite featuring superficially underwhelming content, 'Meh TV' and T4 were vital in performing the function of propagating C4's brand identity and operating as a promotional, lifestyle-oriented zone, whilst sustaining youth audience share. The chapter will

subsequently analyse *Popworld* (2000-2007) and *Shipwrecked* (2000 -) as examples of content that not only displayed T4's gradually shifting tone and purpose, but also the type of programming that was increasingly featured within it.

Finally, an overview of how presenting teams, or 'presenter-brands', facilitated the selling of both T4 and C4-as-brand will be provided. The notion of presenters as valuable brands for the channel and the increased 'celebrification' of the zone, continues the running theme of recycling that the strand, as a proxy for C4, articulates. However, this moves beyond the recycling of content discussed in earlier chapters, where archive and imported materials were rebranded to appeal to different demographics, towards the re-deployment of presenters and personality-archetypes to achieve the same effect. The chapter will also cover new media's role in further removing the need for televisual 'expertise', whilst emphasising the need to establish a complex brand identity in order to reach youth audiences in the digital arena.

Saturday Morning TV - Building the backbone for T4 (and the *Popworld* experiment)

> In response to a perceived lack of youth-oriented programmes, Channel 4 created T4, a Sunday morning zone for children and teens. The channel prioritised programming for 10 to 16-year-olds with shows such as *Buzz, Planet Pop* and *No Balls Allowed*. (Channel 4 Corporation 1998e, p.18)

> Sunday 25th October 1998, 5.50AM T4
> Set your alarm clocks for the most enticing environment for young people.. . Fast, furious and full of fun, old favourites and new excitements, one thing is for sure - your Sunday mornings will never be the same…
> Presented by FRAN LEE and BEN SHEPHARD. (Channel 4 Corporation 1998c, p.14)

The roots of T4 can be traced back to Saturday morning TV, such as BBC's *Going Live* (1987-93) and *Live and Kicking* (1993-2001), along with ITV's *SM:TV* (1998-2003), particularly in its early incarnations that featured long presenter links and usage of animated series along with soap drama. Indeed,

the above quotes highlight T4's early function as a kids and young teens programming zone. Saturday morning television was initially attempted by the BBC in the 1960s, who strung children's programming across Saturday morning schedules. However, programming such as ITV's *Saturday Scene* (1973-76) and *TISWAS* (1974-82) throughout the 70s and 80s introduced live presenter links in order to produce a more coherent experience (McGown n.d., b). As the genre developed, so did the importance placed upon elements of popular youth culture featured within. In particular, popular music along with the graphics, idents and branding were deployed in order to hold and retain viewer attention and loyalty. Overt commercialism was also displayed by such programming at an early stage, mainly through the enticement of prizes that could be won from phone-ins. Saturday morning television, particularly from the 1980s onwards, was predominantly a space for selling and promotion. Indeed, as Buckingham suggests:

> The BBC's... *Live and Kicking*, for example, constructs a highly self-referential world where the guests are pop stars or actors from soaps, the games and the pop videos are ads for other commodities, and the prizes are various media artefacts; and in the process, it advertises itself and its own magazine to what is effectively a captive audience. (…) Far from merely selling audiences to advertisers, the media are now busily selling audiences to other media - and indeed the boundaries between 'media' and 'advertising' have begun to break down. (Buckingham 1999, p.59)

Contained within such programming were cheaply imported animations (or as Stephen Kline (1995) describes them, "product-based animations"). These animated series, such as *The Transformers* (1984-87) and *He-Man* (1983-85), were popular with the youth demographic and acted as a significant draw to the Saturday morning schedules. However, such content possessed limited public service or educative value and often acted as nothing more than "extended commercial(s)" that "tried to cash in on the merchandising market" (Geraghty 2008, p.183), encouraging excessive consumption from their audiences. Although legislation in the USA did subsequently endeavour throughout the 90s to shape such content towards more public service and educational goals. This

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lead to programming such as *Rugrats* (1991-2004) from networks such as Nickleodeon, that incorporated elements of social commentary and critique, appealing to a broader range of audiences (Buckingham 1999, p.69).

BBC's *Going Live* and *Live and Kicking* featured such animation, in conjunction with encouragement to interact with the hosts and the show itself through phone-ins and other competitions. This subsequently earned the broadcaster revenue, as well as encouraged brand awareness and loyalty to the BBC. However, it also highlighted the importance of presenters-as-brands, acting as a 'face of the channel' in order to either attract and retain audiences or to act as role models for particular lifestyles and fashions portrayed within the programming. A key template for Saturday morning programming was *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop* (1976-82), along with *Saturday Superstore* (1982). The former, hosted by Radio 1 DJ Noel Edmonds, showcased the ability to interact with the host and participate in the creation of the program through phone-ins, with the lure of being heard on TV and talking to a celebrity being a key selling point of the show. This level of interactivity and 'closeness' to audiences could be seen within subsequent televisual projects that Edmonds was involved with, who was subsequently the face of BBC light entertainment throughout the 90s. *Saturday Superstore*, on the other hand, lessened the interactive elements and focussed on the presentation of a consumerist ideology, via the use of pop videos and celebrity guests (McGown n.d., a), articulating a sense of aspirationalism. The programming that followed these early examples subsequently combined the elements of interactivity and consumerism with celebrity presenters, in order to create what could now be recognised as 'Saturday morning TV'. Such programming, along with MTV's aesthetic and tonal example throughout the 90s, acted as a precursor to T4's Sunday morning slot. However, the template from which T4 was wrought was not adhered to for very long. It swiftly shifted from its child-oriented mandate towards a broader

'youthful' demographic, with the mode of presentation and the content within the strand becoming ever more formulaic and calculating, drifting away from a sense of fun, liveness and innovation.

T4 was initially positioned as Sunday morning 'counter-programming' for youth audiences, competing against religious/regional content provided on other terrestrial channels and mirroring the use of imported content in C4's early evening schedules which competed against news bulletins. Created as a means to "form a brand around Sunday's omnibus edition of *Hollyoaks"* (O'Neill 2000, p.17), the strand was initially geared towards younger teens from its inception in October 1998. However, it was latterly positioned towards an older 'post-post pub' demographic, similar to 4Later's target group, as the 00s wore on. The early scheduling of T4 was particularly haphazard, combining classic animation (*Tintin* - 1991-92), antique kids TV (*Camberwick Green* - 1966), contemporary American animation (*Johnny Bravo* - 1997-2004), access TV (*Wise Up* - 1995-2000) and miscellaneous (and rather incongruous) C4 content (*The Waltons* (1972-81)*, Late Lunch with Mel and Sue* - 1998-99). This did indeed provide a genuine alternative to other terrestrial scheduling, but it was not terribly coherent or focussed. Indeed, T4 was itself indicative of the burgeoning notion of *spray* surrounding the channel's strategising, with C4 scrambling to build something coherent with the odds and ends of its archives. On the one hand, T4 provided an example of kids TV, emphasised by the buying-in of programming such as *The Zack Files* (2000-02) and *Angela Anaconda* (1999-2002) to appeal to younger audiences (Cole 2000), but on the other hand, the zone was often a dumping ground for content previously broadcast by C4. However, as Sandler (2003, p.99) points out in regards to another youth-friendly brand (Cartoon Network), the "recontextualisation" of old or classic content "is the method by which (the channel) repackages its vast cartoon library to fall in line with the network's brand identity and to appeal to

adult viewers". He goes on to suggest that "...interstitials and stunts furnish vintage characters with an attitude they were never meant to have in order to build brand preference and strengthen (Cartoon Network's) brand identity" (p.100). Sandler's observations are equally applicable to early T4 branding and its lack of programming strategy, where a somewhat haphazard and scattershot selection of content was initially shoehorned into and repositioned for T4, representing yet another example of *spray*.

This process of re-contextualisation and repurposing of archive material, redeploying it throughout the schedules and maximising its use-value, was something that C4 did with imported content in particular. As time progressed, T4's content became more focussed, with the zone becoming synonymous with theme and stunt programming. Sunday schedules, up until the early evening, were focussed on either genre (soaps, reality formats) or specific imports (*Dawson's Creek*, *Friends*) being repositioned and branded for youth audiences. This efficient process of recycling and rebranding allowed T4 to use such content in order to produce a lifestyle zone that was cognisant of its burgeoning multi-platform responsibilities. C4 also recognised T4's usefulness beyond Sunday mornings, as it was used throughout holiday periods such as Easter and Christmas, as well as in conjunction with special summer 4Music events.

Live links, hosted by Dermot O'Leary and Margherita Taylor at the beginning, connected T4's disparate selection of content together, which also featured teen sitcoms and cleaned-up versions of other Channel 4 shows such as 4Later's *Bits*. It accomplished this in a style similar to the aforementioned Saturday morning shows. These links and presented material were vital in producing a branded zone which was coherent and engaging, as well as keeping the viewers' attention. Live performances and interviews with C4-

affiliated celebrities, such as the cast of *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000)*,* were another means by which to draw in and retain audiences (O'Neill 2000).

However, what characterised the zone was the uncertainty regarding its purpose. Andi Peters - previously a presenter on the BBC Saturday morning shows *Going Live* and *Live and Kicking -* was appointed Channel 4 commissioning editor for children's content in 1998 due to his experience with public service and youth provision. As Buckingham (1999, p.64) observed regarding Peters' appointment, "his published statements thus far seem to reflect a wish to combine youth and children's programming (…) the distinction between children's and other forms of programming (is becoming) increasingly uncertain". This was evidenced by some of his commissions. Peters was responsible for the teen doc-soap *Shipwrecked*, which subsequently garnered high ratings for the slot, suggesting early on the future direction of much youth-oriented content: cheap and ratings-centred formatted entertainment (Gannon 2000). However, there were examples of programming within the T4 schedule that bucked this trend. One such example was *Popworld*, which operated as an intriguing amalgam of Saturday morning TV, music programming and ironic critique of both the popular music and broadcasting industries.

Popworld

> The Spice Girls seem to have been conceived, from the start, as a brand rather than a band. Developed by producers with very specific objectives in mind, they were the outcome of marketing plans rather than a grassroots fan or performance base. (Turner 2004, p.55)

In 2000, Channel 4 made an agreement with Simon Fuller (ex-Spice Girls manager) and Robert Dodds to provide youth programming for C4, primarily via T4 and the new digital channel E4. This programming took the shape of the *Popworld* "brand" which would air five times a week on E4, along with a one hour special on T4 on Sundays, as the producers looked to build the brand

globally and across new media platforms ("Channel 4 signs exclusive Popworld deal", 2000). *Popworld* took over from *Planet Pop* (1998-2000) in the T4 schedule. The latter was initially commissioned by Channel 4 in 1998 and was a similarly pop-oriented music series featuring Lauren Laverne and June Sarpong, who would become a long-standing T4 presenter. *Planet Pop* was subsequently re-commissioned for a brief run by the cable youth network Trouble in 2001 (Hughes 2001b), until the production company responsible for it (Straight TV) was liquidated in 2002.

Popworld, featuring Simon Amstell and Miquita Taylor, after initially operating to fill the gap left by the aforementioned *Planet Pop*, went on to represent one of T4's longer-running original commissions whose brand was inextricably linked with 4Music and C4-affiliated music events. One example of such an event was commissioned by Neil McCullum (commissioner for Music and Youth in 2003) for T4, named *Christmas in Popworld*, presented by the *Popworld* presenters and held at Wembley in December 2003. It featured pop acts like Gareth Gates and Girls Aloud, but was created primarily (and opportunistically) in order to fill the void left by *TOTP/Smash Hits* events not taking place that year (Gallagher 2003). Despite this promotional function and seemingly symbiotic relationship to the music industry, the programme treated its guests and its role in promoting them in an increasingly sardonic and mocking fashion, simultaneously praising and scorning all who came to sell their music, themselves and their brand. This can be evidenced through analysis of the 'Best of 2005' *Popworld* editions (broadcast 17/12/2005 and 31/12/2005) as well as 'Simon and Miquita's last show' (broadcast 15/04/2006).

The show deliberately highlighted the constructedness of the music industry's promotional 'system'. In particular, it critiqued the role musicians, performers and bands "played" within media, such as television, by playing with

expectations and conventions put in place. *Popworld* didn't conform to the often superficial level of questioning of music artists expected from TV shows, which were a space by which the former can exploit the latter in order to promote and sell product. This is particularly ironic, given that *Popworld* itself was conceived as a multi-media/multi-platform youth brand (as mentioned above), intended to be spread across a range of media in order to reach a multitude of teen demographics.

Popworld saw itself as a space by which the presenters could mock the status quo by creating surreal and absurd situations. It did this by using bizarre lines of questioning and interrogating the level of (self)importance of these musical acts. This was often helped by the musicians who were selected to come onto the show. These were either new musicians, 'microcelebrities' who had enjoyed a moment of success elsewhere in the media or bands that were seeking a comeback or had been absent from the industry for a while. Such acts were therefore eager to be visible within the media, regardless of the programme. *Popworld* exploited this need for its own comedic ends and entertainment value, ironically commenting on the ephemeral and (self)promotional nature of the industry, often through the undercutting of otherwise straightforward imagery with nonsensical or rude voiceover. This irreverent mode of address was also popular within many C4 late-night offerings discussed earlier, such as *Eurotrash* and *The Word*.

However, it was not only the musicians and the industry that were mocked within the programme: it was also the codes and conventions of television programming that was geared to promote them. Sequences aping VH1's *Behind the Music* (1997-) 'documentary' forms were one such example of this mockery, along with other more staid or traditional music programming itself, such as *CD:UK* (1998-2006) and *Top of the Pops* (1964-2006), being targeted

for ridicule within the last Amstell/Oliver-presented *Popworld* in April 2006. However, this mockery was accomplished through dream sequences and long-running narratives that were ongoing throughout the programme and the series, whilst ostensibly operating within the genres of factual entertainment and music. The notion of continuity evident here was not in keeping with either the brand identity of T4, or much of the other formatted entertainment broadcast within the zone. Given the shift of the T4 strand towards providing 'Meh TV' - content which could be consumed distractedly and without effort – programming that required knowledge of a pre-existing narrative universe, as well as a presentation style that could potentially divide audiences, was ill-fitting and no longer relevant to T4.

Despite *Popworld* holding true to many Channel 4 ideals, with its innovative treatment of music programming, the emphasis upon difference expressed via its presenters (along lines of race and sexuality) and its polysemic nature allowing it to be enjoyed by a variety of youth demographics, it became a victim of T4's shifting identity and purpose. Its cancellation in 2007, after over 6 years within the T4 zone, was justified by C4 as the broadcaster articulated its desire to "use the T4 platform as a launch pad for new music formats that reflect our audience's tastes and the way in which they consume music" (Conlan 2007). A strategic push towards interactivity and new media forms, or at least content that prioritised this, was undertaken by Channel 4. This also dovetailed with a shift away from content that was risque, ironic or that which fell into an earlier conception of what constituted Channel 4 youth content. Additionally, the use of continuity and the blending of narratives, fantasy and surreality within something that ostensibly operated as promotional music programming, led to a certain brand incongruity and dissonance with T4's identity. *Popworld* was also another in a string of music shows to be cancelled at around this time, with ITV's *CD:UK*, and the BBC's venerable *TOTP* also

disappearing from schedules (Conlan 2007), which was reflective of the internet's increasingly disruptive impact (downloads, streaming video) upon the music industry.

Making it "Meh" – Formatted entertainment, celebrity culture and T4's strategy for producing comfort television

It wasn't only through music programming and animation that T4 pushed its increasingly consumption-oriented mandate. Formatted entertainment and its presenters, discussed in a later section, were also utilised as delivery systems for this message. Whereas in the past T4 was a little more subtle about its role as promoter/marketeer, as time progressed the 'joins' between its promotional elements and the content broadcast within the zone became both more insidious and blatant. Testament to this was an increased and highly visible shift towards programme and strand sponsorship, with the latter being sponsored in later years by Toyota Aygo. T4's strategic shift further highlighted the dichotomy between prestigious, expensive 'quality TV' and sensationalist, cheap 'trashy' programming that the channel has continually battled with, connected also with the balancing between commerciality and public service. Both types of programming brought ratings and also attention to the channel - both positive and negative. It showcased T4's movement away from the concentration upon younger demographics evidenced through the use of animation, towards a much broader targeting of 'youthfulness'. This involved the incorporation of re-purposed archive programming that could be repositioned and rebranded to promote different messages, linked together by interstitials, promos and presenter teams. It displayed another modification of emphasis evident within the zone and Channel 4 itself: the content being secondary to brand identity, the platforms the brands are distributed on and the manner in which the T4 and C4 brands were experienced and consumed by audiences. The latter point leads to the viewing strategy and televisual

scheduling combination of 'Meh TV', as initially outlined earlier in the introduction. A discussion of this viewing practice, as well as a link between 'quality' and 'trash' forms of content, can be found within Livingstone's (2002) work. She surmises that:

> Since its introduction in the 1950s, it seems that very rapidly, two kinds of television viewing became established (O'Sullivan 1991): the valued activity of watching a favourite programme and the 'filling in' of otherwise unstructured time. These two kinds of viewing remain central to young people's experience of television today... (Livingstone 2002, p.100)

Sunday daytime represented an excellent example of this 'dead time' for young people. It worked as a scheduling space that C4/T4 looked to fill with programming catering for a non-specific 'youthful' demographic which covered a wide variety of lifestyle choices. There was a contrast between viewing positions for T4: a conscious choice to view specific programming through a sense of fandom or the selection of 'quality' favourites, and television as a means of time filling or a means of distraction. The latter, in this instance, being an example of 'Meh TV'.

Big Brother and *Hollyoaks,* via 'catch-up' omnibus shows, both featured heavily as part of the T4 programming bundle on Sundays.   In addition, both *Dawson's Creek* and *Friends* were redeployed by T4 for 'theme days' of programming (27th August and 16th July 2000 respectively), with Sunday schedules given over to promoting the shows and their stars. This also encouraged youth audience participation to 'get involved' and further immerse themselves within both the televisual text and T4 brand itself. However, just as there has been much debate over what constitutes 'quality programming', T4, and by association, Channel 4, seemed to be unsure of what constituted quality *youth* programming. Indeed, the scheduling practices and processes of redeployment and recycling belied confusion regarding what actually appealed specifically to youth audiences. This further suggests not only the sense of flux

that the zone experienced in its existence, but also the confusion in C4's own identity since the turn of the century.

T4 did gain a measure of stability and predictability when production and responsibility for it was shifted from in-house to At It Productions in 2003, who oversaw many music-oriented C4/4Music shows such as *25 Years of Smash Hits* (2003) and *Jo Whiley* (1998-2000) (Hughes 2003). This also led to the introduction of new commissioning editors and executive producers, with Andi Peters also leaving T4 in 2004 to return to the BBC. Tamsin Summers, the new executive producer of T4, was previously involved with *Network 7, The Word* and *The Big Breakfast* through the Planet 24 production company, as well as being vice-president of factual entertainment programming at MTV Europe. It was therefore inevitable that an aesthetic similarity, as well as programming strategy - the slightly incongruous combination of risque liveness and risk-averse formatting of content - would begin to leech into T4 output.

However, T4 wasn't to suffer complete wholesale alterations, with an imperative that a certain amount of continuity should be retained by At It, particularly relating to the presenter teams. Continuity and cohesion were watchwords for the zone, with all content trying to remain congruent with the pre-existing T4 brand identity, whilst new programming and idents were discussed in terms of encouraging viewer retention. In short, a certain 'mateyness' in tone was being striven for, with T4, its content and presenters tryin to resemble casual, informal partners to spend weekend mornings with ("Trade Talk - Summers' day", 2003). This is connected to the earlier suggestion regarding the reduction in importance of content in favour of an consistent mode of presentation. The T4 slot wasn't designed to challenge or innovate through its content, but rather acted as an eclectic, undemanding collection of television that was more about tone and attitude, rather than

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substantial content. Any innovations associated with the content broadcast within the zone were linked to derivations of existing formats, or the potential delivery of additional content within new media spaces.

One way of achieving the 'casual' aesthetic being striven for was through the use of formatted entertainment featuring the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary, with certain commissions not promoting conspicuous consumption, glamour or indeed any form of replicable or aspirational lifestyle. *Big Brother* (2000-2010) and *Shipwrecked* (1999 -) were two early examples of this, with contestants marooned in isolated environments and cut off from all the comforts of the outside world. In addition, the channel bought ABC teen reality show *Switched* (2003-04) for use within T4 in 2004, which was indicative of T4's and C4's increasing shift towards reality formats over innovative content (Mutel 2004). However, it was when T4 brought back *Shipwrecked* (produced by RDF Media) in 2005, a youth reality show had been commissioned by Andi Peters and initially broadcast in 1999, that emphasised the importance of successful formats to youth programming ("C4 brings back Shipwrecked", 2005). As Holmes (2008, p.168) suggests, "Reality TV has been a key site upon which the status, strategy and future of...(terrestrial) channels have been debated in the multi-channel environment", with T4 acting as a test-bed for Channel 4's endeavours within that environment. *Shipwrecked* highlighted the changing strategies of C4/T4, as well as the mutability of formatted entertainment. Richard Kilborn emphasises the point, suggesting branded entertainment and reality formats "underscore(s) the commercially driven need of broadcasters to produce work according to established formulae and *draw(s) attention to the crucial importance of packaging in the development of a programme concept*' (Kilborn 2003, p. 55 – Emphasis added).

Shipwrecked

SUNDAY 9TH JANUARY 2000 - 12.30PM - SHIPWRECKED… CASTING SPECIAL
In the first of a unique observational documentary series, we see 24 intrepid hopefuls test their mental and physical resilience at an adventure training centre in Norfolk. (...) A la Lord of the Flies, they will have to use their initiative and leadership skills to survive, catching their own fish and building their own shelters. (...)Which of these young people will be chosen to brave the ordeal, and how will they fare? (Channel 4 Corporation 2000a, p.11)

The initial scheduling pattern of Sundays and the Wednesday early evening slot persisted throughout the course of the nine-episode series. The series, with its cast of photogenically bedraggled young people and exotic locales had the opportunity to sell the notion of isolationism/survivalism as an alternative lifestyle or as a form of escapism to scheduling slots affiliated with youth demographics - weekend mornings and early evenings. Its alternate function was as a promotional travel programme, drumming up business for the South Pacific islands, whilst allowing the varied youth cast to provide audiences with something to aspire towards, dream about and judge, covering some of the key rationales and viewing positions for lifestyle television.

However, what makes the series particularly interesting is that it didn't appear to be following a set formula at first, with ideas being introduced part-way through the programme, such as the 'ration run' in episode four that shifted focus away from island life. It initially positioned itself, as *Big Brother* did in its early stages, as more 'unique and important sociological experiments' (Joseph 2000). Such rationalisation was in keeping with much 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary rhetoric and evident within comparable series such as the BBC's *Castaway 2000* (also broadcast in 2000), rather than formatted entertainment or game show. *Shipwrecked*'s later generic shift is indicative of the wider hybridisation of reality formats and television itself. Mittell (2004, p.xiv) elucidates upon this, pointing out that "genres operate in an ongoing historical process of category formation - genres are constantly in flux, and thus their

analysis must be historically situated", meaning that the reality genre and its definitions will inevitably change and mutate over time.

As O'Sullivan also observes concerning the increasingly problematic amalgam of lifestyle television and reality formats, "...'how-to-do-it' guides coexist uneasily within the increasingly hybridised formats that emerged to achieve prominence in the 1990s" (O'Sullivan 2005, p.31), with *Shipwrecked*'s generic status sharing qualities of both formats. Along with the difficulties in defining the form, the increasing televisual shift towards the creation of lifestyle brands and destinations (which will be discussed in later chapters) that perform a function beyond television entertainment meant that one had to understand them as multi-platform, hybrid entities that operated beyond generic concerns. As Holmes (2008, p.162) mentions in a discussion concerned with the problematic nature of industry definitions of reality formats, producers and broadcasters are seemingly less concerned with defining or restricting content through generic markers, but rather prize the potential for possible growth, audience reach and brand flexibility as time goes on. Hill (2005, p.45) expands the point, in interview materials with Endemol executives, that content is secondary to brand penetration and the potential for ancillary markets:

> Gary Carter, international director of licensing at Endemol, prefers to describe the genre (Reality TV) as 'reality entertainment'. In fact, for Carter, *what is more important is intellectual property rather than content*. Carter and (Peter) Bazalgette are *primarily interested in 'an entertainment idea' that can be instantly accessed by audiences/users across different types of media - TV, radio, telephone and the internet* (Emphasis added)

When *Shipwrecked* was re-introduced in 2005 by T4 after a four year hiatus, the element of competition between island teams and the prospect of cash prizes (Deans 2005) subsequently shifted the purpose, focus and generic definition of the show. It was adjusted to be more in line with how formatted entertainment operated at that particular moment, particularly content that was being produced by RDF Media, responsible for *Shipwrecked*, as well as *Wife Swap* (2003-09).

It also illustrated how *Shipwrecked* could fit with T4's shift towards the competitive selling of lifestyles through reality formats, as well as the lurch, to varying degrees, towards crass commerciality often associated with the form (Holmes 2008, p.171). The new version of the series also featured, prior to the finalisation of the casting process, both a strong online element, as well as a focus on 'talent auditions' (a la *Pop Idol*) in order for potential applicants to have a chance to feature on the show (Stoker 2006a). This was a turnaround from having contestants go through the rigorous "mental and physical resilience" testing mentioned above in the initial press release for the first series.

Any ethnographic, anthropological and sociological pretence suggested by the show in earlier series, which allowed for the provision of televisual, pseudo-pedagogical 'lessons' like much early lifestyle television (O'Sullivan 2005, p.32), was scrapped. This was in favour of facilitating self-promotion through new media platforms in order to achieve potential fame, celebrity and, given its increasing promotion as a game show, cash prizes. *Shipwrecked*'s initially high-minded purpose was stripped away in order to make the show more accessible, more exciting, more in keeping with other reality formats and easier to follow. Such alterations were perfect for T4's attempted address to viewers who watched content within the slot distractedly or as a form of comfort TV. As Hill (2005, p.52) once again observes:

> Another reason why popular factual programmes appeal to occasional viewers relates to the accessible format of much popular factual television, such as the self-contained, short segments, and/or serialised stories with *strong, identifiable characters*. The self-contained stories in (these) programmes…attract occasional viewers who dip in and out of the series…*the appeal of these programmes is partly explained by viewers looking for undemanding factual television*. (Emphasis added)

Branded properties such as *Shipwrecked* were subsequently less concerned with the content or purpose of the programming. They were however more focussed on the wider function that it, the brand and the material attached to it,

including the potential celebrities who appeared within these narratives, could perform within and for the platforms that it appeared on. The surface, image and congruity of this branded content with what the T4 brand represented was paramount, rather than the pushing of experimentation or innovation relating to televisual form or genre. This re-branding and relaunching of *Shipwrecked* articulated that quite clearly, as well as crystallising the altered function for the T4 zone: from counter-programming for kids, towards a consumer-oriented lifestyle space that allowed youthful audiences to browse content distractedly. This shift encapsulates the essence of 'Meh TV', with programming deployed to retain audiences and consolidate market share, in conjunction with C4's pushing of promotionally-oriented content and spaces. As O'Sullivan (2005, p.33) postulates, via the work of John Ellis, this movement towards contemporary lifestyle television content and platforms by broadcasters and producers is indicative of a wider shift: from public service to a distinctly more populist version of public service.

Everything Must Go! T4's mimicry of MTV's move from music television to 'Meh TV'

> If TVIII is the era of branding, then the role and function of branding needs to be considered not simply as a feature of television networks, but also as a feature of television programmes. In this era the non-broadcast arena has become an increasingly important part of the television industry, and of the ways in which viewers engage with television programmes. Branding can help to analyse the relationships between the texts of television (from programmes to websites), to explore their relationship with networks and producers, and to examine their consumption by audiences. Branding emerges in the era of TVIII not simply as a logo or a set of values, but as (to paraphrase Lury 2004) a set of relations between producers, writers, networks, texts and viewers, that emerges in the branding of networks and in the branding of programmes. (Johnson 2007, p.16)

Johnson's discussion above regarding the importance of branding within the contemporary televisual marketplace is useful, but it neglects the moments prior to a widespread multi-channel environment, as well as the potential for other branding opportunities. Namely, the branding of presenters and television

personalities, along with the branding of zones and strands within television schedules that allow for a level of demarcation by the channel to target particular demographics through specific marketing and branding strategies. T4 operated as a promotional enclosed space that propagated and sold a C4 'brand essence' to viewers across a variety of old and new media platforms. This essence incorporated a variety of lifestyle and consumption options available through the presenters, performers, guests and the content, that allowed not only the idea of T4/C4 to be sold to audiences, but notions concerning youth and popular culture itself.

A comparison between MTV and T4 is productive, particularly given that they have followed a similar 'arc', whilst enjoying a complementary relationship. C4 agreed a deal with MTV to screen the MTV Europe Music Awards, which included T4 programming content (behind the scenes, interviews) on 10th November 2001. Connected to this, an agreement for MTV to produce a UK version of MTV's US series *FANatic* (1998-2000) was also announced at the same time, suggesting a crossover of aesthetic, industrial and strategic aims ("C4 signs first ever deal with MTV", 2001). Their similarities also included the reliance upon the use of animation, branded music events and latterly factual entertainment formats, in order to sell themselves as lifestyle destinations designed to attract youth audiences. They have been similarly innovative in their deployment of idents and interstitials, making them both fully branded content environments and marking them out as separate from other channels, and in the case of T4, parts of the C4 schedule. Additionally, both have gradually shifted away from a self-aware, ironic mode of address to audiences, towards straight-up promotion that makes little effort to disguise the nature and purpose of themselves: to sell everything featured within them.

Idents, interstitials and icons - MTV and C4's recognition of the brand being king

…the distinction between promotional material and entertainment was smudged if not erased by MTV...(Cashmore 2004, p.41)

Content was no longer enough in a multichannel environment, a network needed a unique presentational mode… (Sandler 2003, p.94)

Both the above quotes articulate the oppositional positioning of cable networks' branding in comparison to the staid bigger networks, whilst also articulating the blurring of the lines between content and promotion. The 1990s were marked by the important need to differentiate between and demarcate channel brands by aiming at specific demographic groups in an increasingly cluttered multi-channel marketplace, which was the case in both the UK and the USA. The mid to late 90s, as have been outlined, were a period of flux for Channel 4, but was a definitive maturation period for the MTV network, in which innovation, invention and risk-taking (the historical watchwords of C4), were supplanted by consolidation, synergism and diversification. The latter process was displayed in the fragmentation of MTV which Goodwin (1992, p.154) presciently understood as a likely eventuality. This fragmentation was a reversion to the earlier 'narrowcast' period of the network, where discretely targeted MTV-derivatives (MTV Base, MTV Hits), marked a shift from the 'schizophrenic' identity that MTV had previously possessed as a singular entity. Each of these aimed to cover specific demographics of the overall MTV target audience. This strategy was something that was mirrored and emulated by many British terrestrial broadcasters, not least Channel 4.

The issue of commerce versus culture is something that has remained at the core of academic discussions regarding both MTV and Channel 4: how could either institution appear to be anti-establishment and counter-hegemonic and thus appealing to a youth audience, when it was part of an establishment beholden to a commercialist, profit-driven mandate. The answer was a complex and carefully constructed aesthetic which masked the fact that rather than

rocking out, MTV was obsessed with selling itself (out) as part of a process of becoming what Naomi Klein (2000, p.44) refers to as "the first truly branded network". Instantly recognisable iconography was required in order to accomplish this, that could "sell" the idea of the network itself to its audience, with the mutability of the logo and associated idents being vital.

The MTV logo and the animated representations of it within the station idents served a variety of functions, one of which was to set it apart from the aesthetically staid network television. It was originally commissioned by Fred Seibert, the "director of on-air promotions" from Manhattan Design (McGrath 1996, p.50). Seibert recognised the mutable potential of the logo, and indeed so did other creatives within and outside of the company. As Candy Kugel (1998, p.1) recalls "it was…MTV's intention of changing the look of the logo every time the viewer saw it", or as Abby Terkuhle (animation and creative director of MTV) put it, the logo was "a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) that we could always change" (Terkuhle in Willems 1997, p.1). Historically, such statements can also be applied to Channel 4's iconography. With Channel 4 (and its idents), which was itself launched one year after MTV in 1982, the brashly colourful and animated logo, utilising new computer technologies in order to produce a 3-D effect, which ripped itself apart and then reformed into the iconic "4", shared much in common with MTV's logo mutability. However C4 had a more high-minded mission at the outset in comparison to MTV, with each coloured block within the logo representing a socio-cultural minority and diaspora that the channel would be featuring, its multiplicitous design suggesting diversity (Lambie-Nairn 1997, pp.64-66).

In the case of MTV, the animated idents served the function of breaking up the hypnotic flow that the repetitive cycle of music videos created, in a highly "stylised effort to grab the attention of the viewer" (Pettegrew 1992, p.61).

Conversely, the usage of the idents, rather than to disrupt attention, was also part of what Rabinovitz (1988, p.99) calls a "unifying" process of joining together "the network's disparate and heterogeneous elements" (the adverts and music videos). This was in order to signify an overall postmodernist aesthetic and a obsession with "excessive style", that set it apart from the identities of the American broadcast networks at the time (Caldwell 1995). All of these elements helped establish a particular brand identity synonymous with 'coolness' and hipness, which in turn was vital in attracting the core target demographic that MTV was endeavouring to reel in (Sandler 1995).

The T4 logo/branding, as part of the C4 portfolio of brands, which included strands such as 4Music, digital channels such as E4 and More4 and new media spaces such as 4Beauty, represented one facet of C4's multiple identities, as well as a focus upon youth lifestyles. This can be evidenced within the 2011 rebrand of T4, which involved a series of interstitial stings that highlighted both iconography and attitudes concerned with youth culture. Specifically, short clips that involved the detritus of a night out, including kebabs, mobile phones in a fishbowl and cups of tea, with the logo eventually being incorporated out of these components. This strategy, of stitching together a fluidic and mutable brand identity out of interstitials, idents and links, as has been evidenced by MTV, is not a new one. Indeed, the E4 interstitial 'stings' have allowed for additional creativity through fan cultures, whilst allowing an expression of E4's brand identity (similar to T4) in numerous and changeable ways. More4's 2012 rebranding on the other hand, is also both a throwback to the early C4 branding/logo of multi-coloured shapes and logo mutability, as well as a highlighting of that channel's purpose and grown-up identity. In this instance, the logo was constructed from material and colour swatches, connoting the channel's affiliation with lifestyle content. The T4 logo and branding highlighted not only youth cultural practices, but also suggested

lifestyle elements, particularly fashion. The use of pink in the logo and through the digital platform spaces can be linked to 4Beauty's aesthetic (another digital lifestyle space), whilst this colour scheme is also suggestive of stereotypical femininity and 'feminine practices' of consumption and shopping, further emphasising the purpose of the zone and propagating its brand identity.

As Cashmore (2004, p.42) suggests, regarding youth television, "as its (MTV's) imitators proliferated, blurring the difference between entertainment and marketing became passé: making the two one and the same thing was the task". The role of the strand, as indeed the role of many components of the C4 brands portfolio (both online and offline), was to not only sell its programming to audiences, but also the lifestyles portrayed within it and the notion of the C4 brand itself. One vital way in which to accomplish this, whilst retaining audiences along with overall brand coherence, was via another series of brands: presenter-brands.

A brand has personality when the personality is a brand

In 2004, Channel 4 engaged in a marketing campaign that deployed celebrities and recognisable 'personalities' affiliated with the channel over the course of its existence. A series of interstitials were constructed to further enhance the channel's reputation and re-emphasise its relevance within contemporary British culture and broadcasting, whilst consolidating its brand identity of that as a purveyor of quality programming which was representative of the diversity of British life. It did this through a mix of presenters and personalities, both recently popular and long-serving, such as Jon Snow, Richard & Judy and Jamie Oliver, along with American talent who had featured prominently thanks to C4's historical reliance upon quality imports, with actors from *Friends, E.R., Lost* and *The O.C.* all making appearances. Each personality featured within these short clips discussed what made the channel important to them, what the

channel represented, their fondest memory or more memorable moment associated with the channel, acting as a nostalgic and evocative lens for audiences to view the channel through. This was made all the more potent through the campaigns' use of stars that Channel 4 helped achieve their level of fame, at least within this country.

Presenters within TV can be seen as brands, but also archetypes, with each presenter in the last incarnation of T4 being linked to those who had come before. There were distinct similarities between well-known ex-T4 presenters, such as Simon Amstell and Dermot O'Leary, and the contemporary group of presenters. In this case, T4 utilised an 'identikit' formula based around the personae of previously successful examples of presenters featured within its youth programming, such as Taylor and Amstell in *Popworld*. It refreshed the line-up when these personalities were developed to the point where they could be shifted into higher profile programming within the network of Channel 4 channels (as Amstell was with *The Morning After Show* in 2005), ensuring continuity whilst preventing the format from becoming stale. As Bonner (2003, p.68) astutely observes:

> Presenters speak on behalf of the programmes as a whole; they are embodiments of the programme's ethos and are permitted to speak as the authority which determines its shape and direction (…) The presenters of television programmes are…intermediaries between the viewers and the programme as an entity as well as its content; although…they are themselves also programme content.

Given that the presenting teams all looked to appeal to certain elements of the youth demographic, through their promotion of particular fashions and lifestyles, Bonner's statement that presenters are 'content' is further suggestive that everything within the strand is branded and there to be sold and subsequently bought. However, there was minimal explicit selling of fashion, with little fashion-centric programming within T4. Teen dramas like *Dawson's Creek* and

As If however, acted, like the presenting teams, as moving clothing catalogues, whilst the presenting teams themselves represented particular lifestyles or personality archetypes. This focus on youth culture archetypes, fashions and lifestyles mirrored various teen TV series featured within T4, with both offering sets of tools to construct identity to as wide a demographic range as possible.

Part of the set of 'tools' provided in this instance by the programme-makers were explicit details and information pertaining to how to replicate the lifestyles portrayed on screen through music and fashion guides available through either the T4 digital platform itself or dedicated programme spaces. This was particularly important, as Furlong (2006, p.83) notes that "…visual styles adopted by young people through the consumption of clothing are regarded as having become increasingly central to the establishment of identity…", with fashion and consumption required to achieve and replicate images, identities and lifestyles as portrayed on-screen and within digital spaces. These spaces were therefore catering for audience interest concerning how to replicate various lifestyle elements expressed within T4, often in order for individuals to be able to articulate their own identities through on-screen fashions as well as adding these items to an already existing individual style. Arguably, this ties into what Willis (1990, p.85) describes as acts of "creative consumption" which were a part of identity construction and visible "symbolic work". However, Willis assumes that this process is highly active, selective and knowingly individualistic. He does not take into consideration the possibility of young people (and audiences) wishing to merely *replicate* an existing look or lifestyle wholesale, which some lifestyle spaces, including 4Beauty, endeavoured to facilitate.

The image of the presenting teams was subsequently important for shaping perception of the T4 brand. Given that T4 was in the business of

selling itself as a brand within the Channel 4 schedule on Sundays, as well as a branded 'lifestyle experience' for viewers, it performed the vital roles as promotional tool for everything that appeared within the T4 zone. This applied to both inside the channel (programming, websites, merchandise) and outside (films, albums, gigs), as well as the lifestyles of the presenters themselves. Early focus upon Dermot O'Leary as the 'face' of T4 (and also that of *Big Brother* spin-off show, *Big Brother's Little Brother*), made T4 'essential viewing for the weekend' for 'the hungover masses'. This suggested that the power of the presenter's image within such branded zones was important in producing the desired audience response and reception ("Perfect cure for a hangover", 2001). Indeed, O'Leary's casual and accessible persona was key to "achiev(ing) the necessary closeness to the audience through which televisual popularity is mediated…the presenter need(ing) to make a performance of being ordinary" (Bonner 2003, p.69). Such a mode of address was particularly appropriate given the low-key and undemanding tenor of the T4 strand.

A gradual shift away from expertise was evident within presenting teams, which was apparent within the supplied presenter biographies formerly made available on the T4 website. Previously, presenters, such as Andi Peters in his time within BBC employ, had to 'do a tour of duty' within the industry (radio, kids TV, music). In the contemporary instance of T4, presenters often had minimal professional media experience, with ex-models and bloggers increasingly making appearances within presenting teams. This articulated a wider shift towards user-generated, amateur production within television and particularly new media spaces (which will be covered in greater depth in later chapters). The role of presenters within T4 undoubtedly became more that of brand marketers and arbiters of taste, than of television professionals. T4 was exclusively, in the latter day instance, about selling, promotion and branding, with all personnel featured within being flexible and interchangeable in regards

to expertise. Presenters could be soap stars. Soap stars could be popstars. Models could be presenters. The presenter-brand was fluid and malleable, re-usable and recyclable, able to be repurposed elsewhere, suggestive of the wider social imperative to work on and update one's identity/self-image in order to better fit within contemporary society.

T4, like 4Later before it, acted as a testing ground. However, T4 was a testing ground for *presenting talent*, rather than *content*, which itself was often rebranded and repurposed from elsewhere in the schedules. Presenters who began within T4 were utilised within other zones and parts of the schedule. Indeed, C4, as suggested by Kevin Lygo, looked to generate a production line of a "new generation of entertainment presenters" and talent, developing prime-time projects for those who've been involved with the channel elsewhere, such as presenters who had featured within T4, like Steve Jones and Simon Amstell, bringing into focus C4's emphasis on celebrification, celebrities-as-brands and promotion (Deans 2006).

However, as Turner (2004, p.69) points out regarding the celebrities within reality formats, the 'shelf-life' of personalities and longevity of careers based on image and the processes of celebrity culture, was somewhat brief at best. Arguably, the careers on offer amount to little more than presenting jobs on youth programming, with Brian Dowling from *Big Brother*'s subsequent stint on ITV's *SM:tv* being one such example. There was a correlation between the personalities on display within such reality and lifestyle formats and presenters without this affiliation, such as those who present youth television programming like Miquita Taylor and Dermot O'Leary. They both possessed a limited timeframe through which they could be deemed relevant and effective within their position and there was a rapid turnover within both 'careers'. This rapid process of iteration was intrinsic to the programming they appeared on and part

of the nature of youth presenting itself.   T4 and programming of its ilk was always on a search for new talent and presenters who can best appeal to various youth demographics, in an endless process of recycling, repurposing and shifting strategy.

Conclusion

The example of T4, both as a brand enclosure and as an example of Channel 4's programming policy in regards to youth audiences and potential new media 'extensions' is extremely instructive in that it foreshadows a primary focus of this thesis: the link to new media cultures and platforms. It also highlighted the changing form of television itself, the creeping reliance upon social networking to build brands, celebrity culture vis-à-vis youth culture, formatted content and branded lifestyle 'experiences'. T4 also offered something different from the other cited examples in regards to its purpose: it illustrated how the channel saw T4 as a potential template for E4.

Indeed, the T4 strand received a scheduled slot within E4 at its launch, specifically within the opening hours (4pm to 8pm) of the channel. This was conceivably to transfer the 'attitude' of T4 onto the new channel, which was aiming to have a similarly anarchic and youthful sensibility (Shelton 2000). Additionally, E4's positioning as a digital destination for young people was pre-empted by T4, with EMAP and C4 announcing a digital collaboration in order to create a 'multimedia youth brand', that looked to spin off T4's brand successes by using content from T4 in conjunction with new material to create a digital destination for teens. This strategy was designed in order to maximise the earning potential of T4 for C4, leveraging the brand into new spaces with commercially-oriented partners (Brech 2000a). However, this raised issues about the PSB nature of such ventures and the collaboration was subsequently scrapped after the realisation by Andy Anson (head of strategic planning and

interactive at C4) that the market for such a portal was overly cluttered and that the venture was strategically flawed (Aston 2001).

However, both new media spaces and brand consistency of programming strands and digital channels with the parent brand was important to Channel 4, which made sure that there was congruence across its various identities. The T4 strand re-jigged its on-air branding to match that of C4's re-branding, in order for the portfolio of channels as well as strands contained within the main channel to be congruent, consistent and in-keeping with C4's statement of brand values (Lee 2005a). It, along with the other brands within C4's portfolio, continued to re-invent and refresh its aesthetic, identity and purpose on a regular basis. As Fanthome (2007, p.68) suggests:

> The various 4 identities as seen on the main channel and the digital channels share the core value of innovation whilst simultaneously expressing different aspects of the personality implicit in the brand, and as such the brand and its manifestations adapt and function well within the new digital environment.

T4's web portal was redesigned to match new on-air rebranding in 2004, focussing heavily on web-community functionality as well as games and video. This was conducive with Michael Jackson's initial vision for C4 (multi-media, new media), with Mark Thompson briefly following up on this strategy and Andy Duncan re-articulating it. It also highlighted the importance of the connection, and C4's burgeoning recognition of it, between new media spaces and youth audiences, specifically in regards to how the latter were utilising them ("Mook to redesign T4 site", 2004).

Livingstone (2002, p.101) discusses how media are "inextricably part of our everyday routines, but new media have to find a place in our everyday lives". This suggests that broadcasters such as Channel 4 endeavour to juggle between bringing a sense of familiarity within scheduled strands, whilst also

incorporating necessary socio-technological developments that allow them to both retain audience interest and evolve, along with their audiences, the notion of a viewing routine as time goes on. Such a juggling act was enforced by the governmental shift towards digitisation of the television industry, meaning a reconceptualisation of strategies and a fragmentation of brand identities across a multi-channel and multi-media landscape (Born 2003). This subsequently had a large impact, both economic and socio-cultural, upon traditional notions of programming, scheduling and commissioning, as well as ideas concerning public service in a new media environment populated by youth demographics.

These tensions were also exacerbated by budgetary cuts to various C4 departments from 2008, as well as outsourcing of various strands and platforms, including T4, which was eventually placed under the control of Shine-owned Princess Productions (Parker 2008c). However, T4 was mothballed at the end of 2012, with C4 recognising that E4 should be the sole brand that caters for more youthful audiences ("T4 comes to an end, C4 commissions Friday night music pilots", 2012). Sunday daytime schedules were subsequently filled with *Sunday Brunch*, a commission (by Princess Productions), more commensurate with C4's increasingly lifestyle-centric commissioning strategies for the timeslot.

The aforementioned tensions, between the need to provide a version of public service across platforms and the desire for ratings and commercial success even within daytime scheduling, will now be explored further in the next chapter which discusses Channel 4's educational commissioning, content and spaces for youth audiences.

Chapter 4: Education, schools and learning – The three blunted prongs of Channel 4's partial public service commitment?

This chapter will further investigate the core questions that drive this thesis, surrounding the balancing act between PSB and commercial obligations, definitions of 'youth' and the uneven institutional strategies displayed by C4. To this end, the chapter will examine the problematic notion of 'education' and educational content, in the context of various moments of C4's history. Within Channel 4, 'education' is as fluid a definition as 'youth', 'quality' and 'cult', as mentioned on numerous occasions within past chapters. This chapter will be split into three chronological sections that will endeavour to analyse differing conceptions and definitions of educational provision throughout the channel's history (along with key figures who were responsible for overseeing this content), with the main focus being upon the contemporary moment.

The first section will look at the work of Naomi Sargant throughout the initial operating period of the channel, in order to examine C4's promotion and scheduling of its educational provision, as well as the channel's early conceptualisation of such programming. In order to interrogate how the channel sought to appeal to youthful audiences through educational content whilst also aiming for broader appeal, Anne Wood's *Pob's Programme* (1985-87) and *Let's Parlez Franglais* (1984) will be discussed. The former was a family oriented, child-friendly show that subsequently formed a key moment in weekend early afternoon programming, whilst the latter was a French language programme that blurred the lines between informing, educating and entertaining its audiences through the use of comedy and celebrity. Both programmes articulate C4's early attempts at supplying educational television which was distinctive, alternative and popular, but also sum up C4's wider issues with its public service remit and desire to be seen by broader audiences.

The second section will track C4's increased educational responsibilities and provide an historical overview of schools television, leading onto the broadcast of ITV Schools material on C4 (from 1987), then moving on to a discussion of the dedicated C4 Schools programming strand overseen by Paul Ashton, which took over from ITV's service in 1993. It will also examine Channel 4's educational provision more widely, investigating to see if this public service requirement was something that suffered under the tenure of Michael Grade. An overview of breakfast TV will also be included, culminating in an analysis of *The Big Breakfast* (1992-2002), which preceded C4's Schools TV service. This is in order to discuss how Channel 4 endeavoured to 'bridge' the gaps in its morning scheduling, as well as using *The Big Breakfast* as a bridge between its public service and commercial imperatives. The section will be rounded off by a discussion concerning C4's jettisoning of schools provision, as part of the 4Ventures restructuring that increasingly focussed on the monetisation of public service.

The final section will provide an overview of C4's shift towards multiplatform projects and away from traditional schools programming. Discussing the wider operational and policy-oriented shifts occurring at the latter part of the 90s and into the 00s (under Michael Jackson), this section will track the shift in the C4's conceptualisation of itself-as-broadcaster within a multichannel, multiplatform environment. It will subsequently examine the results of the Andy Duncan-driven 'Next on 4' (2008) policy document, along with new media commissioning (headed by Matt Locke), on educational content, themselves a response to the contemporary broadcasting environment. The section will provide analyses of the educational project *Battlefront* (2008 -) and health series *Embarrassing Bodies* (2007 -). Both of these illustrate how C4 endeavoured to encapsulate and successfully achieve the aims set out in the latest reconceptualisation of its public service remit in a digital context.

However, the section will conclude with mention of less successful exponents of these digital multi-platform strategies, specifically the 4iP pilot initiative which sought to move beyond televisual provision and commissioning. This argues that the long-standing balancing between commercial and public service goals was further problematised by the need to not only diversify C4-as-channel, but also C4 as a network of multiplatform brands.

Education, Naomi Sargant and family viewing

> Despite its public service role, education was positioned as a minority interest scheduled in off-peak times – e.g. RTÉ's morning schedule or BBC's Learning Zone late night schedule (Sargant 1996). This marginalization of educational programmes resulted in lower visibility and audience ratings for educational broadcasting, thereby decreasing its potential advertising revenue and capacity to gain valuable political legitimacy. (Grummell 2009, p.276)

> (In reference to the 1980 Broadcasting Act) The IBA was required to ensure that the Channel 4 service would contain (…) *a 'suitable proportion of programmes…of an educational nature'*; it was also to '…encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes' (Harvey 1994, p.116 – Emphasis added)

The educational expectations for and parameters of Channel 4 from its inception were laid out within the 1980 Broadcasting Act and as Harvey herself suggests above, these were interlinked with the channel's imperatives towards experimental, innovative content. As a result, the channel had to broadcast educational material - 15% of its overall output (although this wasn't a statutory figure - Sargant 1998, p.141), that its terrestrial counterparts weren't willing or able to provide. Therefore, early educational C4 commissioning, overseen by Commissioning Editor for Education Naomi Sargant, was primarily aimed towards more adult educational programming. This was instead of child-friendly content that ITV, with its schools television and the BBC with its children's programming, were already providing. Channel 4's early educational provision moved beyond either schools or children's programming, with Sargant commissioning content that had a wider appeal and practical application. An example of this would be *A Question of Economics,* produced by Yorkshire

Television and broadcast in January 1984. The series aimed to combat "economic illiteracy", explain jargon and make economics more accessible as a topic, linking programmes to actual socio-economic issues and supplementing existing schools programming ("Money talks/TV Channel 4 to launch education programme on economics", 1984). This is not to say that there were no child or family-friendly commissions, but in the early moments of C4, series that served a pedagogic function for adults were certainly prioritised. Such prioritisation marked C4 out as 'providing something different' in comparison to its televisual competition. It also helped that Sargant's background was not television, but rather adult education, as well as marketing (Sargant 1998).

It is worth questioning Grummell's (2009, p.276) assertion at the start of this chapter relating to the "marginalisation" of educational provision in British television, particularly in reference to Channel 4 and its early history. Education was an integral driver of much C4 commissioning within both Jeremy Isaacs's and Sargant's tenures at the channel. This was partially because it was a key element of C4's public service provision, but it was also a preoccupation of both Isaacs and Sargant, who endeavoured to cater for neglected or vulnerable audiences. However, this raises further issues with 'education' as a descriptor, along with which audiences were actually being addressed here, whilst also considering the youthful audiences traditionally associated with the term 'education'. Grummell (2009) attempts to unpack the term and works to demarcate, as indeed this chapter tries to, between differing types of educational television and the audiences for it, mentioning the BBC's and C4's efforts in this arena. He splits the provision into a trio of definitions; formal education (for example schools provision), 'educative' provision (for example, genres with a potential educative function, like science, history or documentary) and 'edutainment' (such as formatted entertainment and lifestyle programming). This allows for different conceptualisations of educational provision, whilst

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further outlining the problematic status of educational content, as well as the problems inherent in trying to clearly define it.

The press reaction to much early programming on C4 was fairly negative, particularly within the tabloids, including that which served an educative function (leading the channel to be dubbed "Channel Snore" by The Sun – Duguid n.d). Series such as *Mushroom Magic* (1989), *Quilts in Women's Lives* (1980), *Pottery Ladies* (1985) and *Make It Pay* (1983) were all examples of series that had an educational bent. Indeed, these early C4 series laid the groundwork for the lifestyle content and formats upon which the channel would latterly become over-reliant. However, the purpose of these series was more 'educative' than 'edutainment', pointing audiences in the direction of self-improvement. They also encapsulated C4's remit to deliver content to under-served audiences concerning topics not covered by other televisual providers. The main issue was that these series were presented in a worthy, low-key manner, whilst also suffering from uneven quality in keeping with many early C4 commissions, often due to budgetary issues. Such programming was not made to be popular or mainstream, but rather made to serve both marginalised audiences and Channel 4's own remit and ideals.

As Naomi Sargant suggests regarding the function of education relating to C4, in her interview with Catterall:

> What it wasn't conceived as was formal, sequential, curriculum-led education in the way that educational broadcasting had heretofore basically been thought of...there were a number of goals like reaching the unemployed, like consumer education, like political education (which I conceived of as active democracy)…there were a number of areas where you didn't need to treat it as a piece of curriculum. (Sargant 1998, pp.136-37)

It was in the more youth and child-oriented commissions - or rather, those that were less explicitly pedagogical or formal - where C4 began to show a blurring

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of the lines between worthy educational provision and more entertaining, engaging fare. *Let's Parlez Franglais* (1984), broadcast on Monday 6th August 1984, was an example of this more informal educative programming, being described by the channel as:

> an unprecedented kind of educational programme, a star-studded ten-part comedy series *vraiment sans cateqorie* with PETULA CLARK,CLIFF RICHARD, ANGELA RIPPON, SACHA DISTEL, JANET SUZMAN, JAMES HUNT, LESLIE PHILLIPS, RULA LENSKA and many more celebrities. (Channel 4 Corporation 1984b, p.12)

The title (a hybrid of English and French), the use of celebrity presenters, the short episode length (15 minutes), along with the statement of generic hybridity (comedy and education), all suggest a level of accessibility to audiences previously unavailable with some other commissioned educational material. Indeed, accessibility is emphasised throughout the press materials regarding the series, with any educative function of the series being suggested as a fortunate by-product of viewing. In terms of content, 'sketches' and scenarios depicting Parisian life were emphasised, rather than academic endeavour. The series was an example of the crossover between education and entertainment – 'edutainment' - whilst also providing something different to what was being broadcast elsewhere. It also allowed for an alternative to imported materials used by C4 in this scheduling slot, which was initially 6.40-7pm, moving to the 5.30-5.45pm slot when the series was repeated in April 1986. However, as Messenger-Davies illustrates in relation to her work on children's drama series:

> Public service for children also includes a recognition of their needs and rights to childish entertainment…The market may provide shows (of this ilk), which are commercial and down-market, but (the continuation of such shows)…is dependent on regulation and a public service ethos. *The essence of a PSB schedule…is not to rule out commercially attractive genres…but to provide a framework which can guarantee diversity - a diversity both of genre, and of audience appeal*." (Messenger-Davies 2001, p.45 – Emphasis added)

Messenger-Davies suggests here that this entertaining mode of presentation and blending of purpose was an example of C4's 'diversity' at work, along with

an illustration of its balancing act between commercialism and public service that can subsequently be seen in other commissioned content and types of provision. Such blending was subsequently deployed in other youth-oriented education series, such as the science-themed *Abracadabra* (1987), described by Stoddart (1987) as "the magic mix of entertainment, information and education... a superbly boggling kaleidoscope of sketches, graphics and facts...". This operated in contrast to earlier schools and educational programming which was rather more aesthetically staid and functional. Additionally, series like *Let's Parlez Franglais* operated partly as educational series, but mostly as comedic, ironic *parodies* of educational language series of yesteryear, providing modes of address to multiple audiences and possessing a broader appeal.

It was in the pre-school and family-friendly programming, which was the channel's concession to children's provision, that the line between entertainment, information and education began to skew further towards the former. As Steemers (2010, p.36) suggests, "In the 1980s and 1990s...preschoolers and their parents became an attractive audience for a wide range of shows that combined public service/educational and commercial priorities". Channel 4's commissioning of *Pob's Programme* and purchase of *Sesame Street*, show recognition of this potential audience group's value.

Pob's Programme, Sesame Street **and sweetening the educational medicine for pre-schoolers (and everybody else)**

Pob's Programme, first broadcast on Sunday 6th October 1985 (2-2.25pm), was commissioned from Ragdoll Productions. Ragdoll was the production company of Anne Wood, an ex-teacher and previously a consulting children's editor at the ill-fated *TV-am* ITV breakfast franchise, where she had been responsible for a few of its more successful elements, such as Roland Rat and *Rub-a-Dub-Tub* (MacAskill 1985). *Pob's Programme* was described within the press materials

as "an entertaining, stimulating and colourful series for young children and their families", which simultaneously promoted Wood's programme-making credentials and education background (Channel 4 Corporation 1985, p.8). Through such promotion, it is evident that the channel aimed to position the series as a quality, public service-oriented product that had the potential to inform, entertain and educate.

The series also received prominent coverage throughout the press pack (with pictures and a full-page synopsis) and was featured on the front cover, unusual for a children's Sunday afternoon series. However, the 'celebrity guests' and the wider appeal of the series which moved beyond solely pre-schoolers, meant that C4 recognised an opportunity to build a brand to be exploited elsewhere in the schedules. The sense of prestige and quality generated around the series and its creator, with awards success and Anne Wood's career in children's media provision being emphasised, helped in this endeavour. It is noticeable that the press pack is also seen as a cross-promotional opportunity for supplementary materials ('full colour activity book'), although given Wood's background in educational publishing, this type of tie-in wasn't entirely surprising (Walker 1999).

Interestingly. when the series returned for a second series on Sunday 19th October 1986, the promotion for it was prefaced by direct quotation of positive audience feedback:

2.00-2.30PM - POB'S PROGRAMME (1/16 - NEW SERIES)

"Our little girl waits all week for Pob" wrote one enthusiastic parent of a three-year-old, while another reported, "My son enjoys Pob's Programme, although there are many children's programmes he enjoys, the first time he watched Pob he happened to be alone, and we could hear shrieks of laughter coming from him. It was lovely to hear how much pleasure the programme was giving". And another family pleaded, "Please bring Pob back as soon as possible! We're missing him already. I've already told my little boy that Pob was away while he was having a new jumper knitted for him". (Channel 4 Corporation 1986, p.15)

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This opening passage is suggestive of a level of intense fandom on the part of

its young audiences, along with the notion that this programme was potentially

popular enough to allow C4 to compete with other youth TV providers. It also

illustrates the (not entirely straightforward) viewing practices involved with

educative children's television provision. Oswell (2002, pp.156-157) illustrates

these nuances further when he suggests that:

> …we see forms of children's television programme that very explicitly
> target one age-group of children, but which are then taken up by a range
> of other television constituencies…(with) pre-school children's television
> (having) always addressed both parental and child audiences as a means
> of facilitating inter-generational talk and the child's cognitive
> development…this form of multiple address does not necessarily lead to a
> convergence of adult and child positions.

Oswell (2002, pp.162-163) goes on to suggest that the link between children's

provision and a child audience is actually somewhat tenuous, with "children's

programmes themselves (often being) designed to address a much wider

constituency than just children". This can be illustrated once again through the

C4 press pack's highlighting of celebrity guests:

> Pob's special star guests this season will include PAT COOMBS (today),
> SPIKE MILLIGAN (next week), SU POLLARD (in the Christmas special),
> BRIAN BLESSED, MADHUR JAFFREY, JOHN DUTTINE, ANNI
> DOMINGO and BRIAN PATTEN. (Channel 4 Corporation 1986, p.15)

Supplementary materials are also heavily promoted within the press packs,

which sought to further capitalise upon the initial success of the first series and

the *Pob* brand, prioritising commercial imperatives rather than educative

function (despite the exhortations of the latter within the press materials). As

Sargant (1998, p.160) suggests in regards to *Pob*'s unexpected success:

"Neither Jeremy (Isaacs) nor Liz (Forgan) liked Pob, they didn't understand

children's stuff, but Pob was wonderful and the kids loved him, he became a

cult". Indeed, the importance of cult programming and the cultivation of its

audiences would become an increasingly important consideration for the

channel in terms of its purchasing and commissioning choices, as has been discussed in earlier chapters.

However, in terms of longevity and success with a wide variety of audiences, it was the procurement of the CTW (Children's Television Workshop) series *Sesame Street* in 1987, after first appearing on the ITV franchise Thames Television in 1971, that would represent the firmest commitment by C4 throughout the 90s to children's educational provision (beyond schools TV). It also represented C4's import procurement policy in action: buying in content that encapsulated elements of its multicultural, experimental and innovatory mission. Steemers (2010, p.25) further outlines its potential appeal to C4, discussing its hybridity in terms of blending entertainment and educational curriculum, making it a less formal yet effective mode of delivering C4's educational goals. Its procurement also illustrated the issue specific to Channel 4 of "…finding a balance between public service goals and finding enough money for the production of quality children's programming (which) often seems incompatible, leading to a reliance on foreign, especially American, imports" (Messenger-Davies 2001, p.27). C4's status as publisher-commissioner of content in this instance meant that it often leant toward finding the best deals, rather than the commissions that supported its PSB-oriented remit, particularly later in its history.

This is emphasised within the press materials released upon its first broadcast on Monday 30th November 1987 (Channel 4 Corporation 1987b). Amongst the trumpeting of its quality (through mention of awards), the series' "special emphasis on disadvantaged and minority children" (Channel 4 Corporation 1987b, p.19) and the "unique blend of entertainment and education" (p.18) which "employs the techniques of commercial television to teach" (p.18) perhaps best articulates the slightly conflicted nature of C4's

educationally-oriented programming, and by association, C4 itself. Interestingly, one of the closing statements to the press materials reads: "More than 2,300 episodes after its debut, *Sesame Street remains an experiment*" (p.19 - Emphasis added). This is something that could equally be said of C4's educational programming, an experimental balancing act between informing, educating and entertaining. As Buckingham (1999, p.64) suggests (reinforcing the point):

> ...the children's department at Channel Four must strive to establish a brand identity in competition with other channels; while internally, it has to compete with other departments for scarce resources. The Children's Commissioning Editor has to establish popularity with the audience and credibility with colleagues; and in children's television, these two requirements are not only not synonymous but are also often quite contradictory. Perhaps the inevitable consequence here...*is the gap between rhetoric and reality.* (Emphasis added)

In balancing public service and commercial commitments, promises regarding experimentation, innovation and public service (whilst endeavouring to garner largest youth audiences possible), are perhaps more important than *delivering* on these promises in a sustained fashion. This also ties into Steemers's suggestion (2010, p.36) that children's television in general (and pre-school in particular) is conflicted between the desire to organise children's provision around social, informational and educational functions, whilst appreciating television's function as a business. Buckingham (1999, p.64) emphasises this, suggesting that "there remain clear economic gains in merging children with more valuable sectors of the audience", positioning that particular audience in commercial terms, but also further problematising the definition, composition and identity of that audience.

Ironically, at the beginning of the 1990s, Channel 4 was the most prolific exhibitor of pre-school TV compared to ITV and the BBC, thanks to its stripping of *Sesame Street*, although this abruptly stopped from 1992 onwards (Steemers 2010, p.32). Indeed, the child audience, despite Messenger-Davies' (2001,

p.32) description of it as a "permanent minority", was not terribly well regarded

by the channel. As Buckingham (1999, pp. 63-64) once again illustrates,

"Despite its (C4's) statutory requirement to reach minority audiences, children

were not seen as a high priority. Its children's department was abolished in

1988, only to be revived in 1993". 1993 would prove to be a crucial year in

terms of Channel 4's educational and youthful provision, as it took on full

responsibility for something it had been broadcasting since 1987: schools

television.

Schools TV: a blessing or a burden?

> Education was one of the first areas of public service broadcasting to adopt...changes to ensure its continued survival, such as Channel 4's commercialization of educational broadcasting through 4 Ventures in the UK. (Grummell 2009, p.276)

> I was there with him for a year and never once did I have a serious conversation with Michael Grade about the educational programming, even though it was such a large part of the channel, nor did he ever comment on any of the programmes. Education never had the pride of place that it had before. (Sargant 1998, p.161)

The beginnings of schools television can be traced back to December 1956,

where the ITV franchise Associated Rediffusion announced that they wished to

broadcast a series of half-hour weekday programming designed for classroom

use, which commenced transmission in May 1957 (Weltman 1991) and was

subsequently greeted with press uproar and derision. This was particularly

ironic, given ITV's commercially-oriented, ratings-focussed status and cultural

associations with lowering standards. Doubly so, given that they beat the BBC,

the standard-bearer for public service provision, to the punch. The BBC in this

instance were indecisive about a schools service, after running a series of

limited, closed-circuit programming within schools since 1952 (Weltman 1991,

p.5). However, as time passed, both the BBC and ITV rapidly increased

provision for schools, with a sense of co-operation, rather than competition

existing between the two broadcasters. Multiple regional franchises involved

with ITV subsequently contributed material for the service, meaning that "at the beginning of the 1980s the ITV schools weekly programme output had passed 12 1/2 hours" (Weltman 1991, p.6)

However, with the 1990 Broadcasting Act (preceded by the 1988 White Paper), the circumstances and general state of educational broadcasting was set to change. Indeed, the announcement of the 1988 Paper spurred the BBC and ITV into further competition, with ratings-oriented strategies being devised, particularly around the under-utilised daytime slots. Urgency was shown by BBC1 and ITV schedulers in endeavouring to shunt their schools programming to BBC2 and C4, in order to create more palatable and ratings-winning daytime schedules (Stoddart 1985). The ITV companies however required the permission of the IBA to start their daytime service ahead of a 1987 deadline. Unfortunately for them, they did not receive this permission, which provided the BBC with a 'head start' in establishing their daytime schedules. With competition for ratings between ITV and BBC1 at the time being fierce, it was left to BBC2 and Channel 4, who began broadcasting an ITV Schools service in 1987, to broadcast the more niche and educationally-oriented content (Fiddick 1986).

The provision of the schools service specifically (and educational broadcasting in general) was an issue of considerable concern to various parties prior to the specifics of the Broadcasting Act of 1990 being released (Reid 1991). Indeed, as Wade (1989) suggests in an article extrapolating the oft-discussed future of schools television, educational television was a relatively minor priority in a broadcasting context of intensified competition, regardless of its importance to the public service requirements of all British broadcasters. Robin Moss, the IBA head of educational broadcasting, worried that "the whole ecology of broadcasting is changing in Britain and it's difficult to be convinced

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that schools television can be insulated from the changes going on elsewhere." (Wade 1989). With the arrival of Michael Grade at Channel 4, it wasn't only educational TV under threat, as Messenger-Davies (1988) outlines Grade's cutting of children's and pre-school commissioning. Despite such content being evidential of public service provision as well as innovation and experimentation, as outlined in the previous section, it was deemed ill-fitting with the new direction regarding the channel's address to youth. Instead, an increased focus upon other 'neglected' youth audiences was prioritised, as could be witnessed within other parts of the schedule, like the previously discussed late-night schedules.

With that said, there was still significant fanfare over Channel 4's own bespoke schools service, even if taking on this responsibility financially hindered the newly formed Channel 4 Corporation, which was announced at around the same time as 4% cuts in programming spend (Hellen 1992). The service was announced within a Channel 4 Schools press booklet as "the most significant departure in educational broadcasting for Schools in (the UK) for many years" (1993b, p.1). Such rhetoric espoused by the channel and the new schools commissioning editor (Paul Ashton) focussed on how commissioned content would re-interpret and re-imagine the curriculum in imaginative and innovative ways. Additionally, it would also provide a sense of continuity with the previous ITV service and lend support to not only teachers and educators, but also to its coterie of independent producers (Clarke 1993, pp.20-21). It is noticeable that within these materials, an effort is made to distance this service from the previous one, whilst also endeavouring to produce content that was less staid and had broader audience appeal. This was part of C4's increased awareness of the need to attract audiences and advertisers, but also operated as an unspoken attempt to compete with BBC's schools service (Macdonald 1993, p.18). This latter point was emphasised by the problematic lack of

complementarity, communication and co-operation between the services, leading to content duplication (Monteith 1994, Moss 1995), although such an interpretation is certainly subjective. As Flynn (1995, p.6) asserts, there was constant communication between the two services, whilst also suggesting that any competition was healthy, whilst Grade himself wished for greater linkage between the services, mainly because of the opportunities for cross-promotion ("Schools TV plea'" 1995, p.9).

A certain amount of foreshadowing is also evident. In interviews with Ashton, within the press materials and via the new children's commissioner, Lucinda Whitely (appointed in 1993), the importance of interactivity and innovation through new media forms are emphasised, which could and would become prototypical for future endeavours for the channel in attempts to reach youth audiences (Smith 1995, p.7). This is something that will receive greater focus in the next section. However, one of the most important elements in ensuring a degree of success for this quasi-enforced educational service was its scheduling - or rather, what was scheduled prior to it - breakfast television.

The Big Breakfast (A bridge between what C4 was and would be)

> The programme (breakfast slot) was being changed from being effectively a factual commission to being an entertainment commission, but it needed to tick factual concerns (Parsons in Potter 2008, p.218)

Channel 4's breakfast-time provision, particularly in terms of finding the correct mode of address and target demographic, had been something of a struggle in the 1980s. The *Channel 4 Daily* (1989-92) was very much in the mould of earlier, worthier C4 output and as Potter (2008, p.217) mentions, was "fractured and inaccessible" in comparison to *TV-am* and the BBC's breakfast offerings. The quote from Charlie Parsons at the start of the section contextualises Channel 4's need to find a solution which not only bridged the gap between providing factual public service and entertainment programming, but also

bridged between its more educative morning content and entertainment content later on. The independent production company Planet 24 managed to provide an alternative to the *Daily* as well as a potential solution to Channel 4's problem. Primarily pitched at youthful demographics, rather than a mass audience, in order to provide alternatives to other breakfast programming (Hellen 1992a), *The Big Breakfast* (1992-2002) was also produced as a means to potentially increase audience share and gain advertising revenue. This was particularly pertinent, given the economic context of Channel 4 at the time, so the decision to replace the ailing *Daily* was fairly straightforward (Reid 1992). Ostensibly, the commission was to attract youthful and family audiences, although its aesthetic and format were geared to target an older (teen) youth audience. This tied into a broader imperative within the channel to commission content that skewed in a younger entertainment-centric direction, rather than in the direction of educative public service.

   The Big Breakfast was heavily promoted months prior to its actual broadcast (evident in newspapers and the trade press), as well as for months afterwards (within the Channel 4 press packs). Multiple-page advertising, including schedules ('The Big Breakfast Menu'), line-ups and summaries of its purpose within the C4 schedule, were still appearing in December press packs long after its premiere in September 1992. C4 devoted much time and promotional energy to *The Big Breakfast*, given its role to act as breakfast-time competition and a youthful alternative to the BBC and ITV's franchise offering, *GMTV*. It also suggests that C4 were concerned about making this commission and slot a success, not only with audiences, but with advertisers, which were somewhat divided regarding its appeal and potential for success (Mistry 1992). Its positioning, as a stylistic alternative to pre-existing breakfast shows, can be evidenced within its promotion, along with the language used in order to create its brand identity, whilst also showcasing Channel 4's gradual shift towards a

reliance upon celebrity, formatting and striking graphic work.

> *The Big Breakfast* beams out every weekday on Channel 4, 7.00am till 9.00am. The Planet 24 production *continues to deliver something different for the more demanding audiences of the 1990s*. Among a number of *startling innovations* are live reaction lines, fax-ins and the Big Brother house itself - *a visual cornucopia of stunning interior design*… (Channel 4 Corporation 1992 – Emphasis added)

The pack also forefronts the importance of five key presenting figures (Chris Evans, Gabby Roslin, Paula Yates, Bob Geldof - along with Mark Lamaar), all of whom either had pre-existing fame, or would subsequently go on to encapsulate (in Evans's case) what the Channel 4 brand was throughout the 1990s. In short: brash, colourful and popular, but lacking substance and adherence to what the channel was initially set up to do. This presenting team was arguably a cynical attempt to be all things to all audiences, covering all demographic tastes, whilst the press pack claims of "innovation" were a ploy to satisfy the desire for greater ratings, using celebrity figures to cheerlead such innovation.

The structure and content of the show was set up in order to maximise youthful audience attention, with the initial "menu" for *The Big Breakfast* consisting of a selection of televisual canapes - bite-size morsels between 3-18 minutes, but often no more than 10. These segments offered a variety of flavour: from cartoons, news, fashion/lifestyle segments, vox-pops, interviews (which fluctuated wildly in terms of tone) and showbiz, meaning that there was usually something for everyone, although the hyperactive, brash style and mostly irreverent tone of the programme slanted towards youth. This focus on style and reliance on format was influenced by (and would subsequently influence), existing Planet 24 productions such as *The Word*, whilst the subsequent Evans vehicle *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush* (1994-95) was heavily reliant on stylistic tropes intrinsic to 'zoo TV' (Mills 1992) established in the earlier programmes.

The Big Breakfast (broadcast at 7am) was also an important 'bridging' tool from both the 'Close/4-tel' parts of the schedule (filled with animation) that preceded it at 6am, to Schools TV which usually followed it at 9.30am. *The Bigger Breakfast* (1997-2000), a brief spin-off which was usually deployed in holidays and half-terms, on the other hand acted as a proto-T4 in its similar use of imports and youth content, tone and separate branding from the main channel (and main *Big Breakfast* brand). The role of the *Big Breakfast* brand was strategic, with its placement and function not necessarily educational, but instead there to fulfil other elements of the C4 remit, such as diversity (providing a service to neglected youth audiences) and innovation (in form and presentation). However, what can be gleaned from this is that although C4 fulfilled its remit-oriented requirement to broadcast schools and educative content within morning slots of the schedule, the risk of losing audiences through the broadcasting of this content was tempered by what it was being preceded by: more commercially-oriented and entertainment-centric youth fare.

The Big Breakfast therefore acted as a lure for youthful audiences, a bridge to schools programming and operated as an "innovative and populist" (Miller 1992) alternative to the somewhat troubled breakfast offering on ITV – *GMTV*, described as 'bad downmarket television' (Brown 1993) which was in danger of bankruptcy (Miller 1993). It also inflected C4's morning schedules with a youthful orientation, culminating with a schools TV service that had half an eye on accessibility and ratings, judging by a selection of commissions that aimed to "mirror the whole of (C4's) general output in its range" (Channel 4 Corporation 1993b, p.2). This was perhaps best encapsulated within the Rapido production, *Channel Hopping* (1996-97), starring Eddie Izzard & Antoine de Caunes. The function of the commission was to blend entertainment and a more practical educative purpose beyond the purely pedagogical, with an emphasis on communication rather than correct grammar. In addition, the

programme was structured around routines and scenarios, more generically

akin to a sketch show than a schools programme (Edwards 1996), drawing

parallels to the earlier language series *Let's Parlez Franglais*. This highlighted

the growing tendency by C4 to commission series that balanced PSB

commitments with an eye on both youth audiences and larger ratings.

4Ventures/4Learning - A new era of education equals the death of schools provision

> The creation of 4 Ventures is the next stage of Channel 4's strategy to transform from a single television channel into a network of media businesses on a range of platforms. This strategy is parallel to those adopted by the BBC, ITV and BSkyB in response to the rapid spread of digital technology, which is transforming television and opening up new means of distributing content. (Channel 4 Corporation 2000h, p.28)

Upon Michael Grade's departure and Michael Jackson's arrival in 1997, a

number of significant institutional and organisational shifts occurred within C4,

including a push towards the diversification of its business model, in recognition

of increased competition from terrestrial, satellite and online. Educational

content and schools programming were not immune from this fundamental

channel-wide sea-change.

A bespoke C4 Schools website was launched in early 1999, ostensibly to

offer a database of programming and other resources, but with an additional

focus upon e-shopping, providing books, support materials and videos

("Channel 4 Schools Launches ECommerce Site", 1999). This was part of a

more general shift towards not only the exploitation of new media spaces to

push content, but of a need to exploit and monetise those spaces around

content that had previously not been profitable. C4 Learning, distributor of C4

Schools programming and related materials, operated in a similar fashion to

BBC Worldwide. It was a commercial subsidiary that looked to exploit C4

branded product, which was part of a wider recognition within UK PSBs that

increased commercial activity was necessary in order to retain financial viability in a competitive marketplace.

However, C4's educative mission and need to supply schools programming wasn't being entirely disregarded in favour of rank commercialism. Indeed, innovation and experimentation were still vital in relation to educational programming according to Paul Ashton, whilst suggesting that collaboration with entertainment-oriented indie producers (like Rapido) and the digital realm itself, with its potential for interactivity, was key to the evolution of the form (Fry 1999). This is confirmed by Marlow (1999) who suggests that interactive technologies would have a fundamental and beneficial effect upon schools provision, developing viewers into engaged users, although there was little opportunity for real interactivity to take place within the online spaces at the time.

With the merging of C4 Schools, C4 Learning and educational programme support into a new unit, 4Learning, in 2000, a shift in programming address, form and rationale was to take place in terms of education. In practical terms, this meant a greater focus on specific youthful demographics (16-24), increased production of new media projects and an injection of funding (Davies 2000). This melding together of previously disparate units was described within a Channel 4 policy document, suggesting that:

> Education is at the core of Channel 4's purpose, and education programmes are at the heart of Channel 4's schedule. Channel 4's multi-platform education strategy will be centred in 4Learning, which will develop a coherent focus for its education remit across appropriate on-screen and online platforms. (Channel 4 Corporation 2001)

This development was not an isolated one. The formation of 4Ventures, a separate arm of the Channel 4 Corporation that dealt with new digital channels (like E4) and commercial ventures (Brown 2001), was another variation upon the BBC's commercial arm (BBC Worldwide). It offered a point of demarcation

between C4's commercial endeavours and public service remit, whilst representing Jackson's vision to restructure and reshape C4 for a digital, multi-channel, multi-platform context. This meant, in the context of schools provision, that content was shifted towards interactive provision and delivered digitally where possible, with the balance from broadcast to digital shifting in favour of the latter ("Schools programming: Lessons in digital", 2001). It also meant a gradual cutting of budgets for education, something that was also necessitated by an advertising downturn and the fact that 4Learning, along with 4Ventures more generally, was not profitable (Hughes 2001a).

These economic difficulties, leading to a brief commissioning freeze for 2003, tied into a wider decline in schools TV provision, with Paul Ashton leaving in 2002 (Hughes 2002a). Brown (2002) also highlighted an growing lack of specialised educational broadcasting producers as well as fresh commissions, with the primary focus being upon digital and online. The blending of education, information and entertainment - something key to public service content, along with latter-day educational and schools TV - was being further unbalanced in favour of entertainment. Indeed, Heather Rabbatts (managing director of 4Learning in 2002) suggested that educational content should reflect a more general C4 ethos and aesthetic: 'edgy and provocative', appealing to older (yet still youthful) audiences, whilst also being more leisure and lifestyle-oriented ("On-the-job learning", 2002).

Despite the eventual failure of 4Ventures (and by association, 4Learning), which was folded back into the main Channel 4 Corporation in 2005 (Tryhorn 2005), the push towards re-branding and commercialisation of public service and new media platforms, coupled with the phasing out of traditional schools provision, had been set firmly in motion. Further attempts to reconfigure educational provision for a post-broadcasting and multi-platform environment

would be made in the tenure of Mark Thompson's successor, Andy Duncan, which will now be discussed in the following section.

Multiplatform learning and Channel 4's digital public service

> Karppinen (2006: 58) reminds us that "the remit of public service broadcasting is especially intangible and normative, embedded in the ideas of public sphere, citizenship, pluralism, creativity, national culture, all values that are notoriously difficult to define in an unambiguous way, let alone measure empirically". The same point is applicable to the contribution of education to public service broadcasting, where the balance between learning in a pedagogical sense and entertaining information is increasingly precarious. (Grummell 2009, pp.281-82)

> When new media emerge, the level of diversity is expected to increase. At the levels of ownership, content, receiver/audience and channel, additional mass media might increase diversity. New forms of journalistic expression might be created, new modalities of consumption might be developed and new business opportunities might attract entrepreneurial initiatives. (Trappel 2008, p.314)

The post-Michael Jackson era reflected Channel 4's continued push towards educational provision for a teen audience, rather than adult education/pre-school/children's provision, that the channel had been furnishing audiences with throughout the 1980s and 90s. Teens had been a recognisable target for Channel 4 since Michael Grade's tenure. They represented both a 'marginalised' demographic group that had historically been ill-served, as well as a valuable potential market that was appealing to advertisers, whilst also appealing to Channel 4's fluid, malleable brand identity. The growing prominence and importance of new media spaces to youth demographics from the late 1990s onwards, meant that broadcasters, both public service and commercially-oriented, had to find ways to exploit these platforms in a manner befitting their remit and function. In the case of Channel 4, it had to balance between commercial exploitation and allowing for public service outcomes, such as democracy and citizenship, as well as promoting experimentation and diversity. This is something that Catherine Johnson (2012, p.107) has problematised further, discussing how "the public service encounter" in the contemporary digital context must now be managed across a diverse range of

services and platforms, meaning that a range of distinct brands co-exist simultaneously and not always harmoniously.

However, Channel 4's long- and short-term decision-making and strategic thinking had sometimes been flawed and often made on the hoof. This was particularly evident when it came to extending the Channel 4 brand beyond the terrestrial space, as Maggie Brown's (2007) discussion of the rapid creation of Channel 4's digital youth channel E4 highlights. As a result, its terrestrial and multi-channel competitors, particularly the BBC, often had a head-start on the channel regarding the deployment of content and the propagation of the brand within digital spaces. This was something that Michael Jackson attempted to remedy in the early 2000s with various initiatives and restructuring of C4. However, this expansion, including 4Ventures, was rushed, leading to Channel 4 over-reaching and subsequently having to rethink and cut back on its digital ambitions. Andy Duncan's tenure, which began in 2004, was marked by many similar errors in strategy and policy-making, although Duncan did endeavour to leave his stamp on the channel in terms of trying to re-conceptualise its identity for the digital age. The most definitive articulation of such goals was within the 'Next on 4' policy document.

'Next on 4' – A step in the right direction or the moment where Channel 4 was made dizzy by 360 degree commissioning?

> 2008 was also a year of creative renewal, as we refocused Channel 4's activities for the digital age. In March we launched Next on 4, our strategy to accelerate the organisation's evolution from a public service broadcaster to a truly cross-platform public service network. (Channel 4 Corporation 2008b, p.5)

Channel 4 education and digital education projects were trumpeted by Andy Duncan within the Next on 4 policy document. This statement of intent was one that sought to follow in Michael Jackson's digitally-infused footsteps back at the start of the decade, but which also sought to pre-empt the *Digital Britain* policy

document in 2009 (latterly becoming the Digital Economy Act in 2010). According to the above quote from Channel 4's annual report in 2008, this was in order for Channel 4 to move from a *public service broadcaster* to a *public service network,* one that propagated its brand(s) across a variety of platforms via initiatives not necessarily televisual in nature, falling in line with the *Digital Britain* report's proposed suggestions that Channel 4 should focus its energies further on non-televisual platforms. This was also in recognition of multiplatform branding being essential to building brand loyalty across a range of demographics, particularly youthful ones. Indeed, Duncan's role when he was appointed Channel 4 Chief Executive was to "guide Channel 4's digital strategy" and sort out its portfolio of channels, whilst Duncan himself stated that his goal was to "transition (C4) from being highly successful in the analogue world to...deliver(ing) public purpose in a digital world" (Brown 2007, p.293).

Next on 4 was issued in partial response to criticism of the channel's lack of proactivity, along with the sense that it was not necessarily well-equipped to operate in a rapidly shifting digital broadcasting environment. This was partially due to the lack of a coherent long-term strategic plan for digital, which itself was due to relatively rapid turnover of Chief Executives in the 2000s. The lack of strategy was particularly pronounced in comparison to the BBC and its various digital youth initiatives at the time, like Switch and Blast. The former was introduced the year before (2007) as a youth content aggregator, disseminating the BBC brand across multiple platforms, whilst the latter had been operational since 2002 as a space for youth creativity and informal learning. The more formalised BBC services came via Bytesize and the short-lived and ill-fated digital curriculum project BBC Jam, which was shelved before it went fully online in 2007 (Michalis 2012). Thornham & McFarlane's work on BBC Blast further unpacks the disconnection between its proposed purpose versus its actual use by users in a nuanced fashion, with the suggestion that "[teenaged

users were] celebrated, not necessarily for their level of interaction or quality of discussion, but for the quantity of content they provide" (2011, p.270). These examples of the problematic execution of digital education initiatives would act more as harbingers of what was to follow for such projects, with issues of multiplatform brand consistency, impact and value all coming to the fore.

Within Next on 4, there was an emphasis on providing public value across *all* platforms, not just television, with an increased focus on educational content and other 'public service' genres, such as factual/documentary and news, which fell in line with *Digital Britain*'s insistence that Channel 4 should be public-service oriented, despite its pressing need for further commercial activity (or alternative economic support) which would make up for an impending "funding gap" (Holmwood 2009). However, what was most apparent was that collaboration and external funding, along with creativity and innovation, were seemingly key to Channel 4's success in its future endeavours, as perceived by Andy Duncan and Channel 4 senior management at the time, with partnerships between funding bodies, art institutions and social networking platforms all being integral to Channel 4's work within digital spaces. This is not to mention the collaborative production processes between TV indies and digital indies (along with the broadcasters themselves) in order to create multi-platform product, which in itself brought in its own issues beyond the scope of this chapter, but are covered in greater detail elsewhere (see Bennett et al. 2012). Matt Locke was a key figure involved in the implementation of the ideas espoused within Next on 4, including multi-platform '360 degree commissioning' which encouraged content production beyond the televisual and across a variety of spaces. Locke was appointed in 2007 as the commissioning editor for Education and New Media, after previously being Head of Innovation at BBC Future Media and Technology. His focus was primarily on digital and new media initiatives, rather than purely televisual ones and his work, along with that

of Tom Loosemore and Daniel Heaf (of 4iP), was integral in triggering an explosion of multi-platform projects at Channel 4. This followed up on Duncan's Next on 4 promises to develop the channel from PSB to public service network. An example of an educational project highlighting a discernible and positive outcome of these policy promises is *Battlefront*, which is discussed below.

Battlefront - A fight for the hearts and minds (but not wallets) of youth audiences as citizens

> …(PSBs) seem to have found a powerful rhetorical tool in the coupling of the classic ideal of serving the public as active citizens, and prospects of a digital, convergent media environment. The positive connotations of 'participation', in contrast to 'passive viewing', are employed rhetorically to renew the appeal of public service broadcasting. (Enli 2008, p.116)

> Scratch an activist and you're apt to find a fan (Duncombe 2012, para. 1)

Commissioned by Matt Locke and effectively displaying Channel 4's movement away from schools programming towards multiplatform projects, *Battlefront* (2008 -) was perhaps the most effective exemplar of this strategic shift, winning an International Digital Emmy in 2008 (Channel 4 Corporation 2008b, p.5). The shift was part of a policy that targeted the engagement of youth audiences within informal social networking spaces, encouraging a form of informal or 'stealth' learning that forefronted collaboration, creativity and the exchange of ideas, whilst highlighting the potential for gaining skills and knowledge relating to careers, business and politics, rather than pushing school-style learning (Monahan 2008). Greenhow & Robelia's (2009, p.122) work on informal learning provides further nuance, suggesting that "*Informal learning*, as we define it, is spontaneous, experiential, and unplanned", whilst comparing it to "non-formal" (students actively completing their own research, helped by peers or the media) and "formal" learning (classroom or other structured/directed learning environments). They go on to suggest that informal or non-formal learning spaces and social platforms:

...such as blogging, MySpace, and other Web 2.0 applications, have corresponded with discussions about how to prepare young people not only to become informed and watchful citizens, but also to promote their participation in civic life through internet-based volunteering, campaigning, and lobbying as well as through the creation of 'youth media' (e.g. blog entries, e-zines, podcasts, videocasts, online communities) that present discussion and debate about political, social and cultural issues (Selwyn 2007, 2–3) (Greenhow & Robelia 2009, p.125)

Battlefront was an example of these practices in action, operating as a cross-media, multiplatform offering whose televisual content was secondary to the online space, with the first series being broadcast in two blocks (in 2008/2009) after the digital environment was well-established. Described by Channel 4 as a project that gave teenagers the "tools and resources they needed to manage their own campaigns to change the world" (Channel 4 Corporation 2008b, p.55), be they political, ethical or environmental (Parker 2008b), it was education project as digital activism. It offered up an example of crowdsourcing (like Wikipedia) and collective intelligence (Jenkins 2006) that allowed its youthful users the opportunity to operate in a democratic, politicised fashion, rather than being encouraged to behave as consumers of products and lifestyles. This is an accusation that can be directed at other C4 digital spaces, such as 4Beauty, 4Homes and 4Food, which have been part of Channel 4's burgeoning shift towards the 'lifestyling' and increased commercialisation of its online presences. Projects such as *Battlefront,* however, were arguably designed to re-engage youth audiences with public service content. Carter, in her brief editorial about children's news and youth audiences (citing BBC's *Newsround* (1972 -) as a key case study) postulates that:

Teenagers...*are becoming increasingly disengaged from a political process that they believe largely ignores them and their interests*… Media producers who appear only to want to appeal to young people as consumer citizens must now accept some responsibility for encouraging political citizenship by providing children and teenagers with critical and challenging news services… (Carter 2009, p.35 - Emphasis added)

She, and also Matthews (2009), surmises that there is a pressing need for

youth provision that facilitates a sense of democratic action and citizenry, but highlights a crucial lack of provision for *teen* audiences in this area, at least televisually speaking. *Battlefront*'s digitally-oriented focus and user-driven community allowed for the production of public service content in an egalitarian fashion. As Mair (2009, para. 1) suggests "*Battlefront* was a project that *needed* an integrated digital offering with an active online community to realise its full potential", and indeed this space (or variety of spaces) was key to the successful functioning of the project. Collaboration with other social networks, such as its partnership with Bebo, along with links to Myspace and Twitter, was vital in building brand awareness of the project. This was achieved primarily through campaigning and viral work through social networking sites, due to *Battlefront*'s status as a multi-platform project which was lacking a prime-time scheduling presence (Willis 2009). However, in the official documentation and press releases, the *users* are the ones considered as most important in this promotional process: rather than operating as a 'top-down' project, the rhetoric suggested a 'bottom-up', grassroots ideal (Parker 2008b). They were involved in constructing a corpus of shared knowledge for other users and campaigners to draw and learn from, whilst also allowing for a re-conceptualisation of youth audiences as engaged and passionate, rather than as mere consumers.

The television series itself, along with the online spaces that the *Battlefront* brand inhabited, reflected both its digital origins and the importance of impassioned user-campaigners to drive the series. Examination of the opening episode of *Battlefront* (broadcast on December 1st 2008 at 11.30am), reveals adherence to many formal/aesthetic choices that can be witnessed in non-educational youth productions (fast editing, contemporary music soundtracking the action, use of graphics). Other aesthetic choices, such as the 'screens within screens' effect, are suggestive of its close interrelationship with other platforms. This acts as an explicit reference point to the web, which

is particularly pronounced in the video diary segments that resemble YouTube clips. This also functions, in conjunction with the use of graphics and SFX, to break up the programme into bite-sized segments and helping to retain viewer attention. It is further fragmented with 30 second interstitial 'stings', featuring other campaigners succinctly summarising the thrusts of their campaigns, which can be examined further online.

The episode showcases a series of key themes that display how *Battlefront,* and by association Channel 4, sees its campaigners/audiences and, conversely, how users see *Battlefront*: as a tool to get their voices heard and to potentially shape the debate on key issues. The campaigner featured in the episode (Alex Rose) joined *Battlefront* in order to boost his anti-knife and gun crime initiative ("STOP"), with the brand facilitating a multi-pronged, multi-platform thrust that allowed interactivity and relationships to form with other like-minded users on a much larger scale. Indeed, Rose exhorts the viewers to "get involved" and the notions of collaboration and teamwork via are emphasised throughout the episode through social networking, as well as face-to-face/real-life action, forming the basis of what the *Battlefront* initiative was supposed to be for. Rather than having the debate shaped for them, *Battlefront* potentially allows its user-campaigners to engage in some agenda-setting and operate as engaged citizens. This has not always happened in the past, particularly in relation to youth news services such as *Newsround*, which often shaped the news agenda along populist/entertainment lines and negatively impacted upon the potential for youth audience engagement with key issues (Matthews 2009, pp.561-562).

Additionally, campaigning-as-business (showing the lobbying and charity industries) and campaigning-as-lifestyle (through the focus on Rose's personal and professional life) are articulated in the space of the episode. The featuring

of various public figures (Desmond Tutu, John Bird) also lend credibility to Rose's personal campaign and display the necessity of celebrity, however small, in allowing *Battlefront* to effectively function beyond the personal. This use of celebrity can also be witnessed within *Battlefront's* online spaces, where a section entitled "Our Famous Battlefronters", replete with video clips and images, is featured prominently. "Famous" is somewhat subjective in this instance, given that it heavily features presenters, television personalities and musicians with a close affiliation to (the now defunct) T4, that the televisual *Battlefront* brand was itself affiliated with. However, the section's inclusion is further suggestive of the need of famous figures as a means to successfully promote and enact democratic, politically-fuelled action. The same could also be said of Channel 4's historical need to utilise celebrity figures to propagate its own brand identity, as discussed earlier.

Another Channel 4 series with an educational mission can be mentioned at this juncture, particularly as a counterpoint to *Battlefront*. Cunningham (2009, p.89) discusses the much-lauded health series *Embarrassing Bodies* (originally *Embarrassing Illnesses*, commissioned in 2007 through Maverick Television) as a more acute example of, or precursor to, C4 multi-platform policy at work. The series, additional multi-media content and the spaces it was spread across, had a clear address and appeal to youth audiences, through its tabloidised tone and frank depiction of sexual issues and the body. Cunningham also highlights how the content began as television, then swiftly expanded across multiple platforms, including mobile, focussing largely on interactive elements. It was subsequently spread across branded digital spaces, which enabled Channel 4 to grow its audience for the brand. This represented a trajectory that was the inverse of *Battlefront's* rationale, which placed its faith in digital spaces and the primacy of the user, rather than the audience. It also displayed the shift in commissioning policy regarding digital commissions and particularly educational

commissions, although the online-first strategy could be witnessed in other youth-oriented commissions. E4's *Skins* (2007-13) was one such example where brand and audience building was being heavily undertaken prior to television broadcast, the success of which lead to it being used as a template for other E4 youth drama brands. *Embarrassing Bodies* and its online spaces also operated in comparison to the official NHS Choices site, with the former having greater youth appeal due to not only its informal tone, but allowance of user-generated content and emphasis on interactivity and user agency.

These digital education projects were a successful encapsulation of Channel 4's digital ideals at the time and an interesting reformulation of educational content, encouraging democracy, innovation, interactivity and user-generated content. However, Matt Locke in 2008 outlined the problematic relationships within Channel 4 (and elsewhere in British broadcasting) between cross-platform and televisual commissioning teams, suggesting a lack of understanding and communication between the two, along with a lack of truly integrated and joined-up thinking (Locke 2008). This suggests that for all the rhetoric about '360 degree commissioning' and multi-platform innovation, Channel 4 still had issues reconciling its *previous* identity as a broadcaster with its *proposed* one as a network or platform for digital opportunity. It is with this in mind, that 4iP, introduced in the wake of Next on 4, is now discussed.

4iP – The moment where Channel 4 lost motivation for digital innovation?

> The main rationale behind online media provided by PSB is the basic consideration that the public service remit is not confined to a specific technology (like radio or broadcasting) but to a specific service. PSB therefore has to follow the audience to where they would access such services. (Trappel 2008, p.320)

> Channel 4 has innovated by developing a philosophy of public service media 'beyond broadcasting'. Channel 4 is using the interactive potential of digital media to refocus on public service (Cunningham 2009, p.89)

Cunningham (2009, p.88) describes UK's Channel 4 as "a public service provider leading in social innovation". The creation of the 4iP fund (Four Innovation for the Public), closely linked with the aims of Next on 4, was evidence of this in action. It was important, as Channel 4 had no formal R&D/Innovation unit at that moment (Cunningham 2009), although it has latterly developed (since 2011) an "Audience Technologies and Insight" research department. Launched in 2008 and controlled by Tom Loosemore and Daniel Heaf, the future-focussed fund acted as a 'talent scout' for the regions (Curtis 2008), encouraging collaboration with regional institutions and digital agencies. This displayed C4's urge to shift away from London-centrism, acting as a spur towards a variety of cross-platform commissioning beyond education/factual content, through small-scale investment and innovation within the digital realm, rather than just the televisual. Indeed, it was suggested that the fund could invest in "entirely independent self-standing concepts away from Channel 4's core platforms" (Channel 4 Corporation 2008c) operating outside of C4's role as televisual publisher.   4iP was a means to evolve pre-existing public service genres, solidifying the channel's commitment to educative provision. It endeavoured to collaborate to produce interactive public service media (and not television), which could operate, in the words of the website set up to promote its aims, in "a post-broadcast world" (Channel 4 Corporation 2008c).

Parker (2008a) mentions how in the past, C4's online strategy was driven by marketing and advertising branded content, with the suggestion that, post-Next on 4, Channel 4 needed to evolve beyond that and produce a greater variety of functionality in its work, *as well as* new and different content. As Andy Duncan mentioned at the time:

> Web has to be the priority platform and it must go further than 'TV plus' (...) It can be more radical and experimental. I can guarantee that some projects will be unmitigated disasters, but that's the point. (Duncan in Parker 2008a).

Indeed, Tom Loosemore agreed, suggesting that 4iP acted as a throwback to an earlier, daring and provocative version of Channel 4 (Parker 2008f), whilst Emily Bell (2009) outlined it as "a new model of public service provision". It was also seen as a key component in the transformation of public service media that allowed Channel 4 to fulfil its remit in new ways (Kiss 2009). This re-conceptualisation of public service links into descriptions of other digital/multi-platform content that was being commissioned at the time. Examples included Channel 4 Education projects such as *Year Dot* (2008-09) and *The Insiders* (2008), which both tackled issues concerning careers and citizenship for teen demographics, deploying multi-platform strategy and emphasising interactivity and user-generated content to do so. Drama brands like *Skins* and series like Touchpaper Television's *City of Vice* in 2008*,* with its interactive elements being fulfilled by the *Bow Street Runner* online game, also embraced innovation and collaboration within the multi-platform arena, hewing to the aims of Next on 4 and emphasising the importance of user agency and creativity.

However, 4iP was initially intended as a pilot scheme and therefore had a potentially limited shelf-life. Despite Tom Loosemore's desire for 4iP (and its practices) to be permanently integrated into C4 commissioning and digital policy (Kiss 2009), this would end up being stymied by management changes at Channel 4. The appointment of Richard Davidson-Houston in 2010 as C4 Head of Online, along with David Abraham replacing Andy Duncan in the same year, meant that Channel 4's goals in the digital sphere and interpretation of its remit would change once again. 4iP was subsequently shuttered in 2010 as part of an institutional process of streamlining digital projects, with a suggestion the broadcaster's online/digital strategy at that moment was sprawling, lacking in focus and a coherent brand identity. This move towards the reining-in of innovation was arguably so that a sense of brand consistency could be re-established across all platforms, which is laudable, especially as Johnson

(2012) has illustrated that Channel 4's brand identity in the contemporary instance is complicated and highly fluid.

Despite acting as a 'bridging mechanism', with hubs around the country and the successes of projects like Audioboo (an audio 'micro-blogging' platform) and the Newspaper Club (a company which facilitated small-scale newspaper runs), there was a sense that 4iP did not provide sufficient 'public value', nor connect sufficiently to the core brand: Channel 4 itself. It neither grew audiences, nor generated significant revenues. The arrival of David Abraham "sealed 4ip's fate", as he wished to refocus C4 around TV programming (Kiss 2010), with closer links being established to TV commissioning editors. This was justified in terms of making this a more coherent experience for audiences across platforms: *audiences*, rather than *users*. The decision inadvertently showed that the channel's priorities lay with television, at a moment where the medium's future, as well as its conceptualisation, was in flux. There seemed to be a hesitancy and lack of clear focus in terms of what Channel 4's future digital strategy was or would be.

Arguably, the majority of the projects, initiatives and commissions springing from Duncan's policy document were also hamstrung by either a lack of cohesion relating to brand identity or overall purpose, despite their innovation. In the case of 4iP, it was difficult to ascertain its actual purpose. There was also a lack of sustained attention and care given over to many education commissions, with the majority (other than *Battlefront*) only lasting for a single series or year of multi-platform production, although this may've been by design, with various projects (like 4iP) having a set life-span. There was also a sense that the new Chief Executive (David Abrahams) was not a fan of the kind of innovation and digital experimentation espoused within Duncan's policy promises. Indeed, there was little support for Duncan's initiatives or digital

youth education commissions, signalling a retreat from platform agnosticism, innovation and risk.

Conclusion

4iP perhaps represented best the failure of C4 to live up to its promises of reconceptualising itself into a public service network that endeavoured to move beyond the televisual. Other digital education projects, such as *Year Dot* and *Slabovia,* commissioned in 2008, along with drama brands such as *Skins* and *Misfits*, are further examples of both a failure to fully embrace the potential for Channel 4 expressed within the Next on 4 document, as well as the primacy of commercialism within the part-PSB broadcaster. The latter issue articulates the problematic balancing act for Channel 4 (between commercial imperatives and public service remit obligations), subsequently making it difficult for purely educational and truly multi-platform projects to thrive within such an environment. The rapid shifts in digital strategy and overall vision for the channel, which can be evidenced within the relatively short period outlined here, are part of Channel 4's long-term struggles with long-term planning and commissioning strategy. Whilst promises are often made, as they were within Next on 4 regarding the foregrounding and cheerleading of Channel 4's PSB role in an increasingly digital environment, they often rung hollow given the channel's refocussing upon the televisual, the commercial and the safe.

Once David Abraham became Chief Executive in 2010, many of the initiatives and commissions that sprang from Next on 4 were scrapped, rather than sustained. A lack of sustained interest in innovation, education and risk, three things often considered integral to Channel 4's identity, stymied projects and content which were initially commissioned by the publisher-network to encapsulate these ideas. This pattern was also mirrored by another UK PSB, with the BBC's cutting of Switch and Blast. These were digital multiplatform

projects that sought to provide youth content, a space for fan creativity and interactivity as well as a means to aggregate youth content and were examples of the BBC, in James Bennett's (2011) words, 'bleeding platforms dry'. However, they were cancelled due to cost-cutting measures and a perception that the BBC, which already catered to youth through BBC3, should steer clear of areas already well-served by commercial providers. Instead, a sense that a favouring of commercial reward and 'impact' was being prioritised by British broadcasters generally, over traditional notions of public service, was overwhelming. In the case of the initiatives and projects here, the fostering of autonomous interactive learning cultures and subsequently the retention of the broadcasters' future audiences, was hindered and short-changed through development of limited, tokenistic and eventually short-lived digital initiatives. Conversely, the online presences for entertainment brands, like E4's *Skins* and BBC's *Doctor Who,* and online lifestyle zones, like 4Beauty, were prominently invested in. This succinctly articulates the prevailing need for a more pragmatic mode of public service (or public value) networking that attracts desirable demographics and deletes the idealism left behind in the memory of catering for citizenry via public service broadcasting.

Such cross-platform pragmatism and increasingly commercialised interpretations of what constituted public service will now be investigated within a chapter which examines the initial steps down the pathway of digital televisual youth provision, leading to the compromised situation outlined both above and within the final chapter, focussing on C4's and the BBC's youth channels (E4 and BBC3), which represent an intensification of the process of *spray*.

Chapter 5: 'Neither one thing nor the other' – How E4 and BBC3 represented public service broadcasting's uneven solution to the digital multichannel problem

E4, Channel 4's second and youth-oriented digital channel, was a culmination of various experiments and strategies expressed within the strands chapters. It was a 'testing ground' for risky ideas, similar to late night scheduling. In addition, E4 was also a lifestyle destination like T4, a place where it could be "Friday night every night" with the best of American imported television and a multiplatform space that wished to 'gamify' content and innovate in public service spaces (like education). This chapter therefore represents a culmination of what the strands chapters were building up to, where disparate programming zones and strategies were combined to form a single digital channel (or series of spaces). The chapter acts as a bridge between the earlier chapters that illuminated C4's experiments within the confines of a single channel's schedules, and the final chapter, which will subsequently articulate the acceleration of *spray* across a network of digital spaces created by broadcasters.

Both E4 and BBC3 will be discussed, the latter being the BBC's own attempt to cater for the youth market, acting as a relaunched version of the earlier BBC Choice. An analysis of their programming and commissioning methodologies, branding strategies and new media endeavours will be undertaken, placing them in wider industrial and socio-political contexts, particularly relating to how wider governmental policy affected their shape and direction. This is in order to discover and compare how these broadcasters attempted to navigate through this digitally-induced uncertainty and increased commercialism whilst endeavouring to stay true to their identities and public service obligations. These digital youth channels also represent a 'bridging' moment in and of themselves in the greater context of broadcasting history and Channel 4 in particular. They operated as stepping stones from television's old

media strategies towards new media experimentation and digital platforms. I

will suggest that these spaces and channels were the products of uncertainty

and flux, operating as further examples of C4's *spray*.

The comparison with BBC3 is also undertaken in order to understand

differing approaches to youth audiences and public service. BBC3 focussed on

content generation, whilst E4 focussed on lifestyle destinations and the brand,

with imports being a means to lure viewers into multiplatform spaces, which

raised issues about E4's ostensible public service role. However, the

comparison is also used to see the almost symbiotic relationship the two

channels shared in their competition with one another. This can be seen

particularly in the rapid turnover of channel controllers defecting to 'the

competition', whilst also seeing how each controller's conceptions of what

constituted youth appeal could have long-standing effects on programming

strategy and channel identity. Key programming and branded content will also

be discussed, such as E4's teen drama *Skins* (2007-13) and BBC3's *Being

Human* (2008-13). This is in order to unpack the disconnect between what

each channel was *promising* and what they actually *delivered*, a recurring

theme throughout this thesis regarding C4. A discussion will also be undertaken

regarding how E4 and BBC3 represented examples of convergence television

and multiplatform commissioning, shifting away from traditional modes of

broadcasting in a concentrated attempt to attract youth audiences and re-

conceptualise public service in a commercially-oriented environment.

Mo' channels, mo' problems – balancing multichannel with public service

> The potential for brand extensions in the digital entertainment age is
> boundless. In June, Michael Jackson, chief executive of Channel 4,
> announced his intention of turning it into a fully realised multi-media
> company and to double online spending. The interactive department was
> launched in January, with pounds 10m and six new businesses, under the
> control of Andy Anson, who had previously worked at Disney. The prize
> project is E4, a multi-tiered interactive entertainment platform (O'Rorke
> 2000, p.64)

Within Britain, changes in broadcasting throughout the 1990s were marked by the rise to prominence of the multi-channel environment. This was primarily perpetrated by the satellite television provider Sky and its competitors. Tthe BBC, as part of a consortium, operated as this competition through the Freeview digital terrestrial platform, itself developed from the ill-fated ITV Digital platform in 2002. However, a governmental push towards digitalisation of the media (Born 2003) was also occurring at this time. The governmental policies of deregulating media ownership, allowing for foreign interests to own and control the new satellite and cable markets (Murdock 2000), along with the creation of the unified communications regulator OFCOM in 2003, recognised the shift away from scarcity in broadcasting. Such policies allowed the Labour government at the time to smooth the path towards free open markets (Smith 2006, p.929). This meant that the previously comfortable arrangement between public service-oriented terrestrial broadcasters was being shaken up (Petley in Gomery & Hockley 2006, p.43). All of which subsequently forced UK broadcasters into diversification and differentiation of their services for a diverse cable/satellite audience, a process that some were better prepared for than others. Such differentiation was beyond that of the terrestrial and far past the scheduling experiments discussed in earlier chapters.

The BBC showed that they were thinking of the bigger picture through consideration of its global audience, brand identity and financial future via the commercially-oriented BBC Worldwide, formed in 1995, which raised a series of questions pertaining to PSB funding and ideology. It also established a presence within the multichannel arena, with the entertainment, then youth-oriented BBC Choice (1998-2003) and education-centric BBC Knowledge (1998-2002) forming a part of its digital multichannel strategy. These channels would subsequently represent prototypes of what would later become BBC3

and BBC4 respectively. Whilst the latter would not alter much from its early incarnation, it was the former that would prove to reveal the BBC's relationship with a much sought-after 'minority audience'. This would eventually become BBC3, hunting after the valuable youth market. However, executing these plans to refresh its digital channel presence was far from a straightforward enterprise.

In proposals submitted between 2000 to 2002 to the Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, summarising BBC3's programming rationales and overall mandate, a commitment was made to provide a substantial amount of original British programming specifically commissioned for the channel. Eighty percent had to be original commissions, whilst ninety percent had to be made within the UK. These commissions also had to showcase innovation, risk and new talent, especially within the genres of comedy and drama (Leonard 2003). However, these proposals underwent significant re-working, following their initial rejection in September 2000 (Wilkes 2001). This was primarily due to concerns by Jowell that BBC3 would not be offering anything discernibly different from the BBC's commercial rivals, along with an imbalance in the types of programming to be provided. These concerns would turn out to be prescient, as BBC3's subsequent programming policy and overall purpose was fragmented and lacking in coherence from its inception, with a lack of balance evident in its scheduling, particularly in the initial stages of Stuart Murphy's reign (Gibson 2005, Burrell 2004).

Channel 4's initial response to the potential of the digital multichannel environment was FilmFour, a venture launched in late 1998 with a purposely niche audience base, which was initially successful compared to other terrestrial multichannel ventures, such as the digital Carlton channels. Its early success was ascribed to a "distinct personality" and brand identity, the targeting of niche audiences and being possessed of a "sophisticated" aesthetic (Plunkett 1999).

Filmfour's status as a spin-off of an established brand (C4), allowed it to hit the ground running and pave the way for other digital ventures. The subscription-only channel, despite its initial successes, demonstrated certain issues with the development of digital services. The subsequent justification of such services by public service broadcasters lead to C4 couching discussion of Filmfour in terms of remit obligations (Hayes 2000). Being forced to compete within a highly competitive commercial environment, where the distribution platforms were being controlled by corporations such as Sky, meant that these ventures had to put economic concerns first.

The process of swiftly establishing a varied presence in the digital marketplace lead to the creation of E4 being comparatively rushed. Its creation was in order to remain competitive in the throes of an post-millennial advertising recession, but it would also lead to its parent channel being placed in a weakened economic position overall (Brown 2008, pp.238-39, Born 2003, pp.774-75). E4 was created as a youth-oriented channel, with the youth market being considered key to establishing C4's PSB credentials by "(demographically) differentiating C4 from ITV" (Born 2003, p.787). It was also ostensibly created to establish a strong branded presence within satellite and cable markets and to provide alternate streams of revenue to the main channel, whilst also providing competition to Sky's own entertainment channel: Sky One (Born 2003, p.780).

However, E4's creation was not part of long-term strategising, but rather more prosaically from C4's competitive acquisition policy. C4's snatching of the rights from Sky of the American series *Friends* (1994-2004) and *ER* (1994-2009), as part of a three year deal with Warner Brothers including terrestrial rights and archive episodes, was to "form the backbone of C4's proposed entertainment channel, E4" ("Sky set to air E4", 2001). This ended the

complementary relationship between Sky and C4 regarding broadcasting of these series, potentially damaging future arrangements between the two broadcasters. Indeed, it subsequently lead to squabbles between the two over carriage of E4 on Sky, despite the former operating as a potential draw to the latter's service ("Sky set to air E4", 2001). A key element of brand differentiation within the competitive multichannel environment, populated by competitors like ITV2 and Sky One, was in the emphasis on quality "first-run" programming – both commissioned and acquired (emphasising exclusivity) - as well as the catering towards valuable and under-served youth audiences (Reid 2001, p.20). Although seen as a blow to Sky One, with these imported series forming a large part of their branding strategy at the time, there was the sense that C4 overpaid for series that were "past their prime" ("C4 bags Sky rights to Friends and ER", 1999). Such series, like the examples laid out within the imports chapter earlier, would be subject to the same process of recycling, rebranding and repurposing for their new home on the youth-centric E4. However, this is not to suggest that E4's purpose was entirely one-dimensional, or that the Channel 4 management were completely lacking in strategy.

Indeed, as is mentioned by Collins (2001, p.12) "E4 is more than just a channel, it's another plank in Channel 4's expansion...(with) talk at marketing meetings..now (being) of the Channel 4 'family'". It was part of a wider plan, consisting of a £15 million budget, to rejuvenate and relaunch Channel 4's online offerings and .com portal. E4 was at the centre of C4's push towards new entertainment portals, with E4.com being described as "a network of interactive comedy, games, music and entertainment channels" (Brech 2000b, p.1), with its offline content feeding into the online experience ("C4 unveils plans for new websites", 2000). This tied more generally into C4's hurried shift towards online projects and platforms. C4's strategy involved the increased targeting of viewers as consumers (with individual profiling of customers), a

greater focus upon interactive TV (taking cues from the US televisual experience), as well as collaborations and partnerships with commercial interests (like AOL and Warner Bros). These shifts were in order to realise C4's new media ambitions, endeavouring to retain C4's brand identity and ethos within these interactive spaces (O'Rorke 2000, p.64). The underlying sense of a push towards the monetisation of these spaces and the retention of audience share in a multi-channel, multi-platform environment being important for future successes was certainly evident here, but the variety and speed of these movements highlighted the increasing uncertainty within broadcasting at the time. However, some of the rhetoric surrounding E4 prior to its launch was certainly familiar, with the suggestion that "Channel 4 will use the service, aimed at younger viewers and available on cable, satellite and terrestrial, to launch new talent and programme ideas" (Wells 2000, p.5), acting as a experimental testing ground that could lead to content migrating across to the main channel. This echoed the channel's long-standing desires to do similar things within its schedules when it was simply a single terrestrial broadcaster. However, it also echoed C4's previous inability to sustain and support programming experiments and policy initiatives, as was laid out within the strands chapters

E4, as a part of Channel 4, was also therefore mandated to provide innovation and diversity in its content, along with the delivery of it, which is connected to the advent of digital television and the prevalent discourses of 'interactivity' and 'convergence'. The use of the term "content" itself, as opposed to the traditional idea of "programming", signified a shift towards what Caldwell (2005b, pp.41-74) has referred to as "convergence television". In this instance, textual product can be moved and sold across various media platforms as part of a strategy to provide a unified multi-media experience, but was also part of a underlying methodology to reduce costs. This, as will be seen within the following section's analysis of the content featured on E4, was a

recurring issue for the channel and its digital outlets.

The idea that this new wave of digitisation and technological convergence that would move the industry towards commercialisation and production of niche services, making irrelevant the notion of broadcasting, was perhaps a little premature. Gripsrud's (2005, pp.213-15) view that the premise of broadcasting, particularly public service broadcasting, is more relevant than ever within a multi-channel and digitised environment, as it provides tools vital for viewer citizenship, would support this notion. However, this disregards the potential impact that digital culture can have upon viewing publics, especially youth audiences, and their less culturally entrenched relationship with broadcasting. Gripsrud's blithe optimism here is somewhat incongruous, given the growingly fragmented nature of the European televisual market and the rise to prominence of niche content and alternate nodes of distribution.

These developments within digital television and the increasing emphasis upon convergence generated an ever more fragmented audience, which was being thinly spread across a widening variety of media. It wasn't only the economic and logistical considerations of digital television highlighted earlier that were proving to be a challenge to broadcasters' policy-making and overall identity. The interactive and community-oriented facets increasingly intrinsic to the notions of media, cultural and technological convergence were altering both the way in which media producers could generate content, as well as where and how they could distribute it. This was part of what Caldwell (2005b, pp.46-47) has outlined as "fundamental changes in the look of television" brought on by the rise of digital media and the internet. The aforementioned fragmentation has been occurring due to the constantly evolving interrelationships between technologies, genres and industries (as well as audiences), as part of an ongoing process that affects the manner of media consumption and production

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itself (Jenkins 2006, pp.15-16).

It is with this in mind that I now wish to provide an analytical overview of key branded content, along with a discussion of programming policy and new media strategies undertaken by a succession of channel controllers responsible for digital public service youth provision in a competitive commercial environment. This is in order to highlight the depth of fragmentation relating to institutional strategy and user experience. However, it will also showcase how these digital services expressed and were part of an all-pervading sense of flux, in terms of their identity and strategy. Such services acted as a bridge for what was to follow, operating as placeholders in broadcasters' ongoing quest for youth audiences.

Youth brands, programming strands and shifting sands

Ostensibly, both E4 and BBC3 set out with similar missions: to attract and retain youthful audiences through either content or marketing that suggested that the channels and their new media spaces were a space for formal or stylistic experimentation and innovation. The key differences however were in their subsequent interpretation of both this mission, along with a public service (or public value) remit, tying into their parent channels' place within the multi-channel marketplace. This positioning and construction of strategy would subsequently allow for a clear demarcation between the two digital youth channels, whilst also highlighting a great deal of overlap. The level of overlap pertaining to strategy, commissioning and brand identity was perhaps inevitable, particularly given the consistent management exchanges between the two channels. This impacted upon the coherence of vision of both channels, affecting the ability of both to build any sense of programming and commissioning coherence, or any momentum within the multi-channel marketplace. Additionally, the often fractious relationship between C4 and the

BBC with their respective youth channels, after a relatively harmonious period in which conditional support was provided for the latter by the former, certainly intensified the sense of competition between the two. C4, and specifically Mark Thompson, who had initially drawn up plans for BBC3 whilst at the channel, withdrew support and criticised plans for launching BBC3, as it would potentially negatively impact financially on C4, whilst Greg Dyke retorted that this about-face was due to financial difficulties suffered by C4 that year ("Dyke slams C4 over criticism of BBC3", 2002).

Julian Bellamy came to an important realisation after replacing Murray Bolland as E4 controller in 2005, a point which coincided with the beginning of Andy Duncan's tenure at Channel 4. E4, its procurement strategy and its commissioning practices, after many initial promises of innovation and experimentation was getting stale and 'lagging behind' its digital competition (Sky One, but mainly BBC3). Bellamy's strategy was to subsequently increase homegrown commissions (drama, comedy, entertainment), in a bid to "rediscover E4's distinctiveness" suggesting that "drama and entertainment can define a channel" and that reality shows should not form the sole bedrock for success for E4 (Brown 2005, p.8). However, programming strategy was only one element that was of importance to the management of these digital channels.

Stuart Murphy's departure as channel controller of BBC3 in 2006 and subsequent replacement by Bellamy was telling of the BBC's plans for BBC3. It also showcased the shallowness of the pool of channel controller talent, especially in terms of youth television. Bellamy was ostensibly employed to further develop the BBC3's burgeoning success within entertainment, with *Little Britain* (2003-06) being a big hit for the channel. However, a more important element of his role was also to innovate within the digital realm, with this being

seen a key space to appeal to the broadcaster's future audiences. This was considered a major loss to C4, mainly as Bellamy had been responsible for many factual entertainment hits such as *Big Brother*, which had, like other formatted entertainment, been seen as a huge draw for youth audiences. The BBC's then-director of television, Jana Bennett, suggested that he had been brought in because of his "fantastic experience of building channels and brands in a multi-platform digital environment", whilst "his dual experience as both a commissioning editor of factual entertainment and innovative shows like *Big Brother* - and of running a mixed genre channel - will bring a new dynamic to BBC3 as it evolves, grows and meets ever-changing audience expectations."" ("Bellamy lands BBC3 job", 2005). Such a statement suggested that Bennett was hedging her bets regarding how she saw BBC3 in regards to the wider BBC brand, whilst emphasising both Bellamy's broadcasting credentials and his experience in new media. These skills would allow BBC3 to appeal to youth audiences in their natural habitat, whilst retaining a competitive 'holding pattern' in the multi-channel environment.

Bellamy's policies of digital innovation were something that was subsequently continued by Danny Cohen from 2006 after Bellamy left for BBC3, with his work and plans for E4 also including an emphasis on home-grown commissions, whilst making E4 'fit for the future'. This implied that E4 couldn't survive on the success of imports alone, particularly given the increased competition for their procurement by other digital channels. Imports were something that the E4 brand had been built around and were considered to have both universal and youth appeal, so these shifts in strategy were a distinct departure from E4's initial brand identity. There is a comparison to be drawn at the time between Cohen's work at E4 and Bellamy's at BBC3, with the latter's emphasis on original comedy and (youthful) drama operating as a template for what Cohen wanted at E4.

Ironically, Bellamy's replacement at E4, Danny Cohen, would subsequently swiftly replace Bellamy, who moved back in the other direction after just 14 months at the BBC (Dams 2008a). After Cohen's successes with a series of strong factual commissions and homegrown content on E4, Jana Bennett (now head of BBC Vision) once again heralded a new channel controller's credentials, suggesting that "he's (Cohen) someone who absolutely understands what young adults are looking for" ("Head of E4 moves to lead BBC Three", 2007, p.27), changing the direction of BBC3 whilst arresting any momentum that its competitor (E4) had been building under Cohen's guidance.

What can be ascertained from this brief overview which articulates the "braindrain" within British television (and between the BBC and C4 specifically) is that both ventures were stricken with problems. Two key issues affected both BBC3 and E4 in their aim to provide innovative, boundary-pushing youth channels: *a lack of sustained, coherent strategy* and *economic restrictions*. Each different channel controller's idiosyncratic vision for youth provision would subsequently impact upon the shape and direction of that channel for some time after they had left. However, these visions were not always complimentary with the parent channel's goals and aims. Often, what was being produced and broadcast by the channels did not measure up and sometimes bore no resemblance to what was being promised. In the case of E4, its genesis was born out of a hurried desire to consolidate within an increasingly digital-centric, multi-channel marketplace, with its subsequent programming dictated by budget, limiting what it could procure and commission. BBC3, as will be outlined later, suffered from both a confused sense of who its 'youth' audience actually were and an unnaturally long gestation period, caused by governmental interference.

I will now go on to discuss each channel's programming and commissioning strategies, forms of youth address and issues that the channels subsequently suffered in trying to balance their public service and ratings-oriented commitments.

E4: Rebranding public service, exhausting imports and producing 'innovation' on a budget

E4's programming policy was, like C4 within prime-time, primarily designed around acquisitions, with imported US comedy and drama series filling the schedule. E4 was required to be profitable, so a dependency upon cheap imports and repeats of programming featured on its sister channels, whilst working within the confines of a restrictive budget, is perhaps inevitable (Brown 2008a). Its overall programming budget was initially £40m, with £11m of that going towards original programming upon its launch in 2001. Mark Thompson suggested that E4 initially acted primarily as a space of cross-promotion that supported the broadcaster's "core business" (Hughes 2002b), with branding being the only means by which to differentiate between E4 and C4 content.

However, the E4 budget was subsequently boosted to £60m in 2005 when the channel was made available on Freeview. This budgetary increase was part of an economic and institutional reshuffling at Channel 4, primarily involving the 4Ventures commercial arm which E4, along with the other digital channels, was part of before being returned to Channel 4's control ("E4 gets new chief and £20m boost", 2005). There had been a suggestion from within the television industry (particularly via ex-C5 chief David Elstein) that Channel 4's digital and commercial exploits had become more opaque and sprawling under Jackson, with the corporation becoming overly commercial whilst overreaching in terms of ambition and remit (Timms 2001). This concern was prescient. Due to the worsening economic climate, along with the failures of 4Ventures, Channel 4 had to slash its programming budget across its network to £525m

overall in 2009, which was a drop of £90m from two years previously (Parker 2009). These cuts significantly affected its ability and desire to produce high quality, UK-sourced content across the range of its channels. The economic climate within broadcasting throughout the 2000s led to broadcasters and media corporations having to cut back and scale down costs, reconsidering investments in what could be described as a period of consolidation, rather than a time for risk-taking. This cautious attitude permeated previously progressive commissioning and 'edgy' televisual texts, leading them towards 'safe' conservative intellectual properties and formulas, such as the BBC's *Dr Who* brand, that were proven to be successful. Such attitudes mirrored earlier crises of faith in risque or experimental content at C4 discussed in earlier chapters, such as the 4Later strand suffering at the expense of the 4Music brand.

However, E4 was also born out of promises of innovation and experimentation, in order to stay true to its parent channel's "core values" (Anson in O'Rorke 2000, p.64), along with an appeal to neglected youthful demographics. As a result, an emphasis upon home-grown commissions was necessary, although in this instance, the circumstances and commissioning rationale between E4 and BBC3 were diametrically opposite. The latter was hamstrung by an overwhelming and tightly negotiated need to produce expensive UK-originated commissions, whilst not being able to utilise a great deal of imported material. The former, on the other hand, started out by having minimal original content. This meant that it would have to repeatedly justify its existence and rationale in terms of its public service purpose and promises of innovation and experimentation. However, E4 would compare poorly to other moments of experimental content that had occurred in C4's recent history, such as those within the late-night slots and educational commissions.

This was something that C4 was repeatedly having to defend against after

only a year of E4's existence. The suggestion being that although E4 had built a strong brand identity with good marketing, "the programming has not always lived up to the image" with a dearth of quality original (drama) commissions and a lack of recommissioning: out of 19 new commissions in 2001, only 5 were recommissioned (Deans 2002, p.2). Others also suggested that C4's system of homegrown entertainment commissioning was flawed and far from prolific, accusing the director of programmes at the time (Tim Gardem) of not doing enough to support indie productions ("ITV Digital meltdown 'will not scupper E4'", 2002). Channel 4 had to evolve its digital commissioning strategies away from what had been successful in an analogue context. Structural changes were required within the broadcaster, to reflect the need to expand into digital markets and commission appropriate content, distributing more power to digital channels in the process ("Digital strategy - Will C4 stick to its digital guns?", 2002). However, E4's initial content and branding strategies did not favour original material, with the branding and marketing of pre-existing programming being prioritised over the commissioning of a variety of new and challenging content. With that said, the content on E4 was not designed to challenge, but instead operated to entertain. E4, particularly within its early years, was unhealthily reliant on certain key brands – both for ratings and in generating interest in and around the channel (Deans 2002, p.2). Indeed, E4 was dependent upon repeats of imports and was heavily subservient to the *Big Brother* brand, with the latter being seen as a "model for growth", rather than a stop-gap or temporary driver of ratings ("Digital strategy - Will C4 stick to its digital guns?", 2002).

The content that E4 had commissioned, along with that which it had acquired, was linked with the desire to construct E4 as an 'entertainment portal' which was spread across platforms. It was designed more as a branded lifestyle destination, acting as a container for 'all your favourite content' - similar

to the programming strategy exhibited by T4 - rather than a space which pushed boundaries relating to new or experimental content. Gameshows (*Banzai*, 2001-03), formatted entertainment (*Big Brother*), imports (*Friends*, *Dawson's Creek*, *E.R.*) and after it became a "24 hour network" in 2005 (Brown 2005, p.8), music videos, formed the majority of the schedules. These generic preoccupations tied into the common themes and content featured within the online spaces. It is noticeable that certain early rhetoric around the channel's function and overall purpose circled around its potential for "launching new talent" and "generating new programme ideas" (Wells 2000, p.5). The E4 "music zone", acting as a facsimile of MTV, was latterly being described as a "test bed for the latest interactive techniques" (Plunkett 2005), whilst continuing the function of T4's creation and cross-promotion of presenter-brands. The connotation of 'programme ideas' in actuality related to different formats and new brands, rather than anything idiosyncratic. From this evidence, E4 and its controllers were restricted in terms of imagination, as well as budgets.

Nevertheless, there were some concessions to creativity via homegrown comedy and drama. Indeed, as Collins (2001, p.12) suggests, there were benefits in allowing E4 to be a "testbed for new shows", allowing C4 to strengthen its position in the marketplace and have a pool of new content for potential repurposing. Programming like *Show Me the Funny* (comedy, 2002), *TV Go Home* (2001, written by Charlie Brooker), first-run *Hollyoaks* (1995 -), the return of *The Adam and Joe Show* and the specially commissioned youth drama *As If* (2001-04) were all key examples of youth content featured by E4 in its early years. None of these commissions, with perhaps the exception of the still-running *Hollyoaks*, made much of a lasting impact. C4's long-standing historical issues of inconsistent promotion or a sense of how best to utilise these programme-brands was evident once again. In an ironic twist, a series especially commissioned for E4 (*As If*) was more closely associated with the *T4*

weekend scheduling slot, rather than E4. Indeed, as Collins (2001, p.12) once more suggests, "Programme-wise, (E4 is) a pay-TV extension of C4's own Sunday morning teen-zone T4", with an emphasis on safe 'old favourites' which have subsequently been rebranded and repurposed to appear fresh and in-keeping with E4's youth rhetoric, despite the content itself being tired.

However, Danny Cohen's tenure would prove to be memorable and decisive in offering an alternative to what had gone before at E4. As Stoker (2006c) mentions, Cohen's focus on factual entertainment commissions (*Stop Treating Me Like a Kid*, 2006) and teen drama (*Skins*, 2007-2013) would prove to resonate and prove an effective substitute for E4's previous over-reliance upon imports and reality brands. Indeed, E4's procession of successful youth dramas (*Skins, Misfits, The In-Betweeners*) can be placed in comparison to successful BBC3 dramas, which were not centred on 'youth' in the same way, such as *Being Human* (2008-13) and *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-10) (Dean 2009). E4 also operated a 'less is more' commissioning strategy enforced by its relatively meagre budgets, with fewer homegrown commissions in comparison to BBC3. The latter were remit-obligated to broadcast primarily UK-originated product, but had the "luxury of time and budget" to produce good *drama* series, not just *youth drama* (Dean 2009). However, E4 was not alone in attempting to execute Cohen's strategy and was playing 'catch-up' with the competition. The primary competition, referred to earlier, was BBC3, whose approach to youth audiences and the digital environment both contrasted against and complimented E4's.

BBC3: A story about the BBC's addled youth brand

E4 was not the only youth channel with strategy and budget issues. The creation of BBC3, evolving from BBC Choice after a pained and prolonged period of governmental negotiation, lead to an initially compromised and

confused end product. The channel was duty-bound to produce 'public value', avoid a reliance on imported material and focus on homegrown commissions, whilst serving a variety of functions. From its eventual launch in 2003, up until Danny Cohen was placed in the position of channel controller in 2007, there had been a gradual shift in BBC3 programming priorities towards less expensive and more 'marketable' product. In executing the BBC's mandate to provide content that had "public value" (BBC 2004, Petley 2006, pp.43-44), such value was arguably being provided in economic rather than socio-cultural terms. Subsequently, its initial commitments to animation, which was expensive and time-consuming to produce, along with edgy comedy which could be potentially offensive or inviting of media criticism, were either poorly scheduled or never redeployed elsewhere (Sandler 2003, Kitson 2008).

Instead, factual entertainment and "formatted" programming (Hill 2005) became prevalent within the schedule. Such content simultaneously satisfied BBC3's remit to produce youth-oriented public service programming, whilst representing good value in comparison to other riskier and more expensive programming. This drew parallels to E4's necessity-based programming policy, which explained its rationale for formats like *Big Brother* (and its spin-offs) for a prolonged period, operating ostensibly as 'public service television'. The intrinsic flexibility of factual entertainment formats featured on BBC3 provided the channel with much-needed economic and creative latitude, as these could be made to satisfy programming requirements and quotas whilst remaining relatively cheap. In addition to this, as established formats and formulas which could be tweaked to fit the needs of various demographics, they represented a reduction of risk. This was something that the BBC increasingly favoured in a wider context, given its primary terrestrial channels' gradual turn towards an increasingly populist programming ethos (Cooke 2003) since the process of digitisation within television in the 90s (Murdock 2000, Deuze 2007)

BBC3's programming budget was reduced to around £80m in 2008, from a high of £97m a few years previously (Brown 2008b), which was part of a wider process of cost-cutting and rationalisation within the BBC since its Royal Charter status review in 2004 (BBC 2004) and subsequent charter renewal in 2006. This budget was still significantly higher in comparison to other comparable digital outlets (BBC4's was around £40m at around the same time). BBC3's programming was the most expensive per hour (£179,000 compared to BBC1's £97,000 – Bell 2008a) on BBC's network, by virtue of its mandate demanding original British commissions and talent to star in it. This remit hamstrung the channel, as it was required to *produce* innovative and fresh content that appealed to a youth demographic, rather than rely upon acquisitions (like E4) to fill the schedule.

BBC3 programmes themselves, particularly in the early part of the channel's history, could be understood in terms of their evolving tone and mode of address to their audiences over time, as well as their relationship to scheduling, marketing and distribution. There were significant issues with a section of BBC3 programming in the Stuart Murphy era (2003-2007), particularly relating to its drama and comedy commissioning. The tone of what was being produced was either too dark and cynical or it was wildly uneven. Comedy programmes like *Monkey Dust* (2003-05), *Nighty Night* (2004-05), *15 Storeys High* (2002-04), *Snuff Box* (2006) and the medical drama series *Bodies* (2004-06) all suffered similar fates. In short, they were seldom recirculated on the BBC network (if at all), which was trumpeted as a key part of BBC3's apparent function: to provide original programming that could be repurposed for other BBC content hubs. This content was also poorly scheduled and often positioned in unfriendly 'graveyard' slots making it difficult for them to find audiences. They were also afforded minimal promotion by the BBC and

struggled to achieve re-commissioning. BBC3 struggled with having to maintain

adherence to the notional respectability that the BBC brand connotes, whilst

simultaneously appealling to youth demographics. It also highlights, as the

chapter on late-night showed, the problems inherent to making promises to

provide risky or experimental content. Such content would often push

boundaries of taste and also of televisual form, making for difficult viewing.

With the issue of uneven tone, ostensible 'youth' drama programmes such

as the *Dr Who* spin-off series *Torchwood* (2006 -) and *Sinchronicity* (2006)

suffered from grasping self-consciously for a distinctly 'adult' tone through the

deployment of various thematic and aesthetic concerns. In the case of

Sinchronicity, the preoccupation with sexual themes and risqué language gave

it the impression of striving overly hard to reach a young male demographic.

Torchwood however, whilst suffering with similar tonal issues and preoccupation

with sexual content in its early series, arguably also suffered in comparison to

its source text (*Dr Who*) in its attempts to differentiate itself.   These issues are

comparable to the issues that BBC3 initially had in its association with the BBC:

that of establishing an identity distinct from that of its source. Ironically, this was

also something that E4 endeavoured to do, often at the expense of its other

mission to provide innovative content. *Torchwood* was also notable in that it

marked the beginning of the BBC's embracing of spin-off or franchise televisual

properties, as part of an overall scheme to maximise the success of the (re-

branded) *Dr Who* through various brand extensions, diversification and

provision of added content. In this instance, the BBC was more concerned with

brand congruence with its status as a PSB than could be said of Channel 4 and

E4's lurch towards commercialism.

Examining the BBC3 schedules from June 2007 to April 2008, over the

first year of Danny Cohen's reign at the channel which began in May 2007,

showed distinct patterns along with a shift in the make-up of programming from a set point onwards. From June until the end of the year, the programming could be summarised into two themes; repetition and repeats (mimicking E4); and lifestyle programming/reality formats. This displayed the channel being heavily reliant upon a small coterie of proven ratings earners and solidly inoffensive fare, which bore a strong resemblance to E4's early programming and scheduling policies. Examples of such content which propped up the BBC3 schedule in this period were *The Real Hustle* (factual entertainment, 2006-12), *Family Guy* (animated comedy, 2005 -), *Doctor Who* (sci-fi / family entertainment, 2005 -), the ever-present *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps* (sitcom, 2001-11) and the long-running *Snog, Marry, Avoid* (makeover show, 2008 -). The *Eastenders* (1985 -) omnibus edition was also a staple of BBC3 scheduling.

2008 however saw BBC3 commission a string of drama pilots as part of a scheme to provide an injection of new narrative worlds into BBC3's somewhat predictable and repetitious schedule, with the intention of selecting one of them to produce a full series (Vine 2008). This gave the impression of a proactive commissioning and programming strategy, which was something that E4 could be accused of lacking for long spells in its early history. However, it was *Being Human* (2008-2013), a distinctly less calculating interpretation of BBC3's youth mission to provide programming that could compete with E4's string of youth drama successes that was commissioned. *Being Human*, after receiving a groundswell of support via online fans of the programme (Martin 2009), was produced and distributed in a similar fashion to *Skins* and American 'teen TV' featured on E4. It had its own space on the BBC3 website which acted as a hub for community and interactivity, whilst extending the narrative through a variety of additional content. There was also a focus on transmitting the series via online platforms first, with episodes being made available on iPlayer before

transmission on BBC3, in order to maximise its potential audience. Audiences, in this and other instances, were being encouraged to further investigate and consume texts across platforms in ways they saw fit - up to a point. This shift towards "convergence television" and changing perceptions by broadcasters of how broadcasters could operate within a digital environment will now be discussed in the following section.

Digital content, convergence TV and the irresistible shift towards multiplatforming

BBC3's primary purpose, similar to E4's, was to generate interest from within the youth demographic in the BBC brand which could be migrated across, along with its content, to other channels on the BBC network. BBC3, certainly in the early part of its existence, was less a channel in its own right, but more a hub or testing ground, a space where new content and ideas could be developed safely and subsequently can be distributed elsewhere. This echoed BBC2's early role, along with Channel 4's experimentation with scheduling strands and zones. It occurred without the main parent channels having taken the risk on it and with some guarantee of success for the provider who will be (re)transmitting it. Anything that it, or digital channels in general, does is primarily in the service of the greater good (the parent brand) and as a means of competing with other digital (commercial) channels for valuable demographics. However, this lead to a particular problem for BBC3: when it had been placed in the position as aggregator of new content and as competition to other channels, it would have little coherent identity of its own, especially when the standard of the programming produced was inconsistent (Bell 2008a). It laboured in trying to establish itself as a individual branded entity that was both separate from and part of the broader BBC brand, yet was hampered by both the uneven quality of its content and the public service connotations of its parent brand: a producer of high quality, highbrow content. BBC3 was required to be distinctive and 'innovative' in order to both differentiate itself from its commercial competitors,

whilst still appealing to youth audiences. However, it couldn't deviate too far from what is perceived of and required through its remit as a BBC branded entity.

After providing the impetus for the multiplatform marketing and distribution (Bell 2008b) of *Skins* on E4, Danny Cohen as BBC3 controller endeavoured to replicate the process on the BBC network with similar programming and a comparable incorporation of convergence. A process of rationalisation and definition of the interaction between new digital technologies and audiences was undertaken, which allowed for a greater level of interactivity. However, the example of *Skins* in this case is instructive, in that it was the first real example of Channel 4's full implementation of their digital television strategies, displaying an embrace of new media and its possibilities relating to audiences, acting as a template for future multiplatform drama commissions. It operated in contrast to the arbitrary, bolted-on "interactivity" and 24 hour webcam access available within Channel 4's initial attempt at convergent television: the reality gameshow *Big Brother* (2000 -) (Born 2003, Brown 2008). *Skins* was purposely constructed to generate committed audience groups, through its integration of (and marketing and distribution within) social networking, encouraging audience interactivity and discourse, which followed the example of American teen TV networks (Wee 2008). This could be witnessed within extensive social media campaigns that allowed for multi-platform interaction with characters within the *Skins* narrative universe. In this instance, interactions were facilitated "in places relevant to each character", whilst Paul Bennun (of Somethin' Else) suggested that " multi-platform shows need unconventional campaigns that are like an extension of the show in themselves" making them distinctive, yet also blurring the line between promotion and content (Bennun in Davies 2010b). Such strategies were in recognition of rapidly evolving audience consumption practices. Channel 4 and E4 were being forced to move as swiftly as their

audiences and, in Jon Gisby's words (head of Future Media at C4 in 2009), "(had) to become more innovative because as more people tune in online it will become more and more challenging commercially", stating the growing preference for consumption of content, rather than television, along with the impact this would have on broadcasters operating from old media models ("Television by internet starts to get under our Skins", 2009, p.43).

Given British broadcasting's often uneasy and under-prepared dealings with new media spaces and their inhabitants (as has been illustrated in other chapters), it is evident that many digital strategies were not the result of careful planning and forethought, but were instead rather more reactive. These forays represented a desire by broadcasters to swiftly try and regain control of increasingly active audiences by staking a claim to and marking the territory of these online realms. Brooker's (2001) conception of "overflow" in this instance is a charitable detailing of TV institutions' deployment of media convergence - suggesting a degree of control and calculation over the process - as part of a general change in the make-up of textual product. This is further detailed by Sconce (2005) in his discussion of television networks' development of immersive "narrative universes", as well as Jenkins' (2004) and Perryman's (2008) unpacking of "transmedia storytelling" that also depicts the increasing multi-media overspill of televisual content. "Overflow" however does not adequately illustrate the need to deploy digital media policies and initatives by British institutions and media producers in as rapid and widespread a fashion as possible, suggestive of a loss of control and strategic purpose. This belies the shifting, fluidic nature of media consumption and the malleable shapes of media texts which are now *sprayed* across the widest possible spectrum of available media in the hope of regaining audience interest and maximising coverage.

This shift towards *spray* was also due to the fractured relationship

(mentioned earlier) between fragmented audiences and evolving media producers. The relationship was also further problematised by the uncertainty displayed by the latter regarding whether to treat the former as citizens or as consumers. This was part of an overriding problem faced by 'old' (or 'offline') media when challenged with the task of how to best exploit these 'new' (online) media locales presented to them, increasingly frequented by their fast disappearing viewership. The issue is brought into sharper focus when these spaces themselves were rapidly evolving and mutating, subsequently making it difficult to either conceptualise or build policy around them (Livingstone 1999). Indeed, as Siapera (2004) has observed, televisual institutions have tried to impose both the logic of television onto online spaces, as well as previously conceived notions of audiences. Broadcasters engaged in this exercise, rather than seeking to truly embrace (and exploit) the potential of this alternate medium. In addition, they neglected the opportunity to conceive of a more sophisticated and contemporary understanding of fragmented audiences: not as demographic groups or even as individuals, but rather as idiosyncratic taste publics, un-tethered by loyalties to any one medium or channel. Although Siapera (2004, p.159) does outline how institutions attempted to arrange audiences into groups pertaining to their often interrelated and fluid relationships with the medium (fandom, citizenship, educational), which are organised around their prospective levels of agency. Their online spaces are subsequently tailored to suit the activities of these groups. However, Bennett (2008b, pp.279-80), via Dan Harries (2002), develops and brings nuance to the situation. He demarcates between "audiences" (ostensibly passive) and "users" (ostensibly active) to denote the distinction between "old" and "new" media viewer groups, but he also introduces a 'third way' – that of the "viewser". This articulates the conflicting and complex limbo state outlining the interrelationship between televisual institutions, new technologies and viewers/users, with a need to bridge the gap between 'old' and 'new' viewing/using practices. This

state is illustrated both within examples of "iTV" (interactive television, outlined further in the final chapter) and within the aesthetic and overall purpose of the new digital channels produced by broadcasters with a public service mission.

However, the BBC has had an arms-length relationship with the audience in the past, with its attempts to facilitate interactivity being somewhat limited and its online spaces restricted in functionality. Within these, material is ostensibly made available to facilitate a more immersive experience with programme brands for audiences, making available images, video and press materials. On the other hand, there has been little in the way of spaces that enable community (message boards or forums) or interactivity with fellow viewers that would allow debate regarding specific texts and viewing experience. That is not to suggest that the BBC has not attempted to facilitate interactivity and user-productivity – indeed, its short-lived Switch and Blast youth and education brands emphasised this – but these examples, like early spaces designed for programme brands such as *Being Human*, were heavily proscriptive and controlled. The BBC's methods of digital distribution and an embracing of the online realm could be witnessed with promotion of the BBC iPlayer (launched in 2007). This delivery system, which made streaming media available to audiences before transmission on television, showed a growing appreciation of the importance of the internet and the changing ways that audiences, particularly youth audiences, consumed media. When Danny Cohen arrived in 2007 as BBC3 channel controller, this arms-length arrangement appeared to be open to change, as could be witnessed with the example of *Being Human.* The gap between policy rhetoric and actual execution narrowed, leading to a more coherent realisation of multiplatform strategy, with interactivity being recognised as something that facilitated public value, rather than undermined public service (Enli 2008, p.106).

<u>Conclusion</u>

E4 and BBC3 had similar problems, as well as identical aims: innovation, a youthful focus, emphasis on multiplatform commissioning and the role of acting as a bridge between broadcasting and digital content. It is just the execution that differed. A key issue related to the intersection between youth audiences and the digital outlets of UK broadcasters is that of achieving balance. Specifically, reaching a difficult-to-placate group with content that appealed to it thematically, aesthetically and which encouraged interactivity, whilst remaining both true to the parent channels' core brand values, along with governmental policy pertaining to notions of public service. This illustrates how these channels are examples of several balancing acts, whilst highlighting the precariousness and folly of trying to sustain broadcasting ventures designed to appeal to audiences who're increasingly indifferent to broadcasting, but not content. These channels acted to bridge the gap between what these broadcasters *were* and *what they were trying to become*.

However, E4 was not part of a coherent, integrated whole. Instead, it was initially an isolated element within an increasingly disparate Channel 4 production and distribution umbrella, which can be seen within an examination of the failed 4Ventures initiative mentioned in previous chapters. This betrayed a recurring issue instrinsic to the broadcaster, failing to fully bridge the gap between its public service ideals and a need to either be commercially viable and to have specific appeal to particular demographic groups. This was an issue not unique to E4, but which also applied to other digital offshoots, such as BBC3. As Brown (2008, pp.276-77) reveals, Channel 4's lack of "in-house strategy" relating to programming, demographic and digital policy was later bemoaned by Chief Executive Mark Thompson, who later admitted that the "new media/digital" policy for the channel, initially undertaken by Michael Jackson, was under-developed and overly tokenistic (Brown 2008, p.279).

Such a statement ties into Hesmondhalgh's (2002, p.228) assertion that:

> …for all the rhetoric about choice and interactivity, much of it derived from internet-speak, digital television very much remains the centralised, top-down medium that developed in the era of analogue broadcasting.

The development and attempted integration of digital media within existing broadcasting systems could conceivably lead to a greater pluralism of voices, acting as part of the overall process of democratisation that convergence media is supposed to facilitate. Regarding youth-oriented television, this may well be true. The spaces set up by broadcasters for audiences online, such as those for *Skins* and *Misfits* by E4 and *Being Human* for BBC3, were part of a wider trend towards the processes of media and cultural convergence. This is something that Brooker (2001, p.458) describes as competing terms denoting "structured interactivity" and "participatory community" respectively, between official and unofficial, corporate and fan practices. These occur within an increasingly "participatory media culture" that blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers/audiences (Deuze 2007). It also highlights the key battleground for control by broadcasters, as they shift into the role of multiplatform producers and aggregators of content, ensuring that their user-audiences remain within the official, sanctioned spaces, as will be analysed in the final chapter.

Chapter 6: The beginning of the endgame - The tale of Channel 4's uneven lurch towards a future beyond the televisual

Channel 4 has been involved in a gradual and evolving process to deliver content to specific under-served audience groups since its inception. The 90s saw the broadcaster recognise that the nebulous 'youth' demographic was an opportunity to fulfil its historical need to cater for minorities, whilst targeting an audience in which advertisers had an interest. It was a ploy that was simultaneously noble and lucrative. This subsequently lead to stranding and zoning of the C4 schedules, demarcating designated areas and collections of content designed for youthful audiences. These zones have been extensively discussed in earlier chapters, adding nuance to the definitions of youth, whilst attempting to comprehend the true purpose of these strands, beyond the promotional, corporate rhetoric. They acted as an experiment, a precursor to what was to follow for Channel 4. As Michael Jackson came to power, the broadcaster diversified its interests and realised it should replicate these stranding/zoning experiments within a multichannel (and latterly, multiplatform) digital environment, subsequently leading to a selection of niche channels created as part of a transformative process from broadcaster to network. One of these, the youth-centric E4, was discussed at length in the previous chapter.

This chapter will now focus on recent developments which encourage further investigation of Channel 4's youth provision and digital production practices. The increased exploitation of digital platforms and online spaces allowed the broadcaster to partially fulfil its promises made within the Next on 4 document in 2008, to become a public service network, delivering varied types and shapes of content across a variety of platforms and spaces, both native to Channel 4 and external. This was in order to keep pace with rapidly mutating audience practices, as well as to allow themselves the opportunity for alternative and untapped revenue streams. These developments subsequently

lead to an iterative commissioning methodology, a re-evaluation of branding practices and a greater appreciation of audiences and users. Channel 4's content, in short, needed to change along with Channel 4 itself, whilst coherent multiplatform programme brands required careful development through Channel 4's publishing-house-turned-digital-network. The aggregation of content across Channel 4's network of branded spaces was therefore necessary in order to retain the interest of its designated youthful 'minority audiences', who themselves engaged with material across multiple platforms, not just the televisual.

This chapter will be broken into three main sections, with the final one consisting of a series of programming case studies that will examine the current state of Channel 4's multiplatform policies and digital endeavours. The first section will discuss delivery systems and the notion of archive exploitation. Specifically, the development of video-on-demand from the 90s onwards, culminating in the development of an online variant of traditional television: 4oD, which will be compared to the BBC's development of the iPlayer. The second section will investigate evolving media consumption practices, examining the phenomena of 'second screen viewing', with Channel 4's collaboration with Zeebox being a key example. This will primarily focus on the increasing importance and primacy of social media and social networking sites in the propagation and potential success of programme brands, with the productive (and often uneven) interrelationship between producers and users being studied. The final section will combine elements discussed in the first two sections in order to investigate the coherence (and adherence to public service) of Channel 4's contemporary multiplatform strategy. It will achieve this through the discussion of the programme-brands *Fresh Meat* (2011 -), *Hotel GB* (2012) and *Utopia* (2013 -), in order to highlight discrepancies of strategy and purpose across platforms and channels, as well as showcasing Channel 4's problematic

preferential treatment of certain properties over others.

By way of introducing the first section, a history of VOD needs to be provided, setting the scene for how all broadcasters would eventually turn towards aggregation and exploitation of past archival content.

Bleeding archives dry – Delivery systems, archive exploitation and the *spray* of the televisual onto the digital

> *Four On Demand will run across broadband and cable channels in four "strands": commissioned programming; the best of acquired shows; music; and a Film Four channel with content to buy or rent. The broadcaster will also develop its internet-only offerings with customer-generated content.* (Turner 2006, p.15 – Emphasis added)

> *Channel 4 plans to become a video-on-demand aggregator, selling shows produced by indies for other broadcasters on its forthcoming service.* (…) A new media adviser to C4 said: 'The understanding is that to compete in the VoD space you have to offer as much content as possible. If C4 is able to launch its service before other UK broadcasters it might have a chance'. The strategy means C4 could sell popular BBC dramas *Life on Mars* and *Spooks*, which are made by Kudos, alongside its own flagship drama *Shameless* from Company Pictures. (Stoker 2006b – Emphasis added)

Throughout the 90s there were attempts, both within British and American broadcast environments, to extend the form and function of the television screen. This was evidenced with a push towards video content-on-demand as well as technologies which facilitated 'interactive' television and the gamification of televisual content, which early multi-media devices, like Phillips' CD-i, attempted to capitalise upon (Homer 1993, p.26). These early endeavours, which focussed upon providing a sense of greater viewer choice and agency, were somewhat rudimentary and limited. There was also the perception that this 'choice' came at high economic cost, through the need for investment in new technologies placed alongside the 'box in the living room', along with the added cost that 'pay-per-view' on-demand services incurred (Fox 1994, p.14). Interestingly, in early discussions of these new technologies, it is telling that terrestrial broadcasters do not feature, with the onus being on the distributors

and technological providers of content, rather than the producers of it. Concerns were raised about the potential for monopoly over the future digital television market that companies like Sky and BT acting as a prospective 'digital gatekeeper' may have, particularly over pay-per-view sporting events and films. This was mainly as the costs involved in creating new technologies (set-top boxes, decoders) were prohibitive for prospective competitors like Granada and the BBC (Fry 1996). Worryingly, the shape of digital TV in the mid-90s was almost exclusively commercially-oriented, with little sense of regulatory imperatives to ensure that British digital TV adhered to public service obligations, raising issues concerning its future direction.

The two largest proponents of public service broadcasting in the UK – the BBC and C4 – also made their online presence felt around the same time, with Channel 4 Online going live at the end of 1996 and BBC Online launching in 1997 (and subsequently endured various branded iterations throughout the 00s, such as BBCi). Within the 90s, these spaces were seen by broadcasters as little more than an adjunct to broadcasting activity: a further means by which to promote old media product, with little attempt made to truly make the most of the new platforms. Indeed, the content within these spaces consisted of listings, additional programming information and broadcaster contact information. However, towards the turn of the century, there was an internal realisation that these spaces and new technologies had the potential to broaden the broadcaster's brand identity, act as new spaces of promotion and to further exploit content across platforms beyond the televisual.

It was within the televisual space though, that UK broadcasters began to recognise the value of developing the televisual text (whilst encouraging interactivity beyond it), as well as sensing the increasing agency of and desire shown by their audiences to consume content on their own terms. This can be

witnessed in the more effective development of interactive television mentioned earlier, which was rolled out by Sky in 1999, followed by the BBC across a range of digital television platforms in 2001 (Bennett 2008b, p.278). Interactive television (or iTV) was further developed by various broadcasters in order to offer 'red-button' functionality, but was initially utilised as a means through which to deliver new shopping experiences, offer rudimentary information services and provide different angles for live sporting events (Homer 1993**)**. This functionality served multiple purposes however, and had a variety of impacts.

As both James Bennett (2008b, p.279) and Catherine Johnson (2012, p.103) surmise, these digital services and promises of interactivity were couched in the promotional rhetoric of "enhancing" or "reinforcing" institutions like the BBC's "core public service values", utilising discourses of "choice" or "empowerment" for the digital user/viewer. Bennett's term, appropriated itself from Harries [2002], of "viewser", which operated as an amalgam of both user and viewer, was representative of the iTV viewer position. iTV also represented, at least in germinal form, a version of Kelly's (2011, p.123) description of "online TV" as:

> …an amalgam of both old and new media logics, extending established practices of broadcast flow while capitalising upon the new promotional, economic and textual possibilities inherent in digital media.

Whilst also tying into Caldwell's (2003, p.131) discussions surrounding "convergence media" not being:

> ...defined by any new technically induced or determined quality or capacity, but instead defines itself in the ways that networks and studios use convergence initiatives to implement long-standing industry practices (such as programming, syndication and branding)

In short, this operated as an imposition of old media logics and practices upon new media technologies and spaces. Interactive TV did display a case of it

happening the other way around, through the process of remediation, which Bolter & Grusin (2001) have discussed in their seminal text. They suggest that television has always been willing to "accept digital technologies that may enhance its mediated status" whilst deploying a range of other "visual and cultural styles" (p.188). The televisual, in this case, appropriates other styles and practices, but also endeavours to enforce its style upon other spaces and platforms. This could potentially lead to a somewhat schizophrenic viewing experience when iTV was introduced, although as Bennett (2008a, p.163) highlights:

> ...whilst the aesthetics of iTV often evidence a fracturing of the television screen into multiple windows, turning the hyper-activity of videographic style that Caldwell (1995) notes arises in 1980s television into hyperlinks, these are normalized, and ultimately pared down, by the persistence of window-on-the-world discourses.

This suggested that the focus upon discourses of "liveness, intimacy and mobility" (Bennett 2008a, pp.162-163) regarding the promotion of iTV, offering parallels to the discourse of the "everydayness" of television itself, allowed for television to "'converge' with computer-controlled media without entirely losing its identity" whilst its producers seek to use new technologies "to enhance their medium's claim to immediacy" (Bolter & Grusin 2001, p.185). However, more prosaically, iTV offered broadcasters a chance to operationalise red-button functionality beyond simple commercial exploitation (betting), ostensible 'interactivity' (voting) or 'enhancing' the live televisual experience (such as had been evidenced within sporting events and reality TV), through the creation of 'supplementary' content and consumption options that favoured the notion of user choice.

As the BBC's head of interactive TV in 2004, Scott Gronmark remarked;

> 'Supplementary programming is an interesting area. Audiences like to extend their viewing from the linear channel. They press the red button if they're enjoying what they're watching and want more of it, not because

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they want to get away from the programme.' (Gronmark in Webdale 2004, p.40)

This potentially allowed for the further extension of the narrative universe of a text and expansion of the functionality of brands, platforms and interactive technologies. However, the shift towards producing fresh, innovative and supplementary materials in order to expand the use-value and life-span of media texts was arguably not a priority for British broadcasters. The exploitation of pre-existing materials on the other hand, certainly was.

The impulse to try and find new distributive avenues and spaces for content exhibition was displayed in early discussions between television companies and broadcasters, like the BBC, as well as Granada and C4. These were mainly focussed around swelling revenues through collaborative ventures that would provide services showcasing the 'best of British' programming content (Wood 2000). This would act as a precursor to what would later become the ill-fated 'Project Kangaroo', which would latterly become Seesaw and finally Youview. Collaborations were not just limited to those between UK broadcasting companies, but increasingly between emergent internet/new media corporations, as broadband technologies became more effective in delivering content and services across non-televisual spaces. This is something that Amanda Lotz (2007a) highlights in her work that studies the impact of the post-network era and new media corporations on American television networks, indicating that:

> At the same time traditional television brands moved into broadband distribution, traditional computer brands such as Google, Yahoo!, and AOL began to compete and collaborate. Many in the broadcast sector fear that in the post-network era, Google, Yahoo!, and AOL could come to play the role CBS, NBC, and ABC had in the network era (…) These few Internet portals have, in fact, achieved a vaster audience reach than those of most broadcast networks or cable channels; they are also often able to precisely report information about their users to advertisers, who, in turn, can target their advertisements more effectively. (Lotz 2007a, pp.133-134)

These issues were not limited to the US, as some of Lotz's points, particularly pertaining to the evolving relationships between media corporations and advertisers, as well as between new and old media corporations, will be covered in following sections. Indeed, a key issue for UK public service broadcasters was figuring out how best to exploit new media spaces, delivery systems and their own assets, whilst competing with corporations such as Google and Yahoo! (who were providing web video services and reaching users in a far more effective and nuanced way than broadcasters) in a manner commensurate with their remit aims and goals. This had to be done whilst taking into consideration the need to be seen as competitive and commercially viable in an environment that increasingly prized competition and profit. Catherine Johnson (2012, p.103) discusses the BBC's dealings with this issue, whilst problematising the balance between outright commerciality and the need to provide public service in a digital environment, surmising that:

> …there were two interrelated aspects of the BBC's commercial expansion from the late-1980s: the development of new channel brands that build on the BBC's reputation and programme archive; and the exploitation of BBC content as brands that could be extended into new ventures and onto new platforms.

Whilst new channel brands were covered in the last chapter (with the discussion of BBC3 in comparison with C4's E4), it is the notion of exploiting programme archives across new platforms which is of most interest here, particularly with the BBC. Indeed, it was announced in 2000 that the the BBC intended to invest £20 million in order to preserve TV and radio content by converting it to digital formats, which was justified under charter obligations to maintain an archive of high quality output, promising that said content would be made available via digital television and radio services (Rouse 2000). This strategy was continued, as the BBC endeavoured to introduce further initiatives that would make the best use of its materials through the "enlargement of access" to the Motion Gallery along with a stepping-up of digitisation of content. The emphasis of the

archiving projects was on "education, film and online broadcasting" (Crichton 2004, p.8), although there was concern that the archive may well be sold off to commercial interests. However, the BBC's commercial competition were also concerned that these projects and other elements of expansionist new media strategy meant that the corporation was encroaching on the marketplace (Burrell 2006).

Ashley Highfield's (then BBC's Head of Future Media and Technology) asserted that given the BBC had one of the world's largest archives, it should be liberated and made available for the audience to consume online at its leisure (Burrell 2006, p.10). This followed through on Greg Dyke's promises back in 2003 to do so. The launch of the corporation's own VOD solution (the iPlayer) four years later in 2007 to facilitate Dyke's and Highfield's vision, suggests that commercial concerns were warranted. The line between preserving content, making it available to the public in the spirit of universal access, civics and educational possibilities (which was the aim of BBC Future Media), and exploiting the full "revenue potential of the archive", using commercialised versions of the iPlayer and impacting on the market (which was BBC Worldwide's intention) ("Auntie dusts off more old gems for online archive trial", 2007) was difficult to perceive at times. It also articulated a key issue of PSBs in the digital age: of balancing between commercial concerns and public service. However, it also highlighted the conflict regarding the best way of exploiting archive materials online (and indeed which materials should be unearthed and repurposed). Indeed, as Messenger-Davies (2010, p.41) postulates:

> Material needs to be seen as valuable in some way for it to be worth the time and expense of the transfer to digital formats, and subsequent archiving and cataloguing – and value has a number of components. As TV historian Cathy Johnson has put it: "Any evaluation is an assessment of how well a particular text performs a particular function within a particular context. This may be an evaluation of historical importance, of artistic creativity or of quality."

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Whilst Joanne Garde-Hansen reinforces this notion, by suggesting that "in the context of digital archives, digital memory and digital cultural heritage, we need to accept that the old-media frameworks of traditional transmission and consumption continue to have authority." (Garde-Hansen 2011, p.83). Her implication here is that old media definitions of 'quality' and 'value' would bleed though into new media spaces, with certain types of text, branded property, strategy and projects being prioritised over others. In short: the archive would be selective, partial and subject to top-down hierarchal thinking, meaning that rather than an exhaustive selection being made available, in all likelihood only the most well-known and potentially profitable content would be featured. Subsequent digital projects by the BBC highlighted this unevenness and controlling, curatorial impulse, whilst also highlighting the primacy of new media platforms and technologies over new media content. Indeed, as James Bennett's work (2011, 2012) on the independent production sector and the BBC suggests, there is an issue with the BBC's push to maximise its new media and multiplatform activities, with the onus being on platforms and technologies, rather than the content (and particularly new content) itself. There is an old media logic at work with reference to the BBC's relationship with new media, which can also be seen in its promotion of its archive materials, with initiatives like the Permanent Collection displaying the push towards 'archive discovery' within BBC Online (Keating 2011).

The importance of archive content and new delivery systems in supporting broadcasters' digital aims and existing terrestrial programme brands was not limited to the BBC. Channel 4 has also been looking to sustain its tradition of innovation in this regard, which was done out of a growing necessity to evolve beyond the broadcasting realm, given its aforementioned issues with a revenue shortfall in the 2000s. It helped that, as Johnson (2012, p.95) mentions, "…

online initiatives...are used (by C4) not only in an attempt to retain audiences, but to support Channel 4's public service remit", allowing these initiatives to become a part of C4's 'juggling act' between public service and commercial imperatives. These initiatives and innovations however would not be in the same vein as the BBC for a number of reasons, chiefly amongst them was the relative shallowness of the archive that C4 could conceivably exploit (in comparison to the BBC), whilst it was also not possessed of a dedicated R&D unit which explored technological possibilities. As Johnson (2012, p.94) once again recognises, "…as an aggregator of content, (C4's) family of brands is largely made up of forms of distribution", meaning that as it had no content of its own to innovate with, it had to focus on ways of presenting, promoting and distributing that content in a fashion that befitted its position. This imperative was particularly pronounced after the turn of the century, as it positioned itself as a public service network that endeavoured to innovate.

To do this, it would have to consider new ways of promoting and delivering content, as well as considering how audiences could interact with it (a notion which will be explored further in the next section). This was initially problematic, given the early limitations of broadband technology, along with interactive television and 'web TV' ultimately being seen as "a means of extending viewers' engagement with major events and brands" in the broadcast schedules, with this material being "designed to complement existing TV output" (Howell 2004, p.25), ultimately subservient and subordinated to the primacy of the broadcast text. Indeed, it was key televisual brands that were drivers of new technologies and innovations in this instance, with the oft-cited *Big Brother* franchise on C4 being lauded for its provision of interactivity, whilst the channel also launched its 4Broadband (subscription) service off the back of its success (Howell 2004). Although this was not seen as a replacement or serious competitor for terrestrial TV, given its lack of capacity for long-form, long-duration viewing. *Big Brother*

was further seen as, in the words of Paul Whitehead (then-Head of business development of Channel 4 New Media), "mark(ing) the start of a long-term commitment to making our programming available on as many new media platforms as possible" (Whitehead in "Channel 4 pioneers on-demand programming with Big Brother" 2005, p.1).

Whitehead's statement suggested that the *Big Brother* brand could mark the beginning of a push by C4 towards developing multiple web and mobile portals for various textual properties and drive further use of and production for digital/broadband platforms. This was part of a wider strategy to simulcast its schedules across terrestrial and digital spaces, emphasising a sense of universal "accessibility" which, once again, looked to satisfy elements of public service in a tangential manner (Lee 2005b, p.1). There was also a sense that C4 were frantically trying to keep up with the innovation and digital developments displayed by both public service (BBC) and commercial (Sky) competition, reacting to successful schemes and ideas often by duplicating them. An example of this in action can be seen after BBC3's VOD experimental service on digital satellite, where the channel was split into four separate streams (main schedule + three archived programmes) allowing the viewer to choose. The scheme was piloted by BBC3's Stuart Murphy in the hope that such a scheme could be rolled out across the BBC family of channels (BBC1, BBC2, BBC3, BBC4, CBeebies, CBBC), whilst also showcasing BBC3's role as a testing-ground, not only for content, but also for delivery ("BBC3 launches VOD service", 2005). The channel also streamed content (the youth comedy series *The Mighty Boosh*) on its website a week before terrestrial transmission (Wood 2005), which C4 replicated in a similar experiment with the comedy series *The IT Crowd* (2006-13), making it available for download. Interestingly, promotion of content and of digital services would prove to be vital to their successful uptake by prospective audiences. As Sabbagh (2006, p.71) points

out:

> *Channel 4 found that the number of downloads varied sharply depending on how heavily the new technology was promoted*. The launch episode was picked up 144,000 times, while some of the less popular episodes were viewed less than 30,000 times. (Emphasis added)

The suggestion being here that future distributive endeavours within the multi-platform marketplace would have to ensure strong promotion across all branded platforms, as well as across external sites, in order to continue to attract significant audiences numbers to sustain itself economically. C4 subsequently looked to increase investment in new media initiatives, with a separate investment fund put aside to do so, as part of a longer-term strategy to cover the impending £100m funding gap in its finances. Key among these initiatives was a direct competitor to BBC's iPlayer, mainly in order to combat dropping television audience figures with "always-on" access to content ("Channel 4 plans on-demand service to safeguard its future", 2006, p.3). This competitor would be 'Four on Demand' (4oD), which went live on 6th December 2006, offering over 500 hours of archive content (for a price) after C4 secured digital rights through over a hundred deals with indie producers, whilst also offering around 50 hours a week of catch-up programming (Rogers 2006), which was made available for 30 days after broadcast. The latter point was something that raised the ire of competitors such as the BBC, who offered 7 day services.

However, as some have noted, there was an apparent disconnect between these new media platforms, the broadcasters and their audiences, with the suggestion that VOD services were little more than 'shops' rather than innovations upon content delivery. The initial lack of linkage between 4OD and viewer practices/audience agency suggests that little thought had been given over to how new media audiences actually use services that have greater functionality/social networking opportunity (such as iTunes and Amazon, that

feature recommendations and reviews), suggesting that 4oD was initially rooted in the mindset of a TV channel. Rather than operating as something different, new or other, which offered levels of personalisation and customisation of the experience, these broadcaster services were merely extensions of old media, rather than autonomous, innovative entities (Lilley 2006, p.8). This is supported by Caldwell's (2003, p.143) early summations of digital deployment by old media corporations, surmising that:

> All of the predictions about digital's utopian promise as a responsive, "lean-in, "pull" technology aside, programmers and the financial interests that deploy them will continue to attempt to "push" content, to brand delivery systems, and to schedule media experience.

It is perhaps worth at this point looking beyond the platforms and distributive services provided by these British broadcasters, in order to look at a globalised service that performs similar functions, along with a variety of additional ones: YouTube. As the work of Burgess & Green (2009) along with William Uricchio (2009b) recognised, YouTube also had the potential to innovate and push forward an idea of what TV was or could be. The key difference being that it was not constrained, like the BBC, Channel 4, or the American networks, by history and preconceptions of itself-as-medium (an issue for broadcasters' early VOD and distribution platforms). Indeed, as Burgess & Green (2009, p.103) argue:

> YouTube launched without knowing exactly what it was for, and arguably it is this under-determination that explains the scale and diversity of its uses today. YouTube is a large enough entity, and loosely enough managed, that it can be whatever its various participants want it to be.

Agency in this instance was in the hands of media users, rather than media producers. Indeed, the two would become synonymous with the rise to prominence of UGC (more of which in the second section). YouTube could be

an place where users indeed "broadcast themselves" - a spin on the early branding of YouTube as a place to "broadcast yourself" not entirely escaping the phantasm of television - allowing the user to create their own materials and distribute it across the YouTube network. It could also be an archive of media content, albeit an unofficial or "accidental" archive (Burgess & Green 2009). Although, rather than the BBC's or Channel 4's endeavours as they tried to figure out how to best exploit their archives, or in comparison to Hulu (the US VOD/streaming collaboration between NBC, Fox and others), which offered a "temporary archive...(with) potential for permanence but preference for ephemerality" (Kelly 2011, pp.130-131), this haphazard archive was initially impartial to what was placed into it. Needless to say, as time went on and as legal actions arose from media corporations such as Viacom over the exhibition of its content within YouTube, the utility and depth of this archive would be affected by media corporations endeavouring to control where their content was going and how it was being consumed. Indeed, Marshall (2009, p.43) suggests that despite television going out of its way to control what YouTube could or couldn't host on its site, networks and broadcasters "entered into content deals with YouTube to put what they would classify as promotional content for their key properties on the site." This was yet another example of old media trying to bend new media spaces to their will.

However, as Uricchio (2009b, p.36) mentions, YouTube offered alternatives to broadcast TV: as a place to watch content; as a place to produce one's own content; as a space to re-conceptualise TV itself; and as a holding space for material that had either been forgotten by the industry, would never be broadcast or hadn't been considered useful. Eventually, the capacity of YouTube to supplement television (rather than supplant it) was recognised. Channel 4 and VoD could harness the promotional potential of YouTube and drive users towards the official 4oD service by having a 4oD branded channel

within YouTube, featuring clips and trailers that showcased the best of C4, past and present. As Sarah Rose (then-C4 head of VoD and channel development) suggested in 2007:

> While we can drive traffic to 4oD from the TV channels and channel4.com, we have to be proactive at attracting attention from elsewhere. 'We want 4oD to be a Rolls-Royce service but we are willing to give some of our content to third parties. Talks are in early stages but the sort of deal we hope to do with YouTube is exactly this sort of thing. (Rose in Thompson 2007)

Furthermore, this supports Marshall's (2009, p.44) point that:

> (commercial and public) broadcasters have worked to make their own sites the portals for their own content through a partial embrace of the internet cacophony via multiple add-on videos to productions and extended capacities for viewers/users to write in or video in their own comments.

This suggestion being that broadcasters recognised the importance and usefulness of YouTube as a promotional tool and alternative distribution space (or to put it another way, "a significant cross-media outlet" - Uricchio 2009b, p.28), but wished to keep it on a relatively tight leash, whilst promoting the superiority and primacy of their own spaces. Channel 4 was no different. It is in these spaces, and the relationships with its audiences and their consumption practices, that I wish to now turn.

We put the 'media' in (anti)social media

> Patterns of audience usage are shifting dramatically, to the bewilderment of network executive*s who seem willing to embrace new models of viewership (and economic support), from iPods to streaming video, at the drop of a hat in the pursuit of the youth demographic. Viewing patterns that had been enshrined as laws, such as flow, now appear washed away with the click-accessibility of Internet TV.* (Simon & Rose 2010, p.52 – Emphasis added)

> …it is not enough to offer read-only access, *the market demands to be able to read and rewrite.* For the ability to read, hear or view stories at any point *has led inevitably to the desire to annotate, comment and mark, alter and remix, the work ourselves.* (Knight & Weedon 2010, p.149 – Emphasis added)

Whereas social networking spaces like Myspace and latterly Facebook were deployed in aid of the officially sanctioned promotion of various youth-centred texts like *Skins* via links within C4/E4 programming webpages, the interrelationship between such programming, YouTube, (fan) audiences and broadcasters was considerably less straightforward. YouTube itself is a contrary entity as Burgess & Green (2009) have illustrated, in that it operates as a corporate, commercialised concern that happens to enable "cultural citizenship" through its "communities of practice" (2009, p.78). It can be seen as an alternative public sphere that allows its users to participate democratically, interacting with one another on a global scale through their submissions of video content, which are often concerned with the personal politics of everyday life (Burgess & Green 2009, pp.78-79). As had been touched upon in the previous section, it has also acted as a somewhat disorganised, but culturally vital repository of visual content, collating filmic and televisual ephemera, promotional material and historical footage as part of an "accidental archive", in that this was never its intended purpose (Burgess & Green 2009, pp.87-90). Prelinger (2009, pp.270-272) outlines YouTube's appeal to audiences and those seeking alternatives to official (and limited) media archives in a succinct fashion:

> First, it was a complete collection—or at least appeared to be (…) Second, YouTube was open to user contributions (…) Third, YouTube offered instantaneous access with very few limitations other than reduced quality (…) Fourth, YouTube offered basic (if not overly sophisticated) social-networking features (…) Finally, though it takes some skill to download a video from YouTube, the videos were very easily embeddable.

As Wilson (2009, pp.190-191) points out in his work on ephemera and media history, the official, corporate system often favours the exploitation of finished products to consumers, rather than showcasing entire archives that display "evidence of the process and supporting materials". He articulates a vision of media history shaped through commercial interests and corporate institutions,

where success, quality and public value are emphasised. The utility of digital spaces like YouTube (and tools like The Wayback Machine), is to potentially preserve moments of media history that would otherwise go unremarked or be supplanted in favour of official rhetoric and corporate narratives that showcase either media institutions or programming policy in the best possible light. As Garde-Hansen (2011, pp.75-76) suggests, "the logic that drives the archiving of content by major institutions has been less interested in what media means personally, emotionally and memorably to (fans and individuals)", meaning that tools that allow audiences or fans to build their own archives or to construct counter-histories operating in opposition to official narratives, is vital. It is often left to those not affiliated with broadcasters or media companies to provide accurate insight into modern televisual history, as Nelson and Cooke (2010, p.xviii) postulate:

> The role of fans and enthusiasts in caring about television history, and in sustaining the quest for as full an information retrieval as possible, is clear when institutions, careless of television history in the past, now follow mainly commercial – or other institutional – interests.

Artefacts such as idents, interstitial promotions, music videos, trailers and fan-produced materials seemingly have little place within official discourses and histories concerned with televisual institutions such as the BBC and C4. These ephemeral moments and artefacts "offer a snapshot of the past that seems to capture our forebears when they weren't looking" (Byerley 2009, p.1), uncovering patterns and revealing cultural preoccupations of the period (Byerley 2009, p.7). This ties into Jermyn and Holmes' (2006, p.55) discussions regarding the rise of "telephilia" and prominence of television fan practices, which are often stymied by broadcasters, suggesting that:

> ...only certain kinds of television series typically make it to DVD in their entirety, so that the telephile does not quite have a free rein in choosing and building their television archive in this regard, but is instead hampered by institutionalised hierarchies. But these hierarchies are perhaps more

fluid than they once were: the various spaces and forms of consumption open to the telephile, whether institutionally sanctioned or otherwise, are more diverse than they have ever been.

Indeed, this process has been aided by new technologies and new media spaces, like YouTube and BitTorrent, to facilitate archives and collections of texts that broadcasters have not favoured with commercial DVD or digital releases, along with the promotional ephemera that surrounded the texts upon their initial broadcast.

The archiving function of YouTube, as well as its potential for democratic community, highlights its usefulness to fan cultures, who desired to not only post and share examples of fan-work on the site (such as homemade music videos), but to also use the space to upload any material associated with their object of fandom. This included the aforementioned ephemera such as interviews and adverts, which fall into the 'spirit' of Youtube archiving of miscellany. However, it also included material ripped from DVD releases or recorded from broadcast television, in order to provide an extensive variety of material within a single site. It dwarfed the selective and incomplete collection made available by broadcasters like Channel 4 within its own branded spaces and through its own bespoke video delivery systems (4oD). Understandably, the latter material is often rapidly pulled from YouTube at the request of the broadcaster under the banner of copyright infringement. However, this situation may not be as clear-cut as it first appears. To provide a pertinent example with the E4 teen drama *Skins*, weeks prior to the broadcast of its third series, such copyrighted content had been hosted on YouTube via fan channels Skinsonline, Skinsmedia and Skinsissss. This material was subsequently pulled from these unofficial channels - and by association, the 'accidental archive' that YouTube represented, impacting upon the utility and usefulness of the resource - upon the re-launch in 2009 of the E4 online *Skins*-space which made video materials

available that were previously only accessible through 'unofficial' channels. This was a foreshadowing of Channel 4's renewed push to digitise and exploit its televisual archives via its 4oD service, accessible through digital television services and online through C4/E4 hubs. The desired effect of closing off this 'unofficial' digital avenue to fans was to push them towards Channel 4's proprietary technology and enclosed, branded online spaces. This would subsequently limit the alternatives to 'officially sanctioned' viewing whilst promoting a more unified, less fragmentary fan/user experience. As Marshall (2009, p.44) confirms:

> (Both commercial and public) broadcasters have worked to make their own sites the portals for their own content through a partial embrace of the internet cacophony via multiple add-on videos to productions and extended capacities for viewers/users to write in or video in their own comments.

This suggests that not only did broadcasters wish to control the delivery and consumption of the primary televisual text, but also all the associated ephemera, "paratexts" (Gray 2010a) and "overflow" (Brooker 2001) along with it, which served to make the relationship between users and producers antagonistic. However, complicating the situation further is the equally complex and uneasy relationship between "old" (broadcasters) and "new" (Internet-centric) media producers and institutions, which Ross (2008) discusses in depth in the context of American television.

This discouraging of unofficial or 'illegal' practices of consumption, which as Newman (2009) discusses regarding "peer-to-peer" distribution and use of the BitTorrent protocol, can often be counter-productive in that this "closing down" of choice can alienate fans/users, pushing them to utilise alternative methods of viewing as a means to counter overbearing institutional practices. These torrent communities also run counter to officially-sanctioned, 'preferred' modes of consumption (which within the online realm, revolves around on-

demand streaming) in a manner similar to YouTube. As Smith (2011a, para. 10) highlights in relation to "bootleg archives" of film content, "these filesharing communities offer a makeshift archive of rare material that provides access to films that might otherwise be forgotten." It is the closing down of choice and restrictions to access that cause unofficial and unsanctioned audience practices, whilst the broadcasters' attempts to control the televisual experience within non-televisual spaces leads to issues when it comes to either monetising or restricting access to it, given its previous position as "a public good, freely available to anyone" (Newman 2011, p.467). As Newman (2011, p.466) again mentions:

> The ability of users to program their own viewing rather than being "slaves to the schedule" of broadcasters, and the possibility of watching television shows purged of commercials and promotions, function to legitimate television (Newman and Levine 2011) (…) *Thus the P2P distribution of television is one among a cluster of technologies of agency*... (Emphasis added)

Mittell (2005, para.10) also suggests that, relating to the online consumption of American television series, such "illicit practices" can often generate larger audiences and greater revenue thanks to the "try before you buy" logic of these practices. This allowed audiences who may have not had access to (or a desire to access) the programming in question to enjoy it after it has been broadcast. However, it is this desire to control the way in which the text is enjoyed that is the driving force here. This was part of the need, highlighted at numerous points throughout this thesis, of old media to enforce its logics on new media spaces, rather than fear of revenue loss by Channel 4, although the latter concern is certainly a driver of modern C4 strategy. As Amanda Lotz (2007a, pp.150-151) discusses in relation to the American "post-network" era of broadcasting

> Viewers do, indeed, appear likely to benefit to some degree as the cultural institution of television evolves (…) New distribution methods allow more viewer choice (...) and have more ready access to content outside of that

created by commercial conglomerates. (…) [However], although expanded viewer sovereignty still seems possible in this nascent stage of the post-network era, the history of distribution tells a different story…[with emergent technologies being] subsumed by dominant and controlling commercial interests as they become more established.

Lotz suggests that although these new technologies and alternative spaces and practices may allow for audience agency and rebellious practices in the short term, media corporations and broadcasters will eventually find ways to circumvent them and redeploy these spaces (or re-assert the primacy of their own preferred viewing practices and spaces) in the longer term.

The key issues at work here for broadcasters then are getting audiences consuming content in a manner that made economic and strategic sense to broadcasters and justified their existence, whilst simultaneously exploiting new technologies and social media spaces that key audiences dwelt within. As has been mentioned on numerous occasions, in the case of C4, these were youth audiences. This meant a period of experimentation by C4 and reconceptualisation of youth audiences and their practices, which as was demonstrated within the Education chapter and bore fruit when the broadcaster-cum-network looked to fulfil its promises of moving beyond the televisual and collaborated with new media companies and social networks. It is within this post-2008 period that C4 began to consider the potential, beyond educational commissions, of social networking spaces, new mobile technologies and the agency of their audiences, who wanted to consume and rework media content on their own terms (such as downloading), rather than those dictated by broadcasters (such as the newly set up VOD platforms). This shift by audiences away from a restrictive mode of delivery (broadcasting) and towards a variety of other platforms, further served to fracture C4's audience, already splintered by the development of the multi-channel market. This has, in recent years, been further exacerbated by what some, including Chuck Tryon (2012),

have referred to as "platform mobility" further facilitating "mobility, flexibility and convenience" of media consumption (p.288). Tryon (2012, p.289) goes on to suggest that

> …digital delivery not only opens up forms of spatial mobility, allowing us to watch films wherever we happen to be, but also allows for the possibility of temporal mobility, expanding the time- shifting potential of television technologies such as the VCR and the DVR. This time-shifting potential has contributed to a further casualization of the practice of film and television watching, making it possible for viewers to watch according to their own schedule rather than in the discrete timeframes suggested by theatres and broadcasters.

However, some of these issues are also discussed in an editorial by Knight and Weedon (2010, p.147), who suggest that new media technologies and social networks are managing to bridge "the deep divide" between various "time-based media" (like television), re-establishing the sense of liveness and "immediacy" that were key to the appeal of the televisual, as well as offering a solution to the potential loss of audiences and users. They highlight the potential for these technologies, devices and spaces to re-unite fragmentary, disparate audience groups via these same spaces and technology, but potentially around key media: television texts. Practices and strategies emphasising immediate, synchronous communication and activity were subsequently cultivated and encouraged. An example of one of these strategies will be covered a little further down, but one that proven to be of recent worth to broadcasters, particularly Channel 4, has been the development of 'second-screen' viewing strategies and the rise of 'social TV'.

As has been mentioned on previous occasions, Channel 4 had ostensibly championed innovation and potential for audience agency through the "interactivity" involved within the iTV add-ons connected with *Big Brother*. As Jermyn & Holmes (2006, p.52) surmised in relation to that brand, "both text and audience are dispersed across a range of media sites", whilst each of these

sites "have their own temporal and spatial regimes, feeding off a live textual 'organism' in often divergent and contradictory ways", with online spaces operating both as place of discussion as well as textual delivery.

E4, prior to the launch of the third series of *Skins*, attempted to harness its online users' behaviour and their televisual consumption practices, by introducing the MSN "*Skins* Messenger" service. What was essentially a bot (an automated programme) that supplied information relating to *Skins* episodes as they are being broadcast to every user who is on its friends list, was also an encapsulation of the level of institutional understanding by E4, that has developed over time, relating to how youth audiences consumed televisual content. Specifically, how these audiences often viewed distractedly or as part of a (convergent) process of multi-tasking (Jenkins 2006, p.16), in which a variety of activities are being engaged in simultaneously whilst the viewing takes place. By mimicking the synchronous activities of fans, or as Santo (2009, para. 4) puts it, the "co-opting (of) fan practice", who often discuss the fan-text *as they view it*, whilst providing insights and information relating to the content of the episode *as it is being broadcast*, it both brought the producers closer to the fans, whilst encouraging the latter to view at the time it was scheduled on broadcast television, when the bot was active. This acted as a more subtle example of E4 dissuading fan-users from viewing the *Skins*-text via the alternative or 'illicit' means mentioned earlier in this section, through the suggestion that the experience will not be as fulfilling, interactive or content-rich. In short, the audience will 'miss out' if they do not engage in the activities laid out for them within the 'official' spaces by the producers and consume the text in a manner that best suits their purposes. Although elements of this strategy were valid (the provision of bonus content, opportunities for increased knowledge and capital, the re-assertion of the primacy of live viewing), it was tricky to manage audience interactions through a limited space, whilst it lacked

elegance as a solution to the broadcaster's attempts to garner greater awareness about their targeted demographic.

This usage of a synchronous online messaging service in conjunction with a teen television text displayed a growing appreciation by the channel of changing viewer/user practices. This had increasingly been picked up on by staff within C4's multiplatform department. They realised that audiences were watching television "with their laptops open at the same time", with programming like the innovative and multiplatform-centric *Embarrassing Bodies* which "pioneered second screen watching for factual programming" **(**"A nation of audience participation", 2012) showing "that people multitask while watching factual programming" (Carter 2009, p.5). This realisation came in conjunction with Jon Gisby's (then-Head of Future Media and Technology at C4) suggestions regarding the importance of "search engine optimisation and….*social network optimisation*" (Parker 2008e - Emphasis added). These new areas were seen as equally important and comparable to (within the new media environment), scheduling within the televisual, as a means of locating and pushing content in(to) spaces where audiences are likely to be browsing anyway (Parker 2008e). Within both these realisations for the broadcaster, the sense that social media and the spaces that came along with them, like YouTube, was for potential promotion of texts, offered an opportunity to farm data from users and to foster a sense of collaboration and (illusory) closeness with them. The manner in which this could be done, whilst still sustaining the primacy of the televisual text, was in part resolved by second screen strategies (like the MSN example) and collaboration with social TV apps.

Second screen operated as a strategy which emphasised the importance and primacy of "liveness" and immediacy of viewing TV-as-broadcast. It endeavoured to discourage viewing practices such as timeshifting and

downloading which circumvented and disrupted television's intentions regarding its intended delivery, whilst also providing ostensible agency to audiences and users. Second screen provided incentives and bonuses for viewing live (as demonstrated in the *Skins* MSN example), furnishing users with supplementary material and information and allowing viewers to feel connected to a viewing community by ensuring discussions about programming content occurred immediately after (or even during) broadcast. This allowed for the 'water-cooler' moments discussed by many television theorists in times past. Indeed, as Land (2012) suggests in relation to the contemporary situation:

> Second screen activity has become normal in many households, with viewers able to connect to, discuss and recommend the shows they are viewing through social networks like Facebook and Twitter. The experience of TV viewing is even more social and dynamic than ever before and we are now on the cusp of a significant *shift in the way brands can connect with consumers through the medium of television, using social networks as the gateway*. (Emphasis added)

He goes on to suggest that *television*, for youth audiences, *operates as the second screen*, rather than the laptop or mobile phone, stating that television needs to reassert its relevance to this audience through the use of social media and apps, which are the contemporary drivers of interactivity.

C4/E4's early experimentation with Zeebox, a "social TV app", designed by Anthony Rose, who was also involved with the creation of the BBC iPlayer, was one of many such apps being produced to capitalise upon this shift towards social TV (with Getglue being another that C4 had collaborated with). Zeebox operates as a social media aggregator organised around the dissemination the discussion of televisual content within social media spaces, whilst also supplying additional data pertaining to that content which facilitates additional discussion. It is perhaps ironic that an aggregator of content (C4) saw fit to collaborate with another aggregator, but the opportunity to receive information about viewing practices, feedback about content and the chance to produce

bespoke content for the app (which it did with its *Desperate Scousewives* (2011-12) commission) was one that was strategically useful (Davies 2011), given C4's contemporaneous shift towards mining data from individual youthful users. Indeed, C4 subsequently developed their own bespoke app in 2013 (4Now) which continued further down this path. This early collaborative example was certainly instructive in articulating Channel 4's multiplatform commissioning intentions, with multiple-screen commissions, although placing the televisual at the forefront, certainly suggests a greater flexibility and fluidity regarding what could be commissioned and where it might be deployed ("Louise Brown, multiplatform, C4", 2011). This, it can be surmised, is was due to a desire to understand audience behaviour across platforms, with any innovation and pushing of boundaries undertaken as part of a data collection process. Additionally, collaborations and agreements with a variety of social networks, apps and new media companies are vital in C4's continued appeal to youth audiences, its remit obligations towards public service innovation and its desire to remain competitive in the midst of its transformation from broadcaster to multiplatform network. However. the question raised by these developments is whether or not social media was a means to showcase and encourage interactivity and user agency, or a way of conducting free market research, collating data about users in order to refine new media/youth audience strategy.

The lessons learnt from earlier collaborations and the functionality displayed within these spaces can subsequently be seen to be deployed by C4 within their own attempts at space-building. In addition, C4 has made a concerted attempt to funnel users away from external sites in an attempt to direct 'user flows' back to the C4 branded spaces. But what of the users? How do they operate within such spaces? To once again use E4's *Skins* as an example, E4/C4 gradually developed increasingly enticing ways to engender fan-user involvement and productivity that was helpful to its aims, rather than

running counter to them (Gwenllian Jones 2003, Jenkins 1998). E4's invitation of a level of engagement which encouraged interactivity, through exhortations to "Get Involved" and "*Skins* Needs You!" via online and offline promotional campaigns for series two, was to encourage production and provision of officially-sanctioned "fan-work" (Santo 2009a, Johnson 2009, Andrejevic 2008) that would potentially enrich the online *Skins* universe.

The initial request for fan contributions came with the series two introduction of the "Skinscast"; a (now defunct) weekly podcast that relied upon the fans submitting questions to the cast of *Skins* about elements concerning the episode of that week. The onus being placed on the audience to become producers of material that could be utilised for the benefit of the wider community and their understandings of the text. The subsequent 'agency' of being allowed to ask questions pertinent to their fandom and the prospect of getting close to people involved in the making of *Skins*, seemingly offset the fact that there was no economic recompense for their 'work'. This invitation was an example of the growing (ostensible) democratisation of the televisual form that the internet and new media has caused in its encouragements towards audience interactivity (Jenkins 2006, Russell et al 2008), which Channel 4, with its mandate towards public service innovation, would wish to herald. These "organic invitations", in that the broadcasters and producers assumed that its youthful audiences were already currently engaged in such activities online within forums or social networks (Ross 2008, pp.124-25), perhaps displayed this fluidic power relationship between producers and consumers best, as well as making broadcasters' intentions increasingly opaque. Such invitations included the encouragement towards the production of (incidental) music and costume design (key elements of the *Skins' raison d'etre*) and contributing to the overall look of the series. With members of the production staff (including the creator Brian Elsley himself) providing these invitations, the prospect of

crossing the boundary from spectator to creator proves to be a potentially appealing lure.

Conversely, this institutional encouragement by the programme-makers could equally be construed as a cynical attempt to both engender the misapprehension that *all* fan production is vital to the formation of the *Skins*-text. In reality, only a fraction of the content generated by fan-work was actually seen to be deployed, whilst the channel received a wealth of material that could be utilised across various platforms free of charge. Andrejevic (2008, p.30) outlines these developments as part of an expectation of the "active consumer" to take on "work that used to be the province of producers" as part of a "duty of interaction", where it is the fans' responsibility within this "democratic" online space to bear the burden of production in order to make for a more pleasurable (read: 'active', rather than 'passive') fan-experience, whilst adding "value" to the fan-text (2008, p.32). This also tied into Santo's (2009a, para. 2) assertions (in relation to the American series *Heroes* and *Battlestar Galactica*) relating to how television networks and producer endeavour to "repurpose fan creative efforts in ways that align with the economic goals of brand ownership", exploiting fan-user creativity as a way to promote and give legitimacy to the brand (in that it is 'worthy' of such 'work') whilst guiding such labour closer towards the promotionally-oriented aims of the producers.

However, the levels of agency and interactivity outlined above, as well as C4's attempts at innovating within new media spaces and collaborating with start-ups, were evidence of a false dawn, rather than indicative of C4's desire to truly innovate and empower its youthful users. This can be witnessed within a series of strategic developments and spaces that, despite their links to social networks and practices of new media consumption/production, were not squarely aimed at the demographic that C4 has spent time and money trying to

attract. When Channel 4 announced that More4, its middle-brow digital channel for older audiences, was being relaunched and rebranded in 2012, there doesn't appear to be any initial link to what has been the focus throughout this section. However, it was the announcement that the channel and affiliated digital spaces was to become increasingly lifestyle-focussed, with popular factual brands and content taking precedence over the previously high-minded More 4 (which provided competition to similar digital channels like BBC4 and Sky Arts). It heralded the future direction of Channel 4's digital ambitions and multiplatform endeavours, with social media being forefronted as a key driver of future potential success. Indeed, the launch of the first C4 television channel in seven years (4seven) was partially in response to the need to belatedly harvest data and "buzz" emanating from platforms like Twitter and Facebook, with its scheduling being determined to an extent by "social media buzz" (Barnett 2012). It operated as a 'best-of' channel that ostensibly showcased what the audience believed to be the best that the channel had to offer over the space of a week. The channel was also created as a way of further exploiting its most recent content (with 4oD performing the function of exploiting its legacy content), as well as trying to claw back dwindling televisual audience share. 4seven acted as what David Abraham referred to as a "bridge" between traditional modes of TV consumption and convergence television consumed by an active audience (Sweney 2012). In short, it was less a channel that embraced the central tenets (innovation and experimentation in content and form) of what Channel 4 was, but rather an example of pragmatic and consolidative strategy to increase multichannel presence, whilst attempting to appeal to audiences in non-televisual spaces, as part of the shift towards sustaining the C4 brand across a swelling network.

The most interesting development however, was neither the More4 rebrand, nor "the Facebook channel", as 4seven was being referred to as. The

"Digital Scrapbook", an initiative pushed by Richard Davidson-Houston (C4 head of online) tied into C4's pushing of its "4Life" portfolio (4Beauty, 4Food and 4Homes) of digital spaces to its users (Khalsa 2012). However, this initiative, announced at the same time as the More4 rebrand, was indicative of the channel's conservative strategies and dwindling creativity. The Scrapbook was Channel 4's limited version of hybrid microblogging sites/social networks like Pinterest and Tumblr, allowing users to "link to (their) favourite Channel 4 content and keep it all in one place (with) these links – 'snippets' – containing text and images" (http://scrapbook.channel4.com/scrapbookrules), letting the user "cut out and keep all the best recipes, stockists and expert advice." (http://scrapbook.channel4.com/). This service was internally promoted heavily within the aforementioned "4Life" suite of spaces, becoming an adjunct to and facilitator of Channel 4's 'lifestyling' of its online spaces, which endeavoured to keep users within Channel 4's branded areas. The "expert advice" mentioned on the front page of the site would be supplied by another selection of reassuring, comforting brands associated with C4: celebrities, who were mentioned within previous chapters as being key to the promotional efforts of the broadcasters and will be discussed further in the final section. Indeed, this strategy was a recognition of user practices within social media spaces outside of C4 like Facebook, whilst also recognising the possible value of Tumblr and Pinterest. It was also another way of building and potentially exploiting archives, this time of user-bookmarked materials within C4 branded spaces and of C4 branded materials, as a means to engender brand loyalty. More importantly, it was a means to encourage registration to the site and log-ins, in order to gain access to bonus content. This would bring Channel 4 closer to its audiences, but the true aim here was to farm data from its users who were willing to supply information (or just willing to register and log-in) which could then be passed on to advertisers

Ironically, there are official C4 branded spaces within both Pinterest (http://pinterest.com/source/scrapbook.channel4.com/), as well as Tumblr, which mostly focusses upon its Fuel4 initiative (http://channel4online.tumblr.com/), displaying evidence of its scattered strategising, as well as the *spray* of its presence across all digital platforms. It highlights the quandary for the broadcaster: between appealing to its current and future (youthful) audiences within the social media spaces that they spend time in (and reveal most about themselves), and building a coherent, public service network of interlinked brands and platforms which are inherently of the broadcaster/network in question. The numerous initiatives and collaborations discussed within this section illustrate the shifting back and forth of strategy and focus. This could be seen in projects that encouraged the user experience to be increasingly insular (keeping them within the C4 branded enclosure) and collaborations which embraced the messiness of external social media platforms (like Facebook and Twitter) and disparate applications (like Zeebox and MSN), in order to understand the full range of the user experience. This messiness, along with the rise to prominence of multiplatform content brands, is something that I will now go on to discuss within the final section.

Multiplatform programme brands – From bespoke solutions to the standardisation of the youth experience?

> *I'm not following the template we have explored for* Misfits *and* Skins*, which is essentially building the world of the drama in social networks. There's always going to be an element of social networks in there as audiences use those platforms, but it is only a part of it - we are not building the world of the show there.* We are more playing with the edges of where *Utopia* meets real life. (Perkins in Davies 2012 – Emphasis added)

> All of (C4's) programmes have a web presence, but the level of interactivity will vary, says (Louise) Brown. "In terms of resources, *I would rather have the focus on a few standout, compelling experiences around really appropriate subject matter than try to make everything a little bit multiplatform*," she says. ("Louise Brown, multiplatform, C4", 2011 – Emphasis added)

As the previous section illustrated, there was an increased messiness surrounding both Channel 4's televisual and multiplatform strategies and branding, with the C4 brand and branded content being sprayed across a variety of spaces and interacting with numerous apps. Consistency, in terms of brand identity and commissioning, was something that C4 was striving for, but found increasingly difficult to achieve across its swollen portfolio of content and distributive avenues (Johnson 2012). This was problematised by C4's need to produce content experiences which went beyond the televisual and across the spaces its desired youth demographic inhabited. However, this was not entirely unfamiliar ground for the broadcaster (as highlighted in the above Perkins in Davies 2012 quote), with E4 acting as a test bed for extra-textual experimentation, as well as C4's education commissions (discussed in a previous chapter) highlighting avenues leading to digital innovation that could be successfully exploited elsewhere. Indeed, this forms the thread of what this final section looks to accomplish: discussing how C4 utilises earlier experimentation and well-worn promotional strategy to form the basis of its contemporary and future multiplatform endeavours.

This does signal a shift from bespoke spaces and strategies for each commission, evidenced within the aforementioned education content, the 4iP initiative and E4's *Skins.* The latter acted as a template for standardisation when it came to multiplatform commissioning on E4. As time has progressed, the building of programme-brands that both operated more effectively within the C4 online spaces (rather than being wholly reliant on external social networking/production company websites) and were congruent with C4 brand identity and strategy at that particular moment, was progressively encouraged. This premise is supported through an examination of C4's departmental structure (and re-structuring) upon the appointment of David Abrahams and Richard Davidson-Houston in 2010. These appointments, along with a slew of

others connected with the C4 Online and multiplatform commissioning departments, suggested that C4 wanted to replicate the success of series like *Skins*, *Embarrassing Bodies* and educational commissions in a more consistent manner. Such programme-brands acted as templates for what Channel 4 was seeking to accomplish, with Davidson-Houston suggesting at the time that:

> We're (C4) looking for big, seamless multiplatform ideas and want to commission from a diverse range of suppliers as C4 deliberately does," (...) "*We want to create more public value, additional revenue, stickiness and engagement with TV shows and forge closer, more intimate relationships with audiences.* ("C4 Online reveals commissioners and strategy", 2011 – Emphasis added)

However, for all its grand talk of risk, diversity and innovation, as well as "big ideas", C4 was somewhat staid and risk-averse, belied by its increasing reliance upon audience metrics, with experimentation being iterative, rather than bold. This is supported by Davidson-Houston's introduction and implementation of a series of criteria to measure the relative success of multiplatform commissions, amongst them being their possession of public and commercial value, as well as their ability to extract data from users and increase viewing figures. These imperatives were combined along with a push to merge multiplatform commissioning into genre commissioning in order to highlight the former's importance to future C4 success ("C4 spells out aims for multiplatform orders", 2011)

With that said, the following case studies will highlight any innovation that was being provided by C4 was done in the arena of multiplatform *promotion*, rather than the form of the primary content. However, this is not to underplay the significance of promotion in the construction of programme-brands, nor suggest that promotion is not in itself content (and content that is instructive regarding C4's wider institutional strategy). These examples of multiplatform brands illustrate discrete and divergent deployment of Channel 4's multiplatform strategy. Inconsistency, in terms of the application of this strategy

(as well as the unevenness of the strategy itself), can be seen in the levels of sophistication and coherence evident within the multiplatform provision for these programme-brands. This suggests that the effort and budget expended is commensurate with how well the brand in question tied into C4's own overall brand strategy and whether these programme-brands are consistent with how Channel 4 sees itself in the present and future.

The newness and ostensible innovation intrinsic to multiplatform brands is illusory, with ideas and content, along with promotional campaigns and programming strategy, being recycled and re-imagined for new youth audiences. Channel 4 in this instance was not progressing forward and evolving, but rather operating cyclically, with progress being made at a crawl, despite the leaps forward that were being suggested within management rhetoric. The content featured is testament to this, drawing strong parallels to earlier examples discussed in previous chapters. Despite featuring more sophisticated promotion and being disseminated across a wider variety of platforms and spaces, the content still bears the mark of what had preceded it, acting as an echo of previous successful (and unsuccessful) programming and promotional experiments.

Each of these case study examples can be linked to content and themes discussed in the earlier strands chapters. *Fresh Meat*, the first case study, can be tied into ideas discussed in the education chapter, particularly in terms of its digital presence and balancing between education and entertainment. *Hotel GB*, the second case study, is linked to the weekend/lifestyle/celebrity-oriented chapter, given the prominence of its deployment of celebrity-brands and reliance upon format over experiment. *Utopia*, the final case study, has connections to cult/late-night content, as well as "quality" imports again featured in earlier chapters, with the problems and themes inherent to both being raised

once more with the contemporary example. Each case study endeavours to illustrate the consistent falling-back onto previously utilised branding strategies used by C4, with promotional campaigns also falling into this recycling imperative. They also highlight the often arbitrary selection process relating to "full multi-platform commissioning", which each case study were examples of, rather than merely "online programme support" ("C4 plans interactive homes campaign", 2011). This begs the question: what criteria helps to decide which programme-brands receive the "full" multiplatform treatment? Is it down to genre? Potential commercial appeal? Provision of public value?

A discussion of the first case study, *Fresh Meat*, will now seek to investigate some of these questions.

FRESH MEAT

"Meatabix" - The tangy multiplatform combination of entertainment and education is hard to swallow

Fresh Meat (Objective Productions/Lime Pictures, 2011 -) followed a commissioning pattern established by C4 throughout the 00s, seeking to build on pre-existing successes and proven formats. However, it is a generically and thematically intriguing text, in that it operates as a youth comedy-drama focussed upon the existence of university students. Raeside (2011, p.8) discusses the dearth (and under-exploitation) of university-set comedy-dramas, with *The Young Ones* (1982-84) given as a single example, produced back in the early 80s. The rationale for this lack is suggested as being that the subject matter (students) were unsympathetic figures to audiences, although ironically this allows them to perform a comedic function. Much previous youth drama commissioned by C4 or other UK broadcasters and illustrated within this thesis, has either focussed on twenty-somethings (with the 90s BBC series *This Life* being an instructive example, focussed as it is on a post-University group) or

teens, which both C4 and E4 have produced various examples of (*The In-Betweeners*, *Misfits*). *Fresh Meat* however, falls between genre and generation, whilst also exploiting a neglected thematic premise, giving the brand the veneer of novelty. Parker (2011) does raise a valid concern about the series, given its focus on youthful characters, suggesting that:

> C4 clearly has high hopes for *Fresh Meat* as a returnable character-driven comedy drama, *but at times it feels more E4 and I hope that it doesn't get too lost on the main channel*. (Emphasis added)

Indeed, further parallels can be drawn between *Fresh Meat* and E4 programming such as the comedy-drama *Skins*, particularly at the point of their initial broadcast. There are explicit connections drawn by the producers and C4 to previously successful and acclaimed programme-brands that preceded the newer series, with *Shameless* being cited in relation to *Skins* prior to the latter's first broadcast and Bain and Armstrong's *Peep Show* being heavily referenced before *Fresh Meat* first aired. This was inevitable, given that the latter were created by the same team, who acted as show-runners for *Fresh Meat*, whilst using the production process (again similar to *Skins*) to develop new writers and talent under their tutelage (Parker 2011). This had the upside of ensuring that the style and tone of the content retained a level of consistency throughout (Raeside 2011, p.8). However, this referencing of historical successes relating to 'quality drama' also served to convey the veneer of success and quality onto the new, untested brand, providing them with a 'running start' and increasing their chances of success. This was particularly important, given the competition for ratings from other terrestrial broadcasters in the 10pm timeslot. Ironically, the biggest competition initially came from Five, through a programme-brand that Channel 4 had felt compelled to discard in order to evolve their programming strategy (and avoid negative press): *Big Brother*. The first series of *Fresh Meat* - an original drama-comedy commission - was close enough to the ratings of *Big Brother* for the latter's absence from C4 schedules to not be

so keenly felt (Plunkett 2011). This suggests that C4's strategic shift towards original commissions to fill the gaps, producing original and potentially public service content, was viable and could be undertaken without losing significant audience share. The commissioning of *Fresh Meat* illustrates the shift in commissioning and programming that C4 has had to undergo after losing *Big Brother*'s presence from its schedules. The result of the loss has led to C4 trying to fill schedules with original commissions which will appeal to similar youth demographics and to garner the ratings which the aforementioned reality format had done.

Similar to *Big Brother*, *Fresh Meat* was also used as a branded space through which C4 could innovate in terms of distribution. Whereas the former programme-brand pushed interactivity and live streaming, the latter showcased the importance of VOD and particularly 4oD as a means to exploit content and try and resolve (terrestrial) scheduling issues. An example of this can be witnessed within the scheduling of the penultimate episode of *Fresh Meat*'s first series, which was made available via the 4oD platform immediately after the broadcast of the sixth episode, as it would not be broadcast in its usual slot the following week. This was due to another recent scheduling peccadillo of Channel 4 – the stripping of drama content across the schedule – where in this instance, *Top Boy* (2011 -) was broadcast in the 10pm slot all week ("C4 to air penultimate Fresh Meat online first", 2011). Stripping quality content was yet another example of C4's idiosyncratic scheduling strategy, seen throughout examples supplied within the strands chapters, but also of its willingness to placate youth audiences with promises of bonus material and immediate access to televisual content within spaces (and via platforms) in which they were most likely to consume it: online. Availability of this content acted as a further promotional push by C4, asserting the importance of the 4oD platform. The platform would gain further importance to C4 in the long-term as a means of

shoring up dropping television ratings, whilst also facilitating the gathering of more detailed data on audiences and their consumption practices. *Fresh Meat*'s success through on-demand services specifically, where it ranked as the most watched series in October 2011 (2.95m views - being half a million views ahead of its nearest competition, *Hollyoaks*), was part of a general increase of 4oD consumption, whilst also suggesting the value of taking into account of non-televisual consumption for youth TV content ("Fresh Meat tops 4oD chart", 2011).

Indeed, the manner in which *Fresh Meat* was promoted (and extended) by C4, both televisually and beyond, is worthy of further discussion. The *Fresh Meat* promotional campaign was fairly straightforward for its first series, with minimal online elements tied into the brand, other than a non-bespoke web presence within C4's "Programmes" section which featured text-based character overviews and video clips. Indeed, the content featured within these spaces acted similarly to the provision within Channel 4's online press spaces, with minimal bonus material being made for available for audiences. A comparison between the promo/trailer campaigns for the first and second series of *Fresh Meat* are also interesting. Whilst the first series trailer was provocative (http://vimeo.com/44674746), highly memorable and strongly linked to what the creators had produced before (*Peep Show*), the trailers for the second series emphasised the show's award-winning status, whilst aesthetically being less aesthetically daring and more boilerplate, focussing on the characters' return, how they'd changed and the detailing of plot points for the second series.

The differences (and similarities) in promotional strategy mirror another recent youth oriented brand affiliated with C4: E4's *Skins* promos. The televisual trailers for *Skins* also highlighted prior creative successes on E4's sister channel, with the Company Pictures drama *Shameless* being used, prior

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to the broadcast of the first series, as evidence of earlier quality not just from C4, but also from the production company who would produce *Skins*. Innovation with daring promo/trailer work, particularly with Series 2 and 3 of *Skins*, additionally pushed both thematic and aesthetic boundaries, whilst garnering audience and press attention. This attention was mostly negative however, in that both garnered controversy and complaints to the ASA (Advertising Standards Agency) via their depictions of overly sexualised imagery (Series 2), as well as violence and drug-use (Series 3) (Sweney 2008, 2009). Although such themes and overriding aesthetic, in tandem with its emphasis on social media-driven viral marketing (which subsequently gained more respectable attention from the advertising industry, winning various awards in 2008), suggests that such provocative strategy was effective on many levels.

The first series teaser trailer for *Fresh Meat* would follow a similar pattern, pushing boundaries of taste in its depiction of naked 'students' acting as the 'meat' in a kebab shop, whilst simultaneously outlining the premise of the show and providing insight into the characters within it in less than a minute. The promotion also effectively and memorably acted as a compressed version or taster of the programme-brand itself, setting a tone for the content of the main series to follow. This ties into Jonathan Gray's (2010b, p.56) suggestion that "promos quite frequently create a text", in which they promise audiences a specific array of pleasures, informing them of the prospective style and tone of the completed content, as well as suggesting to whom the series is supposed to appeal.

Fresh Meat did not innovate for its first series, promotionally-speaking, in terms of multiplatform presence. It was limited, for the most part, to 'traditional' and mostly televisual promotion, like the aforementioned teaser trailer. There

were no character-driven Twitter feeds, no bespoke online presence and no notable online 'events' which would allow user-audiences to interact with programme-makers or the cast. In short, there was little encouragement for audiences to 'get involved', as they had been exhorted to via multiple E4 youth brands. Indeed, this encouragement was a core element of E4's grassroots, user-generated content pushes, which brought audiences and production closer together. Channel 4 drama brands, on the other hand, kept their distance from their audiences, meaning the first series of *Fresh Meat* was treated as a primarily televisual proposition by C4. It also operated mostly as quality entertainment, rather than a PSB-oriented commission. However, Channel 4's commissioning and promotional strategies would shift in the time between series, reflecting the management's desire to bring previously disparate departments together in order to encourage collaboration, efficiency and greater brand coherence. There was a sense that within expensive commissions and prominent programme-brands, which *Fresh Meat* would become, should act as showcases for everything that C4 was endeavouring to accomplish, rather than just act as quality television in their own right. Such brands would subsequently be sprayed across a variety of spaces and platforms, in order to propagate their presence, as well as C4's increasingly fragmentary and uncertain brand identity, in an example of C4's assertion of its (and their) relevance within them to user-audiences.

The second series of *Fresh Meat* saw modification and evolution in the brand's promotion, via an embracing of full multiplatform commissioning for it, reflecting the increased importance of the brand. This increased prominence was partially due to the series' success at the Royal Television Awards in 2012, where it picked up accolades for comedy writing and scripted comedy (Plunkett 2012). This subsequent confirmation of the brand's 'quality' status was reflected both in the increased prominence that C4 felt the brand should have, through its

selection for a stronger cross-platform presence which fell in line with C4's multiplatform strategy at the time, as well as in its televisual promotion, which repeatedly articulated the brand's status (as well as its showrunners') as 'award-winning'. *Fresh Meat*'s upgraded promotion and increased multiplatform presence can be seen via "The Fresh Meat House", which ties into Gray's (2010b, p.55) discussion concerning the television industry's increased preference to create spaces in order to spray content across them, suggesting that:

> Many shows have long since learned the value of creating official Web sites that offer production details, clips, discussion forums, surrounding and background materials, and occasionally alternate reality games (ARGs) or other spaces of play for fans or would-be fans (…) *The industry, in other words, is spending a lot of time, money, and labor to fill the mediascape with promos*. (Emphasis added)

Gray's suggestion here is that these bonus materials (also discussed earlier) are an important means through which to connect to audiences in non-televisual spaces, but which perform the more important role of raising programme-brand awareness beyond the televisual. The Fresh Meat House (freshmeathouse.channel4.com) was "*an online spin-off of comedy drama Fresh Meat to provide resources and guidance to teenagers leaving home for the first time.*" It was ordered by Channel 4 Education and featured a " *virtual version of the student house includes exclusive video content designed for over 16s that explores issues such as sexuality, dealing with relationships, finance management and careers advice*, as well as a bespoke radio station" ("C4 Education orders Fresh Meat spin-off", 2012). Although the rationale supplied for this provision was fair and was certainly consistent with C4 Education's previous multiplatform commissions, which endeavoured to provide practical careers and lifestyle-oriented information, rather than scholastic material (as highlighted within the education chapter), one may question why this educative commissioning strategy (and collaboration with C4 Education) had not been applied to other youth-oriented drama elsewhere on C4. More to the point, if

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C4's educational provision and *Fresh Meat* had been such a straightforward and obvious fit, why had the multiplatform provision and collaboration between drama and education only been implemented from the second series? The themes and ideas raised, as well as the purpose of the commission, are pertinent, relating both to C4 Education aims (to provide educative material across non-televisual spaces), as well as to issues experienced both by students generally and the student characters within the *Fresh Meat* narrative universe. It is in the execution of this commission however where problems can (and do) occur.

The Fresh Meat House, produced by Objective Productions and the multiplatform arm of Maverick Productions (two companies separate from the televisual commission) showed little in the way of sophistication or a sense of true integration with either the characters set within the *Fresh Meat* narrative, or audiences and their practices. Despite this being a collaboration with Channel 4 Education, a department with experience in setting up and deploying multiplatform projects which facilitated interactivity that assisted public service goals, this was a shallow and disjointed endeavour. A key issue here was that *Fresh Meat* (the television series) is, at root, a fiction commission (drama) and not factual (education). Despite a laudable attempt to redeploy the (under-used) expertise of Channel 4 Education in the realm of multiplatform, the 'fit' between what it attempts to accomplish and how the *Fresh Meat* brand or brand experience might be expected to operate (as a comedy-drama product) is problematic, with educational elements of the multiplatform commission feeling tokenistic and bolted-on, rather than as an organic extension of a coherent product. This notion is taken up further by Gray (2010b, pp.55-56) who suggests that:

> Cultural critics have long noted the at-times radical disconnect between brand and product…and critics have rightfully been concerned about an ad's ability to take over the history, present and experience of a product

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with branding. (…) With ads and promos for television shows, then, a similar situation exists, wherein the promo exerts a strong *textual* pull over the show.

Gray's highlighting of promotional dissonance, with a clash between what the televisual brand *is* (or at least, how it is promoted) and what Channel 4 *would like it to be*, is also at work regarding *Fresh Meat*'s presence across platforms. The emergence of multiplatform commissioning further problematises this potential "disconnect between brand and product", given that the product is no longer singular, but fragmented (not always coherently) across platforms. This ties into Catherine Johnson's discussion of C4 in the contemporary instance, surmising that:

> ...as Channel 4 has expanded into the digital era, branding has emerged as a way of creating an identity, but one that is malleable enough to be targeted at different sections of the Channel 4 audience and to be expanded and differentiated across new services and platforms." (Johnson 2012, pp.93-94)

This malleability and ability to repurpose brands and branded content for various demographics is something of a necessity for broadcasters, but it is also a headache for Channel 4 in particular, when it attempts to balance its commercial and public service commitments within the space of a single programme-brand across a variety of spaces. What also didn't help in maintaining a sense of coherence between the multiplatform elements and televisual parts of *Fresh Meat* was the erratic roll-out of the web-presence, further exacerbated by the poor televisual promotion of the multiplatform elements. Despite being available around the broadcast of the first episode of the second series, there was no discernible television promotion of The Fresh Meat House until episode three. The Fresh Meat House itself was also far from polished or coherent, reflecting the somewhat unclear role it was supposed to play in supporting the *Fresh Meat* brand. The educative elements of "the house" were limited to links directed to student support, loosely connected to

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issues characters experienced within episodes, often centring around drug or alcohol-use. Generally, the content within the site, educative or entertainment-oriented (or a clumsy meshing of the two), felt forced and rushed. Video diary sections, ostensibly to provide additional insight into character motivations and thoughts not verbalised within the primary text, were well-acted yet conceptually hackneyed, with their creation feeling at odds and inconsistent with character behaviours within the narrative universe of *Fresh Meat*. Their inclusion smacked of content being included within new media spaces for the sake of having (multiplatform) content in them. The premise of The Fresh Meat House represented an opportunity for an effective expansion of the *Fresh Meat* narrative and exploitation of the brand, yet the execution stymied further insight and provided little value, other than the potential for further C4 rhetoric regarding how it was fulfilling educational requirements. The multiplatform provision for *Fresh Meat*'s third series ("Fresh Meat Unlocked") partially remedies the convoluted nature of "The Fresh Meat House" by removing the conceptual clumsiness and focussing upon finding more effective vehicles for additional content.

This example, relating to Channel 4's Education department and its (enforced) interrelationship with other departments, is an instance of C4 trying to integrate commissioning and extracting maximum value out of departments (and brands), whilst also being indicative of how C4 Education's role has shifted. In particular, how it has shifted from that of innovator (during the time of Matt Locke's tenure) and pusher of multiplatform boundaries, towards that of facilitator of the needs of other departments. Education, in this instance, is seen as vital in boosting the public service elements of televisual commissions and brands which may be entertainment-based in origin, further justifying their commission.

It is now no longer enough for C4 to be producing quality drama as proof of public service credentials. This may have sufficed when the channel was operating within a purely televisual environment, where this content was championed within promotional materials as evidence that C4 was holding true to its remit and diverted attention away from its more overtly commercial endeavours. Given that C4 has branched out across platforms, its public service obligations, and the subsequent justification of them, must also branch out and evolve. The under-deployment and under-funding of its educational arm suggests that this latter usage of education-as-provider-of-supplementary-materials (such as that which can be witnessed within "The Fresh Meat House") could be seen as C4 killing two birds with one stone. Namely, proving its public service credentials across a network of programme and channel-brands, through education-centric additional material within digital and mobile spaces, as well as deploying education as a cross-platform, inter-departmental "go-to guy" when drama and comedy brands needed further material which can be linked to public-service oriented purposes.

However, there are obvious glitches in this rationale, revolving around whether or not these drama/comedy brands actually require an educative function in the first place, potentially leading to a poor "fit" between the televisual and the supplementary content. Additionally, the selection process concerning which programme-brands get selected for this treatment often appears arbritrarily localised around the explicitly youth-oriented brands. Further examples of this problematic blending and collaboration between education and entertainment, as well as Channel 4's scattershot commissioning policy, which endeavoured to fold multiplatform into the equation whether it was appropriate or not, will now be discussed in relation to the next case study example.

<u>***HOTEL GB***</u>

<u>"Check out, don't check it out" - Innovation takes a break at C4's celebrity rest-home</u>

Hotel GB (Optomen, 2012), upon its commissioning, was another factual entertainment brand which served both to fill the gap left by *Big Brother*'s departure as well as to service Channel 4's wider multiplatform and public service strategies. Indeed, the manner in which the brand was positioned was not dissimilar to *Big Brother*'s early promotion prior to its initial broadcast, placing it in a tradition of social experiment with public service aims and educative function, via the reality-doc format. This represented Channel 4 re-articulating and echoing previously successful content in the hope that, with tweaking, the same success could be achieved with an ostensibly different branded property. This strategy was not without its risks however, particularly given *Big Brother*'s fall from grace on C4, its brand tarnished by controversies and conceptual exhaustion, with such 'factual entertainment' latterly becoming quaint and ill-fitting with Channel 4's remit of innovation. C4's shedding of the brand was in order to 'clear the decks' and make way for original commissions, leading to a supposedly different strategy that would fill the schedules whilst retaining audience share. This was supported towards the end of 2011, where C4 planned on increasing its programming budget as part of a process of "creative renewal" (Khalsa 2011), or as Frost (2012, p.18) puts it, a "fundamental creative overhaul", which also included the rebranding of More 4 and the introduction of Scrapbook, mentioned earlier. This programming facelift was to be driven primarily by C4's new chief creative officer, Jay Hunt, appointed in 2011, who was responsible for bringing in content which resonated with its desired youth demographic, introducing a range of programming which epitomised C4's "mission to make mischief" whilst showing a shift away from over-reliance upon single brands (Campbell 2011).

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Hotel GB was positioned as part of this process of mischief-making and renewal. Justified as public service entertainment, with parallels to similar 'mission' programme-brands driven by C4 celebrity figureheads such as Jamie Oliver (*Jamie's Kitchen, Jamie's School Dinners, Jamie's Dream School*), it emphasised its links to charity, with revenue earned by the hotel being passed along to The Prince's Trust and The Springboard Charity. Its promises to aid under-privileged groups, along with commitments to raise awareness of various issues, also contributed to this charitable 'mission'. It traversed moments of C4's past and television's present via its topicality, acting as an example of 'recession television' through its highlighting of employment issues. With that said, the attempted positioning of the brand, in the words of Jay Hunt prior to its broadcast as something "completely different" to earlier factual entertainment brands which would "revolutionise television as *Big Brother* had before it" (Hunt in Frost 2012, p.18), was an example of the disconnect between Channel 4's promotional rhetoric and the realities of a brand's execution.

The *Hotel GB* brand is interesting in that it acted as a curious generic and strategic amalgam, riffing on factual entertainment formats of Channel 4's past, along with contemporary celebrity figures affiliated with the main C4 brand, such as Gok Wan, Gordon Ramsey and Phil Spencer. This was an example of Channel 4 once again deploying celebrity-brands in order to propagate C4 brand identity and values (which links into debates raised within the T4/lifestyle chapter). This did however run against the grain of British broadcasting strategy, particularly evident with the BBC and ITV, which had been predominant: namely, a shift towards quality drama, rather than factual formats. Indeed, this commission seemed rather retrograde, acting as a 'greatest hits' of Channel 4 ideas, formats and personalities, rather than something that represented true innovation or the creative renewal spoken of earlier. *Hotel GB* was possessed of a generic messiness, combining elements from a variety of

pre-existing content, who the personalities featured within had been previously involved with, adding to the sense of melange. There was also a subsequent lack of coherence, with little convincing rationale being supplied regarding the role of *Hotel GB* or why the celebrities featured were being deployed in such a fashion. Arguably, the brand was nothing more than a promotional vehicle: for the celebrities, for the guests, for the hotel and for C4 itself. As Heritage ("Hotel GB: checking out Channel 4's reality show", 2002) suggests, *Hotel GB* was an "oddity", an experiment in multiplatform and terrestrial 'stripping' which endeavoured to perform various disparate functions simultaneously.

In terms of its promotion, *Hotel GB*'s teaser promo trailer signposts the brand's intentions, as well as its potential problems. With the strapline of "*Hotel GB*: where Channel 4's finest are at your service - what could possibly go wrong?", the trail acts to inform both of the tone of the show – irreverent, ironic, self-promoting – and the relative importance of the celebrities featured within it. In this instance, Mary Portas and Gordon Ramsey are at the top of the 'management pyramid', signalling the strength of their celebrity and the potential for such personalities to carry the show if needed. However, the promo is suggestive of a chaotic experience, riddled with failure and mishap. This, on the one hand, is perhaps inevitable, given that the celebrities were performing unfamiliar roles, whilst the hotel was also operating as a training ground for young people. On the other hand, failure, disorganisation and incoherence were all apt descriptions for the *Hotel GB* brand itself (and by association, Channel 4). This was discussed further by Jeffreys (2012, p.6) in terms of Jay Hunt's tenure as chief creative officer at C4, suggesting that:

> While its competitors have been busy ploughing funds into scripted television - drama at ITV and the BBC, comedy at Sky - *C4 invested in the obsolete celebrity reality show genre using contracted talent*. (Emphasis added)

The suggestion here is that rather than creative renewal and innovation, a

reliance upon the safety of tried, tested and tired formats and celebrity-brands was being exercised, moving in opposition to prevailing televisual trends (and indeed, the rhetorical logic of C4 itself). The *Hotel GB* trailer's depictions of random celebrities performing menial tasks poorly is a precis of how the brand operated as a whole: failure being central at all times. The blending of a variety of factual entertainment formats and educational imperatives also lead to a queasy, unpalatable concoction, with the sense that *Hotel GB* was a poor choice to spearhead Channel 4's renewal. It wasn't only the televisual elements of *Hotel GB* that were problematic, however.

The experimental multiplatforming, which was at the forefront of C4's strategy at the time, arguably positions the brand in a manner similar to that could be found within C4 Education commissions, as well as the latter's collaborations with non-education departments. However, it is debatable whether *Hotel GB* operates as entertainment or education, particularly as it cannot decide what it wants to be. This is inevitable, given that so many different celebrity brands and programme concepts are being shoehorned into the confines of a single show. Its status and identity mirrored Channel 4 itself at that moment (and indeed in previous moments); fractured by its necessity to perform functions which are not necessarily compatible with one another, producing an inconsistent, fragmentary experience. A positive that can be drawn from the brand is that it did hold true to Channel 4's historical imperatives towards experimentation, although as shall be outlined, this experiment was geared towards commercial, entertainment and promotional ends. *Hotel GB* acted as the logical end result of Channel 4's historical preoccupation with exploiting celebrity-brands in order to propagate its own brand identity. In this instance, Channel 4 endeavoured to combine its previous efforts in the field with its increasing embrace of multiplatform, in order to form a hybrid 'super-brand'.

Again, like *Fresh Meat*, *Hotel GB*'s multiplatform offering was created by Maverick Productions, rather than the company dealing with the televisual offering, Optomen. Despite the connection between Optomen and Maverick through their ownership by All3Media, there would once again be consequences for the overall coherence of the *Hotel GB* brand, with content being produced by different and autonomous production units. Like *Fresh Meat* (and also *Utopia*, which will be discussed later), *Hotel GB* possessed a bespoke multiplatform presence and online space (hotelgb.channel4.com), which included links to a centralised *Hotel GB* Twitter presence, along with links to the individual celebrities involved with the brand. Indeed, a sense of collaboration was evident between C4 and Twitter for this commission, in order for the show's Twitter presence to "cheerlead" for the show within a social media space, "boost(ing) the profile" of Hotel GB, whilst Twitter also provided "behind-the-scenes technical input", enhancing the sense that this was a true collaborative effort ("Twitter & C4 tie-up for Hotel GB", 2012). C4's employment of "celebrity social media cheerleaders" through Twitter and Facebook (Tim Lovejoy and Sara Cox) in order to utilise their pre-existing popularity and audience reach to build awareness of this new branded property was all the more vital, given *Hotel GB*'s time-sensitive and limited nature ("C4 recruits celebs to cheerlead Hotel GB", 2012).

Hotel GB's status as 'ephemeral' and limited is part of a tradition of attention-grabbing, one-off Channel 4 programming. This ranged from single-event programming such as *Drugs Live: The Ecstasy Trial* (Renegade Pictures, 2012), to seasons of themed programming such as the sexuality-oriented *Red Light Zone* factual season (1995) and the un-broadcast *Wank* Week, which was due to be transmitted in 2007, but subsequently shelved. The wisdom and prudence of trying to build a strong multiplatform presence around a commission so intrinsically ephemeral does raise serious questions regarding

C4's strategy. However, it is perhaps a realisation on the part of C4, shown increasingly through their digital policies that:

> Television can no longer be understood as an autonomous medium, but rather as being connected to other screens (Internet, mobile phone) and cultural sites (sports fields, theme parks, sets)...(with it being as much) embedded in public spheres as in domestic ones, and as a consequence the ways in which we engage with television have also changed. (Roscoe 2004, p.364)

This recognition is extended to a realisation that, due to fragmented audiences and changing consumption practices which often revolve around second-screen, audiences are now being drawn towards events, rather than standard scheduling (Roscoe 2004, p.364). However, whereas in previous examples of one-off televisual commissions and seasons of programming these events were primarily televisual in nature, a variety of platforms must now be considered for maximum impact and reach. Niki Strange's (2011) research on the BBC's "Bundled Project" and the deployment of public service beyond the televisual ties into Roscoe's work and is certainly instructive here. She suggests that:

> multiplatform event television developed as a production practice that was designed to mimic changed patterns of media consumption and new modes of communication among audiences (…this was) driven largely by a desire among broadcasters to capture a (youth) demographic whose patterns of media consumption were beginning to shift in favour of such platforms… (2011, p.133)

Strange goes on to extrapolate a "post-broadcast" landscape (discussed elsewhere in this chapter) caused by the development of changing audience practices and new technologies, with texts necessarily "dispersed across a range of proprietary channels and platforms and beyond into third-party spaces" (2011, p.138). In this context, partnerships and collaborations (like those mentioned earlier in this chapter) were necessary in order to create a greater range of content across a wider variety of platforms, increasing the likelihood of such content reaching its desired audiences. She goes on to raise an issue which is integral to the discussion of all the case studies within this chapter,

given their status as "full" multiplatform commissions, commenting that:

> …there remains, with highly dispersed texts such as bundled projects, a question of how a "unified (and unifying) discourse" might be conveyed though a multitude of sites (each with their concomitant conventions and aesthetic registers) to a wide range of users/viewers. (2011, p.148)

Strange's comment highlights the difficulty of retaining a level of brand consistency; both in terms of within the programme-brand itself, but also in relation to whether the variety of content is congruent with the aims of the parent brand. *Hotel GB*'s status as multiplatform event programming however is conceptually flawed at its root. This is despite operating as something which is ostensibly imbued with Channel 4's experimental ethos (through promotional rhetoric), as well as its drive towards education and public service (albeit a re-conceptualised version of the latter). Can an ephemeral televisual brand have a sustained presence within and impact upon non-televisual spaces? What was the purpose of the multiplatform *Hotel GB* branded presence, beyond supplying a legacy for the televisual commission?

Notably, the online *Hotel GB* spaces can be linked to Channel 4's '4Life' (4Food, 4Homes, 4Beauty) suite of C4 lifestyle spaces/portals, featuring many of the same celebrity-brands promoting those branded enclosures. Curiously, there is no linkage to or functionality for the Digital Scrapbook project, which, given its factual entertainment generic status, would make strategic sense. Although the clash between lifestyle and education would make for an even more fragmentary brand and uneven tone, with the lifestyle emphasis potentially negating the educative 'mission' and campaigning elements that *Hotel GB* endeavoured to deploy.

Hotel GB's online presence also included blogs, quizzes and bonus video content on its main site, whilst also highlighting its potential educative function (links to "career resources"), as well as interactivity (a "casting tool" allowed

viewers/users to feature in the programme). A launch of a tie-in mobile game (iOS/Android) for *Hotel GB*, was also included in this multiplatform strategy. The game commission featured further collaboration between the factual entertainment and C4 Education departments, operating as the first one that wasn't entirely from/for an education commission through the latter department (Farber 2012). However, the game undoubtedly acted as a driver of further revenue, rather than an exemplar of educative provision or public service. It is debatable of how effective these disparate elements were in providing educative or public value to the *Hotel GB* brand. Indeed, many of them were somewhat tokenistic and welded-on, providing little value or added functionality to the user experience, falling short in its attempts to provide educative material in an entertaining manner, as it provides too little of either education or entertainment. This could also be said of the previous case study example, whose multiplatform offering was also produced by Maverick. The failure of balance is one which could be seen throughout *Hotel GB*'s televisual commission, as well as with regard to C4-as-institution, when trying to cope with its commercial and public service goals.

Hotel GB operated as a microcosm of C4's digital and multiplatform strategy. A hotel with many rooms, many potential functions, a space that performs a useful service but only operating for a limited time, using personnel ill-equipped for the task, with little coherent overall purpose. It's a hotel in name only: a hotel that is a hotel because that is how it is being sold to a paying public. Channel 4 is a public service network that performs useful functions and is commercially viable, as that is how it sells and brands itself. There is an overwhelming sense that this self-promotion is fine in theory and is certainly defensible, but not one that holds up in practice or to sustained scrutiny. Like *Hotel GB*'s many rooms, C4 possesses multiple platforms, ventures, channels and personalities, which in theory perform everything that is expected of C4:

championing innovation, diversity and experimentation. In reality, it is a hollow, fractured collation of empty rooms and empty promises, sprayed across a vast, confusing and competitive digital landscape, that struggles to attract paying customers to its doorstep, without deceiving them about what exactly they are paying for and what they will be paying with. As Jeffreys (2012, p.6) suggests in an editorial discussing Channel 4's post-30 year anniversary future, the broadcaster is essentially managing a slow decline. This is due to dropping revenues, an inability to compete with Sky and the BBC for both content and talent, whilst simultaneously suffering a long-running crisis of identity and strategic rudderlessness in an media environment which does not favour televisual-centric companies.

Could C4 produce content which effectively combined strong multiplatform presence and promotion with coherent, quality content that would subsequently garner adequate ratings or generate 'buzz'? The last case-study looks to discover whether Channel 4 could effectively execute its multiplatform commissioning policy and promotional strategies (blending rhetoric and reality) in order to produce coherent results, showcasing a path forward for the network.

UTOPIA

Do dystopian narratives and apocalyptic ratings equal the future of Channel 4's multiplatform strategy?

Utopia (Kudos Productions, 2013 -) acts as an interesting counterpoint to the previous two case studies regarding its promotion (a recurring preoccupation of this chapter), but also in terms of how it operated in opposition to much of Channel 4's contemporary programming, instead harking back to other such moments in C4's past. Its commission was also notable for being, in the words of Hilary Perkins (C4 head of multiplatform drama), C4's 'first full multiplatform drama commission" (Davies 2012). With *Utopia*, C4 was following the success

of similar commissions via E4, such as *Misfits* and *Skins*, two programme-brands which (as has been discussed) endeavoured to forge relationships with youth audiences across platforms with transmedia content. However, a different approach would have to be manufactured for C4 audiences, who, unlike youth audiences, were assumed to have less time to investigate non-televisual spaces and content. Additionally, Perkins asserted that for *Utopia*, Channel 4 would;

> *...not following the template we have explored for* Misfits *and* Skins*, which is essentially building the world of the drama in social networks. There's always going to be an element of social networks in there as audiences use those platforms, but it is only a part of it - we are not building the world of the show there.* We are more playing with the edges of where Utopia meets real life. (Perkins in Davies 2012 – Emphasis added)

Indeed, this new commission would have to be executed in a different way to those E4 brands, whilst the transmedia elements would also take on a different shape in comparison to the other two case studies, given that the multiplatform elements were to be delivered by the digital agency TH_NK (in collaboration with the creator Dennis Kelly and Kudos), rather than Maverick. However, the televisual proposition is deserving of attention, as it provided an integrated and coherent jumping-off point for the multiplatform elements, whilst simultaneously acting as a catalyst for a discussion pertaining to C4 commissioning strategy.

Utopia was part of a noticeable, relatively recent and reactive C4 commissioning strategy, featuring a small string of prominent homegrown dramas commissioned by C4. These often came to prominence whenever C4 needed to make a statement, reaffirming its relevance within the British TV marketplace, rebutting accusations that C4 was overly reliant upon formatted entertainment to generate discussion, re-establishing its public service credentials and garnering awards for 'quality' drama. This was particularly the case in the late 00s, where *The Red Riding Trilogy* (2009), *The Devil's Whore* (2008) and *This is England '86* and '88 (2010, 2011) represented a series of

commissions following a brief to represent the best of what C4 could achieve, being aesthetically striking and thematically risky. All three examples were featured prominently within official C4 promotional materials (such as their Annual Reports) as exemplars of Channel 4's remit towards supporting creative talent and pushing of boundaries, all of which acted as a distraction from the over-abundance of tired formats and cheap filler prevalent within C4 schedules at the time. With the appointment of David Abraham, along with Richard Davidson-Houston and Jay Hunt, a concerted effort was seemingly made to merge rhetoric with reality, as well as the televisual with multiplatform (discussed at the end of the education chapter), in order to fulfil C4's goal of 'creative renewal'.

Utopia encapsulates this transitional time, as well as operates as a bridge between C4's history and its future (a recurring theme concerning the programming in this chapter, with some "bridges" sturdier and more viable than others). Indeed, associations with other programme-brands, both contemporary and of the past are raised (deliberately or otherwise). Mark Munden, Utopia's director for three of the six episodes, was also the director for the aforementioned The Devil's Whore, as well as another contemporary quality drama on BBC2, The Crimson Petal and the White (2011), conveying a veneer of success and quality upon the new series. It is noticeable that within the promotional materials for Utopia, both award-winning status and British-originated productions are emphasised, whilst links to recent international filmic (critical) successes are also suggestive, even before broadcast, of the tone that Utopia is trying to achieve. Interestingly, there is a link that connects C4 and E4 together – Nathan Stewart-Jarrett, previously of E4's Misfits – who functions to build positive associations between previously successful multiplatform youth dramas and new ones through different outlets. This tactic, forefronting previous successes and emphasising the quality of productions (often through

the association with awards) has been consistently deployed by C4 across platforms and channel-brands in order to encourage audience take-up. However, the question must be asked whether youth audiences, the desired audience demographic for Channel 4 across the majority of its spaces, were concerned with such successes and sense of historical accomplishment. In addition, it remains to be seen if it can be considered wise for Channel 4 to lean on past successes and history more generally, given its self-branding as an innovator and experimenter which always looks to move forward. An emphasis upon originality and newness would certainly be more productive and more in line with stated C4 strategy than a rehashing of what had come before.

Utopia certainly possesses an aesthetic freshness and distinctiveness, although it does have clear thematic and aesthetic links to quality/cult television and film, along with their promotion. *Lost* and David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* are two immediate points of reference in this instance, being series which were reliant upon dense central mysteries and complicated narrative structure. Whilst *Lost* having the Dharma Initiative and *Twin Peaks* investigating Laura Palmer, *Utopia* had Jessica Hyde ("Who is Jessica Hyde?") and 'The Network' in its first series. These themes can be linked to much quality US TV broadcast on British television (examples of which can be discussed further in the imports chapter), with the central mystery narrative being key to their appeal. The aesthetic of *Utopia* is also rooted in the traditions of quality imported drama, seen throughout C4's history in their deployment of imports as a 'draw' to the channel, with production values bringing a cinematic quality. This is especially true of *Utopia* which operated in stark relief to the aesthetic and tone of the bulk of contemporary C4 (and indeed British TV) schedules. Arguably, *Utopia* would not have been out of place in C4 schedules a decade ago, where it can be productively compared to many examples of experimental, late-night and quality imported content (again discussed in earlier chapters). However, these

historical experimental examples made way for a slew of more straightforward and less aesthetically and thematically daring content, suggesting that *Utopia*'s otherness is perhaps not beneficial to its long-term future. Where much of C4's formatted entertainment is often aesthetically and thematically interchangeable, *Utopia* is distinctive and unlikely to be mistaken for another series of television. It is possessed of a strong visual identity through its deployment of rich colour schemes, memorable typography (in its opening titling) and cinematic cinematography and sound work. Indeed, if anything, *Utopia* is anti-televisual, whereas the previous case study *Hotel GB*, its aesthetic and thematic opposite, was televisually referential to a fault.

The brand did not stand completely alone from anything else on Channel 4. It had a spiritual companion piece in Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* anthology series (2011 -). They cover similar thematic ground (paranoia, technophobia) and are both possessed of mordant humour. However, there are key differences and potential issues in reception. Brooker's series has the possibility of being more easily accepted and picked up on by the desired youth demographic, given the creator's building of goodwill and fandom amongst the audience through previous televisual exploits, such as the comedic television-critique BBC series *Screenwipe* (2006-2009), reality TV satire *Dead Set* (2009) and more recently, topical discussion format, *10 O'Clock Live* (2011 -).

Utopia, on the other hand, lacked this creator frame-of-reference and potential for in-built fandom, which made the building of momentum and the finding of common ground with potential audiences problematic. This was further exacerbated by the fact that it neither looked nor operated like much other UK-originated contemporary drama content. Further problematising the reception for the new programme-brand was both its genre and, by association, its pacing. *Utopia*'s generic links to science fiction and mystery, along with

elements of comic-book culture, meant that it was not geared towards ease-of-access or understanding. The pacing (and nature of the mystery narrative) meant that the first series was meant to be enjoyed slowly, with the entirety of the series run comprising one element of a larger narrative, similar to earlier import series on C4 like *Lost* and *Babylon 5.* Although these early examples are instructive regarding C4's treatment of such generic content in that they either did not last for the duration of their run on C4, or were poorly scheduled/edited beyond recognition respectively. Its generic positioning meant that there was little in the way of instant gratification for audiences, which ran counter to much contemporary youth drama content on C4 (and indeed, content designed for youth demographics more generally), which was more low-key, low-effort and low-budget in comparison. There was a distinct disconnect between *Utopia* and much of Channel 4's other output, drama or otherwise. So, how was Channel 4 to fulfil its promises of making the series an effective example of multiplatform drama commissioning which appealed to its core demographic, given the problems inherent in the source material? The answer was in its promotion and its usage of social media.

Utopia's promotional campaign arguably drew parallels with C4's *Lost* teaser campaign in 2005 when it was first broadcast in the UK, particularly in its online elements (see the imports chapter, where this is discussed in greater detail). The *Utopia* campaign emphasised the sense of mystery and puzzle elements through both the use of trailers and via the bespoke utopia.channel4.com site, launched in January 2013. The emphasis was on provoking discussion and interaction from audiences, encouraging them to unravel clues and solve the mystery, whilst forefronting themes of surveillance and corporate malfeasance in conjunction with a social media focus. Arguably, the characters within and premise of the series, revolving around fan cultures and the prophetic graphic novel "The Utopia Inquiry", suggest that certain niche

audiences groups affiliated with fannish consumption practices are being targeted here, along with audiences interested in the range of C4's contemporary and historical quality drama. However, it was the bespoke promotion utilising Twitter, particularly the tailored videos from "Wilson Wilson" to various prominent celebrity Twitter users, as well as the feed's use of mentions which detail revealing information about other prominent Twitter users with a varied social media presence which is particularly worthy of discussion here. Parks' (2004, p.135) ideas regarding "flexible microcasting" and the increasing individualisation of user experience are pertinent here, where she suggests that:

> ...computer and television technologies are combined to produce the effect of enhanced viewer choice in the form of a stream of programming carefully tailored to the viewer's preferences, tastes and desires. Flexible microcasting is organised around social distinctions…that are arranged to maximise profit for media producers, networks and advertisers. *The personalisation of TV is ultimately about developing narrowly defined yet infinitely flexible content that commodifies layers of individual identity, desire, taste, and preference*. (Emphasis added)

In this instance, *Utopia*'s Twitter interactions seized upon various individual users' tastes, identities and activity and turn that information against them. Such manipulation of social media was part of a process of bringing users closer to the programme-brand as well as deepening and furthering the key themes of paranoia and surveillance culture intrinsic to *Utopia*. This was an example of C4 learning from its early Twitter experiments, witnessed in the *Hotel GB* examples above. It displayed an evolution from the use of "social media cheerleaders", towards something which was coherent and consistent with *Utopia*'s narrative universe and characters, using the platform as a means of continuing the narrative and retaining the tone of the brand across new media spaces. "The Network", in this instance, operated as an analogy for social media ubiquity as another means of enforcing surveillance culture - something that was central to the interactive elements to the bespoke web-space quizzes. The Twitter feed, although performing the function of promotion, for the

programme-brand and for C4 itself, was not primarily promotional in function, but operated to extend the brand and narrative in a more integrated fashion than could be witnessed in C4's other attempts. Interestingly, the YouTube clips of Wilson Wilson that the Twitter feed links to, echoed earlier C4 experiments with online video: namely "The Collective" video diaries featured within the 4Later block discussed in a previous chapter. These also showcased various disenfranchised viewers rambling about esoterica and conspiracies (like Wilson Wilson), which mirrored the woozy tone of the zone. Wilson Wilson's videos are similarly effective in conveying the tone and feel of the primary *Utopia* brand, whilst utilising Twitter to directly address key figures featured on it (such as Jonathan Ross and Grace Dent). It calls on them to (indirectly) build 'buzz' around the brand by mentioning it, in an accidental example of celebrity-fan work. This connects to John Caldwell's (2005a, p.95) discussion of a "viral marketing scheme" for media, where:

> Each multimedia platform (the Web site and the DVD with extras) serves as a "host body" for the studio/network's mutating content, and various forms of industrial reflexivity (behind-the-scenes, making-ofs, bonus tracks, and interactively negotiated production knowledge) *serve as the fuel that drives the endless mutation of this content across proprietary host bodies* within the conglomerated world *(with) onscreen critical analysis (whether from scholars, publicists, show-biz reports, or industrial marketing departments) (facilitating) the process of repurposing and mutation.* (Emphasis added)

However, this social media push, like the televisual elements of the *Utopia* brand, was not without its issues, despite its useful promotional function.

There was a distinct disconnect between *Utopia* and other youth-oriented output (read: factual entertainment) on Channel 4, with the social media push and designation of *Utopia* as C4's "first multiplatform drama series" being problematic. The links with youth that social media connotes, particularly given the cultivation of this connection that C4 fostered via E4 youth drama commissions, were somewhat incompatible with the distinctly 'adult' tone, slow

pace and complex narrative of *Utopia.* This is not to suggest that youth audiences were incapable of enjoying such texts, but given the rarity of them, it can be surmised that such commissions would (at least initially) appear alien. Although *Utopia* undoubtedly benefits from possessing a strong social media presence, particularly in its innovative usage of Twitter, appreciation of the televisual brand is hampered by its content. *Utopia* did not fit with either the contemporary brand identity nor the predominant content of Channel 4, nor would it operate effectively on the teen-oriented E4, despite that channel-brand's predilection for multiplatform drama commissions. Despite following the groundwork laid down by the latter's drama commissions (like *Skins*), there was a level of brand incongruity between *Utopia* and Channel 4 that did not exist between E4 and its homegrown commissions. This incongruity is also evident within the other case study examples mentioned earlier (*Fresh Meat, Hotel GB*) between brand and content. There was a disparity between what C4 wanted to accomplish (seen within its corporate rhetoric) and what it was actually able to accomplish due to its positioning within the televisual marketplace. As a result, ideas and commissions that were successfully executed within its satellite channels (More 4, E4) were not always entirely transferrable to the parent brand, or at least, they were not achievable in the same manner due to different demographics consuming media in different ways. *Utopia* garnered a decidedly mixed social media response, monitored via Zeebox upon viewing the series as-broadcast, along with relatively poor ratings due to its relatively late 10pm scheduling, bear out the problems raised above concerning multiplatform commissioning, as well as with quality/cult drama, on C4. *Utopia*'s sheer 'otherness' to everything else broadcast on Channel 4 (bar perhaps *Black Mirror*) in the contemporary instance, make it a fine example of brave, innovative, risk-taking and distinctive commissioning by C4.

The coverage of these case studies raises a variety of pertinent questions,

pertaining to the direction of C4-as-commissioner and the purpose of C4-as-institution. The multiplatform commissioning strategy that Channel 4 (rather than one of its satellite channel-brands, like E4) has endeavoured to implement displays a distinct lack of confidence in its published content, or at least a lack of faith in its ability to find audiences. It also questions C4's ability to satisfy the non-commercial elements of its remit across the entirety of its schedules, in this unwieldy affixing of educational elements to previously pure entertainment texts. It also displays a noticeable schism in quality, tone and mode of address between its factual and fiction commissions, abundantly evident when comparing series like *Utopia* with *Hotel GB*, to the point where quality, award-winning drama, aiming to challenge and enlighten its audiences, succeeds only in bemusing the majority of them. This reality is starkly illustrated upon examination of the (often negative) social media response to such commissions, generated by the youth demographic that C4 continually endeavours to cultivate. Wider concerns regarding which audience C4-as-channel (rather than C4-as-network) is actually looking to reach are raised by both this seemingly arbitrary commissioning process and the response of audiences to said commissions. Of greater concern is the seeming necessity felt by C4 to mesh both educational elements and social media spaces into programme-brands - seen most egregiously within the *Fresh Meat* example - according to the latter's perceived importance to the channel. Rather than enhance such programme-brands and provide an enriching experience, these elements muddy their actual purpose: to act as quality, popular entertainment. The three case studies all function as something that Channel 4 is duty-bound to accomplish: experiment. Unfortunately, as has been illustrated on numerous other occasions within previous chapters, experiments on Channel 4 are often poorly treated and compromised by the broadcaster's own split, inconsistent nature. Experiments are also often short-lived and have been used by C4 to suggest that it is holding true to its historical purpose – a rhetorical defence

against criticism of its perceived over-reliance upon cheap, sensationalist formatted content - rather than acting as any indication of the direction the channel can (and will) actually go from this point onwards. The question is; where can Channel 4 go from here (and has it already gone too far in a direction it cannot change course from)?

Conclusion: How the teenaged spectres of C4's past are haunting its present and stifling its future

> I don't have a paper to present, so here's a speech (Paraphrased from Richard Davidson-Houston, *Cowboys and Indies* event, held at BFI Southbank, London, September 20th 2012)

> ...we are now at the point where history ends, and futurology starts. (Brown 2008, p.328)

The "Cowboys and Indies" event, held at the BFI in September 2012 as part of James Bennett et al's (2012) *Multiplatforming Public Service Broadcasting* AHRC project, was a showcase for the relationship between the independent production sector (initially cultivated by Channel 4), the television industry and academia. It focussed on where British television presently is in terms of production, distribution, commissioning and promotion, as well as where it could be going. Richard Davidson-Houston (head of C4 online) provided the final closing statement to the event, offering agreeable symmetry given C4's vital involvement in the initial cultivation of the indie sector, and allowed for a glimpse into the strategic thinking and potential future of Channel 4. However, insight and clarity of strategy were sadly not abundant, with an understandably cagey and vague selection of observations offered, reflecting Channel 4's own tentativeness as it tried to work out a sense of its identity and purpose once more, running counter to and jarring with the papers that preceded it.

Davidson-Houston's presentation neatly illustrates the ideas and debates put forward in my thesis and acts as a microcosm for Channel 4: as it existed a decade ago, as it exists now and how it will exist in the future. The sense of an institution that doesn't know what it is, where it's going and how it fits into the current televisual environment. The presentation highlighted the sense of uncertainty and rapidly shifting strategising surrounding not only British broadcasting, but Channel 4 in particular. This can be linked to the concept of *spray* outlined throughout this thesis. Different (and sometimes forgotten)

periods in C4's history have confirmed a lack of consistency of commissioning and programming policy. Such inconsistency is highlighted by an emphasis upon promotion to mask issues concerning the increasingly contradictory nature of C4. The sense that C4-as-channel, as well as C4-as-network, is stuck between its past positioning as a hybrid PSB publisher and its desire to build itself into a commercially-viable aggregator-network fit to deal with the digital marketplace. At present, it is simultaneously both yet neither of these; its series of balancing acts hindering its sense of institutional decisiveness and crippling its sense of identity.

This thesis has also operated as a reassessment of C4's role in publishing content for youth, facilitating experimentation in televisual form and pushing innovation of distribution, promotion and commissioning of content. It has re-examined the C4 narrative through the lens of youth - the 'minority' that C4 selected as a means to effectively balance its public service and commercial imperatives - highlighting key moments in its history where the balance between the two was out of kilter and cracks in the coherence of C4's brand image and mission were most prominent.

However, in doing this it was also necessary to discuss specific moments in Channel 4's history that are less well-known. Moments which are disruptive to a coherent and tidy history of C4-as-broadcaster and which have, for the most part, been otherwise forgotten within other histories of both Channel 4 and youth television. These are two topics which have had conferences, monographs and extended critical discussion devoted to them individually, but seemingly not in conjunction with one another. This is all the more strange, given their close historical relationship. Focussing upon youth was the best way for Channel 4 to express both its experimental bent and need to innovate, within the context of an increasingly competitive commercial environment. It also

forced C4 to always be forward-facing and to refresh and change along with its chosen 'minority', whilst balancing between contradictory and potentially destructive imperatives.

The thesis has examined numerous (neglected) moments concerning Channel 4's youth provision throughout 30 years of its history, with the completion of the thesis tying into the birthday of the broadcaster. Channel 4's past, as well as the moments leading up to its genesis, has often been mapped in terms of its moments of experimentation and innovation, its adherence to difference, along with its various programming successes (and some of its failures). However, this thesis has endeavoured to dig deeper into Channel 4's history, in order to understand its present and extrapolate its future. It seemed fitting to produce original and provocative research which tied into the initial spirit of the broadcaster - rebellious, different and innovative – whilst simultaneously questioning C4's function, its direction and its relevance. Importantly, this thesis has investigated the inconsistencies and cracks in C4's facade, encapsulated by Davidson-Houston's words at the beginning, between what it promised and what it could deliver. It has also showcased the increasing disparity between promotion and product.

Channel 4-as-network has been aiming to provide greater brand differentiation and demarcation between services and platforms in order to retain audiences throughout their TV-consuming existence. Channel 4-as-channel on the other hand is in a problematic situation, with its role being to occupy EPG real estate and entrench C4's brand presence. So, who is 4 for? What role does it play in relation to C4-as-network's family of services? Given the clarity of distinction between its digital channels (operating as niche-casting), C4-as-channel's operation as a broadcaster is anachronistic, especially given its repeated exhortations concerning its shift towards

multiplatform commissioning, strong digital presence, concerted youth focus and ongoing transformation into a publishing network. Channel 4 is going through the same identity crisis that BBC2 has endured in a post-multichannel environment, which is apt, given the close thematic historical linkage between the two. The difference between the two being that Channel 4 is the flagship channel of the Channel 4 family of brands and services, whereas BBC2 has often operated with uncertainty, with its sense of purpose and identity further eroded in relation to the BBC flagship (BBC1) and especially in relation to BBC3 (youth) and BBC4 (highbrow). However, this thesis has shown how Channel 4's currently conflicted sense of identity has in actual fact been longstanding. The publisher-network has been institutionally problematic since its series of strategic decisions that lead to its youth orientation. This, in conjunction with its necessity to balance between two diametrically opposed broadcasting models, along with its role as commissioner, rather than producer of content, have left it riven with uncertainty. Channel 4's method of dealing with these issues, as has been emphasised throughout this thesis, is through the use of promotion, branding and rhetoric that allows it to put forward the impression that it successfully achieves the impossible. This thesis has endeavoured to separate rhetoric from reality.

Research findings

This thesis has succeeded in its stated aims to produce a series of interlinked (forgotten) histories covering different programme genres associated with youth audiences at various moments in C4's history. The strands chapters, covering C4's relationships with and production of experimental and *paratelevision*, lifestyle content and educational provision, all offer original and necessary insights into Channel 4, youth TV and audiences. Each chapter highlights not only the overriding commercial tensions within C4 post-1990 Act, which rubbed uncomfortably against C4's early noble purposes and cavalier attitude to

mainstream provision, but more notably the tensions between how the broadcaster promoted the materials it had at its disposal and how it deployed them over a sustained period, particularly pre-Michael Jackson. In short, these chapters allow for an extended and nuanced discussion regarding Channel 4's choice of youth in order to fulfil both its public service and commercial goals. They also illustrate how this decision was characterised by uncertainty over what Channel 4 was and should become, as well as who this youth audience was and what they wanted - or what television and Channel 4 in particular thought they wanted.

Such uncertainty - concerning who their audiences were, what their identity should be, how to balance between public service and commercialism - was characterised by a concept articulated in the introduction to this thesis and repeatedly raised throughout the work: *spray*. Indeed, this thesis introduced other useful concepts, such as *paratelevision* (in conjunction with C4's late-night provision) and *Meh TV* (when discussing lifestyle content and weekend stranding), which act as vital shorthand for encapsulating these particular "forgotten histories". *Spray* however most effectively discusses a historical period of Channel 4 from within the early digital, multichannel, multiplatform era of television onwards. Indeed, this thesis offers a fresh re-conceptualisation of both the germinal and contemporary digital televisual environment, particularly regarding Channel 4's understanding of it and attempts to cope within it. However, it also highlights how these industrial shifts made Channel 4's attempts to bridge between its public service and commercial imperatives increasingly problematic, exacerbating its contradictory nature.

Therefore, a recurring theme that was raised within each chapter of the thesis and also intrinsic to the conceptualisation of *spray*, was that of failure. Such failure could either be witnessed in Channel 4's inability to execute ideas

or initiatives consistently or coherently; or in its unwillingness to truly commit to its mandate to innovate and experiment in terms of televisual form, rather than promotion or delivery of content. These shortcomings are certainly brought into sharp relief in relation to Channel 4's more public-service endeavours, which can be seen within the education and late-night chapters. These two chapters were an unerring showcase of how C4's pedagogical and experimental initiatives were cut off at the knees in favour of more commercially-minded and safer alternatives. The importance of these chapters in illustrating the broadcaster's abortive attempts to fulfil its remit can be seen in both the value of providing insight to neglected periods of Channel 4's history for their own sake, but also in their facility of foreshadowing Channel 4's future initiatives and failures in subsequent chapters.

Despite its grand gestures, attention-grabbing commissions and eye-catching showcases of controversial content, Channel 4 was increasingly, from the 90s onwards (and in diverse ways), averse to *risk*. This in itself did not make the broadcaster unusual within the UK broadcasting environment, particularly given the increased competition from multichannel and the looming spectre of online. Indeed, when digital and multichannel presence became a pressing concern for UK broadcasters, Channel 4, helmed by Michael Jackson at the time, engaged in a period of rapid expansion in order to not be left behind in the digital environment. This also operated as a means to spread the C4 brand across spaces beyond the simply televisual, lessening the chances of its products being ignored and subsequently failing. However, years later, when David Abrahams became chief executive at Channel 4, this sprawl was initially rolled back in favour of a refocussing upon television, heralding a series of inconsistent strategic moves by Channel 4, as well as a move away from risky non-televisual enterprises. Both of these examples were suggestive of minimal long-term or consistent strategy for Channel 4, with an 'all or nothing' approach

characterising its post-millennial strategies, further encapsulating the sense of *spray*. What makes this shift especially problematic however, is that this risk-aversion was coming from a broadcaster that had been designed to take risks, innovate, experiment and do things its terrestrial competition was afraid to do (illustrated within the late-night and education chapters). Ironically, this 'anti-risk' strategy was in and of itself risky, as it threatened the reputation and identity of a brand defined by risk-taking.

The series of histories outlined within the strands chapters, operating as a corrective or alternative to other narratives concerning Channel 4, highlight the *messiness* intrinsic to the broadcaster and help define the concept of *spray* further. Ironically, messiness and Channel 4 was perhaps inevitable, as Channel 4 from the outset has operated as a hotchpotch collection of collaborative compromises, leading to a broadcaster-publisher that would define itself through its non-conformity. This lead to the broadcaster resembling a collection of ideas, influences and identities, as well as strategies, strands and content which had difficulty cohering together into a singular, easy-to-consume whole. The long-term Channel 4 experience has been a fragmentary one, which is the inevitable upshot of historically attempting to represent a disparate collection of niche interest groups and minorities, along with a burgeoning and sprawling independent production sector. Channel 4 was also hamstrung by its position as a hybrid entity as a combination broadcaster-publisher, as well as a public service/commercial institution. It was also a hybrid of British and American television and promotion models, being influenced by and implementing models and trends inherent to both at various points in its history.

As a result, the public service elements of Channel 4 commissioning and programming have often been defined by however the broadcaster has chosen to promote them within its increasingly iterative remit. The changing nature of

public service and indeed television generally, as well as the increasingly competitive marketplace, meant that public service was often seen as something to be subverted or ignored, whilst rapid re-formulations of the Channel 4 remit and an identity marked by uncertainty were indicative of *spray*. This impacted upon wider, long-term Channel 4 strategy and decision-making in a variety of ways. There were attempts at positioning commercial content, such as imported programming featured within the opening chapter, as either 'quality' or 'alternative' 'cult' content, which could subsequently be repositioned as both public service material and material which epitomised Channel 4's anti-establishment branding which catered for niches. This content was given PSB status by dint of its scheduling, its promotion and its mode of audience address. In other words, it was repurposed to suit the needs of Channel 4 to be seen as a viable broadcasting hybrid.

Conversely, content which had been commissioned for public service purposes or was explicitly experimental, such as that which had been featured within both the late-night and education chapters, was often tweaked towards commerciality through links to other more commercially-minded content or spaces. This was a way for Channel 4 to 'hedge its bets' and lessen the chances of failure, which ironically, due to being neither one thing nor another, increased that content or strand's chances of failure through its inability to commit. In these instances, *spray* doesn't just refer to the uncontrolled and uneven distribution of content and chaotic strategising, it also relates to commissioning policy and the quality of the content itself, which as the final chapter illustrated in terms of C4's contemporary output, was very uneven. The other strands chapters have emphasised the issue of how content had always been subservient to either scheduling or promotion. One part of the underlying narrative running through each chapter is how Channel 4 had increasingly been more concerned with how it was perceived, rather than how effectively it

executed its public service mission or catered to neglected audience groups. The other part of the narrative being that in terms of emphasis regarding its balancing act, commercial imperatives would inevitably derail the broadcaster's good intentions.

As can be seen throughout the thesis, when Channel 4 chose to innovate and experiment with content, it genuinely lived up to its (self)promotion as an alternative within UK broadcasting. Its educational and late-night endeavours, the youth commissioning on E4 and its commitment to UK production, have all provided something different, something odd and something memorable. Despite Channel 4's consistent aversion to sustained commissioning of risky, innovative content, it is such content that allows it to build its brand identity, offering a sense of differentiation from other providers within the British televisual marketplace, as well as a sense of hope for a profitable, successful future.

Channel 4's future (What will 4 be for?)

Arguably, this thesis has raised more questions than it has answered, leaving room for further enquiry into various areas. It has briefly illuminated key forgotten moments of Channel 4's past along with its present, whilst also formulating concepts for understanding Channel 4, along with British broadcasting and niche television. These questions concern Channel 4's future direction, as well as future research that can be done around Channel 4. However, this research has been building towards answering the question regarding Channel 4's future (and future relevance) as a channel within the British television environment. This question being: what is C4 for (and what will it be for in the future)?

This question is all the more pressing, given that the breakdown in the

balancing act between commerciality and public service, discussed throughout the thesis, is becoming more apparent through various strategic and commissioning decisions. Channel 4 is now more explicit about its commercial drives and needs, with PSB being an imposition to this or inconvenience to be circumvented. However, this further problematises its sense of identity and adds to the sense of uncertainty surrounding Channel 4, encapsulated by Davidson-Houston's speech mentioned at the start of this conclusion. It remains to be seen when (not if) Channel 4 will request either the removal of PSB shackles or some form of subsidy, as Andy Duncan had during his tenure, in order to move further towards commerciality. Further moves towards the usage of 'advertainment' content is prevalent within Channel 4 daytime scheduling and multiplatform spaces. The recent *What's Cooking?* (2013 -) is the culmination of such thinking and collaboration with (non-media) brands, whilst foreshadowing the potential for advertiser-funded content and an increased blurring between editorial and advertising. Indeed, Channel 4 doesn't really try to conceal such commerciality, nor balance it out, but rather looks to exploit the corporate relationships C4 has built with the likes of Sainsbury's.

Sunday Brunch (2012 -), which replaced T4, is another example. T4 was also lifestyle-centric, but was youth-slanted, offering up a melange of music, imports and promotional content. *Sunday Brunch* is explicitly promotional however, endeavouring to shoehorn in linkage to C4 Scrapbook functionality, with cross-promotion which encourages audiences to dwell in non-televisual spaces as a means for Channel 4 to hedge its bets and sustain profits across its network of brands. The cancellation of the T4 brand was justified by C4 through the suggestion that E4 would be its sole youth-centric brand within the Channel 4 network. Although this move is understandable and even progressive, as the T4 brand was starting to look tired, its replacement by *Brunch* is neither, nor does it have the virtue as operating as either counter-programming or being

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youth-centric. It instead heralds Channel 4's retreat from risk, but also from a sense of sustained quality across the C4 channel. It also brings into question whether Channel 4 is planning to drop its association with youth, given that E4 performs that function in its family of channels. However, if it does so, it brings its core function into question once more.

Channel 4's longstanding youth-centric focus has had multiple benefits, driving C4 to consistently renew its output in order to try and appeal to 'youth'. Handily, 'youth' are not in the position to recognise the moments of disjuncture and recycling that have been recurrent throughout Channel 4's history, being too young to have witnessed content and campaigns the first time around. However, a key downside in this has been in trying to keep up with the rapidly mutating movements, trends and preferences of youth audiences. Channel 4, rather than being forward-looking and trend-setting as they were within the televisual arena in the 80s, are now often sluggish in their implementation of the digital strategies necessary to keep up. Rather than being early adopters, Channel 4 are now resembling bandwagon-jumpers in terms of content, distribution and digital spaces, seeking to deploy strategy which serves practices their audiences have already been engaged in and which seeks to keep them loyal to the brand.

This leads to the question of whether a strategy of endless recycling, rebranding and reclamation can sustain Channel 4, or whether will it eventually return to its initial mission: representing and subsequently publishing something different. Indeed, Channel 4's practices of recycling and repurposing is increasingly becoming a game of diminishing returns. The pressing issue in this instance concerns the potential duration of Channel 4's reliance upon these practices before its audiences pick up on the lack of originality. However, there are two issues here: firstly, rather than being produced at an organic pace, TV is

being treated as a product following a set formula, with quality being affected by rapid turnarounds. Secondly, audiences who have witnessed the 'C4 experience' for a sustained duration will inevitably begin to pick up on promotional/programming repetition and re-appropriation.

This raises a series of further questions: does Channel 4 want to be a publisher of innovative content, or operate as a distributor of product in an innovative fashion (or facilitate advertising in an innovative way, or *promote* product in an innovative fashion)? Does its hybrid status and role as publisher, rather than a producer, both obfuscate and problematise its future purpose, both to itself and to researchers attempting to extrapolate where C4 is headed?

Channel 4's contemporary commitments to innovation and experiment are becoming increasingly defined by their *ephemerality*, rather than their longevity or legacy. Its content and initiatives are designed to be disposable; deleted and forgotten if they cannot be repurposed. Archive exploitation, app culture and new forms of media distribution are Channel 4's way of proving innovation whilst becoming more resolutely commercial. The shift towards technological innovation, experimental distribution and promotion is taking precedence over discovery and support of new televisual forms, mimicking in part the BBC's techno-centric approach to "public value". Channel 4's promises are now increasingly fleeting as it engages in a constant process of iterative change and adjustment to the digital environment, along with institutional restructuring. Channel 4, like the youth audiences it chose to target, is struggling with growing pains and is trying to both sustain and refresh its identity as a broadcaster.

Channel 4 initially defined itself at its inception against its terrestrial competition, which occupied a safe 'middle-ground'. As time has progressed, particularly post-1990 Broadcasting Act, Channel 4 hasn't retreated towards the

safety of the middle-ground, but rather gone further in its extremes between high and low-brow, as well as further away from any hope of achieving 'balance' in terms of its output - a constant issue for the channel since the days of Isaacs. The question is: if the terrestrial opposition that it once defined itself against is as fragmented and troubled as Channel 4 is (and indeed many broadcasters are, within the multiplatform, multichannel environment), how does Channel 4 define itself? What is 4 for, if not to rebel against the TV establishment and complacency? What is 4 for, when E4, More4, FilmFour and 4Seven exist? Is the rebelliousness which is hard-coded into the identity of Channel 4 less about its mission to provide something different and alternative to the status quo and more about perception (with such a brand identity more likely to appeal to youth audiences)?

Future research

This thesis is representative of current and future work being completed in the fields of new media, television studies and media history, combining elements of the textual and the industrial with contemporary theoretical debates surrounding audiences and consumption practices. AHRC research projects such as those undertaken by Catherine Johnson and Paul Grainge ("TV and Digital Promotion: Agile Strategies for a New Media Ecology"), the work done at the University of Warwick ("A History of Television for Women in Britain", "Histories of the Digital Future") by Charlotte Brunsdon and Rachel Moseley and the upcoming AHRC project undertaken by Lez Cooke and John Hill on "The History of Forgotten TV Drama in Britain" (mentioned in the introduction), are all evidence that work that this thesis has completed is not only viable, it is vital. Other research which touches upon similar themes to those discussed in this thesis - youth television and audiences, imported series, promotion - such as that undertaken by Faye Woods in her 2013 paper which focusses on T4, also validates the pertinence of this work. Indeed, Woods' piece, although intriguing and relevant, highlights the

necessity to move beyond the textual. Instead, a multiperspectival approach

should be deployed that encompasses elements of industrial contextualisation

and audience studies along with a (para)textual analysis, as this thesis has

done. A drive towards evolving and developing pre-existing conceptual

frameworks and terminology is lacking within Woods' work, which instead leans

heavily upon the safety offered by Karen Lury's 2001 work on British youth TV,

whilst also focussing upon the textual at the expense of the industrial.

So, where can my research go next?

This thesis has opened up opportunities for further research in a variety of

areas. There is the potential for collaboration with broadcasters or industry in

the vein of Portsmouth's AHRC-funded project "Channel 4 and British Film

Culture" or James Bennett et al's (2012) work on the independent production

sector. This represents a move towards both more popular and traditional

research methodologies, allowing for impactful and pertinent research which

tracks the rapidly mutating televisual marketplace, whilst also examining the

increased importance of promotion/marketing (particularly through 4Creative, in

the instance of C4).

However, there are two main areas for future study which are more closely

aligned to the function and purposes of this project. Firstly, a re-deployment

and evolution of *spray*-as-concept, testing its utility and facility regarding other

broadcasters like the BBC, often used as a point of comparison in this thesis.

The highlighting of the BBC here is instructive, given that it appears to be

shifting closer to Channel 4's drive towards commerciality, through the

exploitation of archives and the exploration of alternative revenue streams. In

addition and/or in conjunction with *spray*, a development of the methodological

practices which have allowed the production of "forgotten histories" integral to

creating counter-narratives within this thesis, can be undertaken. These two drives in tandem would allow for the construction of a more complete, nuanced picture concerning the contemporary shape of media institutions, along with greater clarity concerning how they had reached that point.

Secondly, a continuation of my focus upon C4-as-institution and its purpose can be undertaken through an investigation of Channel 4's shift towards expansive audience research and surveillance of its user-audiences. This shift, along with changes in its commissioning methodologies, can be mapped via its "UK Tribes" research project, a collaboration between C4 Sales and Crowd DNA. This future research operates as an investigation of contemporary digital and multiplatform 'innovation'. However, this is not innovation in terms of television form, but rather in marketing and promotion, drawing parallels with Grainge and Johnson's AHRC project. These innovations, in tandem with further development of distributive avenues along with the audience research push, are subsequently driving the future shape and utility of Channel 4's content, whilst simultaneously eradicating risk and idiosyncrasy.

Whatever direction I choose, this thesis offers a vital springboard from which to investigate a variety of pertinent and pressing issues relating to the future (and forgotten past) of British television, youth culture and Channel 4.

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Abrams, J.J., Lieber, J. & Lindelof, D. (Creators). (2004-10) *Lost* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Abrams, J.J. (Creator). (2001-06). *Alias* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Addams, C. (Creator) (1964-66). *The Addams Family* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

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Barbato, R. & Bailey, F. (Producers). (1991-93). *Manhattan Cable* [Television Series]. USA/UK: Channel 4.

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Barratt, J. & Fielding, N. (Creators/Writers). (2004-07). *The Mighty Boosh* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

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Bender, D. (Commissioning Editor). (1999-2001). *4Later* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Berry, M. & Fulcher, M. (Creators/Writers). (2006). *Snuff Box* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Bellinger, C. (Series Editor). (1987-93). *Going Live!* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Bellinger, C. (Editor/Executive Producer). (1993-2001). *Live and Kicking* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Bennett, J. (Producer). (1989). *Mushroom Magic* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Bernasconi, S. (Director). (1991-92). *The Adventures of Tintin* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Black, N. (Producer/Director). (1999-2000). *Mirrorball* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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Brand, J. & Falsey. (Creators). (1982-88). *St. Elsewhere* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

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Brooker, C. (Creator/Writer). (2001). *TV Go Home* [Television Series]. UK: E4.

Brooker, C. (Creator/Writer). (2006-08). *Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe* [Television Series]. UK: BBC4.

Brooker, C. (Creator/Writer). (2008). *Dead Set* [Television Series]. UK: E4.

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Brooks, J.L., Burns, A. & Reynolds, G. (Creators). (1977-82). *Lou Grant* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

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Burns, A. & Hayward, C. (Creators). (1964-66). *The Munsters* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Burroughs, J., Charles, G. & Charles, L. (Creators). (1982-93). *Cheers* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Butler, R. & Gleason, M. (Creators). (1982-87). *Remington Steele* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Buxton, A. & Cornish, J. (Creators/Writers). (1996-2001). *The Adam & Joe Show* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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Chase, D. (Creator). (1999-2007). *The Sopranos* [Television Series]. USA: HBO.

Clarke, L. (Series Producer). (1994-95) *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush*.

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Cody, S. (Producer/Series Editor). (1987-2003). *After Dark* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/BBC4.

Connolly Jr, E. & Norton, D. (Executive Producers). (1998-2000). *FANatic)Aka. MTV's FANatic)* [Television Series]. USA: MTV.

Conran, A. & Wilson, P. (Writers). (2006-12). *The Real Hustle* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Cooney, J.G. & Morrisett, L. (Creators). (1969 -). *Sesame Street* [Television Series]. USA: NET/PBS/PTV.

Corden, J. & Jones, R. (Creators/Writers). (2007-10). *Gavin and Stacey* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3/BBC1.

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Cosby, B., Leeson, M. & Weinberger, E. (Creators) (1984-92) *The Cosby Show* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Cosgrove, S. (Commissioning Editor). (1995 -). *The Shooting Gallery* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4..

Crane, D. & Kauffman, M. (Creators). (1994-2004). *Friends* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Craven, J. & Barnes, E. (Creators). (1972 -). *Newsround* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Crichton, M. (Creator). (1994-2009). *E.R.* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Cunning, M. (Series & Executive Producer). (1998-2000). *Jo Whiley* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Daniels, S. & Weinberger, E. (Executive Producers). (1977-78). *The Betty White Show* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Davies, R.T (Creator/Writer). (1999-2000). *Queer As Folk* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Davies, R.T (Creator/Writer). (2006 -). *Torchwood* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Davis, J. (Creator/Writer). (2004-05). *Nighty Night* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3/BBC2.

De Mol, J. (Creator). (2001-10). *Big Brother* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

De Mol, J. (Creator). (2001-10). *Celebrity Big Brother* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

Dhillon, K. (Producer). (1998-2000). *Exploitica (Aka. Exploitica Rides Again)* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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Eglin, S., Harris, S. & Jones, D. (Executive Producers). (2007 -). *Embarrassing Bodies* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Ellis, J. (Producer/Series Producer/Series Editor). (1982-85). *Visions* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Elsley, B (Series producer/Writer). (2007-13). *Skins* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

Faber, M. (Writer) & Coxon, L. (Screenwriter). (2011). *The Crimson Petal and the White* [Television Series]. UK: BBC2.

Fallon, T. (Series Producer). (1998-99). *Late Lunch (Aka. Late Lunch with Mel and Sue)* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Ferrero, P. (Director). (1980). *Quilts in Women's Lives* [Motion Picture]. USA: Ferrero Films.

Ferrone, J. & Rose, S. (Creators). (1999-2002). *Angela Anaconda* [Television Series]. Canada: Teletoon.

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Ford, M. (Series Producer). (1996-97). *The Girlie Show* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Friedman, B.V. & Zabel, B. (Creators). (1996-97). *Dark Skies* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Frost, M. & Lynch, D. (Creators). (1990-91). *Twin Peaks* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Gerrie, M. (Executive Producer). (1982-87). *The Tube* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Gill, R. (Editor). (1976-82). *Multi-coloured Swap Shop* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

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Grant, B. (Series Director/Director/Producer). (2001-04). *As If* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

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Harries, A. (Series Producer). (1988-89). *The Incredibly Strange Film Show (Aka. Son of Incredibly Strange Film Show* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Hayling, A. & Ramsden, S. (Executive Producers). *Drugs Live: The Ecstasy Trial* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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Hilary, B. (Commissioning Editor). (1993-96). *Late Licence* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4

Hill, H. (Creator). (2001-12). *Harry Hill's TV Burp* [Television Series]. UK: ITV.

Hodgson, J. (Creator). (1988-99). *Mystery Science Theater 3000* [Television Series]. USA: KTMA/The Comedy Channel/Comedy Central/Sci-Fi Channel.

Holzman, W (Creator/Writer). (1994-95). *My So-Called Life* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

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Kelly, D. (Creator/Writer). (2013 -). *Utopia* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Kemp, B. (Creator). (1982-90). *Newhart* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Kemp, D. (Producer). (1982-87). *Union World* [Television Series]. Manchester: Channel 4.

Klasky, M., Csupó, G. & Germain, P. (Creators). (1991-2004). *Rugrats* [Television Series]. USA: Nickelodeon.

Linehan, G. (Creator/Writer). (2006-13). *The IT Crowd* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Loane, T. (Creator). (2001-04). *Teachers* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Jackson, P. (Executive Producer). (1987-88). *Don't Miss Wax* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Jelley, C. (Executive Producer). (1985). *A Question of Economics* [Television Series]. UK: ITV/Channel 4.

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Kring, T. (Creator/Writer). (2006-10). *Heroes* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Lambert, S. (Creator). (2003-09). *Wife Swap* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Le Vack, D. (Producer). (1987). *Abracadabra* [Television Series]. UK/Belgium: Channel 4.

Lock, S., Trenaman, M. & Jones, M. (Creators/Writers). *15 Storeys High* [Television Series]. UK: BBC Choice/BBC3/BBC2.

London, S. (Executive Producer). (2005). *The Morning After Show* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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MacKinnon, L. (Producer). (2008). *City of Vice* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

MacMahon, D. (Executive Producer). (1993-98). *Moviewatch* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Major-Stevenson, B. (Series Producer). (1995-96). *Takeover TV* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Marlens, N., Black, C. & Rosenthal, D.S. (Creators). (1994-98). *Ellen* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Mayall, R., Mayer, L. & Elton, B. (Creators/Writers). (1982-84). *The Young Ones* [Television Series]. UK: BBC2.

McAnally, C. (Executive Producer). (1998-2003). *SM:TV (Aka. SM:TV Live, SM://Live)* [Television Series]. UK: ITV1.

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Mercurio, J. (Creator/Writer). (2004-06). *Bodies* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Metzger, R. (Writer/Director/Presenter). (2000-01). *Disinfo Nation (Aka. Disinformation)* [Television Series]. USA: Channel 4.

Mills, R. & Bardusco, N. (Producers). (2012). *Hotel GB* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Minoprio, S. (Executive Producer). (2000-01). *Shipwrecked* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Moll, G. (Executive Producer). (1997 -). *Behind the Music* [Television Series]. USA: VH1.

Monaghan, G. & Moody, L. (Creators). (2001-03). *Banzai* [Television Series]. UK: E4.

Moore, P. (Series Editor). (2002). *Jamie's Kitchen* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Moore, R.D. (Developed by/Producer). (2004-09). *Battlestar Galactica* [Television Series]. USA: Sci-Fi Channel.

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Morris, C. (Creator/Director/Writer). (2000). *Jam* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

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Murphy, S. (Series Producer). (2002-2010). *Big Brother's Little Brother* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

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Neads, R. & Rowet, L. (Producers). (2003). *25 Years of Smash Hits* [Television Broadcast]. London: Channel 4.

Newman, S. (Creator). (1961-69). *The Avengers* [Television Series]. London: ITV.

Newman, S., Webber, C.E. & Wilson, D. (Creators). (1963-89, 1996, 2005 -). *Doctor Who* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Nickson, S. (Creator). (2001-11). *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps* {Television Series]. UK: BBC2/BBC Choice/BBC3.

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Oliver, J. (Creator). (2011). *Jamie's Dream School* [Television Series]. UK:

Channel 4.

Oppenheimer, J. (Producer). (1951-57). *I Love Lucy* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Overman, H. (Creator/Writer). (2009 -). *Misfits* [Television Series]. UK: E4.

Palumbo, A. (Series Producer). (1999-2001). *Bits (Aka. Bitz)* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Parker, T. & Stone, M. (Creators/Executive Producers). (1997 -). *South Park* [Television Series]. USA: Comedy Central.

Parsons, C. (Creator). (1992-2002). *The Big Breakfast* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Partible, J. (Creator/Writer/Director). (1997-2004). *Johnny Bravo* [Television Series]. USA: Cartoon Network.

Patchett, T. & Tarses, J. (Creators). (1983-84). *Buffalo Bill* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Patterson, D. & Leveson, M. (Creators). (1988-98). *Whose Line is it Anyway?* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Peace, J. (Writer) & Grisoni, T. (Screenwriter). (2009). *The Red Riding Trilogy* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Redmond, P (Creator). (1995 -). *Hollyoaks* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/E4.

Reed, R. (Producer). (1983-84). *Jeopardy* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Reubens, P. (Creator). (1986-90). *Pee-wee's Playhouse* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Robertson, M. (Producer). (1995-2000). *Wise Up* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Roddenberry, G. (Creator). (1966-69). *Star Trek: The Original Series* [Television Series]. USA: NBC.

Rose, M. & Mohr, C. (Producers). (1994-2001). *Video Nation* [Television Series]. UK: BBC2.

Ryan, B. (Executive Producer). (1998-2000). *Planet Pop* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4/Trouble.

Sabin, M. (Producer). (2003-04). *Switched* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Saks, S. (Creator). (1964-72). *Bewitched* [Television Series]. USA: ABC.

Schura, F. (Producer/Director). (2000-01). *Troma's Edge TV* [Television Series]. USA: Channel 4.

Schwartz, J (Creator/Writer/Producer). (2003-07). *The O.C.* [Television Series]. USA: FOX.

Slevin, K. (Writer). (2000-02). *The Zack Files* [Television Series]. Canada: YTV.

Smith, M. (Producer). (1973-77). *Saturday Scene (Aka. Supersonic Saturday Scene)* [Television Series]. UK: ITV.

Stewart, J. (Creator). (1964-2006). *Top of the Pops* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Straczynski, J.M. (Creator). (1993-98). *Babylon 5* [Television Series]. USA: PTEN/TNT.

Street-Porter, J. (Producer). (1988-94). *DEF II* [Television Series]. UK: BBC2.

Stuart, P. (Executive Producer). (1996-97). *Channel Hopping* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Stuart, P. (Executive Producer). (1993-2007). *Eurotrash* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Sutcliffe, T. (Producer). (1984). *Let's Parlez Franglais* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Taylor, J. (Creator). (2002-05). *The Osbournes* [Television Series]. USA: MTV.

Thirkell, R. (Series Editor). (2005). *Jamie's School Dinners* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Thompson, H & Pye, S. (Creators/Writers). (2003-05). *Monkey Dust* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Tomlinson, P. (Creator). (1974-82). *TISWAS* [Television Series]. UK: ITV.

Uden, P. (Producer/Editor). (1986-2006). *Equinox* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Walliams, D. & Lucas, M. (Creators/Writers). (2003-06). *Little Britain* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3/BBC1.

Walter, S. (Producer). (2000-01). *Onedottv (Aka. One Dot TV)* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Wells, P. (Producer). (1991 -). *You've Been Framed!* [Television Series]. UK: ITV.

Westwell, A. (Series Producer). (2011 -). *10 O'Clock Live* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Wetzler, G. (Producer). (1984-87). *The Transformers* [Television Series]. UK: Sky/BBC1.

Wetzler, G. (Director). (1983-85). *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* [Television Series]. UK: BBC1.

Whedon, J. (Creator/Writer/Director/Producer). (1997-2003). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* [Television Series]. Los Angeles, California, USA: The WB/UPN.

Whedon, J. & Greenwalt, D. (Creators). (1999-2004). *Angel* [Television Series]. USA: The WB.

Whitehouse, T (Creator/Writer). (2008-13). *Being Human* [Television Series]. UK: BBC3.

Williamson, K (Creator/Producer). (1998-2003). *Dawson's Creek* [Television Series]. USA: The WB.

Willis, L. (Executive Producer). (2008 -). *Battlefront* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Wilson, H. (Creator). (1978-82). *WKRP in Cincinnati* [Television Series]. USA: CBS.

Wilson, R. (Executive Producer). (1985). *Pottery Ladies* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

Wood, A. (Creator/Producer). (1983). *Rub-a-dub-tub* [Television Series]. UK: ITV.

Wood, A. (Creator/Producer). (1985-87). *Pob's Programme* [Television Series]. UK: Channel 4.

FORM UPR16
Research Ethics Review Checklist

University of **Portsmouth**

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook for more information

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	210650
Candidate Name:	Michael O'Neill		
Department:	SCAFM	**First Supervisor:**	Dr Lincoln Geraghty
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	01/02/10		

Study Mode and Route:	Part-time ❏	MPhil ❏	Integrated Doctorate (NewRoute) ❏
	Full-time ☒	MD ❏	Prof Doc (PD) ❏
		PhD ☒	

Title of Thesis:	**DIGITAL SPRAY: Channel 4, youth programming and innovation in the age of digital technologies.**
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	78,868

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:
(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)

a)	**Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?**	YES
b)	**Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?**	YES
c)	**Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?**	YES
d)	**Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?**	YES
e)	**Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?**	YES

*Delete as appropriate

Candidate Statement:	
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)	
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	**FO: 05/12-0059**
Signed: MICHAEL O'NEILL *(Student)*	**Date: 28/11/13**
If you have *not* submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain why this is so:	
Signed: *(Student)*	**Date:**