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Expanded Mockuworlds. Mockumentary as a Transmedial Narrative Style

Abstract

Customarily, mockumentary tends to be discussed merely as a filmic and televisual form. Yet, on closer inspection, it proves to be a narrative style that not only can easily be employed in a variety of different medial contexts but is also suitable for delivering a single story across various platforms. In particular, the article seeks to demonstrate that it is not infrequent for the storyworld of a filmic or televisual mockumentary to be extended on one or more media through paratexts that are in themselves self-contained mockumentaries, thus giving life to out-and-out expanded mockuworlds.

1. Introduction

The notion of transmedia storytelling started to make inroads into public debate in relation to a mockumentary: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) (cf. JENKINS 2006: 101). Indeed, this movie's release was preceded and followed by a vast number of what Jonathan Gray describes as »incorporated paratexts« (GRAY 2010: 210). In other words, aside from the film poster and analogous accompanying texts aimed merely at branding *The Blair Witch Project* and at shaping its meaning, one could find diverse paratexts that added to its storyworld and allowed »viewers chances to explore that world further or even to contribute to it« (GRAY 2010: 210). An example is the movie's website, which not only provided a framework for its

narrative (cf. JENKINS 2006: 102) but also prolonged the story and introduced two new characters through a section entitled »The Aftermath«.[1] Therefore, in order to gain an effective understanding of its surprising success, this mockumentary couldn't be thought of »just as a film«, because that would have meant loosing »the bigger picture« (JENKINS 2006: 101). As a consequence, in the discussions surrounding the movie, the concept of transmedia storytelling began circulating.

However, what I intend to draw attention to is that, if the diffusion of this notion is linked precisely to a mockumentary, it might not be by chance. Undeniably, that of *The Blair Witch Project*, for instance, is not simply »a narrative that includes a series of stories expressed through different media« (SCOLARI 2009: 600). More precisely, it is a transmedial mockumentary storyworld. That is to say, with the exclusion of the film's sequel *Book of Shadows. Blair Witch 2* (2000), the texts throughout which this narrative has been expanded onto the other media platforms involved are mockumentaries too.[2] For example, the aforementioned website portrayed the three students as if they had been real-life youths and their disappearance as if it had actually occurred, by providing photographs of them as kids, news feeds on their vanishing, pictures of the material retrieved in the woods by the police, interviews with Heather's mother and with the private investigator entrusted by the three undergraduates' families to search for them and so on. Analogously, the television program *Curse of the Blair Witch* (1999), which was created »utilizing the leftover footage from the film« (ROSCOE 2000: 4) and was aired on the Sci-Fi Channel the same day of the movie's theatrical release, was structured as an expositional documentary in the vein of the late 1970s series on supernatural phenomena *In Search of...* (1976–1982). The book *The Blair Witch Project. A Dossier* (1999) was, likewise, presented as edited by the allegedly noted occult journalist D.A. Stern and it contained an array of those »exhibits« (COLOMBO 1984: 50) (e.g., documents, interviews, articles, and reports feignedly correlated to the investigation on Heather, Joshua, and Michael's vanishing) which, according to Italian researcher Fausto Colombo, tend to be perceived as traces of an event having effectively happened in the real-world (cf. COLOMBO 1984: 50). Even the movie's music CD, *Josh's Blair Witch Mix* (1999), was pretended to be a compilation found inside the car of the three disappeared youths. Therefore, it is no coincidence that scholar Craig Hight describes *The Blair Witch Project* as »a cross-platform mockumentary« (HIGHT 2008: 214).

Together with that of *Cloverfield* (2008), that of the *Blair Witch Project* is possibly the most known expanded mockuworld, but it is not just a one-off.

[1] More precisely, herein are introduced the characters of Heather's mother and of the private investigator Buck Buchanan. Among this mockumentary's incorporated paratexts, there are as well a television program, a book, mockumentary-style magazine articles, a music CD, and a filmic sequel (cf. HOPGOOD 2006; JENKINS 2006: 101).

[2] Though *Book of Shadows* is not a mockumentary, on occasion of its release were produced the short film *Burkittsville 7* (2000) and the television program *Shadow of the Blair Witch* (2000), which do employ the mockumentary narrative style and can thus be seen as part of the same transmedial mockuworld (cf. HIGHT 2010: 61).

On the contrary, it must be acknowledged that it is not uncommon for the narrative of a filmic or televisual mockumentary to be extended across further media platforms—though often the latter are not involved in as large a number as it happened for *The Blair Witch Project.* Against this background, the present essay will outline that mockumentary proves to be a *transmedial* narrative style, using the notion of style in the »extensive« (BUCCHERI 2010: 38) sense proposed by Vincenzo Buccheri, according to which the term refers to the »outward structure [...] that a text emerged in a set historical period shares with other texts, often arisen in identical productive and social circumstances« (BUCCHERI 2010: 36, translation C.F.). In other words, I thus aim at demonstrating that the mockumentary is a mode of narration apt at delivering a single story across various media.[3] I do not claim, however, that each of these hybrids' storyworlds is necessarily broadened onto several platforms, but rather that it is not infrequent for it to occur and, above all, that, potentially, it could happen for any of the stories told by making use of this narrative style, due to the latter's employability in a variety of different medial contexts.

In depicting the foregoing, the essay will also offer an account of how and in which terms such mockuworlds are expanded and will underscore how these extensions of their narratives on other media serve to further authenticate as factual the fictitious stories that are recounted in them.

2. Traversing the Media Landscape. Mockumentary's Adaptability to Different Platforms

As emphasized by Hight, the »mockumentary [...] has proven itself malleable enough to be applied over a broad range of media forms« (HIGHT 2010: 44). Indeed, under this label fall those texts which, though recounting imaginary happenings, are *entirely* constructed as nonfictional works by replicating their medium of destination's veridictive marks. That is to say, they reproduce those aesthetics and narrative structures we habitually associate with that particular medium's factual production.[4] And since almost every media platform has its own nonfiction realm and consequently one or more factual modes of representation on which to draw on in order to give an invented story the form of a nonfictional text, it emerges how this narrative style can easily be adopted on distinct means of communication.

Yet, in order to be defined as a mockumentary, aside from having the appearance of a factual product, a text must also showcase (more or less evident) clues of its fictional nature, such as, for example, a disclaimer, the

[3] The aim of the article is precisely that of highlighting this narrative style's transmedial nature. For a discussion of why mockumentary should be considered a narrative style and not a genre or a »complex discourse« (HIGHT 2010: 17) as well as for a more detailed description of what is intended with this expression, I refer the reader to FORMENTI 2014: 26–34.

[4] For an account of the various veridictive marks employable (though limited to the case of the filmic mockumentary) and the way in which they operate, cf. ROSCOE/HIGHT 2001: 15–21.

presence of renown actors, a surreal plot, the deployment of parody or more subtle cues like glances in the direction of the camera and small narrative incoherences. Indeed, what distinguishes such hybrids from fake documentaries is precisely that, contrary to what happens with the latter, their effective ontological status has to be somehow signposted (cf. HIGHT 2010: 18). There is not, however, a pre-set collection of hints to use to this end. Hence, it is possible to select the clues more suitable for suggesting each of these texts' fictionality, according to the demands of the specific media platform for which they are intended. Thus it becomes evident, once again, that mockumentary is a form of narration whose employability is not confined to a single medium.

This finds further validation in the fact that we can track down examples of such hybrids in the context of various means of communication. Although, as outlined by Hight, the »most well-known and popular« mockumentaries »are comedic feature films« (HIGHT 2010: 46) such as Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1983) and Rob Rainer's *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), the medium within which this narrative style has first been employed was not cinema, but radio. In particular, among the mockumentaries initially created, we recall Orson Welles' famous radio drama *War of the Worlds* (1938), wherein H.G. Wells' homonymous novel has been retold in the fashion of a live bulletin, by deploying »aural codes and conventions associated with news reporting« (HIGHT 2010: 45), like interviews with eyewitnesses, declarations of experts and feeds from on-location journalists. It must also be noted that, in line with what was previously described as characteristic of this style, it was as well hinted at the program's fictional nature through four disclaimers, a near future setting, and the date of its airing (cf. BARTHOLOMEW/RADFORD 2012: 16–22; ROSCOE/HIGHT 2001: 78–79).

And *War of the Worlds* has not remained an exception in the radio production's panorama. There are also more recent examples of radio mockumentaries, such as BBC Radio 4's series *People Like Us* (1995–1997) that revolved around the character of the inept reporter Roy Mallard, who, in each episode, feigned to be providing the account of the average working-day of a different professional category's representative. This comedic series proved so successful that it was later adapted for the small screen,[5] a practice that, according to Hight, is not so rare:

> Many of the examples of British mockumentary (or part mockumentary) series were trialled first as radio series, with performers honing their skills in mimicking voices, developing characters and narratives based around the appropriation of such non-fiction tropes as ›voice of god‹ narration and on-location interviews. (HIGHT 2010: 46)

If radio has, thus, »retained a key role in the history of mockumentary«, especially »as a site for comedic experimentation« (HIGHT 2010: 46), the medium that offers »ideal conditions« (HIGHT 2010: 73) for the proliferation of these hybrids would instead be the small screen, due to the fact that »non-fiction is at the core of television programming« (HIGHT 2010: 102). In an essay pub-

[5] For an analysis of the televisual adaptation of *People Like Us*, cf. HIGHT 2010: 255–257.

lished in 2012, Hight further states that »television as a medium serves as the natural space for mockumentary. The breadth and variety of nonfiction and fact-fiction forms within television provide for extraordinary rich sources of intertextual appropriation and commentary« (HIGHT 2012: 74).

To consider the small screen a media platform more suitable than any other for harbouring these hybrids might be too extreme. It is, however, undeniable that in the last two decades the »[m]ockumentary has become part of the mainstream of television programming; it has become another style to be employed for both banal and artistic ends« (HIGHT 2012: 73). In particular, this mode of narration is herein deployed to create four main typologies of texts: one-off episodes within otherwise straightforward fictional series; single news feeds in factual programs; non-serial products; entire series. An example of the first is the *Grey's Anatomy* episode »These Arms of Mine« (2010), which maintains the series' episodes customary narrative structure, but adopts the point of view of an external documentary crew, entered in the diegetic space to attest how a shooting, which had occurred in the hospital a few months earlier, had changed the lives of the characters, as if they were real-life doctors. An example of the second is the case of that April Fool's Day hoax known as *The Swiss Spaghetti Harvest* (1957), which is considered to be the first audio-visual mockumentary (cf. MILLER 2012: xii), whereas in the third category fall films produced expressly for the small screen, such as Costa Botes and Peter Jackson's *Forgotten Silver* (1995), or programs like Lesley Manning's *Ghostwatch* (1992). Examples of the last category are the popular sitcoms *The Office* (2001–2003) and *Modern Family* (2009–), which feign to be *vérité* gazes on the everyday life of a British workplace and of an extended Los Angeles family, respectively.[6]

However, television is not the only medium whose number of harboured mockumentaries has increased at a constant rate in the last decades. In parallel with the emergence of the online documentary (cf. NASH/HIGHT/SUMMERHAYES 2014), a growth of such hybrids has been registered also on the web, which not only has become a platform for the distribution of single videos or entire series that adopt this mode of narration[7] but also houses what Federico Zecca refers to as »hoax websites« (ZECCA 2012: 30)—that is to say, webpages, blogs, or websites that portray a fictional character, an invented company, or an imaginary community as if existing in the real world. For example, on the Net we can encounter the website of the city of Pawnee (allegedly located in Indiana), with regard to which James Hay noted:

> The home page [...] follows the generic conventions of real city government websites: its heading is emblazoned with the motto, »My Hometown«, underneath which is a menu of links for the city's various departments, such as Business, Public Safety, Information & Technology, Arts and Culture, Transportation, and Parks & Recreation. (HAY 2010: 170)

[6] For a detailed treatise of television mockumentary, cf. HIGHT 2010.
[7] For an overview of online mockumentary short films and webseries, cf. FORMENTI 2014: 92–95.

Although the website has changed over time, and, today, its homepage no longer corresponds to what was described by Hay, it still strongly resembles those of actual towns (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). Yet, this city is fictitious as are its councilmen, who are embodied by popular television actors (a fact that we can ascertain, for instance, through the photographs that accompany their biographies in the »City Council Bios« page). Indeed, not only are we here dealing with a hoax website, but the latter was also constructed in order to extend on the web the storyworld of the televisual mockumentary sitcom *Parks and Recreation* (2009–). However, as it replicates the structures and the aesthetics of nonfictional websites and at the same time presents hints to its fictitious nature—through parodic written contents, a link to the *Parks and Recreation* series' webpage, and the aforementioned photographs—, we can consider it a mockumentary in itself.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that hoax websites do not necessarily expand just the narrative of a mockumentary ur-text but can also be used to prolong straightforward fictional storyworlds. Indeed, Christy Dena has observed that

> [s]ome filmmakers are populating their storyworld on the web shoulder to shoulder with real world sites. Sites for fictional companies and characters in films are emerging across cyberspace, almost indistinguishable from their real world counterparts... if not for their outlandish nature. For instance, the company that erases Joel Barish's memory in Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of* [*the*] *Spotless Mind* (2004) has its own corporate site: *Lacuna Inc*. The company that provided the cloned child in Nick Hamm's *Godsend* (2004) is likewise online: *Godsend Institute.* [...] Over the past few years, it has been these practices—representing the world of the film as being real—that have emerged as a primary aesthetic for many audiences and creators. (DENA 2007: n.pag.)

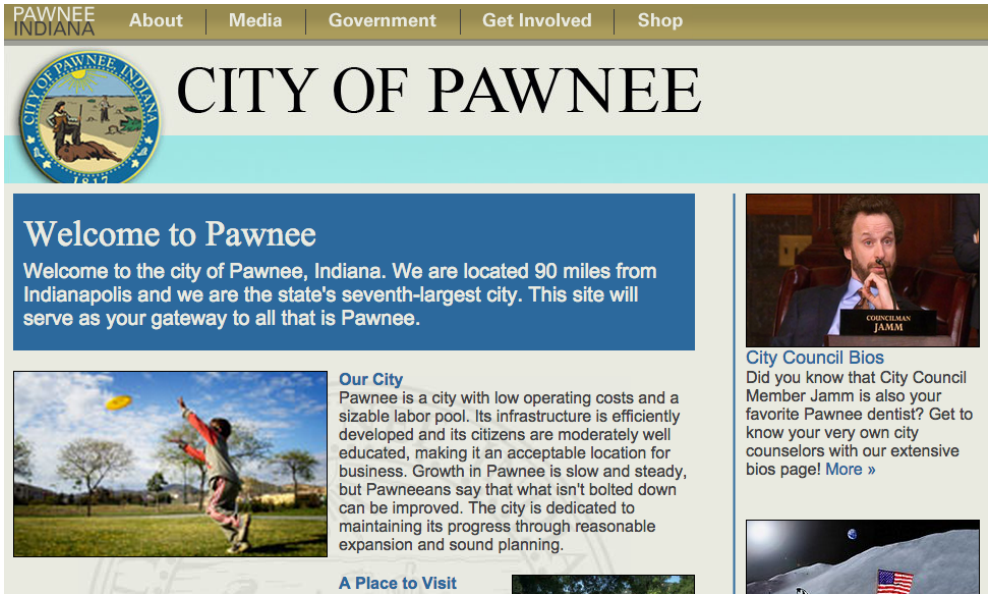

Fig. 1:
The current homepage of the website http://www.pawneeindiana.com [accessed August 19, 2014]

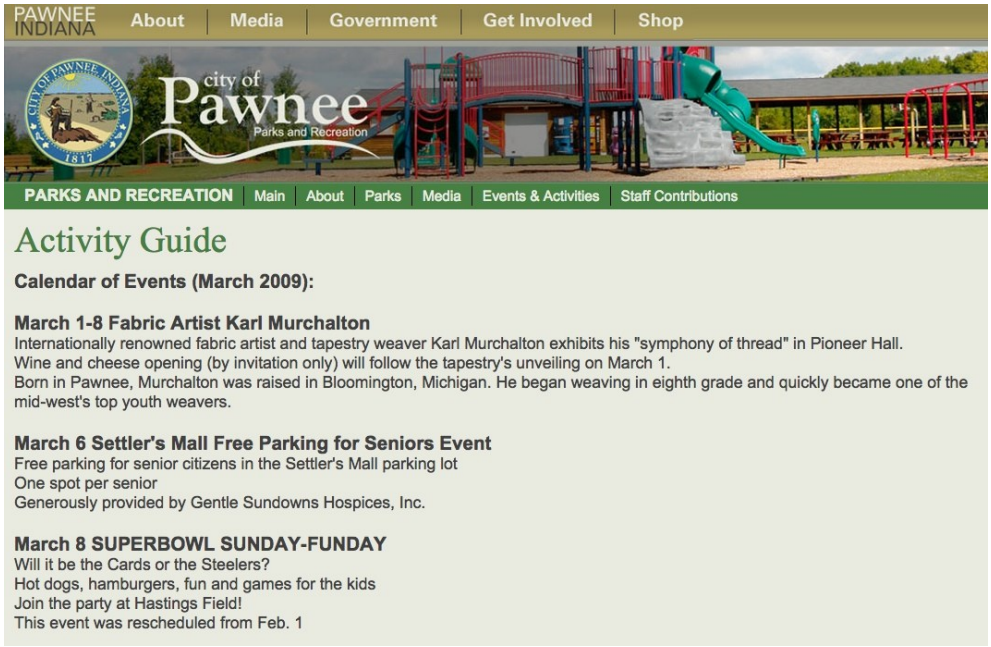

Fig. 2:
A page from the section »Departments. Parks and Recreation« on http://www.pawneeindiana.com [accessed August 19, 2014]

And since, as outlined by John Dovey, »the content of the blogosphere, of Facebook, Twitter or Flicker is factual, journalistic, expressive, everyday—the precise ground of documentary materials and research« (DOVEY 2014: 11), social media, too, provide a perfect soil for the creation of mockumentaries. Referring to real-people's Facebook profiles, Ruth Page has suggested that, »[a]s single teller accounts of life experience oriented to the teller's social self, status updates share some affinity with the genre of life history« (PAGE 2010: 426). She further explains:

> Over time, the updates compose an archive which documents an ongoing narrative of the writer's life experiences. [...] Like life histories, the developing archive of status updates is a necessarily discontinuous and open unit that unfolds over time and is revised in keeping with the writer's life experiences. But the reports posted in status updates are neither extensive in length, nor do they focus on significant episodes in the speaker's history. Instead, status updates typically focus on the minutiae of everyday events. (PAGE 2010: 425f.)

It thus comes as no surprise to learn that, generally speaking, social networking sites are used to create character-driven mockumentaries, wherein status feeds and/or the images and videos posted ›document‹ the everyday life of a fictitious figure. Similarly to what was noted with regard to hoax websites, this person might, in turn, be the protagonist of a cinematic or televisual mockumentary or rather of a traditional fiction feature or television program. Examples of the former case are the MySpace profiles that were generated for each of *Cloverfield*'s main characters. Herein, Rob Hawkins, Elizabeth McIntyre, Hudson Plattcerca, Jason Hawkins, Jamie Lescano, Lily Ford, and Marlena Diamond were presented as if they were actually existing youths,

providing information on their age, interests, and so on. Moreover, through posts feignedly written by them on the blogs that each MySpace profile used to have, a fully-fledged online mockumentary prequel of the movie was created. For instance, on January 5, 2008, Rob (i.e., the guy for whose departure is thrown the party with which the movie opens) announced on his blog:

> So I got a job offer, and it's everything I wanted. [...] One catch -- I need to move to freakin' JAPAN! The job is the V.P. of Marketing and Promotions for SLUSHO! brand ›happy drink‹. [...] When I said I'd be willing to leave NYC for the new gig, I was thinking maybe Chicago or Toronto, maybe L.A. Japan is a whole other extreme. [...] But you know what? Maybe this is exactly the jolt my lame little life needs. [...] I told them I needed the weekend to think it over, but I'm pretty sure I'm gonna take it.

And all the other characters commented on this post. Elizabeth wrote: »Japan!? Oh my god, Rob! Come over this weekend so we can talk about it?«. Hudson, instead, tried to discourage his friend:

> Dude I just googled Slusho, did you know they are a subsidiary of some evil oil company called Tagruato? We both know how much you hate oil (you always say no oil when you order a hoagie), so you better turn down the job and stay here and live with me forever and ever.[8]

Therefore, in this case we also have an *interaction* between various apparently independent pages, an aspect that is becoming a recurrent trait in online mockumentaries. Each of these hybrid social media profiles as well as each hoax website or video making use of this narrative style can be seen as an online mockumentary in itself. Yet, all these typologies of products can also be combined together to give birth to what Spencer Schaffner refers to as »multigeneric web mockumentary projects« (SCHAFFNER 2012: 204). According to Schaffner, a »rich assemblage of online material—websites, Twitter feeds, Facebook profiles, photos, text, music, and mockumentary-style video—is becoming the face of mockumentary online« (SCHAFFNER 2012: 201). Once again, this does not astonish if we consider that the development of such narrative style is strongly dependent on the evolutions nonfiction production itself undergoes over time. Indeed, Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes have outlined how the online documentary is increasingly becoming a »dynamic system in which the parts are multiply connected and interdependent« (NASH/HIGHT/SUMMERHAYES 2014: 2).

It must also be noted that multigeneric web mockumentary projects ask us to shift our position from that of a more passive receiver (in which we are put when mockumentaries are cinematic, radio, or televisual) to that of »a *user* [...] playing active roles in examining and discovering various elements« (SCHAFFNER 2012: 202, original emphasis). An example of this type of online

[8] Since the summer of 2013, these blogs are no longer visible online, as MySpace has changed its format. An important part of *Cloverfield*'s narrative has therefore been lost. Indeed, if, prior to this date, I had the chance of studying them, future scholars will not. This should be seen as a warning signal that the issue of transmedial storyworlds' preservation needs to be addressed more effectively and thoughtfully, so that such losses will not keep happening. Otherwise, it will be impossible to gain an understanding of how the storyworld building has developed for the generations of researchers to come.

mockumentaries is the *Die Antwoord* project (2008–) that, following in the footsteps of *This Is Spinal Tap*, authenticates an imaginary rap group through videos of its alleged performances, in-character interviews posted online, photographs, and so on, distributing all these ›tiles‹ of the story on various pages and websites. Nonetheless, the web expansion of the aforementioned television series *Parks and Recreation* (of which the website www.pawnee indiana.com is only one of various pieces) and that of the filmic *Nothing So Strange* (2002) fall into this category.[9] For instance, the online extension of Flemming's mockumentary is formed by a collection of websites linked together and ostensibly launched in part by the components of the fictitious group Citizen for Truth—the chronicling of whose investigations on Bill Gates' hypothetical murder constitutes the core of the movie—and in part by new characters, such as the electronic engineer Jack Prude. In particular, the latter is feigned to be the creator of www.billgatesisdead.com, a website on the life and death of Microsoft's CEO, which not only devotes significant space to introducing the character of Prude and to discussing Gate's assassination, but which also offers links to a webring of memorial pages with flickering candles and floral tributes dedicated to the American tycoon (see fig. 3). The main website, however, is www.citizenfortruth.org, which embeds short clips, photographs, and documents related to the investigation conducted by this organization as well as an array of links to other pages, such as that containing the police report on Gate's murder, questioned by the group both in the film and on the website.[10] Indeed, the pages that form this web expansion of *Nothing So Strange*'s narrative are many more than those here described. Yet, even from this partial overview, it clearly emerges that such an online extension of the film's storyworld can be viewed in itself as a multigeneric web mockumentary, since these pages go beyond being merely »diegetic artifacts« (ZECCA 2012: 30). On the contrary, as observed by Kate Stables, they form a »›web universe‹« that enables the viewers to push »the film's narrative into a second chapter online, with their own conspiracy theories« (STABLES 2002: 54).

[9] As far as *Parks and Recreation* is concerned, there is also a website for Leslie Knope's 2012 campaign for city council, one for Andy Dwyer's band Mouse Rat, a personal blog for nurse Ann Perkins, a wedding website for the marriage of Andy with Pawnee Department of Parks and Recreation's employee April Ludgate, and various other pages, most of which are directly referenced in the series episodes and are linked together among them. For a more in depth account, cf. BOURDAA 2012. For a detailed description of the *Die Antwoord* project, cf. SCHAFFNER 2012: 205–206.

[10] www.citizenfortruth.org contains many references to happenings portrayed in the movie. For instance, there is a section wherein, reproducing the structures of actual conferences' websites, is advertised the meeting that in the film is feigned to have been held by the group at Park Plaza Hotel.

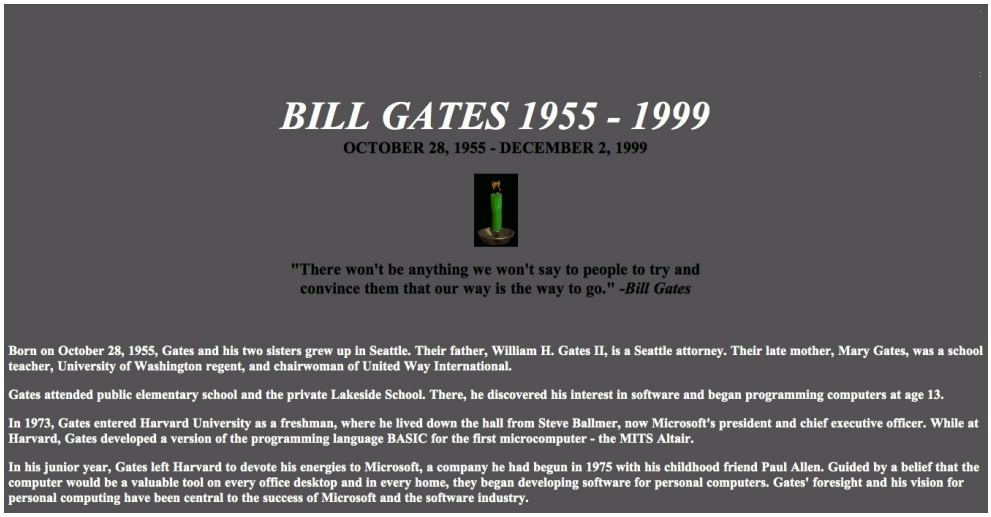

Fig. 3:
Memorial webpage dedicated to Bill Gates on http://www.billgatesisdead.com [accessed August 19, 2014]

Finally, it is important to underscore that radio, cinema, television, web, and social networking sites are not the sole media that can harbour mockumentaries. Even the more traditional print can fulfil this function. Examples of this can be found in books such as the already mentioned *The Blair Witch Project. A Dossier* that, similarly to what happens in the filmic mockumentaries structured as expository documentaries, recounts fictional happenings through a compilation of purported documents. We can as well encounter newspaper or magazine articles, which, through fragments of alleged interviews with fictitious characters, chronicle a moment in the latter's life or an imaginary happening. This is the case with a piece that appeared in *Independent Weekend* on June 1, 1996 and was entitled »Tap Into the Future«. Therein, it was announced that the band protagonist of Rob Rainer's 1984 film (here presented as a documentary by Marti Di Bergi, in line with the movie's alleged nonfictional premise) had »re-formed for the third time« (WHITE/HELMORE 1996: 3). Pretending that the group was real, journalists Jim White and Edward Helmore reported:

> After the end of their come-back Japanese tour with which Marti Di Bergi's movie concludes, they split in acrimony, law suits and complaints about the back-stage catering arrangements. Nigel Tufnel [...] spent a lot of time in the Waitrose near his Chelsea home »buying food«; guitarist David St Hubbins collaborated by mail with his amateur musician father, Ivor, on an »all-scat« version of Bizet's *Carmen*; and Derek Small joined a Christian rock band Lambs-blood. He had a fish tattooed on his arm [...]. A chance meeting when Lambsblood next-to-headlined at a »Monster of Jesus« festival in orange County, California, led to the band re-grouping. »I decided to throw my lot in with the devil again«, says Small. »At that point I felt the tattoo would be inappropriate. I tried to have it removed, but it was not possible, so an artistically gifted friend tattooed a devil's head above it, apparently consuming the fish«. (WHITE/HELMORE 1996: 3)

Exploiting the report's structure (a form that in print journalism is traditionally associated with nonfiction) and a veridictive mark such as the interview, but simultaneously chronicling comedic and, from time to time, surreal hap-

penings (exactly as it had been done in the film), White and Helmore have created a self-contained text which is itself a mockumentary.[11] Yet, this article is not a mere print adaptation of the movie, but rather an expansion of its storyworld that constitutes a mockumentary-style sequel of the film.

3. ›That Is‹ a Transmedial Mockumentary Storyworld

The release of a filmic or televisual mockumentary can be preceded, accompanied, and/or followed by two sets of paratexts: 1) those aimed mainly at marketing the text and suggesting the type of universe it presents (e.g., film poster, trailer, print adds, reviews, and so on), which are ›inseparable‹ from the product they refer to; 2) »incorporated« (GRAY 2010: 210) ones, that are generally self-contained and expand the text's storyworld, often becoming in themselves a sequel, a prequel, or a spin-off of it. The former are created for any of these mockumentaries and, curiously, tend to highlight the specific fiction-filmmaking or televisual genre to which they belong, thus suggesting the real ontological status of the products they market.[12] For instance, the print ads of *Confetti* (2006) presented the film as »the funniest British comedy in years« (see fig. 4), whereas the original poster of *This Is Spinal Tap* visibly recalled that of *Airplane!* (1980), thereby conveying the idea that Rainer's movie is part of the same comic genre (cf. DE SEIFE 2007: 19). Moreover, as emphasized by Hight, »[m]any mockumentaries have promotional sites which to varying degrees ›flag‹ the status of the film or television programme as fictional texts« (HIGHT 2008: 215).

The incorporated paratexts—which are not necessarily created for every mockumentary—work, instead, in the opposite direction. Indeed, aside from the omnipresent agenda of marketing the text and/or of capitalizing its brand by exploiting it in other media, they serve the function of nourishing the film or television program's premise that what is recounted in it pertains to our world. In other words, these paratexts help to authenticate the text as a nonfiction product by showing that the events and characters depicted in it have left traces in other media as well. Yet, if, according to Dena, a diegetic artifact *per se* would suffice to equalize a straightforward fictional world to ours (cf. DENA 2009: 282–290), this might not be enough for mockuworlds, since at stake is not just a matter of putting an imaginary universe on the same level as ours, but rather of pretending that it *is* ours. As a consequence, in order to make the paratexts of such hybrids actually effective in this sense, they are normally constructed adopting the same narrative style as the origi-

[11] Interestingly, in 2009, an analogous article that was in itself somehow transmedial appeared in *Vanity Fair*. Indeed, in it the reader was invited to browse to www.vanityfair.com to hear the complete recording of the interview (cf. HOGAN 2009: 82).

[12] This is not to say that they are presented as mockumentaries, but rather that the genre to which they also belong is emphasized (e.g., horror, comedy, science-fiction, and so on) (cf. FORMENTI 2014: 26–29).

nal text, namely the mockumentary style. A choice that is rendered easier by the fact that, in this case, maintaining a cohesive mode of narration does not lead to a limitation in terms of number of platforms usable, due to such style being characterized by a strong adaptability to the various means of communication.

Fig. 4:
Ad for the film *Confetti* published in *Time Out* in 2006

It must be said that some of these incorporated paratexts brush against adaptation, as is the case with www.frankiewilde.com. This website portrays as a real-life person the imaginary DJ Frankie Wilde, whose life and progressive loss of hearing is chronicled in Michael Dowse's biographical mockumentary *It's All Gone Pete Tong* (2004). Similarly to the film, the website is composed of four sections respectively telling about the rise, fall, redemption, and disappearance of this pretend-to-be legendary DJ. In each of them, we are provided with a short written text, summarizing a period in his life, wherein statements of people who have allegedly been part of it are embedded. As a corollary, every section also contains photographs, videos of Frankie's public appearances, and some of the music he composed. Narratively, the paratext is thus self-contained, as, by exploring it, we can learn the DJ's entire story. Yet, the add-ons with respect to the film are minimal. Indeed, the ›new material‹ is reduced to the aforementioned videos and soundtracks. Hence, this website functions solely for the purpose of bestowing concreteness on Frankie by pretending that he was relevant in our world to the point of obtaining coverage in more than one medium. That is to say, it only serves the agenda of authenticating the character and, consequently, the film's narrative.

Nevertheless, most incorporated paratexts created for mockumentaries also serve the function of expanding the storyworld. This might happen by filling a gap in the text's narrative, as in the case of the MySpace profiles generated for *Cloverfield*'s protagonists, which come to constitute a full-fledged prequel of the film. But, it may as well be done by creating what Scolari calls »parallel stories« (SCOLARI 2009: 598). An example of the latter are the webisodes designed for the American version of *The Office* (2005–2013) in order »to maintain audience interest in the programme during the hiatus between seasons« (HIGHT 2010: 285). Indeed, the majority of these webseries focus on secondary characters and can thus be considered spin-offs of the televisual one, as suggested by Carolyn Handler Miller specifically in relation to 2006's *The Office. The Accountants* (cf. HANDLER MILLER 2008: 311). We can, however, also find paratexts that are in themselves »peripheral stories« in the sense of »more or less distant satellites of the macrostory« (SCOLARI 2009: 598). The latter is, for instance, the case with imaginary Japanese teacher Katsuro Matsuda's blog, created as part of the viral marketing campaign for the Italian mockumentary *Il mundial dimenticato* (2011). Indeed, while the film chronicles a World Cup that has purportedly taken place in Patagonia in 1942, Matsuda starts a blog to attest his loss of 100 million yen in a television show due to his claims regarding this football competition being considered wrong. It therefore emerges how, in this case, the linkage with the movie's narrative is tenuous. Yet, the style is consistent: not only does the teacher accompany his written assertions with video material proving his statements but there is also a mocku-news bulletin from Repubblica TV covering his story.

Moreover, as has already partially emerged, such expansions might take place by focusing on the core text's protagonists or on a background character or even by introducing new characters. But such strategies can also be combined, even in the same medium. For instance, the web extension of *Cloverfield*'s narrative also comprised the peripheral story of the disappearance of Jamie Lascano's boyfriend (Teddy Hansen), which was told through an online video diary of the girl, the blog missingteddyhansen.blogspot.com purportedly created by Teddy's sister in an attempt to find him, and the website of the eco-group T.I.D.O. Wave, for which the guy was apparently working when he vanished.

To this we must add that, if there are mockumentaries such as *The Blair Witch Project*, whose incorporated paratexts are created for a vast gamut of media, in most cases a more limited number of platforms is used. In particular, as the examples provided so far render manifest, the privileged means of communication for such expansions is the Net. An explanation for this tendency is indirectly provided by Schaffner when, referring to the *Die Antwoord* project, he highlights that the web »multiplie[s] the number of channels« that can be »used to represent an inauthentic subject as authentic« (SCHAFFNER 2012: 206). Furthermore, despite our inclination to read this medium as a source for information and news, and thus to be more prone to putting in place a »documentarizing reading« (ODIN 2000: 202, translation C.F.)—i.e., »to construct an Enunciator who functions as a real origin« (ODIN 2000: 202, translation C.F.)—, taking »seriously, in reality« (ODIN 2000: 204, translation C.F.), the content that is presented as factual—exactly as Roger Odin observes happens for television (cf. ODIN 2004: 210–211)—, there are no difficulties in also elaborating the cues of fictionality (whose presence is necessary in order for such paratexts to configure as mockumentaries themselves). In particular, Hight notes that it is not infrequent for the effective nature of these online paratexts to be revealed »by including sections of a website that provide information on cast biographies, while other pages offer straight-faced messages from the characters they play« (HIGHT 2010: 54).

Although this brief overview has shown that there is neither a common way in which the expansion of the original mockuworld is made nor a constant number of media used, it cannot be denied that we are here confronted with a kind of transmedia storytelling analogous to that outlined by Jason Mittell for television (cf. MITTELL 2014). That is to say, we are dealing with a typology of transmedia storytelling wherein we have a core or urtext—normally constituted by a film or television mockumentary—, the expansion of whose narrative across other media is delegated to a series of paratexts which are required to »protect the ›mothership‹« (MITTELL 2014: 255). In order to fully do so, they thus not only have to aim primarily at driving viewers to the core text but also have to perpetrate its premise of being a nonfictional product. Consequently, in light of the fact that a product's style features among the set of attributes that, according to Scolari, distinguish a brand (cf. SCOLARI 2009: 600), these paratexts are configured as mockumen-

taries, too, thus creating not simply a transmedial storyworld, but rather a *mockumentary* transmedial one.[13]

In particular, the broad narrative model adopted here appears to be the one Mittell describes as »›What Is‹«, which »seeks to extend the fiction canonically, explaining the universe with coordinated precision and hopefully expanding viewers' understanding and appreciation of the storyworld« (MITTELL 2014: 273). More precisely, in the specific case of mockumentary, the expansions of the core text's narrative are generally top-down, going from products like *Parks and Recreation*, whose spread on other media was foreseen from the outset—as it is demonstrated by the presence of »internal migratory cues« (RUPPEL 2012: 86) in the ur-text—, to others, whose expansion was conducted ›consciously‹ only after the mothership reached cult status, as in the case of *This Is Spinal Tap*. User-generated extensions of mockuworlds are, instead, comparatively rare. Fans seem to be more prone to adopt this mode of narration for crafting their contribution to a straightforward fictional universe than to a mockumentary one. And when they do expand a mockumentary storyworld, the resulting paratext might as well be rendered top-down, as it happened for Spinal Tap's website. Indeed, fan Chip Rowe created a site that was so much better than the one launched by MGM—wherein the merchandising agenda was predominant (cf. ANONYMOUS 2000: 58)—that it was ›canonized‹, first by linking to it and subsequently by making it become the official website of this imaginary band (cf. DE SEIFE 2007: 36). For this reason, I would rather call the narrative model adopted by transmedial mockumentaries ›That Is‹, since this expression better reflects its strong top-down character.

4. Conclusions

Although, as we have seen, the notion of transmedia storytelling was introduced in 1999 to describe *The Blair Witch Project* phenomenon, the mockumentary's ability to adapt to different media platforms was exploited to create expanded mockuworlds much earlier than that. Indeed, Hight notes how, for instance, Rob Rainer's 1984 *This Is Spinal Tap* can already be seen as »an example of a cinematic mockumentary which successfully expanded its presence into other media, building upon and contributing to its status as a cult film« (HIGHT 2010: 50). More precisely, this fictitious British band, interpreted by the three comedians Harry Shearer, Michael McKean, and Christopher Guest, appeared for the first time in 1979 in what can be seen as an incorporated »entryway« (GRAY 2010: 35) paratext of the movie, consisting in a participation in a special of ABC's *The T.V. Show*, where these alleged musicians were presented as one of the program's actual guest groups. And after

[13] And this proves once again that the best way of conceiving the mockumentary is precisely as a style.

the film's release, in parallel with it gaining cult status, the career of Spinal Tap kept being chronicled across various media through dedicated websites, in-character interviews, mocku-articles, and so on. This imaginary band also ended up giving real-life concerts throughout the world and releasing actual albums, such as 1992's *Break Like the Wind* and 2009's *Back from the Dead*. Thus, by remaining in-character, the actors that embodied David, Nigel, and Derek had the possibility of actually experiencing the rock star lifestyle.

In this case, by replicating what had been done in the 1970s with the alleged band starring in the British mockumentary *The Rutles. All You Need Is Cash* (1978), the boundaries of fiction and reality were blurred to the point of consenting to the viewer an extreme immersion in the storyworld, which in the following decades, as far as such hybrids are concerned, has only rarely been pursued again. Yet, the creation of incorporated paratexts aimed at authenticating and spreading a core mockumentary text's narrative across various media continued. And the numerous transmedial mockuworlds that have as such come to (and still do) take shape prove how mockumentary is a narrative style apt at creating coherent expanded storyworlds that encourage »forensic fandom« (MITTELL 2014: 273) and thus a mode of narration perfectly capable of responding to the needs of an era like the present one, which »worships at the altar of convergence« (JENKINS 2006: 1).

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