

Nikki and Paulo – Paralyzed from the Start
An exploration of the changing dialogs between producers
and viewers of network television

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In an age of convergence culture, more and more producers of television shows are going beyond the medium of television to develop multiplatform, interactive, narrative experiences. Standing on the threshold of this change is *Lost*, a currently running television show on ABC about survivors of a plane crash who end up on a mysterious island. The producers of *Lost* have come up with a number of ways to engage fans beyond the scope of the television show, including mobisodes (short films released for cell phones), alternative reality games, and even a novel that was supposedly written by one of the victims of the crash of Oceanic Flight 815. The producers of *Lost* are also willing to engage in mediated conversations with the fans through the Official *Lost* Podcasts during a weekly segment in which they respond to fan questions. They have also admitted to making different "creative choices" in response to viewer reactions. This paper details an in depth examination of what happens in a convergence culture when the producers actively respond to specific fan-generated concerns with regards to a particular aspect of a show and how it affects both the producers and the audience. The main questions that I will answer are as follows: How have the producers of *Lost* made it known that they are willing to embrace convergence and participatory culture? How did the producers cater to the desires of the fans, as shown by the introduction and subsequent deaths of the characters of Nikki Fernandez and Paulo (no last name) in the third season of *Lost*? What does this mean for the nature of television shows and how will it influence the study of convergence culture?

In the study of television and fan cultures, it is important to make distinctions between different consumers of television. Fiske (1987) differentiates between the audience, a passive group of people who simply receive the program, and viewer, someone who actively watches television and derives both pleasure and meaning through this act. Pullen (2004) takes this one step further saying, "Some audience members dialogue more aggressively and sustainedly than others; they are fans (p. 80)." Jenkins (1992) lays out five main fan activities, including watching and re-watching shows with a strong emotional investment and a hyper-critical eye; learning how to interpret shows based on the fan community and through this creating a "meta-text" that is comprised of the bulk of knowledge that fans collectively have about a show; being active participants who, due to their knowledge and emotional investment, feel as though they have a right to write to producers and networks about a particular program or plot line or characters; creating cultural productions such as fan fiction, artwork, and online form posts; and creating an alternative social community by which they feel connected to other fans who share their passion. With the increasing popularity of the Internet and with the networks and producers encouraging audiences to take part in fan activities online, more viewers are participating in fandom, the collective term for the extent of fan activities, expanding both the number of fans and the extratextual items that keep fans engaged (Pullen, 2004). Pullen (2004) says, "Ultimately, fans' pervasive presence on the Internet may mean that stereotypes of the fan as a fringe obsessive will give way to views of the fan as a typical Internet user (p. 83)". Throughout this paper, I will be using the terms "audience" and "viewers" somewhat interchangeably but I will

continue to use the term "fan" for viewers who display a higher level of participation than an average viewer.

As touched upon in the previous paragraph, television shows are not constructed as sole entities; there are promotional materials, interviews, reviews, magazines, fan fictions, online discussions, and a variety of other material attached to any particular series. The collection of all items surrounding a television show is most often called the "meta-text", transmedia or extratextual extensions, or the universe of the show (Askwith, 2007; Jenkins, 1992). Fiske (1987) separates the texts into three levels: the primary level is the show itself; the secondary level is comprised of all of the various "official" texts that surround a show, such as interviews with the producers, official show guides, reviews, and promotional materials; the tertiary texts are texts produced by the viewers themselves, such as letters to the network or press, fan magazines, online discussions, and fan fiction. Fiske then examines how vertical readings of these three levels help to explain the meanings that are surrounding the texts at any given time. Askwith (2007) claims that with the reworking of broadcast models to include more than just the television show, networks are repurposing the secondary and tertiary texts to help "satisfy the audience's growing demand for related content (p. 43)." Therefore these texts can no longer be seen as inferior to the primary text, but instead all of the texts become part of the "engagement medium" surrounding television and as such should be described as "ancillary content" (Askwith, 2007).

Fans have always been active watchers of television shows, especially those labeled cult television shows. With the development of the VCR came fans who would

watch a show critically, often frame by frame; with the advent of the internet came the appearance of online message groups where fans could freely and instantly discuss favorite cult television shows with other fans. In the article "Do You Enjoy Making the Rest of Us Feel Stupid," Henry Jenkins (2006b) examines how fans of *Twin Peaks* used the Usenet group alt.tv.twinpeaks to discuss the episodes, look for clues, and work out theories about the enigmas of the show. The Usenet group "intensifies this process, allowing fans to compare notes, elaborate and refine theories through collaboration with other contributors. All of the participants saw the group as involved in communal enterprise (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 122)." The interactions between the fans on this group helped them to make sense of a very convoluted mystery show and let them feel that only through this community could they come to a full understanding of all of the nuances of the text. This was one of the first times that private speculations and discussion about a television show happened in such a public space (Jenkins, 2006b).

However, for all the discussion that happened over alt.tv.twinpeaks, there was no confirmation that the showrunners (executive producers who are involved with the day-to-day production of a show) ever paid attention to the group, even if some members speculated that they might have (Jenkins, 2006b). In another article, "Interactive Audiences," Jenkins (2006b) states that, "Television producers are increasingly knowledgeable about their fan communities, often soliciting their support through networked computing (p. 145)." He goes on to recount how the creator-producer of *Babylon 5*, J. Michael Straczinski, would often log onto the message boards and interact directly with fans of the show. However, his lawyers got worried about the possibility of fans suing him for plagiarizing their ideas. This case illustrates how television

executives are still not comfortable with the fans having direct access to the producers, especially if they have the ability to influence the outcome of a show (Jenkins, 2006b).

While television networks and producers have always paid attention to television ratings, it is not until recently that they have been able to receive such immediate content specific feedback about their series. This feedback allows them to make mid-season adjustments to the show, as opposed to networks simply canceling shows that are not doing well. June Deery (2003) argues that TV companies are now starting to take interest in fan activities online and even encourage audiences to participate in these online discussions. She recounts how the "*X-files* staff did read fan sites and did take on some suggestions occasionally (p. 177)." In fact, producers of the show were taking note of which characters the fans liked and disliked and were increasing or decreasing some of the roles based on this response (Deery, 2003). Producers of *Dawson's Creek* were known to moderate many of the fan sites that sprung up about the series (Jenkins, 2006a). However, Andrejevic (2008) argues that while online message boards, such as Television Without Pity (TWP), can serve as focus groups for producers, it is unknown how much influence the fans really have on the outcome of the show. He also claims that the users of these forums are interested in developing ways in which to improve their own critical analysis of their favorite shows and in reading the postings of other users whose comments they respect. This analysis reinforces the traditional idea that fans are more interested in building communities with other fans than they are in communicating with the producers.

Convergence culture, as set forth by Jenkins, is the way in which different types of media are being used in concurrence by both producers and consumers in order to

enhance the experience of engaging with the text as well as giving the fans the ability to take an active role in exploring the world that the producers have created. This "interplay between many such works can create an unprecedented degree of complexity and generate a depth of engagement that will satisfy the most committed viewer (Jenkins, 2004, p. 40)." Jenkins (2006a) says that convergence is "both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process (p. 18)." From the top-down, networks and producers are using the Internet to promote television shows through official show Web sites and encourage viewers to participate in official show or network forums, providing information and a place for community that was once only available through fan generated content (Pullen, 2004). This multiplatform approach to marketing tries to pull viewers further into the show, turning them into fans who will then help to build the viewership of a show (Johnson, 2007).

While networks are trying to use the Internet to make fandom more mainstream, fans continue to use convergence culture to interact with the show in a multitude of ways. Fans involve themselves in online counter-cultures, for example, by writing and publishing fan fictions or using wikis to document and explore the nuances of a specific show (Pullen, 2004). In his thesis "Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an engagement medium," Askwith (2007) states, "These [products, features, and activities] reposition television as an engagement medium by providing new opportunities for the viewer to participate both with and around the television text in meaningful ways (p. 51)."

Lost premiered on ABC on September 22, 2004. The basic premise of the series is that Oceanic Flight 815 crashed onto a mysterious island and the 48 survivors have to deal with the island and with each other. The show revolves around 10-12 main characters, the survivors "A-Team". Each hour-long episode is composed of two interwoven pieces: what is currently happening on the island (which in the *Lost* universe is presently around Christmas 2004) and flashbacks focusing on a specific character, explaining what his/her life was like before he/she came to the island. In this way, the show is able to maintain an active ensemble cast while still having character-centric episodes.

Lost is what Gwendolyn Jones (2004) terms a "portal" show because while the main events happen in one location (the island), it also becomes a gateway to other locations, and in this case times, as seen through the flashbacks. What makes *Lost* so special, and such a popular show, is the way the producers weave fantastical elements and clues about the enigmas of the island into each episodes. While viewers care deeply about the individual characters, it is the mysteries of the island, too numerous to list here, that pull the stories together, forming a backbone upon which the rest of the drama is played out (Card, 2006). These complex puzzles drive viewers to not only watch the next episode, but to go back and re-watch previous episodes looking for missed pieces (Askwith, 2007). The interplay between the central questions of the show, the deeply philosophical questions, and the engaging interpersonal dramas are what the showrunners believe attracts both mainstream and cult audiences (Askwith, 2007).

Much like *Twin Peaks* and *X-Files* before it, *Lost* has become an interactive experience with many Web sites, Usenet groups, discussion boards, and wikis populated by large groups of fans who analyze all aspects of the show, often through multiple re-watchings as mentioned above. However, *Lost* has an advantage over its predecessors for these days a larger percentage of the audience has become technologically proficient (Millman, 2006). Furthermore, the producers of *Lost* have embraced the concept of convergence culture on a variety of levels, creating an unusual relationship between the producers and consumers (Askwith, 2007). The producers purposely include clues that only an active viewer going through the show frame-by-frame using a DVR or watch the show on DVD will be able to catch (Askwith, 2007). They are also known to create episodes that discredit popular fan theories, such as the often-circulated speculation that entire show is taking place in one character's mind (Johnson, 2007).

The network has also given viewers a chance to access the show in more ways than just through broadcast television. In addition to following the trend of releasing seasons on DVD, on April 30, 2006 ABC launched a broadband video initiative, which allowed users to stream high-quality videos of their shows, including *Lost*. This initiative was so popular that they now offer some of their programs in high-definition streaming. (Askwith, 2007). As of the writing of this paper, the first three seasons and as much of the fourth that has currently been aired of *Lost* are offered in this format and it should be noted that it is the only show to be offered as such (see Figure 1). Also, between seasons three and

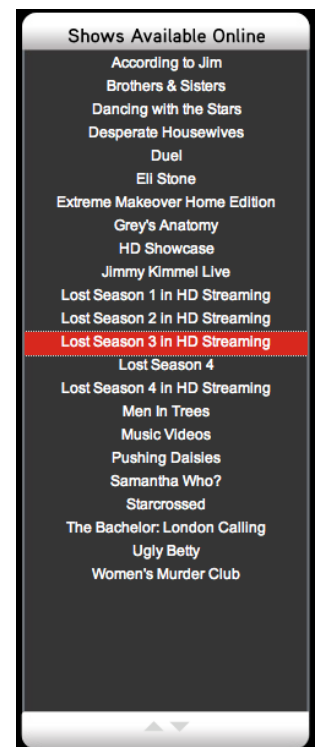


Figure 1

four, a mini-series, called *Lost: the Missing Pieces* was produced. It consisted of 13 two-three minute mobisodes which were later broadcast on ABC.com. As Askwith (2007) says, "the ability for media consumers to access the program and related content via the Internet, iPods, mobile phones and other channels is a critical aspect of *Lost's* construction as 'engagement television' (p. 123)." It also shows how viewers are choosing to access television shows in a larger variety of ways, further confirming the notion that audiences in general have become more comfortable with a multimedia approach to receiving content.

In addition providing access to the show through a variety of media, the producers of *Lost* have created an extratextual universe that crosses into our world on multitude of platforms, engaging viewers on a range of different levels. Many of the fictional companies or organizations that are referenced in the series have their own Web sites, such as such as Oceanic-Air.com and TheHansoFoundation.org. Encouraged by responses to these Web sites, ABC published *The Bad Twin*, a novel that was supposedly written by Gary Troupe, one of the victims of the plane crash. The manuscript for the book was shown being read by one of the main characters, Hurley, in episode 2x13, *The Long Con*. *The Bad Twin* was a success for the production team, peaking at #12 on *The New York Times* bestseller list. The popularity of this book suggests that viewers are willing to accept the crossing of diegetic elements, elements that are part of the narrative of the show, into the physical world of the consumer (Askwith, 2007; Johnson, 2007).

To date there have been two Alternative Reality Games (ARGs) that further blur these lines: The Lost Experience (TLE), which took place during the summer between

the second and third seasons, and Find 815, which took place in the five weeks leading up to the start of the fourth season. These ARGs, which took place in the *Lost* universe with characters that were not seen part of the broadcast show, led fans on scavenger hunts in order to figure out clues and possibly find out answers to some of the mysteries of the show. In addition to leaving hints on diegetic Web sites, clues were also hidden on commercial Web sites, such as Sprite.com and Monster.com. Special candy bars, which were seen being eaten on *Lost*, were distributed to fans who knew where to find them, and characters from TLE appeared live at San Diego ComicCon and on late night talk shows. The ARGs represent the producers' desire to explore non-traditional story telling methods (Askwith, 2007). Furthermore, according to Johnson (2007), they "reshape the relationships between industry, audience, and text (p. 73)." By providing new ways to interact with the show's universe and by engaging fans who come together to use their collective intelligence to assemble the clues, the fans start to become part of the production process.

Starting near the beginning of season two, ABC began producing the Official *Lost* Podcasts, which are generally released for free two or three days after an episode airs. The executive producers of *Lost*, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, have a segment at the end of each episode in which they reply to fan questions that have been posted to the message boards on ABC.com. Podcast listeners, addressed as "*Lost* fans¹," have come to feel as though the showrunners are friends or acquaintances and "often develop a parasocial relationship with them (Askwith, 2007, p. 139)." Through the podcast and the relationships that the listeners feel they have with the producers, the showrunners are encouraging fans to not only take a more critical look at the show, but

¹ For example on October 30, 2006

also to be willing to ask questions about it and even criticize choices that the producers have made. Jenkins (1992) says, "Fans have little say about what happens to their characters...but fans claim the right to protest and protest loudly decisions contradicting their perceptions of what is desirable or appropriate (p. 118)." However, new media technologies are allowing the fans and producers of *Lost* to change this perception.

A recent implementation of convergence culture, as described above, can be seen in an examination of fan reaction to the creation and subsequent death of Nikki and Paulo. In the third season of *Lost*, two new characters, Nikki Fernandez and Paulo (no last name), played by Kiele Sanchez and Rodrigo Santoro respectively, were briefly introduced at the end of episode 3x3, *Further Instructions*². They played a more prominent role in episode 3x5, *The Cost of Living*³, where they go on an adventure with some of the main characters, and minor roles in a few of the other season three episodes. These characters were supposed to be survivors of the plane crash who had been there all along, but were always in the background. The background survivors are what the fans call "redshirts," after the random ensigns on *Star Trek* who would come along on a mission only to be killed off, showing the audience the inherent danger of any given situation. Fan response to these two characters, whom the audience had never seen before, as they were not cast until the third season, was less than welcoming. In fact, it has been stated that they were "universally despised (Jensen and Snierson, 2007)."

² First aired on October 18, 2006

³ First aired on November 1, 2006

At the start of episode 3x14, *Exposé*⁴, Nikki and Paulo are found presumably dead. The episode jumps between the main characters trying to figure out what happened to them and flashbacks of the lives of Nikki and Paulo, focusing on what they were doing while the rest of the narrative of *Lost* happened around them. At the end of the episode it is revealed to the audience that Nikki and Paulo are not dead, but were temporarily paralyzed. However, the main characters are not aware of this and unknowingly bury the hapless duo alive. This shocking ending was supposedly done in response to the negative fan reaction (Jensen and Armstrong, 2007).

In order to fully explore the new dynamic that seems to be emerging between producers and consumers of interactive or engagement media, I examined the decisions that lead to the emergence of the characters Nikki and Paulo; why and in what ways the fans reacted negatively towards them and what the producers said; the subsequent killing of the characters; and the fan response to the horrific nature of their deaths; and how the producers answered questions about the decisions they made. I undertook this investigation in several ways. I carefully examined the episodes in which Nikki and Paulo appeared, especially the three mentioned in the previous paragraph. I listened to the Official *Lost* Podcasts in which Lindelof and Cuse discuss Nikki and Paulo. I studied fan reactions to the characters and the episodes on two major online forums: Television Without Pity and alt.tv.lost, the latter of which I was able to access through Google Groups. While I read through many posts on both forums, I focused more on TWoP, due to the different styles of the forums – TWoP has fewer threads but with more posts per thread where as alt.tv.lost has more threads with fewer posts per

⁴ First aired on March 28, 2007

thread. I also wanted to look at the *Lost* message boards on ABC.com, but unfortunately they only go back 90 days and therefore I was not be able to use them as primary sources in my analysis. I read online articles from major popular culture magazines, such as Entertainment Weekly and TV Guide, which provided both interviews with Lindelof and Cuse as well as episode reviews and personal opinions of the column writers. I also looked for data about the ratings and number of people watching individual episodes of the third season of *Lost*.

First, it is important to illustrate that Nikki and Paulo were introduced partially due to fan curiosity and partially due to writer curiosity, how the negative fan reactions was an influence, along with ratings and gut feelings, on the producers of *Lost*, causing them to shorten their plan for these characters, and how some fans were still disappointed in what happened. I looked at the time codes of posts to see if reactions to the characters and episodes happened universally throughout the *Lost* fandom all at the same time or if hating Nikki and Paulo was championed by was a few loud voices with others eventually jumping on the bandwagon. By studying this case, I tried to understand how consumers are not only putting themselves in the place of the producer, but are actually influencing the producers of a show, producing a new set of interactions between these two groups. Moreover, I hoped to put a perspective on the new powers that some fans feel that they have over a television show like *Lost*.

As mentioned earlier, although there were only 48 survivors of the crash, only 10-12 of them became main characters on *Lost*. Occasionally one of the background Lostaways (a play on the word "castaway" that is used by fans to refer to the collective

group of survivors, both main and background) would talk to a main character or would be referenced by one. In the thread "Your Season Two Wishlist,"⁵ BanjoSteve, who started the thread, wished for an episode where the background people are in the foreground and the main characters are in the background⁶. Later on in the thread, innamorata says, "I understand the redshirts can't talk but the clique can mention them, as in our lostaways acknowledge they exist and interact with them daily."⁷ Both of these posts were made in late May 2005, and there were a number of other posts to this thread that agreed with these sentiments. However, on February 1, 2006 (partially into season two), RatPack posted to the same thread, "Take care of the characters you already got! Don't add more! Don't neglect the stories of the original characters in favor of new people."⁸ This was probably in reaction to the addition of survivors from the tail section of the plane who were introduced in season two.

In the first post of the thread "Your Season Three Wishlist,"⁹ murlough23 once again brings up the idea of bringing in the background characters,

"Let the redshirts do stuff. I know, it means you have to pay extras in order to let them have lines.... The redshirts don't have to get flashbacks or increasingly convoluted backstories. I just want to see that they're something more than mindless sheep who quietly go along with whatever the main 14 (or however many characters) say they should do. Hell, if you want to be really daring, have an episode with a B-plot devoted to a secret shared among the redshirts that none of the clique-ish main cast knows about.... Don't introduce a major character if you don't have a long-term story arc planned for that character."¹⁰

Again, the frustration of seeing people in the background without knowing anything about them has become something that fans expressed, hoping the producers would

⁵ <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3127320>, started May 26, 2005

⁶ Post #1

⁷ Post #44

⁸ Post #350

⁹ <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3141333>, started May 25, 2006

¹⁰ Post #1

listen. Other posters to this thread agreed with murlogh23, including stp00005 who wanted either an episode about the background characters or for the producers to not include them at all because "Every single time one of these anonymous people is standing around behind one of the major characters I just get distracted."¹¹

However, some people, such as monkeylove, did not want the producers to add any new characters saying, "adding new characters means we lose the interest on the ones that we're invested in.... New interesting characters would make this slightly more palatable, but the characters that count are the ones that we have emotional attachments too."¹² This again was probably backlash against the introduction of the "Tailies" in the second season. When it was found out in early July 2006 that there was a good chance two out of the three new people cast for the third season of *Lost* would be background characters brought to the front, youdidntseeme23 posted, "I really can't stand NEW Characters. Like brand new ones? That have been on the island the whole time, we just haven't seen them? Like wtf?! How about giving some redshirts roles...so at least it will be more believable."¹³ Other wishes that were repeated by multiple posters were for more strong female characters and to stop pointless deaths or at least to stop introducing new characters and then killing them off before the season is over.

On the October 30, 2006 podcast, the showrunners answer a fan question asking about seeing more background characters on the show. They mention that there were two new characters at the end of the third episode and that the audience will learn more about them and their backstory as time goes on. In a recent interview with the A.V. Club, Lindelof said,

¹¹ Post #32

¹² Post #127

¹³ Post #346

"For Nikki and Paulo, we kept hearing fans saying, "What's going on with the other 30 people on the island? Why don't they go on any adventures?" And we were like, "That's a good and legitimate gripe, and let's see if we can figure out a way to get some of those guys into the show (Murray, 2008)."

What is interesting to note is that even though fans were saying that they wanted to see more of the "redshirts" what they wanted was for the producers to give speaking rolls to familiar faces, not new faces. However, the producers chose to bring in new faces instead to try to answer this fan desire. In this sense, the producers were listening to the fans, but not fully embracing what they had to say.

After Nikki and Paulo were quickly introduced at the end of *Further Instructions*, fans on both TWoP and alt.tv.lost were talking about them within 24 hours of the show's airing. Some people noticed how attractive or "hot" they were, leading to them being nicknamed either "Ken and Barbie" or "Shannon and Boone 2.0" (Shannon and Boone were attractive characters that had been killed off in earlier seasons). But most of the other comments were negative. On the thread "3-3: 'Further Instructions' 2006.10.18,¹⁴" TWoP fans felt that the characters were introduced "haphazardly" and in "the lamest way ever." Another common sentiment was that the actors were bad, their lines were "over-rehearsed", and that they felt "forced". Just an hour and a half after the episode aired, LostLyra commented, "I hated those newbies. They seemed to mess up their few lines."¹⁵ QueenoftheImps posted to "3-4: 'Every Man For Himself' 2006.10.25¹⁶" the following sentiment, "[Paulo] and Nikki have me rooting for their early demise. A slow, painful demise."¹⁷ Not only did the viewers notice the new faces, but the reactions were

¹⁴ <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3147313>

¹⁵ Post #138

¹⁶ <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3147565>

¹⁷ Post #95

fairly immediate and there were very few contradictory opinions, most of which were along the lines of "we don't know them yet, give them a chance."

When Nikki and Paulo got to go on an adventure with four of the major characters during *The Cost of Living*, the reactions to the two of them became even more hostile. Even though they had already been introduced, some people still didn't know who they were, wondering as glassman did, "am I LOST or have we not gotten any history of these 2 before?"¹⁸ to which Brandon prophetically responded, "They were in a couple other episodes earlier this seasons. I think the audience is being set up to accept them as minor recurring characters, only for the writers to suddenly and brutally kill them off." As opposed to just disliking them, more fans were responding with comments about hating or not caring at all about the new characters. On the TWoP thread "3-5: 'The Cost of Living' 2006.11.01,"¹⁹ Crunchie expresses both of these sentiments by stating, "Still hate the new main characters. Do I know their names? No. Do I want to? No."²⁰ The most common complaints were that the characters didn't fit with the rest of the cast, they were too "shiny", "hot", or artificial, they were dull or unmemorable, and they were annoying. There were also a number of calls for the deaths of the characters. Once again fans felt as though Sanchez and Santoro were bad actors and/or were given bad dialogue by the writers. A few people even felt as though Mr. Eko (a "taillie" introduced in Season two who dies in this episode) was killed off in order to make room for the new characters. What is interesting is that the

¹⁸ "Who are the new 2?" - http://groups.google.com/group/alt.tv.lost/browse_thread/thread/11d6ff715ee2e3ab/ - November 2 2006

¹⁹ <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3147836>

²⁰ Post #103

producers expected fans to be angry in this way, even saying on the November 6, 2006 podcast:

"[Damon Lindelof]: This is a cool window into the behind-the-scenes, protoserial function of *Lost*, because we knew that ABC would not be able to resist running promos saying that someone would die this episode. It's a sweeps episode, we only do six episodes; everybody's worrying about the ratings this year, so we knew they were going to go, 'Someone's going to DIE.' So, we introduced these two characters, Paulo and Nikki at the end of the Locke episode, who were sort of just there all along, so when they volunteer to go on this trek...

[Carlton Cuse]: You think, 'dead'. I mean, they're dead.

DL: You think, 'These people are going to be the ones that will die. Which is so lame, because we don't even know them. We've never seen them before, they're going on this trek, and ABC is going to completely sell us a false bill of goods... this is the someone who's going to die?'

CC: But no, we kill the beloved Mr. Eko. What are you guys thinking about?²¹"

Later in the podcast they mention that they both like Nikki and Paulo. However, through analysis of fan responses, it seems as though the death of Mr. Eko was not the primary reason that fans did not like the characters, but a combination of the other factors listed above.

By the February 12, 2007 podcast, Lindelof and Cuse are aware that Nikki and Paulo are "completely hated by everybody and their mother." However, in responding to justblaze05, a fan who has given them a detailed way to kill Paulo, they say that the fan will be sorry about what s/he said and that Nikki and Paulo will be getting "a lot of play in an upcoming episode" and that will make the fan "change [his or her] mind" about them. We can assume that since the producers are aware of many of the fans' feelings towards these characters, they are actually addressing everyone who shared justblaze05's wish. Just before the airing of *Exposé*, Jeff "Doc" Jensen, a writer for Entertainment Weekly and *Lost* fan, reported that "As executive producer Damon Lindelof told EW in January: 'We had a plan when we introduced them... when the plan

²¹ Transcript provided by Lostpedia.com member Pandora.

is executed, Nikki and Paulo will be iconic characters on the show' (2007b)." On the March 20 and 26, 2007 podcasts, Cuse once again states that he loves Nikki and Paulo and is looking forward to their upcoming episode. However, he does say that, "I'm sure that there will be a lot of people that will jump on various websites like Television Without Pity and say that we've jumped the shark with this episode."²² Although the producers are paying attention to fans' feelings at some level, they are still trying to prove that they made good decisions and should be trusted by the viewers and therefore people should continue to watch the show.

By the time *Exposé* aired, many fans already disliked Nikki and Paulo, as illustrated above. Some viewers were wary of an episode focused on the two of them. However, after the airing of the episode, viewers seemed to be split into three camps. As could be predicted, some viewers truly hated *Exposé*, feeling that the characters were still annoying and got what they deserved. After finding out that they were murderers and diamond thieves, these fans felt that Nikki and Paulo were not redeemable in the least bit, and that the show was badly written and acted. On the thread "3rd Season Lost - Exposé - 5 star poll - SPOILERS AHOY !" from alt.tv.lost, Todd summed up these feelings, "Two of the most uninteresting characters ever. And I rejoiced when they died early on. And I cheered when Nikki got buried alive. The writing was godawful.... All around garbage tonight."²³ Others either did not like the episode or did not care about it because it did not advance the overall story of *Lost*. However, a large number of posters to both online forums were pleasantly surprised that they enjoyed *Exposé*, saying that the twist ending made it feel like an episode of *Hitchcock*

²² Transcript provided by Lostpedia.com member Jackdavinci.

²³ http://groups.google.com/group/alt.tv.lost/browse_thread/thread/f76817e29cfb96d0 - March 28, 2007

Presents or *The Twilight Zone*²⁴. None of the posters, not even the ones who liked the episode such as Uncle Benzene²⁵, thought that Nikki and Paulo were now "iconic". What was interesting was that no matter what people thought of *Exposé*, of Nikki and Paulo, and of the actors that played them, no one stated that they felt personally or collectively responsible for the characters dying in such a terrible way. This demonstrates that while fans enjoy the knowledge that there is a good chance that they are being listened to, they still conform to the old dynamic of believing that the producers are the ones who have all of the power.

Another point that divided posters was whether or not the way that Nikki and Paulo's loose ends were tied up in *Exposé* meant that the producers and writers had a clear idea of where they were going with these characters from the beginning or if they were just making stuff up as they went along. In the having a plan camp, blakebabie said, "I agree that this episode did not advance the overall *Lost* story, but it did a nice job of tying up all the loose ends surrounding Nikki & Paulo. Definitely gives you hope that the producers know what they are doing!²⁶" On the writers have no idea what they are doing side, MoreRidonkulous said,

"And I don't believe this was the plan for them all along. This smells so much of a knee-jerk reaction to fan hate-ons for the characters. Someone remembered that Paulo went to the bathroom and miscellaneous other nonsense details and cobbled together a story. Originally, if they'd been actual working characters, I bet other things were planned for them.²⁷"

The executive producers have said many times that they do not introduce any major element onto the show without having a plan for it. On the March 30, 2007 podcast,

²⁴ "3-14: 'Exposé' 2007.03.28" - <http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=3152463> - Post #96 and Post #129.

²⁵ Post #225

²⁶ Post #61

²⁷ Post #54

Cuse, along with writers Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, explain that they had an idea to have an actress on the show since season one "And then we just thought when was the right time to put them in and I think this year we realized we'd introduce Paulo and Nikki.²⁸" However, they went on to say that while they enjoyed creating *Exposé*, they realized early on that they were "being too ambitious" and did not "have time for Nikki and Paulo." Jensen and Armstrong (2007) reported that originally Nikki and Paulo would have a number of episodes, but due to the fan reaction, "the producers decided in December to telescope their ideas into a single kiss-off episode." What is interesting is that later that year, Littleton (2007) writes that,

"In truth, Lindelof sez they're not too worried about running afoul of fans, because the writers' room collectively has a pretty good sense of when things are clicking -- and when they're not -- at any given moment during production.

'We had the feeling with Nikki and Paulo that it wasn't right about a month before the fans started reacting,' Lindelof says matter-of-factly. 'We were already starting to think, "Maybe our instinct here has been wrong.'"

The producers also stated many of the scenes that Sanchez and Santoro shot for other episodes ended up getting cut because they did not work with the rest of the story.

When they decided to get rid of the characters, the writers chose to bury them alive to get a reaction out of the fans (Gough, 2007). This demonstrates that while the producers do make some changes based on fan feedback, they still try to stay true to their original vision for the show. The producers believe they have a good feel for what is working and what is not, whether or not the fans believe this to be the case.

As described in many studies before this one, the producers of a television show either paid attention to the fan forums or were somehow informed of what the reactions

²⁸ Transcription by Allison King

were. In this case, they even predicted that the fans would be unhappy by some of their actions. Even though this predictions turned out to be true, they were not for the reasons that the producers thought they would be. While the producers did make a mid-course change, it is clear that they did not do it solely for due to the fan reactions. They had their own feelings about the course of the show and the fact that the number of viewers dropped over the course of season three probably affected things as well. In fact, *Exposé* was the least watched episode of season three, with only 11.7 million viewers (see Figure 2). The producers did state very clearly that the way in which Nikki and Paulo died was because of how much the characters were hated. However, as stated above, it seems as if the fans did not take ownership of this concept; most of them were happy that the producers chose to get rid of the characters and did so in such a "creepy" way.

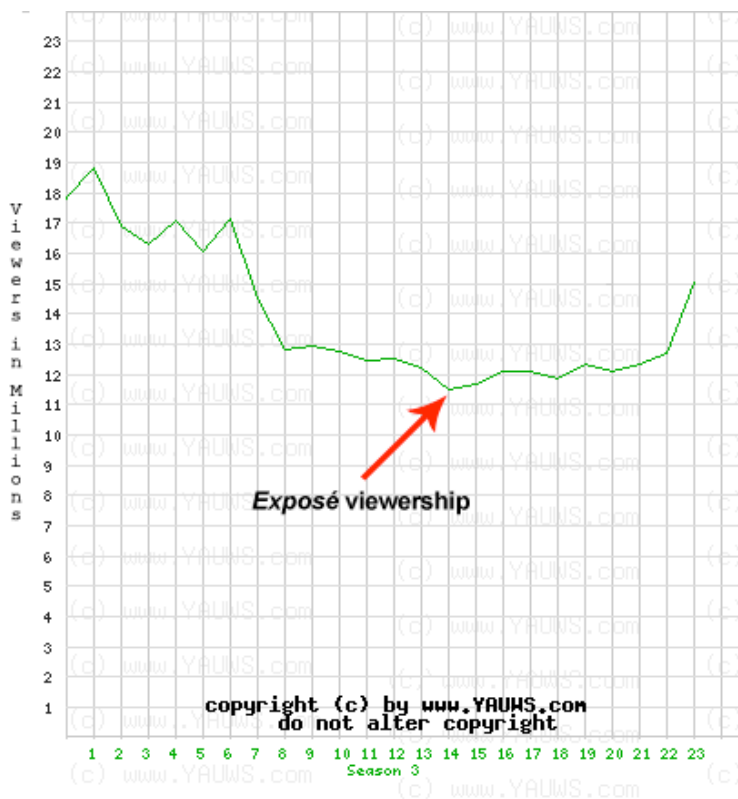


Figure 2

Another interesting point is that the producers seem to have pulled back from their original statements that they try to be in tune with the fans. When asked recently if they pay "a significant amount of attention to fan response," Cuse answered that "we do, but in sort of a filtered manner. We don't really get on the boards and read all those comments." Lindelof adds, "But there is a groundswell of what we hear about the show.... So we do get a sense of what the fans are thinking and feeling. And what the critics are saying, because it's in the paper." (Murray, 2008). This seems to contradict the air of accessibility that they try to give off through their podcasts, public appearances, and acknowledgements of the new ways that they are trying to tell a story. However, fans are usually aware that the showrunners are too busy to actually read through everything, as DaLovin Dj says on the *Exposé* thread on TWoP, "Also, the people behind shows (or there lackeys) monitor places like this."²⁹

Although fans have been using the Internet to express opinions about and collectively analyze a series for many years, only recently have networks and producers started to play with online and other transmedia experiences as a way to draw people into the show. The goal is to get new viewers actively involved, thereby turning them into fans. This is especially important in today's society where so many different programs, not to mention different media, are vying for the consumers' attention. As mentioned near the beginning of this paper, *Lost* is one of the shows on the forefront of this changing dynamic because the producers are willing to try different ways of storytelling. Therefore, it is important study the *Lost* universe not only from a producer

²⁹ Post #487

and a revenue oriented perspective, as Johnson (2007) and Askwith (2007) have, but also to look at how the audiences are actively responding to this encouragement to participate. The interplay between the producers and fans of *Lost* can be seen to be more of a dialogue than a delayed reaction, due to the immediacy of new media technologies.

As networks and producers come to understand and possibly exploit the use of fan generated content on message boards across the Internet, fans are starting to believe that they are being listened to by someone who is connected with the television show and their feelings are being communicated to the producers (Andrejevic, 2008; Johnson, 2007). However, there is still a reluctance on both sides of the equation to go the distance that would provide for a truly collaborative and empowering experience for everyone involved. The fans, on the whole, still want to be entertained, or at least have something to complain about, and the producers and networks are still driven by economic pressures (Johnson, 2007). While viewers are becoming fans as they engage with the variety of extratextual elements that have been created around *Lost*, it seems as though the producers and networks still think along the older terms; they regard these "opportunities for engagement" not as a way of measuring how well the entirety of the meta-text is received or how much of a "cult-like appeal" it has, but as a way to bring audiences back to what they call "the mothership", the show itself (Askwith, 2007). The realm of media studies needs to continue to explore and reevaluate this dialogue as the nature of television programming and the expectations of the fans continues to evolve.

As the intent of this research was mostly exploratory, there were a number of possibilities for studies that I came across but did not have time or space to pursue in the course of this paper. The first study I would like to propose is one that examines what is being said by fans on the official ABC.com *Lost* message boards and see how the opinions and critiques of these fans compare to those who are posting to unofficial forums. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the ABC.com forums, a study of this nature would have to be done immediately after an event occurred, and as such it may be difficult to identify a good opportunity when one happens. Something that jumped out at me while going through both TWoP and alt.tv.lost was the wave of similar response to a situation throughout the *Lost* fandom by those who were using these forums. As discussed earlier, within hours of an episode being broadcast, fans were expressing similar opinions as other fans both on the same and across the two forums. This leads me to think that there must be some connection between fans, most of whom have never met each other in a face-to-face situation. The general agreement of thoughts and ideas seems to be too rapid to just be a number of loud or well-respected fans stating their opinions and then the rest of the fans agreeing with them. However, an extensive study would be required to test this hypothesis.

The final study that interested me was one occurred to me because of a guest star at the beginning of *Exposé*, Billy Dee Williams. I started to wonder if fans of *Star Wars* had a similar reaction to Lando Calrissian, a character introduced in the second movie of the three-movie saga, as those of *Lost* did to Nikki and Paulo. In both cases a random character/characters shows up in the middle of the action and inserts himself/themselves into the action involving the established characters. In his article

"The Kiss-Off of the Spider Woman," Jensen (2007) mentions that he hated Lando for just these reasons. In order to do this study, one would need to gather data about *Star Wars* fans reactions from the early 1980s.

On the surface, the introduction and deaths of Nikki and Paulo on *Lost* looks to be a prime example of the changing dynamics between fans and producers that has been touted by scholars of convergence media. Their creation was admittedly brought about due to fans' curiosity that was picked up by the producers and worked into the show. However, while fans and producers quickly realized that the characters did not work with the series, the way in which the producers "fixed" their mistake caused a number of interesting divisions of fan reactions. The resolution of the Nikki and Paulo storyline did not give the fans a strong sense of a feeling of control over the direction of the show, which would have been a sign of a change in the way that fans felt that they could interact with producers. Also, instead of embracing the fan influence and interest, producers have actually taken a step back and have said that they have to do what they believe is right for the show, instead of succumbing to fan pressure, all while trying to assure fans that they do have a plan. Ultimately, I have to agree with both Askwith (2007) and Johnson (2007) in that while the producers are willing to try to use different forms of engagement mediums that allow fans new ways to access the meta-text of the show, the producers are still driven by established business models. As such, the fans are unsure of where they fit in the big picture once they adapt to this new way of storytelling. What can be seen in this case study is the future potential for both fans and producers to develop new relationships as media converges and new opportunities for engagement arise.

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