EDITORIAL

The Brando Brand

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Perhaps one day movie stars and celebrities will leave their names and likenesses to the public domain. That would clear up what might be called the Brando problem — the case of a major public figure who dies and leaves behind a potent if contradictory image and no clear commercial legacy. The effort to create a Brando brand out of the Marlon Brando trust is in the hands of his rather oddly assorted trustees: a producer, an accountant and his former personal assistant. So far, their major activity has been suing companies for infringing upon Brando's name, which is trademarked.

As Michael Cieply wrote in The Times this week, the trustees have just filed suit against the operators of the so-called Brando Loft in Los Angeles's Broadcast Center Apartments. (The suit notes that the Brando name is also being used without permission elsewhere, including on the Brando floor plan in a Miami Beach condo.)

Creating a meaningful brand out of Brando — as opposed to merely warning off those who use his name without permission — will be no easy task. The search for the truly marketable Brando is likely to take some interesting twists.

Will it be the young man who starred in the drama “The Wild One”? The sullen but brilliant stage actor? Will it evoke thoughts of Don Corleone or Jor-El or Maria Schneider? Or will it be the figure who retreated to a private atoll in the South Pacific, where the trustees are planning to build a Brando-themed, ecologically minded resort?

Compared to the largely unitary legacy of Elvis Presley, Brando — that is whoever he was when he wasn’t acting — is a mist. He is a perfect example of the figure who, in an ideal world, would have been released to the public in whose presence his name was made.