



MISE-EN-SCÈNE

The Journal of Film & Visual Narration

The Viral Image: Transmedia Mise-en-scène in the Fictional Real

Chloe Anna Milligan

University of Florida

Abstract:

In network culture, marketing often sets the scene for the media being promoted. This article argues that mise-en-scène begins outside the film through transmedia storytelling. Out in the “fictional real,” viral media marketing’s impact hinges upon a “factualization” of fiction, which directly utilizes the technologies of its media culture to extend film’s visual thematic effect through film’s promotion by exploiting actual settings and typically non-fictional media formats. By first examining *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)—among the most iconic films noted for its impeccable mise-en-scène—and its marketing, and then the “found footage” horror film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), indie thriller *Sound of My Voice* (2011), the science fictional epic *District 9* (2009), and superhero blockbuster *The Dark Knight* (2008), two separate, yet similar, cultural histories reveal how mise-en-scène can be transmediated. Mise-en-scène, translated literally from French as “placing on stage,” can also suggest “telling a story”; transmedia storytelling becomes transmedia mise-en-scène. But how that story gets told filmically matters both within and outside the film; therefore, the mise-en-scène becomes the establishing (and lasting) image of a film’s diegetic world. Through analysis of the marketing campaigns alongside the films, it becomes evident that transmedia mise-en-scène begins in the fictional real with the viral image.

“It’s not quite reality. It’s like a totally filtered reality. It’s like you can pretend everything’s not quite the way it is”
(*The Blair Witch Project*).

Promoting Fact, Fiction, and Film

In network culture, film narratives increasingly begin before the film’s release, through media marketing. Network culture, as we conceive it today, describes the way we perceive society as interconnected through new media and computer technology, and film gets subsumed into and distributed across those connections. Even long before the concept of a media virus could spread across any semblance of networks, one famous media promo-

tion already “went viral” to start its story. Now almost a century old, Robert Wiene’s 1920 expressionist classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is an essential film example of mise-en-scène staged exceptionally well. Yet its aesthetic was actually already established outside the film by boasting a rather contemporary marketing strategy that, read in the context of our current culture’s spreading fascination with viral media, should be considered a progenitor to recent, more popularly regarded examples of transmedia storytelling. Without explanation of any product tie-in, various posters and print ads exhorted, “You must become Caligari”; they did not suggest any fiction to passersby, only the uncanny contemplation of what-

ever this strange message could mean. That real ease was both relieved and heightened by the film to come, as consumers realized their factual feelings were complicated by fictional entertainment. It was the marketing campaign, therefore, that implicated the film's mise-en-scène in the "fictional real,"¹ as it exploited actual settings and typically non-fictional media formats. If this transmedia trope seems familiar, it should be; since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Internet, as an extension of these settings, has become the playground for similarly inspired projects promoting films through a blurring of the real and mediated. This article argues that the impact of viral media marketing hinges upon a "factualization" of fiction, which directly utilizes the technologies of its media culture to extend a film's visual thematic effect through a film's promotion. By engaging first with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)—among the most iconic films noted for its impeccable mise-en-scène—and its marketing, and then the "found footage" horror film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), indie thriller *Sound of My Voice* (2011), the science fictional epic *District 9* (2009), and superhero blockbuster *The Dark Knight* (2008),² this article connects two separate, yet similar, cultural histories that reveal how mise-en-scène can be transmediated. Therefore, when analyzing marketing campaigns alongside their films, we see that transmedia mise-en-scène starts here in the fictional real.

Mise-en-scène is widely regarded as "cinema's grand undefined term" (Henderson 6), so a working definition for this article's argument is in order. Mise-en-scène's literal French meaning "placing on stage" can be read as "telling a story," in order to refer to transmedia storytelling as transmedia mise-

en-scène. But how that story gets told filmically matters both within and outside the film; this article regards mise-en-scène as the establishing (and lasting) image of a film's diegetic world. Film storytelling in network culture, nuanced in this article from Brian Henderson's "long take" theory of mise-en-scène, must establish its long take outside the theater in short time to capture the attention of what scholar Michael Cowan calls "the mobile spectator" (473). Mise-en-scène is mobile now, not just in the streets, but across the information highways of the Web, spreading virally, according to media expert Henry Jenkins. Its diffusion reinserts "the photographic image" (14) back into the conditions of time and space from which André Bazin claimed film was free. Yet this time and space is both temporally and spatially real and fictionally unreal, making it the viral no-place made of place: the fictional real. The fictional real turns Bazin's depth of field into a literal condition near and far. Transmedia mise-en-scène in the fictional real then begins with the viral image, registering within the moviegoer outside the movie.

Convergence *Cabinet*

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari's marketing strategy demonstrated that convergence culture was already in its early form in Weimar Germany. Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* defines its titular model as a place "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (2). Convergence, according to Jenkins, necessitates what he calls a participatory culture, which he believes "contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship" (3). Describing how participatory culture narratively engages media,

*Mise-en-scène
is
mobile now,
not just in the
streets, but
across the
information
highways of
the Web.*

he explains that “transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities” (20-21), as stories can begin in their own marketing and spread virally. While he clearly has interactive media in mind for his definitions, *Caligari*’s posters may work as prototypes if we contest Jenkins’s estimation of “older notions” and entertain the film’s covert advertisements as an early kind of consumer participation. The posters mean to hypnotize viewers into “becoming Caligari”; therefore, viewers “passively” accept their participation in the transmedia mise-en-scène from print image to film.

The film is clearly a product of its time, released into a culture reeling from shell shock and fascinated by hypnosis. The First World War had just ended in

Germany’s humiliation, and *Caligari* premiered less than two years later. Its plot draws much of its horror from the then-cultural vogue of pseudo-scientific exhibits of hypnosis. In *Shell Shock Cinema*, Anton Kaes insists that these facets are inextricably linked, for hypnosis was a popular method used to treat shell shock victims. *Caligari* works at the nexus of both, and speaks to its viewing audience on dual fronts. Most compellingly, Kaes suggests, “Stage shows and illustrated lectures featuring hypnosis existed in a twilight zone between scholarly-scientific pursuit and downright charlatanism” (59). As the film depicts Dr. Caligari as both a sideshow charlatan and a respected psychiatrist, its plot inhabits the blurred dimensions of fake and fact, as visually accented through its German Expressionist mise-en-scène. The fictional real setting within the film is



Fig. 1: German World War I propaganda poster, reading: “Your Fatherland is in Danger, Register!”



Fig. 2: Promotional poster for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* subverting wartime propaganda’s conscriptive language, demanding “Du Musst Caligari Werden!” (“You must become Caligari!”).

marked by impossible architecture (e.g., twisted, angled, and bizarrely-proportioned buildings and props) that favours symbolism over functionality or verisimilitude, which indicates that its story of fake and fact is simultaneously distinct from reality yet reminiscent of it.

The blurring of the real and fictional already began that visual theme when the *Caligari* posters started appearing around Berlin. The posters similarly work on what Kaes identifies as dual fronts of postwar trauma and hypnotic fascination (68). Actual propaganda ads leading up to and during the Great War itself were similarly posted around the city and carried with them conscripting language featuring rhetoric like “You must [do your part/support the troops/buy war bonds/etc.]” (Fig. 1).³ The *Caligari* posters, unveiled while the war memory was still fresh, functioned as the film’s “propaganda”⁴ by subverting the language and using the emotionally evocative colour schemes (passionate palates like red and black, for example) of war propaganda in a way that reminded consumers of recent war rhetoric and simultaneously offered a way out of their disillusioned identities. “You must become *Caligari*!” (Fig. 2). Kaes says, “The exhortation to become someone else resonated in the postwar years, when many Germans found themselves in a state of denial and disavowal about their identity” (68). Calling the cinema “the cabinet of the movie theater” (68), he continues that viewers could then split their identity by becoming *Caligari* through seeing *Caligari*. The posters, drawing upon the dimensions of not just propaganda, but advertising, function then as the circus flyers for *Caligari*’s stage show within the film, thus including moviegoers in its *mise-en-scène* outside the film. This effect draws upon the posters’ other dimension—its hypnotic aesthetic, described by Kaes as “a spiral that suggested hypnotic power” (67). Academic Stefan Andriopoulos similarly calls it “a hypnotic, vertical spiral” (13), but he more explic-

itly links the posters’ mesmerizing power to their enigmatic role as promotion. In his argument, the posters’ worded message equally hypnotizes and advertises: “The almost coercive imperative ‘You must’ foregrounded and simultaneously enacted the ‘suggestive’ or ‘hypnotic’ power of advertising, which was still a fairly new mode of shaping social behavior” (13). The posters then, as the film’s establishing image of the fictional real, feature advertising framed as hypnosis just as much as they do hypnosis framed as advertising.

By working along the tensions of hypnosis and advertising, the posters were not entirely inexplicable. In fact, Cowan surmises that Berliners would have likely recognized them as advertising *something*, even if it isn’t clear what. This hazy association rests upon the *Caligari* posters’ appropriation of an already established product brand, Manoli cigarettes (Fig. 3). Cowan argues that

[the poster] harkens back to the first electric light advertisement of Berlin, a display for Manoli cigarettes erected in 1898 on the roof of a building on Alexanderplatz, on which a circle of lights appeared to spin furiously before giving way to the blinking command... ‘Smoke Manoli!’... Significantly, the famous ‘Manoli wheel’ gave rise to a well-known Berlin expression ‘Du bist manoli’ meaning ‘You must be crazy’. At least one of the initial *Caligari* advertisements from 1919 appeared to imitate the Manoli advertisement by showing the phrase



Fig. 3: The *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* poster echoing the famous “Manoli wheel” advertisement.

‘Du musst Caligari werden’ in a simulated circular movement, and it would be no surprise if the film’s first viewers also made the connection. (465)

This allusion to something as innocuous as a cigarette brand works on two levels. First, by relaying a different, more enigmatically sinister message through a recognizable product slogan, the *Caligari* poster can be suggested as an early form of subliminal messaging, truly advertising’s covert complication of hypnosis’s overt suggestion. Second, Cowan argues that the images needed to be simple, yet evocative, to capture the “fleeting glance” (473) of the busy city-goer. After the end of the Great War, city life was speeding up and consumers were more in a hurry than ever before. Advertising had to keep up. Cowan states, “Such a transformation in the visual culture of advertising implied a new concept of spectatorship, for the paradigmatic spectator was now understood above all as *mobile* spectator and advertising agencies sought to attract such mobile gazes at the nodal points of circulating traffic” (473). He elaborates that advertising, therefore, “sought to ‘direct’ the traffic of consumer attention” (474). Unpacking his traffic metaphors, Cowan explains: “If such descriptions of stopping the eye and steering its movements seem to echo the language of traffic regulation, this is hardly a coincidence: advertising layouts were indeed understood as traffic signals, regulating the trajectories of visual attention in motion” (475). The *Caligari* posters then had to elicit some kind of “rapid legibility” (474) to get their mobile *mise-en-scène* into the minds of passersby. Cowan’s point importantly distinguishes for this argument that the *Caligari* posters

For this mise-en-scène to register with the mobile spectator, the invitation to “become Caligari” needed to be brief but powerful to succeed—and succeed it did.

were not literally hypnotizing viewers, only engaging a hypnotic aesthetic to remain memorable in a visually overloaded culture.⁵ For this *mise-en-scène* to register with the mobile spectator, the invitation to “become *Caligari*” needed to be brief but powerful to succeed—and succeed it did, for the film was substantially successful, remaining in theaters for weeks and even returning a couple of weeks later (Robinson 46). In a proto-participatory culture of a different time, audiences participated in the viral marketing of *Caligari* by entertaining its fictional real of being “hypnotized” by it, thus handing over their wallets for ticket after ticket, entering and reentering its staging which began outside the theater. Consumers were savvy enough to know they were not actually becoming *Caligari*, but accepting the posters’ invitation to do so made them feel in on the trend, meaning the marketing campaign at least hypnotized them to “buy *Caligari*.” Potential moviegoers caught up in the advertising traffic of rapidly-moving Berlin were then directed through the haunting gaze of those posters toward *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Almost eighty years later and across the Atlantic, the traffic of viral marketing circulated in a more mediated avenue. To echo Cowan, if “the language of traffic regulation” (475) sounds similar, it should, for it is still how the flow of Internet navigation is explained today. At the turn of the twenty-first century, circa 1999, the modern viral movie marketing campaign would kick off with *The Blair Witch Project* and a new kind of traffic had to be detected. Internet traffic now directed consumers toward a *mise-en-scène* that straddled both physical space and cyberspace. In *Spreadable Media*, Henry

Jenkins, et al. establish their concept of “spreadability” versus “stickiness” to highlight how media texts signal such traffic to draw attention and merit sharing that gets substantial attention. Beginning their book by bluntly stating, “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead” (1), they describe how content has to be circulated to remain relevant in the rapid information culture. In their estimation, “stickiness” is the creation of content which enlists deep audience engagement and attention at centralized locations—such as websites designed for specific purposes and communities (like those to be discussed)—while “spreadability” encompasses the practices of sharing content—memes, videos, even ideas—across media platforms that can then be accessed in multiple ways. Though they do not put the terms directly at odds, they do suggest their mode of “spreadability” as “a corrective to the ways in which the concept of ‘stickiness’ has developed over time to measure success in online commerce” (4). Despite their decision to put these terms at odds, both still contribute to the phenomenon of viral marketing in compelling ways, as they describe the ways in which web “traffic” gets routed toward media content even when new shortcuts are constantly created. They furthermore suggest that *mise-en-scène* in the fictional real can stick visually as it spreads virally.

The Internet can evoke many mixed metaphors though, so the direction of traffic toward virality merits explanation. Intent on updating popular terminology, Jenkins, et al. move away from this commercially popular notion, exclaiming, “We’ve found a cure for viral media!” (16). They argue, “the viral metaphor does little to describe situations in which people actively assess a media text, deciding who to share it with and how to pass it along,” highlighting the irony, in their words, that “this rhetoric of passive audiences becoming infected by a media virus gained widespread traction at the same time as a shift toward greater acknowledgment that audience members are active participants in making meaning within

networked media” (20). Wanting to move away from the negative connotations of the metaphor, the authors offer “spreadability” as its replacement (20). Nevertheless, virality and all its complications still best describe our interactions with transmedia storytelling. Jenkins, et al. build their point around the safely assumed rhetoric that no one wants to get “infected,” but *active* audiences actually undo their claim and *choose* infection by their media. This phenomenon is not passive; consumers know what they are doing when they spread the sickness. Just like the media-savvy Berliners pretended hypnosis with the *Caligari* posters, consumers furthermore know that to “spread the sickness” is to play a figurative game in order to be in on the trend. They willfully, therefore, enter this metaphorical setting and participate in an aesthetic of infection. For example, in the case of *Caligari*, audiences play the hypnotic impetus to “become *Caligari*,” not just seeing the film, but taking on a new mediated identity through spectatorship. For the contemporary films to be discussed, the Internet’s role as the “site of infection” in the *factualization-of-fiction* model makes viral media marketing’s major symptom, “reality fever.”⁶ Reality fever describes the network’s influence upon consumer desire for a more playful blur of the fictional real. As fact and fiction are scrambled through contexts of transmedia *mise-en-scène*, what starts in the network extends outward to its users, and the media virus infects both consumer and technology.

The Fictional Real from Physical to Cyberspace

Infected consumers and technology meet in Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez’s 1999 “found footage” horror film *The Blair Witch Project*. The film tells the story of three amateur documentarians investigating the Blair Witch legend in the small town of Burkittsville, Maryland, only to never be found again once they take their filming into the woods. As seen through the promotion leading up to and content of the film, the *factualization of fiction* via establishing transmedia *mise-en-scène* reaches new

levels thanks to network culture. To explain network culture, Steven Shaviro begins his book, *Connected* with “Today, we are inclined to see nearly everything in terms of connections and networks. The network is the computer, we like to say. We think that intelligence is a distributed, networked phenomenon” (3). Shaviro claims that we “see...everything,” as network culture reinforces that film’s *mise-en-scène* begins in the fictional real. Helping us “see” through that, scholar Chuck Tryon argues that *The Blair Witch Project*, and horror films like it, diagnose what is wrong with that network:

These films seem to imply that electronic media will lead to fragmented social relationships because of their illusion of authenticity and their potential to further isolate people from a larger community. Moreover, the films seem to imply, because of their emphasis on perceived threats to documentary authenticity, that TV, video, and the Internet will undermine our grounds for interpretation and knowledge. (40)

Using contemporary communication technologies as critique of those technologies, found footage horror films imply that “interpretation and knowledge” (40) are at risk of reality fever. *The Blair Witch Project* stands out as the turn-of-the-new-century archetype to play with the boundaries of the fictional real. It uses its contemporary technologies to make this move; the film’s opening shot “correlates video with subjective vision rather than the objective, impersonal shots associated with a standard film” (Tryon 43). The film’s *mise-en-scène* is tied directly into its filming technology, as it suggests that the handheld video camera is more “real” than the film camera.

Yet this media commentary is nothing that has not been done already. In 1719, Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* with a written disclaimer that everything described in its pages actually happened—a necessary move in a culture still distrustful of the novel and long-form fiction (Rose 32). The “fear of fiction” (31) in the past contrasts our current culture, which is absolutely replete with fiction, and exhibits instead signs of reality fever through a fascination with the real, even the fictional real.

The fictional real is implicated in both *The Blair Witch Project*’s marketing and release through transmedia *mise-en-scène*. Following the bloody footsteps of the proto-found-footage horror film, Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), Myrick and Sanchez created a film that really began through notorious reputation before the release of the actual film.⁷ Deodato restricted his actors from appearing in any other projects for one year after filming of his project wrapped, so their absence would intensify word-of-mouth surrounding the controversial film. That tactic proved too effective once Deodato had to produce the actors in court to be acquitted of actually murdering them (“In the Jungle”). Myrick and Sanchez attempted a different approach, both far less extreme and even more haunting. *Cannibal Holocaust*, advertised conventionally by contrast, incites only immediate reaction; *The Blair Witch Project* took its time in unveiling a thorough transmedia narrative. Before the film was on anyone’s radar, its staging was set when www.blairwitch.com appeared on the Web. Told through text, photographs, videos, and audio recordings, the website features a history of the Blair Witch legend, profiles for the “missing” filmmakers,

...our current culture...is absolutely replete with fiction, and exhibits instead signs of reality fever through a fascination with the real, even the fictional real.



Fig. 4: “The Legacy” section of *The Blair Witch Project* website, presenting material left behind from the found footage as realistic documentation, committing fully to the factualization of fiction.

an explanation reporting the aftermath of their disappearance, and even a facsimile of Heather’s journal (Fig. 4). The website embodies Rose’s description of the Internet as “the first medium that can act like all media—it can be text, or audio, or video, or all of the above” (2). It can, therefore, distribute *mise-en-scène* across all these media. But the film’s transmedia promotion even extended onto television through a documentary on the Sci-Fi Channel, *The Curse of the Blair Witch* (Tryon 42). The *Blair Witch*, completely fabricated by the filmmakers, appeared as factual now as any other grisly small town true story.⁸ To continue the effect, Myrick and Sanchez wisely did not abandon these elements of the narrative as window dressing for the film. Details from the website are recalled in the film’s narrative, and as the film’s amateur documentarians conduct interviews around Burkittsville, Tryon describes, “In one interview, a mother holding her small child incorrectly remembers hearing about the *Blair Witch* on the Discovery Channel, rather than the Sci-Fi Channel, thus casting doubt on her reliability as an authority but also reminding knowledgeable viewers

about the transmedia elements of the *Blair Witch* narrative” (43). The film’s factualization of fiction renders elements of its story into non-filmic contexts and then loops the non-filmic back through the film again. Its *mise-en-scène* began outside the film, but it makes that outside compellingly a part of the film’s image within as well.

In a different viral strategy, video precedes film in Zal Batmanglij’s *Sound of My Voice*. Batmanglij’s 2011 indie thriller, co-written with its star Brit Marling, advanced a recently successful viral video campaign, especially for a low budget indie film. Batmanglij’s film perfectly utilizes the Web as its delivery platform for its transmedia *mise-en-scène*, truly the place for inexplicable viral videos that generate conversation. Rather than implicate the film’s technical composition with the “did this actually happen?” gimmick à la *The Blair Witch Project*, this film takes up belief as a more thematic concern, and its viral marketing component sets that up eerily. *Sound of My Voice* tells the story of Peter and Lorna, two journalists bent on exposing a popular cult leader as a fraud. To do so, they infiltrate the cult, after which



Fig. 5: Richard Warton (left), pictured here with Christopher Denham in the film, was first seen in *Sound of My Voice's* initial viral video.



Fig. 6: Actors from *Sound of My Voice* stand outside Los Angeles's Ukrainian Culture Center welcoming people into the film's fictional cult initiation class.

a wedge is driven between the two, as Peter starts to reservedly believe in the cult leader too. Before the film was released, two videos began circulating from YouTube and then around the Web: one an invitation to join the cult from the film, and the other following a woman who visits places the cult leader Maggie has been (Fig. 5). Both oscillate between bizarre and unsettling, especially the first, which mentions a specific meeting place and time for the cult's initiation class. In a move from the Web back into the world, actors from the film actually held these meetings at the Ukrainian Culture Center in Los Angeles (Fig. 6). The meetings were sparsely attended, mostly by film journalists and occasional viral marketing devotees, but the absolute dedication of the actors to the rhythms and conversations of their fictional cult actually made the lack of turnout part of the fictional real here: those that attended were chosen messengers, special and distinct from the masses, imbued with the responsibility to spread the word. And just as viral media is wont to do, word did spread across the web, tangling the physically performative in with the networked informative. The depth of field defining *mise-en-scène* gets extended here into the fictional real and the physically reachable as an extension and combination of digitally distributed storytelling.

Similarly, *District 9's* "For Humans Only" sign campaign demonstrates how viral marketing campaigns utilize actual spaces to construct transmedia *mise-en-scène*. Set in 2010, the film tells the story of an alternate Johannesburg, South Africa in which aliens landed back in 1982 and have been rounded up by the government and ghettoized in the titular District 9. The film's narrative blurs fact and fiction by referencing the actual District 6, where black South Africans were segregated during apartheid. Before the story's unveiling, however, its viral marketing strategy outside the film obscured fact and fiction on a more literal location-based level. Just like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* did nearly ninety years earlier, Neill Blomkamp's 2009 science fiction film placed enigmatic signs and posters at major points of pedestrian and mobile traffic in major cities to generate interest among consumers looking forward to the project that will explain the ads. These posters depicted alien-shaped silhouettes crossed out above stark warnings that read "FOR HUMANS ONLY / NON-HUMANS BANNED!" at locations such as bus stops and restrooms. These posters extended the physical congregation of pedestrian traffic into user-generated Web traffic though by advertising a website, D-9.com (Fig. 7). This additional innovation is a feature of our network culture, being directed from

one place to a new place that is technically no-place: the story gets entangled in the Web, and mise-en-

network culture then constantly involves a blurring of fiction into the real. The transmedia mise-en-scène is established: it is here that the fictional real thrives.

What *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* presciently started, *District 9* and D-9.com continue. Though now just a homepage for the film, the promotional website initially linked to the page for Multinational United, the private military company depicted in the film, with whom main character Wikus van de Merwe works.⁹ This website, full of information on the world of the film through documents and videos, committed fully to the factualization of fiction. Its fictional real continued the segregation enforced at sign locations by offering two navigation paths, one for Humans and one for Non-Humans. The Non-Human interface offered the option to have text read aloud for help assimilating into human culture. The website also featured nods to the film's plot as well, for typing certain character names into its search bar results in a ban from the website for violating particular "MNU regulations." Just as "You Must Become Caligari" first featured in the film's ads before it "penetrate[d] the image" (Kaes 70) and was incorporated into the film (Fig. 8), versions of the "For Humans Only" signs similarly re-feature in *District 9*, (Fig. 9). Conversely then, elements of the film *District*



Fig. 7: District 9's "FOR HUMANS ONLY" poster including a link to the film's fictionalized website.

scène sets a cyber stage. As media become more immersive than ever, the events of Blomkamp's film start to seem as reasonable as the technologically innovative ways we tell stories across not just across format, but across the network. Shaviro quips in response, "You may say that all this is merely science fiction. None of it is happening: not now, not here, not yet" (250), suggesting that our media culture's present feels like a science fictional future. Living in



Fig. 8: The famous "Du musst Caligari werden!" scene inserted the film's cryptic promotional line literally into *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari's* setting.



Fig. 9: A slightly modified version of the "FOR HUMANS ONLY" posters appears within *District 9's* alternate Johannesburg scenery.

9 feature online through the transmedia mise-en-scène outside the film. Describing the “becoming Caligari” scene, Kaes writes that, “Writing as a competing and ‘older’ representational form threatens the integrity and exclusivity of the visual” (70). Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, in their book *Remediation*, see the threat move in the opposite direction: “Arguably the most important popular art form of the twentieth century, film is especially challenged by new media” (147). Their idea of remediation, “the representation of one medium in another” (45) absolutely typifies transmedia mise-en-scène, as the examples in this article show. We should, however, aim to do away with the language of media threatening media. Rose insists that “the way we tell [stories] changes with the technology at hand. Every new medium has given rise to a new form of narrative” (2), and he is right; but part of that change encouraged through viral marketing is media inhabiting other media. No threat, no challenge, just collaboration—just like the collaboration this transmedia approach encourages. As for that spirit of interaction, both Wiene’s and Blomkamp’s films, through their sign campaigns, began in the fictional real. To paraphrase Cowan, they took it to the streets.

Out among those streets, *The Dark Knight’s* alternate reality game *Why So Serious?* (2007) shows most clearly that viral movie marketing begins a film’s mise-en-scène right here in the real. *The Dark Knight* is the second of Christopher Nolan’s wildly profitable and acclaimed Batman trilogy. Telling the story of Batman facing off against his comic book nemesis, The Joker—and even managing a last act showdown against Harvey Dent turned Two-Face—it is an epic film with an epic viral marketing campaign played out through an alternate reality game. This experience was designed from site to

street by 42 Entertainment, a company that specializes in creating alternate reality games to promote particular films and other media. Rose explains:

Alternate reality games...are a hybrid of game and story. The story is told in fragments; the game comes in piecing the fragments together. The task is too complicated for any one person. But through the connective power of the Web, a group intelligence emerges to assemble the pieces, solve the mysteries, and, in the process, tell and retell the story online. Ultimately, the audience comes to own the story, in ways that movies themselves can’t match. (14)

A well regarded early example would be *The Beast* (2001), the game promoting Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, which required players to follow “rabbit holes” across various websites in a nonlinear fashion to unlock the complete story. While *The Beast* is traversed solely over the Web, what distinguishes *Why So Serious?* as an even more ambitious experience is its sprawling real world component (Fig. 10). Of course, much of it did consist of piecing together backstory across websites containing fictional police files, political materials, and newspaper articles. It was the game’s mastermind, though, that brought the play out into the real: the Joker himself. Indeed, the film may be Batman’s, but the game is Joker’s. Through online and real-world instructions, the Joker rallied “accomplices” masked in his iconic red and white face paint to storm public places, including bakeries, where cakes concealed phones that allowed him to further contact them. As Harvey Dent and Batman also attempted to influence the game, the Joker always remained a step ahead, ending the game by defacing everything: every single website, media material, all of it. In total, *Why So Serious?* rallied over ten million participants in seventy-five countries, which contributed to *The Dark Knight’s* billion-dollar revenue.¹⁰



Fig. 10: : Promotional page for *Why So Serious?*, the alternate reality game preceding *The Dark Knight*.

Therefore, it is arguably proven that audiences are willing to engage transmedia mise-en-scène as it extends into the real world. For viral movie marketing of this kind starts the mise-en-scène in the real and invites moviegoers to become part of it, outside the film and in the streets. Out in the physical world, transmedia mise-en-scène more specifically makes the public into participants in the fictional real, for *The Dark Knight* and these other films. Millions of people in nearly one hundred countries played as citizens of Gotham City, a fictional metropolis. Gotham City was founded everywhere but physically exists nowhere. *Sound of My Voice* staged meetings in the Ukrainian Culture Center for a cult that did not exist. *The Blair Witch Project* drew thousands of unwanted tourists to Burkittsville when the film was actually shot in Seneca Creek State Park, over twenty miles away. And *District 9*, like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* before it, posted hints of a reality not quite real, be it science fictional or marked by impossible expressionist architecture. All of these films are not only transmediated through viral marketing; they are implicated in the actual hypermediated world. The

factualization of fiction is completed by participants acting like it is real.

Transmedia Mise-en-scène’s Lasting Image

A film does not begin with the film anymore. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* challenges that film ever did. Robert Wiene’s film and its proto-viral marketing strategy make a compelling case for evaluating not only the film, but how its mise-en-scène begins in its promotion. Moreover, these other films from 1999 onward tell their stories across transmedia platforms in ways different from and newer than *Caligari*, but they merely utilize the technology and cultural interests of the present moment as they did in the latter. From 1920 to 2012, and continuing today, transmedia mise-en-scène, through viral marketing in all its forms, shows that we are always looking for new ways to extend the establishing image of film storytelling outside “the cabinet of the movie theater” into the fictional real. Therefore, rather than limit mise-en-scène to the depth of field inside the screen, network culture deepens the image into the fictional real, a space where the reel meets the real. Though *Caligari* went viral before the term was

coined, its proto-network culture maps well onto our irrevocably connected one today, indicating how networks both enmesh media and are mediated. Transmedia *mise-en-scène* leaves a lasting image of

film storytelling outside the film and of the moviegoers participating within it.

Notes

1. All terminology invented for this article will be bracketed in quotation marks only once to establish its use throughout the article.

2. Having established these films as the example texts, other recent films including elements of transmedia storytelling worth mentioning are *Fight Club* (1999), *Memento* (2000), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *Cloverfield* (2008), *Wanted* (2008), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *Inception* (2010), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), *Bullhead* (2011), *Prometheus* (2012), *Ex Machina* (2015), etc. This list of many films should indicate that this article's contribution to the critical study of *mise-en-scène* is not limited to a small analysis of unique titles.

3. All images included in this article were obtained under the United States legal doctrine of Fair Use.

4. Stahl and Arpke likely did not literally intend this subversion with their iconic poster, but the timing and similarity of these trends draw poignant correlation.

5. This clarification is mentioned to add that Andriopoulos and Kaes take *Caligari's* hypnotism too literally, which condescends to the moviegoer.

6. The idea for "reality fever" is adapted from David Shields's *Reality Hunger*, an important book tracing how readers and authors want to blend the real and fictional through genres like literary collage, etc., just as this article argues moviegoers and filmmakers hope to engage through transmedia storytelling.

7. *Cannibal Holocaust* is technically the first "found footage" horror film, not *The Blair Witch Project*, as is often mistaken.

8. *The Blair Witch Project* had its own poster campaign as well, with advertisements masquerading as missing posters for the main characters in the film.

9. This documentation of lost transmedia plot resembles a twenty-first century version of scholars discussing lost silent films via censorship records.

10. The current argument does not have the space to further analyze the fact that alternate reality games function as complete rejections of Bazin's claim that the photographic image mummifies change (15). When participants outside the screen join in the image, then part of that image becomes temporary and spatially bound. The alternate reality game cannot really be played over.

Works Cited

A.I. Artificial Intelligence. Directed by Steven Spielberg, performances by Haley Joel Osment, Jude Law, Frances O'Connor, and William Hurt, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2001.

Andriopoulos, Stefan. "Suggestion, Hypnosis, and Crime: Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)." *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, edited by Noah Isenberg, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 13-32.

Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?, Volume I*. Translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 1967.

The Blair Witch Project. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, performances by Heather Donahue, Michael C. Williams, and Joshua Leonard, Artisan Entertainment, 1999.

Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2000.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. Directed by Robert Wiene, performances by Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt, and Friedrich Feher, Decla-Bioscop, 1920.

Cannibal Holocaust. Directed by Ruggero Deodato, performances by Robert Kerman, Gabriel Yorke, and Francesca Ciardi, United Artists Europa, 1980.

Cook, Cameron. "Join Us Every Thursday with the *Sound of My Voice*." *Fox Searchlight Pictures*, Mar. 5, 2012, foxsearchlight.com/post/3310/join-us-every-thursday-with-the-sound-of-my-voice/.

Cowan, Michael. "Taking it to the Street: Screening the Advertising Film in the Weimar Republic." *Screen*, vol. 54, no. 4, Winter 2013, pp. 463-479. *Oxford*

- Journals*, screen.oxfordjournals.org.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/content/54/4/463.full.
- The Dark Knight*. Directed by Christopher Nolan, performances by Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Heath Ledger, and Aaron Eckhart, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008.
- District 9*. Directed by Neill Blomkamp, performances by Sharlto Copley, Jason Cope, and David James, TriStar Pictures, 2009.
- Fight Club*. Directed by David Fincher, performances by Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, Helena Bonham Carter, 20th Century Fox, 1999.
- FOR HUMANS ONLY. Sony, 2008. *Traileraddict*, traileraddict.com/district-9/poster/1.
- Henderson, Brian. "The Long Take." *Film Comment*, vol. 7, no. 2, Summer 1971, pp. 6-11. JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/43752806.
- "In the Jungle: The Making of *Cannibal Holocaust*." Directed by Michele De Angelis, Alan Young Pictures, 2003.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2008.
- Jenkins, Henry, et al. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York University Press, 2013.
- Kaes, Anton. *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- "The Legacy." *The Blair Witch Project*, blairwitch.com/legacy.html.
- Robinson, David. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. British Film Institute, 2013.
- Rose, Frank. *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2012.
- Shaviri, Steven. *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. Knopf, 2010.
- Sound of My Voice*. Directed by Zal Batmanglij, performances by Christopher Denham, Nicole Vicius, and Brit Marling, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2012.
- Stahl, Erich Ludwig and Otto Arpke. *Du Musst Caligari Werden!*. 1919. *PosterConnection Inc.*, posterconnection.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/the-cabinet-of-dr-caligari-the-posters/.
- Tryon, Chuck. "Video from the Void: Video Spectatorship, Domestic Film Cultures, and Contemporary Horror Film." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 61, no. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 40-51. JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/20688633.
- Why So Serious?*. *42 Entertainment*, 2007, 42entertainment.com/work/whysoserious.
- Zabel, Lucien. *Dein Vaterland ist in Gefahr, Melde Dich!*. 1918. *Library of Congress*, loc.gov/pictures/item/2006680285/.
- Zborowski, James. "District 9 and its World." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 52, Summer 2010, ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/zborowskiDst9/index.html.