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# Media Convergence and Transmedial Worlds (Part 2)/ Medienkonvergenz und transmediale Welten (Teil 2)

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# Introduction. Media Convergence and Transmedial Worlds (Part 2)

In the past few decades, technical innovations, the increasing mediatization of everyday life, and the economic interests of global media conglomerates have led to a highly interconnected media landscape where intellectual property is often spread across a variety of media platforms. One of the effects of this technological, economic, and cultural media convergence appears to be the increasing visibility and presence of transmedial entertainment franchises which represent—usually, but not necessarily: fictional—stories, characters, and worlds across the borders of conventionally distinct media.

In light of the socio-cultural relevance and the commercial success of transmedial entertainment franchises in contemporary media culture, it will come as no surprise that media studies have started to focus on transmedial phenomena as well, with terms such as ›transmedia(l) storytelling‹ or ›transmedial worlds‹ enjoying ever broader popularity. However, the astonishing heterogeneity of forms that can be observed with regard to transmedial phenomena is usually not quite as present in the discourses of media studies. It is this heterogeneity of forms that will be further examined by the present special issue of *IMAGE*, which is the second installment of a three-part series.

A substantial part of the essays collected in the present as well as in both the previously published and the still forthcoming special issue of *IMAGE* is based on papers presented during the Winter School »Transmedial Worlds in Convergent Media Culture«, which took place from February 24 to February 28, 2014 at the Graduate Academy of the University of Tübingen and was supported by the Institutional Strategy of the University of Tübingen (German Research Foundation, ZUK 63).

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Johannes Fehrle

# Leading into the Franchise. Remediation as (Simulated) Transmedia World. The Case of *Scott Pilgrim*


## Abstract

In this article, I examine the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise from an adaptation as well as a transmedia franchising angle, setting these approaches off from Henry Jenkins' conceptualization of transmedia storytelling. By focusing mainly on Edgar Wright's film adaptation, I examine how remediation is used in the film as a strategy to link the adaptation to the comic books as well as the simultaneously released video game. I argue that the film both integrates itself into the larger franchise by drawing on the other products, particularly through its visual aesthetics, and opens the door to a larger transmedial world by ›simulating‹ its existence through references to other products that seem to, but do not in fact, exist in our world.


## 1. Enter. *Scott Pilgrim*

At the latest since its film adaptation by Edgar Wright in 2010, Korean-French-Canadian artist and writer Bryan Lee O'Malley's comic book series *Scott Pilgrim* (2004–2010) has become firmly lodged in the international nerd canon.[1] Both film and comic book tell the story of video game expert, untalented bass

[1] I would like to thank Stefan Danter as well as the anonymous reviewers for their comments on this article; needless to say, all oversights are mine.

player, and professional slacker Scott Pilgrim, who tries to get over the recent breakup with his ex-girlfriend Natalie ›Envy‹ Adams. While his initial inability to ›move on‹ is expressed in his rebound-dating of an Asian-Canadian high school girl, Knives Chau, things change when the Amazon delivery girl Ramona Flowers shows up in his dream and, shortly thereafter, in reality. Ramona quickly becomes his new love interest. While she revives Scott's life spirit, Ramona comes with the baggage of having seven evil ex-boyfriends (or evil exes in the film, since one of the exes turns out to be an ex-girlfriend) whom Scott has to defeat in fighting-game-inspired battles in order to win or keep Ramona as a girlfriend. Following Jeff Thoss, one can regard the relatively simple plot of love, heart break, music, and game culture as primarily a means for the narratives to draw heavily on the aesthetics and special semiotics of arcade and early console fighting games and beat 'em ups to attempt to imitate or—using Bolter and Grusin's term—remediate them first in the comic and then, with the adaptation, in the film medium (cf. BOLTER/GRUSIN 2000). As Thoss puts it, »the relatively trite and uninspired story of romance and self-realization is used as a mere foil for O'Malley to demonstrate his arguably novel and ingenious skills in impersonating games« (THOSS 2014: 193). As Thoss rightly points out, the comic copies a video game aesthetic; its plot development likewise copies a fighting game's movement from boss battle to boss battle, eventually leading to a fight with a final boss, the American club owner Gideon Graves, which includes a ›replay‹ sequence starting from the beginning of the final ›boss level‹. As the idea of a ›replay‹ suggests, the storyworld's logic, which is mostly oriented toward a somewhat caricatured but ›realistic‹ depiction of late 20th/early 21st century urban Canadian life, breaks radically with real-world laws in the fighting sequences and, like the plot development, functions according to a video game logic: in best fighting game fashion, the characters' kicks and punches are labeled as ›combo‹, ›reversal‹, etc., the combatants can perform physical feats impossible in a realistic storyworld, and Scott's adversaries drop coins, items, and, in one case, an extra life. It is therefore not surprising that the film picks up on and, in fact, exaggerates these references and remediations, or that a beat 'em up console game entitled *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World. The Game* (2010) was released to coincide with the film adaptation's opening in movie theaters. It could even be argued that the game, in some sense, brings the storyworld's orientation on fighting games full circle. Ironically, the game, however, lacks most of the remediations which mark the comic's and film's aesthetics and therefore—from a critical perspective—is the least interesting of the texts.

## 2. *Scott Pilgrim* and Transmedia Storytelling

Despite the presence of multiple media products unified under the *Scott Pilgrim* label, if we look at the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise from a transmedia per-

spective, we do not see an example of the interlinking of media products which for Henry Jenkins constitutes an instance of transmedia storytelling. As Jenkins has written on various occasions, transmedia storytelling ›at its best‹ functions like a mosaic or puzzle that is assembled by consumers as they ›travel‹ across multiple media. As Jenkins puts it,

> [t]ransmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. […] Most often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories. This process of world-building encourages an encyclopedic impulse in both readers and writers. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

Neither of the two processes which Jenkins describes as typical for transmedia storytelling are particularly pronounced in the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise. All three main texts—comic, movie, and game—aim to tell the ›same‹ story employing the ›same‹ characters; the impossibility of telling the same story in different versions or media notwithstanding. It nevertheless seems safe to say that the plot and characters are recognizable to a reader, player, or viewer, as variants of one version of, e.g., Ramona Flowers not aiming toward radical alterations, despite the difference in versions, interpretations, and media and their necessarily different narrative and ludic strategies and potentials. An adaptation studies perspective would furthermore highlight the various creators and co-creators as well as the different aesthetic effects they achieve, the different consumptive experiences of those who interact with the various texts (cf. Hutcheon's concept of modes of engagement proposed in HUTCHEON 2013), to name only a few, and reach the conclusion that these are, of course, not the same characters in the same story. While these stories and characters therefore are not exact and faithful copies of an original—something that is impossible to achieve whenever an act of recreation is involved, whether in the same medium or a different one—, they clearly aim at recognizability and similarity, if not ›sameness‹. It seems safe to assume, moreover, that they will be judged accordingly by many readers/viewers/players familiar with other products in the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise.

There is still more to be said about the interconnectedness of these texts from an adaptation studies perspective. If we accept the graphic novel as a ›source text‹, a common term outside adaptation studies but one laden with problematic connotations and thus avoided within most adaptation theorists' more nuanced perspective, the situation is fairly clear. What Jenkins calls extensions of the fictional universe, a technique he sets off from ›mere‹ adaptations (cf. JENKINS 2007: n.pag.), take place mostly within un-official fan discourse. If we follow the de-hierarchization of so-called ›source texts‹ frequently advocated in adaptation studies, however, we might as well regard the movie as a first point of entry into the fictional universe of *Scott Pilgrim* for many consumers, and thus as a ›personal‹ source text, despite its later time of production. In other words, as Linda Hutcheon sums up, »[m]ultiple

versions [of a text] exist laterally, not vertically« (HUTCHEON 2013: xv). If the movie thus becomes the ›original‹ instantiation of the fictional universe in a viewer's personal consumptive history, the graphic novel, alongside other products such as a promotional animated mini clip *Scott Pilgrim vs. the Animation* (2010), which aired on American cable network Adult Swim to support the film's release, constitute extensions of the film's storyworld.[2] Finally, if we move away from the narrow view focusing exclusively on plot and narrative, which seems to underlie Jenkins' definition, there are, of course, countless ›extensions‹ of the comic in the filmic version, such as the almost necessarily greater detail of a photographic image, even one that has been simplified and altered through CGI processes, as opposed to a drawn one, creative decisions regarding color, lighting, casting, acting, and so forth, which ›extend‹ as well as ›reduce‹—or, to choose less value-laden terms, transform, reinterpret, and reinvent—the bare-bone aesthetics of O'Malley's rather iconic drawing style.[3]

To the extent that rudiments exist of a transmedia world-making understood, according to Jenkins' definition, as plot extension rather than the transformation of consumptive experience via the aesthetic as well as the minor narrative transformations I have laid out, they are most clearly found in fan fiction. *Scott Pilgrim* fan fiction ranges from the expected—and, in this case, decidedly genre appropriate—›shipping‹—i.e., matching the characters in different romantic constellations—via stories filling narrative gaps or exploring the characters' past (romantic) relationships—a classic case of extention of the narrative in Jenkins' sense—to crossovers and mash ups with other fictional universes typical of fan fiction, and such mundane, but apparently fetishistically-charged stories as *Scott Pilgrim vs. The Winter* (2010), a narrative in eight installations, in which Scott, his ›cool gay roommate‹ Wallace, and Ramona battle a common cold and nurse each other. The non-official nature of fan fiction, of course, raises its own problems with regard to the concept of transmedia storytelling, since I would claim that the idea of transmedia storytelling usually involves an orchestrated or at least coordinated act on a producer's (or ›author's‹) part—but I cannot go into this aspect here.

## 3. *Scott Pilgrim* and Transmedia Franchising

Instead, I want to shift the focus of my discussion to an angle suggested by Clare Parody, who examines transmedia products from a marketing rather

[2] *Scott Pilgrim vs. the Animation* fills in, in animated form, some of the backstory of Scott and Kim as well as that of a minor character called Lisa, who appears at the beginning of the second comic book *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2005) but does not appear in the movie.

[3] Cf. Pascal Lefevre's exploration of the different visual ontologies of comic to film adaptation, which serves as a helpful first step despite Lefevre's strong privileging of the source text and the somewhat problematic idea of an adaptation being faithful »to the spirit of the original work« (LEFEVRE 2007: 5). I use the term ›iconic‹ in Scott McCloud's sense (cf. MCCLOUD 1994: 27–57). Through its reduction of mimetic detail, this iconic style carries with it the implication of a greater universality and bigger *Leerstellen* (gaps) in the sense of reader-response criticism.

than a primarily narrative perspective, labeling what she finds as »transmedia franchising« (PARODY 2011: passim). Transmedia franchising involves the distribution of commodities under one label in different media, which certainly applies to the case of *Scott Pilgrim*. While franchising is not exactly a new technique, as Jenkins rightfully notes in a response to critics of his definition of transmedia storytelling on his weblog, transmedia franchising does change in a convergence environment. According to Jenkins, »[m]ost previous media franchises were based on reproduction and redundancy, but transmedia represents a structure based on the further development of the storyworld through each new medium« (JENKINS 2011: n.pag.). As with Jenkins' limited model of adaptation, the idea of franchise as merely reproductive is too reductionist and too much invested with the idea of a freely transferable core, resulting from Jenkins' focus on content, which he seems to understand as clearly separable from form. A critique of Jenkins' understanding of adaptation, such as the one by Christy Dena, which Jenkins addresses on his blog, could be extended to his understanding of franchising. Dena highlights the act of interpretation which is a part of any adaptation. The same could be said for franchising, which also necessarily involves some form of adaptation. Whereas Jenkins attempts to explicate his position by pointing to the model of »additive comprehension« (JENKINS 2011: n.pag.) borrowed from game designer Neil Young, a concept he also employs in *Convergence Culture* (cf. JENKINS 2008: 127–133), he merely restates his contentions when he excludes transmedia adaptations in a concept focusing on »the degree that each new text adds to our understanding of the story as a whole« (JENKINS 2011: n.pag.). Adaptations obviously also add to or change our understanding of a story by, e.g., giving us a clearer (more detailed) image of the storyworld or an actor's face for a character we had previously only imagined. Of the four main functions of transmedia storytelling's additive comprehension which Jenkins' lists in »Transmedia 202« (»[o]ffers backstory, [m]aps the [w]orld, [o]ffers us other character's perspectives on the action, [d]eepens audience engagement« [JENKINS 2011: n.pag.]), two—offering a backstory and offering other character's perspectives—are primarily narrative. Whereas the offering of a backstory is a clear plot extension, offering other characters' perspectives is also a feature of many adaptations (e.g., in the segments in HBO's adaptation *Game of Thrones* [2011– ] in which none of the view point characters from Martin's novels are present), while mapping the world (e.g., through added visual interpretation and detail) and attempting to deepen audience engagement are (almost) inescapably features of transmedia adaptations. The reality of transmediation is more complex and richer than Jenkins seems to want to admit in order to keep his model orderly. In other words, adaptations organized within transmedia franchises also exist in complex interactions with each other and in further interactions with the larger forces of convergence culture and, therefore, likewise benefit from an exploration taking their interconnectedness into consideration.

Coming back to the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise, we have three main texts, if we do not count fan fiction for the moment: the comics, the film, and the game. Moreover, there are various paraphernalia, from an adaptation/ remediation of the comic for mobile devices to non- or at least less-narrative and more obviously commercial products such as clothing, dolls, wall clocks, iPhone hard cases, and other products. All of these are marketed under the *Scott Pilgrim* label and link back primarily to one of the three main texts, mainly through the use of images from film, comic, or video game. The transmedia franchise rests, as is frequently the case, according to Parody, on the back of an adaptation (cf. PARODY 2011: 211), in this case most often, but not always, the film version, which the producers hoped would reach a larger audience than the comics originally published by the West Coast independent publisher Oni Press.

While it seems fairly non-controversial to group the various merchandise items as part of a transmedia franchise, there is a more intricate (and more controversial) point to be made about transmediality, and an existing transmedial world of *Scott Pilgrim* as well as its link to franchising. As mentioned, there is a real transmedia franchise in place, but there is also a ›simulated‹ transmedia world (for lack of a better term) or, more correctly, a story-world marked as transmedia world in the comic and, to an even greater extent, in the film. This simulation of a world that is transmedial in one medium is closely connected to the strategy of what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call ›remediation‹, the representation of one medium in another. Jeff Thoss has discussed many instances of remediation, under the heading of what he calls the comic's and film's attempt to »tell it like a game«, as instances of a »performative media rivalry« (THOSS 2014: 187 and passim) in which one medium attempts to performatively evoke through its discourse the language and specificity of another medium, in this case video games, and show how well it can simulate that media's presence in its own.

## 4. Remediation, the Simulation of a Transmedia World, and the Interconnectedness of the Franchise

Placing the film at the center of my reading, I want to argue that the film even more than the comics or the video game uses remediation as an aesthetic strategy in order to simulate a transmediality. It consequently creates a seemingly transmedial world in which it not only foregrounds its own filmic nature, but also draws on and plays with the viewers' game and comic encyclopedias.[4] As my main example, I want to use Scott Pilgrim's fight against Matthew Patel, Ramona's first evil ex. In the fighting sequence we do not only have the remediation of arcade fighting and beat 'em up video games, which Thoss

[4] I am drawing here on the concept of an encyclopedia used by reader and creator to encode/ decode a text as suggested by Eco, e.g., in his *The Role of the Reader* (cf. ECO 1979: passim).

explores in his article, but also a TV aesthetic, the film's foregrounding of its own mediality as well as a play with some iconic film genres, a remediation of the comics medium, and finally a strong link to the theater as a fifth medium thrown into the mix when we see Ramona on a Shakespearean balcony placed at the center of an extremely conspicuous spotlight (cf. THOSS 2014). The scene begins with Sex Bob-omb's performance and employs a split screen, originally a filmic technique employed in early Hollywood films, but—especially in combination with the images of musicians we see—more recently associated primarily with the MTV-aesthetics of 1990s TV. More broadly, a split screen is perceived as an ›unnatural‹ editing technique, foregrounding the mediality of film by making visible the impact of an editor, a role which in the dominant continuity editing system is regarded as one that should be kept hidden in order to not disrupt the audience's engagement and willing suspension of disbelief. If we read the filmic text as an adaptation of a comics source, the side by side of seemingly non-temporally progressing images also recalls the strong spatiality of the comics medium through its panel layout. This view is strengthened by a small black gutter-like division between the three ›panels‹. A third option for the interpretation of this sequence is through the narrative's link to video games as a split screen typical of console video games' multiplayer modes, in which a part of the screen is reserved for each player's avatar. Coming back to the original interpretation of the split screen as a link to music television, several other references to the music video/dance film genre can be detected in actor Satya Bhabha's parody of a tap dance, which is highlighted by the camera's framing of only his feet, as well as his willfully over-acted *Saturday Night Fever*-inspired pose (see fig. 1).

Apart from its pastiche of various genres and unusual editing choices, Satya Bhabha's campy, non-naturalistic acting is another way in which the film foregrounds its own mediality, if any reminder of its mediality was still necessary given the barrage of other media appearing as remediated bits. An excessive use of generic elements from the spaghetti western-style through-the-legs duel shot which Sergio Leone popularized in his 1960s films (see fig. 2), via martial arts sequences in best non-naturalistic Hong Kong style, to anime-inspired sequences extending time and space and including motion lines, translate the comic's combination of Western and Eastern graphic traditions into the film medium. As Drew Morton argues in his visual essay *From the Panel to the Frame*, the radical manipulation of film speed, which he describes as the »temporal remediation« (MORTON 2013: n.pag.) of speed ramping, to slow narrative time down and in the process make possible almost panel-like freeze frames is a recurring feature in recent film adaptations of comic books such as Zack Snyder's *Watchmen* (2009). The complete disregard for real world physics which make it possible for Scott, e.g., to jump for a long enough time to hit Matthew Patel 64 times and for people to crash through roofs and stone walls without being seriously injured, which the film takes over via the comic from arcade and Eastern martial arts and anime films, comes almost as an afterthought in this firework of remediation.

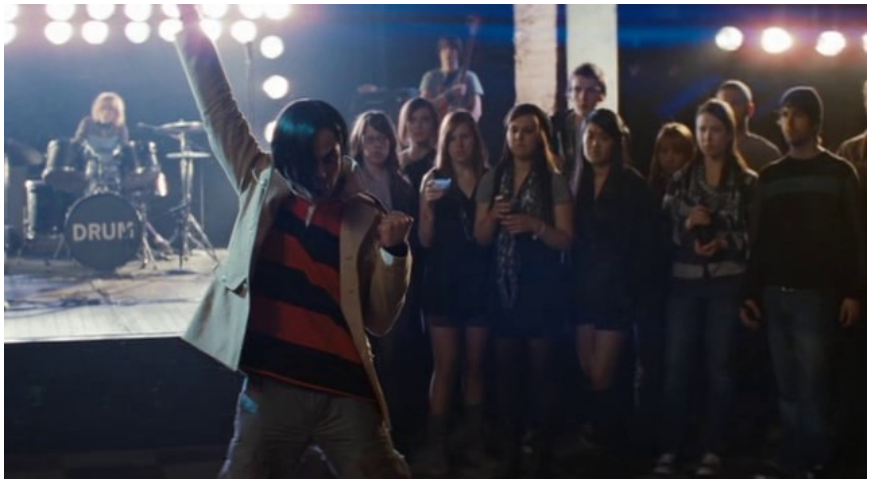


Fig. 1:
Matthew Patel (Satya Bhabha) strikes a *Saturday Night Fever* pose

Fig. 2:
The battle as duel. A pastiche of a ›duel shot‹ in the style of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns

Fig. 3:
Spatial remediation in an attempt to simulate comics spatio-topia

As becomes apparent from these examples, the line between different media and the medial origin of the various instances of remediation is blurred in a style which, with Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, can be described as ›hypermediated‹. Hypermediacy is a style which arises out of a »fascination with media« (BOLTER/GRUSIN 2000: 31) and aims to foreground the mediality of the various media whose styles and registers are appropriated and simulated as well as the film's own mediality. While it is clear that we are facing hypermediacy, the medial origin of the particular semiotics is not always clear. Some of the instances discussed, for example, could also be understood as crossing over into comics or video game territory. There are clear markers of the semiotics of comics present in the fighting sequence between Scott Pilgrim and Matthew Patel. The most striking example is the overlaying of the photographic image with drawn-in comic sound effects, which are themselves the comic mediums' attempt to represent and remediate aural phenomena. In the case of the film, these involve a playfully unnecessary instance of a re-remediation that is entirely non-naturalistic. The most striking instance of a remediation of comics expressive potential, however, is the film's use of O'Malleys original drawings arranged as animated comic panels on the screen in an act of both graphic and spatial remediation (cf. MORTON 2013) in an attempt to approximate comics' arrangement of its different panels into the spatio-temporal layout (see fig. 3), which comics theoretician Thierry Groensteen sees as defining for comics (cf. GROENSTEEN 2007).[5]

Finally, there are countless video game elements, ranging from auditory to visual. The auditory elements comprise, among others, an 8-bit arcade ›bling‹ sound playing when Patel lands as well as the excessive echo and slight delay on Wallace's voice as he screams »fight«, an effect meant to resemble/appropriate the sound frequently played at the beginning of a round in fighting games such as *Street Fighter* (1987) or *Tekken* (1994). Visual borrowings and remediations from video games include superimposed text, stemming this time not from the semiotic register of comics but from the discourse of fighting games, which dramatically juxtaposes the opponents, instructs the player what to do or explains the (health or energy) status of characters or helps players interpret what is happening beyond the immediately apparent spectacle of two polygon figures engaging in a ›fight‹.

This sequence is exemplary for Wright's style in *Scott Pilgrim*, which rests heavily on the remediation of other media, as well as the highly visible and ironic ›enunciation‹ of the film's own mediality through its hypermediacy. If we read the film through Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation, we see that the tension at play in remediation between immediacy and hypermediacy, »the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves« (BOLTER/GRUSIN 2000: 21) or, in Jeff Thoss's paraphrase, eradicating vs. foregrounding the signs of mediation (cf. THOSS 2014: 188), the

[5] Groensteen distinguishes between spatio-topia and arthrology, that is, the importance of space and the placement of panels, borders, and breakdowns on the page, and the relation between individual panels, respectively.

film leans heavily toward a hypermediated remediation. In fact it seems to shun any sense of immediacy which, according to Bolter and Grusin, »dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented« (BOLTER/GRUSIN 2000: 6). This is remarkable considering that, as noted, immediacy is the usual mode films produced within the Hollywood system aim at (cf. BOLTER/GRUSIN 2000: 146–158). The remediation in Wright's film, however, in best postmodern simulacrum fashion, presents us with elements which are themselves merely signifiers pointing at signifiers, images drawn from generic media conventions ultimately uninterested in pointing at any media-external reality. What immediacy is attainable is always already a mediated one. The more ›immediate‹ version of a remediated game is its ›original‹ mediation, the more ›immediate‹ version of the spatially remediated and animated comic panels depicting the backstory of Ramona and Patel in the sequence discussed, for instance, is found in O'Malley's comics. It is this process of pointing at other texts, both existing and non-existing, which most effectively positions the text in a transmedia franchise, both real (there is after all a comic as well as a video game) and simulated. Nevertheless, immediacy attainable by going back to the historically preceding ›original‹ of the comics is nowhere near the ›transparent presentation‹ of an experience even somewhat close to immediate.

Writing about the comic version, Thoss argues that »*Scott Pilgrim* turns its storyworld into a video game storyworld in order to show how comics can performatively simulate the presence of a different medium« (THOSS 2014: 193). The same argument seems applicable for the film adaptation at first glance and, in fact, Thoss makes precisely this argument speaking of a competition between the two texts over which manages to better remediate the medial ›language‹ of video games. I believe, however, that there is a crucial difference at play between the versions, which positions the film within the system of a transmedial *Scott Pilgrim* franchise not present in the comics and only later added as a paratext: rather than merely performatively remediating a generic style of 1980s 8- and 16-bit console video games, as the comic did, the film positions itself within the transmedial *Scott Pilgrim* franchise that was being created while the film was shot. As opposed to the comic, which was written as a stand-alone text remediating only generic bits of video games and other media, most prominently music, the film specifically ties itself to the comic by using O'Malley drawings and animating them for film in Ramona's revelation about her past with Matthew Patel. Its makers similarly connect the two texts in the TV marketing extension *Scott Pilgrim vs. the Animation*, in which characters clearly based on O'Malley's original artwork are animated in more traditionally filmic ways and voiced by the live action film's cast. While this is not entirely unheard of or surprising for an adaptation which after all often tries to cash in, literally as well as culturally, on its source's cultural capital and authenticity, Wright's film employs a similar strategy with regard to the video game by tying in Paul Robertson, the lead game designer for the *Scott Pilgrim* video game, into the filming process. As

Drew Morton explains, the film makers asked Robertson to design the extra life Scott collects. As Morton argues, the visuals of the extra life clash with the film's own not only through its pixelated 8-bit aesthetics, but also by including a Scott Pilgrim who does not look like actor Michael Cera at all, but rather draws on the design for the video game, which oriented itself more toward O'Malley's original art work in order to escape the stigma of being seen merely as a cheap tie-in product promising little value or enjoyment for a customer. The transmedial mixing through remediation aims at a double effect, one aesthetic, creating, in Morton's words, a »transmedia style« (MORTON 2013: n.pag.), the other economic. The film simulates what could be called a ›transmedia world‹ by saturating its own storyworld with highly stylized, hypermediated remediation of other media from games, via drama and film, to comics, in essence blending them into one storyworld in which these various media and their distinctive semiotic registers exist side by side. Through this ›simulated‹ transmediality, achieved through the remediation of multiple media in one, it also leads from the primarily aesthetic or narrative simulation of other media to the economic function underlying the logic of franchising, as it draws attention and guides viewers/customers to the existence of other, similar products. Since, as I have argued, the remediation in *Scott Pilgrim* dwells primarily on the strategy of hypermediacy in Bolter and Grusin's equation, it leaves the consumer longing for both the greater immediacy of the first instantiation of mediation (i.e., the comic, which turns out to be already remediated as well) and for the more immediate—haptic and engaging—ludic experience of the game, in which a consumer can ›become‹ Scott, rather than watching Scott, Knives, Ramona and Co. ›become‹ video game ›characters‹ through their actions. This invitation to participate in a game not only exists implicitly in the game-like fighting sequences, but is made explicit in another instance of self-conscious hypermediacy, when, early in the film, we watch Scott and Knives interact with an arcade game called *Ninja Ninja Revolution*, a parody of the late 1990s Konami game *Dance Dance Revolution* (1998) which looked and functioned similarly. Through such strategies, Wright's film links to both its ›source‹, the comic, and its ›sibling‹ in the franchise, the simultaneously released video game, in a way that transcends both traditional, pre-convergence culture adaptations, with their frequent attempt to eradicate and replace their sources or play on their cultural significance, and tie-in games, which often come as the tail ends of successful adaptations.

Finally, the comic book itself also joins this transmedia mix, if only retroactively and paratextually—as is frequently the case with other adapted texts which become integrated into a transmedia franchise despite not necessarily being narratively interwoven with other products. The back cover of *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour* (2010), the sixth and final volume of the series, completed and released only after the film was shot and the game programmed, includes a design clearly remediating the video game adaptation's aesthetic, at least in the version released by Fourth Estate for the British and

European market. A slip case for the sale of the entire comic book series was likewise designed by Robertson as part of the transmedia marketing campaign following the expectation of renewed attention for the comic by new audiences following the film's release. While there is, ultimately, a sense of a position as part of a larger transmedia franchise in each of the texts, the storytelling itself is—as I have argued—not the additive puzzle or ›quest‹ through different media to get a fuller picture of the narrative and fill in gaps left by the individual texts, which is the hallmark of transmedia storytelling according to Jenkins. It is rather the pleasure of a »repetition without replication« (HUTCHEON 2013: 7), which Linda Hutcheon sees as central to an adaptation's appeal, an aspect which is arguably also central in transmedia storytelling and transmedia franchising. In Drew Morton's opinion, the effect of *Scott Pilgrim*'s avoidance of a ›full-on‹ transmedia narrative approach is that »the *Scott Pilgrim* experience appeases fans of the franchise without alienating the casual consumer with narrative homework« (MORTON 2013: n.pag.).

The double edge of transmedia storytelling, caught between allowing dedicated fans to achieve additive comprehension while not alienating more casual consumers, has also been noted by other critics of transmedia storytelling, even those as enthusiastic about its potentials as Jenkins, who stresses that »going deeper has to remain an option—something readers choose to do—and not the only way to derive pleasure from media franchises« (JENKINS 2008: 134). While the double aim of providing pleasure for fans and new customers alike is the mark of a successful adaptation, *Scott Pilgrim* still manages to place itself more firmly within the context of a transmedia franchise than most traditional novel to film adaptations. In particular through its remediation of both existing sources, such as the comic or the simultaneously released video game, and more generic and less specific bits of pop culture and media-specific semiotics integrated into its storyworld and narrative style, the *Scott Pilgrim* film simulates a transmedia experience that, on the one hand, directs the consumer to the other main products (comic and video game as well as other merchandise articles) and, at the same time, is not upheld by the fairly small number of existing products. Rather, it ›simulates‹ (and, therefore, opens doors to) a franchise much larger than the fairly small one that was eventually produced due to the film's lack of a wider commercial success. While *Scott Pilgrim*'s practices of excessive remediation are central to opening its texts to a transmedia franchise, it seems that they are also what limits both the texts' appeal to a broad audience and its suitability as a formula to be copied by other franchises. What the case of *Scott Pilgrim* serves to show, however, is that there are multiple strategies and avenues into conceptualizing a franchise both for producers and critics of these transmedia texts and that aesthetically successful strategies can complement the nature and style of the text they integrate into the franchise. It also shows that the principle of transmedia should not be constructed in opposition to adaptation, as suggested by Jenkins, but is in fact sympathetic to and shares many aspects with adaptations.

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[Table of Contents]

Martin Hennig

# Why Some Worlds Fail. Observations on the Relationship Between Intertextuality, Intermediality, and Transmediality in the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* Universes


## Abstract

Both the *Resident Evil* and the *Silent Hill* series were among the most famous and successful franchises of video game culture until the film adaptations appeared, which initiated a slow but unstoppable decline. The films remained artistically independent, but the game experience of the following parts of the game series increasingly converged with the movies. The *Resident Evil* series put the focus on more action instead of horror and puzzles and the *Silent Hill* series adapted itself to the narrative design and dramaturgy of the cinematic franchise. This resulted in both game worlds no longer being able to replicate their earlier artistic and economic successes—the most recent parts, *Resident Evil 6* (2012) and *Silent Hill. Downpour* (2012), were considered the low points of the series. In this article, reasons for this loss are discussed by describing the processes in both transmedial franchises with the related concepts of intermediality and intertextuality. A starting point of this article is the assumption that each storyworld includes a specific set of general rules (characters, settings, conflicts, etc.), which can be varied to a certain degree in a transmedial adaptation. Nevertheless, video games seem to include media-specific rules whose violation within the same medium is perceived as a

break in the structural coherence of the storyworld. A closer look at the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* series indicates that, in these cases, new releases are considered to stand in an intermedial or intertextual, but no longer in a transmedial relationship to the original texts.

## 1. Introduction

What is transmedial storytelling? The superordinate concept of intermediality can broadly be defined as the totality of crossmedia phenomena (cf. FRAAS/BARCZOK/DI GAETANO 2006: 7),[1] involving a crossing of borders between media (cf. RAJEWSKY 2005: 46), for instance in the form of an adaptation of a text[2] in another medium, whereby the two media stand in hierarchical relation to each other. It follows that the crucial difference between inter- and transmediality lies mainly in the fact that the indication of an original medium is not important or even possible within a transmedial system (cf. RAJEWSKY 2002: 13); the essential characteristic of transmediality is the media-independence of its objects (cf. POPPE 2013: 39). In this case, certain plots, themes, motifs, or compositional strategies are realized across multiple media with the formal means specific to each medium (cf. RAJEWSKY 2005: 46), thus accentuating the intrinsic value of any involved medium. Jenkins therefore defines transmedial storytelling as a non-media-specific, platform-neutral phenomenon:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

Then, however, two questions arise:

1. What does media independence mean, if this refers not only to a single transmedial phenomenon, but also to an entire transmedial franchise?[3] A production-aesthetical approach is commonly taken to help specify this. This line of argumentation has also already been created by Jenkins:

> Transmedia storytelling reflects the economics of media consolidation or what industry observers call »synergy«. Modern media companies are horizontally integrated—that is, they hold interests across a range of what were once distinct media industries. A media conglomerate has an incentive to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

While a degree of simultaneity is connoted here with the image of horizontal integration, the offshoots of a transmedial franchise are of course not always released at the same time. However, if the temporal dimension is not im-

[1] I exclude phenomena of media combination here, since these are also related to the term multimediality.
[2] ›Text‹ is not used as a literary term in the following; rather, it refers to various forms of medial articulation, which are composed of signs and produce meanings.
[3] JENKINS 2007 refers, for example, to the *Matrix* universe or several superhero franchises.

portant, at what point exactly is it no longer possible to specify an original medium?[4] This question is all the more justified since textual origins seem to be very well perceived in the cultural consciousness and form an intrinsic basis for valuation when a cultural artefact makes its own contribution to a franchise. As it said in a review of the video game to the hit TV series *Lost* (2004–2010): »This is a game for the fans, which only fans can appreciate. But at the same time—in a strange bit of paradox—this is a game that will disappoint almost every Lost fan« (GOLDSTEIN 2008: n.pag.). The TV series therefore seems to form the yardstick for measuring all subsequent offshoots of the franchise—and so the question arises as to the difference between intermediality and transmediality in the process of transmedial storytelling.

Nevertheless, this differentiation is becoming increasingly important, especially for the field of game studies, because the contemporary video game can be considered a paradigmatic pioneer of the processes described by Jenkins. This needs to be verified. A sub-type of intermediality is formed by intermedial references,[5] specified by Rajewsky as a simulation of the functioning of one medium in another, as far as intermedial references by definition imply a crossing of media borders:

> Intermedial references, then, can be distinguished from intramedial [...] by the fact that a given media product cannot *use* or genuinely *reproduce* elements or structures of a different medial system through its own media-specific means; it can only *evoke* or *imitate* them. [...] And yet it is precisely this illusion that potentially solicits in the recipient of a literary text, say, a sense of filmic, painterly, or musical qualities, or—more generally speaking—a sense of a visual or acoustic presence. (RAJEWSKY 2005: 55, original emphases)

Following this approach, the video game relies less and less on intermedial strategies (for example the adaptation of literary structuring patterns); instead, it positions itself increasingly in transmedial systems, in which its own medial specifics are emphasized. The episodic adventure series *The Walking Dead* (2012– ), for example, accentuates its interactive quality compared to the previous comics and the TV series as its unique selling point.[6] This is already becoming apparent in the introductory text message that follows directly after the start of the game: »This game series adapts to the choices you make. The story is tailored by how you play«. This example again suggests that transmediality has less to do with the chronological order of publication than with a general independence of the productions involved.

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[4] Schröter points out that the impossibility of speaking of specifics of media any longer is a general problem of the transmedial perspective: »1. On the one hand, [...] the thought of such a directed transfer of a procedure [...] has to assume that the procedure is *media-unspecific* enough in order to be able to appear in another media context as the same, that is, as a re-identifiable principle—this being the basis for every transmedial comparison. 2. On the other hand, the procedure has to be *media-specific* enough in order to still be able to point in its new media context to the medium from which it was borrowed, or from which it originates« (SCHRÖTER 2012: 24f., original emphases).

[5] On the various types of explicit and implicit intermedial references, cf. WOLF 2014: 29–37.

[6] Cf. SCHMIDT 2014 for detailed explanations on transmedial aspects of the franchise of *The Walking Dead*.

2. But how can this independence be defined more precisely? A related question is: How does it differ from the concept of intertextuality? Intertextuality in the narrow sense denotes the reference of a text to another text, but this reference is not crossmedial in the sense that the mediality of the original text is not important (although the texts may belong to different media).[7] As an analytical concept, intertextuality examines how an independent meaning (i.e., one *different* to the original text) is created by intertextual references. The single text as a closed entity is not questioned in this way (cf. BECKER 2007: 140). When each medium in a transmedial system contributes to the whole in an independent manner, this, conversely, means that each text is, in principle, a closed structure, and that the relationship between these independent texts can also be defined as an intertextual relationship.

Hence, the distinctions between intermediality and transmediality as well as between intertextuality and transmediality are difficult to draw within a transmedial reference system. On the other hand, the concepts of intertextuality and intermediality can help describe the processes of transmedial storytelling in greater detail. This will be discussed in the following on the basis of two exemplary franchises, where reactions from fans and critics suggest that new releases, at a certain point, are no longer accepted as parts of the respective franchises.[8] This means that new releases in these cases are considered to stand in an intermedial or intertextual, but no longer in a transmedial relationship to the original texts.

The *Resident Evil* and the *Silent Hill* series will serve as examples, since both were among the most famous and successful franchises of video game culture until the film adaptations appeared, which initiated a slow but unstoppable decline. Since being made into a film in 2002, *Resident Evil* has become a successful series with four sequels to date. The movie *Silent Hill* in 2006 has already produced one sequel. Although both films went artistically independent ways, in terms of their game experience, the subsequent parts of the game series converged increasingly with the movies. This resulted in both series no longer being able to replicate their earlier artistic and economic successes—the last parts *Resident Evil 6* (2012) and *Silent Hill. Downpour* (2012) were considered the low points of the series, which can be verified by comparing the ratings on www.metacritic.com. In contrast to their paradigmatic, highly rated predecessors (*Resident Evil 4* [2005], PS2: Metascore 96, User Score 8.9/*Silent Hill 2* [2001], PS2: Metascore 89, User Score 8.8),[9] *Resi-*

[7] Following a narrow, literary understanding of the term ›text‹, intertextual references could be also described as *intra*medial references (cf. WOLF 2014: 22).

[8] Some exemplary user comments: »An absolute mess of a game, you call this ›Resident Evil‹?« (Lokizarro); »I used to be the biggest Capcom and RE fan ever, but I wont be buying another Resident Evil game after this one« (Pfhor); »Silent hill is coming to an end with downpour« (carpejason); »This game is atrocious as a Silent Hill sequel« (Inccubus). Of course, there are also positive reviews and dissenting opinions, but it is conspicuous that negative reviews usually refer to deviations from the *Silent Hill* or *Resident Evil* brand.

[9] ›Metascore‹ is the legally protected term from the *Metacritic* website for an arithmetic mean of existing reviews from professional testers, the ›User Score‹ is based on consumer reports. Even if the calculation of the average is not transparent, tendencies can be read here nevertheless.

*dent Evil 6* achieved a Metascore of 67 and a User Score of 5.0, while *Silent Hill. Downpour* achieved a Metascore of 68 and a User Score of 7.3.[10]

What happened? One way to explain these processes lies in a further defining characteristic of transmedial franchises, which are equipped with a greater openness compared to other texts:

> The encyclopedic ambitions of transmedia texts often results in what might be seen as gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story: that is, they introduce potential plots which can not be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

It is therefore useful to refer to the premises of the storyworld concept, which is based on a holistic understanding of narrative texts in the process of interpretation and also takes into account blank spaces:

> More generally, *storyworld* points to the way interpreters of narrative reconstruct a sequence of states, events, and actions not just additively or incrementally but integratively or »ecologically«; recipients do not just attempt to piece together bits of action into a linear timeline but furthermore try to measure the significance of the timeline that emerges against other possible courses of development in the world in which narrated occurrences take place. (HERMAN 2002: 14, original emphasis)[11]

The potentiality of the storyworld is introduced here in contrast to the fixation of narrative texts in a traditional understanding. From this perspective, it is important to ensure consistency across all media products involved in a transmedial franchise and to give the impression that the developed fictional universe is at least potentially perfect and can be explained by logical reasoning, without, of course, excluding fantastic elements (cf. BRÜCKS/WEEDEL 2013: 336f.; THON 2015).

With regard to this impression of logicality, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that each storyworld includes a specific set of general rules (existents, setting, physical laws, social rules and values) that are essential for maintaining narrative coherence (cf. RYAN 2014: 34ff.).[12] These rules can apparently be varied to a certain degree in a transmedial adaptation, such as in the *Star Wars* video game *The Force Unleashed* (2008), where the player is located on the dark side of the Force. Nevertheless, video games seem to include media-specific rules whose violation within the same medium is perceived as a break in the structural coherence of the storyworld. This is the case in the examples of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Accordingly, I will go on to discuss the specific transfer processes between the original *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games and their cinematic adaptations as well as the related modifications of the game series, in order to be able to reconstruct the essential storyworld rules on a ludic and a narrative level. On this basis, the relationship between intertextuality, intermediality, and transmediality in both fictional universes will be described in more detail.

[10] Both values are based on the versions for the Xbox 360.

[11] For an application of the storyworld concept to the field of video games, cf. BACKE 2008: 215–232.

[12] Ryan calls such rules static components and separates them from dynamic components (physical and mental events) (cf. RYAN 2013: 91).

## 2. From Games to Movies[13]

An innovative quality is often denied to cinematic adaptations of video game franchises, because, as Bittanti states, »the logic behind the adaptation strategy is purely economic: In most cases, these films simply try to draw a pre-existing fan base to the cinema rather than expanding the cinematic discourse on video games« (BITTANTI 2001: 219). The *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* movies, in contrast, contribute to the narrative context developed in the games in a media-reflexive manner, in the form of a simulation of the ludic mechanisms of video games on a narrative level.

The *Resident Evil* movies include an independent plot: the protagonist Alice does not appear in the games. Parallels can be found particularly in an intermedial sense. The cinematic franchise is based on a dramaturgy that is typical for games: it includes short cutscenes with little explanatory dialog, followed by long action sequences. The narrative fragments of the films also correspond to the conventional *topoi* of video games. Nothing less than the fate of the world is on the line and all characters besides the main protagonist Alice (Milla Jovovich) are peripheral. Alice's heroic role in the plot consists in her turning out to be the ultimate weapon against the zombie invasion of the world. Consequently, Alice functions as the center of all depicted events. Additionally, in a striking number of scenes, she is positioned centrally in the picture, like a game avatar.

Especially the fifth part of the movie franchise, *Resident Evil. Retribution* (2012) is characterized by a complete conversion to game dramaturgy. The main location, a Research Institute of the dubious Umbrella Group, functions as a simulator of different settings, such as Moscow or an American suburb. Some are known from the previous movies, since Umbrella has tested different zombie scenarios in the simulation. Each environment acts as an individual game level with special enemies in each section (e.g., communist zombies in Moscow). Even reincarnations are possible here, which are reminiscent of a game-specific restart button. Several dead characters from the first parts of the cinematic franchise return for a guest appearance and even Alice herself is marked as replaceable: in a clone faculty, she meets dozens of images of herself.

The first *Silent Hill* movie also includes references to several game mechanics and the initial situation of the film roughly corresponds to that of the first game. When Sharon DaSilva (Jodelle Ferland) suddenly gets visions of Silent Hill, her mother Rose (Radha Mitchell) drives her to the town, where Sharon disappears only a little later. Rose begins the search for her missing daughter in the Midwich Elementary School in Silent Hill, which also acts as the first major setting of the game. Additionally, Sharon has to use the same items as her virtual predecessors, such as a map or a flashlight; she must

[13] A retelling of the extremely convoluted plots of the two series is limited to what is necessary in the following.

also fulfill game-like tasks (a search for keys, etc.), and a noisy radio signals approaching enemies, which is one of the trademarks of the games series.

At the same time, the movies adapt the narrative model of the games to film-specific conventions. This will be illustrated with reference to the *Silent Hill* franchise.[14] For example, the explanatory models are more scientific than in the games. The omnipresent fog in Silent Hill is explained explicitly for the first time in the franchise as originating from a subterranean fire and causing a permanent ash rain. The population of Silent Hill is also much more present in the movies, with members of a twisted religious cult providing monological explanations for the mysterious events. The locations in the first parts of the games were, in contrast, empty wasteland, where the social history of the place had to be decrypted from textual fragments and dialogues with the few minor characters. In the movies, this process of demystification is supported by a conversion to conventional narrative *topoi* such as the classical two-worlds model of the fantastic film. The *Silent Hill* movie adds a storyline to the plot of the first game, in which Christopher DaSilva (Sean Bean), the husband of the disappeared character Rose, searches for his wife in a ›real-world‹ version of Silent Hill, visualized by an alternating scene, in which Rose is located on a street in Silent Hill, while her husband searches her at the corresponding place in his reality. In the games, however, the ontological state of the town remains unexplained, because they do not include an external perspective on the location.

In addition to these disambiguations, there is a shift toward classical American horror cinema, by changing the sex of the main character in relation to the first game. This is underlined by the fact that Rose acts as a typical ›scream queen‹ in the first half of the film. Genuinely cinematic models are therefore used to adapt the gameplay to the medium, with this trend being intensified in the second part of the movie series. *Silent Hill. Revelation* (2012) broadly follows the dramaturgy of the slasher genre: every time the protagonist Heather (Adelaide Clemens) discovers another setting, another monster that resides there pursues her, so that Heather is constantly busy running and hiding. This leads to a traditional heroes' journey, where the heroine only starts to fight against the monsters and followers of the cult after the first two thirds of the film.

These changes on the narrative level cause a crucial change in the subtext. While the place Silent Hill represents a psychologically motivated manifestation of the personal hell of several main characters in the games, it is charged with characteristics of a Christian connoted imagination of hell in the movies (e.g., in connection with the aforementioned subterranean fire, which causes a blazing inferno beneath the streets of the town). Another ex-

[14] However, the *Resident Evil* films are also based on as many game-related allusions as TV or cinematic references. The character Chris Redfield, for instance, is double-coded because he not only refers to the game character with the same name but is also played by the main actor of *Prison Break* (2005–2009), Wentworth Miller. Accordingly, Chris is the only person who knows the way out of the zombified prison in *Resident Evil. Afterlife* (2010), which is used as a running gag throughout the film.

ample concerns the famous game character Pyramid Head. For James in *Silent Hill 2*, the recurring enemy of the executioner symbolizes the fact that he has killed his beloved wife and consequently repressed the memory of his actions. For Rose, however, the executioner pursuing her has no personal meaning, so he is charged with features of decay, such as slimy, rotting cockroaches on his body, which occur here for the first time in the franchise (the games take over this element later), since Pyramid Head represents a Christian conception of hell and its demonic minions. Unlike in the underlying game, this Christian-connoted model of world results in the church acting as the central location in the first film, since the cult's twisted faith here forms the central normative transgression. Thus, the spatial boundary between the church and Silent Hill does not act as a semantic boundary. Rather, the cult emerges as the real evil throughout the film and is finally sanctioned in an act of escalating violence.

At the same time, the cinematic world is charged by the tragic history of the protagonists; a dysfunctional family model frames the terrible events. Rose drives with Sharon to the town without informing her husband about the plan. Since the family has not previously been intact, it is also not possible to reinstall the family idyll in the course of the film; hence the search of the husband for his wife and daughter remains unsuccessful. This is especially evident at the end of the film, which connects the tragic family history with the Christian model of world and includes a significant departure from the games. Rose manages to rescue her daughter from Silent Hill, but when she returns home she realizes that she and her daughter are still located in an intermediate world, since her husband is not able to interact with them. While Silent Hill is a mainly psychological manifestation in the games, it is conceived as a kind of limbo in the film, from where there is no escape, especially when the leading characters suffer for deviation from norms such as the middle-class American family model. The morality propagated in traditional American horror movies, which punishes those that transgress against the bourgeois moral code, seems to be responsible for this additional punishing of the characters.

Consequently, the intermedial staging of the cinematic franchise moves further and further away from the mechanisms of the video game series in the second movie. References to the games are situated on a metaphorical level. For instance, all characters in this part wear masks, either directly, or in a symbolic sense, that can be understood as a reference to the game-specific dichotomy between player and avatar:[15] the monsters are faceless or turn out to be shape changers. A friend of Heather turns out to be a traitor and a member of the twisted cult, while the cult itself does not show its true face. Ordinary cult members wear gas masks and their leader reveals

[15] This is also confirmed by the fact that Sharon is controlled by several instances all the time. Her father tries to dominate her, while the darkness (the demonic power behind the events in Silent Hill) uses Sharon—or, rather, Sharon's separated dark side, Allessa—literally as an avatar on earth.

herself as a demon at the end of the movie, transforming into a horrible monster. The main protagonists Heather and Harry are also not what they seem: they carry the names of characters from *Silent Hill 3* (2003) as disguise, so that the cult cannot find them. In reality, they are identical with Christopher DaSilva and his daughter Sharon from the first film.

Sharon is therefore created as an ambivalent figure. In one of the first scenes, her father gives her the outfit of Heather in *Silent Hill 3* as a birthday present, a situation that foreshadows the subsequent events for the informed viewers. Sharon's story ends when she is able to defend herself like Heather in the games. Thus, her implicit task is to merge with her embodied character, which exists as a differentiated person only in the extradiegetic reality—i.e., the storyworld—formed by the *Silent Hill* games. Sharon is designed as a character that in principle is independent from her virtual role model, since she originates from the first movie. However, the games form an intertextual level of comparison and constitute an implicit goal for her journey, providing it with meaning.

In summary, the narratives of the films differ significantly from that of the games due to media-related actualizations and transformations into cinematic conventions. They include intermedial references to the medium of video games, in the form of a combination of a simulation of video game structures on a narrative level with massive intertextual references to the original storyworlds (either similar settings or parallels in the constellation of characters, etc.).[16] The intertextual level also specifies the configuration of the intermedial references (to determine concretely, for example, which items—map, flashlight, etc.—Sharon carries in her ›inventory‹), condenses the plot, and injects additional meaning for connoisseurs of the games. In this way, the movies constitute themselves as independent in relation to the video games, on the basis of intermedial references, while intertextuality ensures narrative coherence.

## 3. From Movies to Games

The transfer processes do not run in one direction only: both game series have been deeply transformed by borrowing from the cinematic adaptations. Beginning with the fifth part, *Silent Hill. Homecoming* (2008), the *Silent Hill* series has experienced some obvious visual changes as well as some less obvious narrative and ludic adaptations to the cinematic storyworld. These have characterized the *Silent Hill* game world ever since. The visual changes are most evident: the visual changes of the world in *Silent Hill. Homecoming* have been taken over directly from the *Silent Hill* movie, for instance. The same applies for major parts of the world design and the visual appearance of the enemies in the subsequent games.

[16] Cf. also FEHRLE 2015; THOSS 2014 on *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010).

It is worth taking a closer look at these narrative and ludic changes. Particularly interesting in this respect is *Silent Hill. Downpour*, where the narrative changes relate to the open-world structure of the game. In the course of events, the prisoner Murphy experiences his personal hell in Silent Hill, comparable to James Sunderland in part two. The main character suffers from his complicity in the attack on a friendly guard during his time in jail and the town permanently confronts him with this guilt. But this is not psychologically suppressed, like in *Silent Hill 2*. Murphy knows his guilt, his story is only narrated in fragments through flashbacks. Furthermore, the exact events are not fixed, but related to the actions of the players at the end of the game: Depending on whether they kill or spare another character, the following cutscene shows whether Murphy has attacked or spared his friend in the past. Thus, the end of the game changes. Either Murphy goes free or he is executed. In this way, a moral model of guilt and punishment is implemented in the gaming process. Not for nothing are negative characters visualized in the game as representations of the Boogeyman, who punishes children for evil deeds. It is not the repression or acceptance of a past crime that are the dominant narrative topics here; rather, the represented world is dominated by a form of divine justice, which seeks to sanction norm violations and is linked with the Christian-connoted world model of the movie franchise.

These narrative modifications led to a ludic alignment with the action genre. Attempts to run and hide formed an important part of the first games, as this was in harmony with the theme of repression. With the disappearance of this narrative level and the focus on retribution, the game mechanics changed. Even comparing the cover designs used for *Silent Hill. Homecoming* with those of the first four games makes clear that part five focuses more on the conflict with monstrous creatures than on psychological horror. While the covers of *Silent Hill* part one to four tended to accentuate the acting characters or the mysterious setting, some design variants of part five are based on a presentation of the horrific opponents, partly including the weapon arm of the protagonist as a prefiguration of the upcoming fight.

This is also reflected in the characterization of the main figure: since protagonist Alex passed through military combat training, the gameplay is much more action-driven than that of its predecessors. And while the intrigues of the secret cult constitute a central mythological background of the entire game series, the members of the cult act as physical opponents in the movies, which must be combated by force. This also forms a central gameplay element of *Silent Hill. Homecoming*, in which Alex combats the members with the force of arms.

Part six, *Silent Hill. Downpour*, also tries to stimulate innovation with the integration of foreign genre elements: the game is based on an open-world mechanic which involves dozens of voluntary sidequests besides the main missions. Such gameplay adjustments continued to the point that the *Silent Hill* brand served only as a narrative context for the mobile adaption *Silent Hill. Book of Memories* (2012) for the handheld PlayStation Vita. The

game itself works as a gameplay clone of the hack and slay *Diablo* (1996), and has nothing in common with the original game mechanics of the series. Consequently, this change of the game genre was not accepted by fans and critics—the production received devastating reviews all around the world.

In relation to the *Resident Evil* series, changes can be stated on a slightly different level. In this case, the games adapt to the character focus and the global setting from the movies, and this also culminates in modifications on the level of game mechanics:

1.) The first *Resident Evil* movie is created relatively episodically, but the episodes are held together by the overarching story of the outbreak of the T-virus and questions about the memory loss of the main character, Alice. This development culminates in the fourth installment of the cinematic series, in which relevant story elements are settled exclusively at the beginning and end of the film: appearances of the antagonist Wesker (Shawn Roberts) connect the two parts, the middle episode in the prison is self-sufficient. *Resident Evil. Retribution* is episodic anyway, due to the level structure. The games are therefore increasingly episodically structured. *Resident Evil 6* divides the story into four campaigns, which describe the same events from different perspectives and can be played individually. This is accompanied by a general sub-dominance of the narrative level. All four campaigns include several McGuffins; the actions of the protagonists are motivated simply by the fact that they have to keep track of a special person in every case. Fittingly, it works as a personal and non-scenario centered narration. The structure of the represented dystopia contains no more secrets, thus focusing the soap opera-like character constellations.

2.) The movie franchise ceased to be limited to the events in Raccoon City since the third part in 2007. Since *Resident Evil 5* (2009) the game series has also been designed as a global narrative. *Resident Evil 6* in particular includes more varied and spectacular locations than ever before. A plot summary would also fit into a James Bond scenario. A review describes this point as follows:

> Alone in the Leon campaign which was promoted as »classic«, the hero [...] is not only almost killed by a military aircraft and followed by dozens of cars in an explosion cloud, he also survives a plane crash, car accidents, as well as a train wreck and flies with a helicopter through a complete high-rise building. (HERDE 2012: n.pag., translation M.H.)

Because of this global focus, well-known and public locations (such as Shanghai in part six) are staged as flashpoints from the outbreak, and the atmosphere gets more and more apocalyptic. Likewise, the films are strictly steering toward a global apocalypse, which is already made clear by the title of the second part, *Resident Evil. Apocalypse* (2004). The first game parts, however, were restricted to enclosed scenarios, where a non-infected outside was always imaginable.

3.) The subdominance of the narrative level, the dissolution of the enigmatic character of the represented world, and the apocalyptic setting, led to

the point were puzzles became a rarity in the game series.[17] Instead, the films' tendency toward action overkill was translated into suitable game mechanics. The Las Plagas virus, originating in *Resident Evil 4*, created intelligent weapon-using zombies and initiated a development that transformed the *Resident Evil* series into a narrative scenario that is able to adapt to any kind of action mechanic, such as a team shooter scenario. Consequently, the shoot-outs in part six provide a third-person cover shooter gameplay, as in the *Gears of War* series.

## 4. Dysfunctional Convergences

The *Resident Evil* movies established some kind of theme park version of the franchise, as described by Aarseth in relation to the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game *World of Warcraft* (2004– ), whose players are »moving from one attraction to the next while forgetting or ignoring everything about the fictional world of the same name« (AARSETH 2008: 119). They implemented an arcade game-like staging, by building on level structures, etc., which the games never had in this way. At the same time, however, the game series modernized toward a more action-oriented approach, whereby the films worked as exemplary models. The result was an increasing convergence between games and movies, just as in the case of the *Silent Hill* franchise.

But what exactly were the incompatible processes regarding the transmedial storytelling? Storyworld writer Jörg Ihle distinguishes between six elements, that each storyworld includes: ›concept‹, ›conflict‹, ›character‹, ›setting‹, ›rules‹ and ›genre‹ (cf. IHLE 2014). But in relation to games, this elements can refer both to the ludic and the narrative level. Following this, the *Resident Evil* game series includes narrative changes relating to ›character‹ and ›setting‹, but what has changed here to a larger extent are the related ludic ›rules‹ and thus also the ›genre‹ of the game, not the narrative genre of the storyworld, which remains a horror scenario.

The narrative changes in the *Silent Hill* game series, by contrast, have taken place on the levels of ›concept‹ and ›conflict‹. While the central conflicts in the earlier parts were settled on a personal level (me vs. myself), the conflict in *Silent Hill. Downpour* becomes ethical-moral (good vs. evil). However, the essential effect on the narrative coherence of the represented world is also based on a corresponding transformation of the ludic components: some game elements, such as the integration of free decision rules and the open-world genre, which are related to the newly integrated moral conflict on the

[17] A few puzzle settings are still included in part six—e.g., in the cathedral section, where mirrors or statues must be placed in the correct positions. This is typical for the series—except that the solution is directly determined, because there is only one way of doing this.

narrative level, do not match the original concept of the storyworld, with its guilty protagonists and uncompromising consequences.

This is precisely why the series were better able to cope with the change from games to movies than with the change from movies to games. In the first phase, the movies simulated features of games on a narrative level. They worked as intermedial adaptations of games *per se.* To do this, however, they had to move away from the narrative models developed in the games. Thus, transmedial storytelling requires a foreign media reference, but only in order to accentuate the specific value of the media involved.[18] At the same time, the movies ensured narrative coherence by referring to storyworld elements of the original *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games. In this way, the films can be regarded as transmedial because they retain their medial independence with a merely intertextual approach to storyworld elements of the games.

The games, in contrast, were more adaptive, because they simulated narrative elements of the films on a ludic level as well. They can therefore be regarded as full intermedial adaptations of the films. However, this resulted in a radical break with the storyworld elements of the original games: when the game series absorbed the scenarios, which were adapted for the movies, some storyworld specifics got lost. Consequently, the more recent parts were perceived by users as different storyworlds, which remained only in an intertextual relationship to their virtual predecessors.

In both cases, it is again worth citing David Herman, who describes the storyworld reception as a model-building process:

> Narrative understanding requires determining how the actions and events recounted relate to what might have happened in the past, what could be happening (alternatively) in the present, and what may yet happen as a result of what already has come about. (HERMAN 2002: 14)

This seems to apply also and in particular to ludic specifics of video games, because when they get lost, the related storyworlds lose their own identity. The production company Capcom noted as a result that it wants to perform a return to the roots of the game series for *Resident Evil* part seven (cf. WÖBBEKING 2013); the same seems to apply for the next part of *Silent Hill* (cf. KROSTA 2014).

## 5. Epilogue. Functional Franchises

Finally, it should be noted that the concepts of intermediality and intertextuality can be used for a description of the processes in successful transmedial franchises. One telling example of this is the *Lego* game series. The users

[18] The *Walking Dead* games series also accentuates its interactive qualities in the context of an intermedial reference to serial TV conventions (»previously on« sequences at the beginning of a new episode, cliffhanger structures, etc.).

experience stories related to different cinematic franchises (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, etc.)—just with *Lego* figures as main characters. The crucial question in this context seems to be: should the represented world be described as a part of, for instance, the *Star Wars* universe, the *Lego* universe, or as a hybrid form? And if it is a hybrid form, then which universe can be determined as the dominant one? If we take the rules of the layer of the *ludic* world as the basis of our considerations, the answer is simple, since these rules correspond not to those of video games, located in the *Star Wars* universe, but to the overall rules of the *Lego* franchise: the characters are not able to die, puzzles need to be solved by constructing objects with *Lego* bricks, etc. In this respect, we are dealing with a game world belonging to the *Lego* universe, with intertextual references to storyworld elements of the *Lego* franchise on a ludic level, including intermedial references to the *Star Wars* movies as a background against which the games mark themselves as independent. Additional intertextual references to storyworld elements of the *Star Wars* universe on a narrative level ensure the narrative coherence of this hybrid *Lego Star Wars* franchise.

Interestingly, this reading also corresponds with *The LEGO Movie* (2014). It includes significant intermedial references to the *Lego* video games: ludic mechanisms involving building objects out of *Lego* bricks are cited in several sequences. Overall, however, movies and games are marked as functioning independently from each other. While the games involve an ironic retelling of the plots of their cinematic models, *The LEGO Movie* tells a separate story, which lends plausibility to the integration of the different *Lego* video game franchises in one *Lego* universe. The protagonists of the film reach several new places (or, rather, storyworlds) within the *Lego* universe, in which intertextual references to different franchises are located. The world of the film is thus created as a superior world from which the offshoots derive.[19]

This relationship between the movie and the games in the *Lego* universe represents a paradigmatic transmedial franchise, because of the general independence of the productions involved in different media, which is demonstrated on the basis of intermedial references. At the same time, all the games follow the ludic rules of the *Lego* universe in an intertextual sense. Hence no logical break is provoked within the game worlds, as in the examples of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill.*

And while the success of the *Lego* universe does not break down, there are some developments from the independent games sector, such as *Outlast* (2013), that seem to aspire to the rank of the old survival horror genre kings *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Also of interest in this regard is *The Evil Within* (2014) by creative director Shinji Mikami, the creator of the *Resident Evil* series, which references the original narrative and ludic world rules of both game series on an intertextual level, to contrast the actual situation of

[19] As the last minutes of the film demonstrate, this superior world is in turn subordinated to the real world. This way, the heterogeneous, intertextual mix of the film is classified as a product of the imagination of a playing child and thus also made plausible.

the survival horror genre. The game includes numerous allusions to the first parts of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*: the cutscene to the first zombie encounter, for example, corresponds to the analogue sequence in *Resident Evil 1,* the gameplay is very similar to that of *Resident Evil 4.* In addition, the game switches to a mental hospital in an intermediate world between the chapters, reminiscent of the psychological background and the metaphorical visual language of the first parts of *Silent Hill*. At the same time, the visual presentation of *The Evil Within* includes noticeable black bars at the top and the bottom of the screen—again, an intermedial reference serves as a background, against which the media independence of the product is emphasized. In this case, this means that *The Evil Within* distances itself from the current cinematically inspired standard of survival horror, for which the last parts of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* are paradigmatic, by simulating an aesthetic proximity to the older parts of the two series. Thus, the core of both series now appears to move into other franchises and seems to become the basis of the local world rules. Perhaps the reason for this is simple: some worlds fail.

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Anne Ganzert

# »We welcome you to your *Heroes* community. Remember, everything is connected«. A Case Study in Transmedia Storytelling


## Abstract

Second screen strategies are quite common in today's television industry. Television viewers are used to hashtag suggestions appearing on their screens while watching their shows; networks commonly use second screen options and apps to enhance the audience's engagement with programming. NBC's *Heroes* (2006–2010) was »arguably, the largest and most complex transmedia network […] conceived« (RUPPEL 2012: 224) at the time; the series tested many strategies of media convergence in distributing elements of its fictional world through multiple media platforms.

This article focuses on the show's strategies enticing viewers to engage with its websites, print media extensions, accompanying games, and tie-over webisodes. There have been studies focusing on the series' branding (cf. GIANNINI 2014) or on the links connecting *Heroes*' different elements (cf. RUPPEL 2012: 61), yet there is a tangible lack of attention to what Jason Mittell has termed »forensic fandom« (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.).

This article examines the narrative gaps and story arc stops created by the fantasy series. The following discusses how these gaps allowed some viewers to evolve from their assumed passiveness in the general audience to instead become part of the fast growing fan base. Depending on varying levels of involvement, this fandom generated a number of *Heroes* ›experts‹, creating a tiered hierarchy. Those experts sought to answer questions about

mystified symbols, underdeveloped characters, open-ended storylines and potential references provided by the series. This article argues that the NBC strategy ensured the growth of a willing fandom and growing expert base without relying on overt prompts.

## 1. Welcome to *Heroes*

An ever-growing group of people with diverse special, or even supernatural powers tries to avoid apocalyptic versions of the future, while struggling with their personal issues. They slowly but surely come to terms with their only recently discovered talents as well as with the consequences of these skills and, in long and intertwining storylines, meet friends and foes on their journey. The characters either choose to join, fight against, or are captured by at least two mysterious organizations that know a lot more about the origins of these powers than the people affected. Declared season one goals are expressed in phrases like »Save the cheerleader, save the world« or questions like »How to stop an exploding man?«.

This is perhaps the most basic description of the first season of the television series *Heroes*, which aired on NBC in 2006 and will find new life in 2015 in the form of *Heroes Reborn*. The team around the executive producers Tim Kring and Dennis Hammer employed different transmedia strategies to advertise their show to potential and early audiences from the series' beginnings. They also used transmedia techniques in the so-called *Heroes Evolutions* concept to drive the narrative through the four seasons until 2010. Having witnessed the success of ABC's *Lost* (2004–2010) and its associated fandom and transmedia activities, *Heroes* was eager to benefit from the results of the experimental transmedia universe of *Lost*'s early years (cf. SHORT 2011: 139).

The *Heroes Evolutions* concept allowed for free exploration of content as well as giving guidance through its different media outlets for the participants in an Alternate Realty Game (ARG). Some users functioned as pathfinders, drilling into the narrative and spreading their findings in forums (cf. MITTEL 2012: n.pag.), encouraging others to explore themselves. These lead-users, their subsequent-users, and the ARG-players guided by the developers all had to be invited or encouraged to enter into the transmedia world. The different points of entry and the audience's movement through different media are the focal point here.[1] The original four-season run of *Heroes* is a closed object of investigation that can give insight into strategies employed by NBC before the contemporary standards such as twitter handles and mobile apps developed. This study will be of renewed interest with the continua-

[1] Audience is understood as a target group or niche group within the larger dimension of viewers, but »which is not an analytical category, like class, gender or race, but a product of the media industry itself« (MOSCO 1996: 262).

tion of the thematic world of *Heroes* in the form of the limited run series *Heroes. Reborn* in 2015.

Looking back to 2006, NBC offered a limited range of online features to the series' audience. The series' homepage provided basic information on characters, cast, and series narrative, an episode guide, and downloadable screensavers. This page was linked to the network's main site and went up around the time of the series' premier on broadcast television. Contrary to newer series, such as HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011– ), it is doubtful that this online introduction material was meant to generate an early ›buzz‹ for the series. This becomes evident by investigating the marketing tool that introduced *Game of Thrones*, Campfire's *The Maester's Path* campaign (2011) in comparison.

*The Maester's Path* both targeted fans of the preexisting novels and sought a new fan-base for HBO's TV adaptation. The marketing agency sent so-called ›influencers‹ a wooden case full of spices and bottled scents, allowing them to (re-)create smells of the different regions in the fictional realm of Westeros (cf. KLASTRUP/TOSCA 2014). Campfire, in an accompanying video for the campaign, explains that they selected these individuals because of their ability to quickly share their experience with their respective readers and social media followers. Identifying their own lead-users and utilizing them so they would actively invite their subsequent-users along on the virtual journey to sites of George R.R. Martin's narrative universe had multiple effects. The subsequent-users too could walk on ›the Wall‹ or listen in on conversations in a tavern; the lead-users' blogs got increased traffic and the campaign spread virally, due to its ›digital word of mouth‹ approach via YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

Note that Twitter was just starting out in 2006, so it was not yet considered to be integral to marketing campaigns. Therefore no cleverly hidden *Heroes* twitter handles can be found in the set dressing, as for example SyFy's *Haven* (2010– ) likes to do, by disguising #escapetohaven in their *mise-en-scène* (e.g., as graffiti on a house). Neither was there a mobile app to sync your current episode to, as for example Starz' *Da Vinci's Demons* offered in 2013. The show asked the audience to »sync now« at the beginning of each episode. Using different characters, they could then digitally explore the realms of renaissance Florence, Italy. The scenes and objects available to the users would change according to which episode they were currently watching and synced to (cf. GANZERT 2013). Another transmedia device, often used today, did not find application in *Heroes* either. Many series, to increase the shares and Facebook likes, create polls in which viewers can vote for series elements such as their ›favorite villain‹. These polls provide some knowledge about viewers and uses of convergent offerings, but provide little for the narrative. They also generate revenue.[2] *Heroes*' web extensions instead focused on inviting further investigation into characters, the series' fictional compa-

[2] During the show's hiatus between seasons, there was one voting process regarding possible new characters for upcoming seasons and their abilities, but again there was no charge.

nies, and locations. The websites thereby created a narrative construct that added diegetically to the series storyworld and therefore the enjoyment of the participating audience. All second-screen offers mentioned in this article were accessible without overly specific media conditions and generally free of charge. They were, however, financed through sponsorship and product placement by companies such as Cisco, Nissan, Sprint, and Apple, as Erin Giannini has explained (cf. GIANNINI 2014: 28).

Most of these elements were part of a concept originally entitled the *Heroes 360 Experience*. The name was changed into *Heroes Evolutions* for season 2 and the concept received a Creative Arts Emmy for Interactive Media Programming/Interactive Fiction in 2008 (cf. GILLAN 2011: 3). In her book *Television and New Media*, Jennifer Gillan considers *Heroes Evolutions* as »must-click TV«, a term she uses »to describe new media influenced network programming, marketing, broadcasting, and distribution strategies and audience reception practices« (GILLAN 2011: 1). It was activated on January 19, 2007, the original broadcasting date of the first season's 12th episode, »Godsend«. This episode was clearly not chosen randomly, as will become evident later. In an interview about *Heroes Evolutions*, co-executive producer and writer Jesse Alexander said that the then current version was a ›dry run‹ for an even bigger experience in the works for the future. It will be interesting to look at those strategies again, when *Heroes Reborn* will be shown and advertized for in 2015—this time, it already has a hashtag.

## 2. Entering the *Heroes* Orbit

Before entering the *Heroes* universe, the audience has to be identified as ›the audience‹ (cf. ANG 1991: 61), with the potential and the media conditions necessary. At the same time the audience has to consent to their interpellation as such (cf. ALTHUSSER 2010: 146) and be willing to accept the invitation to interact with the show (cf. BOOTH 2011: 373f.). This is what, according to TV scholar Sara Gwenllian-Jones, constitutes the popularity of transmedia narrations:

> The appeal of these vast, transmedia fictions lies precisely in their invitations to immersion and interactivity; they are constructed, marketed, and used by fans not as ›texts‹ to be ›read‹ but as cosmologies to be entered, experienced and imaginatively interacted with. (GWENLLIAN-JONES 2011: 84)

These invitations to enter can be rather obvious, like text blurbs or overlays over the images to invite people to visit a homepage, use a twitter handle or, as mentioned above, to »sync now«. Nevertheless, this kind of interpellation is not applicable for audiences of the DVD version of *Heroes*, given that such overlays are usually only part of the broadcasted episodes and deducted for the DVD. This is why this paper focuses on invitations that were expressed through the narration, staging and montage itself.

For example, so-called eastereggs are useful devices in order to lead audiences deeper into a narrative world. Director Lars von Trier calls them »Lookeys«, and explains: »For the casual observer, it's just a glitch or a mistake«, but »[f]or the initiated, it's a riddle to be solved. All Lookeys can be decoded by a system that is unique« (quoted in BROWN 2006: n.pag.). Movie and series creators alike have long applied this kind of hidden object or symbol principle, as Carlos A. Scolari has shown for *Lost* (cf. SCOLARI 2013: 50) and Paul Booth for *Doctor Who* (2005– ) (cf. BOOTH 2011: 370). Such elements can also be found in *Heroes*. The most prominent easteregg is a helix symbol that appears in varying quantities and forms in 17 out of the 23 episodes in the first season. In the second episode alone it is visible in a DNA computer program, on a business card, in a drawing, a painting, in a comic, and in one shot, the symbol is even formed by pool noodles. Later in the season, glass shards or the holes in a burned door take the shape of the helix. This symbol was so much of a central idea and connecting or guiding symbol for the series, that, in an interview with TV critic Michael Ausiello, creator Tim Kring stated:

> I would just say that part of the fun of watching the show is seeing how certain things crop up. And if you look at that symbol carefully, you might be able to figure it out. By the way, the symbol also shows up in places viewers can't see: On the door of a room in the soundstage where Heroes shoots, the sign reads ›PROPS‹—with that special S as the symbol. (Ausiello Report/Entertainment Weekly, 2006)

Other eastereggs in *Heroes* are a cockroach, a mysterious scar and the entirely fictional medical publication *Activating Evolution*, written by one of the show's characters. The book's title and cover are frequently mentioned and shown in the series, either prominently featured in the camera shot or casually placed in the background. The introduction to the book used to be partly legible on a homepage that appeared legitimate, complete with contact information, testimonials, and critiques for the book. Digging into the meaning and origin of these eastereggs is an important part of the show's forensic fandom (cf. MITTELL 2009), but only one element in the *Heroes* universe.

## 3. The Planets in the *Heroes* Universe

*Heroes* follows a mostly chronological timeline and narrates its long storyarches in logical succession. But the show is at times as tricky as a mind-game movie or puzzle film (cf. BUCKLAND 2009). In order to gather all the small pieces to solve such a puzzle (cf. BUCKLAND 2009: 57) the audience ideally decides: »We're going to have to watch that again!« (MITTELL 2006: 35, quoting *Lost*'s John Locke). In order not to miss a hint to the mythology, re-watching is a common viewing practice (cf. JENKINS 1995: 56). The *Heroes* puzzle pieces are especially small, as each character has very little screen-time to his- or herself before the focus jumps to someone else, causing a cliffhanger or pos-

ing a riddle every few minutes. But »[t]he weeks between episodes open up a text, allowing all manner of intruders and intertexts to inflect our textual gestalt« (GRAY 2003: 69) and giving the audience time to think about the riddles or research them online.

This built-in research period shrinks due to new viewing practices, like ›binge watching‹ with TV-on-demand. And if the trend toward *ad hoc* releases of whole seasons continues, like *Netflix* did for their first in-house production *House of Cards* in February 2013, transmedia universes will also change. But the invitations to older transmedia worlds hold up, even if the contents on the other end of the link might no longer be available (cf. RUPPEL 2012: 51).

If, between 2006 and 2010, audience members accepted one of the invitations and went online to educate themselves about, e.g., the helix symbol, they could find countless forums and message boards. They could learn that the symbol is a vertical half of the well-established symbol for DNA sequences and compare and discuss their observations with others. One of the bigger discussion forums was located on the *9th Wonders!* page, that also inspired this paper's title. This page was the official/unofficial fan site for *Heroes* and promised many things to its visitors:

> This site is your direct connection to Heroes. The cast. The creators. The fans. We're all in this together. Come back here often to get updates from the set. Clues of storyline to come. Interviews. Live chats. Videos. And some surprises that we have in store. We welcome you to your Heroes community. Remember, everything is connected.
>
> Tim Kring

The page is made to look like a silkscreen printed paper cover and therefore aesthetically references back into the TV series. In *Heroes*, *9th Wonders!* is a comic book drawn by Isaac Mendez, an artist who can look into the future, in which other characters recognize themselves and find useful hints for their own actions. It is—at least on a visual level—what Jason Mittell accurately calls a »diegetic extension« (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.). Even though *Heroes*' aesthetics are similar to adaptations of DC or Marvel comics and the genre might suggest otherwise, the show was not based on a print original comic book. But while the series was running as well as during the hiatus, free comics were released online.[3] Comics or books and the core element of a transmedia world can have different relations: they can either be retellings or be structured like a new, unseen episode (cf. MITTELL 2015: n.pag.). Following this definition, the *Heroes* graphic novels were a mix. A single graphic novel is too short for a whole new episode, but they could be the equivalent to one character's screen time in one *Heroes*' episode. They all offered new information on character origins and past events, so they were not mere retellings of the story. However, while they sometimes ventured far away from the show's plot, the comics connected to it very closely and added to the ›fan-text‹ (cf. ROBSON 2010: 211) through transmedia. Tying in nicely with this transmediali-

[3] The show's developer, Tim Kring, and his team of authors gave a nod to the roots of the genre and offered a highlight for fans when they invited comic legend Stan Lee to do a cameo as a bus driver in Episode 16 of the first season.

ty is the fact that the TV show itself is structured like a printed publication: the seasons are volumes and the episodes are called chapters—another nod toward the intertwining of the different media outlets. Unfortunately, this literary structure does not extend to the *9th Wonders!* page, even though the page was supposedly creator Tim Kring's direct connection to the show's fans and could have been structured similarly.

This page with its promise of ›a community‹ and all the fan-operated pages are clearly aimed at the fans as an extradiegetic group of people. The community will thus form as they communicate with each other and exchange knowledge, gaining more and more experience with the fictional universe of the show. The forums are also the space in which the lead-users and their subsequent-users communicate with each other. In order to be recognized as a lead-users, they had to share their forensic endeavors with others, posting news on their search or their »drilling« (MITTEL 2012: n.pag.), which would sometimes »lead them to go as far as examining the source code to a digital graphic novel in the hope it might reveal a link to a hidden space of content« (RUPPEL 2012: 55).

These external fan practices may be participatory but they are clearly located in an extradiegetic orbit of the narrative world. This means that these fan activities have little effect on the narrative, as Scolari poignantly puts it: »In short: *not all the paratexts that sprout around a text necessarily form part of its narrative world*« (SCOLARI 2013: 62, original emphasis). The *9th Wonders!* page is an »engagement medium«, which, in the words of Ivan Askwith, is able »to provide audiences with a range of opportunities to engage with television content« (ASKWITH 2007: 62). Fan forums like this do not necessarily fall under the oft-quoted definition by Henry Jenkins:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (JENKINS 2011: n.pag.)

To avoid slipping into a transmedia taxonomy or a mere listing of elements and failing the claim to know every corner of the *Heroes* universe, the following section hones in on how an intradiegetic invitation to transmediality can take place.

## 4. An Intradiegetic Transmedia Invitation

As one evident example for this kind of invitation, I draw upon one specific scene from episode 12 of season 1, »Godsend«, the episode when the *Heroes Evolutions* concept launched as mentioned above. The two adversary characters Mohinder Suresh and Noah Bennet have a brief conversation during which Bennet hands over one of his business cards. In a close-up of the card the audience can now read the web address »www.primatechpaper.com«

(see fig. 1). At this point of the TV narrative, the audience already knows the name of Bennet's company—the only reason for this invitational close-up is for people to go online and try out the web address. This is even more evident given that we never see Mohinder actually visit the homepage. Christy Dena understands this scene as a »catalytic allusion«, which »can have two functions: they can simply operate normally as part of the non-interactive discourse, or they can succeed in being recognised and acted upon as a catalyst for action« (DENA 2009: 310). Assuming the allusion worked and the audience followed the invitation, they found a homepage that let them browse through company information, etc. It was very reduced in style as well as information and the design looked outdated for 2007.


Fig. 1:
Screenshot of business card close up from *Heroes* S01E12 (»Godsend«)

In Marc Ruppel's detailed network analysis of the connections between media and narration, he explains the different links or edges that can prompt movement from one medium to another, focusing on what he calls ›migratory cues‹. These cues can be »any sign in a transmedia fiction that assists an audience in making correspondences and connections between sites« (RUPPEL 2012: 62). When the audience recognizes and follows the prompt to move to another source of content, they have to blend the information given at the start with the content at the end point of their movement: »In other words, migratory cues are active cognitive constructs, devices of storytelling through which various narrative paths are marked by producers and located by an audience through activation patterns« (RUPPEL 2012: 62). To Ruppel, the business card close-up is a

> unidirectional example of a direct internal cue (unidirectional in that there is no content that subsequently leads one [back] to the TV episode from which the cue originated). [...] Once this cue is followed (the target being the website itself), we encounter a similarly seamless and fictional website for the Primatech Paper Company [...] Following yet another direct internal cue—the phone number—one can opt into the Heroes 360° Experience [...] In this regard, the direct cue also functions as a trailhead for the intracompositional integration of an Alternate Reality Game. (RUPPEL 2012: 103f.)

At this point I want to consider the visitors who didn't follow the latter cue, but continued their own research on the page.[4] When the mouse cursor of the self-motivated user hovered over the company's logo on the top left corner (see fig. 2), the ever-present helix symbol lit up in red. After clicking on the symbol a login window appeared, asking for a name and password. The name »bennet« was already filled in and the matching password was easy to guess. If successful, a secret *Assignment Tracker 2.0* database opened up, which allowed the users access to blackened .pdf files about characters that ›the company‹ was either employing, following, or holding in custody.


Fig. 2:
Screenshot of http://www.primatechpaper.com [accessed August 2, 2009]

These redacted files are a great metaphor for the clearly defined power structures at play in this specific interaction—we, as the audience or »viewsers« (HARRIES 2002: 103),[5] are clearly restricted in our access to information. The fictional company and the actual network both determine what we get so see or read. The fact that the power of the company would also extend to the user immersed in the fiction makes sense. The fact that the power of the NBC developers also restricted the actual range of interaction for the factual user reveals that *Heroes*' transmedia world might be interactive but is not really participatory. Nonetheless, the lead-viewsers were now

[4] The possibilities for forensic fandom are built into the transmedia world, but are of no importance in Ruppel's study. They may be part of the intricate network diagrams but are not elaborated on in the text (cf. RUPPEL 2012: 235).

[5] I consider this term useful, as it is not about content being produced through audience participation, as Axel Bruns' ›prosumer‹ (cf. BRUNS 2010) and others are concerned with. Instead, »the ›viewser‹ is intimately involved in mixing or producing their screen media experience« (HARRIES 2002: 103).

inside the company's database on their own account and, therefore, inside the extended diegesis. They could decide to share the precise information how to get there in a forum or opt to just point their subsequent-users in the right direction, without reducing the scavenger hunt facet for them. Players of the ARG would eventually also arrive at this point, but they would have been shown the way and given the password (see below).[6]

Knowing about Primatech's homepage, lead-viewsers who were tempted to look into Hiro Nakamura's background could visit the homepage of the Yamagato Fellowship. This Tokyo-based, totally fictitious company belongs to Hiro's family and is highly involved in the series mythology. On the page, the storylines of fictional characters are mixed with actual historic persons, such as Benjamin Franklin or biblical figures like Jason. The page advertised an exhibit on the ›legendary‹ Samurai Kensei, Hiro Nakamura's childhood idol. The symbol on the hilt of his katana is explained as being the combination of two Japanese signs meaning ›godsend‹. Unsurprisingly, it is the helix. A fictional documentary about the samurai makes strong references to the TV series' storyline: the sword is reported stolen and the TV audience knows by whom. Not only was this homepage a way to enrich the Japanese storylines in *Heroes*, it also added the perception that the TV audience now had more knowledge than the reporters in the documentary and could increase their knowledge by watching and searching. They could support Nathan Petrelli's intradiegetic run for office in the US Senate via his campaign homepage, downloading »Vote Petrelli« stickers, etc. His biggest campaign sponsor, Mr. Linderman, naturally also had an online presentation for his Las Vegas casino The Corinthian. After this character gets killed in episode 22, there was a short obituary added to the otherwise very static page as well as a notification that the casino was going to be demolished soon.

Note that on none of these homepages, NBC banners or any other signs that marked them as parts of a fictional narration were shown. Still, it is more than unlikely that anyone but a member of the curious *Heroes* audience would start promoting Petrelli's senate campaign. Even if, theoretically, anyone could access these pages with or without the knowledge of their context, in their status as probable but still fictional homepages located in the always extradiegetic Internet, it becomes evident that these homepages are transmedia extension, relating to the transmedia universe of a clearly defined core text. Although they worked as singular entities, they do not fulfill Jenkins' demand that »[e]ach franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa« (JENKINS 2006: 96). As will become evident, even the ARG cannot be considered a self-sufficient part of the *Heroes* franchise, because it always links back to the show which »acts as a binder, a spine through which network continuity and coherence is maintained« (RUPPEL 2012: 256).

[6] I can only assume that there has to be a difference in the personal experience of those who found their own way around the described functions and those who followed the path laid out for them by the producers.

The question of how people who were neither lead- nor subsequent-users were guided through the transmedia universe remains. *Heroes Evolutions* chose a character to be the scout for the audience, leading them to the various realms of the narrative universe: Hana Gitelman. Other characters had a part in guiding the viewsers as well. For example, Hiro Nakamura, who started a blog called *A Hero's Quest* on February 9, 2010, after the existence of evolved humans was revealed to the world by Claire Bennet, or the collective identity of two graphic novel characters aptly named Evs Dropper, trying to bring down the company and sending out messages. But Hana Gitelman

> is unique in that she was introduced and developed entirely as a cross-sited character, one whose exploits are charted across the Web, SMS messages, email and graphic novels, occasionally appearing in the television show as well. (RUPPEL 2012: 303)

## 5. Hana Gitelman—A Transmedia Guide

In the opening scenes of episode 16, season 1, the TV audience meets Hana for the first time: a very confused and, unfortunately, nuclear Ted Sprague is hiding in a wooden hut »somewhere in the Nevada desert«. He gets contacted via a chat message and gets even more confused when he notices that his Internet connection is down. His chat partner is called »wireless« and proceeds to show him schematic drawings of an injection gun, with a needle that explains the shape of a scar Ted and many of the characters have on their neck. Intrigued by this information, he asks »wireless« for a meeting. Almost immediately after that message, a woman enters the hut, telling him her name is Hana Gitelman and that she has the ability to mentally receive and give out digital information without an Internet connection. She also displays the scar on her neck, before straight up asking Ted to help her destroy the company: »I can find them, Ted. You can nuke them«.

The TV audience can gather that she is out for revenge, but, other than her scar, they have no real indication as to why she is so determined. Viewsers who followed the invitation of the business card from four episodes earlier could have already read Hana's blackened file in the *Assignment Tracker 2.0*. They know that she herself is basically a transmedia superhero, who taps into any wireless device through her altered brain waves. Comic readers could have downloaded four issues solely on Hana's background story. Through that, they know, at the moment of the original broadcasting of this episode, that Noah Bennet recruited her from the Mossad for the company, where her abilities manifested. In the last »wireless« comic, Hana escapes the company's compound on a motorbike (see fig. 3). The readers would only find out whom she was headed for, when *Heroes* returned to the TV screen after the show's hiatus. When actress Stana Katic enters the scene just described, the similarities to the drawings in the comics are obvious and Hana's story continues.

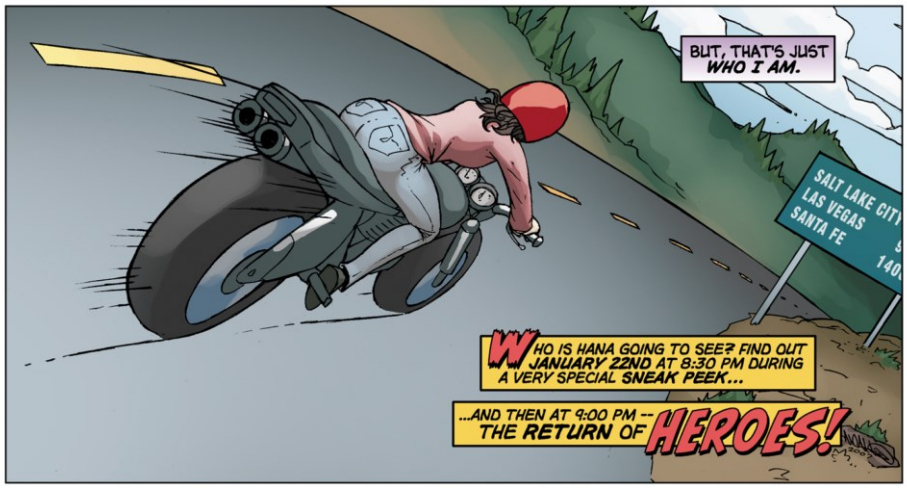


Fig. 3:
Last panel in Chapter 16, wireless Part 4 of the *Heroes* comic (2006)

Even though lead-users could have discovered Hana's web presence on their own, finding the blog[7] was easiest for the players of the ARG. Hana is their main contact, who sent them emails and text messages that, for example, led to Primatech's hidden functions described above: »Get2 2 kno Ted 2: Go 2 primatechpaper.com, find helix. Same place as b4. Usrnme: bennet Pwrd: claire. Ted's code: TSntz14b. Rembr: Usernme always bennet«. Other messages referred to her MySpace page, a platform that in 2006 was still frequently used, and other online transmedia extensions. Hana is eventually killed but continues to exist virtually, proceeding to »relate to the present-time of and media employed by the players« (DENA 2009: 283). Even post-mortem, she blogged and communicated with the ARG players. In one post, she offered a link that led back to The Corinthian's homepage, which lead-viewsers may have found before. But this time, there was a chat window, with a conversation going on between Hana and Micah Sanders, a little boy who can manipulate machines. Micah then invited Hana and the user into another password protected area and led through Linderman's art archives with virtual post-its. This function was only available through the link on Hana's blog and couldn't have been found otherwise.

Hana Gitelman clearly is *Heroes*' transmedia guide and, in the terms of art theory, could be called a *Rückenfigur* or rear-view figure, representing the searching viewer in this setting and being the figure to identify with (cf. KOCH 1965). Marc Ruppel even goes as far as proclaiming »Wireless is less a character moving through the Heroes universe as she is a facilitator of the causal interactions that take place in the ARG« (RUPPEL 2012: 309). He traces her movement in and out of the various sites of the *Heroes* transmedia network, showing how she explores the extensions alongside the user. Through

[7] The blog could be found at http://www.samantha48616e61.com [accessed December 11, 2011]. Many researchers as well as myself face the challenge of content being taken down over time, so only static documentation of the pages is still available.

the narrative information of these extensions, *Heroes* can establish what Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst have called »a form of skilled audience« (ABCROMBIE/LONGHURST 1998: 121). From this skilled audience, »the fan ›expert‹« (ROBSON 2010: 212) is recruited. This *Heroes* expert has an abundance of knowledge about the weekly TV audience. If an audience member is not yet part of the experts, they might never get a more open invitation to become one while actually watching *Heroes* than Hana mentally typing »Look at the needle« on the computer screen.

This is where I would like to refer to what I read as the golden rule in Mittell's chapter on transmedia storytelling, namely »[t]*hat transmedia extensions from a serial franchise must reward those who partake in them, but cannot punish those who do not*« (MITTELL 2015: n.pag., original emphasis). It is clearly rewarding to have this additional knowledge, but the show was actually very well watchable and understandable without it. And in a way very similar to Mittell's *Lost* example, a lot of the information acquirable online was never referred to in the show.[8] The text messages and emails that were directly addressed to the players of the ARG are surely one of the most effective ways to create a connection between the audience members—who have become users or viewsers and who also may have become ARG players. Their forensic fandom or gameplay temporarily leads them far away from the TV series itself and deeper into the transmedia universe, before pushing them back toward the actual show, without which little of the additional information would make sense. Thus, the *Heroes* universe always keeps the television series as its gravitational centre, pulling all the other elements back to the main narrative outlet. Staying in this imagery, it has become clear that, while the described transmedial elements work in their own sphere, none would work without the show. Still, all were utilized in their media specific capacity employing not only specific strategies but also aesthetics (as was already discussed with regard to the comics). The entire experience of *Heroes Evolutions* was unified and coordinated by the creators leading the audience through the experience by employing transmedia scout Hana Gitelman, who was able to cross the borders of all the sites of the transmedia network.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to give an impression of how the creators of *Heroes* and *Heroes Evolutions* integrated print media, multiple homepages, various online forums, an Alternate Reality Game, etc. into their storytelling. The case study allowed reflections on the implications of each element for the transmedia universe of *Heroes*, whether it falls under current definitions

[8] However, this cannot be definitely stated, as the second season was cut short, both in episodes and in quality, because of the writers' strike of 2007. Accordingly, some plot lines might have been prepared without ever having been executed.

for transmedia, crossmedia, transmodal narration, intertextuality, or some other term. While most of the additional offers were successful and were used or accessed by the audience and especially by lead-users, there was hardly any overt invitation to the audience to emerge into said transmedial world. Instead, as this article has shown, there were multiple (more or less) subtle hints or migratory cues that motivated the so-called passive TV audience to become active online.

Through these devices, the audience was encouraged to seek out sources of knowledge about mystified symbols, unintroduced characters, and open ends other than the TV show itself. Posing almost as an unreliable narrator, the series did not primarily aim at generating clicks on the nowadays notorious second screen. Instead, it left gaps and seemingly dead ends in its storytelling to be explored. *Heroes* succeeded in establishing not only a loyal fan base but a distinct and large group of *Heroes* experts. These experts could be divided into at least three groups of lead-users or -viewsers, subsequent-users, and ARG players. All groups had to actively search the Internet to obtain specific knowledge about the series' universe and needed to be willing to invest time and effort into the show's mythology—but, as a result, they also became part of the *Heroes* community. »Remember, everything is connected«.

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Jonas Nesselhauf/Markus Schleich

# A Stream of Medial Consciousness. Transmedia Storytelling in Contemporary German Quality Television


## Abstract

Transmedial phenomena are omnipresent in what is often dubbed ›quality television‹. Shows like *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) or *Game of Thrones* (2011– ) do not only rely on storytelling within the show itself but also offer their viewers a variety of possibilities to delve into the universe of the franchise. Mobile apps, minisodes, or interactive websites guarantee a deeper involvement of fans and personalize the viewing experience. These shows also add narrative complexity on a horizontal level, which many see as a recent criterion for ›quality television‹. Whereas ›good‹ television seems to be exclusively located in the US, where premium cable operators like HBO, Showtime, and AMC use new media to transgress the borders of the television screen, the developments in Germany are often criticized for a lack of innovative strategies. There is at least one German show to challenge this perspective: *Zeit der Helden* (2013). Regardless of the involved media, the show features a complex narrative and ambivalent protagonists. Even though the setting promises a suburban everyday-life melodrama, the show explores the cracks that offer a look beneath the surface. The website www.zeitderhelden.de offers a scavenger hunt into the protagonists' past. In order to grasp the depth of the characters fully and to understand the complexity of the story arc, the viewer has to actively interact with the franchise and to enter a digital universe that in itself is just as dazzling as the shows' characters.

## 1. Quality Television. Of German Apples and US American Oranges

25 years ago, television was primarily associated with cheap entertainment and the secondary use of Hollywood blockbusters (cf. SCHWIERIN 2013: 24; THOMPSON 2007: xvii). But then, »[s]omething [...] happen[ed] on American TV« (AKASS/MCCABE 2007: 1) and television featured material worthy of the silver screen (cf. KÄMMERLINGS 2010: n.pag.). Cinema is no longer the dominant visual outlet for fiction (cf. METELING/OTTO/SCHABACHER 2010: 7) and television—or a segment of it that is often referred to as ›quality television‹ (cf. THOMPSON 1996: 13)—has established itself as the preferred medium for complex narratives (cf. BUCKLEY/LEVERETTE/OTT 2008: 1) and as an independent art form.

Whenever there is a discussion in Germany about quality television, be it among scholars or fans, series and serials from the United States seem to be widely praised. There is a general notion of enthusiasm among the works of scholars of literary studies as well as media, film, and cultural studies, especially in Germany. The growing number of publications (cf. BOHNE/ESCHKE 2010; GRAWE 2010; KELLETER 2012; KÜHN/SCHMÖLLER 2011; METELING/OTTO/SCHABACHER 2010; PIEPIORKA 2011; SEILER 2008) regarding various aspects of quality television indicates a significant academic interest in the field. At the same time, silence is cast on domestic outings. In German newspaper *feuilletons*, the German television landscape is depicted as a cultural wasteland (cf. BUß 2013: n.pag.; DIEZ/HÜETLIN 2013: 130) not worth to be part of the quality television discourse. As a result, German serials are rarely featured in this field of research (cf. BLEICHER 2010: 9) and when they are, they are often seen in the context of »des tourenden Formats« (TÜRSCHMANN/WAGNER 2011: 13), a term denoting German adaptations of American serials. Studies that focus on genuine German serials are almost exclusively concerned with *Tatort* (cf. GRÄF 2010; GRÄF/KRAH 2010; HIßNAUER/SCHERER/STOCKINGER 2012) and, to a limited extent, *Polizeiruf 110* (cf. WALTER 2011).

None of the publications mentioned above specifically highlights this aspect, but the large amount of articles focussing on US-American serials could be interpreted as a lack of quality in German television. Do US-American serials represent the kind of quality television that is yet to come for German serials? Can none of the praised ›quality‹ be found in German television? In contrast to academia, which does not answer these questions, journalist Dennis Krah states that there seem to be two kinds of television: the ›good kind‹ that mainly comes from the US and the ›bad kind‹, which is almost exclusively made in Germany (cf. KRAH 2013: n.pag.).

This specific stance is not only shared within the German community, it is also quite common abroad:

> And what about German TV? Why [...] are there no German TV series filling BBC4's 9pm Saturday night Euro-drama subtitle-a-rama slot? [... W]e aren't missing much, apart from a cop show called Derrick which finished broadcasting 15 years ago. Your next box

> set might well be in Danish but nobody's will be in German. But why is there no German rival to Denmark's The Killing, Sweden's Wallander, Italy's Inspector Montalbano or France's Spiral? (JEFFRIES 2013: n.pag.)

As innovation is a key to quality, German television, lacking such element, is perceived as dull and slow to pick up trends. US American cable operators like HBO, AMC, and—to some extent—Showtime use new media to transgress the borders of the television screen. German operators in contrast are often criticized for a lack of innovative strategies to commit the audience to their serials, which are constantly seen as anything but innovative. In 1998, Knut Hickethier demanded innovative transmedial strategies for television to stay relevant within a steadily changing media landscape (cf. HICKETHIER 1998: 76). Especially the so-called ›post television era‹ (cf. BUCKLEY/LEVERETTE/OTT 2008: 1–9), in which more and more people consume video on demand, requires television to be a platform for a multimedia experience (cf. KIRCHMANN 2010: 63). Dislocating the narrative into interactive and digital areas is a proper reaction to a more media affine viewership (cf. NELSON 2013: 21). Accordingly, ›quality television‹ must understand itself as a »Hypermedia TV Narrative« (NELSON 2013: 21) in order to establish interactivity and connections between product and consumer (cf. SCHWIERIN 2013: 24). This should then generate new narrative approaches with experiments and ›expanded narration‹ as Bernd Kracke and Marc Ries label it (cf. KRACKE/RIES 2013: 10).

In the following, the focus lies on the relation between quality television and transmedial storytelling and the question whether there are German serials that make use of transmedial storytelling, which could offer a chance to reintegrate German serials into the discourse of quality TV.

## 2. Complexity and Transmedia Storytelling in Contemporary Television

In recent years, there have been quite a few attempts to narrow down what puts the ›quality‹ in ›quality television‹. Labels such as »art TV« (MITTELL 2006: 29), »prestige TV« (HILL 2013: n.pag.), or »auteur series« (DREHER 2010: 23) all quote literary merits and innovative narrative strategies as criteria. Quite recently, Jason Mittell ditched his idea of »art TV«. According to him, quality television is complex television. *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), *The Wire* (2002–2008), and *Breaking Bad* can offer complex narratives because they have a lot of screen time to do so:

> Even a show that fails to find an audience typically airs for a comparatively long time—for instance, the single-season *Terriers* may be viewed as a commercial failure, but it still offered 13 episodes of serial storytelling, with a combined running time of over nine hours that eclipses the scope of most novels and nearly every feature film. (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.)

Time allows for idiosyncratic storytelling with overlapping plot lines, slow character development, and controversial themes. Jason Mittell's article

»Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television« offers what the authors believe is a fruitful estimation: »I believe that American television of the past twenty years will be remembered as an era of narrative experimentation and innovation, challenging the norms of what the medium can do« (MITTELL 2006: 29). A few years later, Mittell argues that

> [f]ew storytelling forms can match serial television for narrative breadth and vastness. A single narrative universe can continue onward for years, or even decades in the case of daytime serials, with cumulative plotlines and character backstories accruing far beyond what any dedicated fan could reasonably remember. [...] In short, of all the challenges that face the creators of television fiction, the lack of screen time to tell their stories is hardly an issue. (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.)

Time is what makes all the difference, what allows for all these grand narratives to be so complex and compelling. Time represents the vertical level of complexity and complexity definitely stands out as a criterion of quality television.

We think of it as fruitful to add another aspect of complexity; i.e., complexity on a horizontal level, the ›transmedial space‹ (cf. NESSELHAUF/SCHLEICH 2014: 21). Henry Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as

> a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

Thus, besides a progressing storyline there are other medial outlets to enhance the serials' universe. To exemplify what this means, one could turn to AMC's *Breaking Bad* among many others.

According to Ivan Askwith's *Television 2.0*, the viewer is more likely to stay interested in an artefact, the more opportunities it provides for social, emotional, temporal, and intellectual engagement (cf. ASKWITH 2007: 51). *Breaking Bad* offers a lot of »related activities« (BOBINEAU 2013: 34) that function as ›touch points‹ for interaction. For instance, the viewer has the chance to put him- or herself in the shoes of Hank Schrader, during an investigation that has been created on the serial's website. Or he or she can actually *be* Jesse Pinkman in the application *The Cost of Doing Business* and work his or her way through the criminal underbelly of New Mexico. In both cases, the viewer—or, rather, the user—enters a narrative extension of *Breaking Bad* and acts as one of the serial's main characters. There is new content adding depth to these characters but no connection to the main plot. These touch points can be classified as ›experimental activities‹, as they turn the viewer into an »active agent with varying degrees of autonomy and control« (ASKWITH 2007: 77).

For ›ancillary content‹—additional information—one can visit Saul Goodman's website and get the lawyer's advice on the viewer's criminal activity or learn about Walter White's cancer while browsing www.savewalterwhite.com. The viewer can also figure out which criminal he or she would be on a ›criminal aptitude test‹ that would be a ›challenge activity‹, questioning

the viewer's knowledge of the serial (cf. BOBINEAU 2013: 34). These apps or games rely on previous knowledge of the show and reward the user with images and small scripts. Furthermore, there are plenty of ›minisodes‹ that provide more details about the protagonists to soften the blow of yet another devastating cliff-hanger. If the viewer has done all that but still wants to dwell in the *Breaking Bad* franchise, he or she could still play a round of *Metholopy*—a *Breaking Bad* themed version of *Monopoly*—, which is more of a ›themed activity‹ as it does not directly belong to the franchise itself. All of these additional delivery channels enable the viewer to customize his or her viewing experience. The recipient fumbles slightly with the way a serial is perceived and these transmedial elements allow for more complexity on plots, the fictional world, and its characters.

Despite this, we still believe that there is a hierarchy between the involved media. Chronologically, *Breaking Bad* appeared *before* the advanced ›serial frame‹ (cf. NESSELHAUF/SCHLEICH 2014: 20) of apps, games and minisodes. All these spin-offs appeared after the first season, when the serial had built a certain fan base and reputation and served mainly to keep the audience busy while nervously awaiting the second season of the main franchise. *Breaking Bad* does very well work on its own, while the spin-offs rely on an at least partial familiarity with the main vehicle—Mittell labels it »the mothership« (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.) of the serial franchise *Breaking Bad*. Refering to Jonathan Gray's *Show Sold Separately*, Mittell further claims that:

> We cannot view any text in our media-saturated age in isolation from its paratexts—for instance, films come pre-framed by trailers, DVD covers, and posters, and once any text enters into cultural circulation, it becomes part of a complex intertextual web. However, we can distinguish between paratexts that function primarily to hype, promote, and introduce a text, with those that function as ongoing sites of narrative expansion. (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.)

The paratexts mentioned before all fall into the category of promotion. Their sole purpose is to create attention for the serial itself to go viral (cf. LANGNER 2007: 29). In a complex media age like ours, television programmers need to find new ways to hold on to the audience at comparably little costs. As Sönke Hahn puts it, these offerings function mainly to keep the viewer awake during times when the serial itself falls asleep (cf. HAHN 2013: 10). While a serial is on hiatus, there is an immanent danger of losing viewers not only to other television serial but to entirely different media as well:

> The current industrial obsession with engagement begins with the assumption that the traditional »mass audience« is dead. Faced with a proliferation of media options and content choices, the mass audience—so critical in television's earliest years—has fragmented into a million niche audiences and communities. [...] Fragmentation simply suggests that a mass audience can no longer be taken for granted. (ASKWITH 2007: 18)

A positive aspect of this development is that the networks rethink their status as mere provider of television content:

> In their attempt to create programming that »rivets« the audience, television executives now find themselves struggling to transform television from a medium defined by pas-

> sive consumption to one characterized by active—and wherever possible, interactive—engagement. (ASKWITH 2007: 19)

But as the television content is still their bread and butter, the transmedial world created around the franchise has strict limitations. As Julien Bobineau indicates, networks want the involved media to reflect the hierarchy of ›the mothership‹ and additional content (cf. BOBINEAU 2013: 42). We would follow up on this idea by adding that, if the additional content becomes too elaborate and is able to function all by itself, viewers might not return to ›the mothership‹ but remain on the outskirts of the multimedia universe. To put it bluntly, networks use interactive content to sell a product, not to innovate storytelling. Transmedial aspects *must not* be necessary to understand the monomedial structured *Breaking Bad.* To further illuminate this issue, let us draw upon the thoughts of a man, who knew probably very little about transmedial worlds, but a lot about epic storytelling. Aristotle said about the unity of plot:

> As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole. (ARISTOTLE 1907: 34)

When we focus on the narrative nature of these transmedial offering, we must admit that they do very little for the story itself. None of the transmedial spinoffs of *Breaking Bad* are really necessary for Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg and none of the serials plot holes are filled within the paratexts, even though they undoubtedly add depth to the fictional universe. These paratexts circulate *around* the text, or ›the mothership‹, but are »not fully integrated into the show's complex serial arcs« (MITTELL 2015: n.pag.). The ideal of transmedia storytelling, as proposed by Jenkins, is that each of the involved media contributes a unique part to the story as a whole. While the additional content mentioned above does offer unique experiences—a television show is not primarily designed for active interactivity but rather passive consumption—it does not do much (or anything at all) for the story. So it might be interesting to differentiate transmedial storytelling as a part of the story arc from transmedial storytelling that simply expands the fictional universe.

Bizarrely enough, while there is an on-going debate on Germany's run down television landscape, when we thought about serials that actually use transmedia storytelling to swap out essential parts of its plot to other medial channels, we instantly thought of a German serial: *Zeit der Helden.*

## 3. Narrative Transmedia Unfolding. www.zeitderhelden.de

*Zeit der Helden* ran from March 25 to March 29, 2013, from 8.15 pm to 9.00 pm and from 10.00 pm to 10.30 pm, all in fictional real-time. *Zeit der Helden* presents the viewer with the story of two families during the Easter week. Arndt and Mai, on the one hand, question their social roles within the changing family context as their offspring prepares to leave the family home. Arndt decides to buy a certain object to lure the children back home. Meanwhile Mai flirts with disaster in the form of an old high school boyfriend. Gregor and Sandra, on the other hand, realize they never had children because they always put their careers first and developed a very competitive behaviour. When Gregor loses his job, their fragile marriage is put to a test and new information regarding Gregor's fertility derails the situation further.

The serial has not yet been featured in an academic paper. One reason for this might be the somewhat bizarre decision of its network, WDR, to place *Zeit der Helden* within the ›40+‹ initiative—an entire week's program devoted to midlife crisis and other ›catastrophes‹. Some critics state that *Zeit der Helden* is not interested in easy answers about relationships but rather focuses on the complexity of basic human interaction (cf. KUZMANY 2013: n.pag.)—but in the ›40+‹-context, most scholars and critics might have expected the serial to be just another mediocre soap opera, of which there are quite a few already.

The serial itself is well made, shot entirely in the dark surroundings of a tiny German suburb, with an accompanying bombastic score that creates a threatening atmosphere; and it utilizes the narrative device of fictional real-time to great benefit. It is rather obvious that the serial plays with stereotypes found in the most prominent serial using fictional real time: *24* (2001–2010). When Arndt makes a hazy excuse to leave the house for a late job (he works as a electrician), he meets a dodgy man in a dimly lit industrial area. There is a lot of secrecy involved, as both negotiate on how and when the not yet identified ›commodity‹ is to be paid. When they meet each other half way for a compromise, Arndt is told to return later, to avoid potential witnesses. This works similar to *24*, albeit on a significantly smaller scale, and the viewer is to expect a shady deal with severe consequences. But whereas *24* would usually discharge these tensions with an explosion, *Zeit der Helden* delivers a rather profane explanation: it turns out that Arndt planned to buy a swimming pool—an obviously stolen good—to create an environment that makes visiting home a pleasant experience for his children.

*Zeit der Helden* mingles genres such as the crime thriller with melodrama, which according to Thompson is a distinctive feature of quality TV (cf. THOMPSON 1996: 14), but almost 20 years after his analysis—and after the success of *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Mad Men* (2007– )—, the fusion of established genres to create a new one is hardly innovative anymore.

However, the handling of genres is not the outstanding feature of *Zeit der Helden*, even though this adds complexity of a certain kind. What makes this serial complex is not necessarily the factor time. It's hard to use the term epic here, as it only ran for 9 episodes, so instead of *24* we have *5hours & 35minutes*. The serial gains much of its complexity from a digital scavenger hunt that could be found at www.zeitderhelden.de*. Zeit der Helden*, just like *Breaking Bad*, offers its viewers the possibility to actively shape the way they watch the serial. On a special website, fans could dive into the backstories of the protagonists by playing online games, reading diary entries or watching short films. Viewers could decide how deeply they want to explore the serial and its fictional world offers a rich and colourful history for each character and their relationships. Unfortunately, after 12 months, most of the content went offline.

How did this differ from a serial like *Breaking Bad*? There are some aspects where the transmedial approach of *Zeit der Helden* goes beyond expanding the fictional world. There is undoubtedly still a hierarchy between the involved media: ›the mothership‹ of the serial can be watched on its own and delivers a functional viewing experience; the website, though, did not offer a satisfying coherent narrative when perceived isolated from the serial. Still, the website was not merely meant to be a goodie bag for dedicated fans who want to dwell within *Zeit der Helden* and learn a bit more about the characters and it was not just about playing games. Rather, the website provided bits and pieces of the characters' past that shed an entirely new light on their present actions and thus were firmly integrated into the overall story arc.

## 4. New Digital Perspectives. The Kids Are Alright

One specific element that we would like to explore in depth is the function of parenthood. In episode 5, the viewer learns that Gregor is infertile and that he used Sandra's career-oriented life style as an alibi. When he loses his job and push comes to shove, he has a heated argument with Sandra and informs her about his deficit. Sandra reacts quite furiously to Gregor's confession: she takes a chain saw from the basement and dismembers the furniture around her.

Her reaction appears to be irrational, overly aggressive, and not consistent with her portrayal to this point. The scene appears to break with the conventions of the serial to be somewhat realistic. It is only when the viewer digs a bit deeper into Sandra's past on the website www.zeitderhelden.de that her behaviour is put into perspective. There are several clips and games exploring her youth and adolescence: since her early childhood, Sandra reacted violently to defeats of any kind. Be it at school sports, her job, or her relationship: missing out on something, a victory to be specific, infuriates her. In another clip, it is revealed that her parents educated her in an uber-

competitive way. Missing out on the chance to have a baby, whether she wants a baby or not, is to her like losing a business deal or losing a game of handball—one of the clips shows her isolated in the dressing room after she bit an opponent who defeated her, even though it was a harmless friendly match. The show itself does not mention any of this. As a matter of fact, her reaction might turn some viewers off, as it does not seem very plausible within the sole context of the serial. The viewer needs the information on the website to round her story off. If the serial had incorporated these facets of her personality, the scene would be more in line with her rather sober portrayal. Exploring her backstory within the serial would have been static, whereas actively researching Sandra's past within the digital content is dynamic and personalized.

The same is true in the case of Gregor. On www.zeitderhelden.de, the viewer uncovers Gregor's inability to father a child was the reason he broke up with his former girlfriend Esther. This is also mentioned in the serial itself, but the fact that this left him traumatized is not. His state of mind has some interesting consequences: for the first four episodes, Gregor tried to befriend Arndt's son Ben, which is a quite curious behaviour for someone who apparently decided not to have children to focus on his career. Later, it is revealed that his attitude is motivated by despair. At a later stage, Gregor mentions to Arndt how much he envies Arndt's family with two kids, even though Arndt envies Gregor for not having to put up with all the stress. Arndt tells Gregor that not having children was the right decision, the right choice. At this point, the situation seems clear: Arndt is privileged for being able to decide whether to have children or not, whereas Gregor had no choice whatsoever.

With information obtained from www.zeitderhelden.de the viewer's perspective changes. The viewer knows that Mai gave birth to Pauline before she met Arndt. It is reasonable to assume that Ben is the son of Mai and Arndt. There is one game called ›my wife, her daughter, our child live here‹, though, in which the viewer/player learns that Mai and Arndt applied for an adoption. Given that it is known that Mai is fertile, this indicates that Arndt is infertile as well, thus making the two men very much alike. It is one specific moment when www.zeitderhelden.de goes beyond expanding the universe; narratively speaking, this is game changer, because the viewer can now re-evaluate his impression of Arndt and Gregor, as both of them had a choice; they've simply chosen differently. The website does change the story, gives additional information that influences the plot itself. Indeed, there are numerous other hints that explain the characters in a way the serial does not.

## 5. Transmedia Storytelling. More than Merchandise

*Zeit der Helden* is closer to Jenkins' idea of transmedia storytelling than *Breaking Bad*, even though the latter claims a far more prominent role in the

discourse surrounding transmedia storytelling in general and quality TV in particular. *Zeit der Helden* qualifies for ›complex TV‹ as drafted by Mittell. There are many positive aspects of the show that are usually rare within German television: the serial has a memory, is literary and writer-based, has an ensemble cast, creates a new genre, appeals to an educated audience, is self-conscious, aspires to realism, and at least partly tends to the controversial theme of depression. Obviously, *Zeit der Helden* would score rather well in Robert J. Thompson's omnipresent list from 1996, but one should not ignore the fact that most of the notoriously mentioned serials like *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men* or *The Wire* did not attract large audiences; they all ran on networks like HBO, AMC, or Showtime which never strived for high ratings because their business model is not based on it. Quality television is designed for a minority. While Carsten Heidböhmer hails the serial as probably the best German serial of 2013, he has to admit that the serial did not find an audience (cf. HEIDBÖHMER 2013: n.pag.).

The reason for this might not be found in the serial itself, but rather in its transmedial structure. One could argue that the serial aims to capture the interest of the 40+ generations, whereas the digital content appeals to a much younger audience. *Zeit der Helden* does not rely on monomedial storytelling, which is a step into the right direction, but misplaced within the overall program. The target audience perceived it as a well-executed melodrama, but not as milestone of transmedia storytelling. And while Tilman Gangloff's praise for the serial (cf. GANGLOFF 2012: n.pag.) is meant to promote it as an opportunity for television to discard its status as an ›accessory medium‹ (*Begleitmedium*) and to reclaim its spot as a ›key medium‹ (*Leitmedium*), this appraisal does not help the serial's reputation. *Zeit der Helden* is a transmedial vortex and omnidirectional stream of medial consciousness, not a monomedial sequence. The involved media channels are all accessories for the transmedial experience. When the monomedial serial is perceived as a ›key medium‹, the quality of the whole endeavour suffers badly.

To conclude, we would like to stress the narrative potential of transmedia or crossmedia storytelling. Not only does it enable the viewer to interact with a product, he or she turns into the actual producer of his viewing experience. *Zeit der Helden* blurs the hierarchy of the involved media; it relies on all medial channels to narrate its story, especially when viewed in real time like it was intended. In order to make sense of the at times arbitrary actions of the protagonists, the viewer has to dig deeper, unless of course he or she is satisfied with the somewhat sparse information policy of the serial itself. But it is only a fragment of a bigger picture that is tessellated from a variety of medial parts. Transmedia storytelling does away with the strict distinction of text and paratext. It is a crossmedial stream of consciousness, which only unfolds fully to those who invest time and energy, actively participating instead of just passively watching the telly. *Zeit der Helden* works well in the context of quality TV—it is ironic, though, that it gains much of its quality beyond the television screen.

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[Table of Contents]

Cristina Formenti

# 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]

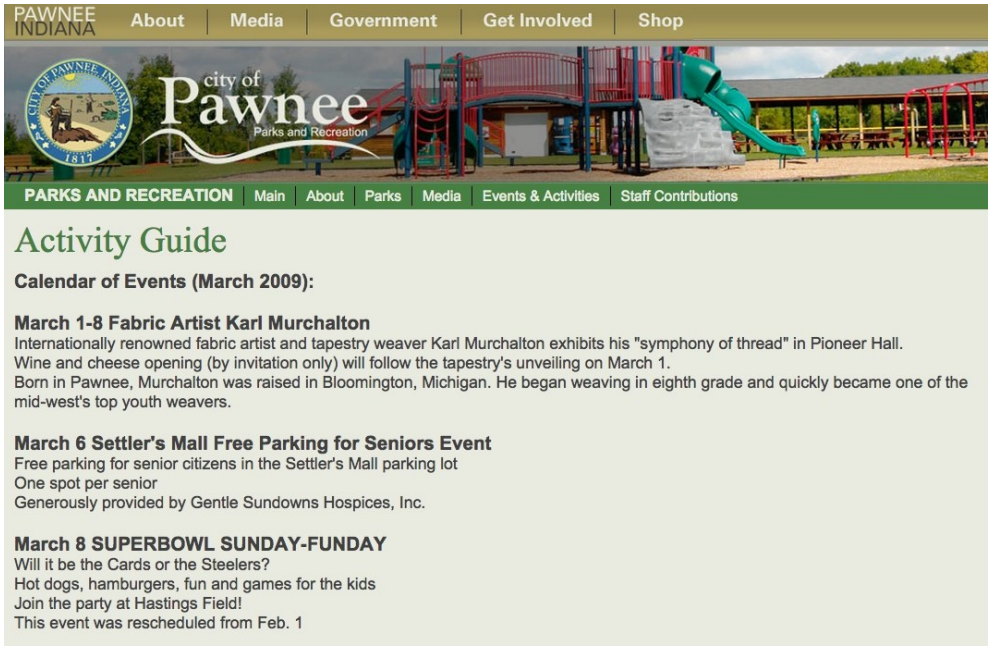


Fig. 2:
A page from the section »Departments. Parks and Recreation« on http://www.pawneeindiana.com [accessed August 19, 2014]

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.

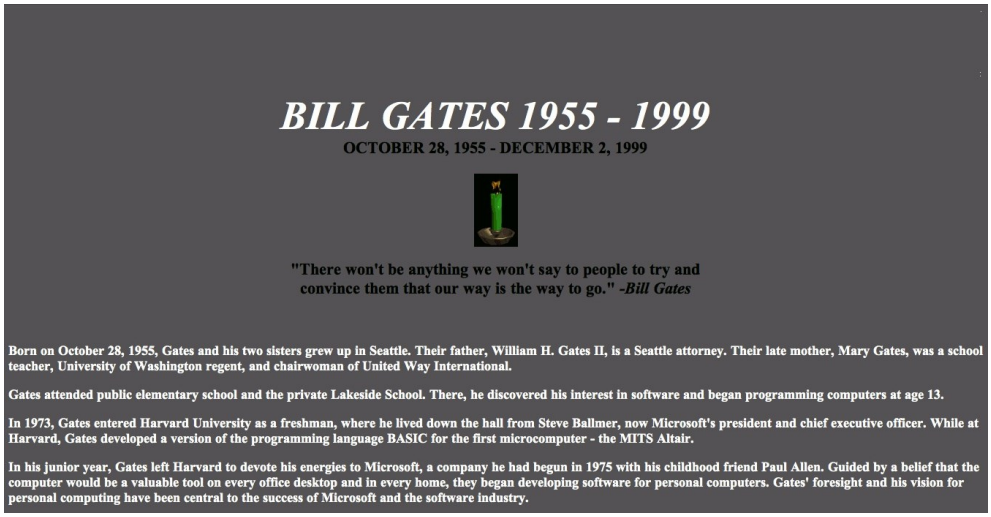


Fig. 3:
Memorial webpage dedicated to Bill Gates on http://www.billgatesisdead.com [accessed August 19, 2014]

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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[Table of Contents]

Laura Schlichting

# Transmedia Storytelling and the Challenge of Knowledge Transfer in Contemporary Digital Journalism. A Look at the Interactive Documentary *Hollow* (2012– )


## Abstract

This article explores transmedia storytelling in the context of web-aware journalism, drawing on the documentary *Hollow* (2012– ) to discuss what it means to fruitfully combine different types of media in a journalistic context. The following analysis is thus informed by journalism as well as by literary and cultural studies, particularly focusing on (trans-)media studies, narratology, and digital communication. It starts from two premises: First, the article recognizes the problem of knowledge transfer, which has become a serious challenge in the digital age. Since the Internet has become the superior way to create and distribute news, the status of newspapers has taken a beating. Second, the article points to a research gap in the analysis of transmediality in nonfiction stories—in this case, in interactive journalistic documentaries or reportages. It proposes, therefore, that the use of transmediality in digital documentary journalism not only affects the way stories are narrated today but, as print journalism declines in popularity, also leads to changes and processes of rethinking in the journalistic field—on the sides of both producers and recipients. Based on this, the objective of this article is to show that the application of Henry Jenkins' concept of transmediality to web-aware journalism can encourage knowledge transfer as well as usher in a new future of long-form journalism in an age of digital overload.

## 1. Introduction. Transmediality in Digital Journalistic Documentaries

Even if the average time spent on the Internet has been steadily increasing,[1] only a fraction of this time is occupied with reading about major (world) events or serious (inter-)national affairs. As Heike E. Jüngst puts it, »[k]nowledge transfer […] is one of the most pressing problems in our society« (JÜNGST 2010: 1, translation L.S.). The question, then, becomes how this presumed disinterest in ›niche topics‹ may be overcome, while still ensuring knowledge transfer and that substantial content is once again made tempting for a broader audience.

In December 2012, the *New York Times* was the first newspaper that began to break new ground with their opulent, interactive, and ultimately Pulitzer-Prize-winning coverage of *Snow Fall. The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek*. The piece relied on intermedial and transmedial elements[2] to narrate the dramatic story of an avalanche disaster which had happened in the USA in early 2012. Since then, the relationship between transmediality and journalism has become only more symbiotic, even if this has mostly occurred in the Anglophone press.

The digital revolution has changed how we perceive our world. For many decades, newspapers were the primary medium through which news was accessed.[3] This is why the first hypothesis here is based on the observation that, although the Internet has allowed for a new freedom of expression as well as for a new freedom of information, this change in the media landscape requires, first, a new way of telling stories and, second, a new perspective on journalistic narration as such. There have never been so many sources for people to draw from in order to form their own opinions about local, national, or international events, mostly accessible in real time and often free of charge. Now, it is possible for a reader to access a variety of news sources, either via traditional news websites, blogs, or television—as long as s/he does wish to read and not only surf, watch, play, or purchase items on the Internet. Since the rise of »Web 2.0« (DINUCCI 1999: 32), nearly every person with access to the World Wide Web can produce news and distribute them with a single ›click‹. According to the American media theorist Clay Shirky, the problem of disinterest is not caused by »information overload«,

[1] According to the survey »Mass Communication in 2010« by the German public TV channels ARD/ZDF, 14 to 29-year-olds dedicate, on average, just ten minutes a day to reading the newspaper. Their parents spent three times as long (cf. BEST/BREUNIG 2011: 18f.). Although these statistics are specific to Germany, the numbers represent a more general and far-reaching trend.

[2] In this article, ›intermediality‹ is defined as »a variety of phenomena that transcend medial boundaries and involve at least two conventionally distinct media« (THON 2014: 335); in contrast, ›transmediality‹ is understood here as all those »medially unspecified phenomena that are not connected to a specific medium or its mediality and […] can be realized using the means of a large number of different media« (THON 2014: 335).

[3] This paper does not define ›news‹ as the more colloquial, fragmented pieces of news, but rather as the so–called ›long reads‹ with political, socio-cultural, or critical themes, which are not written about on a daily basis and require background information to be well-researched as well as more time in the reception process.

but is rather due to what he terms »filter failure« (SHIRKY 2010: n.pag.)—the user's supposed inability to extract from the Internet the information which is most relevant for him/her.

As the editors of *Journalismus in der digitalen Moderne* observe, the effect of the rise in digitalization leads to a socio-cultural modernization of contemporary societies (cf. KRAMP et al. 2013: 8). This means that, in the medium term, recipients will mainly receive journalistic contents in digital form via electronic devices such as tablets, iPads, and smart phones (cf. NOVY 2013: 27). Indeed, millions of citizens already willingly share their private lives with others on the Internet—mostly via social media. However, it is surprising that their interest in public affairs, socio-cultural events, politics, or economy is kept at a minimum. Consequently, the new media can be seen as holding enormous potential for the strengthening of general interest and engagement in public events. In order to investigate this intersection of information, distribution, digital technology, and journalism, innovative systems and interdisciplinary methods are required. Originating in media studies, the concept of transmediality allows us to focus on the ways in which information is attended to. Looking at the well-known definition by Henry Jenkins, one might agree that

> [t]ransmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it[s] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (JENKINS 2007: n.pag.)

Applying transmedia storytelling to digital journalism involves telling stories on multiple platforms and with different formats. A definition by Ford suggests that

> [t]he purpose of a transmedia news story is to inform the readers in the best way possible, and using a combination of media forms to do so makes sense in a world where such partnerships across content platforms is becoming more plausible and where Internet publishing provides the means by which one can put together a package of text, audio, video, and pictures into an overarching coverage package. (FORD 2007: n.pag.)

But even with this definition in mind, the concept remains rather abstract and is mostly connected to fictional worlds and contexts. However, as the narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan argues, »[t]here is no reason why transmedia storytelling should be limited to the kind of fantastic worlds. Nor is there any reason why it should be limited to fiction« (RYAN 2013: 10). When transferred to nonfictional contexts—e.g., information studies—the third hypothesis here follows: transmediality will eventually lead to a revitalization of the journalistic branch requiring new reading competencies as the source material is spread across different media and platforms.

From a narratological perspective, one can argue that when the term ›storytelling‹ is mentioned in digital journalism, it is often surrounding issues of representation, staying firmly on the side of the discourse. It is not usually about changes in narration, narrativity, plot structure, or narrative intentions, but rather about questions like ›How can one make complex realities through

multimedia representations more understandable?‹ or ›How can one get the readers' attention?‹. At its best, web-aware journalism makes use of the concept of transmediality to tell stories vividly, perhaps to cover niche themes and thus to reach a broader readership. According to Hickethier, the utilization of different media is an essential feature of the cultural self-understanding of society because media changes can develop in every direction. They are versatile and multidimensional (cf. HICKETHIER 2013: 22).

After this attempt to define transmediality in a nonfictional context, however, the question remains as to when the label ›transmedia journalism‹ should be applied. I would argue that journalism often becomes transmedial when the concept of realism is not as rigid as in other genres, allowing some room for authorial creativity and for the text to take on some of the characteristics of fiction. This may either be the case when personal stories which include a subjective-emotional touch are told (as in the case of *Hollow*) or when topics which need to be narrated and focalized by as many voices as possible are chosen in order to provide the readership with profound background knowledge. Looking at recent transmedial documentaries, this often seems to be the case with controversial issues about environmental or political matters, as with *NSA Files. Decoded* (2013) or *Geheimer Krieg* (2013).[4]

Even if many textual and pictorial contributions enrich the content with additional perspectives, an increasing range of digital information also requires more contextualization, classification, and background information (cf. NOVY 2013: 26). The question that remains is how one can prove the trustworthiness and reliability of these sources. This, indeed, is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, if one includes many voices, a more well-rounded perspective on the issue is presented and the reader may be allowed to reach his/her own opinion. On the other hand, it is helpful to look at the reporters and organizations and their aims in pursuing particular digital journalistic projects; for journalists, the code of ethics should generally be regarded as the foundation of their job and taken for granted.

Consequently, transmedia journalists can afford to put more emphasis on (multi-)cultural codes, ethics, and the project's quality instead of quantity in the investigation process because transmedia journalists do the same thing they have always done—namely, tell stories, albeit now ›more‹ multimodally and multimedially. Since a common way of financing articles is through crowdfunding or other social payment services, many journalists work independently because they are not as constrained by time, market guidelines, and other formulas as other permanently hired journalists may be. Thus, they are not as afraid of breaking with some journalistic norms as their colleagues, because they are mostly working independently of publishing houses and can, as a result, tell their stories truthfully, ethically, responsibly, and accurately (cf. WESTBROOK 2009). According to Novy, director of the Institute for Development and Research (IWM) in Vienna, who wrote an article on

[4] DETEL 2014 discusses this project in more detail.

normativity and the crisis of journalism today, it is due to the new possibilities offered by the Internet that journalism is probably better and more independent than ever before, even taking into account its century-long history (cf. NOVY 2013: 26).

Apart from increasing competition among publishing houses connected to economic crisis in general, journalism also suffers from the readers' unwillingness to invest money in high-quality journalistic documentaries and reportages requiring expensive research. All of these factors contribute to the necessity of making changes within the journalistic sector. Regarding the challenge of knowledge transfer, the question arises of what one can do to support web-aware journalism and nonfictional storytelling, while at the same time not losing target audiences and getting more people interested in the latest (world) events. My suggestion is twofold: First, involve the people, and second, combine old media with new media in a way that enriches both.

The most dynamic feature of web-aware journalism is likely the dialogue between the user and producer of content, which plays such an extraordinary role (cf. KRAMP 2013: 54). Mark Deuze, a Dutch media sociologist, uses the term »liquid journalism« (DEUZE 2008: 848), by which he means the ability of people to choose the news that seem most interesting and, in this process, journalists becoming an even more active part of society, stimulating civic engagement (cf. DEUZE 2008: 859). There is a wide range of terms for web-aware journalism circulating among media scholars, which, at least at first glance, is causing confusion rather than clarifying the concept (cf. BRUNS 2005: 5). Although the terms vary in their meanings, what they hold in common is that the wishes, desires, and concerns of citizens are perceived and taken seriously. A term often used in this context is ›convergence culture‹. It is not by chance that the term originates in political studies. In this context, it is an allusion to democracy and applies to nonfictional web-aware journalism with its aim of fostering participatory and democratic culture. It creates platforms for people to discuss issues and become informed about what is happening, while it simultaneously seeks to produce journalistic projects of high quality. Even if it is a promising new area to test and explore, there are not yet many transmedia projects in journalism. This is, perhaps, not due to a lack of qualified or creative people willing to engage in such projects, but rather a question of money for substantial research, financing through advertisements, and fulfilling market shares.

At this point, it must be emphasized that traditional media such as radio, television, and the newspaper are not dead and the Internet does not signify their end. Jenkins argues that »journalists [should] learn to respect the new kinds of civic connections which are felt by young people« (JENKINS 2006: n.pag.). Bearing this in mind, one may deduce a second proposition: combine old media with new media in a way that enriches both. The Internet provides journalists with freedom to display creativity. Transmedia journalists should thus always ask themselves: ›Via which channels can I tell my story best? Does it make sense to start a blog? Do I need graphic material to support my

argument? Do I wish to include social networks and to what purpose?‹. During the working process, one should question whether there might be a better visual way of telling the story. The Internet, in combination with transmedia storytelling, is a bold and exciting new area for expression, creativity, and innovation.

## 2. *Hollow* as an Example of a New Direction Within Documentary Journalism

These and many other questions had to be taken into account while creating *Hollow*. *Hollow* is created, or, rather, digitally ›curated‹ by Elaine McMillion Sheldon, an American documentary storyteller, filmmaker, and photographer. With many different detailed storylines, the project describes the history of the ›fallen region‹ of McDowell County. The county is a dying community in West Virginia which flourished in the 1940s and 1950s due to coal mining, but the money has never come back. This area has little desire for a new road, new infrastructure, or a new water system, and because of the lack of these, the young people of McDowell are leaving the area. During the past years, for these various reasons, this region has become associated with a number of negative stereotypes in the media, if it was granted any media coverage at all. McMillon Sheldon wanted to overcome these stereotypes by trying to give McDowell's citizens a chance to tell their stories from their perspectives and to make people understand the other side of McDowell. This is another reason McMillion Sheldon cites for showing that there are also so many similarities with other states, like Vermont or the ›Ruin Porn-City‹ of Detroit (Michigan). In short, *Hollow* describes a region that is a poster child for all that has gone wrong in America and which is now ignored by the government — »economic stagnation, dwindling population, high teenage pregnancy rate, […] obesity and drug addiction« (COSTA 2013: n.pag.).

At the beginning, when entering the website, recipients are asked to use headphones. They are invited to scroll through a timeline plotting McDowell County's population boom and subsequent decline. Unlike a traditional documentary in which viewers turn the lights down, sit back, and wait for a story to unfold, participants ›watching‹ *Hollow* can scroll-and-point through various narrative arcs, stopping along the way to unlock content and watch video interviews. The more you scroll, the more these stories unfold and become close to cinematic life (cf. LINKINS 2013: n.pag.). Utilizing parallax scrolling, a special scrolling technique in computer graphics, background images are made to move slower than foreground images, creating an illusion of depth in a 2D project. Although one has to access the website on the Internet, the borders between this medium's features and TV become blurred.


Fig. 1:
A typical web-surface of Hollow consists of a collage of photographs and different buttons describing what applications can be found behind each chapter.
http://hollerhome.hollowdocumentary.com/holler-home/ [accessed January 11, 2013]

The *Hollow* website itself is very video-heavy, and offers more than three hours of video content. This is not unusual, as a typical feature of transmedia storytelling is the choice of including many audio (or audiovisual) tapes. In the case of *Hollow*, this may be due to the high illiteracy rate of the people living there, with the large amounts of video perhaps representing the good will of the creators in allowing it to be accessed and understood by everyone living in McDowell. Presenting the piece in this manner is very expensive and it is a challenge to finance the server costs in order to keep them running every month. Because McMillon Sheldon and her team cannot continue to record the citizens and events of McDowell indefinitely, they have trained the community to film their own lives, report on their progress, and post on a blog on the website. That is how the residents participate in the project and how a voice is given to topics they would like to see receive public attention.

A feature quite common to transmedia digital journalism is the use of multiperspectivity to provide different perspectives and authenticity. Thus, *Hollow* includes interactive, analytical, and quantitative elements. One can see, for example, a photograph of a flower on the website. Some moments later, in a video, the same photo can be seen again while it is being taken by McDowell's citizen Alan Johnston. This points to the original intention of McMillon Sheldon to create a way in which to give McDowell's people a voice. Another example typical of this format is the insertion of interactive elements with which to ›play‹, which also include statistics. Just one of many interac-

tive elements in *Hollow* allows the visitor of the website to participate in a data survey about small-town exodus. The user types in his/her home town and is immediately presented with a world map with the number of how many young people have already left their home town and moved to another. Another transmedial element of *Hollow* is the possibility the user has to post entries about public occasions and private lives, or simply become informed about the latest news, storms, etc. (see fig. 2). To some extent, it is reminiscent of an online newspaper or a hyperlocal blog as discussed by Prothmann (cf. PROTHMANN 2013: 125). According to him, hyperlocal blogs replace local newspapers where local news offices are shut down in provincial areas. Sometimes this medium fosters interest in social, cultural, historical, and political debates by encouraging writing about local issues.

In *Hollow*, which is very similar to a multimedia reportage (and maybe one cannot even clearly separate the two[5]), pictures and photographs become movable and there are always background sounds which, to some extent, determine the rhythm of reading. That this strategy has proven successful is not only due to the quality of the sound engineering and the entire »coverage package« (FORD 2007: n.pag.) of different modes and media, which inevitably cause the recipient to sympathize with the community. Rather, that the active role of the reader/player/watcher becomes important is also connected to many other multimodal features, like links to *Hollow*'s website from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. It is not far-fetched to assume that the idea behind the use of all of these new media is to convey the feeling of belonging to ›the‹ McDowell-community.

Against this background, it becomes clear that the recipient's role in the process of reading changes. The reader is no longer merely a reader, but may also be initiator, consumer, user, author, journalist, blogger, photographer, or activist. Oswald uses the term »prosumer« (OSWALD 2013: 64) to describe this new role(s). In the context of web-based comics, Thierry Groensteen uses the term »readeragent« (GROENSTEEN 2013: 74), a moniker I would also like to adopt here. It fits in well with the case presented here, because reading and interacting become two different modes of attention. According to Groensteen, »[t]he reader no longer asks ›What happens next‹ or ›How is this story going to end‹, but ›What new actions will I be asked to perform?‹« (GROENSTEEN 2013: 75).

[5] »The difference between transmediality and multimodality is not always clear, but a reliable criterion is the autonomy of the different types of information [... I]n multimodality they are given as a package, because they cannot be separated« (RYAN 2013: 11).


Fig. 2:
Hollerhome—a local news website similar to a hyperlocal blog.
http://hollerhome.hollowdocumentary.com/holler-home/ [accessed January 11, 2013]

## 3. Purposes, Impacts, and Possible Dangers of Nonfictional Transmedial Storytelling in Digital Journalism

Using the example of *Hollow*, one can deduce several purposes and results of nonfictional transmedia storytelling. If journalists choose to use several different platforms, they intend to send a serious message because such a novel media use increases the urgency and presence among a country's citizens. Mostly, online journalists try to draw attention to ›niche issues‹ that are overlooked by mainstream newspapers or even ignored by society and politics.

To narrate transmedially means to spread certain contents of a story across various channels in order to create unique and daring entertainment (cf. EICK 2014: 179). But this does not mean that the entertaining aspects should predominate over educational aspects when applying transmediality to web-aware journalism. If consuming news is fun, it can also be entertaining enough that the educational value sometimes takes a backseat. Additionally, it is the power of the entertaining and technologically novel elements

that makes it easier for recipients to ›play with‹ and check out new ways of storytelling, to apply and to develop new ways of digital technology and communication, to support teamwork and interdisciplinary working processes, and, in the process, to draw attention to subjects and attract new recipients.

Concerning the impact of transmediality on journalistic reportage, one can differentiate between the side of the producer and the side of the recipient. As far as the recipient is concerned, there is no longer a given rule for how to read the transmedial ›text‹ because the readeragent can determine the course of the story himself/herself: »Facing multiple points of access, no two consumers are likely to encounter story information in the same order« (BORDWELL 2011: n.pag.). This is also due to the fact that meaning is no longer only generated by the story that is verbally narrated, but also generated through other media like photographs, social media, and audio or video tapes. Thus, transmedia storytellers attempt to exploit the features specific to each medium as well as possible. Along the way, many different perspectives and voices can be adopted, which add various new layers of meaning to the decoding process. Concerning the formal structure of an online transmedia project, the question arises whether there is a break in linearity. How can one watch or read the online article without spoiling the facts or without interrupting the narrative arc, even if there may be various strategies for reading and interacting? In other words, readeragents can take unique, nonlinear, and nonchronological paths through content.

However, the critical challenge in this form of storytelling is that the narrative arc of the story is not predetermined by the journalists. Instead, the user's interaction with the content determines the story that emerges: »The interface is the narrative. The narrative happens when you set up those relationships between the data, and even allow users to add to that« (Dana Coester, quoted in CURRIE SIVEK 2012: n.pag.). Consequently, the readeragents feel like they are on a journey while interacting with the project. In the case of *Hollow*, it was important to McMillion Sheldon that the

> audience not only stay[s] engaged in the project for more than the »five-minute attention span« of online explorers, but also that site visitors relate to the »characters« and engage in the sociological and anthropological aspects of the project. (COSTA 2013: n.pag.)

On the producer's side, the most noticeable effect of applying transmedial concepts is that journalistic work changes from a product-oriented to a process-oriented structure (cf. KRAMP 2013: 54). In other words, the focus is not put on the end-product—or any medial part of the project—any longer, but rather on the process of creating it. According to Oswald, an article is ideally not a finished product, but the starting point for a constructive debate with user participation, leading to new posts and articles (cf. KRAMP 2013: 72). However, this does not only hold true for written texts, but for any kind of medial contribution. To some extent, it also implies that the notion of endings in journalistic pieces is *passé*. In consequence, this influences the story that is

told. On the one hand, the end of some stories perhaps will simply never come. On the other hand, leaving stories open seems closer to how they operate in real life, in which not all events have a definite ending (cf. OSWALD 2013: 72). But if the story is endless, who decides to restrict the accumulated information to an appropriate size for digital uploading? This question is even more complicated with regard to hypertexts, particularly when considering limitations on amounts of data or digital storage capacity.

In addition to the transmedial advantages offered by new media with regard to the revitalization of online journalism, there are dangers of which one ought to be aware. First of all, this massively impacts the profession of journalism. Although scholarly opinions vary in this respect, one can agree with Westbrook that

> [t]he journalist of the future is a reporter, a video journalist, a photo-journalist, audio journalist and interactive designer, all-in-one. They shoot and edit films, audio slideshows, podcasts, vodcasts, blogs, and longer articles. They may have one specialism out of those, but can go somewhere and cover a story in a multitude of platforms. (WESTBROOK 2009: n.pag.)

One might even argue that the journalism of the future will be a collective experience. Certainly, the workload and working time of journalists will change noticeably. In Meyer's opinion, they will become akin to »non-stop-services« (MEYER 2013: 142) such as firefighters or locksmiths and perhaps will never be off-duty. This would have a huge impact, as transmedia projects cannot be realized by a single person, but rather must be composed by a group of specialists. At the same time, journalists are at risk of losing their status as experts, as anybody can now start a blog online and write. Content exists infinitely, whereas our attention is limited (cf. EICK 2014: 33). Today, people no longer perceive news and events one-dimensionally and read about them from one media source, but, rather, they perceive them multi-dimensionally and in a more fragmented fashion (cf. EICK 2014: 32). Additionally, there will no longer be any such thing as one audience, which means that the communication model of ›one-to-many‹ has become outdated. The ›many-to-many‹ communication model becomes more applicable in this context. Additionally, journalists are now required to think in more economic terms. This already starts at the level of the university, with teaching journalism students computer science, product design, product marketing, etc. (cf. CURRIE SIVEK 2012: n.pag.).

## 4. Conclusion. Digitalization and Transmediality Lead to Changes in Reception and Production

Human minds do not exclusively operate with facts and thus create their own stories to make sense of otherwise discrete or isolated events and issues. For this reason, great stories and articles win hearts and minds. Why, then, turn

to multi-media? Telling stories across multiple media formats is a trend in digital journalism because no single medium remains capable of satisfying the curiosity and lifestyle of 21st century citizens now that we are surrounded by an unprecedented world of content, products, and leisure opportunities.

The people transmedia journalists tell their stories to have the technology to decide whether they want to inform themselves further or not. According to Eick, this kind of digitalization shifts our social milieu and thus changes reception behavior as well (cf. EICK 2014: 24). As a result, the former ›reader‹ or ›user‹ changes from a passive recipient into an active and sometimes even creative participant who, in this paper, is referred to as a reader-agent—a term borrowed from Thierry Groensteen's work in comics studies.

Moreover, applying transmediality to web-aware journalism does not lead to a ›just-so-reading‹, as these articles focus on digital long-format journalistic projects—so-called ›long reads‹. These texts require extensive research and are not classifiable as ›en passant‹ reading. In that, they differ from the daily news in print journalism: »When you look at loyal readers of paper newspapers, they tend to read the news during their leisure time; during breakfast, over the lunch hour, or in the evening. By contrast, online news is accessed throughout the day« (VARIAN 2013: n.pag.).

Moreover, this paper has shown that the use of transmedia in digital documentary journalism not only affects the way stories are narrated but also leads to changes and rethinking within the journalistic field itself. By examining *Hollow*, this paper has illustrated that the concept of transmediality is a useful and fruitful tool to exploit. The argument presented here is that digital journalism changes with transmediality from a product to a process-oriented practice, which affects the recipients as well as the producers. It is, therefore, inevitable that journalism as a career will change in the future, but this may also present new opportunities.

However, the question remains whether transmedial storytelling can foster higher-quality journalism, especially with regard to digital journalism, particularly because transmedia projects are able to respond so rapidly to technological progress and the aesthetic needs of recipients. Improvements in technology also lead, however, to the culling of human resources, eventually limiting time available for high-quality research.

Another crucial point to consider when dealing with digital projects is the access the elderly and underprivileged have or, rather, do not have to web-aware transmedia journalism. In other words, how might the digital divide with regard to age and financial situation be overcome? The Internet, as a medium of globalization, also intensifies the exclusion of the less privileged from society. But, to some extent, one has to come to terms with some kind of discrimination, as not all people can afford digital devices.

The Internet offers nearly unlimited opportunities for testing and developing new (trans-)medial formats. Of course, not every journalist must become a photographer, editor, and marketing expert. Even if journalists learn to think multimedially, multimedia storytelling and transmediality in

digital journalism will be produced in teams. According to Kayser-Bril, it will no longer only be journalists who are responsible for ›good‹ journalism (cf. KAYSER-BRIL 2013: 136). Since knowledge is the essential component of journalism, a big challenge—but also an opportunity—could lie in using the knowledge of the collective for adding, re-editing, and correcting information.

To conclude, it has never been more exciting and challenging to be a journalist, even if many of the new possibilities have to be further explored and tested before they may become ›mainstream-compatible‹. Transmediality has the potential both to fight apathy and to decrease the gap in successful knowledge transfer. Transmediality in web-aware journalism will make digital journalism much more innovative and interesting for ›Generation Y‹ and beyond. As such, it is a highly promising trend both with regard to producers and recipients of 21st century news.

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**MARTINA PLÜMACHER/KLAUS SACHS-HOMBACH**: Einleitung
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**SASCHA DEMARMELS**: Funktion des Bildstils von politischen Plakaten. Eine historische Analyse am Beispiel von Abstimmungsplakaten
**DAGMAR SCHMAUKS**: Rippchen, Rüssel, Ringelschwanz. Stilisierungen des Schweins in Werbung und Cartoon
**BEATRICE NUNOLD**: Landschaft als Immersionsraum und Sakralisierung der Landschaft
**KLAUS SACHS-HOMBACH/JÖRG R.J. SCHIRRA**: Bildstil als rhetorische Kategorie

## IMAGE 2: Kunstgeschichtliche Interpretation und bildwissenschaftliche Systematik

**Herausgeber:** Klaus Sachs-Hombach

**KLAUS SACHS-HOMBACH**: Einleitung
**BENJAMIN DRECHSEL**: Die Macht der Bilder als Ohnmacht der Politikwissenschaft. Ein Plädoyer für die transdisziplinäre Erforschung visueller politischer Kommunikation
**EMMANUEL ALLOA**: Bildökonomie. Von den theologischen Wurzeln eines streitbaren Begriffs
**SILVIA SEJA**: Das Bild als Handlung? Zum Verhältnis der Begriffe ›Bild‹ und ›Handlung‹
**HELGE MEYER**: Die Kunst des Handelns und des Leidens. Schmerz als Bild in der Performance Art
**STEFAN MEIER-SCHUEGRAF**: Rechtsextreme Bannerwerbung im Web. Eine medienspezifische Untersuchung neuer Propagandaformen von rechtsextremen Gruppierungen im Internet

## IMAGE 2 Themenheft: Filmforschung und Filmlehre

**Herausgeber/in:** Eva Fritsch, Rüdiger Steinmetz



## IMAGE 1: Bildwissenschaft als interdisziplinäres Unternehmen. Eine Standortbestimmung



## IMAGE 1 Themenheft: Die schräge Kamera

**Herausgeber:** Klaus Sachs-Hombach, Hans Jürgen Wulff