

## **Modular construction and anamorphosis in Channel 4 idents: past and present**

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### **Abstract**

In the 30 years since the first appearance of Martin Lambie Nairn's ident, *Round and Back*, Channel 4 has established a reputation for screening idents that are both innovative and pleasingly familiar. While many texts have acknowledged the significance of these artefacts, there has, as yet, been no sufficient exploration into the precise behaviours that make these idents so distinct. This article explores the construction of the Channel 4 logo from independently moving parts, and the alignment of static parts prompted by tracked navigation, showing how these behaviours are made possible by the modularity of the Channel 4 logo. These behaviours are likened to anamorphosis, in which a privileged viewing zone reveals to viewers an alignment of forms, and a fleeting moment in which separate pictorial objects collaborate in the presentation of a more significant numerical configuration.

### **Keywords**

Channel 4, ident, logo, Gestalt, anamorphosis, typography.

### **Introduction**

From its launch in 1982 to the present, Channel 4 has identified its presence on screen with a continually evolving set of idents. These idents signify Channel 4's core values of innovation and diversity, through a number of converging blocks which align to construct the Channel 4 logo. In 2011, 29 years after Martin Lambie Nairn's first ident was broadcast, the appearance of these idents has changed dramatically, with the figure '4' being constructed from objects that are rendered to blend seamlessly into photorealistic environments. Nevertheless, the basic process by which this '4' emerges from the scene remains largely unchanged. The viewer directly witnesses the construction of the '4' logo from separate, and apparently unrelated objects, which either converge or align to collaborate in the presentation of the Channel's identity.

Although numerous texts acknowledge the significance of Martin Lambie Nairn and MPC's idents, none adequately explore the behaviour that makes them distinct (see, for example, Aymer, 2006, and Woolman and Bellantoni 1999: 34). Many focus on what Yin Yin Wong (1995: 11) describes as 'structural characteristics' (the features of physical form), rather than the 'behavioural characteristics' which are so remarkable in these idents. Despite

intending to provide a thorough exploration of Channel 4 branding, Christine Fanthome (2007: 258) devotes very little of her text to describing kinetic features, instead focusing on its structural attributes including its three-dimensionality and colours. Though perhaps prompted by Fanthome (2007: 267), even Brett Foraker of 4Creative, who was directly involved in the design of Channel 4's more recent *Atlas* idents, appears to focus on the use of 'dimensional and solid' components rather than on the way in which these components align. Paul Grainge (2009) describes, in detail, some of the architectural scenes and objects that feature in recent idents, but does not describe their behaviours except through the observation that they aim to imitate Lambie Nairn's originals. Though these structural features are an essential part of Channel 4's idents, they also exist in the static version of the logo, intended for print, and so do not sufficiently distinguish it from static artefacts.

When commentators discuss the temporal features of the Channel 4 idents, they generally acknowledge that it involves construction, in that it presents 'various parts [that] converge in space' (Woolman and Bellantoni 1999: 34), 'come together' (Heusser et al. 2007), or 'unite' (Fanthome 2007: 255). These descriptions, however, are rarely thorough enough to explain how that construction occurs. When they attempt more specific description, the outcome is often vague or misleading. Fanthome's description of *Round and Back*, for example, tells readers that the components of the '4' 'simply rotated through three-hundred and sixty degrees' (Fanthome 2007: 259). As is shown below, closer inspection of this ident reveals that its components engage in more complex behaviour than rotation. It is perhaps ironic that these texts so enthusiastically relate the success and originality of Lambie Nairn's idents, and yet seem largely unable to accurately describe, explain and analyse them. Without this knowledge, it is difficult for practice to move forward, as practitioners may only consider their work in terms of what has come before. It is necessary for new practice to be able to distinguish itself from its predecessors, and in order to do that it must find the language to identify innovations.

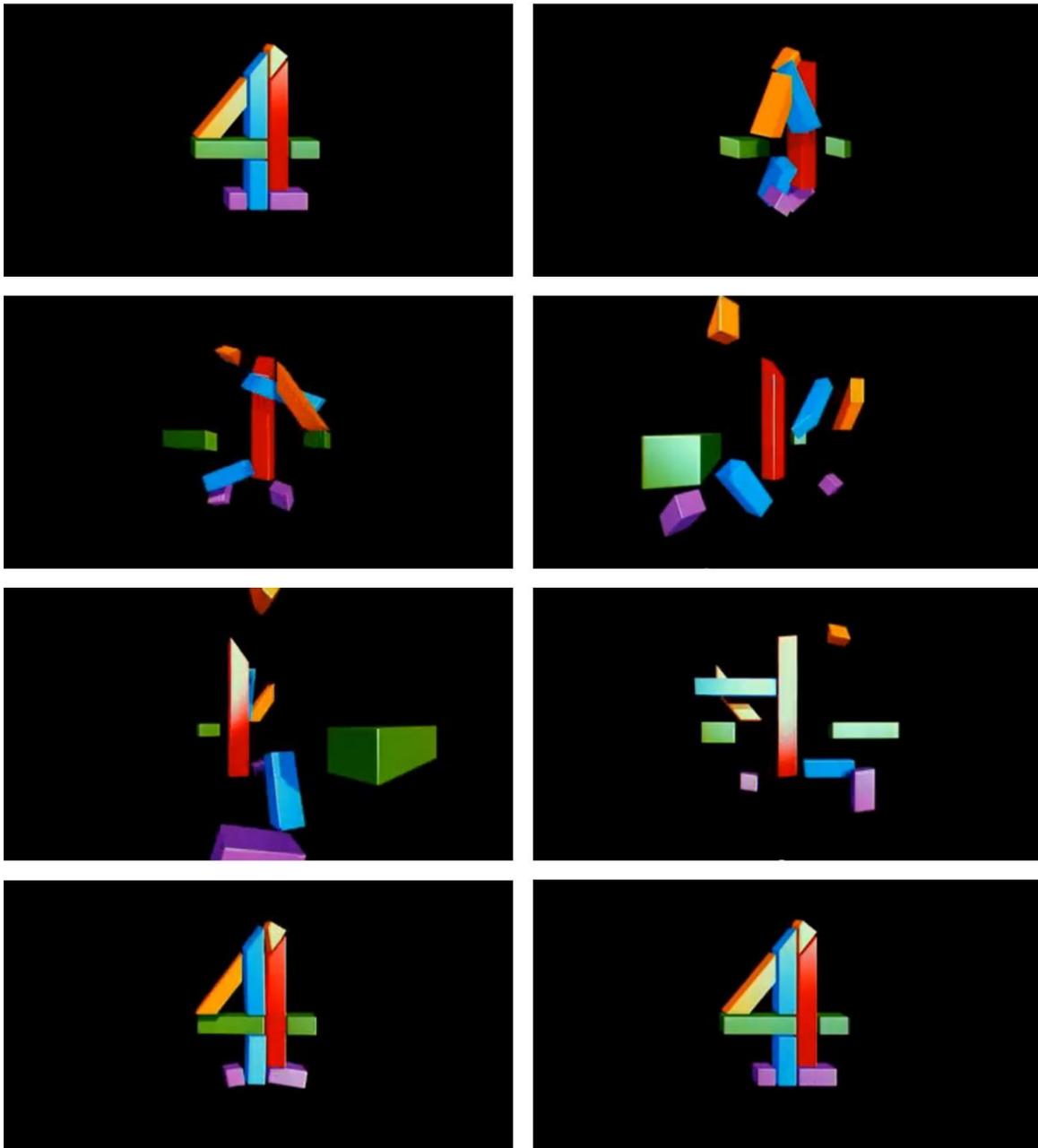
This article will discuss the modular construction of the Channel 4 logo in its idents, dividing them into two broad categories: those which exhibit construction through the motion of parts, and those which exhibit alignment through the tracked navigation of the camera. This discussion will thereby aim to provide a more explicit and detailed exploration of the behaviours exhibited in Channel 4 idents than has been previously offered by existing texts. It will be shown that these idents exploit similar conditions to those seen in anamorphosis, whereby a privileged 'viewing zone' (Kac 1997) grants access to apparent compression of space, leading to a meaningful alignment of shapes. This article will further observe how the

audience's increasing familiarity with this process has allowed Channel 4 idents to become ever more complex, and for the moment of alignment of the '4' to become increasingly fleeting.

### **Construction in Martin Lambie-Nairn's early Channel 4 idents**

Martin Lambie Nairn's first Channel 4 idents, produced from 1982 onwards, signified the practice that set Channel 4 apart from other British television broadcasters at the time: that of sourcing a variety of television shows from a range of production companies (Woolman and Bellantoni 1999: 34). This practice is illustrated in the coming-together of visibly different elements in the construction of the Channel 4 logo. In Lambie Nairn's first series of idents, coloured polygons converge towards the centre of the screen, against an empty black background, and align to form the figure '4'. At this moment the polygons appear to undergo a change in identity, becoming parts of a verbal sign, and achieving particular purpose and verbal meaning. A single identifiable sign emerges, and the polygons appear to shift from one paradigm to another: pictorial or abstract, to verbal.

In constructing a numerical character from separate pictorial forms, Lambie Nairn intended to assert Channel 4's difference from existing broadcasters. In particular, he wished to communicate the channel's aim to provide 'diversity and innovation' in its programming (Docherty et al. 1988: 6). The innovation, which set this ident apart from those used by ITV and the BBC at the time, came in the form of the use of pictorial three-dimensional elements in the construction of a numerical whole. This innovation was acknowledged by others in the branding and graphic design industry, as Lambie Nairn's work was seen as heralding a new era in television branding, and won numerous awards (Fanthome 2007: 258). Diversity was also viewed as particularly important in establishing the character and methods of the new channel. As opposed to the production role of other channels, Channel 4 saw itself as a 'publisher', selecting and broadcasting programmes produced elsewhere (Docherty et al. 1988: 8). This role as a publisher was one way in which it aimed to promote diversity, as it gave minority groups the opportunity 'to express their views unmediated by television bureaucrats' (Docherty et al. 1988: 36). By directly depicting the construction of the logo from separate parts, Lambie Nairn's ident effectively conveys not only Channel 4's role as publisher, but also the relationship between this role and the ambition for diversity. The convergence of several differently coloured polygons acts as a metaphor for the sourcing of programmes from different production companies, and for collaboration between culturally diverse groups.



**Figure 1. Martin Lambie Nairn, *Round and Back*, 1982. In this, Lambie Nairn's first Channel 4 ident, the figure '4' breaks apart into coloured polygons, which are flung outwards and trapped in a vortex created by the revolving central column of the upward stroke. The polygons are then pulled back towards the centre of the vortex, and return to their original positions in the '4' configuration.**

All of Lambie Nairn's idents aim to communicate these values of innovation and diversity, using the construction of the figure '4' from separate parts. However, each ident involves slightly different motion of parts, and differently shaped components. This capacity to adapt communicates to audiences the message that the channel is not only diverse, but able to respond to change and constantly reinvent itself without compromising its core values. In the very first of Lambie Nairn's idents, *Round and Back* (1982, Fig. 1), the viewer is

presented with the '4' logo from the very beginning breaking apart into its component polygons. The polygons are flung outwards from a revolving central column – the vertical stroke of the '4' – and then spin as if caught in a vortex, before returning to their original positions, as if attracted by a gravitational force. This motion is chaotic, with little synchronicity in the motion of the separate parts. In 1983, the sequence was extended so that the second appearance of the '4' was followed by its breaking apart again, with the separate polygons flying out of the frame so that they may be imagined entering the real space occupied by the viewer. Other idents subjected the polygons to entirely different motion. In *Implosion* (1982) the same polygons are used, but their motion is different. They originate from off-screen, and enter from every direction, revolving as they converge on the centre of the screen, where they align to present the '4' configuration. In a few other examples, not only the motion of parts, but also the appearance of those parts, is changed. The familiar polygons are replaced with differently shaped objects, as in *Interlock* (1982, see Fig. 2), in which the '4' is constructed from an array of planar objects. Alternative versions of this ident continued to be developed, each with a variation of the same process of construction.

*Round and Back* differs from Lambie Nairn's later idents in two key ways. Firstly, it offers viewers a preview of what is to come: viewers see the figure '4' at the beginning and the end of the sequence. There is, therefore, no doubt about the intended purpose of the separate polygons, and their identity as part of a group. Secondly, *Round and Back* presents more chaotic motion than can be seen in other Channel 4 idents. In further idents (*Implosion*, for example) the motion of separate parts is often similar in pace and direction. The presence of the figure '4' at the very beginning of *Round and Back* perhaps explains why this first ident can sustain more chaotic motion than is exhibited in other idents. Since the '4' appears at the beginning of the sequence, and the viewer directly witnesses it breaking apart, she can rely on her past knowledge of the configuration, as presented in the first moments of the sequence, to affirm the identities of the separate polygons as part of a group. It is therefore not necessary for the characteristics of the motion to suggest that the moving parts are associated with one another. In short, the chaos of the motion is compensated for by the presence of two identical poles of transformation, where there is more commonly only one.

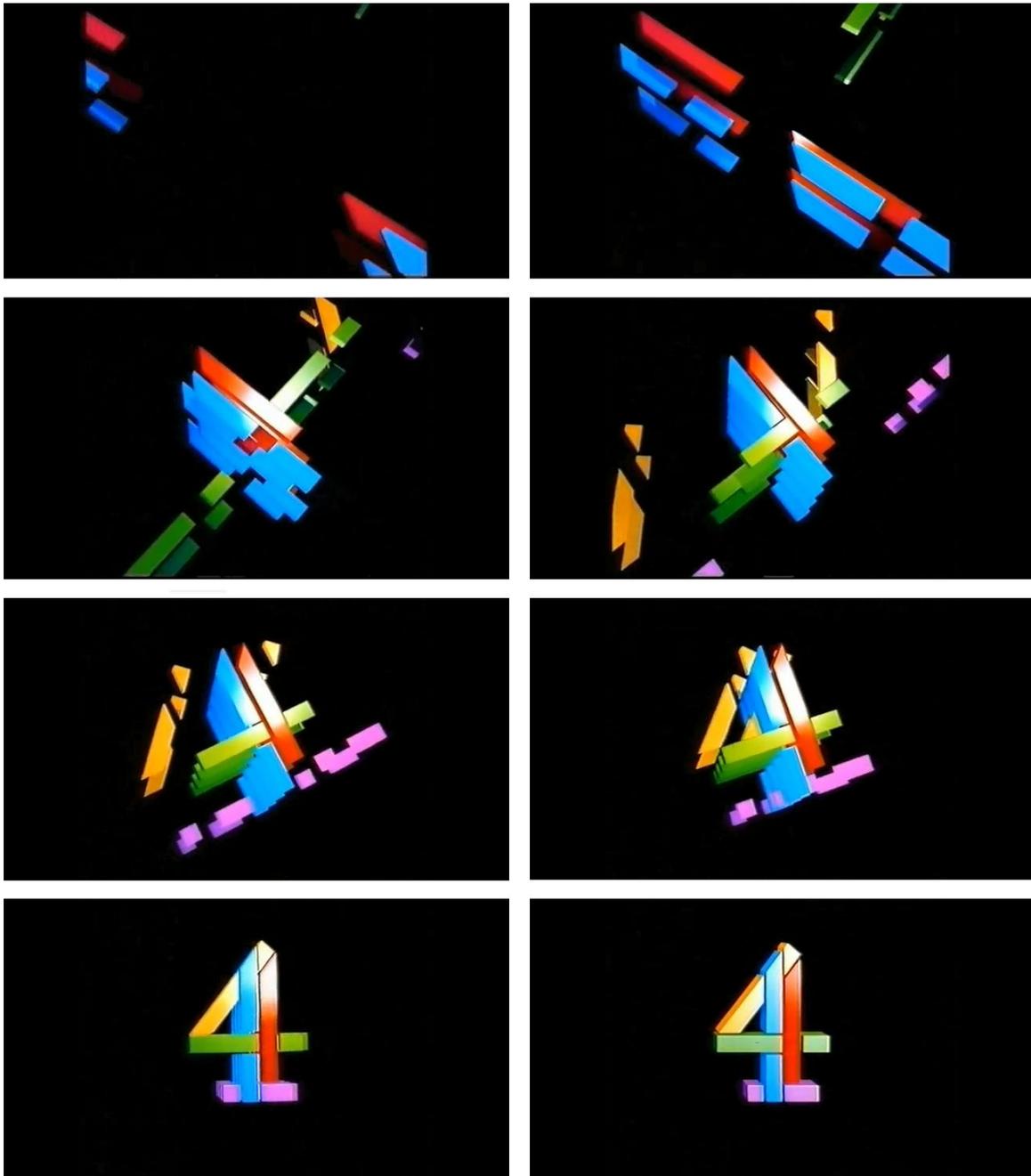


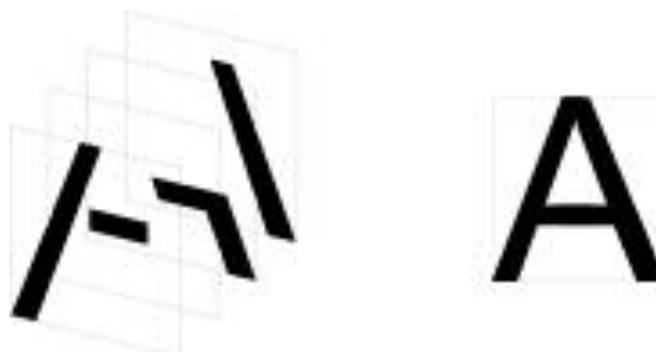
Figure 2. Martin Lambie Nairn, *Interlock*, 1982. In this ident, the '4' is constructed from a greater number of polygons than in other channel idents. Here, a large number of polygons are arranged into separate groups, which converge to construct the figure '4'.

### Modularity in the Channel 4 logo

The construction of the Channel 4 logo from independently moving parts is dependent on the fact that the logo is not a single form but several separate shapes in a particular arrangement. Modular lettering requires the reader to perceive separate forms as part of a greater whole, discarding the abstract or pictorial interpretations of each component part in

favour of a verbal interpretation that considers the entire arrangement. This tendency to favour the perception of a whole group rather than separate parts can be described according to Gestalt laws of perceptual organisation.

Gestalt theories can broadly be broken summarised as a ‘mosaic or “bundle” hypothesis’ (that ‘every “complex” consists of elementary contents or pieces’), or, commonly, that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Wertheimer, 1923: 12). Max Wertheimer’s 1923 paper, ‘Laws of Organisation in Perceptual Forms’, identified the various features which prompt perception of the whole rather than separate parts. In particular, he observed factors of ‘similarity’ and ‘proximity’, that describe how objects that are similar in appearance, and located in close proximity, are likely to be perceived as associated with one another (Wertheimer 1923: 74-75). He further identified the ‘factor of closure’, which suggests that objects that are close together are perceived as being part of a whole to the extent that gaps between them may be imagined to be ‘closed’, forming complete contours (Wertheimer, 1923: 83). These factors may be employed in the perception of modular lettering such as that favoured in the modernist era, including Joseph Albers’ *Stencil* (1925) and Theo van Doesburg’s typeface for *De Stijl* magazine (1917). In these and other modular typefaces, letterforms are constructed from separate parts, described by Rosemberger and MacNiel (1999: 252) as ‘primitives’. Bart van der Leek, who used modular lettering in works including *Het Vlas* (1941), referred to such typographic works as ‘compositions’, describing characters that are built, as opposed to moulded, with each character ‘systematically’ constructed ‘as if it were a building’ (Ryan 2001: 40 and 58). This reflected the modernist enthusiasm for regular and interchangeable component parts, which emulated the machine aesthetic through repetition (Jobling and Crowley 1996: 141). Construction, as opposed to other methods of creation, leaves the component parts as whole forms or objects in their own right: part of a verbal character but still independent. According to Wertheimer’s laws of perceptual organisation, if these separate parts are similar and in close proximity, they will be assumed to be part of a group. According to the factor of closure, the gaps between these separate parts will be ignored, so that each letter is perceived as a single form: an alphanumeric character.



**Figure 3. A modular letter 'A'. The Gestalt laws of *similarity* and *proximity* propose that these separate shapes will be perceived as associated with one another due to their visual similarity (and, by extension, visual difference from the background and other surrounding forms), and close proximity. Meanwhile, the law of *closure* suggests that viewers will ignore the gaps between the forms, perceiving the group as a whole letter.**

Elmar Holmstein (1983: 45-55) identifies, in Albers' *Stencil* typeface, a 'double articulation', in which, a verbal character may be broken down into non-verbal component parts. These component parts, or primitives, may be abstract or graphical, as they are in Martin Lambie Nairn's Channel 4 idents, or they may each have a pictorial identity, as in MPC's more recent Channel 4 idents (which will be explored below). There are, therefore, two possible interpretations of each arrangement: at a local level, there are multiple graphical or pictorial identities, and at a global level there is a single verbal identity. As in much typography, there is a 'plurality', whereby forms communicate two distinct messages; one 'graphemic' and one 'phonetic' (Tsur 2000: 752). The separate graphemic identities, Holmstein (1983: 60) observes, must be overruled in favour of the group identity of the whole configuration.

In the Channel 4 logo the *similarity* and *proximity* of parts ensure that they will be perceived as belonging to a group, while the *factor of closure* ensures that those visibly separate pictorial or abstract parts will be imagined as a complete whole, with verbal meaning. When this logo is animated, as in the Channel 4 idents, further factors come into play that do not influence the perception of the static logo. Most notably, Wertheimer's (1923: 78) factor of 'uniform destiny' becomes important. This suggests that objects which appear to share similar purpose or 'destiny', are likely to be associated with one another. When separate objects are in motion, and appear to be converging or aligning, as in Channel 4 idents, the viewer assumes a shared destiny for those parts, and a role in a greater whole. This perception is aided by not only *similarity* in the visual appearance of the separate forms, but also *similarity* in their style of motion, described by Jinsook Kim (2007: 69) as 'motion similarity'.

Despite the different appearance of the polygons in *Round and Back*, which are of different colours and lengths, they are similar enough in shape that, when Gestalt factors of *proximity*, *closure*, and *uniform destiny* come into play, they are perceived as belonging to a single '4' configuration. These same Gestalt factors continue to be applicable in describing the perceptual process that occurs in response to many more recent Channel 4 idents, which have built upon Lambie Nairn's early ideas. After the success of his first idents, Martin Lambie Nairn became able to exploit the audience's familiarity with the '4' and its component parts; there was no longer a need to show the '4' identity at both ends of the sequence. Later idents relied upon a greater number of Gestalt factors to unite the component polygons, thereby ensuring that the separate parts were associated despite initially appearing at a variety of different locations within (and sometimes beyond) the frame of the screen. In *Interlock* (see Fig. 2), the coloured polygons converge from outside the frame of the screen. As they appear to be converging on a single location, the Gestalt factor of *uniform destiny* prompts the perception of association between the shapes, even though, in this sequence, they have not previously been viewed together. When they reach their destination at the centre of the screen, and align, the Gestalt factors of *proximity*, *similarity* (in shape and surface texture, though not in colour) and *closure* ensure the perception of a '4' configuration. The resulting '4' configuration is identical to those in previous idents, and in static uses of the Chanel 4 logo at that time, however, the component parts which are used in this construction do not resemble those in the previous idents. There are not simply the nine polygons that exist in other examples, but a much larger array of flat, layered shapes. These flat planes are layered in groups (or, perceived as belonging to groups as a result of their *similarity* in colour and motion), which converge in synchronised motion. As each group independently joins the larger group of the final configuration, the space between the layered planes decreases, and they eventually merge into the three-dimensional polygons with which the audience is more familiar. In this way the behaviour does not simply present the alignment of primitives into a single group, but the alignment of an array of groups into a single, greater group.

### **The next generation: Masquerade and anamorphosis**

Variations on Lambie Nairn's idents were used until Channel 4's rebranding in 1996. After a number of other short-lived idents that 'failed to generate plaudits from within or outside the industry', Channel 4 retrieved and updated the behaviours in Lambie Nairn's original idents (Fanthome 2007: 261). For a series of new idents, entitled *Atlas* (2004-2010), The Moving Picture Company (MPC) was employed to retrieve some of the core

characteristics of Lambie Nairn's processes, while introducing new features to demonstrate the radical change that had come about as a consequence of the introduction of 'the arrival of many new digital channels' (Fanthome 2007: 264). The introduction of digital television meant that Channel 4 could no longer position itself as the most avant-garde television broadcaster. In this new broadcasting environment, Channel 4 was one of few UK broadcasters with a history. By revisiting its original idents, the channel was able to remind viewers of its familiarity and longevity, while a digital facelift reassured audiences of its continuing remit for innovation.

The *Atlas* idents present similar construction behaviour to Lambie Nairn's idents, but incorporate significant visual difference with the addition of figurative objects, digitally modelled to imitate live-action footage. In these idents, the component parts of the '4' are 'subtly disguised as elements in each environment shown' (MPC not dated). MPC's idents exhibit what Roland Barthes (1977: 26) conceived as an 'amalgamation' of 'graphic and iconic' signs. As explored below, parts of the '4' masquerade as architectural elements, and introduce an additional element of surprise when each element is revealed to have an alternative identity to that suggested by its initial appearance. In examples including *Tokyo* (2006, Fig. 4), and *Road Signs* (2004), the introductory moments depict everyday scenes and activities. Objects within the environment appear familiar, and are expected to reliably behave as they do in real-life settings.<sup>1</sup> When these objects align, they appear to defy the rules of reality. The scene is abruptly cast out of reality, and suddenly becomes spectacle. As in the earliest forms of mechanically created spectacle, 'we know what we are seeing to be impossible and yet the pleasure of the experience is in seeing – before our very eyes – the most realistic staging of something which cannot happen' (Slater 1995: 219).

These idents can be likened to two forms of spectacle: theatrical illusion, and computer-generated special effects. They may be described in terms identified by Reginald Foakes, as 'scenic illusion', involving the creation of a spectacle within an artificial landscape. Unlike other forms of theatrical illusion, this takes place without the apparent presence of 'human action', with all illusion contained within the elements of an apparently inanimate scene (Foakes 1989: 271). MPC's idents also have key features in common with 'dramatic illusion'. The moment of revelation, when the apparently environmental objects align to present a '4', is comparable to the climax of a dramatic illusion: 'a moment of surprise... when the spectator suddenly realises his expectations were wrong' (Lamont and Wiseman 2005: 50). In this moment, the environmental objects that construct the figure '4' are initially perceived as belonging to the landscape (in Gestalt terms, the *ground*), but are revealed as belonging to a

different paradigm (the *figure*). However, despite the fact that they adopt a new identity, the physical appearance of these objects does not change. Each polygon may still be identified as a separate architectural object. Therefore, in these idents, as in illusions, ‘there are two or more quite different interpretations from a single stimulus’ (Block 2002). Objects are simultaneously environmental and typographic. Both interpretations are correct, but also distinctly different.

Theatrical illusions succeed at creating spectacle because they result in the unexpected. In order to ensure that the climax is unexpected, the illusionist must first lull the viewer into a false sense of security by disguising his tools as everyday objects (Tognazzi 1993: 356). In this disguise, ‘naturalness’ and ‘consistency [are] key to conviction’, and will convince the viewer that the objects are not capable of anything extraordinary (Fitzkee 1945: 355). In film, as in theatrical illusion, events or effects leading up to a moment of spectacle must appear ‘plausible’. This plausibility is achieved when ‘representations are internally consistent’ and ‘coherent’ (Slater 1995: 232). In computer-generated spectacle (usually 3D animation), objects must be rendered to such a high level of believability that they eliminate all suspicion (Tognazzi 1993: 357). In MPC’s Channel 4 idents, the illusionist’s tools are replaced by the components of the fluid ‘4’ configuration, which are ‘rendered [with]...textures...to ensure that they appear to be part of the environment’ (Heusser et al. 2007). The objects blend seamlessly into the backdrop, as if they are no more capable of magic than the surrounding scenery. This disguise fools the viewer into believing that these objects are everyday architectural objects, with no potential for transformation. The perception that these objects are in no way special, or distinct from the surroundings, ensures that the emergence of the ‘4’ will be ‘a moment of surprise’ (Lamont and Wiseman 2005: 50).

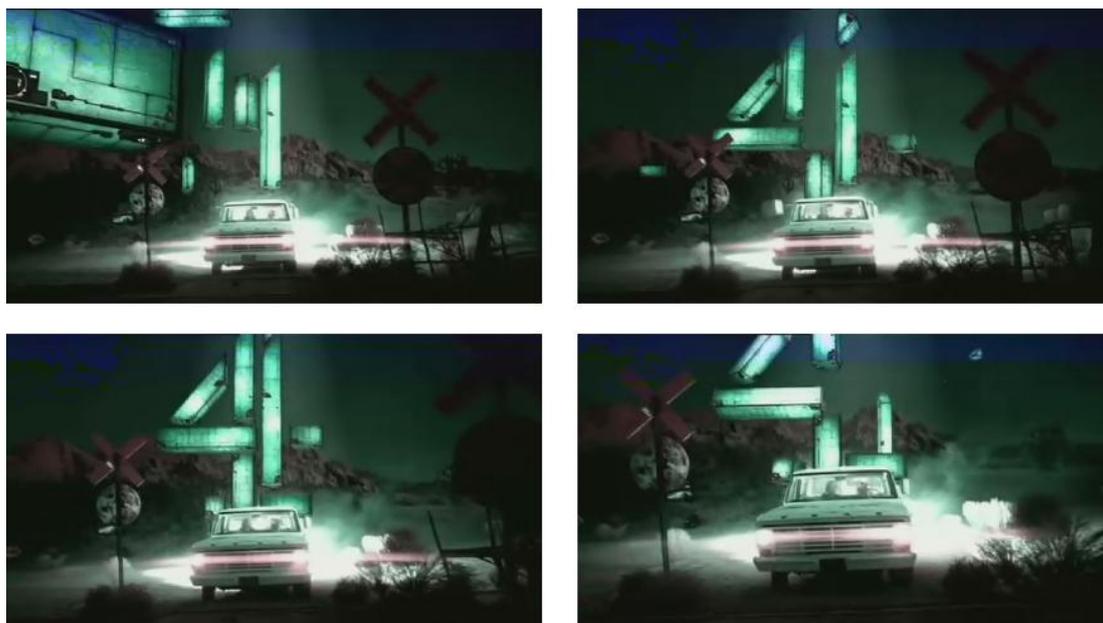
That the component parts of each ‘4’ configuration resemble photographed or filmed objects transports Channel 4 idents from the field of motion graphics to that of live-action film and video effects (VFX). The visually complex objects in MPC’s idents therefore belong, at least in this way, to a different paradigm from the abstract primary-coloured polygons of Martin Lambie Nairn’s earlier idents, which bear more similarity to graphic design than to photography or film. The addition of visual complexity to the component parts of the scene is balanced with a simplification of the fluid process. MPC’s processes are more consistent than those seen in Lambie Nairn’s range of idents. MPC always presents only nine component parts, and always constructs the ‘4’ at only one moment in the sequence. They have, however, introduced a significant alternative behaviour to this set of idents, by constructing the figure ‘4’ not only through the motion of parts, but alternatively through

navigation around static parts, arranged over virtual three-dimensional space. MPCs idents can be divided into two categories: those which present *construction through motion of parts*, in which ‘moving material’ aligns into the ‘4’ configuration; and those which exhibit *construction through navigation*, in which a ‘first person perspective camera moves through the sequence to reveal the Chanel 4 logo at the midpoint’ (MPC not dated).



Figure 4. MPC, *Tokyo*, 2006. In MPC’s idents, the ‘4’ is constructed from apparently environmental objects. These objects appear to be part of the landscape until they apparently align to construct the ‘4’.

In idents including *Alien* (2004, Fig. 5) and *Bowling* (2004) the ‘4’ configuration is constructed as it is in Lambie Nairn’s idents, through the independent motion of separate parts, which present as a configuration through choreographed alignment. Other idents: *Toyko* (2006, Fig. 4), *Road Signs* (2004), and *Pylons* (Fig. 6), involve *construction through navigation*. Several of these (*Pylons* and *Road Signs*) draw attention to the involvement of navigation by presenting the scene framed within car windscreens, with the dashboard and window frames creating the impression that the scene has been serendipitously encountered on a car journey. The emergence of the ‘4’ configuration occurs at the moment when the tracked camera encounters a privileged position, described by MPC Creative Director Russell Appleford (as cited in Heusser et al. 2007) as the ‘hit point’. This event, with a significant configuration appearing as the viewer or camera navigates to a privileged position, reflects experiences that are described as elsewhere as anamorphic.



**Figure 5. MPC, *Alien*, 2004. In this ident, the component parts of the '4' move independently of one another and of the camera/viewer. The fact that their motion appears to be independent and unsynchronised enhances the impression that the appearance of the '4' is coincidental. Source: 'Four to the Floor'**

'Anamorphosis' dates back to elongated drawings which appear in Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus* (c.1485), but more commonly identified in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533). In Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, a strange figure appears towards the bottom of the painting which can be identified as a skull only when viewed from a 'specific vantage point' (Tessauro 2004: 99). Possible connections between lettering and anamorphosis can be observed in Lucas Brunn's *Praxis Perspectivae* (1615), a collection of images of objects viewed from unlikely angles, including a number of three-dimensional letters (see plates reproduced in Massin 1970: 20-21).

Hubert Damisch (2002: 134) describes in anamorphosis the emergence of a 'secret object', when the viewer 'adopts the appropriate point of view'. His use of the term 'secret' suggests that the viewer who can experience the hidden subject is privileged. There is a sense that she is honoured to encounter this subject, and to be able to uncover/expose its true identity. Damisch (2002: 284) further proposes that anamorphosis 'implie[s] being shown an example of spectacular coincidence between the viewing point and the vanishing point'. This description draws attention to the fact that this experience is fleeting; that it may easily be lost. In turn, this implies that the moment of recognition should be a moment to be treasured.



**Figure 6.** MPC, *Pylons*, 2004. In the first of these frames, the frame of a car windscreen is visible, framing the scene. This increases the feeling of immersion, which in turn enhances the sense that this is an extraordinary encounter in an otherwise ordinary landscape. Source: ‘Four to the Floor’

One contemporary example of anamorphosis that bears direct resemblance to MPC’s Channel 4 ident is Eduardo Kac’s holographic poem, *Souvenir D’Andromeda* (1990, Fig. 7). Just as the skull in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* may only be viewed from a privileged viewpoint, the areas in front of Kac’s ‘holopoems’ contain ‘viewing zones’ from which spectators can view the separate forms in typographic alignment (Kac 1997). As with anamorphic paintings and drawings, holopoems appear to ‘change as [they are] viewed from different perspectives’ (Kac 1989: 30). In this holopoem, as the viewer navigates around the hologram, a number of abstract polygons appear to align to present the word ‘LIMBO’. Here, there is not only an apparent compression of space, as in historical examples of anamorphosis, but also the apparent alignment of separate forms. These separate forms are only considered part of the same shape when viewed from a single privileged vantage point - Kac’s ‘viewing zone’. Only from that viewpoint do the Gestalt factors of *similarity* and *proximity* act to bring together these separate parts.



Figure 7. Eduardo Kac, three views of *Souvenir D'Andromeda* 30x40cm, digital transmission hologram, 1990, Collection Acqaviva-Faustino, Paris. Image courtesy: Julia Friedman and Eduardo Kac.

In Kac's holopoetry, we can substitute the physical separation of forms (as in real space) for a virtual separation of forms within the hologram. In holopoetry, though forms are actually contained on the surface of the hologram, they are perceived as being spread across physical space, and so may be perceived as being at different locations. This makes it possible for holopoetry to present a similar experience to that of viewing the anamorphic works of Holbein, Brunn and, more recently, Felice Varini. In MPC's Channel 4 idents, the separation of forms across three-dimensional space is also virtual – contained within the flat screen of the television. The viewer herself is therefore not directly responsible for navigating

into the privileged position or 'viewing zone'. This navigation is the responsibility of the camera, that tracks through the scene until it encounters an alignment of objects to reveal the '4'. The fact that the whole audience at once encounters the privileged position simultaneously does not diminish the feeling of spectacular coincidence. MPC designer Russell Appleford (as cited in Heusser et al. 2007) describes his aim as inviting the impression that the '4' has been 'found' by the viewer, rather than deliberately presented to her. The experience remains fleeting, as the camera continues to track through space, and the verbal identities dissipate. This event ensures the impression that the appearance of the '4' is fleeting, and that the exact location and exact moment of the appearance of the '4' may never be recaptured. There is, in these idents, not only a privileged position, but also a privileged moment that the viewer (with no power to stop the navigation) cannot preserve. By creating a sense that they alone are privileged to witness the alignment of the '4' logo, audiences are given the impression that Channel 4 provides opportunities to view content that cannot be seen elsewhere. Their encounter with the '4' configuration, and so too the rest of their viewing, seems exclusive.

In this collection of idents there is a trend towards an ever more abbreviated alignment. The time for which the '4' configuration is in alignment has decreased to the extent that recent idents, such as *Blackpool* (2011) and *Abbey* (2011), reveal it so fleetingly that viewers must be dedicated to seeking it out in order to notice its split-second appearance. In some cases (as in *Abbey*, Fig. 8) the '4' never fully completes its alignment, providing viewers with only enough alignment to demonstrate the potential for '4' rather than a fully complete figure. This trend illustrates the extent of the success of this set of idents, and the familiarity of their behaviour to the target audience. The audience has become so familiar with the behaviours exhibited in this set of idents that they no longer cause surprise, but instead present a challenge to the viewer, to anticipate the point of alignment by seeking out the component parts of the '4' before they align. The idents are, therefore, no longer simply spectacles, but rather games, involving participation from the audience. The apparent need for the alignment to be abbreviated can be considered in light of the findings of Sarah Kettley, who has observed that, when audiences are repeatedly faced with ambiguous but similar artefacts, 'the rates of visual output... had to be substantially speeded up in order to hold the attention of viewers' (Kettley 2005). Kettley's research would suggest that the increasing speed of the behaviour is required to fend off fatigue in an audience who has been exposed to similar behaviours for almost three decades.



Figure 8. MPC, *Abbey*, 2011. In this ident the figure '4' never fully aligns. The viewer is provided with a lengthy introductory sequence, in which she may seek out possibilities for the appearance of the '4', and then finally is rewarded with enough alignment to prove the existence of the complete figure, without ever revealing it in its complete state. Source: 'Channel 4 Ident – Abbey,' *TV Ark*, 2011, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://www.tv-ark.org.uk/mivana/mediaplayer.php?id=41886355a79876c761ed176d549f0b80>

## Influence

As a sizeable body of work, the Channel 4 idents represent a significant contribution to the field of motion graphics. Since their introduction, other television broadcasters, including channel Five, have followed suit with idents that display similar behaviours, and take advantage of the same Gestalt factors of *similarity*, *proximity*, *closure*, and *uniform destiny*. In Five's *Free* ident (Fig. 9), for example, the word 'free' is constructed as drifting balloons align in the sky. Initially, the balloons are perceived as floating 'freely', following the natural flow of the breeze. Their motion then becomes artificially constrained, and the balloons shift into formation, presenting letterform configurations. As the breeze continues to blow, the 'free' configuration eventually dissipates. According to Gestalt laws, the balloons, which share similar properties, are associated with one another, and are hence perceived as belonging to a single group, with each group adopting the form of a letter. The grouped balloons are simultaneously disassociated from the sky through the same process, since the sky displays different properties. Those balloons that are closest together are perceived as belonging to a single group, while those that drift away from the group are perceived as separated from the configuration. Once the selected balloons have been perceived as belonging together, the factor of closure suggests that the gaps between the

balloons are filled, presenting the letter configurations as apparently solid ‘closed’ forms. Likewise, MTV has branded its channels with various temporal transformations of its logo. Idents by Rauf Yasit (Bubbles, 2009), Ash Bollard (Organic, 2010), and Max Warner (untitled, 2009) all depict the construction of an ‘M’ from component parts. In Warner’s bumper, the ‘M’ is constructed from moving panels which begin in a disorderly array and then rotate and align, locking together to form the contours of a single letter object.

In many cases, like Channel 4, these other television idents have involved the construction of the logo from a collection of separate smaller objects. It is these further examples that expose the limitations imposed by a lack of adequate terminology to define practice. Warner, for example, describes his MTV ident as presenting a ‘morph’, despite the fact that this animation does not present the kind of ‘smooth transition’ that Coquillart, and Jancéne’s (1991: 23) text on metamorphosis state is a requirement of a morph. When practitioners such as these are unable to accurately describe the behaviours that they create, it is impossible for them to describe their work except by comparison to existing artefacts such as the Channel 4 idents. Lack of sufficient vocabulary to describe and analyse temporal typographic transformations has forced practitioners to describe their work in terms of previously existing work, thereby limiting the perceived scope of their ideas and the possibility of innovation. By offering a toolkit for the description and analysis of typographic transformation, designers of new idents will be provided with the means to distinguish themselves from Channel 4, while Channel 4 will have the language to more accurately express the novelty of its own idents.

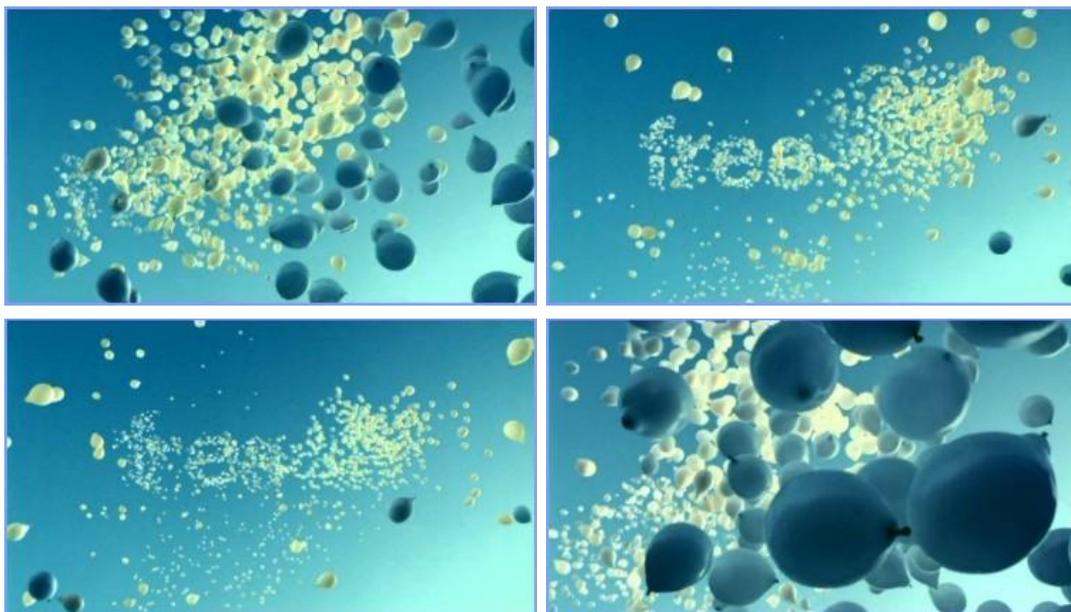


Figure 9. BB/Saunders. *Free. Five* ident. 2006. Source: ‘Channel 5 Idents’ *This is Five*. Accessed July 18, 2011, <http://www.thisisfive.co.uk/ident2006a.shtml>

## **Conclusion**

MPC's recent explorations into anamorphosis have not only inspired other practitioners to follow suit in temporal typography, but have also inspired Channel 4 to explore the potential presentation of their logo in other settings. The virtual compression of space, as prompted by camera navigation in MPC's idents, was replicated in reality in an installation that appeared outside of the Channel 4 headquarters from 2008. In celebration of Channel 4's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a 48-foot tall steel model of the logo was constructed and installed at the company's headquarters (Ozler 2007). The component parts of the giant logo were not positioned on a single plane, but spaced apart, so that they could only be viewed in alignment from a position directly in front of the building. This '4', as a real-life arrangement of objects rather than computer generated models contained within a screen, highlights the fact that the behaviours seen in the 4 idents are not merely a product of temporal media, but are reproducible as a real-life parallax.

This installation reflects a shift in contemporary practice, away from the treatment of the logo as a flat symbol, towards the perception of a logo as a physical object. This shift in perception has prompted other brands to follow suit, with other typographic elements constructed from photorealistic component parts. Recent experiments in fluid typography have yielded numerous artefacts that owe much to the impact of Martin Lambie Nairn and MPC, but despite this, there is still no agreed-upon understanding of the behaviours that are exhibited in these artefacts. New terminology is required for practitioners and commentators to accurately describe this flourishing contemporary practice. It is only with new terminology that the innovation of Channel 4's idents may be accurately expressed and analysed.

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<sup>1</sup> For viewers who have already encountered one of these idents, the revelation of the '4' is expected. The everyday introductory moments become a period of anticipation.