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Elvis Sings for the BBC:

Broadcast branding and digital media design

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In the autumn of 2006, Elvis came back from the dead and appeared ‘live’ on British television screens. This took the form of a brand promotion, aired on the BBC, designed to make audiences sit up and marvel. Using archival footage, the promotion featured a concert performance by Elvis Presley, focusing on the moment when, with characteristic stage presence, he introduces his band. Inexplicably, the band comprises the contemporary girl-group The Sugarbabes on backing vocals, Marvin Gaye on vocal accompaniment, Jimmy Page on lead guitar, Noel Gallagher on rhythm guitar, Keith Moon on drums, Sheryl Crow on bass guitar, and ‘the legendary’ Stevie Wonder on piano. The concert footage appears as if pulled from the vaults, specifically as a lost encore from Elvis’ 1973 *Aloha from Hawaii* television special. Resplendent in his white jumpsuit, Elvis gestures and jokes with his band members; he even smiles wryly when interrupted by an impromptu drum solo by Keith Moon. Playing to a rapturous crowd, the atmosphere of the event is tangible. With introductions complete, and a camera shot of Elvis looking into the glaring stage lights, the sequence ends with the strapline: ‘What an

amazing line up'. This is underlined by the brand message 'all day, every day' and a closing shot of the station logo of BBC Radio 2, the UK's 'most listened to' radio station.

While ephemeral in its life as a promotional text - appearing briefly within television and cinema advertising before developing a more extended life on YouTube - Radio 2's Elvis promotion is suggestive of two related developments in contemporary media culture that I want to explore in this essay. Primarily, it offers a paradigm of 'brandcasting', the attempt by public broadcasters such as the BBC to project their brand identity in more dynamic and tactile ways to meet the demands of a competitive, multi-channel environment. Secondly, it is emblematic of a style of promotional design that is partly encouraged by the remix proclivities of YouTube and is reliant on the digital assemblage and appropriation of found-footage. In each respect, the Elvis ad articulates key tendencies within industrial and textual media practice in the 2000s. It highlights the performance of brand identity and, with it, the role of the specialized digital media companies that produce on-screen logos and promos. At the same time, as a form of techno-spectacle, it provides an especially telling instance of contemporary 'digitextuality', what Anna Everett describes as 'the technological process whereby digital fabrications function as real-time experience of a sort to overcome not only time and space, but life and death' (2003: 10).

Whilst branding imperatives have been discussed as part of broad developments in the contemporary film and television industry (Grainge, 2008a; Johnson, 2007; Murray, 2005), less attention has been paid to the aesthetics of brand logos or to the specialist companies that give life to promotional texts. In critical terms, John Caldwell argues that secondary symbolic forms such as logos, promos, trailers and channel idents provide a

rich source for understanding contemporary industrial and audiovisual culture. The Elvis ad is suggestive here; it is an example of what Caldwell terms a ‘deep text’ (2008: 26). This describes an artefact of production culture that functions as a ‘mediated, textualized and produced form of trade communication’ (ibid) by media industries *about* the nature of corporate media identity and aesthetics. Made by a digital media company called Red Bee Media, the Elvis ad is a curious visual object: a radio promotion made as a television ad using an aesthetic reminiscent of a YouTube video. In corporate terms, it serves to ‘mediate’ the BBC’s brand identity (more specifically that of BBC Radio 2) in relation to the new interchangeability of digital media. In doing so, the ad ‘textualizes’ developments in film and video production, making a song and dance of the BBC brand by using the latest digital technologies and aesthetic styles. Striking in this last respect is the sudden and spellbinding feat of bringing Elvis back from the dead.

Describing the means by which digital image manipulation helps ‘seamlessly construct enthralling diegetic images’ (Everett, 20003:10), Anna Everett considers the way that, in one contemporary sub-genre, archival images of the deceased interact with those still living, a spectral fabrication that has been especially ‘apparent in the form and selling of music/television. While the conceit of having music stars perform ‘beyond the grave’ was developed in the early 1990s, Natalie Cole famously singing ‘Unforgettable’ with her deceased father Nat King Cole in a 1991 music video, advancements in digital compositing and effects technology enabled a number of hypermediated television events in the 2000s that saw Robbie Williams sing with Frank Sinatra in *Live at the Royal Albert Hall* (BBC, 2001), Celine Dion duet with Elvis Presley on a charity episode of *American Idol* (Fox, 2007) and a range of contemporary British pop acts perform with the

superimposed images of Roy Orbison, Dusty Springfield and Peggy Lee in a BBC Christmas special called *Duet Impossible* (2006). While these digital resurrections were something of a fad, a vehicle for showing off new kinds of technological wizardry, they do ask questions about the role of new media technologies in re-imagining cultural and audiovisual temporalities. In connecting ‘off-screen industrial activities with on-screen stylistic tendencies’ (Caldwell, 2008: 274), I want to use the Elvis ad to open out perspectives on the current branding and broadcast environment, investigating, through a prismatic case example, the creative design and corporate function of promotional texts within the recent history of the BBC.

Making the brand sing: the BBC and Red Bee Media

In her ranging ethnography of the BBC at the turn of the twenty-first century, Georgina Born (2005) outlines the new strategic importance of brand-led marketing within the Corporation’s thinking, operations and activities. Responding to the growth of multi-channel broadcasting in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the increasing move towards cross-media convergence (the BBC launching new commercial and public channels and a digital media service), the Corporation took its cue from commercial US networks and began to project its brand identity in more deliberate ways. From 1996, the BBC made efforts to find and propagate ‘a defining vision’ for the Corporation as a public service broadcaster, and to delineate the ‘values’ of particular BBC channels (Born, 2005: 259). These activities formed the core of branding as a new marketing orthodoxy. In trade

discussion during the 1990s and 2000s, branding was no longer seen as a matter of transmitting the meaning of products or services through stolid trademarks or traditional advertising. Instead, it meant identifying the 'core values' of a commodity or company and managing these as an issue of communicable vision. Born writes:

The most significant effect of the rising influence of marketing on the culture of the BBC was that under the impact of brand-thinking, the guiding values of the corporation and of each of its services had now to be consciously formulated and *performed* by branding, where before they had been part of the collective subconscious. (2005: 268)

The Elvis ad stems from this marketing impulse; it is a textual product of the increasingly performative nature of media branding, a principle first established in the BBC's 1997 promotional video 'Perfect Day' and finessed in subsequent logos and idents. Before examining the Elvis ad, it is worth considering the corporate and industrial landscape from which it developed, including, in this case, the predisposition of the BBC since the late nineties to bring its logos to life.

During the era of 'multi-channel transition' that Amanda Lotz (2007) dates between the mid-1980s and the mid-2000s, the cable and broadcasting industry was marked by a proliferation of on-screen promotions, part of the attempt by networks to raise their identity above the burgeoning media 'clutter'. The BBC's 'Perfect Day' video was a signature promotional text in this context. It was devised as a felt expression of what the BBC stood for as a public service broadcaster in the UK at a time when political

questions about the licence fee, and the threat of its non-renewal, continued to hang in the air. In a period in which media companies were competing aggressively for audience loyalty, 'Perfect Day' was the first attempt by the BBC to make its brand literally and metaphorically sing. Appearing between scheduled programmes, and also released as a CD for the BBC's annual Children in Need charity campaign, the video was a cover version of the classic Lou Reed song, performed a line at a time by a wide range of musical artists including Bono, David Bowie, Suzanne Vega, Elton John, Emmylou Harris, Joan Armatrading, Tom Jones, Shane McGowan, Tammy Wynette, Heather Small, Visual Ministry Gospel Choir, as well as Lou Reed himself. Born suggests that in mixing the aesthetic of music video and art house film, by using a multi-ethnic cast of household names from a range of musical styles, and by offering up 'perfect day' as an evangelical homily rather than as a meditation on drug-taking (as in the original song), 'Perfect Day managed to link the BBC as the soul of Britain's musical and media culture with soul music as the symbol of musical healing. It became a paean to the BBC's hybrid cultural and social aspirations, its ability to weave the black with the white, the national with the international, the sublime with the mundane' (2005: 258). The video delivered a powerful brand message about the democratic and cultural potential of public broadcasting. Politically, it sang for the continuing viability of the BBC in a period where free market ideologies had cast doubt on the value of national broadcasting systems. (This was made explicit in the closing lines: 'Whatever your music taste, it is catered for by BBC radio and television. This is possible thanks to the unique way that the BBC is paid for by you. BBC: You make it what it is'). At the same time, 'Perfect Day' signalled a new commitment at the BBC to network marketing as a field of creative practice.

Stylistically, the video ushered in a period of corporate branding initiatives that moved away from traditional logos and idents - embodied in the silent, rotating BBC globe, variations of which had been used to identify BBC 1 since 1964 - to more rhythmic and tonal forms of brand articulation.

As an acclamation of the BBC's modern media identity, the 'Perfect Day' video was accompanied by the launch of a new ident for the main terrestrial channel BBC 1. This saw the aforementioned globe translate into a hot air balloon, filmed flying over ten different locations around Britain. The ident was created by the Lambie-Nairn Company which had first introduced brand marketing principles to British television in 1982 with its Channel 4 logo. This logo marked a watershed in the application of high-tech graphic design, comprising nine brightly coloured blocks that burst onto the screen uniting to form the figure 4 - a three-dimensional motif that had six variations that were used to accentuate different aspects of the channel's personality and programming. According to Christine Fanthome (2007), the Channel 4 logo heralded a new era in the use of on-air promotional products in Britain, establishing a more holistic and graphically innovative approach to channel branding (see also Grainge, 2008b). Given the success of Channel 4, it was perhaps no surprise that the BBC should look to Lambie-Nairn in 1991 to remodel its own, comparatively staid, network identity. Initially, this inspired a new playfulness in the logo of the Corporation's second terrestrial channel BBC 2. Between 1991 and 2001, BBC 2 distinguished itself through a set of animated idents that turned the figure '2' into anything from neon tubes to a squeaking, furry pet. With sustained competition from ITV, Channel 4 and Sky channels, and with the launch of the new terrestrial network Channel 5 in 1997, the BBC sought to attribute distinctive brand qualities to its

main channels. Accordingly, BBC 2 was cast as topical, playful, and diverse while BBC 1 was figured as a flagship channel carrying broad national appeal. Their respective idents were designed to visualize 'ideal brand perceptions' (Born, 2005: 259) stemming from these intended qualities; hence the '2' idents were devised as more quirky and heterogeneous, the balloon idents more elegant and authoritative. Although some quipped that the balloon signified the BBC's propensity to be slow, lumbering and full of hot air, it captured the principle of 'unity in diversity' underlying the Corporation's public service proposition, the balloon floating symbolically across all corners of the UK.

Born (2005) suggests that the BBC underwent a period of tumultuous 'reinvention' during the 1990s and 2000s. Strategically, the Corporation undertook a host of new initiatives to position itself for a digital future. This included the launch of digital channels such as BBC 3, BBC 4, CBeebies, CBBC, BBC News 24 and BBC Parliament, and also the creation of the public service website BBC Online. Just as significant, however, was the introduction of a 'new managerialism' under Director-General John Birt (1992-2000) that saw increasing recourse to auditing, management consultancy and audience research. Although Birt's successor, Greg Dyke (2000-2004), would temper some of the excesses of this managerial turn, branding, which had flourished in relation to the priorities of Birt's regime, remained a key means of clarifying corporate value and authoring channel identity. 'Perfect Day' was in many ways a precursor to the range of affectively arresting logos, promos and idents that would develop in the 2000s. For the BBC's main channel, this was signalled in 2002 by the decision by Greg Dyke and BBC 1 controller Lorraine Heggessey to commission Lambie-Nairn to overhaul its idents completely. Wishing to make BBC 1 more energetic and entertaining, Lambie-Nairn

dispensed with the globe and developed a unifying motif of dance (Curtis, 2006). The new idents accentuated BBC 1's new red colour identity and included, among other sequences, disabled basketball players breakdancing in wheelchairs, ballet dancers synchronizing moves in a cliff-top castle, a rugby team performing a haka, young people raving at a gig, and acrobats swinging in taut suspension from silken ropes. These were replaced in 2006 with eight new idents that had a circular motif and included images of hippos swimming, stunt kites flying and children playing. Mark Brownrigg and Peter Meech suggest that examples such as these demonstrate the move in British channel branding from audiovisual approaches that adopt a singular 'fanfare' style to those which invest in more varied 'funfair' utterances; that rely, in other words, less on grand anthems and static logos than on a changing roster of visual images and audio styles, a 'fluid, ambient approach' defined in the 2000s by 'pop-inspired idents' and those with a 'dance feel' (2002: 354).

The song and dance of 'Perfect Day' and the new channel idents indicate the way that the BBC brand was increasingly 'performed' in the 1990s and 2000s. This can be seen as part of a broad move in the cable and broadcasting industry towards the *projection of network personality*, a process that has fostered a minor sub-industry of branding and media design specialists. Whilst the 1990s saw an influx of professional marketers into UK television companies, media corporations have often sought to achieve stylistic individuation through contractual outsourcing of brand/design work. Since 2005, the BBC has outsourced the vast majority of its logo, ident and promotional work to a digital media company called Red Bee Media who, as mentioned earlier, created the Elvis ad. Formerly a commercial subsidiary of the BBC, Red Bee has become highly

successful in the competition for brand business, undertaking work for media clients such as the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, and UKTV, American cable channels such as The History Channel, Travel Channel, Sci Fi Channel, and Discovery Channel, and global corporations ranging from McDonald's to Motorola. According to John Caldwell, such companies often 'represent themselves as forward-thinking, visionary boutiques; places where distinctive personalities and proprietary imaging skills are made available to clients (and audiences) who chose to pay for, watch, or invest in their services' (2008: 22). Describing its approach as a 'fusion of creative origination and technical innovation' (Red Bee Media, 2007a), Red Bee is a model of the specialist company that, in Caldwell's view, has become central to the projection of 'long-term corporate personality building' in the media sphere (2008: 254).

Although the genesis of Red Bee Media is tied to the BBC, it exists as a private company and exemplifies significant changes taking place within the climate of contemporary media production. In particular, it is central to the outsourcing of a wide range of operational, editorial and promotional processes. In two notable examples of Red Bee's technical and creative service role, it is currently responsible for digitally transmitting the entire output of both Channel 4 (including E4, More4, Film4 and video-on-demand) and cable operator Virgin Media, and, in a different capacity, was the company responsible in 2007 for making an infamous trailer for RDF Media, an independent production company used by the BBC, that appeared to show the Queen storming out of a photo shoot with Annie Liebowitz.¹ Institutionally, Red Bee grew from BBC Broadcast, created in 2002 as a subsidiary wholly owned by the BBC that comprised a range of services from the BBC's technical, engineering and editorial arms.

In 2005, BBC Broadcast was given the right by the BBC's governors to bid for outside business, a tacit acceptance that in a climate of increased budgetary pressure, the BBC didn't need to own its broadcast business. This decision laid the foundation for the privatization of BBC Broadcast as a service company, sold for £166 million to the Australian investment fund bank Macquarie Capital Alliance Group in June 2005. The company was renamed Red Bee Media three months later. The sound and connotations of the word 'bee' were said to retain a link with BBC Broadcast. Maintaining the company's red colour identity, the 'bee' suggested, according to brand-speak used at the time, one of 'nature's expert navigators' (Red Bee Media, 2005). The press release opined: 'As a company facing the digital future we need to help the consumer become equally adept as navigators' (ibid). The consumer, in this case, meant the BBC (and its audience) and any other brand willing to pay for its technical and creative services.

As a digital media company, Red Bee Media provides broadcasting and design expertise to all the major British terrestrial networks and offers technical services in digital content management. This includes electronic programme guides that enable audiences to navigate television schedules, 'access services' such as subtitling and audio descriptions, and 'content play-out' that adapts programmes to uses such as video-on-demand and mobile phone clips. Having opened offices in China, France and Australia, Red Bee has sold its services as a digital media hub to regional clients like ESPN, i-Cable Hong Kong, ATV, Jupiter Entertainment, INX Media and STAR. Based in the spanking, BBC-funded Broadcast Centre in London's White City, and with strategic regional offices, Red Bee illustrates the role of technical service companies in the growing transactional markets that support media industries.

Whilst the majority of its contract work is in digital delivery, Red Bee has simultaneously expanded its promotion and media design business. In creative terms, the company has designed many of the logos, idents and programme titles seen on British television screens. It has also produced 3-D information graphic systems used in television election coverage, sports results and weather forecasts, and has developed branded and interactive content - sponsorship sequences, short documentary series, extended dramas - for clients including Sony, IKEA, Renault, Lexus, AOL, Neff and HSBC. Assuming the role of a broadcast branding and promotion company, Red Bee is more than a technical or digital effects house. It has developed instead a brand-building posture; the company's provision of integrated digital media services has placed it to meet the demands of a changing media and marketing environment where, in its own words, 'organisations are being forced to find new ways of reaching and engaging increasingly fragmented audiences' (Red Bee Media, 2007b).

According to its corporate literature, Red Bee offers 'the complete range of services required to promote, playout and provide access to broadcast content across all media, from television to mobile phones' (Red Bee Media, 2007a). In promotional terms, Red Bee brings together creative teams who often work with ad agencies in fulfilling the communication briefs of clients. The Elvis ad, for example, was devised by the agency DFGW and then produced by Red Bee and shot by the commercial director Steve Cope. However, Red Bee's integrative approach to digital media content has posed questions for advertising agencies; it is one of a number of boutique companies generating specialist knowledge claims about the digital media environment: about how, in light of uncertainty about the commercial value of television and press advertising, clients might

deal with an ‘increasingly media-weary world’ (Red Bee Media, 2007b). In finding ‘new ways of talking to audiences’ (ibid), Red Bee has sought in particular to develop a visual and graphic language for the culture of media convergence, creating logos, promos and other forms of branded content that promise, as a function of design, to facilitate more emotional and interactive modes of audience engagement. For example, in producing a new on-screen identity for BBC 2 in 2007, Red Bee created a logo that had an interactive element that could be accessed online. The new broadcast idents not only re-fashioned BBC 2’s heterogeneous logo style - this included a chocolate ‘2’ sprinkled into a cappuccino among thirteen other playful numerical renderings – but also invited viewers to interact with the new identity by downloading the ‘2’ template from the channel website and then create their own films, the best of which would be posted on the site. This form of logo design was expressive of the BBC’s multiplatform ambitions in the mid-2000s; it was purposely designed by Red Bee (and the ad agency AMV BBDO) as both a window and ‘interface’, enacting in part the BBC’s digital-era slogan ‘Information, Education, Entertainment, Interaction, Wherever, Whenever, However You Want It’ (Bennett, 2008).

Although Red Bee is a small company by contemporary standards of media conglomeration, employing 250 people (many ex-BBC employees), it has an annual turnover of £150 million and has managed to carve out a dominant position in the British broadcast design market. Whilst this has been secured by the exclusive ten-year supply contract that Red Bee has with the BBC, purportedly worth £500 million (90 per cent of Red Bee’s revenue is generated through work for the BBC, including one third of its creative revenues),² it has also leveraged a sense of creative difference in its approach to

media promotion, highlighting the advantage of its ninety-or-so ‘creatives’ in coming from typical backgrounds in programme production, 3D animation, music and theatre rather than advertising per se. John Caldwell writes:

Brands in the digital era are expected to function in far more extensive and complex ways than they were in the analog age. In the past, a limited set of product and trademark names functioned as brands, whose ad agencies sponsored mass-audience television shows in the network era. Branding has now become an obligatory specialization, one that requires continual reinvention as technological, market and regulatory changes ripple through the industry. (2003: 138)

It is in this context that Red Bee Media has positioned itself as an agent of brand/design as an ‘obligatory specialization’. The company puts this in no uncertain terms: ‘Let’s face it, when it comes to broadcast design, we understand the medium better than anyone else. And when you know the rules as well as we do, you can break them in ever more surprising ways’ (Red Bee Media, 2007c). It is here that we may consider in more detail the status and significance of the Radio 2 Elvis ad. Playing imaginatively with the ‘rules’ of radio as a sound medium, the Elvis promotion is a quite literal performance of BBC network branding.

Digital media and the visualization of radio

Within academic studies of network branding, television has been the principal focus of concern. However one of the most bruising, and influential, episodes of branding at the BBC in the 1990s involved Radio 1, something which had knock-on effects for its sister stations and the integration of marketing at the Corporation more generally.³ Following the 1990 Broadcasting Act in the UK which deregulated the radio and television industry by tendering new franchises to independent operators, scores of commercial radio stations emerged to compete with the BBC's four main stations. Radio 1 experienced a spectacular fall in listening figures as a result, leading to a re-assessment of the station's mainstream and often achingly middle-aged pop identity. This gave rise in 1997 to a new music identity based on contemporary and up-and-coming bands - given the brand label 'New Music First' - targeted specifically at the youth market. This repositioning led to upheaval and bloodletting, including a major cull of presenters, but its success established a key model for branding at the BBC. As one Radio 1 executive said at the time:

The very first thing you have to do is understand what you're for, define your vision – as the brand people say, your technical and tonal values. It all comes from defining the brand: once you've done that you can create your world with those values in mind; it makes decisions on content easy. (Born, 2005: 261)

This sense of 'brand vision' and 'tonal values' provides a context for thinking about the Elvis ad ten years later for the promotion stems directly from the differentiated service remit of Radio 1 and Radio 2. This has been expressed in corporate policy documentation

and worked through in marketing as the BBC has faced market challenges including, most recently, the transition towards digital radio.

Since 1997, the remit of Radio 1 has been, and remains, ‘to entertain and engage a broad range of young listeners with a distinctive mix of contemporary music and speech. It reflects the lives and interests of 15-29 year olds but also embraces others who share similar tastes’ (BBC, 2007a). Meanwhile, the remit of Radio 2 is to operate as ‘a distinctive mixed music and speech service, targeted at a broad audience which aims to appeal to all age groups over 35’ (BBC, 2007b). Radio 1 and Radio 2 pursue different audience groupings and this is reflected in their promotional address as music stations. For example, recognizing that ‘young people are among the most digitally curious when dealing with new technologies’ (BBC, 2007a), Radio 1 has invested heavily in interactive digital content, fostering its ‘One Music’ identity through online sites about gigs, VJ-ing and other new music practices. Radio 2, on the other hand, has staked its identity on the coverage of live music output from key national and international music events and on concerts and studio sessions broadcast under the ‘Radio 2 Music Club’ banner. This has been supported by the expansion of the BBC Radio 2 website, offering opportunities for digital interactivity - primarily catch-up services via the BBC Radio Player and links to external websites connected to Radio 2 events, social action campaigns and programming initiatives - for an older and potentially more technologically inhibited target audience.

Although appealing to different demographic and taste constituencies, the BBC’s principal music stations still compete for crossover listeners. This is exemplified by Radio 2’s tendency - notable since it overtook Radio 1 in claiming the largest audience of any of the BBC stations - to sign DJs with a trendy and youthful appeal. In the mid-2000s,

Radio 2's marketing image was formed around British media personalities (Jonathan Ross, Chris Evans, Russell Brand, Dermot O'Leary) known for their improvisational talent and broadcasting 'attitude.' Of these, Chris Evans and Russell Brand featured in television promotions for Radio 2, playing instrumental pop tunes with the strapline 'amazing music played by an amazing line-up'. In brand terms, the Elvis ad prefaced the attempt by Radio 2 to connect its musical identity to a roster of star DJs with potential appeal to those in their twenties and early thirties, as well as to the core over-35 market.⁴ However, the ad would also resonate with a particular policy commitment growing out of the BBC's 2006 *Creative Future* five-year strategic plan, a key corporate statement on the purpose of public broadcasting in a digital age.⁵ This policy commitment involved Radio 2 adding 'new elements to its audio output in such areas as the *visualization of live music*, offering greater depth of content as well as exposing the audience to new technologies' (BBC, 2007b, my italics).

The desire to 'visualize' music can be situated in a moment where radio listening via digital broadcasting in the UK went up by 165 per cent in 2004-05 ('Are you Listening', 2005). In 2006, the BBC could report more than twenty million hours of online listening in a single month, with 290 million page impressions on the BBC Radio website (BBC, 2006a). With radio being 'viewed' more extensively online and through digital television screens, the Elvis ad was a promotionally reflexive response by the BBC to the digital-led radio boom. That Elvis should appear on stage with The Sugarbabes, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and Noel Gallagher served a dual purpose. In one sense it offered multiple points of music identification within the rock and pop spectrum to increase Radio 2's mainstream appeal. In a different sense, the ad mediated

the BBC's identity in relation to new media technologies, providing an enthralling visual spectacle consonant with the Corporation's investment in digital content and technology across its television, radio, web and mobile services.

In aesthetic terms, the Elvis promotion was a product indicative of digital remix culture. In particular, it assumed the style of found-footage filmmaking popularized by YouTube. Found-footage filmmaking is not in itself a digital or video-sharing phenomenon. It describes a method where film and video is made from appropriated footage of varying kinds, a process that, in its more experimental and avant-garde forms, has sought to enact a politics of cultural borrowing. As an art practice, found-footage filmmaking is concerned with the material accumulation of (celluloid) images from the past but also with modes of appropriation that change the meaning of images by placing them in new visual contexts.⁶ Found-footage filmmaking has affinities with the activist politics of culture jamming. However, its techniques are not simply the province of experimental film. They have also developed as an outgrowth of musical and video sampling, central to emergent cultural practices like VJ-ing, genres such as mash-ups, and to commercial image forms including, most obviously, brand advertising and music video (Middleton 2007). In 2007, U2's music video for 'Windows in the Sky' digitally manipulated more than a hundred archival performance clips to create the effect of artists such as Louis Armstrong and Frank Zappa lip-synching the song's lyrics. The year before, Volkswagen digitally remade classic Hollywood footage, transforming Gene Kelly's signature performance in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) into a body-popping pitch for the new Golf GTI ('the original, updated'). After his success with the Elvis ad, Steve Cope made a fundraising commercial for the Prostate Cancer Research Foundation that used

footage of the British comedian Bob Monkhouse to create the ghostly effect of him speaking, in front of his own headstone, about the disease that caused his death. These were part of the many and various means by which found-footage techniques became a mark of taste and technical virtuosity within digital media culture in the mid-to-late 2000s.

The Radio 2 Elvis ad was a found-footage spectacle designed to arrest attention. Similar to the ‘Give a Few Bob’ commercial that required Steve Cope to find old, outdoor shots of Bob Monkhouse, Cope went through ‘oceans of material’ to uncover the right musical footage (Walsh, 2007). He had to find artists that Radio 2 would not only play but on footage that came from a videotape source. (This meant that new footage of the Sugarbabes had to be shot with vintage Ikegami cameras). The various clips were then digitally combined. Significantly, image rights had to be cleared in each case. This obliged Cope to remove footage of Eric Clapton, who did not wish to participate, and alter the clip of Stevie Wonder which was taken from a *Sesame Street* episode that Cope found on YouTube (the muppet Grover had to be cut before any part of the Stevie Wonder footage could be used). Potentially most problematic of all in copyright terms was the footage of Elvis himself. Ever since the legal principle of ‘descendibility’ was accorded to the rights to publicity in the early 1980s, the image of Elvis has been controlled by the aggressively litigious Elvis Presley Enterprises (EPE). David Wall (2003) argues that the ‘post-mortem Elvis industry’ is characterized by a paradox of circulation and restriction; EPE need to circulate the intellectual ‘real estate’ of Elvis to generate income streams but it also regulates the way that the posthumous Elvis image is used to ensure that it is not demeaned or transformed. Although, as Wall points out,

‘Elvis has become a generic symbol and remains a vibrant source of signs used in global cultural production’ (2003: 60), the celebrity image of Elvis does not exist in the public domain. Fortunately for the producers of the Radio 2 promotion, the appearance of Elvis with Noel Gallagher and the Sugarbabes was not deemed by EPE to endanger the King’s public image and was therefore granted permission, indicative of commercial arrangements where popular cultural ‘icons’ are now routinely licensed and used to communicate corporate brand value.

In communicating the values of BBC Radio 2, the Elvis ad was defined by its line-up; the promotion drew out Radio 2’s association with star performers and a daytime playlist featuring music ranging from the 1960s to contemporary chart. Just as significantly, however, the ad was distinguished by its digitextual ‘liveness’ - Elvis helped anchor the station’s commitment to the ‘visualization of live music’ in a broadcast environment where radio is no longer simply a sound medium but accessed through television and the Internet. The key footage is adapted from Elvis’s performance at the Honolulu International Center in 1973, one of the first live-via-satellite concerts to be broadcast to a global audience. It attracted a billion viewers in nearly forty countries. Lisa Parks and Melissa McCartney (2007) argue that the concert was marked in the seventies by a combination of American nationalism and global futurism, Elvis’s custom-made American eagle outfit paraded centre stage within a venue overhauled to appear as a giant planetarium. They describe the set design in the following terms:

Mirrored panels framed both sides of the stage, not only simulating the reflective solar panels of a satellite – suggesting that Elvis’s body itself was in global orbit –

but also giving the spectator enhanced visual access to his live performance as cameras captured his movements in mirrored reflections. (Parks and McCartney, 2007: 259)

The Radio 2 ad maintained the stellar set design but expressed the event's 'liveness' as retro. Inserting purple Radio 2 banners on stage, the ad foregrounds ideologies of digital rather than global futurism; it is anchored less by the possibilities of the satellite spectacular, circa 1973, than of the ability of digital media to 'technologize the sublime' (Everett, 2003: 9) and create a sense of broadcasting liveness in the space of the dialogue between new and old media, the living and the dead.

In their theory of remediation, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin suggest that 'even the most hypermediated productions strive for their own brand of immediacy. Directors of music videos rely on multiple media and elaborate editing to create an immediate and apparently spontaneous style; they take great pains to achieve the sense of "liveness" that characterizes rock music' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 9). The Radio 2 Elvis ad is akin to music video in this description, capturing the 'twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy' (ibid 5) that distinguish the way that pyrotechnics of sound and image create visual spectacle in contemporary culture. The Elvis ad combines intimacy and presence with an equivalent feeling of mediation and memory. The former is created by the way that Elvis interacts with his band members. By synchronizing performance clips (interspersing shots of Elvis wandering the stage with close-ups of his face) and by using a simulated voice-track, Elvis is made to appear as if engaging with individual artists. This is achieved through co-ordinated eyeline matches, shot/reverse shots and gestured

and voiced reactions by Elvis to particular instrumental solos ('Play it Stevie', Elvis laughs as Stevie Wonder sways and improvises on the piano). The effect is heightened by the response of an electrified audience at the Honolulu International Centre - cum Radio 2 concert - marvelling at the immediacy of the performance.

The sense of marvel is also based, however, on the spectacle of archival remediation; the ad depends for its effect on the visual enthrallment of seeing 'legendary' artists past and present - and from both sides of the grave - performing side-by-side. It is here that the ad expresses a certain 'promotional reflexivity' (Caldwell, 2008: 246). In its display of new media aesthetics, the concert performance can be viewed as an articulation by the BBC of its own broadcast identity in a digital age. According to James Bennett (2008), the Corporation's investment in catch-up services such as the BBCiPlayer launched in 2007 (and, we might add, the BBC Radio Player launched in 2002) is part of a process of remediating the ontology of television and radio from linear broadcasting *flow* to that of navigational *database*. In this context, the seamless assembly of discontinuous concert footage in the Elvis ad hints at the abundant and simultaneous availability of archival (broadcast) history in the digital age.

In representational terms, the Elvis ad is symptomatic of a media sensibility developing in relation to the 'spatialization of audiovisual culture' (Straw, 2007: 11). Will Straw associates this with the enormous storage capacities of media technologies like the videocassette, CD, DVD and especially the Internet. He suggests that new storage media have led to the piling up of cultural artefacts (texts, images, sounds, objects, technologies) the random availability of which has engendered a situation where 'the circuits of cultural reference that bind one artifact to another reverse chronologies or

cross sequences of development in a way that muddies any sense of historical time' (2007: 11). This has implications for what Amy Holdsworth calls 'medium-specific interrogations of memory' (2008: 138). In a world of archival and semiotic abundance, memory has become subject to renewable configurations and articulations within the cultural terrain. If 'new technologies have consistently rendered the past more richly variegated and dense' (Straw, 2007: 12), media corporations like the BBC have sought to translate this density for its own corporate ends. Through promos like the Elvis ad, the BBC has projected an archival imaginary that reflects an institutional moment where the Corporation's broadcasting past - especially its back-catalogue of television and radio programmes - has become a newly significant asset accessible by the changes brought about by digitization, DVD and online archives.

With radio adjusting to new technologies such as DAB, iPods and on-demand listening, and with plans to create a homepage for every BBC TV and radio programme ever made (Gibson, 2008a), it is perhaps unsurprising that the BBC should develop a brand promotion that marries an aesthetic of liveness *and* the archive. According to Jenny Abramsky, director of audio and music at the BBC between 1999 and 2008, 'if radio didn't go digital, it would eventually die a long, slow death' (Gibson, 2008b: 2). Like the 'Perfect Day' video in 1997, the Elvis ad captures a particular moment in the BBC's contemporary broadcasting and brand history. Through remix promotion, the ad is a network performance that embodies the challenge, in Abramsky's words, of getting people 'to fall in love with radio' (Gibson, 2008b: 1) on terms that befit and anticipate a multiplatform future.

It has not been my intention to provide a full account of the dawn of digital radio (Crisell, 2002) or the history of the medium's visualization (Griffiths, 2007). Instead, I have used the Elvis ad to bring to light a number of inter-related developments in the contemporary branding and broadcast environment - specifically, the projection of network personality in the multi-channel era, the (often overlooked) function of digital media companies in the brand/design process, and the operational and ontological transition of companies like the BBC towards a world of digital content provision. Understood as a 'deep text', the Elvis ad reveals embedded attitudes, practices and ideologies within contemporary production and promotional culture. To borrow from John Caldwell, it demonstrates 'the extent to which textual production - and the analysis of texts by industry - stand simultaneously as corporate strategies, as forms of cultural and economic capital integral to media professional communities, and as the means by which contemporary media industries work to rationalize their operations in an era of great institutional instability' (Caldwell, 2006: 102). Memorable for its found-footage chutzpah, the Elvis ad also, more pointedly, signifies a moment in which corporate media brands such as the BBC are responding deliberately and reflexively to a situation where concepts of media time and space, present and past, liveness and the archive, have become, if not entirely revolutionized, then at least, as the King would have it, 'all shook up'.

Notes

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¹ Increasingly, media companies such as Channel 4 have outsourced the operational side of their business to focus investment on content rather than technical upgrades and infrastructure. Red Bee’s seven-year contract with Channel 4 is worth £16-19 million a year. In its editorial function, Red Bee was caught up in a media furore when it became clear that footage it had used to create a promotional trailer had been essentially faked by RDF in order to publicize a documentary about the Queen. After objections from Buckingham Palace, this led to debate about editorial standards at the BBC (and Red Bee) and the dangers of media outsourcing.

² This contract is the by-product of the commercial sale of BBC Broadcast and runs until 2015. Although BBC contracts are still traded and pitched, industry detractors suggest that Red Bee’s exclusive contract with the BBC gives it long-term financial security in ways that enable it to undercut rivals for other production and design contracts, a claim with enough merit to lead the government regulator Ofcom to investigate potential anti-competitive practice.

³ Radio has often spearheaded the BBC’s brand approach, highlighted in 2008 when Tim Davie, the Corporation’s marketing and communications director, was appointed as the new director of audio and music.

⁴ This backfired in October 2008 when Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand caused a media storm by leaving a message, as a comedy stunt, on the voicemail of actor Andrew Sachs

during Brand's late-night radio show. The message, which said that Brand had 'fucked Sachs' granddaughter', was deemed 'grossly offensive' by the BBC Trust, and led to the suspension of Ross and the resignation of Brand and BBC Radio 2 controller Lesley Douglas. This refreshed debate about editorial standards at the BBC and threw into relief the pitfalls of Douglas' particular 'Brand' strategy in seeking to cross-cut the station's generational appeal.

⁵ According to BBC Director-General Mark Thompson, 'The BBC should no longer think of itself as a broadcaster of TV and radio and some new media on the side. We should aim to deliver public service content to our audiences in whatever media and on whatever device makes sense for them, whether they are at home or on the move' (BBC, 2006b).

⁶ Bruce Connor's early found-footage film *A Movie* (1958) is an oft-cited example of the genre, using sounds and images appropriated from Hollywood and documentary films to challenge concepts of creative originality and authorial rights. More recent examples include Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies under America* (1992) and Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002).

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