THE PROGRESSION OF MOCK-DOCUMENTARY FILM THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Progression of Mock-documentary Film through Digital Media

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This study is presented as a critical analysis to discuss how mock-documentary film is changing and understood through digital media. The author believes that digital technology has altered the way these films are made and how audiences view them. The author illustrates this by looking at the development and theories surrounding the style as well as its employment of the DVD format with satirical comedies and new media with horror films. The analysis points out that DVDs and the internet allow for the creation of a variety of secondary text which may or may not preserve the artifice of the mock-documentary. Through the style along with secondary text, digital media has allowed these movies to further the narrative, discuss the style’s construction as well as shape the promotion of these films.
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Introduction

Throughout the 21st century, the mock-documentary style has gained a lot of notoriety and publicity. Essentially, mock-documentaries are fictional texts that emulate documentary codes and standards. Along with the upsurge in the style’s use, the century brought new mainstream ways of consuming media via digital technology. The purpose of this study is to examine how mock-documentary movies are changing and understood through digital media.

To further understand the style, it is important to know the elements of a documentary. Film critic, Bill Nichols, describes documentary film not as copy of reality, but rather a “representation” of the world we inhabit (1994. p. 20). Documentary has the power to characterize a point of view of the world that the audience may or may not have encountered before, even if some features are familiar to them (Nichols, 1994. p. 20).

Visually, documentary can apply these representations in the form of movies, television programs, or video reporting. In order to make the piece cohesive for the audience, documentaries often employ voice-overs, interviews, vérité footage, graphics, or re-enactments. Similarly, mock-documentary fits into multiple mediums borrowing documentary elements to form/further develop a fictional narrative. The style also incorporates many genres or categories, such as comedy, horror, action, etc.

With variations of mock-documentary filmmaking, texts can look incredibly different from one another. The style has been labeled with several names such as faux documentary, mockumentary, and pseudo-documentary. Often, the various terms are associated with a certain genre. Mockumentary, for example, is usually grouped with comedies. In Jane Roscoe’s and Craig Hight’s book, Faking It, they settled on the term mock-documentary to label the style. The first reason they selected the term was because it indicated imitating a pre-existing form that the audience recognized. The second reason was the word mock indicates a satiric agenda of the
documentary genre on some level (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 1). They note, whether intentional or not, an agenda is unavoidably formed in these narratives. By using mock-documentary, I can broadly cover more information on the topic with little confusion.

For the study, I will use a critical approach to examine mock-documentary movies. To understand the style’s relationship with digital technology I will look at the development and theories surrounding mock-documentary as well as its employment of the DVD format and new media. The study is organized into four chapters the “The Introduction and Review of the Literature”, “DVDs”, “The Internet” and the “Conclusion”.

The first chapter I look at the historical foundations of mock-documentary film and how it stems from non-fiction codes. I also explore theories surrounding the style such as Roscoe and Hight’s three degrees (parody, critique and deconstruction) and Nichols analyses on documentary. The next chapter I discuss how DVDs provide additional text that further develops or examines the central mock-documentary narrative. For the chapter I selected satirical comedies that use the style. The movies include *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) and the Christopher Guest directed films *Waiting for Guffman* (1996), *Best in Show* (2000) and *A Mighty Wind* (2003).

In the third chapter I investigate the relationship between new media and horror mock-documentary. The films I looked at all take the form “found footage” meaning the video material was supposedly ‘discovered’ by someone off-camera (McRoy, 2004). For the chapter, I selected the movies *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), the *909 Experiment* (2000), *Cloverfield* (2008), *Quarantine* (2008) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007). All these film approach the internet in various ways such as sharing, promotion and extending the narrative’s mythos. For the “Conclusion”, I will go over all the main points from the previous chapters and the effects digital media has had on mock-documentary
film. Lastly, I will examine possible directions I believe the style is heading in relation to digital technology.

**Review of the Literature**

With the emergence of film came new ways to capture movement around the world. Originally pioneered to simply record, much of early cinema consisted of short clips of everyday life. These shorts laid down the foundation for non-fiction documentation. These *documentaries* evolved heavily over the following century with emerging techniques and new technology. Some types of non-fiction film include travelogue, direct film, and news programming.

Along with documentary, a new form of fiction developed that mirrored non-fiction text known as mock-documentary. Mock-documentary is unique because it formed as a reflexive model for non-fiction. In order to understand its development and purpose in cinema, I will explore existing literature that outlines the history and theoretical make-up of mock-documentary.

**Origins of Non-fiction Film**

To begin, let’s look at some background information on non-fiction film and the emergence of mock-documentary. Documentaries are used to capture or examine reality. Evidence of the text can be dated all the way back to series photography. Essentially, series photography is a group of still photographs that can create a moving picture. One famous example is Eadweard Muybridge's experiments with electrically operated cameras to capture a multitude of images at once. Most famously, he took images of a horse and displayed them on a magic lantern and a Zoopraxiscope in 1878, which enlarged the images and simulated the motion of the horse moving. Originally works like Muybridge's were limited to only several images.

Before Thomas Edison's company developed the kinetoscope, Edison met with Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey (a French scientist who used moving photography for
documentation) to discuss their work (Barnouw, 1993, p. 5). Edison mentioned the potential in motion picture and sound recording for their archival and educational value. Inventor William Kennedy Dickson would later help develop a motion picture camera for Edison’s company (Barsam, 1992, p. 12). The camera was rather big and required several men to move it. Edison was also insistent that the camera should include electricity to guarantee speed and efficiency. As a result of these issues, the camera was placed in a studio known as the 'Black Maria‘ in West Orange, N.J. The camera was not capable of going outside, so Edison brought people inside the studio. He often filmed celebrities such as Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley (Barsam, 1992, p. 17). He also filmed performers such as dancers, magicians, strongmen and jugglers.

Many of the limitations with motion picture cameras would end with the innovation of the Lumière Brothers. Louis Lumière developed a camera known as the cinématographe. It was lightweight, and the film was hand cranked, so it was not dependent on electricity like Dickson's camera. It also did not have any inherent lighting problems in daylight and could be taken outside to shoot. The cinématographe also worked as a projector and printing machine, meaning it was possible to quickly develop the film and display it (Barsam, 1992, p. 20-21).

On March 22, 1895, the Lumière Brothers showcased their film Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory at the Société d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale in Paris (Barsam, 1992, p. 21). Within the same year, the Lumière brothers along with other operators captured several dozen films, all of which were around a minute long (Barnouw, 1993, p. 7). The Lumière’s company furthered its reach in location shooting by having world-traveler, trained camera operators going to Spain, Italy, Russia, and elsewhere (Barnouw, 1993, p. 9). A notable example of a Lumière film is the Arrival of a Train that showed a train coming into a station at La Ciotat in Southern France. Louis Lumière excluded the theater model in his company's films.
Instead, he was interested in capturing life, especially French life, such as showing children by the seaside, blacksmiths working, the employee picnic, bicycle lessons (Barnouw, 1993, p. 8-9). Though some films had intentional performances, such as the *Table Turned on the Garner* (1895) and *Feeding the Baby* (1895) (Barnouw, 1993, p. 8). Most of these films would fit into Nichols’ *observational mode* of documentary. Nichols describes this mode as the everyday life of subjects captured by an “unobtrusive camera” (Nichols, 2001, p.34).

Besides short films of everyday life, the cinématographe soon became important for recording news and events. For example, the Lumière shot a meeting of Société française de photographie, which is considered one of the first news events on film (Barsam, 1992, p. 18). Other filmmakers, such as British pioneer Birt Acres, used the technology to shoot news coverage that proved to be of international importance, such as the opening of Kiel Canal by Kaiser Wilhelm II in Brunsbüttelkoog (Barsam, 1992, p. 18). Despite the cinématographe’s success, films were relatively short. By 1889, George Eastman helped develop and popularize the celluloid roll film through Eastman Kodak Company. The technology made it achievable to take thousands of images at once. The new Eastman technology, along with various competitors, made longer films possible (Barsam, 1992, p. 10-11).

**Rise of the Narrative Film and Representational Cinema**

Along with Eastman film achievement in length, film pioneers such as Georges Méliès and J. Stuart Blackton were making achievements in storytelling through visual effects. The directors used the camera as an instrument to alter the audience’s view of the world on screen by manipulating the images with techniques such as stop-motion and double exposure (Springer, 2006, p.29). With the new forms of storytelling becoming achievable with film, and the turn of the 20th century around the corner, audiences’ taste shifted toward narrative film. The early
appeal of cinema was giving picture movement and using film as a recording device. By this time, however, story films began to emerge, drawing from familiar plots such as fairy tales and popular fiction, as well as taking ideas from current events (Springer, 2006, p.29).

In John Parris Springer’s essay, he looks at the emerging change from iconic cinema to cinema that forms representational cinema. He uses director’s Edwin S. Port’s Life of an American Fireman (1903) and The Great Train Robbery (1903) as examples (2006, p.31). Both were short films and were distributed by Edison Manufacturing Company. Springer believes these two films are important because they demonstrate two aesthetic models: realism and melodrama (2006, p.31). For Springer, realism often avoids narrative structuring, character categorization, and moral agendas for objective view of reality. Melodrama, on the other hand, is coded with narrative service and characterization. While seemingly opposed, the author argues that melodrama requires a "diegetic presence"; a believable world with familiar dangers (Springer, 2006, p.34).

With realism, the films were intended to be a representation of the real, as well as recognizable social situations. Springer concludes that the movies were important because they managed to dramatize content that was topical to the audience, such as in newspaper, while concurrently providing the melodramatic interests from novels (2006, p.39). In the case of the movies, it was the guided thrill of seeing fire and crime on screen. In short, these films work as records and a depiction. With the cultural influences and news coverage combined in cinematic form, films like Life of an American Fireman and The Great Train Robbery later evolved into docudramas (Springer, 2006, p.39).

Looking at mock-documentaries, they follow a similar formula that Springer has laid out. Instead of trying to reinvent the real as the dramatic, mock-documentaries often reverse the
process by trying to make the dramatic or fiction feel real. In other words, mock-documentary movies mimic codes associated with non-fiction film and apply them to a fictional narrative.

**War of the Worlds and the Replication of Radio Conventions**

Jumping ahead to 1938, Orson Welles’ broadcast of *War of the Worlds* is a good example. While not technically a mock-documentary due to the text being on the radio, it follows a similar template that would later emerge in film. Welles adapted the broadcast from H.G. Wells' science fiction novel of the same name. He constructed his version to have a 'live newscast' along with interviews from eyewitness over the fake alien invasion. The result led to many listeners, including newspapers, believing the story was real (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 78). The local police even questioned the station about the broadcast's authenticity.

Welles gave an apology at a national press conference he was forced to hold. He defended himself, claiming that there were multiple cues in the show to make listeners aware it was fiction, such as the broadcast being slated in the drama slot and two specific disclaimers (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 78). In other words, Welles applied radio codes for a news broadcast to a fictional work to add realism to the story. The work was a major precursor for the mock-documentary films that came later (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 79).

**The Travelogue**

Despite, audiences’ new love for narrative films in the early 20th century, non-fiction movies remained popular, branching out in different forms. In the late 1890’s for example, American companies like Edison’s saw potential in filming major events like the inauguration of President William McKinley, the Alaskan gold rush, and sports film (Barsam, 1992, p. 19). Another major type of film that helped support non-fiction film early on, and still continues today, is the travelogue. What these pictures contained was exploration and travel around the
world. The focal drive of the travelogues was to provide information, ideas and educate
audiences about distant places. Take for instance filmmaker, Burton Holmes, who coined the
term *travelogue* in 1908. He used short films in his travel lectures, along with slides, to teach
audiences at motion picture shows (Barsam, 1992, p. 42).

Filmmakers understood audiences’ desires to see factual movies shot in exotic areas.
Over the next two decades, many travelogues were shot to meet demand. One notable
exploration director to mention is Robert Flaherty. Some silent documentaries he is well known
for are *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926). With *Nanook*, Flaherty collaborated with
his Inuit subjects. Take the opening scene, for example, where they go on a walrus hunt.
Flaherty and Nanook agreed only to hunt when Flaherty gave the signal (Barsam, 1992, p. 50).
In the movie, Flaherty told simple stories about how the Inuit lived, and then formed minor
stories with dramatic elements and suspense around select characters (Barsam, 1992, p. 51).
Beyond structure, it is important to note that *Nanook’s* cost was around $53,000. Paramount
Pictures recovered its investment in the film and turned a huge profit, showcasing that
documentary could have major financial potential (Barnouw, 1993, p. 42).¹

With *Moana*, on the other hand, Flaherty wanted to display how Samoans used to live,
rather than current day-to-day life. He romanticized the way his subjects were garbed and
hunted (Barsam, 1992, p. 51). In a 1926 review, landmark documentarian John Grierson
discussed how he admired *Moana* for its “documentary value” (Green, 2006, p.68). For
Grierson, the documentary value was the authenticity of Samoans’ life. He was aware that actual
value was sandwiched into the romantic narrative. To him the value was likely a symptom of
*Moana* rather than the focus. Nevertheless, it fit under Grierson’s succeeding article “First

¹ By the 1920’s Paramount pictures had become a leader in American film industry. (1993, p. 41).
Principles of Documentary," where he states that documentary was the cinematic practice that might be comprehended as “creative treatment of actuality” (Green, 2006, p.68).

Grierson further develops the first principles of documentary in three points. The first point is that cinema has the ability to travel around. It can observe and choose from life itself. In short, film can be transported anywhere to shoot nature or society. For Grierson, this ability can be exploited in a new and fundamental art form (Grierson, 1971, p. 146). Next, original actors (or natives), as well as original scenes, can provide developed guides to a “screen interpretation of the modern world” (Grierson, 1971, p. 147). What he means by this is documentary allows for an informative reflection or outlook on contemporary times. Thirdly, Grierson believes that stories extracted from the raw can be more satisfactory than the acted piece. In other words, documented moments captured can have a greater impact on the viewer than staged film.

In Flaherty’s case, Grierson believes that Flaherty adhered to these principles, despite Hollywood’s desire to levy a ready-made living drama. Grierson thinks documentary must grasp its material right away, and come in intimacy to arranging it, mentioning how Flaherty would stay in the country and live with the people until the story was told ’out of himself” (Grierson, 1971, p. 148). Put differently, the documentaries form gave Flaherty the opportunity to present a more accurate view of his subjects by permitting him live in their country and shoot them directly.

In Barsam’s book, he claims that a Flaherty work follows the realist tradition -- the necessity of cinematography over editing, Flaherty’s use of long takes, and dependence on long-focus lenses (Barsam1992, p. 53). Barsam also thinks that Flaherty’s work on Nanook taught him that the central style of the film should come from within the topic matter, by choosing the arrangement of information in realist film (1992, p. 54). Flaherty's exploration films had a great
influence on many other filmmakers, such as Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, who worked on two important travel films: *Grass a Nation's Battle for Life* (1925) and *Chang* (1927) (Barsam, 1992, p. 54). One other filmmaker’s work that echoes Flaherty’s films is the Luis Buñuel movie, *Land Without Bread* (1932).

**Land Without Bread & Man with a Movie Camera**

In Caroline Francis’ article, *Slashing the Complacent Eye: Luis Buñuel and Surrealist Documentary*, she argues that Flaherty, Cooper, and Schoedsack's movies were made to appeal to Western audiences (Francis, 2007, p.72). According to her, the films were highly manipulated through narration and editing. By way of contrast, Buñuel's film, he joined ethnographic film conventions with those found in surrealist films (Francis, 2007, p. 73). Despite taking a surrealist approach, Buñuel used very few surreal visual aesthetics. Instead, *Land Without Bread* continuously used codes found in ethnographic films, in order to hide the film's cynicism and criticisms over the non-fiction genre.

The plot centers on the Las Hurdes area of Spain and follows the poor residents in La Alberqua. Using this area as the subject, Buñuel was able to incorporate his moral and political agenda in the film. Francis holds that the movie incorporates surrealism in three ways: the first is the film's usage of the surrealist instrument of black humor, the second is the film's criticism of Western bourgeoisie. Lastly, Buñuel interrogates ethnographic film’s control of logic when depicting reality (Francis, 2007, p. 83).

With these set in place, Buñuel intentionally undermines his movie’s credibility in various ways. One example is using Johannes Bram’s Fourth Symphony synched to shots of the empty stares of the Hurdanos while he does a voice-over about the Hurdanos pitiful presence (Francis, 2007, p. 79). According to Francis, the narration was inconsiderate and unfeeling
because Buñuel wanted to imitate the viewpoint of self-content Westerners. Buñuel also wanted to use unconformable and shocking imagery (Francis, 2007, p. 83). At one point in the film, a goat is shot, and a donkey is slaughtered.

The main argument that Buñuel was trying to make with Land Without Bread is that since film is fundamentally a form of construction, ethnographic films tend to be about the filmmaker because it is the filmmaker that chooses how the stories are crafted, not the subject (Francis, 2007, p. 85). It should also be noted that Land Without Bread showed early signs that would be modernized by mock-documentary. The film fits into Roscoe and Hight’s degrees because it criticizes the medium of documentary by mimicking and displaying conventions from ethnographic and travelogue films to make a point.

Films like Land Without Bread challenge documentary techniques. For film critic Bill Nichols, these reflexive documentaries tackle issues of realism. One other example he provides is the 1929 movie The Man with a Movie Camera directed by Dziga Vertov. Nichols states that the film implements an analytic voice in order to explore the transformative ability of post-revolutionary Soviet society through the organized masses (Nichols, 2001, p. 90).

Vertov shows that the representation of reality is constructed by a cameraman (2001, p. 126). One scene Nichols mentions involves the cameraman riding in a car. The cameraman films people riding in a horse-drawn carriage next to the car. The movie then cuts to an editing room. Elizaveta Svilova, an editor and Vertov’s wife, is shown arranging the strips of film into the sequence previously seen (Nichols, 2001, p. 126-127). Nichols concludes that scenes like this review the notion of unhindered admission to reality. It induces the audience to think about the process of editing and the impression of reality made (2001, p. 127).
Newsreels and Television News

Looking at other non-fiction films in the 1930s, the form known as *newsreel* became quite important over the next couple decades. Newsreel was short films that presented footage of actual events. The material offered eyewitnesses and graphic accounts of history (Barsam, 1992, p. 162). Newsreel also presented the material with simple and informative terms in a short amount of time.

When crafting together newsreel pieces, it was common to separate bias from the subjects being discussed (though they approached subjects such as fashion with humor, or patriotism in sports). Within the decade, almost every theater showed a newsreel along with other programing, such as cartoons and two or more feature movies (Barsam, 1992, p. 162). There were even theaters that solely dedicated to showing newsreel. Newsreel soon became the source for screen and video journalism. Some major shows included The *March of Time*, *Nykino's The World Today*, and *This is America* (Barsam, 1992, p. 163).

With television on the horizon, newsreel presented an example of how to handle visual news stories. By the late 1940s, television sales began to increase heavily. In reaction to these sales, the networks extended their evening broadcasts to seven days a week. Along with the longer schedules, the networks also began to run weeknight newscasts. NBC's news show premiered first in February 1948. Fox Movietone’s newsreel company produced the program and R.J. Reynolds sponsored it. The show had voice-overs but no on-screen anchors when it began. *CBS Evening News*, on the other hand, began in April 1948. It featured a cast of rotating anchors before Douglas Edwards became a regular (Ponce de Leon, 2015, p. 8).

One important person CBS hired for its show was a journalist named Don Hewitt. He later became a producer for the network and made some notable changes to compensate for the
advantages and limitations of television (Ponce de Leon, 2015, p. 10). Hewitt formed the graphics art department to create charts, maps, and captions to better illustrate stories. He also brought in TelePrompTer machines, to make reading easier for anchors. (Before Hewitt introduced the machine, scripts were written on cue cards.) Hewitt was a major factor in CBS’ shift to 16mm film, and he began using in-house camera crews as well (Ponce de Leon, Ponce de Leon, 2015, p. 11).

Another area that Hewitt was responsible for was a paired-projector arrangement that blended narration with film. Essentially the system was used to create news package and served as an archetype for television news. The beginning of the story would have the reporter on camera, starting with a stand upper that announces the story. This section is followed by a voice-over, with the reporter's words recorded separately, detailing the piece.

Local stations also helped popularize the man-on-the-street interviews (Ponce de Leon, 2015, p. 8). With exceptions of those interviews, and the work of stations like KTLA or Telepix Newsreel, most local stations gave summaries of wire-surface headlines. Rarely was much effort put into local stations, because most stations believed viewers got their local news from newspapers and radio stations.

However, with cheaper equipment in the 1960s, such as video and microwave technology, local stations and network affiliates began to increase news programming (Ponce de Leon, 2015, p. 12). Throughout the 1960s many of these news conventions became the standard for the networks, allowing television to become a powerful tool for the public in U.S. It changed many institutions, including politics and sports. Some important topics networks covered at this time were the Great Debates between Kennedy and Nixon during the 1960 presidential campaign, as well as the civil rights movement (Brown, 1995, p. 275).
News Aesthetics Replicated in Film

There are several examples where narrative film borrows newsreel and news broadcast conventions. Take for instance the *March of Time* newsreel from *Citizen Kane* (1941) (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 94). It provides the biography of Welles’ character, Kane, as well as information such as his death. In other movies, such as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), fake news broadcasts provide information regarding authorities locally and nationally.

Fake news broadcasts serve a number of purposes in the films’ construction. The broadcasts are often used to help ground the narratives in a familiar social-historical framework. They can also be used to provide some commentary. With *Living Dead*, the news is used as a parody of government and authoritative institutions, voices, and bureaucracy. The news bulletins also provide insight into the spread of ghouls (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 95).

Along with commentary, fake news broadcasts can show the significance of the visual medium to the people in the movie, demonstrate their reactions, and lend a sense of scale to events. The mock-documentary *Cloverfield* (2008) leverages fake news broadcasts in this way. When a giant monster attacks, the first thing the characters do is turn on CNN. At one point, the characters pass a shop window with news footage. This scene provides the first look at a whole shot of the monster, but the TV screen (viewed through the characters’ camera) is too small to show any big details of the creature. Here, the broadcast is used to ground the spectacle by showing it as a real news broadcast would in a case of a disaster or attack (North, 2010, p.84). Also in this movie, the news is treated as a developing story each time the characters pass a television, rather than simply inflating the image for exposition.

With mock-documentary directly, television news codes can take up sections or entirety of a film’s stylistic framework. With *Cloverfield*, the characters are watching the news on
television. The news story is captured by a camera the character is holding next to the T.V. However, in the online advertising for the film, the various faux news reports exist independently as if the story was uploaded online by news networks. They show an oil rig collapse off the coast of Connecticut suggesting the monster from the movie is nearing New York City. In other films, news reports or television codes may be cut in the film to obtain the spirit of certain situations. In *Best in Show*, for example, there is a dog competition. At points in the movie, the footage replicates codes from these types of televised events. Since the movie is made to look like a documentary, it gives the audience impression that the filmmakers obtained the footage of the competition from television network and spliced into their film.

**Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema**

The 16mm portable cameras were not only used by the news stations; the devices also opened the door for all-new modes of documentary representation in the 1960s. One such form allowed viewers the chance to observe the lived experiences of others’ day-to-day lives (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 235). Like the early Lumière shorts, these films would fit into the *observational mode* (Nichols, 1994, p. 95). Unlike Vertov’s *Man with the Camera*, which focused on Soviet life as a whole, cinéma vérité and direct cinema moved toward shooting domestic and personal subjects. One pioneer of the style was Robert Drew. Drew formed a group at Time, Inc. with individuals such as fellow filmmaker Richard Leacock. Their purpose was to conduct experiments in mobile filmmaking and with synchronized sound shooting. (Barnouw, 1993, p. 235).

An important film they made was called *Primary* (1960), which followed U.S. Senators, John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey, during their campaigning in Wisconsin for the Democratic presidential nomination (Barnouw, 1993, p. 236-238). The movie showed speeches,
interviews, meetings, and motorcades. Drew was insistent that the filmmakers never ask or persuade any action for the subjects. Despite being rejected by all the big networks, *Primary* was broadcast several stations owned by Time, Inc. (Barnouw, 1993, p. 238).

According to Barsam in his book, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History*, the techniques practiced during the decade became a fundamental part of T.V. reporting (Barsam, 1992, p. 281). Though not airing on ABC Network, ABC was impressed with Drew's group's work and contracted them to make documentary programming for them. Some films to come out of this include *Yanki No!* (1960) and *The Chair* (1963) (Barnouw, 1993, p. 238). By the mid-1960's, the group began to scatter. Most of the filmmakers continued to use similar techniques in their own projects (Barnouw, 1993, p. 240). One former member, Albert Maysles, went on to help direct the *Salesman* (1969). Unlike most documentaries for commercial television that dealt with high profile lives and performers, *Salesman* focused on four door-to-door Bible salesmen (Barnouw, 1993, p. 241).

Though commercial television was at times hospitable for direct cinema, public and non-commercial television became a principal distribution for these types of documentaries, such as Fred Wiseman’s *Titicut Follies* (1967), *High School* (1968) and *Welfare* (1978) (Barnouw, 1993, p. 244). One thing that should be noted is that while direct cinema borrowed from cinéma vérité, they have different goals. According to Erik Barnouw’s book *Documentary: a History of Non-Fiction Film*, cinéma vérité is obligated to a paradox with simulated circumstances bringing truth to the surface, while direct cinema finds reality in the events that the camera records (Barnouw, 1993, p. 255).
Reflexive and Performative Documentary

For many mock-documentaries, cinéma vérité and direct cinema have become a target. Though the mock-documentary borrows the same style as these films, they are usually not categorized as such. Mock-documentaries are complete works of fiction and should not be analyzed under the same criteria as documentaries. What can be looked at is how they impact each other. Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight believe most mock-documentaries participate with observational and expositional elements, while the simulation of Nichols’ reflexive and performative documentaries supply extra-text associated with them (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 21).

According to Nichols, the purpose of the reflexive mode is to redirect the audience’s awareness toward the referential characteristics of the documentary rather than its formal qualities (1994, p. 93). Using reflexive procedures will not alienate the viewer from the film’s techniques. Instead, the film guides the audience to look at the documentary’s subjectivities toward whatever topic it's representing (Nichols, 1994, p. 96).

Performative documentary, on the other hand, stresses the referential function as its main feature (Nichols, 1994, p. 94). As a result, it showcases subjective features directed at “classical objective discourse” (Nichols, 1994, p. 95). Nichols also notes that the performative documentary can create a paradox. While the historical world is not forgotten, the film’s referential messages can establish a fiction through expressiveness, subjectivity, and stylization (1994, p. 98).

Roscoe and Hight praise the reflexive and performative modes’ ability to question the methods documentary uses to claim truth (2001, p. 36). However, they believe critiques are limited to these modes because they cannot separate from documentary’s foundations in
actuality. For them, mock-documentary can take the potential of the reflexive and performative modes and apply them to a methodical evaluation of documentary’s claim to truth (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 36).

**Different Forms of Mock-documentary**

Moving on, many mock-documentaries emulate the look of, and satirize popular culture in a manner akin to, observational documentary. For example, *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), makes use of material that came before it in the form of rock documentaries. Rock documentaries were a promotional tool for the music recording business to shed a sympathetic light on the subject or the filmmaker (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 119). Most of these were variations of direct cinema, such as the Maysles brothers *Gimme Shelter* (1970) with the Rolling Stones (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 119).

What *Spinal Tap* attempted to do is criticize heavy metal bands, while also retaining an admiration for them. It engages the viewer with humor as well as relatable characters (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 121). The character development is much more in-focus than some previous mock-documentaries, like the made-for-T.V. film *The Rutles* (1978).

*The Rutles* was a series of skits poking fun at the mythology behind The Beatles (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 102). The characters in this film are much more of a representation of the public icons they signify than fleshed out individuals (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 104).

The handling of the observational form and characters has made *This Is Spinal Tap* a landmark mock-documentary film. Many filmmakers cite *Spinal Tap* as a reference point for their films, such as *Fear of the Black Hat* (1993) (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 121-125). Several televisions shows and movies have since used characteristics of the observational mode for mock-documentary storytelling such as *The Office* (2001-2003) (Griffin, 2008, p. 162).
However, mock-documentary is not limited to a single mode. In early mock-documentary such as Woody Allen's *Take the Money and Run* (1969) and his later effort *Zelig* (1983) he used the expositional mode. Both films use a narrator to voice-over events, highlighting the main character in stock footage and pictures. The films are also broken up in contemporary interviews of individuals that talk about Allen's character (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 111).

Many mock-documentaries also use Nichols’ *participatory mode*, notably hoax films like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Nichols believes participatory documentary highlight the interaction “between the filmmaker and subject” (Nichols, 2001, p. 34). With *Blair Witch*, a group of film students are investigating the legend of the Blair Witch from Burkittsville. They interview residents of the area and read news articles. Both foreshadow events to come when they get lost in the woods (Prince, 2004, p. 197). For the movie, directors Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez trained their three actors to use two cameras; the Hi8 camcorder and a 16mm camcorder. Most of the movie is shot through the character Heather’s Hi8.

At the time, digital equipment such as the HI8 would lead to a revolution in filmmaking for no-budget filmmakers, due to its affordability and accessibility (Hopgood, 2006, p. 242). The new technology allowed filmmakers to sidestep conventional paths, such as formal funding sources (Hopgood, 2006, p. 243). The sound of the movie was almost always recorded from the mic on camera or on the character. In *Blair Witch*, it was Michael’s DAT (digital audio tape) (Hopgood, 2006, p. 242).

To further accomplish the *reality effect* Myrick and Sánchez directed the actors to go into the woods for eight days and shoot. The cast used their real names and improvised most of their lines. At certain points, Myrick and Sánchez left the cast alone in the woods and had the crew
follow the actors. The crew would scare them at night with various noises, and the directors rationed the amount of daily food the cast were allowed to have (Hopgood, 2006, p. 244). The techniques were inspired by US Army’s Special Forces to dive into parts of the psyche that are not normally touched (Hopgood, 2006, p. 244).

Like some of the other films listed, *Blair Witch* drew heavily from conventions of cinéma vérité, observational documentary, and the direct cinema movement (Hopgood, 2006, p. 244). The result shared the movement’s values of rejecting practiced aesthetics of traditional cinema to create a close-feeling and immediate film. It should also be noted that *Blair Witch* displayed many aesthetical rules common to Dogme 95. Dogme 95 was a short avant-garde movement of film and video in Danish film production (Britt, 2013, p. 292). The Danish film director, Lars von Trier, first presented it in 1995 at the ‘Cinema in its Second Century’ conference in the Odeon Theatre in Paris. (Britt, 2013, p. 292) Attendees received a manifesto that outlined the movement. Some of the rules are shooting must be done on location, the sound must never be produced apart from the images, or vice versa, the film must not contain superficial action (Britt, 2013, p. 293).

The onset of Dogme 95 harkened back to cinema’s early roots, including Soviet cinema regulations and Lumière film (Jess, 2005, p. 5). The goal of the movement was for filmmakers to cleanse themselves of mainstream movie practices in order to create films that exerted ‘pure’ cinema (Jess, 2005, p. 3). The challenges the manifesto presented encouraged filmmakers to discover inventive or older techniques, and to surpass them (Simons, 2008, p. 3). Take for example Von Trier’s film *The Idiots* (1998). In it, rarely were any shots predetermined. Instead, Trier pointed and shot the camera at presumably unscripted actors (Simons, 2008, p. 5).
While *Blair Witch Project* did not adhere to all the rules, it followed pretty closely to the manifesto, whether it was intended or not. For example, Blair Witch mainly used handheld footage and natural lighting. One answer for the similarities comes from the author, Dana Och, who believes that both types of films emerged during a neo-postmodern trend in the 1990s (Och, 2015, p. 202). According to her, was carried out through new, digital handheld aesthetics that Dogma 95 and *Blair Witch* followed closely. The result simulated a representation of veracity, helping challenge certain genre tropes (Och, 2015, p. 202).

**Modern Marketing and Promotion for Theatrical Mock-Documentary Releases**

Now that the significance of the historical and cultural development of documentary, news, and mock-documentary form is highlighted, it is important to briefly discuss the marketing of mock-documentary to mainstream audiences. *The Blair Witch Project* was a momentous achievement in this regard. In an article by Fincina Hopgood, she highlights how *Blair Witch ‘s* financial success was a combination of blockbuster marketing and indie filmmaking. Hopgood writes that before the film made its theatrical premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 1999, the directors used the internet as an assistant to *Blair Witch*.

Traditional websites for movies usually consisted of clips, images from the film, biographies of the cast, and merchandise (Hopgood, 2006, p. 240-241). The Blair Witch website, on the other hand, contained hyper-text links to expand the film's fiction. For example, the website contained links to drawings, photos, 'historical documents,' newspaper clippings, and interviews with 'experts' such as a 'Professor of Folklore' (Hopgood, 2006, p. 240). Along with the website, Myrick and Sánchez also broadcast 'trailers' on cable TV. Neither the website nor the trailers revealed that the movie was fictional, thus the legend of the Blair Witch started.
After Artisan Entertainment purchased the movie for $1 million, they invested heavily in the marketing. For instance, since the film targeted the teen and university crowds, Artisan put ads in University papers in form of 'missing' notices featuring the film's actors (Hopgood, 2006, p. 238.). Artisan also produced books and a television 'documentary' titled, *The Curse of the Blair Witch* (1999) (Hopgood, 2006, p. 241). It premiered on the Sci-Fi channel in the form of expositional documentary containing voice-overs and man on the street, as well as 'expert' interviews. Artisan also expanded the website. As for merchandise, in order not to break the 'this is real' hoax of the Blair Witch’s website, Artisan sold through their own webpage rather than directly through Blair Witch’s (Hopgood, 2006, p. 241). These efforts proved successful in making *The Blair Witch Project*, at the time, the most profitable cost-to-gross film in cinematic history (Hopgood, 2006, p. 238).

**Theory**

Next, let’s look at the textual form that structures mock-documentaries. For this section I will primarily use theories and observations from Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight’s *Faking It: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*, as well as Bill Nichols’ *Introduction to Documentary*.

To begin, Roscoe and Hight use Nichols’ description that a documentary is not a primary look at the world and can never live up to its assertions that it reflects society. Instead, it is built on a belief in creating different forms of the social world (2001, p. 8). In other words, documentaries construct views and arguments in the same vein that fictional text would. The main difference, although a documentary asserts the view that it takes on the social world, is that it can access the real world. They believe that a documentary comprises a call to action, not only providing information about the social world, but how to change it (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 8).
According to the authors, the invention of the camera became a device through which the natural world could be precisely recorded (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 9). Thus, the camera was able to benefit from the desire for facts. The camera as an instrument of science, along with the cultural belief of accepting that the camera ‘does not lie,’ authenticates documentary declarations of reliable and accurate portrayals of the social world (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 8).

A documentary further depends on conventions of ‘realism and naturalism’ to preserve its referential position (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 12). These conventions are outlined with codes that are unique and often associated with a documentary (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 15). Examples the authors gave for documentary text are camcorder footage, narrators, interviewees, photographs, and newsreel footage (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 16-17). They then explain how each code benefits the documentary.

With camcorder footage, it is noted that the footage enhances the sense of witnessing the world developing in front of our eyes. By using long takes, naturalistic sound, and actual lighting the look of reality is strengthened to support the idea that the audience is watching the actual events as they unfold (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 17). A narrator, on the other hand, can tell us what is taking place and who everyone is, and explains the evidence. The narrator is often used by the text to mold the thematic structure, while often leading the viewer toward a specific argument or statement in the documentary.

With people in interviews, the authors include eyewitnesses and experts. An eyewitness can give a direct connection to the event, while an expert adds credibility to material with his/her credentials (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 16). Additionally, it is mentioned that still photo graphics and footage can carry authority, because the audience will often assume the material is original
and authentic (even if it's manipulated) (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 17). Despite these codes documentaries, often incorporate manipulated or fictional textual conventions.

One such fictional convention utilized by some documentaries is reconstructions. These can add dramatic code such as actors, music, and lighting (perhaps to set up the film’s *mise-en-scène*) (Lipkin, Paget & Roscoe, 2006). Reconstructions are often used to dramatize the events. When used for the majority of a piece, reconstructions are often referred to as *docudrama*, though many other names exist (Lipkin, Paget & Roscoe, 2006).

Docudrama often uses cinematic narrative structure to stage sequence, with naturalist/realist acting to represent historical occurrences or situations. Another way it can be used is to fully create a sequence of events, as well as depict fictional protagonist (Lipkin, Paget & Roscoe, 2006). The purpose of filming this way is that it may illuminate features of current and actual situations. One example is *The War Game* (1965), where an imaginary scenario portrayed the after effects of a nuclear strike that took place in London. The film won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1966 (Lipkin, Paget & Roscoe, 2006).

That being said, dramatic codes are not limited to reconstruction. It can be as simple as background music to set the mood. Take for instance the BBC three-part series *Power of Nightmares: The Rise of Politics of Fear* (2004). In the series there are points where it incorporates part of the soundtrack of John Carpenter's horror films *Prince of Darkness* and *Halloween* (1978) (Lambert & Curtis, 2004). The music in *Power of Nightmares* builds tension and unease when dealing with its comparisons of neo-conservatives and radical Islamists.

**The Degrees of Mock-documentary**

Unlike docudrama or documentaries, the mock-documentary is completely fictional (2001, p. 46). Roscoe and Hight categorize mock-documentary into three degrees: parody, critique and deconstruction (2001, p. 67). For example, the first degree, parody, is relatively
tame in its criticisms toward documentary. The mock-documentaries primarily use the aesthetics for stylistic purposes, often aiming for humor (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 68). For example, in a degree-1 film, a silly situation might be taking place, only for the camera to turn toward someone who has a rational/deadpan face. Also, while documentaries are primarily used as a “call to action”, parodies frequently center their commentary on cultural figures, such as the movie *This is Spinal Tap* (1984).

In this movie, the ‘documentary crew’ follows the ’band' in the same way they would an actual music group. In the movie the ‘band' has released albums and has gone on tour. These details create an *extra-textual* impression to audience of the bands ‘real existence' (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 69). Though it is likely the audience knows the movie is fake, they buy into the story because of the documentary style, as well because of the way the fabricated information reflects real cultural figures.

Degree 2: Critique mock-documentaries on the other hand, are deliberately reflexive toward factual discourse. A lot of times the subject matter includes or partially includes how media representations themselves are constructed. Looking at a documentary, the filmmakers often examine how the text is an approach for study, analysis, and investigation (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 69-70). One example, where we can see the mock-documentary used as a critique is the 1997 series premiere episode of *ER*. In this episode a PBS film crew enters the emergency room to film a documentary. The episode presents itself as a critique of reality TV shows and their failure to follow moral principles of documentary texts (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 70). Another example is the movie *Bob Roberts* (1992) which criticizes the modern political process, particularly the American system of choosing candidates. It also argues that that
documentaries, as well as political satire, urge the audience to take action rather than accept the piece as a singular work of humor or information (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 71).

According to the authors, the audience role with degree-2 mock-documentaries is to achieve differing measures of reflexivity toward parts of the documentary genre and popular culture. They also note that hoax films fall under degree-2 mock-documentary. With hoaxes, the text tries to confuse audiences about its authenticity. The result is that automatic interpretations are generated by the audience over the fictional status, even if the films do not contain meanings that are reflexive about 'factual discourse' (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 72).

In other words, a hoax film is a fictional piece that presents itself as real. One example is the 1985 short horror film Devil's Experiment (1985). The movie is about three guys who kidnap a young woman and torture her in a variety of ways (McRoy, 2004). In order to add to its authenticity, the film begins with a black title card with scrolling text claiming that whoever was distributing the film obtained the video several years ago. In this way the film presents itself as 'found footage,' meaning the video was lost and later 'obtained' at some point (McRoy, 2004). Like other mock-documentaries, Devil’s Experiment also used documentary codes such as handheld camera footage and long takes, along with natural lighting, to appear 'real' (McRoy, 2004). In order to pull off some of the special effects, there are carefully placed cuts during some of the acts.

Continuing to the third degree of mock-documentary, deconstruction, the main intention of these films is to critique set molds and expectations that surround traditional conventions of documentary and the capacity to document 'truths' (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 72). Man Bites Dog (1992) for instance, seeks to tear apart the political and ethical positions that documentary filmmakers take. Essentially the movie is about a film crew whose main focus is a serial killer.
They follow him around but soon find themselves as accomplices and participants in his murders (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 74). The movie deconstructs the text on several levels, such as the value audiences expect from documentarians and censorship.

Another example the authors provides is *David Holzman’s Diary* (1965). The plot is about a filmmaker who wants to record his life and in the process discovers himself. The authors argue the main subject is not about the filmmaker’s life, but more about what the camera can do and record (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 74).

Degree 3 is the rarest form of text to use for mock-documentaries, likely because it is more specific to commenting on the documentary form, rather than on filmmakers or other subjects. For this reason, most mock-documentaries often fall under degree 1 and 2 (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 74).

**Nichols on Irony**

Looking at Nichols (2001), he believes documentaries and mock-documentaries uses reflexive methods to bring the function of ‘representation’ into question (p. 24.) It disrupts the assumption of documentary’s capacity to capture reality on film. One example he provides to illustrate documentary questioning itself is the film *Land Without Bread*. Nichols reflects on a scene where the commentator stated that Hurdanos only eat goat meat when the goats accidently die. What the audience views instead is gun smoke floating in the corner of the frame as a goat falls off the mountainside (Nichols, 2001, p. 8-9). Nichols interprets the scene’s contradiction as a hint that Buñuel is not depicting a factual account of the Hurdanos culture. He believes that Buñuel uses irony to solidify the message not to believe everything we see and hear (Nichols, 2001, p. 9).
Nichols also refers to institutional framework as a possible way to define documentary. What he means by this is that organizations or institutions label their production as documentaries. In other words, we are told by an institution what we are seeing is documentary (Nichols, 2001, p. 22). Nichols uses shows on the Discovery Channel as an example. Since the Discovery Channel is devoted to showing documentary material, the shows are regarded as documentary unless proven differently. With mock-documentary, films like *Spinal Tap* take advantage of institutional frameworks to construct themselves in an *ironic* way (Nichols, 2001, p. 23).

Nichols writes that these films proclaim to be documentary, only to demonstrate that they are a forgery or imitation of documentary (2001, p. 23). For instance, *The Blair Witch Project* depends on using documentary conventions with the ’gritty realism‘ of camcorder equipment to sell historical believability of fictional events (Nichols, 2001, p. xii). Nichols mentions that if the audience takes the films’ self-descriptions sincerely, we will think Spinal Tap is a real rock band and Blair Witch is actual history.

He writes that the statement is technically not wrong, but we may fail to understand that neither the witch nor Spinal Tap existed before the films’ productions (Nichols, 2001, p. 23). For mock-documentary’s *ironic impact* to work, it relies on the movie’s persuasion and the viewer’s belief, at least partially, that what they are watching is a documentary, because that is what the film tells the viewer they are watching (Nichols, 2001, p. 23).

Lastly, Nichols writes about how he believes the voice of documentary is generally the voice of the oratory. The filmmaker’s voice takes a position concerning a feature of the historical world and tries to prove to us of its qualifications (Nichols, 2001, p. 49). To aid its
merits, Nichols claims that the orator must uphold the “three C’s of historical discourse: credible, convincing, and compelling” (Nichols, 2001, p. 51).

Movies like Land Without Bread use the three ‘C’s’ ironically (Nichols, 2001, p. 55). The commentator seemingly establishes the film’s credibility. What the commentator is saying, however, is undermined by the way he says it. In the movie, for example, he treats the slaughterhouse worker as some god. With conviction, the movie purposely leaks a mocking tone masked by a seemingly objective one (Nichols, 2001, p. 55).

Nichols asks whether we can truly get a full understanding of the Hurdanos life when the commentator compares their customs to barbarian people somewhere else. Land Without Bread deliberately declines to compel truthfulness in its representation. There are clues of exaggeration which destabilize its believability. The purpose is so we can question our idiosyncrasy to accept documentary conventions and point of view as truth.

Nichols believes that irony includes not articulating with ‘what is meant,’ or the opposite (Nichols, 2001, p. 55). The authoritative commentary in Land Without Bread is used as a hint to doubt the documentary conventions in the film. Similarly, Nichols mentions that Spinal Tap partakes in the ironic use of conventions in television journalism to suggest it is a mock-documentary. The results help the raise the audience’s suspicion over the films rather than validate them as legitimate representations of the world (Nichols, 2001, p. 55).

**Critical Review**

There is a lot of information regarding the history and theories surrounding mock-documentaries in the literature. On the theoretical side, Roscoe and Hight’s book did an excellent job of examining mock-documentary on a textual level. Both their book and Nichols’ literature outline how mock-documentaries work in a reflexive mode to analyze documentaries
by replicating non-fiction codes. Nichols’ literature also explains how mock-documentary can fit in an industrial frame, as well as use ironic methods to share the film’s voice. Nichols believes that for a mock-documentary movie’s ironic impact (often humor or horror) to work the audience has to be willing to accept the film as documentary to some degree (Nichols, 2001, p. 23). The documentary codes that these films mimic help enforce the idea that what the viewers are watching is documentary. Roscoe and Hight go deeper in examining the different types of representations mock-documentaries present. In order to separate the different types of mock-documentaries, the authors label them with three degrees: parody, critique and deconstruction.

From a historical perspective, it’s clear that mock-documentary origins branch from non-fiction film. One early example is Land Without Bread where the director, Luis Buñuel, borrowed codes from travelogue film to create an exaggerated piece about residents in La Alberqua. The movie’s creation stemmed from Buñuel’s criticisms of the genre’s staging and manipulative editing.

The literature also indicates that with technological development such as television, new forms of non-fiction media began to emerge, such as news broadcast and direct cinema. With these new forms came novel opportunities to tell fictional narratives, such as the mock-documentary This is Spinal Tap. Spinal Tap tries to emulate the aesthetics of a rock-documentary. Cheaper technology has also allowed mock-documentary to become a viable outlet for independent films, such as The Blair Witch Project.

The historical side of literature does a good job of showing the origins of mock-documentary. What it lacks, however, is an indication of where mock-documentary is heading. The literature review only touches upon digital technology toward the end of the review with Blair Witch’s marketing. I believe Blair Witch is an important example that illustrates how
secondary text can impact the way viewers watched the main film. With new media and DVDs, both platforms can contain texts surrounding the feature or even the feature itself in ways that were not possible before. What needs to be addressed is how digital technology has further developed mock-documentary’s form and how we watch it.
Mock-documentary and DVDs

Introduction

With the emergence of DVD technology in the late 90’s, thousands of movies have since taken on a digital form. Along with films, it is common for the discs to come with supplementary text or “bonus features.” By having these texts combined in a complete package, the bonus features often inform or say something new about the main film. For this chapter, I want to explore how DVD’s affect films that incorporate the mock-documentary style. To do this, I’ll be looking at advantages of the DVD format, as well as analyzing four satirical comedies: This is Spinal Tap (1984), and the following Christopher Guest directed films Waiting for Guffman (1996), Best in Show (2000), and A Mighty Wind (2003).

The reason I have selected these particular comedies is the way they construct mock-documentary. In addition, all these films have a pivotal connection to Christopher Guest. Guest appeared in Spinal Tap as a member of the main cast and seemed to learn from his experience making the film. Later, he would write and direct his own films, and he extended and evolved the mock-documentary style to suit his stories.

By looking at the DVD features, we learn various items or intentions surrounding the films. In the “This is Spinal Tap” section, I look at the 2000 special edition of the disc where most of the central features extend the story in the primary text. I argue that by having the features on the same disc, the DVD ironically explores the relationship between the documentary filmmaker and their subjects. In the “Christopher Guest” section, I use the subsections to explore how he uses the commentary tracks to explain his desire to seize the feelings and emotion of his subjects with his method of mock-documentary. I also look at the reasoning behind the
additional footage on all the discs, as well as the expanded artifice in *A Mighty Wind* for nostalgic framing.

**The DVD Format**

By the year 2000, DVD players became the fastest growing electronic product for consumers in history (Tyron, 2009, p. 20). DVDs have an average storage capacity of 8.5 gigabytes, which gives them the ability to play back music and high-end movies (Parker & Parker, 2004, p. 13).

Due to the expanded storage capacity of DVDs, a variety of additional material can be included on the disc beyond the film itself. These can include recycled items, such as storyboards, trailers, electronic press kits, and deleted scenes. Sometimes bonus material is created exclusively for the DVD release, like behind-the-scenes featurettes (Parker & Parker, 2004, p. 14). For example, bigger studios such as Paramount and Dream Works commission documentary-like making-of material over the course of creating the film to incorporate on the DVD (Parker & Parker, 2004, p. 14).

Another feature that is included on a lot of discs is commentary tracks. The commentary track is an audio track that the user activates on the menu. The track is often recorded from the director, writers, cast, crew members or critics (Parker & Parker, 2004, p.14). It is overlaid through the entirety of the film or episode with the commentator analyzing or discussing the text.

With these features, DVDs are marketed as insider access to the making of the film, or cinematic knowledge (Tyron, 2009, p.24). The features work as “paratext” which affect the audience’s encounters with the primary texts (the main movie or TV show on the disc) (Gray, 2010, p.17). In other words, the bonus material, along with the menus or even the DVD packaging – delivers a framework for interpreting a film (Tyron, 2009, p.24).
Take for example, *Robocop* director, Paul Verhoeven’s commentary track on the film’s DVD. On the track, he examines images from his film and connects them with American culture. For instance, in the film, Verhoeven mentions the policing robot named ED 209 is a reflection of Vietnam (Parker & Parker, 2004, p. 16). Verhoeven discusses how the scientist who built the robot was named McNamara after Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who served under Kennedy and Johnson’s presidential terms. Also the ED 209 robot was modeled after a Bell Huey helicopter (Parker & Parker, 2004, p.16). Through the director’s commentary, audiences listening might now associate the ED 209 with Vietnam, where they might not have with just a single viewing of the primary source (Parker & Parker, 2004, p.16-17). Though directors are not always the most dependable pundits, the commentary tracks provide interpretive protocols, such as the filmmaker’s intentions (Parker & Parker, 2004, p.16).

In an article by Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, they note that the extra features, which they label as “secondary text,” and the primary text are usually separated physically (2005, p. 111). By including both the primary and secondary texts in the same physical package, the relationship between them transforms from intertextual to “intratextual” (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 111). The relationship is unique to DVDs because it not only helps promote the product, but persuades viewers to link the secondary text with the primary. Brookey and Westerfelhaus argue these extras go beyond entertainment value. They use the *Monster Inc.* DVD as an example of Pixar inventing itself as an “auteur” through the extra features (2005, p.116).

Auteur, in this case, means that the studio shapes its expression and representation through the features it presents. The authors argue Pixar brands itself as family entertainment and a creative studio independent of Disney. For instance, the extras say little about the relationship
between Pixar and Disney (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 122). Instead, the DVD asserts that Pixar is a collaborative family that integrates fun and quality into their films (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 116). For example, Brookey and Westerfelhaus analyze the ‘Pixar Fun Factory’ tour found on the second disc. At one point during the feature, the creative officer of Pixar, John Lasseter, shows his office is full of toys. Lasseter says the story is the most important part of the process and playing with toys is a legitimate creative procedure, thus melding fun and work. In the example, other Pixar employees are shown playing with Monsters Inc. merchandise. The inclusion in the segment suggests that this form of fun is sincere in Pixar’s work to guarantee quality in their movies and products for the family. (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 121).

The mock-documentary style has taken significant advantage of the DVD’s storage capacity and ability to tie secondary and primary text together. Spinal Tap, for example, loads the disc with secondary text to expand and continue the story. Like the film itself, the features engage with the audience ironically, as the actors -- in character -- look back on the experience of making the film. I argue that the reflexive use of the commentary track and an interview with the character Marty Di Bergi questions the role documentary filmmakers’ play when presenting themselves and their subjects.

Moving on to director Christopher Guest, he has become synonymous with his use of mock-documentary. Like Paul Verhoeven, Guest and co-writer Eugene Levy provided insight into their films through the DVDs. By looking at the multiple commentary tracks that the DVDs contain, I find that Guest uses the mock-documentary style to attempt to capture the heart and emotional levels of events and characters in his films.
This is Spinal Tap

Like other DVDs, the 2000 special edition of This is Spinal Tap includes a variety of bonus features unique and recycled for the release. As for the content of the movie, it presents itself as a documentary following a fictional British metal rock band’s tour in the United States. The band’s name is Spinal Tap, and it consists of five members: lead singer and rhythm guitarist David St. Hubbins (Michael McKean); lead guitarist Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest); lead bass Derek Smalls (Harry Shearer); keyboardist Viv Savage (David Kaff); and, current drummer (R.J. Parnell). Also accompanying the tour are the band’s manager Ian Faith (Tony Hendra) and St. Hubbins’ girlfriend, Jeanine (June Chadwick).

The film provides an intimate look at the band’s attempts to stay relevant from a behind-the-scenes point of view. The movie also provides a brief history of the band’s rise and fall from stardom. For example, St. Hubbins and Tufnel were childhood friends that started the band. They continually change the band’s name and style to fit whatever form of rock is popular. Initially, it began as a skiffle/blues group before they turned to their flower power anthem and, eventually, heavy metal. The movie is directed by Rob Reiner, who also plays Marty Di Bergi, the filmmaker behind the documentary.

Before going much further in what the DVD’s features entail, I want to discuss the inimitable phenomenon that continues to surround the film. First off, the movie, as well as its director and cast, are noted for keeping up the illusion of reality, even after the film’s theatrical run (Bakken, 2008, p. 69). Occasionally interviews from the actors and filmmakers refer to the production of the film, but the public persona of Spinal Tap is supposed to be that of a “real” rock band. In Jason Middleton’s Documentary’s Awkward Turn, he briefly discusses the

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2 All Spinal Tap’s previous drummers have died.
“band’s” many appearances outside the film, such as on talk shows and live performances (Middleton, 2014, p.78).

He notes that these appearances took place before the movie’s release, as well as in the succeeding years. Some of these events after the film include a genuine U.S. tour, an album release, a reunion performance at London Prince Albert Hall in 1992, and another at Webley Field in 2007 (Bakken, 2008, p.69). In Virgil Bakken’s dissertation, *Christopher Guest’s Social Critique: The Functions of Ironic Humor in Film*, he even mentions that at one concert Spinal Tap performed with The Folksmen, another fictional band from the film *A Mighty Wind* (2014, p.69). When the actors arrive together for these shows, they are always in character as the band members. Middleton believes these appearances are significant because it creates “a continuity” amid performances through diverse media outlets (Middleton, p.78). In other words, the illusion that Spinal Tap is a “real band” is strengthened by the actors remaining in character outside of the primary text.

Consequently, the band’s appearances also cement the acceptance of the movie’s history. To demonstrate the relationship, Bakken uses an example from a BBC Television interview. In the interview, Rob Reiner appears as Marty Di Bergi, the persona he created for the onscreen “director” of *Spinal Tap*. In the interview, he rejoins the band to talk. St. Hubbins tells Di Bergi that he put them on the map, despite how awful he made them look. Bakken says examples like the “interview” are important for two reasons. By signaling to *Spinal Tap’s* history, it shows the level that mock-documentary is accepted as a film genre and the scale to which audiences welcome the satire as truth concerning a “segment of our culture” (Bakken, 2008, p.70).

Likewise, Middleton finds that the performances and interviews melt the film’s “diegetic boundaries” and lengthen the notion that the movie was a documentary from the beginning
He further writes that when fans watch/listen to the secondary text, they engage in an “ironic mode” of admiration. In other words, they place themselves as insiders to the extension of the satire past the movie’s narrative. In short, the fans know the band and music are a joke, but they take part in the satire by acting if Spinal Tap is real and the music is good.

**Different Versions of the Spinal Tap DVD**

As with the interviews and performances, the DVD requests a similar level of engagement from the audience with its bonus features. Before going much farther, I want to touch on the differences between the two DVD releases. The first *This is Spinal Tap* DVD release was by the Criterion Collection in 1999. It is a two-sided disc loaded with extras. The second, special edition *This is Spinal Tap* DVD was released by MGM Home Entertainment in 2000.

The biggest difference between the Criterion version and the 2000 Special Edition lays with Side 1’s commentary tracks on the Criterion release. The Criterion track contained commentary from the main cast Guest, McKean and Harry Shearer. The second track on the Criterion disc included commentary from Reiner, the producer, Karen Murphy and the editors, Robert Leighton, and Kent Bay.

One other minute difference is the Criterion release contains a twenty-minute demo reel titled *Spinal Tap: The Final Tour*. This short film is what Reiner used to originally pitch the movie. With the 2000 release, on the other hand, there is little behind-the-scenes information presented. The movie’s paratext is much more focused on preserving the artifice than letting the viewer know how it was made.
Cheese Rolling Preview

The only item I noticed that blatantly broke the Spinal Tap illusion on the MGM disc is a trailer found under “Promotional Material” titled ‘Cheese Rolling Trailers.’ In the trailer, Rob Reiner speaks directly to the audience as himself. The biggest issue with this inclusion is everywhere else on the disc he is addressed by his character’s name, Di Bergi. With the trailer, Reiner says he completed his first feature film about a British rock band called Spinal Tap. The important part to note from this piece is that he never says the subject he is filming is fictional. Following his spiel about the movie, Reiner proceeds to say that he has nothing to show for it.

Instead, he presents the audience with footage he “found” on the editing room floor and says that we might find it “interesting and quite informative.” What follows is Reiner turning on a projector pointed at the camera as the scene transitions to some older looking film. What is shown is a short mock-documentary along the lines of a travelogue. The piece emulates documentary in what Nichols refers to as the “Expository Mode.” In this mode, the text directly addresses the viewer with voices talking about the “historical world” (Nichols, 1991, p.34). For the trailer, “old,” overexposed, scratchy b-roll is shown over a poorly recorded voice over. The film depicts a fictional Scandinavian Cheese Festival where the townsfolk are rolling big wheels of cheese. According to the narrator, there were no injuries excluding “one spectator being crushed by runaway Gouda.”

Following the clip Reiner appears on screen saying his film is nothing like this one. His movie is about rock and roll and does not contain any cheese. After examining the trailer, I find Reiner’s concluding statements are ironic. While it is true that both films subject matters are different, Reiner plays with Rosco and Heights first degree of mock-documentary. He uses the aesthetics to create humor for the short and the feature, albeit using different modes. Watching
the trailer, I believe the footage works as a preview for the aesthetical direction that Reiner wanted to take Spinal Tap with the exploration of documentary conventions.

**Marty Di Bergi Update**

Unlike, Reiner, who has acted and directed in several films since *Spinal Tap*, Reiner’s fictional character Di Bergi, has not made many post-movie appearances as the Spinal Tap band. Di Bergi has taken various jobs to make ends meet including designing mouse pads. In the bonus feature ‘Catching Up with Marty Di Bergi,’ we learn about the characters experiences during the filming of the movie, as well as what he has been doing in the sixteen years since its release.

According to the “interview,” Di Bergi went to film school and worked on movies before Spinal Tap, including a fictional feature called *Kramer vs. Kramer vs. Godzilla*. Before heading the *Spinal Tap* project, he admitted to liking the band’s earlier work such as "Listen to the Flower People." Di Bergi said the reason he chose Spinal Tap was because he wanted to make a statement about how rock and roll “related to the everyday working man.”

Reflecting back, Di Bergi says he did not get much out of the movie, and there is some footage he captured that the band was not too happy to see. The interview cuts to a fabricated press conference of the band where Tufnel says the film showed them in a non-accurate light. Di Bergi concludes he has not seen the band since the film was released, but says the movie did not hurt the band; in fact, they are still performing and doing tours. The sentiments were returned from the band in the BBC Television “interview” I mentioned earlier, where St. Hubbins admits to Di Bergi that the film brought public attention to the band. Both interviews secure continuity outside the primary narrative between the DVD and the characters’ television appearances. They also function to further the artificial timeline for the characters.
The Band & Documentary Ethics

Moving on to the commentary, the MGM version of the DVD has the cast of *Spinal Tap* remarking on the film in character. Unlike the Criterion version where the commentary tells the actors experiences working on the movie, the MGM edition is a reflexive insight to the movie from the band’s perspective. For example, throughout the commentary they remark how Di Bergi and their producer Ian Faith (Tony Hendra) made them look stupid. For instance, in the scene at the hotel where St. Hubbins is on the phone with his girlfriend, the band mentions on the commentary track that Di Bergi carried around a secret camera. They did not know he was filming with it, and there were apparently times where Di Bergi assured them that certain pieces recorded would not make it into the film, but did.

The commentary brings up an interesting conundrum in how the filmmakers represent the people they film. Bill Nichols points out that, in documentary, tension often arises between the filmmaker’s longing to make a good film and the individual wishing to keep their “social rights” and “personal dignity” maintained (2001, p.11). While the film does not have an answer for these complicated issues, the commentary raises the question of the director and participants’ role.

Throughout the film, an interview with Di Bergi and the band in front of Tufnel’s home is shown. It is intercut throughout the film. In the commentary track, Spinal Tap claims that Di Bergi had an agenda when he was talking to them. They say that they were not given time to prepare and believe that Di Bergi was “cheating” because he had notes with information and answers to some of his questions.

According to Nichols, the Interactive Mode of documentary revolves around interviews. To him, interviews are a type of “hierarchical discourse” stemming from an “unequal distribution of power” such as “confessional” and interrogational (Nichols, 1991, p.47). An example from the
film that situates Di Bergi’s dominance over the band is through his lingering questions over why so many drummers in the band have died. In the commentary, the group believes he is blaming them for the accidents and is trying to get a confession that they were responsible.

Looking at the intratextual relationship between Di Bergi in the interview on the bonus features and Di Bergi in the film, we see some different characteristics. In the movie, he is very lucid and knowledgeable about his subjects. In the interview, however, he is loquacious and undignified. For instance, at one point in the interview, Di Bergi says he did not take on the project because he expected to have a lot of sex, but he did hope something “residual” would occur (it didn’t). Contrast that to the Di Bergi in the film who, while having a sense of humor, seems dedicated to making a good “rockumentary.”

As for his sense of humor, it always seems to be at the expense of the band rather than himself. For example, during the prologue, he says that Spinal Tap is recognized for being one of London’s “loudest” rock bands. He goes on to say he wanted to capture a hardworking rock band’s life on the road and what he got was more, “a lot more.” After re-watching the film, his last statement comes off as mockery rather than sincerity. Looking at these two depictions of Di Bergi on the DVD, one can deduce that Di Bergi fabricated a version of himself for the movie.

Like Nichol’s observation of the hierarchical discourse, Di Bergi placed himself in a higher position when interacting with the band. The possible reason for the subjectivity was to exploit their unique behavior. In the interview, on the other hand, it shows that he is not as smart as the film presented him to be, and that he has not worked much in show businesses since. In fact, at the end of the interview, he tries to market himself as an experienced director to any producers that might be watching. In Di Bergi’s case, the filmmakers are performing a similar hierarchal operation to what he used with the band.
Through the DVD, filmgoers can engage in several features that expand or tell something new about the primary movie. What I took away from the special edition of *This is Spinal Tap* is that by preserving artifice, the film brings a critical self-awareness to the construction of documentary. Using Spinal Tap’s commentary and the Di Bergi interview brought the extra touch on the fabrication and ethical concerns on how filmmakers represent themselves and their subjects. To me, I believe if the film had information on “the making of” it would undermine the construction that the mock-documentary is “real.” I believe by having the actors playing their characters perform a reflexive function, the questions and issues the film wants to bring out are more apparent.

Christopher Guest

Following *This is Spinal Tap*, director Christopher Guest has utilized a similar mock-documentary style in three of his own films: *Waiting for Guffman, Best in Show* (2000), and *A Mighty Wind* (2003). Guest believes that *Spinal Tap* is where his style came to fruition. The idea of using mock-documentary and improvisational techniques to make the stories feel real is what drew him to continue using the style (Bakken, 2008, p. 225).

Middleton notes that Guest’s films have a distinct syntax that allows the movie to equally “satirize” its subjects and to caricature conventions and claims of dependability from the documentary form (2014, p. 15). Though not implemented in all his features, the style has garnered Guest a particular reputation for its use. For example, in an issue of *Time* magazine, the interviewer specifically asks Guest how he took over Reiner’s directing trope from *Spinal Tap*. For Guest, the style, which he refers to as “faux documentaries,” has a different sense of reality compared to traditional films (Bakken, 2008, p. 1). He also believes that there is a kind of comedy that can only be achieved through conventions of documentary.
Guest’s continued use and reputation with mock-documentary style is why I have selected his DVDs to analyze. Unlike the special edition of *This is Spinal Tap*, however, the movies do not try to hide the fact of the mock-documentaries’ fabrication. For instance, each of the three discs has a commentary track with Guest and Levy discussing story elements and how the films were made. Along with this feature, the DVDs are embedded with “additional scenes” as well as theatrical trailers. Despite the similarity in content, each of the extra features on the DVDs provides insight to their respective film.

**Waiting for Guffman**

In *Waiting for Guffman*, the film follows Corky St. Clair played by Guest. He is the director of a community musical production, *Red, White, and Blaine*, for the 150th-anniversary celebration of the fictional town of Blaine, Missouri. Corky was initially from New York and relocated to Missouri after his last play was shut down by the fire marshal. In his play that was shut down, Corky wanted the audience in the theater to have an “in your face” experience of a fire, so he had someone burn newspapers and send the smell through the vents. Working in Missouri, he continued his unconventional way handling rehearsals and actors despite the protests from high school teacher/musical director Lloyd Miller (Bob Balaban). The cast in the show consist of five members, Ron and Shelia Albertson (Catherine O’ Hara and Fred Willard), Libbe Mae Brown (Parker Posey), Dr. Allan Pearl (Levy), and Johnny Savage (Matt Keeslar).

The Albertsons are married travel agents who enjoy performing. Brown is a young worker at Dairy Queen who seems to want to do something else with her life, and Pearl is a dentist who always wanted to become an entertainer. Lastly, Savage is a handsome but incompetent motorist who Corky convinced to be in the play. He is unenthusiastic toward it and ends up dropping out upon his father’s request. Corky replaces Savage’s part with himself.
Corky also managed to get Clifford Wooley (Lewis Arquette), an older citizen of the town and former taxidermist, to narrate the play.

Corky along with his cast hope their musical, *Red, White, and Blaine*, will lead to better things. Their belief is further enhanced when they learn that New York critic, Mort Guffman, will supposedly be attending the show. Corky hopes that the play will help take him and the cast to Broadway. Everyone becomes instantly disappointed, despite the play’s positive reception from the town, when they learn Guffman had not shown up due a storm in New York cancelling the flight. The film is shot with mostly a “direct cinema” style with the camera crew following Corky and the cast. Despite Guest’s use of documentary function, Guest rarely alludes to the purpose of the conventions on the disc.

**The Expectation for the Observer**

In an interview with Virgil Bakken, Guest says he does not approach his films from an “intellectual basis,” but rather from an emotional one (2008, p.228). His films are constructed with emotional perceptions from the beginning. This is supported in a scene from *Guffman* where Corky is brooding in the bathtub. Listening to the commentary in this scene, Guest brings up the “documentary” cameras.

He says that when they were filming the movie he debated why the “camera crew” would be in the bathroom when Corky clearly wants to be alone. Guest never offers an answer to why this is, but the inclusion of the camera in the bathroom suggests that Guest was focused on the emotional beats of the story rather than alerting the audience’s awareness to the style. A possible solution to the issue can be answered with Nichol’s comments on observational filmmaking. He believes the physical presence of the filmmaker should not constrain what we are able to see. Instead the audience should be placed as the “ideal observer” (Nichols, 1991
In documentary, since the scenes are not invented, sometimes the filmmaker’s attendance becomes present, but the “expectation of transparent” entrance remains (Nichols, 1991, p.42). In short, the “documentarians” presence in the bathroom should not hinder the audience’s disbelief, because there is prospect for observational filmmaking to have an unconstrained view of the world.

**Emotional Perceptions**

For Guest, the emotional aspect of the performer is the most crucial to attain. In all three of his mock-documentary films, almost every scene was improvised and went unrehearsed, as if the characters were in a real documentary. Levy mentions in the commentary that his character’s audition for Corky’s performance was the first time Guest had ever seen it. Guest, as Corky, had to give a response appropriate to his character. The idea behind the method was to reflect on the experiences that people go through in local theater.

Guest even said in the commentary that the rehearsal scenes with the characters served as real rehearsals for their *Red, White, and Blaine* performance (the only scripted part of the film). With the musical, the cast acted in front of a real group of people. According to the DVD, the extras in the crowd mainly consisted of locals from the film’s shooting location in Lockhart, Texas. In the commentary, Guest says that though all the cast had experience, they were still nervous to do the show. For me, the scenes in the dressing room really capture that anxiety the characters were going through to do what they believed was a huge deal. On the DVD, Guest said that the concept for *Guffman* originated from a junior high school performance of *Annie Get Your Gun*. He recalls admiring the actors giving the best performances they could at their level.

Guest believes there is something charming and earnest to their devotion. With *Guffman*, Guest said that *Red, White, and Blaine* had to be the most important thing in these characters’
lives. The level of commitment the characters have for this “one big event” transcends all three of Guest’s movies. With the mock-documentary style, the commentary along with the feature reveals how Guest captured emotional and visual intensity that these events had on the characters and their dreams.

**Additional Scenes**

While not overly focused on the reasoning behind why codes of documentary work, Guest does take advantage of mock-documentary style with the DVD. On the behind-the-scene notes from the disc, we learn that the filmmakers shot over 60 hours of material for the movie. Clearly, the editors had to cut some parts out. What is interesting, however, is that deleted footage reveals new material or facts about the characters that is not seen in the feature. For example, there is a scene where Corky explains to the camera that telling actors “they got the part” is one of his favorite things about show business. He then proceeds to drive to the different characters’ jobs to let them know the good news.

The mock-documentary style, along with how the characters behave in the scene is very much in alignment with the main narrative. If this were a documentary, I could easily believe the scene actually took place, but was cut for time. I believe the same concept is true with the scenes on the disc. For this reason, I presume the label of “additional” rather than “deleted” is intentional with *Guffman*. However, some scenes contain contradictory information, such as the Albertsons moving to LA and not finding work. In the main text, the Albertsons ended up moving to Los Angeles after their performance in *Red, White and Blaine* where they worked on minor parts for commercials. For this particular scene, ‘alternate epilogue’ is shown directly on the menu. By including the description of “alternate,” it separates itself from the rest of the
“additional” footage, suggesting it no longer belongs in the film’s continuity. The “alternate” scenes and behind-the-scene notes work as indication markers of the movie’s fabrication.

**Best in Show**

Moving on to *Best in Show*, the film revolves around a group of nine contestants who want to place or win at the Mayflower Kennel Club Dog Show in Philadelphia. The competitors include Meg and Hamilton Swan, Harlan Pepper, Gerry and Cookie Fleck, Sherri Ann and Christy Cummings, and finally, Scott Donlan and Stefan Vanderhoof. A lot of the same cast members from *Guffman* are present in this film. Guest has repeatedly reused actors in his movies because he finds that his team is the best improvisational comedy actors in the world (Bakken, 2008, p. 4).

Looking at the Swan family in the film, they are a married couple played by Posey and Michael Hitchcock competing with their Weimaraner, Beatrice. They are an upper-class married couple who often display neurotic behavior. Harlan Pepper played by Guest, on the other hand, is a fishing goods store owner with a laid-back personality. He enters his bloodhound, Hubert, into Mayflower. Pepper comes from a long line of family members who have traditionally raised bloodhounds, though his real ambition lies with ventriloquism. Next, Gerry and Cookie Fleck, played by Levy and O’Hara, are a married middle-class family from Florida. Gerry is portrayed as a somewhat goofy individual while Cookie is a flirtatious person especially around people she ran into from her past throughout the movie. The two compete with a terrier named Winky.

The following characters, Sherri Ann and Christy Cummings, are performed by Jennifer Coolidge and Jane Lynch. Ann is a two-time past winner of the Mayflower competition thanks to the help of Cummings (a professional dog trainer). Ann is married to a much older rich man named Leslie Ward Cabot, though she shares romantic feelings for Cummings. The two women
enter their poodle, Rhapsody in White, for the third year. The other two characters the film focuses on are Scott Donlan and Stefan Vanderhoof played by John Michael Higgins, and Michael McKean. They are a gay couple who enter their Shih Tzu, Miss Agnes, into the competition. They are portrayed as friendly and enjoy fashion and decorating. They even decorate their whole hotel room during the competition, despite the fact they are only staying that weekend.

The commentators for Mayflower Show are the ignorant Buck Laughlin (Fred Willard), and dog expert Trevor Beckwith (Jim Piddock). In the film, all the characters’ dogs except for the Swans’ get “first” in their selected categories. Beatrice, in contrast, was disqualified for jumping and barking at the judge. The Flecks and their dog would go on to win “best in show”.

Looking at the DVD, *Best in Show* has the fewest features of the three films. Like *Guffman* and *A Mighty Wind*, the bonus content includes a commentary track for the main film as well as the “deleted” scenes. Also included is a movie trailer.

**Deleted Scenes**

In the audio commentary, Guest mentions there is a lot of footage taken for the movie that people will not see. Similar to *Guffman*, there were around 60 hours of film recorded for the movie. Unlike the other two films, though, the extra footage that Guest includes on the disc is labeled “deleted” instead of “additional.” The reason I believe this label was selected was because the footage either contradicts the larger narrative, or does not feel like it was part of it. Take for instance the deleted scene titled ‘The Swans Before the Show.’ The scene shows an interview where the couple discusses their career and methods of caring for their dog before devolving into insults toward each other.
According to the commentary, the scene was one of many interviews taken at the hotel where the characters were staying before the show. These takes went mainly unused. According to Bill Nichols, documentary films often use interviews to combine different accounts into a single story (2001, p. 122). In the case of the Swans, there were interviews and footage in the film that already supported what they said in the deleted scene. Since all the information was provided earlier, the plot elements presented in the deleted scene are unessential to the overall story.

Along with these types of scenes, there are some that would have changed different parts of the story more dramatically. One example is the alternative ending with the Fleck family. In the commentary for the primary text, Guest mentions the other ending was included on the DVD if the audience wanted to “fish” for it. The implication here is that the alternate ending did not serve the story in the way Guest wanted, but was available for viewers who were curious. Guest’s commentary also makes listeners aware of the bonus features included on the disc.

As for the scene itself, it serves as an epilogue for what happened to Gerry Fleck and Cookie Fleck after they won “best in show” at the competition. The scene begins with an interview with the Flecks at a shoe store. The Flecks talk about how companies wanted to put their name onto various dog products after they won Mayflower. Both say they had to be careful what they put their names on because their name was important. Gerry then proceeds to say how he did not want to be part of something ridiculous like a pooper scooper or the “Fleck Poopy Flicker.”

After the interview, the scene cuts to a fake infomercial where Gerry is at a gym. He is trying to sell a brand of left-footed shoes. (The main film often references or shows Gerry’s literal two left feet.) In the commentary for the deleted scene, Guest mentions he was debating
including this epilogue for the longest time, but ultimately said it did not feel right. He, however, believed the scene was funny, and was particularly proud of the intentional bad edits in Gerry’s cheesy infomercial, so he included it on the DVD. In the commentary, he also states how Levy wanted the scene to have an audience. By mentioning the scene’s existence in the commentary of the main film, as well as including it on the DVD, Guest guides viewers willing to watch the scene.

**Guest’s Mock-documentary Construction**

In the primary text, however, the Flecks were interviewed at a recording studio for the epilogue, rather than at a shoe store. They mention how they became celebrities in their home town of Fern City. In the scene, the Flecks talk about how they were on two radio interviews, as well as how a friend encouraged them to record the songs they wrote about their terrier. The interview is followed by footage of the couple singing their music into a microphone. After finishing their song, the audio engineer mentions how he and Cookie were former lovers. The engineer is the last of an on-going gag in the movie where the Flecks run into men that Cookie has slept with throughout her past.

Guest says in the commentary that with his particular films that “once you get into the story, it becomes so intricately constructed, you can’t just move anything around because it will impact something else.” In the alternative epilogue, he said he felt he made the right choice by including the original one. For me, observing the Fleck family throughout the film with the continued gag, along with the song they wrote about their dog, it seems that the epilogue Guest included seems to be a reasonable conclusion for the characters. Listening to the commentary, Guest says that “everything tracks. Everyone has to know who they are in relation to other people.” In the case of the Flecks, everything comes to together and makes sense for the
characters. They start off in a small city, go to the dog show and come home as local celebrities. Also, some things remain the same, with Gerry unable to escape his wife’s old lovers and Cookie’s continued flirtation. Like the Fleck example, I’d argue that the way Guest constructs the film, every scene and interaction between the cast works in context of their characters’ personalities and backstories.

**Essence of the Subject**

Lastly, through the commentary, we learn that one of the most important things Guest tried to accomplish with the narrative was trying to capture the “essence” of the subject. In the movie, Guest wanted to seize the visual spirit of a dog show. According to him, he and Levy watched a competition and researched dog shows before writing the script. Along with research, all the actors took classes on how to handle the dogs. The Mayflower show even included real show judges. Aesthetically, the film also borrows familiar codes that these kinds of presentations display on television.

In the commentary, Guest mentions that the competition looked so real that an extra did not realize the whole show was staged for the movie. He was upset that his dog did not win. Though unintentional, the DVD hints that the individual experienced a hoax. Unlike the hoaxes found in Roscoe and Hights degree 2, the audience was not duped, but rather the individual. Since the extra had no bearing on the story, it has little to do with the narrative outside of the realistic atmosphere Guest was trying to create. It does, however, raise concern with how individuals in the film interact with mock-documentary, with or without knowing the text is fictional. Though unintended with this movie, hoaxes on subjects would become a popular and a deliberate use of filmmaking in later mock-documentaries such as *Borat* (Campbell, 2007, p. 57).
Like the “essence” of the show, it was also important for Guest to capture the angst and anticipation for the characters. For Levy, he said he was nervous during his performance in the Mayflower scenes. In the commentary, he compares his feelings in the dog show to the auditions in *Guffman*. The reason he was nervous was it was his first time doing these actions in front of a live audience. The nervousness and drive that Levy’s character provided aligns with Guest’s theme of fame. Similar to *Guffman*, the characters believe that if they achieve “one large thing,” their lives will change for the better.

A point John Muir makes in his book is that these big events have a transformative effect on the performers and contestants (2004, p. 149). For example, by losing, some characters were able to free themselves from expectations (Muir, 2004, p. 149). Pepper, for instance, went on to pursue his other interest of ventriloquism after losing at Mayflower.

*A Mighty Wind*

The last film I’ll be looking at in this chapter is *A Mighty Wind*. In the movie, the “documentary” crew follows three folk music bands that are playing a reunion concert on television. Jonathan Steinbloom (Balaban) is the organizer of the “show” and the son of Irving Steinbloom, a well-known folk music promoter. After his father passed away, Jonathan decided to hold a concert in his honor at the Town Hall in New York. The concert celebrates the site’s historical legacy with folk performances. For the concert, the “bands,” The Folksmen Trio, The New Main Street Singers, and Mitch & Mickey were recruited to play.

The Folksmen Trio includes Mark Shubb (Shearer), Alan Barrows (Guest), and Jerry Palter (McKean). Over the years they have had several minor hits, but have not played together in decades.
The New Main Street Singers, on the other hand, are a recently formed folk group. They take the name from the original Main Street Singers who are mostly deceased. The only living member to return is George Menschell (Paul Dooley). The band is known for their nine-part harmonies.

The last members included in the concert are Mitch Cohen (Levy) and Mickey Crabbe (O’Hara) who make up the band Mitch and Mickey. Mitch and Mickey have not seen each other in years. Mitch appears burdened with recollections of an offstage romance in the 1960s with Mickey that did not work out. During the film, he does not know if he is capable of singing anymore. Mickey, conversely, has moved on and has married someone else. She is nervous playing with Mitch again, despite being sentimental towards him.

As far as the story goes, the film mainly consists of rehearsals and interviews where the characters talk about the past. During the televised concert, a problem ensues when Mitch goes missing. The Folksman, who were scheduled to perform before Mitch and Mickey, stall for time by talking about the Spanish Civil War and how it inspired one of their songs. Mitch returns to the hall, where he hands Mickey a rose he bought from a vendor. Once on stage, the two singers end their performance with the song, “A Kiss at the End of the Rainbow.” There is a pause after the song and the two kiss, replicating famous moments from the 60s where they would kiss after singing the same thing. The concert ends with all the bands coming on stage and singing “A Mighty Wind.”

One clear distinction from the performers in this film and Guffmann is that these bands actually have musical talent. Muir points out that the movie captures its theme of recapturing moments lost by playing off a sense of nostalgia (Muir, 2004, p. 184). Thematically, the folk music reminds the listening audience in the movie of the world forty years ago. Another point
that Roscoe and Hight bring up about the first degree of mock-documentary is the style
frequently draws on a fervent structure of nostalgia (2001, p. 68). In Guest films, this idea is
quite frequent.

The Framework of Nostalgia & Building “History”

In Guffman, for instance, the film is shaped by Blaine wanting to evoke fondness over the
small town’s history by putting on a musical for its 150th anniversary. The biggest example of a
nostalgic framing, though, comes from A Mighty Wind’s DVD. As Muir mentioned, the film
tries to recapture the famed era and moments from folk music’s past with the televised reunion
performance (Muir, 2004, p. 184). In the movie, Guest strengthens this longing for the culture by
interspersing the film with “old TV appearances” and archived footage that the “bands” or other
characters reminiscence about. In the bonus features, the DVD includes the songs from the “TV”
in their entirety.

Guest and Levy say on the commentary in this ”feature” that they did research to get the
right look of folk singers on television in the 1960s. With The Folksmen, for example, their
performance of ”Hoot Night” on the “show” Old Joe’s Place was shot in black & white by
Guest. It also used a pre-recorded track like folk music shows from the early 60’s would have
done. Guest says he also made sure there was not a microphone on set, because the real shows
did not include them.

Another detail to keep “authentic” likeness to the film’s story is through fashion. On the
DVD, Guest says that the trend for folk bands was often formal in the 50’s to the early 60’s. By
the end of the 60’s, however, some folk bands adopted more of a hippie look. With The
Folksmen, for instance, they are shown wearing flannel shirts and dress pants on Old Joe’s Place
in 1965. In 1968, on the other hand, they are shown wearing items like vests and bell bottom pants on Children of the Sun show featured on the DVD.

In the primary text, most of the bands have now switched to contemporary clothing, except for Mitch. He looks like someone out of the 60’s with long hair and round glasses. The character is depressed and seems shaped by his folk music past. Like the other performers, he too comes to see the event as a way to rekindle his better memories of music and Mickey.

With A Mighty Wind, Guest seems to want to create a representation of a world “lived in” with a history. Beyond the details I already mentioned, there are several ways the DVD and the features add to the artifice of the film. In the movie, for instance, the film often cuts to pictures and album covers of the bands in an expository manner. According to the commentary, the “older” pictures are often touched up to make the actors look younger. Probably due to technical and budgets constraints, the “older” television spots do not age down the cast's faces as effectively as the pictures.

Furthering the Narrative

Other bonuses included in the extra features are entire news clippings. The information from the articles is also shared in the film. One example is the interview with Mitch and Mickey where they talk about how they met. In the scene, they mention how at a coffee house, where Mickey was performing with her sisters, a heckler was bothering them. Mitch then goes over to stop the heckler and ends up getting “pummeled”. During the interview, the same news article from the featurette is used as b-roll. In the paper, you can see a picture of Mitch in a hospital bed with a broken leg along with the title of the article “Folk Musician Pummeled In Greenwich Village Club.”
Obviously, the full story from the paper cannot be shared in the short amount of time of the interview, so the DVD allows the audience to read it in the "special features" section. Using the articles included on the disc, the audience can engage with the faux-history to learn more about the characters. With Mitch’s story, for instance, the article reveals his hospitalization was not from a heckler, but someone else who beat him up after Mickey went to attend his wounds at her home. Along with the papers, two other prominent features include the "PBN TV Broadcast of the Concert" and “The Bands”.

The PBN feature allows the audience to see the entire uninterrupted performance from the reunion concert. This feature sets itself apart from the primary text by stationing itself as “broadcast performance” rather than the narrative documentary. By including it on the DVD, as a separate feature, it lends support to the idea that the events in the main film happened. With “‘The Bands,” on the other hand, the viewer can read a synopsis and background of each band in the film. Like Spinal Tap, including these extra features enables viewers to go more in-depth with the film’s story and its representation of folk music.

**Hidden Behind-the-Scenes Feature**

Despite the films’ transparency in the extras, none of Guest’s movies, with the exception of A Mighty Wind, reveal any footage of the film crew. In the case of A Mighty Wind, the film seems to go out the way to hide the fact that the footage is even included on the disc. In order to watch the behind-the-scene footage, which serves as an ”Easter Egg,” you have to click Special Features and press right on the remote until the last guitar cord on the menu screen is highlighted. The rest of the features are written in text where you can simply move along the list by clicking or scrolling down on your remote or mouse. This “hidden” feature is not listed on the back of DVD’s box either. As for the footage, one segment reveals how the crew did the wall
shaking effect in the scenes where Mitch is sitting in his hotel room and the neighbors in the next room over are having sex.

In the commentary of the footage, Levy did not know how they accomplished this and said it would have been distracting if he knew what the crew was doing behind wall. Likewise, for the audience, knowing the effect demolishes the idea that what we are watching is “real;” perhaps contributing to the rationale for veiling this feature. Though Guest and Levy share little tidbits of details such as this on all the features, they never actually show it. As for why the video of the crew is included in the first place, it might have to do with what Guest jokingly says in the commentary, “the public has to know.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, DVDs bring up a lot new ideas not found on the main feature. In This is Spinal Tap, I found that by preserving the artifice, Reiner could establish continuity in his continued representation of the band’s ongoing history outside and inside media. Also, through a faux-interview and in-character commentary, I believe the disc brings up the ethical question of how a filmmaker situates themselves and their subject(s) when shooting documentaries. However, I do not think the disc provides any clear cut answers to the topical subject.

With Christopher Guest’s films, on the other hand, much of what I drew came from the commentary between him and Levy. Unlike Spinal Tap, none of Guest’s films try to preserve the artifice in the extra features, though A Mighty Wind does expand on it. For Guest, the main focus of his films was to capture the emotional levels of his characters. To do this, he used documentary codes and improvisation techniques to simulate the “essence” of various events, as well as the characters’ (often ironic) response to the “shows” depicted in the films. Through these films and style, he often touches on themes of fame. For him, there is a charm to seeing
people’s devotion and dedication toward a single event, even if they perform at different levels of talent.

With the bigger picture of DVDs as media, the discs allow for varying degrees of digital content to be included or connected in one area. Discussing mock-documentary like *Spinal Tap*, the disc supports a much larger narrative than the primary text provides. On the DVD, the bonus content tries to convince the audience that the characters have a lived-in-past. For example, the disc includes two extras titled “Flower People Press Conference” and “Spinal Tap on ‘The Joe Franklin Show.’” For the press conference extra, the footage is in black & white, with the reporters asking questions about the Vietnam War and drug use. The aesthetic and context of the questions make the press conference appear that it took place in the 1960s. With the Joe Franklin interview, he tells the audience that Spinal Tap just released their seventeenth album. The fact that Franklin is a real radio and television host and his mention that Spinal Tap just released their newest album further supports the idea that the band has a history together.

Other DVDs contain content that expands on the primary text as well, but what makes the features in *Spinal Tap* and *A Mighty Wind* different is the mock-documentary framework. Looking at a Blu-ray Disc such as *Captain America First Avenger*, it contains a secondary feature that extends the mythology of Marvel Studios films. The feature is titled “Marvel One-Shot: A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to Thor’s Hammer.” These “Marvel One-Shots” are a series of short films often included on Marvel Studio discs. With this one, in particular, the character Phil Coulson (Clark Gregg) is on his way to New Mexico to investigate a strange occurrence. While traveling, he stops at a gas station and prevents a robbery. Coulson is an agent of an organization known as S.H.I.E.L.D. and is a character that has been featured in four films.
and a TV show produced by Marvel Studios. The purpose of the short is to shed light on Coulson character, while simultaneously promoting the movie Thor.

What sets the feature apart from those of *Spinal Tap* or *A Mighty Wind* is the short film does not engage the audience ironically. Through the mock-documentary framework, the audience is allowed to treat and enjoy most of the secondary text as if it actually happened. Guest’s commentary on his DVDs state that he believes documentary codes can help capture the essence of events effectively. By mirroring the aesthetics of the primary text to those of non-fiction filmmaking, it is possible to ground the characters in a history that is believable or “recorded.” Also, the interaction with real-world figures such as Joe Franklin adds to the characters’ credibility in and out of media, even when the audience knows it is all artificial. Fictional characters like Coulson, on the other hand, do not have the same flexibility to reach outside their established medium as those from these mock-documentary DVDs. The use of a conventional blockbuster filming style and structure bound the character to his manufactured setting.

With *Captain America*, the one-shot feature on the DVD works more as a supplementary story with little bearing on the primary text. Most of *Spinal Tap*’s and *A Mighty Wind*’s features, conversely, work as an archive. It provides the audience with details of the characters past as well as the “works” they participated in such as TV-spots or music videos, all in one place. Even the characters in *Spinal-Tap* were aware they were in a movie and reflected on it in the commentary. In mock-documentary DVDs, most of the features can be accessed in a singular area with an observational inquiry. The format works especially well with comedies because the features are easily opened without too much digging around.
Unlike DVDs, the internet allows for subsidiary text to be scattered across multiple websites as well as in one area. In contrast to comedy mock-documentaries, horror mock-documentaries surround themselves with mystery and use the internet to perpetuate their "secrecy". For the next chapter, I will examine how users interact differently with horror mock-documentary film online.
Mock-documentary and the Internet

Introduction

An important mock-documentary titled, *The Blair Witch Project*, was released in 1999. The movie is significant for many reasons, such as bringing the “found footage” mock-documentary to mainstream audiences (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 87). As mentioned in the literature review, the “found footage” subgenre is the illusion that the video was lost and uncovered (McRoy, 2004, p. 141). These mock-documentaries are meant to represent audiovisual “documentation” of fictional events. In these films, we are told what we see is real. The ambiguous fictional position, as well as the “low” production values, blur the borders dividing the depicted world from reality. In short, these films are not presented as an artifact, but a fragment of the “real” world (Sayad, 2016 p. 45).

Besides the “found footage” approach, the *Blair Witch* team heavily tied their marketing campaign to new media. It integrated mock-documentary aesthetics into a website to “sell” its reality (Hopgood, 2006 p. 237). The success of the film has had a major influence on how other mock-documentary films, particularly horror ‘found footage‘ movies, use the World Wide Web. For this chapter, I will look at several examples of mock-documentary’s integration into new media through original content, viral marketing, and social media. In addition to *Blair Witch*, the other films I have selected to examine are the *909 Experiment* (2000), *Cloverfield* (2008), *Quarantine* (2008) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007).

I chose the *909 Experiment* because it is an early example of original mock-documentary filmmaking for the web. It also showcases how users online can easily access the movie. The rest of the films I picked out because of their legacy and success at the box office. Looking at *Cloverfield* and *Quarantine*, I discuss the different mock-documentary forms the advertisements
for the films took online. I also consider how the mock-documentary content and the multiple websites created for these movies extended their text, as well as give users the ability to gather material individually or in a group so they could organize and discuss it. With *Paranormal Activity*, on the other hand, I look at how the film’s advertising campaign used the internet to persuade moviegoers to demand the film get a theatrical wide release, by surrounding the movie with mystery rather than showcasing its style.

To begin, I will use Lev Manovich’s principles to define new media. His principles are useful to discuss because they provide a basic understanding of how new media functions. For purposes of this chapter, I will primarily focus on how the principles relate with the World Wide Web. Manovich’s principles include:

- numerical representation
- modularity
- automation
- variability
- transcoding

*Numerical representation* is created through digital code and can be algorithmically manipulated. For example, webpages originate on the computer through numerical and mathematical forms and vary greatly in appearance, depending how the user designs them. Old media can also be converted into digital new media using a conversion process called *digitization*. When an analog image becomes digital, for instance, the picture is sampled (resolution) and assigned a numerical value (such as 0-255 for a 9-bit grayscale image) (Manovich, 2001, p.28).
Modularity refers to media elements that maintain their distinct identities, but that can be created into a larger object. Manovich believes the World Wide Web is wholly modular. It exists as one big object, while webpages can still be accessed individually (Manovich, 2001, p. 30-31). In short, modular media objects are concurrently together yet separate.

Automation is the process that involves creating media automatically. With websites, for example, the page is created when the user reaches the site. The object compiles the virtual material from databases and arranges the page using scripts or templates (Manovich, 2001, p. 32).

Variability means unlimited versions can be created from a single media object (Manovich 2001, p. 36). With an online video, for instance, a version of the video is immediately chosen depending on the user’s connection speed. These versions can vary significantly in detail (Manovich, 2001, p. 39).

Lastly, transcode means transforming one new media object from one format to another (Manovich, 2001, p. 47). For example, a designer can choose how the same new media object like a webpage is displayed differently on devices such as a computer or a smart phone. A wider way of describing transcoding is how culture is being reshaped by the logic of computers. With The Blair Witch Project, for instance, I will discuss how the website is shaped to feed our cultural expectations of how media and information is shared online.

The Blair Witch Project: An Online Pioneer

In Blair Witch, the story follows three college students – Heather Donahue, Michael (Mike) C. Williams, and Joshua (Josh) Leonard. They are making a documentary film for a class about the legend of the Blair Witch from Burkittsville (formally Blair). The students go to the town and record several interviews from local residents about their knowledge of the legend. The
following day, the three characters go into the woods to search for evidence of the witch’s existence. They soon become lost, all the while videotaping strange occurrences, including sounds at night and figurines hanging from trees. One morning, they find that Josh is missing. Then, the two remaining characters come across an abandoned house in the woods. They enter the house and Mike says he heard Josh’s voice coming from the basement. Mike rushes down first and becomes silent. Heather soon follows. The last shot has something hitting Heather. She drops the camera, causing the footage to cut and the film to end.

Fincina Hopgood noted that the official website for the film, www.blairwitch.com, outlined the fictional history of Burkittsville. On the website there is a timeline with clickable hypertext links that redirect the user to items such as newsreel footage, “historical” documents, maps, newspaper clippings, and video interviews (Hopgood, 2006, p. 240). As noted in the literature review, what was significant about the website was that it tried to maintain the film’s fictional narrative. Only clicking a link to Artisan Entertainment’s website would disrupt the fiction by taking the user to Blair Witch’s shop (Hopgood, 2006, p. 241).

Originally, the pre-existing website was set up by filmmakers in June 1998, but Artisan added a lot of the “police records” and “events” that are featured (Kochberg, 2012 p. 36). Searle Kochberg proposes that the site was an “enigma,” and it begged the question of its authenticity (2012, p. 36). He notes that unofficial websites were questioning and discussing events of the story, as well as the trailer uploaded on aint-it-cool-news.com in April 1999. By the time of the film’s U.S. theatrical release in July 1999, the official website was visited over 22 million times (Kochberg, 2012, p. 36). Blair Witch went on to make over $240 million worldwide.

Many of these objects fit under web-mockumentaries, which Spencer Schaffner describes as projects that can use mock-documentary video and insert them into other text, “feeds and
online genres” (Schaffner, 2012, p. 204). Likewise, this also fits into Manovich’s modularity, where distinct objects exist in the larger object. In this case, it is all the individual items, such as the pictures, which are part of the larger webpage.

Looking at www.blairwitch.com today, there are several changes from its 1999 counterpart. The website begins with the opening scene from the movie, where the character Heather Donahue explains that she is leaving her home to go on a trip to the woods. The video then cuts to black with white text that reads, “LION’S GATE ENTERTAINMENT AND HAXAN FILMS CELEBRATE THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY 1999-2009.” The statement automatically destroys the artifice the old website was trying to preserve.

Once on the main homepage, the user has the choice to click five options: Mythology, The Filmmakers, The Aftermath, The Legacy, and a button to buy the DVD. With the DVD option, there is a picture on the bottom of the screen with a summary of the movie, once again dismissing the credibility of the film as historical documentation. Still, the content that remains unchanged from 1999 is important to look at for its value in expanding the narrative and marketing the mock-documentary.

Looking at the timeline, found under the “Mythology” tab, it extends from February 1785 – October 1997. The first date on the timeline correlates with the trial of the fictional Elly Kedward, a woman banished from Blair for practicing witchcraft. The rest of the timeline continues with accounts and statements surrounding the myth of the witch. The last entry states that the three students’ footage was returned to their families. The timeline builds a background for the story the student filmmakers were investigating, as well as contains audio/visual excerpts that were used for the other mock-documentary, The Curse of The Blair Witch (1999). Curse of The Blair Witch was a tie-in film that premiered on the sci-fi channel to promote The Blair Witch
Project. It was an *expositional documentary containing voice-overs, “expert” interviews, and man-on-the-street interviews.*

On the timeline, the date, October 26, 1994, signals an important day for the extended narrative. It is when the Maryland State Police began their search for the lost filmmakers in the Black Hills area. This section of the timeline not only creates continuity between *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Curse of The Blair Witch*, but it also extends to the “The Aftermath” tab.

“The Aftermath” tab, users can see “documented” evidence from the police, such as a black-and-white picture of one of the characters’ cars, or one of their duffel bags. Under the duffel bag picture, there is a statement that details its contents, such as DAT Tapes, CP-16 film camera, Heather’s Journal, and a Hi-8 camera. The bag was “found” under a 100-year-old cabin; the same cabin where Heather and fellow documentarian, Mike Williams’, footage cut off at the end of the movie.

In the “Legacy” section of the website, the user can explore the contents of the bag, such as the 16mm reels and audio tapes, which have been converted digitally for the website. Many of these were the same contents shown in the film, but in a highly compressed form. Not only did these “records” serve to supply mystery around the film, but they also worked as previews.

Additionally, the website included other forms of mock-documentary that did not appear in the primary text such as “news” and extra “interviews” concerning the events and the whereabouts of the filmmakers. These web techniques proved what Kochberg described as “‘word-of-the-internet’” as an essential strategy of movie promotion (2012, p. 36). In other words, part of the movie’s success was the positive response of the film’s demographic to the cross-media promotion between the film and web. The internet also expanded the lore of the film
in a way that mirrored *Blair Witch’s* mock-documentary style to make the material appear grounded in reality.

With the success of *Blair Witch*, many knockoffs and parodies began surfacing, such as *The Tony Blair Witch Project* (2000), or Cartoon Network’s *The Scooby Doo Project* (1999) (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 113). More original content also entered the internet spectrum, using *Blair Witch’s* success in low-budget filmmaking as a guide to using “found footage” on the web. One notable example is the micro-budget film, the *909 Experiment*. The movie follows two college students as they document their paranormal experiences at a house in Lake Arrowhead, California. The house is supposed to have high electromagnetism that causes hallucinations. What is remarkable about the *909 Experiment* is how it gained a cult status. The film is entirely online and can be accessed through file sharing sites and YouTube (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 120). It also bears a striking resemblance to *Paranormal Activity*.

*Paranormal Activity* also focuses on a young couple, Micah and Katie, as they confront supernatural goings-on in their home. In the film, Micah uses a recently purchased camera to “document” their lives. Both movies have a similar plot point where one of the characters sleep walks while possessed. One of the biggest differences between the films is that in *909 Experiment*, there are several interviews spliced in throughout the movie, while *Paranormal Activity* heavily relies on observational documentary. *Activity* director Oren Peli knew how strong the observational documentary mode was on its own “merits,” choosing to side-step interviews altogether (Heller-Nicholas, 2014 p. 121).

The ability to put movies online and quickly access them has given filmmakers the ability to reach new audiences. It might not be so surprising then, that *909 Experiment* might have directly or indirectly influenced *Paranormal Activity*. According to Alexandra Heller-Nicholas,
in the second half of the 2000’s, more “found footage” films focused on conventions of the observational mode used in *Paranormal Activity*. She argues that the rise of YouTube in 2006 showed how tolerant viewers became of User-Generated Content amateur filmmaking. In this climate of filmmaking, the style was incorporated into more mock-documentaries such as *Exhibit A* (2007) and *[Rec]* 2007 (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 125). The amateurish or raw style, as well as internet marketing campaigns, would eventually reach the mainstream at the tail-end of the 2000’s, with pushes from major studios.

**Online Encounters with Mock-documentary: Cloverfield**

Like, *The Blair Witch Project*, the movie *Cloverfield* heavily used the internet for its online marketing. The basic plot of *Cloverfield* is that a group of people are throwing a going-away party at an apartment in New York City for their friend Rob (Michael Stahl-David), who is moving to Japan. After a sudden earthquake, they are forced to leave the apartment. The group discovers that a giant monster has invaded the city, and they spend the rest of the movie trying to get out of it. Their entire movie is made to look like hand-held camera footage, which is how the characters document their struggle. For the film, Paramount Pictures executives and producer J.J. Abrams crafted a unique marketing campaign that combined traditional and non-traditional advertising strategies.

The first trailer released alongside Michael Bay’s *Transformers* in July 2007; it was posted online shortly after (North, 2010, p. 79). Near the end of the trailer, two black title cards with white lettering are shown. The first says ‘From Producer J.J. Abrams,’ followed by a quick clip of a character talking, and finally the title, ”In Theaters 1-18-08.”
Daniel North says the trailer was the first of many “promotional clues” (2008, p. 79). For instance, the release date served as a code to unlock the film’s official website. On the website, “leaked” images would continuously be posted with a time-stamp to encourage viewers to construct them in a “linear sequence” (North, 2010, p. 79).

However, www.1-18-08.com was not the only digital space where Paramount advertised the movie. The film’s viral campaign included other websites and social media such as MySpace, where each of the main characters had their own page. Looking at CarrieLynn Reinhard’s article, she refers to the film’s campaign strategy as “gameplay marketing” (2011, p. 52). In other words, she is referring to advertising that enables viewers to engage and interact with the content to achieve some goal. The goal in Cloverfield’s case is to unlock information on the upcoming film.

Reinhard borrows Ian Bogost’s definition of ‘advergame’ to describe one strategy of gameplay marketing. The advergame is any game that uses “procedural rhetoric” about the statements of a “product or service” (Reinhard, 2011, p. 54). The purpose is to create brand awareness, rather than encourage immediate purchases. With film, the advergame sells the “experience” of engrossing the player further into the movie’s content (Reinhard, 2011, p. 54). Reinhard looked at Cloverfield as an example of marketing “across websites” (2011, p. 58). One website he mentions is www.slusho.jp. It is another fully-designed website created for the movie. It depicts a fictional Japanese drink called Slusho. Reinhard points out it took fans going on the internet, talking to each other, and investigating the link to find out that the drink was referenced in Alias, another Abrams production (2011, p.62).

Throughout the fall, slusho.jp and 1-18-08.com slowly put out additional info, but nothing extensive. By November, however, Slusho showed that the Tagruato Corporation was their “company’s” new distributor. A website was built for Tagruato as well, called

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3 The website “1-18-08.com” is no longer functioning for advertising
www.tagruato.jp. The site said the corporation was an underwater research firm. As the release date for the movie approached, many fabricated news stories from various countries were put online about investigation of a calamity at one of Tagruato’s offshore drilling platforms (Reinhard, 2011, p. 63). Reinhard said that, if the audience managed to find these stories, thorough viewers could connect the sound in the video to the audio clip from 1-18-08.com and realize the sound is from the same creature (2011, p. 63).

All of these online activities ran up to Cloverfield’s release date. According to Reinhard, the advergame ran across various websites purposely built for marketing. She goes on to write that the puzzle style of the game boosted a lot of collective activity from users across additional websites; however, “players” could also tackle the puzzle individually through information forwarded along (2011, p. 63).

Looking at the secondary text, similar to This is Spinal Tap, the online users engaged in an “ironic mode” of participation with Cloverfield’s marketing. While users likely knew the material was fictional, the scattered text allowed them to play the investigator in this big “conspiracy.” Similar to Jason Middleton’s idea, where interviews and performances form “a continuity” for Spinal Tap across “diverse media outlets,” the advergame allows a continuity for the Cloverfield across many websites (Middleton, p.78).

Take for example, the “news broadcasts” for Cloverfield. Unlike the primary text, which is mostly told from an observational standpoint, these “news broadcasts” leverage a variety of modes to simulate real television news. Looking at Nichols’, Introduction to Documentary, he states that television news persuade us with its “powers of reportage” and does not try to stimulate emotion (2001, p. 53). In short, the news attempts to convince us it is objective and we
can trust it as a source of what’s happening in the world. It convinces its audience of truth with factual evidence such as statistics, eyewitnesses, and documentary footage.

Watching *Cloverfield’s* online “news” broadcast, it incorporates a number of these items. For instance, all seven news broadcasts showed video footage taken from a helicopter of the oil rig collapsing. The footage reflects Nichols’ notion of observational cinema. The presence of the camera “on the scene” confirms its attendance “in the historical world” (Nichols 1991, p. 40). The various “news channels” are using the same footage to confirm this event happened.

The American edition of the “news broadcast” also has a reporter near the coast of Connecticut where the rig purportedly collapsed. Nichols believes that the reporter separates themselves from the anchor by being “on location.” The anchors are situated in space with little indication of “geographic coordinates,” while the reporter provides further information on the “details” as the story unfolds. Often the reporter backs up the “truth” the anchor just said (Nichols, 2001, p. 54). In the case of this “broadcast,” the reporter covers the bulk of the story before it cuts to another reporter interviewing an environmentalist.

Since this is mock-documentary, the footage does not mirror historical space. Instead, the film replicates a world familiar to how we see it, as well as expanding the style and narrative of the primary text. Despite the likeness to the historic world, there are a few instances in the footage indicating its falsity (whether intended or not), such as the made-up bugs for the news stations at the bottom of the screen and the clearly computer-animated oilrig.

The footage, however, does signify “continuity” within the narrative. For instance, the footage was used on multiple “stations” around the world to show the event “happened.” It also implies the monster is nearing New York, connecting it to the events of the trailer.
Lastly, the news broadcasts also unites with the websites for Tagruoto and T.I.D.O. Wave. On Tagruoto’s website they include updates on the “Chaui Station” incident. The fictional CEO of the company, Ganu Yoshida, even has an open letter under the “headlines” tab where you can read his statement about the event. In the letter he thanks everyone for their support and mentions he’s opened a fund for the victim’s families.

On T.I.D.O. Wave’s blog, they have information about their groups’ cause and the issues they have with Tagruoto. Users can read through a variety of posts and comment on them (though the comments are monitored). The logo on the website, which is a blue wave with the group’s title overlaid on it, is seen on the “news channels.” The reporters and anchors believe that T.I.D.O. Wave is responsible for the oil rig collapse. According to Manovich, the “computer age” conveyed a new cultural algorithm, “reality → media → data → database” (2001, p.224-225). He believes every website is a database because most contain links to other sites. The database signifies the world as a catalog of items, but declines to order “this list.”

Traditional narratives, on the other hand, generate a “cause-and-effect trajectory” of non-ordered events (Manovich, 2001, p.225). For, Manovich, this makes the narrative and database enemies. For a narrative to exist, linking elements in a certain order needs to happen. He states by creating a “trajectory” one segment can lead to another. Therefore on the “material level,” a narrative is simply a group of links, while the elements remain stored in the database. The trajectory makes the narrative “virtual” whereas the database “exists materially” (Manovich, 2001 p.231).

What Manovich means by this, is the “material” is the links themselves, while the order and content endure as the virtual narrative. Connecting Manovich to Reinhard, the unorganized material on the various webpages for *Cloverfield* provides vague clues through its text. If users
wished to participate in the advergame, they could form an order or structure to the material that then tied to the film’s narrative.

Numerous blogs were established to exchange ideas and post content to help arrange material (Koeck, 2013, p. 147). For instance, on Cloverfieldclues, the blog’s creator, going by the username, Dennis, listed the seven “news” broadcasts concerning the oil rig on January 7, 2008. He also provided a translation for each video. By including these items in a list, each video was readily available, while offering a different perspective on the same story in a single place.

Besides links, Cloverfield managed to penetrate outside virtual space as well. For example, on the Tagruato Corporation website, they include a telephone number that users can actually call. According to Cloverfieldclues, in 2008 users would hear a voicemail saying:

“Thank you for calling Tagruato. Due to high call volumes, your call has been transferred to an automated answering service. If you have questions concerning our ParafFun recall, please leave a message, and one of our associates will find and support you as soon as possible.”

I tried to use the phone number as part of my research, and heard high-pitched static (it might have been a variation of the monster roar), and then it cut to a beeping signal. What is significant about the number on the site, despite the company and messages being entirely fictional, is it allowed users to have the illusion of interacting with Tagruato both through and beyond digital means. Looking at Koeck’s book, he notes that Cloverfield’s viral campaign intended to blur the borders between fiction and reality, with the promotional material reflecting the style of the film (2013, p. 147). Though, as Koeck stated, the film also had traditional means of marketing.

To promote the movie, Paramount placed various large-scale banners and billboards along the East and West coasts of the United States. Some locations that Koeck mentions are
Times Square in New York City and Olympic in Santa Monica (Koeck, 2013, p. 147). According to Koeck, the viral campaign leaked into the real “architectural space” of these advertisements. Online bloggers arranged and participated in billboard “spotting” excursions. Their objective was finding “undisclosed” sites of these signs. They devoted web communities to revel in any discoveries of the advertisements (Koeck, 2013, p. 147).

David Barnoff, the new media executive at Bad Robot Productions, said that they wanted to expand and tell the story immediately. They wanted the audience to be active and not passive in how they engaged the narrative (Koeck, 2013, p. 148). Koeck uses John Eliss’ ‘narrative image’ to provide context to the promotion. According to Ellis, the ‘narrative image’ is a promise or ideas given with snippets concerning a movie. The primary goal of the film is the performance and fulfillment of that pledge.

According to Koeck, the narrative image for Cloverfield is built in the minds of the audience through the enlistment of people seeking clues. For instance, before the film was released there were several fan drawings posted online of how people envisioned the monster might appear. One artist, Doug Williams, for example, posted a giant whale-like create on his blog. Many of these fan drawings were dismissed by Dennis on Cloverfieldclues as, “This is NOT the monster.” Cloverfield also managed to mold the “boundary” of the virtual campaign and physical space (Koeck, 2013, p. 149). The continuation into physical space is derived from the billboard “spotting tours and telephone calls” (Koeck, 2013, p. 149).

**Quarantine**

Cloverfield was not the only horror movie that year to use this kind of viral marketing ploy online. Another, similar case is the mock-documentary, Quarantine, an American remake of the 2007 Spanish film [REC]. The movie is about a TV news reporter and her cameraman as
they follow a group of Los Angeles Firemen into an apartment after their interview was cut short by 911 call. At the building, a woman is discovered with some kind of infection that begins to spread among the residents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confines everyone to the apartment, causing the group inside to fend for themselves.

To market the film, a 42-second clip was released on YouTube’s “promoted videos” portal on March 15, 2008, titled “Please Help Me” (Lee, 2008). The video consisted of grainy footage, likely from a cellphone or mobile camera. In the video, you see a crowd of people, the CDC, and the police outside the apartment building. The camera operator goes up the stairs of a parking garage to get a higher look. In the shot, a giant white tent leading to the apartment can be seen before the camera looks back at the building’s top floor. Someone in the video says that they think somebody is trying to get out followed by a gun shot. The camera pans to the right to the neighboring building where a sniper is in the window. The footage ends with a police officer going toward the camera operator as the video cuts to black. The video was posted by the fictional video diarist, Eric Brody, played by Ben Messmer.

The footage from the promo fits under Roscoe and Hight’s degree 2 as a hoax. According to the authors, the texts’ reflexivity is generated through the reception as well as form (Roscoe and Hight, 2001, p. 144). In a hoax, the audience cannot, or is almost unable to identify, the text as fiction. Unlike Cloverfield, some people were engaging with the content as if it was real. For example, in the comment section there were several people (assuming they were not posted by the studio) questioning the authenticity and even sending out their sympathy. User comment by McPXXXX wrote, “THAT’S NOT GOOD…did anyone get hurt?”, while others like pirategirl428 wrote, “I dont know what happend, but if that was real I feel so sorry for what happened. WAS IT REAL?? SOMEONE TELL ME.” In the LA Times, Chris Lee wrote that the
video was under much speculation in blogs, chatrooms, and bulletin boards (2008). On “Eric’s Video Blog,” the fictional “Eric” finally posted a teaser to the primary text, thus confirming that the video was indeed part of the viral marketing campaign. This was also the last video posted under his account.

Before “Please Help Me,” “Eric’s” video mostly showed him talking to his camera. He is portrayed as a young man who just moved to LA. In his early posts, he essentially asks for items such as restaurant recommendations or fun places to hang out (Lee, 2008). Looking at the comments, it’s clear that many people engaged with Eric as if his character were real. In one of his posts, titled “Heading out tonight,” he mentions that he is going on a date. There are four comments congratulating him and hoping it goes well.

From the videos, we learn that “Eric” works at logging evidence at the local police station. In one video, he mentions stumbling across a video titled “Case 1017” and that he is posting it online (Sperling, 2008). He uploaded “Case 1017” as the “Please Help Me” video. Following the post, Eric’s character goes through a progression. He is looking for a new job and trying to uncover any secrets he can about the mysterious video. He also thanks anyone for their support in helping him. Again, these videos shift the marketing to a more participatory involvement from the audience (whether they were aware of the hoax or not).

The “Please Help Me” video garnered over 1.9 million views within the month (Lee, 2008). Quarantine’s production studio, Screen Gems, contributed to accomplishing this by paying for the video’s placement on the front page of YouTube (Sperling, 2008). As to why the video was called “Case 1017,” the video had a bug on the bottom left-hand corner of the screen that read ID #1017. Once the teaser uploaded, the release date of the film was confirmed to be October 17th, hence “1017” (Lee, 2008).
The purpose of Eric’s videos, other than the promotion, gives the film some backstory and context. The idea is that by having fans obtaining this background knowledge, they are more likely to watch the movie to see how the primary text plays out (Sperling, 2008). Marc Weinstock, Screen Gems’ president of marketing, said that “People don’t want to be marketed to, they want to be marketed around,” (Lee, 2008). In other words, he believes that the audiences do not want upfront advertisements; instead, they want the fulfillment of finding out something for themselves. Weinstock adds that by making a world, viewers will be “invested” in the characters and the narrative before they even release the trailer (Lee, 2008). He goes on to say that “People know something’s going on. They don’t know if it’s a great conspiracy. But either way, they don’t mind. They’re spending time trying to crack the code of this little film,” (Lee, 2008).

Like *Cloverfield*, the promotion works as the narrative image. It promises that answers concerning the secrets of the YouTube videos will be fulfilled. Weinstock finds that if the audience believes that if the studio provided this much time crafting this “alternative world” through the film and marketing, the viewer will think the movie will be “cool” enough to spend their time on.

Both campaigns proved widely successful for *Cloverfield* and *Quarantine*. *Cloverfield* made $40 million in the first weeks. This made it one of the largest January grossing movies at the box office in film history (Koeck, 2013, p. 149). According to Box Office Mojo, the film garnered a worldwide total of $170,764,026 in 2008, with a budget of 25 million. *Quarantine*, while not as fruitful, still made over $40 million at the box office with a budget of only $12 million. Both these films also spawned sequels.
I believe the movies’ mock-documentary style and expansion into new media helped entice the audience and engage them in different ways, while simultaneously expanding the films’ narratives. With *Cloverfield*, many websites were created about or tied into the “events” surrounding the movie. Users who were willing could participate in an advergame, and could organize material to help unlock some of the mystery behind the movie. Likewise, *Quarantine* used YouTube diaries and “leaked” footage, hoping to achieve a similar response with its “mystery.”

Unlike *Cloverfield*, where the vast majority of viewers were approaching the clues ironically, *Quarantine*’s footage emerged with anonymity. There was some indication that the footage was not genuine such as being streamed through the “promoted videos” portal on YouTube, but it is evident the marketing team urged audiences to use a documentary mode of reading for the footage. It was not until the teaser was released when the rug was pulled out from under “Eric’s Video Blog” to expose the hoax. Currently, the video “Please Help Me,” has over 2 million views on YouTube, with 304 “I like this” and 427 “I dislike this” buttons pressed. YouTube’s statics indicate that the video had the most traffic in 2008, so I suggest the massive amount of dislikes came after the trailer was released.

According to Roscoe and Hight, deliberate hoaxes often anger audiences (2001, p. 144). They used a 1998 television mock-documentary, titled *Alien Abduction*, as an example. The hoax was part of an intentional programming agenda to build the audience’s prospects. A substantial amount of the audience was infuriated by learning it was a farce (Roscoe and Hight, 2001, p. 144). What is important to take away is how the mock-documentary style in *Quarantine* and *Cloverfield* bleeds into new media. Both films furthered their narrative, as well as engaging the
viewer in active ways to construct or unlock clues to their mysteries – even if the viewer was not fully aware the material was entirely fictional.

These types of viral marketing methods have been further adapted into other forms and outlets online. Take for example The Last Exorcism (2010) on Chatroulette (an online webcam service). For the advertising, a pre-recorded video of the actress, Ashley Bell, on a webcam is played for a live viewer(s). In the video, her face begins to disfigure, and the camera glitches as she jumps toward the camera. The video cuts away to a black screen with text that says “THELASTEXCORCISM.COM.” By being online, the mock-documentary video engages the viewer differently by giving the illusion they are interacting with a live person.

The Paranormal Activity Approach

Paranormal Activity was another landmark film for the ‘found-footage’ mock-documentary genre. It was first previewed in 2007 at a horror festival in Los Angeles known as Screamfest (Kochberg, 2012 p. 20). To reiterate the plot, the movie is about two characters, Micah and Katie, facing strange incidents in their house. Some of the unusual activity includes footsteps, doors suddenly opening or closing by themselves, and unnatural sounds. In the film, Katie says that an entity has been haunting her since childhood. Micah investigates these occurrences by documenting them on a newly purchased digital camcorder. Micah’s recordings take place within twenty days. White titles occasionally appear to let the audience know the number of days Micah’s taped, as well as the date of the current segment. The titles usually appear during the night sessions Micah records. For example, for the first night session that Micah tapes, the title “Night #1 September 18th, 2006” appears on the screen. In these night sessions, the camera is placed on a tripod to make the shot stationary. The camera documents the couple while they sleep using blue night vison.
Originally, the movie did not receive too much notice until 2008, when DreamWorks became interested. The studio initially offered director Oren Peli $350,000 to remake the film. Steven Spielberg and the film’s producer convinced DreamWorks to release Peli’s original version of *Paranormal Activity*. Spielberg, however, suggested adding the final scene of the theatrical release, where a possessed Katie throws Micah at the camera in their bedroom (Heller-Nicholas, 2014 p. 129).

By 2009, Paramount Pictures began a campaign online. The film received a limited release across twelve U.S. “college towns” on 25 September 2009, including Boston, San Francisco, and Chicago (Kochberg, 2012, p. 20). Paramount further promoted the movie by utilizing social media, while Senior Vice President of Interactive Marketing Amy Powell used the Demand It! Service. The service allowed audiences to vote online for particular movies to play in their region (Heller-Nicholas, 2014 p. 129). Essentially audiences could request the film to play at their theater with enough clicks.

In the film’s original trailer, posted online, it opened unconventionally, with no footage from the film. It shows a line of people standing around as text appears in the bottom left-hand corner. It reads, “In September 2009, a screening was held in Hollywood, California.” The shot cuts to the people taking their seats in the theater. The text changes to, “This audience was among the first to experience the movie, ‘Paranormal Activity’,” before fading away. Then new text reappears, which reads, “This is what they saw….” The lights in the shot go to black, with the audience still being seen through a camera’s night-vision.

The trailer uses an observational documentary approach to record the audience’s reaction. The footage displayed on the theater screen in the trailer seems to have been re-added to provide a clear quality of footage for those watching the trailer. As the trailer progresses, it shows the
audience becoming more unsettled, with quotes from positive reviews intercut between footage from the movie and reactions from the audience. The trailer finally ends with the film’s title, along with two additional cards of text. One states the places where the movie is showing, and the second reads “PARANORMAL ACTIVITY NOT PLAYING IN YOUR AREA? DEMAND IT. BRING IT TO YOUR CITY BY VISITING PARANORMALMOVIE.COM.”

Unlike the campaigns for Cloverfield and Quarantine, Paranormal Activity’s release relied directly on the response of the viewer. It is also evident from the trailer that the item advertised is the “movie” and not “obtained” footage. By this time, audiences were likely accustomed to “found footage,” and were more fascinated with the contents of the film rather than the style itself. It was clever that the trailer showed the crowd watching the movie, rather than only showing clips from the film. It helped garner interest for individuals wanting to know “why this movie was so scary.” To find out, they had to go online to request it. Even on the movie’s poster there is a big “DEMAND IT” button below the title.

According to Caetlin Benson-Allot, the marketing for Paranormal Activity blended the line between the primary text and the paratext (2013, p. 187). In the trailer, the footage highlighted the horror of low-quality digital videotape by mixing the night-vision reaction footage from the audience with the blue-tinted shots from the night sessions that Micah “recorded.” In short, the trailer imposed the film’s realism. Since the footage of the reactions and the footage from the movie were meant to document something, the low-quality video becomes a common language that stitches the two texts together, as well as situates the viewer as a witness to the texts (Benson-Allot, 2013, p. 187). In other words, the style in which the audience was recorded did little to differentiate it from the film’s footage. The combination forces the viewer to consume the trailer as a single projection of low-quality imagery.
Where the two texts run parallel in the trailer, however, is the action. The clip of the audience, for instance, shows people with immediate and terrified responses. The shots from the primary text, on the other hand, show restrained occurrences such as a sheet moving or door closing by itself. Benson-Allot notes that the audience’s horrifying reaction and the primary text’s minimalist action are at “odds” with each other (2013, p. 188). The mixture fuels the mystery of the item the audience is watching. Viewers observing the trailer will likely want to know why the audience is responding with such urgency to clips where, on the face of it, nothing that scary is happening.

Alexander Swanson points out in his article that the audience members in the trailer were used as living props. In the framework of the trailer they are tools to legitimize the terror and anxiety that is supposed to be in the movie (Swanson, 2015, p. 8). By using the audience reactions, the trailer assures a similar sensual involvement to the viewers who want to watch the film. For the viewer, they do not only want to see people scared, but want to be those who are scared. The trailer promises to give that experience of collective frights by watching in a theatrical setting (Swanson, 2015, p. 18). For this reason, the audience also serves as a way to sell the theatrical experience.

Swanson claims that the techniques developed for Activity’s marketing campaign originated from the 1950s in gimmick films (Swanson, 2015, p. 4). According to Kevin Heffernan’s book, the 1950s saw a rise in, “ad campaigns, exploitable titles, and poster art,” that sometimes came before casting and scripting (2004, p.64-65). A lot of the technologies and methods of filmmaking/advertising from this decade were the result of economic concern and dwindling audience attendance.
Heffernan outlines that the reasons for the decline of movie turnout at the start of the 50’s was the surge in television ownership during 1947-1948, with over 175,000 sets sold. Another reason he states is that after the Great Depression and war rationing, Americans saw an increase in disposable income and spent money on different items such as cars, suburban houses, and home appliances rather than going to theaters (2004, p. 5). Some horror films added gimmicks such as 3-D, Smell-O-Vision, and vibrating chairs to validate the theatrical experience.

One example of these methods applied to a film’s advertising is the trailer for *13 Ghosts* (1960). In the trailer, director/producer William Castle talks directly to the audience. He is introduced by a narrator who says, “listen to William Castle, whom the Saturday Evening Post calls the master of horror.” Castle is shown in an office with a picture of a question mark above his head and a desk covered in potions. He is looking at a giant book with the name of the movie on it. He then proceeds to ask the audience if they believe in ghosts, and says that they will once they watch his picture. Castle takes an item off his desk. It is a piece of cardboard shaped like a ghost with two lenses in it. He calls the item a “supernatural viewer” and says it will be handed out at the theater when they watch *13 Ghosts*. Castle says the device will allow the viewer to penetrate the supernatural world so they can see the thirteen ghosts created for the movie. The trailer continues with footage from the film.

*Paranormal Activity*’s trailer is similar to that for *13 Ghosts*. Both promise the viewer entry into the supernatural world only through the theatrical experience. With *13 Ghosts*, the lure to the theater was the ability to see ghosts with the supernatural viewer. In the trailer, only one of the thirteen ghosts is actually exposed. At some point in the trailer the narrator says “you’ll be scared too when you see what they see.” In the clip, it shows one of the characters wearing huge glasses (similar to the “supernatural viewer”), who is frightened by something. *Activity* did the
same thing, except it was not the characters from the film, but rather a real audience with frightened reactions. The characters in the *13 Ghosts* trailer and the audience from the *Activity* trailer serve as vehicles in which the viewer can imagine themselves. A key difference between the trailers is that *Activity* took advantage of the digital platforms available in 2009 and uploaded the trailer online as part of its distribution strategy. These platforms were not available to *13 Ghosts* in 1960.

Swanson notes that the first audience reaction trailer was posted on the film’s Facebook page three days before the movie went into limited release on September 25th (Swanson, 2015, p. 14). In the description for the video post there was a link to *Activity’s* Eventful.com webpage, where users could see which cities the film was showing. If the users found that the movie was not playing in their area, they could click “Demand It!” to request/vote for movie distribution to that area.

According to Swanson, the comments on the trailer’s Facebook page mainly expressed eagerness to see the movie. A lot of the commenters also expressed jealousy, and confusion as to why the movie was not playing in their town (Swanson, 2015, p. p. 14-15). Many comments I found in my research would also list the name of a state, city, or sometimes, a country, and request the film be brought there. For example, one commenter wrote, “ANYBODY FROM INDIANA! GO TO THE WEBSITE AND DEMAND IT IMMEDIATELY!!!!. PLEASE”. The ability to “Demand” the film gave users extra incentive to share the trailer on their own Facebook pages or to send the link to friends. Powell said, “Rather than having a wide release or product-launch strategy, why not invert the funnel, democratize the process and let consumers tell you where to go first?” (Hampp, 2010). In other words, let people have the right, or the power, to fight for something they want to see in theaters.
However, Paramount did need to sell the idea of democratized film. The select screenings and audience reaction trailer were purposely tailored to elicit vocal responses from consumers. The observational mock-documentary from the film and the footage of the audience tied together to create a similar-looking style. That style made the audience look like they were watching actual footage. The minimal action from the primary text versus the heavily scared reaction from the audience was akin to 50’s gimmick horror movies; preserving the mystery of the film and selling the theatrical experience.

*Paranormal Activity’s* trailer essentially wants the viewer to wish they were part of the audience watching the movie. By withholding a wide-release, promising the superior theater-going experience over watching the film on a smaller screen, as well as making the trailer and Demand It website easily sharable, Paramount built a case for users to want to see their movie, and even to fight to make it available in local theaters.

For the advertisements in the movie, despite the idea that the audience in the trailer is watching actual home footage, there is an absence in claiming truth. This claim, however, is present in the film itself. A line at the beginning of the film states, “Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat and Katie Featherston and the San Diego Police Department,” (Heller-Nicholas, 2014 p. 131). As the franchise continued, these claims or statements for truth at the beginning of the films became less apparent. While there is a similar title found in *Paranormal Activity 2*, the marketing did little to preserve the artifice. In fact, on a promotion video for the film found on Facebook, actress Katie Featherston (not in character) is signing DVDs and posing for pictures with filmgoers waiting in line for a special “DEMAND IT” screening in LA. The promotion also shows New York City receiving a screening as well.
As the promotion proceeds, it shows night-vision reactions from the audience, but unlike the trailer for *Activity*, this advertisement does not contain any clips from the primary texts. The absence of mock-documentary footage builds anticipation for the viewer about what will happen in the film. In an interview in the promotion, Featherston says it is what you don’t see in the film that is scary. By extension, the trailer reflects a similar sentiment by hiding the movie from the viewers online.

By the time *Paranormal Activity 3* was released, all the titles saying the footage was “found” were completely gone. Instead, in the third film, Katie and her sister Kristi Rey (Sprague Grayden) are shown finding an old box of VHS tapes in the garage (Heller-Nicholas, 2014 p. 131-132). In the first film, the primary text claims truth, but that claim varied, depending on which version you watched. Months before Paramount wide-released the film, Peli’s original 2007 version appeared over the internet on various torrent boards in the 2007 version, the text that appears at the beginning says, “The Producers would like to thank the families of Micah S. and Katie F. and the Rancho Penasquitos Police Department for providing this footage”. In the 2009 version, the text says, “Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat and Katie Featherston and the San Diego Police Department.”

The notion that two different versions of the film appear fits into Manovich’s later concept of “remixability.” Remixability is idea that new information can be added to or changed in an existing cultural object to create something new. Manovich compares the idea to “Lego-like blocks.” These blocks, regardless of medium or material, are filled with information that can be easily copied and pasted into a different item (2001, p. 4). In *Paranormal Activity*, the biggest differences between Peli’s original 2007 version and the 2009 theatrical release is the alternative opening texts, along with different ending sequences.
For example, in the original ending, Katie murders Micah off-camera and returns to their bedroom with a knife and covered in blood. She sits by her bed in shock for eighteen hours with the on-screen footage being fast forwarded. Eventually two police officers show up and walk upstairs. Katie goes to the bedroom door asking where Micah is. The police spot the knife in her hand and shoot her down. The scene fades to black with the police still talking. A title of white text appears that says “Dedicated to Micah and Katie,” along with a picture of the couple.

With the two different versions, not only does it support Manovich’s concept of “remixability,” but also his “variability” principle, where endless forms of a text can exist digitally. In the case of the 2007 version appearing online, the content is not the only thing that is different, but also the quality of the picture and how it viewed. For instance, the resolution of the torrent download could vary significantly, especially if it was compressed for DVD viewing. The 2009 version, on the other hand was fixed for the theatrical release only (though torrent and digital releases of this movie have appeared as well). Benson-Allot believes that the low-quality of the torrent file for the 2007 version even augments the “mimetic appeal” to the film (2013, p. 190). In other words, the desire for the viewers to see “authentic” hand held footage might find the lower-quality more believable than the version put out by the studio.

The opening title in the 2007 version might also enhance the film’s claim to truth. Using the words “producers” rather than “directors” suggests that the secondary filmmakers were given the footage rather than creating it (Benson-Allot, 2013, p. 189). Though the 2009 versions opening goes mainly unchanged, the new title replaced “producers” with “Paramount Pictures”. It also includes the characters’ last names, while the original film does not. Benson-Allot points out that by not including the last names of the characters in the 2007 version, there is a degree of anonymity or respect for the individuals in the film (2013, p. 189). With “Paramount Pictures”
named in the opening text, the prospect that a big name studio crafted a film from tragic “documentary footage” and exploited the characters’ names is highly unlikely. This difference in the text helps discredit the theatrical version, though most people watching are likely to accept the events in the film ironically.

With the 2007 version posted online, some people might make the mistake of accepting the footage’s authenticity. In fact, Benson-Allot thinks the “delegitimized existence” of Peli’s original film might show that the footage occurred before Paramount obtained it (2013, p. 190). What he means here is, if the footage was leaked online once, it is possible that it was found again by Paramount Pictures. The glaring problem with this Benson-Allot notion is the existence of the multiple endings. In fact, the studio released another alternative ending on the DVD version, where Katie kills Micah off-screen and cuts her own throat. The three endings provide proof that the film is indeed manufactured only to look like observational documentary, despite both versions’ claim for truth.

When the Paramount version was released on October 16, 2009, the marketing campaign resulted in the film receiving a national release with 763 screens showing the movie. By October 20, 2009, it was shown on over 2,000 screens. According to Stuart Ford, the film’s sales agent, the web “spreads the word, it generates loyalty, and it pinpoints the fan base… it showed us that, for marketing, it can be so much more potent than traditional media,” (Kochberg, 2012 p. 21). In other words, the positive word of mouth through the internet played a major part in the film’s success.

Speaking for myself, I saw the movie in high school. I watched it on a whim when the horror movie I was going to see was sold out. The man working the ticket counter told a group of people that Paranormal Activity was a fantastic horror movie, and we should watch it instead. I
enjoyed the film quite a bit, and shared a positive rating and recommendation on Facebook the next morning.

*Activity* thrived due to digital sharing such as this, as well as by selling the theatrical experience. Despite only costing $11,000 to make, the torrent of Peli’s original being leaked, and a 2-million dollar promotional budget, by January 2010, it had made over $93 million, with the franchise grossing over $700 million by 2013 (Heller-Nicholas, 2013, p. 129). Similar to *The Blair Witch Project*, *Paranormal Activity* spawned a number of knock-offs and parodies such as *Paranormal Entity* (2009), *Paranormal Proof* (2010), and *A Haunted House* (2013) (Heller-Nicholas 2013, p. 128). It also opened the market for a slew of new theatrical “found footage“ horror films in the following years, including *The Last Exorcism* (2010), *Apollo 18* (2011), and *Gallows* (2015).

**Conclusion**

Mock-documentary horror movies in the form of “found footage” have heavily used the World Wide Web for original content, viral marketing, and social media. *The Blair Witch Project* used its webpage to build its lore, as well as to preview the film. *Cloverfield* accomplished a similar feat, except it extended its marketing through an “advergame” across multiple websites made specifically for the movie. It allowed users to gather content individually or in a group, and then organize/discuss it. The film's viral marketing even broke into the real world, with events such as online organized billboard “spotting.” Both *Blair Witch* and *Cloverfield* tried to preserve their artifice, while the campaign for *Paranormal Activity* showed that audiences were willing to accept the content based on the mystery behind the trailer.

Generally, websites for films—especially blockbusters—contain details about the movie, rather than expanding on the narrative or hiding a mystery. In Warner Brothers-distributed
movies such as *Godzilla* (2014), *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015), and *Batman v Superman* (2016), some buttons on their websites say “Home, Videos, About/Story, Gallery, Soundtrack.” These websites provide easily accessible details about the films, as well as a way to quickly purchase DVDs or tickets. When *Blair Witch* was released, consumers had to click a link on the official page to go to another website to purchase items surrounding the film. The purpose expanded the narrative of the film and made it more difficult for users to deconstruct the artifice.

With mock-documentary films, typically, the films reflect current and past times to ground the footage in a reality that mirrors our own. The expansive websites for these films try to do the same thing, so they can be consistent with the time in which the mock-documentaries were filmed. For example, the *Blair Witch* website continued with the timeline they established in the film by mentioning events in and after those of the primary text. Likewise, the fictional Tagruato Corporation in *Cloverfield* updated their site to include the news of the oil rig collapse to be consistent with stories from other websites built by the *Cloverfield* marketing campaign.

With *Paranormal Activity*, on the other hand, the film’s marketing did not try to hide the film’s fictional construction in the trailer. Instead, it relied on a mixture of observational documentary and mock-documentary to make the footage a consistent style, yet distinguishable. In the trailer, an audience in a theater is watching the film as if they were watching real footage. Minimal action from the primary text is shown in various clips, while the shots from audience display strong fearful reactions to these clips. The trailer proposes the mystery of why the audience is scared of what they are watching, as well as promises viewers similar frights in the theatrical setting. The mystery surrounding the trailer and the ability to share it easily over the internet led to a successful campaign to increase the film’s theatrical release by letting users vote
to bring the movie to their own town with the online Demand It! Service (even with the original version of the film available to download on torrent websites).

Other horror movies have since used reaction trailers in their promotions such as *The Conjuring* (2013). Unlike the trailer for *Activity*, *The Conjuring* promotion did not say where the screening was or mask footage onto a screen. In fact, most of the clips the audience is “reacting” to were shots from previous trailers. These shots lead me to believe that the audiences in this construction are watching the trailer rather than the film itself, despite interviews intertwined with people claiming they watched the movie. The clash in style between the audience footage and the primary text is also apparent. With *Activity*, the blending of footage made the two styles much more unswerving. Despite *The Conjuring* borrowing *Activity’s* different approach to horror marketing, it also used traditional trailers for most of its advertising. *Activity* and several other films in its franchise, however, built their success on heavily showcasing the ability to be scared of mock-documentary footage in a theatrical setting, as well as providing a way for people to share their expectations and experiences online.

New media allowed these films to engage users in different ways while still withholding secrets from the primary text. Likewise, the internet allowed mock-documentary to be integrated into various forms and outlets, such as “news” stories on YouTube. The ability to put an unlimited amount of content online, as well as audiences’ willingness to connect with the low-budget style, has also allowed independent filmmakers to spread their films; though it must be noted that, with the extensive amount of content on the internet, it is likely many “found footage” horror videos will be left unnoticed. Lastly, the shift toward raw online video has made mock-documentary “found footage” movies rely mainly on replicating the observational mode of documentary in its primary text as an effective way to generate scares.
I should note that website www.blairwitch.com was heavily modified after I finished this chapter to align with the latest release in the franchise, Blair Witch (2016). Most of the online content for the original film can be accessed on http://www.blairwitch.com/project/ with a few alterations since I wrote the Blair Witch Project section. These changes revert the website back to how it looked in 1999 with no references to Lion’s Gate or the DVD.
Mock-documentary and Digital Media Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the contribution digital technology is making for mock-documentary films. I selected the term “mock-documentary” from Jane Roscoe & Craig Hight’s book *Faking It* because it covers a variety of films that mimic documentary codes and standards to create a fictional narrative. Using a critical approach, I first looked at development and theories surrounding the style to understand mock-documentary’s relationship with digital media. Then I looked at the ways mock-documentary has used DVD technology and new media. To be clear, all the movies I discussed in the “DVD” and “New Media” chapters are entirely fictional constructions to exemplify the embracement of digital media by narrative films.

I began the first chapter with a literature review in which I examined the advancement of mock-documentary films. I found, for the most part, that the style stemmed from non-fiction film, using codes that mimic documentary. I also was able to categorize and discuss different forms of mock-documentaries by using Roscoe and Hight’s three degrees (parody, critique and deconstruction), as well as Nichols’ various analyses on the subject of documentary such as his “documentary modes”. In the critical review of the literature, I found these theories and concepts useful for examining documentary and mock-documentary. The literature was also useful in understanding the evolution of the style, outlining how mock-documentary branched from non-fiction films by continuously using their aesthetics to enhance the fictional narrative. What I found limiting, is the literature did not go in much detail about new outlets that digital platforms provide for mock-documentary films.

In the second chapter, I discussed how DVD technology equipped the mock-documentary style by looking at *This is Spinal Tap* and Guest’s three mock-documentaries *Waiting for Guffman, Best in Show*, and *A Mighty Wind*. I found that the extra features, depending on the
DVD discs helped further the narrative, as well as created new ways of looking at the primary text. In *Spinal Tap*, for instance, I believe the commentary by the band in-character, as well as the interview with the “director” opened a discussion about the way documentarians frame their subjects in a film. With Guest’s DVD’s, specifically, his and Levy’s commentary shed light on the construction of the emotional levels in the movies. Using improvisational acting as well as borrowing documentary codes, they were able to create the essence of events/situations and the feelings the characters were going through.

In the third chapter, I observed horror mock-documentary movies’ impact on new media, discussing how several films in the form of “found footage” were able to take advantage of the digital space of the internet by creating supplementary material. For the movies *The Blair Witch Project*, *Cloverfield*, and *Quarantine*, material was created on single/multiple websites to further the narrative and preserve the artifice, as well as to promote the movies.

*Paranormal Activity*, on the other hand, did not try to preserve the artifice. Instead they posted a teaser online that mixed observational documentary of an audience in the theater with similarly styled clips from the film. The purpose was to sell the theatrical experience of the movie as well as hide the secrets about why the audience was having such a strong reaction to the clips. The other film I mentioned in this chapter, *909 Experiment*, illustrated how the style could be equipped by filmmakers with a minimal budget, and the ability to place entire movies online. With the internet having seemingly endless areas to explore, as well as the style being easily accessible for filmmakers, chances are there are many mock-documentary films online that go unnoticed.

The expansion of digital technology has allowed for the creation of a variety of secondary text that surrounds the mock-documentary film. With DVDs, these texts come in forms of bonus
features such as commentary, additional footage, and interviews. Through the internet, secondary texts can take shape as videos, webpages, and blogs. I believe that digital space has allowed for these texts to build a continuity that furthers the narrative of the primary film. The material that does this tries to preserve the artifice. The framework of the primary text extends to the material so that audiences can have the impression that the characters or situations appear to have a history. For instance, on Blair Witch Project’s website, there is police evidence recovered from the missing students in the main film. The example illustrates the aftermath of the events that happened in Blair Witch.

I also argue that the way audiences experience this material can be ironic or literal. Cloverfield, for instance, most people engage the material knowing it is fictional, but treating it as if it was real. With Quarantine’s marketing, on the other hand, some users treated the material as if it was genuine. Additionally, the secondary texts are defined by the primary text. While most material remains in mock-documentary form, others such as the Spinal Tap music videos on the DVD are not. The framework from the primary texts, though, forces viewers to associate the band members with the film. The audience will likely view videos as something the band members filmed at some point in their career.

Not all the material I looked at, however, continued the narrative. One such item I examined was the commentary from Guest’s DVDs. I found that Guest and Levy’s conversation delivered a perceptive way to approach his movies as well as other mock-documentaries. Guest said it was imperative for him to capture the spirit and emotional levels of situations and characters. He accomplished this task through aesthetics and improvised acting. In Best in Show, for example, Guest duplicated codes from similar televised events for the dog competition.
Connecting Guest’s idea to other films, I found that these movies wanted to capture certain feelings through the style as well. In Blair Witch, for instance, I believe the movie wanted to seize the fear of the dark by showcasing the actor’s reactions to random sounds and creating a realistic atmosphere using consumer film equipment. Likewise, I argue that Paranormal Activity’s trailer wanted to do a similar thing. I found that trailer was purposely assembled to make the audience appear scared to help persuade viewers online that they could have a comparable experience if they see the film at the theater.

**Final Thoughts**

In my thesis, I explored how mock-documentary is changing through digital media. In the literature review, I examined the development and effects of the style, as well as the forms it can take in the film. I did find, however, that the literature is somewhat dated as the result of recent progress in mock-documentary. In the next two chapters, I looked at how the DVD format and new media have altered how audiences approach these movies by leveraging secondary text that is often created or placed to promote or highlight a film.

**Continuity**

What I found that is different from many traditional studio films is that some of my examples of mock-documentary movies use “paratext” to build a continuity around their narrative through multiple media outlets. Going back to Spinal Tap, the cast has made appearances in character before and after the events of the main film. Some of these include talk shows and even live performances.

Middleton believes that the appearances dissolve the film’s “diegetic boundaries,” suggesting that the primary text was always a documentary (2014, p. 78). Middleton’s ideas line up with Nichols’ concept of ironic impact. For ironic impact to work, the audiences must
partially believe that what they are watching is a documentary (2001, p. 23). Through secondary text, the ironic impact can extend beyond the primary text. Middleton provides an example of *Spinal Tap* fans engaging with an “ironic mode” of admiration for the band’s appearances outside the film (2014, p. 78). In other words, the audience knows the material is fictional but participate in the satire as if it was a real band.

As I mentioned above, DVDs and websites provide a passage for mock-documentary films to further their narratives. With *Spinal Tap* and *A Mighty Wind*, the additional content on their DVDs builds a history for the characters by including “TV-spots” and “press conferences.” Likewise, the website for *Blair Witch* functioned in a similar way to the DVDs, providing data and information regarding the legend of Blair, as well as evidence surrounding the missing students from the movie.

With *Cloverfield*, I believe the ironic mode applies to the film’s “advergame” marketing, where willing users collect information from various websites to solve a mystery. Reinhard applied Ian Bogost’s “advergame” to *Cloverfield*, in which the websites sell an “experience” to engross the player further into the movie’s content (Reinhard, 2011, p. 54). *Cloverfield’s* marketing encouraged users to gather information from the websites – individually or in a group – for organization and discussion, so they could unlock the mystery encompassing the film (Reinhard, 2011, p. 63). Similar to *Spinal Tap*, users know the material is faux, but interact with it like it is real. In the marketing, there are several “news broadcasts” from around the world that show the fictional company Tagruoto’s oil rig suddenly collapsing. All of these broadcasts are on different websites but contain the same footage of the incident. On the blog, *Cloverfieldclues*, I found that the creator of the site organized the seven “news broadcasts” in a list, as well as translating each video into English.
According to Manovich, an online database cannot exist without organization (Manovich, 2001 p.231). In the case of these videos, the links were organized on the blog, making the content archival similar to the DVDs for *Spinal Tap* and *A Mighty Wind*, and to the website for *Blair Witch*. The post allows for the continuation of the primary text by suggesting that the footage preceded the events of the film, with the monster nearing New York.

These continuities, however, are not limited to the use of ironic impact in order to function. In the case of *Cloverfield*, bloggers organized the websites trying to unlock clues to fulfill the larger narrative. With my example of *Quarantine*, on the other hand, some users engaged with the secondary material as if it were real. YouTube diaries were created for the marketing of Quarantine. They contain videos of a young man named Eric (Ben Messmer) who worked at a police station in Los Angeles (Sperling, 2008). He “leaked” footage of an incident where someone was trying to get out of an apartment building and was sniped through a window. Using the character Eric’s videos and the “leaked footage,” the narrative was organized through a YouTube channel to contribute to the larger story. The leaked footage takes place at the same time as an event in the movie, except the YouTube video was from the perspective of someone outside of the apartment. Eric’s videos, however, transpire after the film. Until the official trailer released on the channel, users engaged with Eric’s post, and even the leaked footage, genuinely. This circumstance fits with Roscoe and Hight’s concept of a hoax, where the audience does not distinguish the text as fiction (2001, p. 144).

Whether or not the audience knows the material was fictionalized, the secondary texts form a record around the primary film through different media forms. This not only promotes a movie, but creates a lived-in world that reflects our own. Also, the online interactions with
secondary text demonstrate the ability of mock-documentary to shift from passive to participatory.

Another area I found constructive in building the continuity was “additional scenes” in Guest’s DVDs for *Guffman* and *A Mighty Wind*. I interpreted the word “additional” to mean that the footage taken out of the movie still worked in the larger narrative. Despite having the clips cut from the primary text, the footage does not directly contradict anything that happened in the films. Like documentary footage taken out of a picture, these clips still could have occurred in the context of the movie. I mentioned in the second chapter that there is an additional scene in *Guffman* where Corky goes around telling the cast members that they have the part. The interaction between the characters remains faithful to how they act in the primary text. The scene could have easily fit, but was likely cut for time. Both *Guffman* and *Best in Show* contain alternate endings for the epilogue. These scenes directly dispute events in the film. The label allows the audience to know that the scenes do not belong in the continuity of the movie.

**Mock-documentary Framework**

Mock-documentary films, however, are not the only movies to use secondary text to extend the narrative. In chapter 2, I gave the example of a “Marvel One-Shots” on the Blu-ray for *Captain America First Avenger*. Marvel One-Shots are a series of short films that shed light on individual characters, as well as cross promoting other Marvel Studio films. Similar to the use of the secondary text I have mentioned for mock-documentary, the narrative of these short films expands on the continuity from feature films by Marvel Studios.

What makes mock-documentary secondary text different from examples such as this is how the viewers approach watching it. Through a mock-documentary framework, the audience treats the secondary text and the primary text as if the events actually happened, ironically or
literally. The supplementary text establishes details of events surrounding the film or items in which the characters participated to build a history. Even if the characters from these movies appear in a form that is not mock-documentary, such as the music videos found on the *Spinal Tap* DVD, the style from the primary text still make the audience associate with the character’s “documented” history. For example, instead of separating the music videos as separate work, we ironically accept that the band members of Spinal Tap have filmed these videos in the past, due to the stylistic framework provided by film.

Alternatively, if a film is not equipped with the style, but uses mock-documentary in the supplementary text, the audience can distance the text from documentary. For example, on the second disc of *The Dark Knight* (2008) Blu-ray, there is a feature titled “Gotham Tonight.” The feature contains six segments from a fax-news program, called Gotham Central, that cover events in the fictional city of Gotham. These particular segments are supposed to take place prior to the events in the film. In “Episode 6,” for instance, the television host Mike Engel (Anthony Michael Hall) interviews district attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart). The episode is made to look like a live television news and talk show program. It includes various elements, such as B-roll footage and citizens phoning in to provide questions for Dent. While the mock-documentary segments imitate news codes, these segments are meant to transpire in the context of the primary text. In other words, audiences are not supposed to literally recognize these segments as non-fiction film, since they are aware of how the primary text was traditionally filmed. Instead, the segments are materialized for the fictional audience of the film, while simultaneously expanding the story for the viewer watching Blu-ray feature.

Like *The Dark Knight* Blu-ray’s “Gotham Tonight” feature, occasionally, there are some websites for traditionally filmed movies that try to develop ideas and situations from the
narrative further. One recent example of this is the *Jurassic World* (2015) website, www.jurassicworld.com. In the film, the story focuses on a fictional entertainment complex where people can see genetically cloned dinosaurs. The page simulates zoo or theme park websites, with items such as updated weather, a schedule, a map, and information about the dinosaurs in the complex. The website even has a section titled “park cam,” where users can click videos to see what is happening around Jurassic World. With these “park cams,” users can watch videos that emulate observational documentary from security cameras. The various cameras you can click create the illusion that what you are watching in the video is live, and happening in real time. The illusion, however, breaks if the user clicks on the same camera again, because it just restarts the footage. In other words, the looping video means the information was prerecorded.

The main site for *Jurassic World* does not keep up with the events of the film. It neglects to highlight the destruction of the park present in the movie. Similar to *Dark Knight*, the website contents related to the context of the film. Through the park cameras, the user can interact with the footage as if they were a character in the world of the film, rather than the historic world. In short, the footage is not treated as documented continuity that reflects our reality, but the reality of the movie.

Unlike films that utilize certain aspects of mock-documentary, movies that are filmed completely in the mock-documentary style typically reflect current or past times. The footage, therefore, is grounded in a reality that mirrors our own. The websites and features that preserve the artifice do the same thing. They are constituted in the timeframe in which the mock-documentaries were filmed.
Essence of Characters and Situations

As I mentioned in the previous chapters, not all DVD features or websites preserve the artifice of the narrative. Looking at Guest’s DVDs for *Guffman*, *A Mighty Wind*, and *Best in Show*, he and Levy provided commentary about each film’s construction on the discs, which contradicts the artifice built by the other features.

Guest has garnered a reputation as an auteur for the mock-documentary style. His commentary is especially useful in understanding the functions of mock-documentary. He stated in the commentary that the utilization of the style is to capture the essence of the events and characters. In *Guffman*, for instance, when Levy’s character auditioned for Corky’s play in the movie, it was the first time Guest had seen it. Guest, in character, had to react in a way that would be suitable for Corky. The method of the direction was to reflect the feeling of trying out for a part in local theater. The style and improvisation in the scene helped it seem genuine because no one knew what Levy was going to do.

Guest’s concept of wanting to capture the essence of these moments is not limited to Guest’s films. Looking at the content of the other mock-documentaries I reviewed, the filming techniques used demonstrate a similar desire to capture the essence of the events that gives mock-documentary its sense of realism. In *Blair Witch*, for example, the film crew would make sounds in the woods at random times to help give the cast something to react to when they heard them (Hopgood, 2006, p. 244). The audience, like the cast, does not know what is happening in the woods. The reaction the actors give, along with the realistic atmosphere created by the equipment used to film the sequences, effectively illustrate moments of fear one might have when they hear something they do not recognize in the dark.
Encapsulating the essence of situations in mock-documentary is not restricted to acting or improvisation alone, but also perspective. With *Cloverfield*, the entire movie is shot to look like footage from a digital camcorder. The point of view from the shots is from the characters holding the camera. Unlike other monster movies that might show the creature in full view, *Cloverfield* only displays it in glimpses. The film is much more focused on the disaster around the characters as they attempt to escape rather than the monster itself. Through digital video and destructive imagery, reminiscent of non-fiction footage from the September 11 attacks, the movie wants to seize the horror of being in the middle of a disastrous situation.

Capturing the essence of events extends to the secondary text as well. Similarly to Guest’s use of television codes in *Best in Show* to create the aesthetics of a televised dog show, the *Cloverfield* news clips about the oil rig collapse, use news codes to feel like real news reports. The various news reports are crafted to look like they are from different countries, with some of the reporters and anchors speaking other languages, to reflect the collapse as a worldwide incident. The same footage of the accident is used in all the reports to confirm that the event happened. In chapter three I mentioned how Nichols wrote that the presence of the camera “on the scene” proves the incident transpired (1991, p. 40). With *Cloverfield*, the various news clips encapsulate the feeling of a worldwide incident with the footage from the oil rig collapse.

I would also make the argument that Guest’s idea about capturing the essence of events applies to *Paranormal Activity’s* trailer as well. Unlike the marketing for the other films I discussed, *Activity’s* trailer does not extend the movie’s narrative. Instead, the trailer is constructed to persuade the viewer that the theatrical version of the film is worth watching. Since the film uses observational documentary, it could be claimed that the trailer captures actual fear from the audience, not just its essence. I think this is true to an extent; the difference, though, is
the editing. While the reactions from the audience might be real, it is hard to know what points in
the movie actually frightened them. The trailer suggests that the clips from the film, placed
throughout preview, are causing it. These clips, however, could have easily been placed in
certain parts of the trailer to illustrate the movie’s style. The alignment of reactions to certain
clips, therefore, creates the essence that what the audience is watching is actually scary. The
trailer is used to persuade viewers that they can have similar feelings to the audience in the clips
if they watch the movie at the theater.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I took a critical approach in looking at how mock-
documentary movies have changed with digital technology. I believe that the digital media has
allowed the way audiences view mock-documentary to shift. The creation of secondary text for
both marketing and narrative purposes has allowed many films to expand or create new ideas
based off the original text. One way this was accomplished is through the establishment of
continuity. The continuity creates a “lived in” history that surrounds the main film.

With the horror films I’ve mentioned, the secondary text is often on internet in
“documented” forms such as timelines, news videos, evidentiary photographs, and company
websites. Likewise, in the comedy films that I analyzed – Spinal Tap, Guffman, A Mighty Wind,
and Best in Show, – the continuity is furthered with bonus features, through additional scenes,
press conferences, news clippings and music videos, unless the titles of the additional features
negate the artifice in some way. Though the items are not always mock-documentary in nature,
such as the music videos, the form of the primary text suggests that these events are defined
within the context of film. For instance, in the music videos on the Spinal Tap DVD, the
audience believes that the “band” filmed the music video, versus believing the characters in the
video existing independently. What these secondary texts attempt to do is preserve the artifice in a way that makes the events and characters appear in a reality that reflects our own, often through the imitation of non-fiction codes.

When watching a mock-documentary film, the audience has to be willing to accept the film as documentary, to a degree (Nichols, 2001, p. 23). If the audience can do that, they will watch the picture either through a literal or ironic lens. The same thing goes for the interaction with the supplementary texts that preserves the artifice. With Cloverfield, for instance, the audience likely knows the material is fictional, but interacts with the websites as if they are real. Quarantine, on the other hand, tried to mislead users at first through YouTube videos, with little indication that the material was fictional. The confusion caused some commenters to treat the videos as if they were real. Both literal and ironic impact, radically shape how the users engage the material. Some instances even allow fictional characters like Spinal Tap or the bands from A Mighty Wind to break from diegetic boundaries in live performances where listeners treat them as actual bands with good music.

Not everything I looked at preserved the artifice. Items such as the commentary on Guest DVDs discussing the construction of the film negate the artifice. Guest and Levy’s discussion, however, provided an insightful way of understanding their mock-documentaries, as well as those created by others. Guest mentioned it was important for him to capture the essence and emotion of certain characters and events. Often he accomplished this through aesthetic codes and improvisational acting. I believe Guest’s idea extends to other films and content, such as Cloverfield, where the film seized the feelings of being trapped in a disaster by showing destructive imagery through a consumer camcorder. I also made the argument that the Paranormal Activity trailer was constructed to do a similar thing. The preview made the
audience look scared at certain points in order to convince online users that they can have a comparable experience at the theater.

All of these examples help demonstrate the direction in which mock-documentary movies are heading with digital technology. Along with taking inspiration from what came before, these types of movies will always borrow and equip new technology, as well as using codes from non-fiction films to build a platform for storytelling and distribution. For instance, a new horror film titled Found Footage 3D (2016), was shot natively using the recent digital 3D technology. The movie imitates a behind-scene documentary crew shooting filmmakers who want to make the first 3D “found footage” movie (Degnnaro, 2013).

Regarding DVDs, comedy mock-documentaries still appear regularly, with similar features to those I have mentioned. One example is Popstar (2016). The movie essentially satirizes music documentaries, with the film crew following a self-absorbed musician. Similar to A Mighty Wind’s DVD, the Blu-ray does not hide the film's fictional construction, but furthers the narrative through bonus footage and music videos. Outside of DVDs, comedy mock-documentaries are becoming more commonplace on streaming services. In fact, Guest’s latest mock-documentary, Mascots (2016), was released on Netflix streaming service as an exclusive film (Kit, 2015). The style has also become popular in serialized and anthological forms of comedy television series. Some of these include Modern Family (2009-) W1A (2014-), Documentary Now (2015-). There have even been eight versions of The Office (2001-2003) made for different countries. I believe television and streaming services have become a viable outlet for the style. Given how common documentary and reality television shows/movies are on these outlets, it makes sense that mock-documentary will continue to adopt these codes on the same medium for comedic and ironic purposes.
As far as online horror mock-documentaries go, additional content is continuously created for the “found footage” style. Take, *Unfriended* (2014), for instance. In the movie, an anonymous person who claims to be a student from the high school of the characters who committed suicide attacks the characters through their computers while they are talking on their webcams. For the movie's promotion, a Facebook page was created for the dead student Laura Barns (Heather Sossaman). On the page, there are several condolences from friends and family. The Facebook page is a recent example of a marketing campaign taking advantage of the emergence of social media, as well as providing a backstory for a primary text.

Looking at the article *Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media*, the authors outline that social media uses mobile and web-based technologies to generate an extremely interactive digital platform through which “individuals and communities share, create, discuss and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p. 242). I believe social media exists within the delineation of new media, but can be defined separately due to the levels of interaction between people. The article places social media into the structure of a honeycomb with seven purposeful building blocks: “identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups” (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 243). The authors state that the building blocks do not have to be mutually exclusive or offered in every social media outlet. They are constructs to help understand the different facets of social media.

According to Facebook, as of the second quarter of 2016, the company has 1.71 billion monthly active users. Other social media outlets such as the microblogging service, Twitter, claim to have a region of 313 million monthly active users in the second quarter of 2016 (2016). These examples illustrate that a vast amount of users that employ social media. The platform has
risen to be a significant source of public opinion and communication. With the structure of these media outlets, social media has given mock-documentaries distinctive opportunities for new ways of direct/indirect advertising, storytelling, and discussions such as *Paranormal Activity*’s trailer, Laura Barns’ Facebook page, and *Cloverfieldclues*.

Even entire films such as *Unfriended* utilized the technology throughout the whole narrative. With Unfriended, the purpose of the technology was to illustrate the dangers that can come through it such as online bullying and self-indulgence. I believe mock-documentary movies will continue to apply social media in different ways and this warrants further study as it evolves and new films are released. Lately, however, I noticed that many studio-released found footage films are taking a traditional approach to marketing online, such as *The Visit* (2015) and *Blair Witch* (2016). The primary websites for these films contain promotional items such as trailers and a summary of the story.

In my study, I found that the relationship between mock-documentary films and digital technology has shifted the way audiences engage with the primary text. Through different digital platforms and equipment, mock-documentary movies are arriving in several forms from both studio and independent filmmakers. Looking at the DVDs and the internet, I found that the technology allowed for the creation of a variety of secondary text, which may or may not preserve the artifice of the mock-documentary films. Since these movies imitate non-fiction films, the texts request that the viewer, at least partially, accept the film as documentary ironically or literally. The notion extends to the secondary texts that try to further the narrative. Due to the nature of mock-documentary, the audience will be willing to accept additional material on DVDs, and the internet as a recorded history of the events and characters that surround the main film.
Items that do not preserve the artifice, on the other hand, perform different functions than those that do. Take Guest’s DVDs and the Paranormal Activity trailer for instance. With Guests’ DVDs, the viewer is granted “insider” access through the commentary, while Activity’s trailer encourages users to see the movie theatrically and vote to for the film to be screened in their area. The examples from my study demonstrate how mock-documentary movies and the way in which audiences view/interact with them have adapted through digital technology. As more technology becomes available, mock-documentary films will continue to innovate and find new ways to tell stories through a technological lens that mirrors the audience’s present/past reality.
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