

BLOGS REMEDIATION

TRANSMEDIALITY FROM DIGITAL TO PAPER TO EBOOK

My purpose is to discuss what happens to blogs – precisely, narrative blogs – when they are subjected to a remediation process, passing from their native digital environment, to paper (publication in a codex-format) and possibly to digital again, in ebook-format. This double transmediality process testifies how the integration between digital and printing technologies and contents is so deep nowadays that is impossible to acknowledge to any “temporary” mediated text the status of “finished work”. On the contrary, transmediality configures itself as an endless transmigration from one medium to another, which redefines at each step the text itself, thus being able to (re)create artistic value. It is in this respect that I investigate if and how transmediality can represent a resource for publishers, which very often show a certain degree of resistance towards digital devices, such as ereaders.

Starting from the definition given by Walker-Rettberg (2008), I define a blog as a specific website: 1)which is regularly updated by one or more authors; 2)which is content-oriented (rather than service-oriented) and whose entries are shown in reverse chronological order; 3)whose structure and layout are kept simple (rather than complex) and post-centered; 4)which has aesthetic purposes (rather than economic/commercial purposes). At the same time, I define a narrative weblog, as a particular sub-kind of weblog which also shows a certain coherence and diegetic development of its content. I am fully aware that this is a provisory definition, but it is useful at least to delimit the field of discussion, overcoming, at the same time, the dualistic definitions of blogs as a genre, or as a medium (Walker-Rettberg, 2008).

For the discussion I will rely on three examples: *Otros Cuadernos de Saramago*¹, by José Saramago; *Studio Illegale*², by Duchesne (alias Federico Baccomo); *Diary of a London Call Girl*³, by Belle de Jour (alias Brooke Magnanti). All three are narrative (and autobiographical) blogs that have become printed books, and Belle de Jour’s books have also been released as ebook version. Since investigating the remediation of blogs in printed codex-format and in ebook-format also inevitably depends on the publishing choices made during the transposition, I need to specify the print/ebook editions I will refer to: Saramago, J. *L’Ultimo Quaderno*, Feltrinelli Editore, Milano, 2010; Duchesne, *Studio Illegale*, Marsilio, Padova, 2011 (2nd edition); Belle de Jour, *The Intimate Adventure of a London Call Girl*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2005; Kindle version: Belle de Jour, *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl*, Phoenix, 2010.

Asking what happens when blogs are remediated passing to codex and ebook versions, means to address a whole range of questions: Are there differences among digital version, printed version and ebook version? If so, which ones? Are blogs and/or author/s affected by the remediation process? If so, how? Are authoriality gender and narrative genre redefined? If so, in which way?

All these questions relate to three orders of change:

- Blog’s life and function (emancipation of the text);

¹ <http://cuaderno.josesaramago.org/>

² <http://studioillegale.splinder.com/>

³ <http://belledejour-uk.blogspot.com/>. Now the blog has been transformed in a more organic website (in content, structure and purpose) and it is not possible to read the old posts. However, the majority of its posts can be retrieved at <http://archive.org>.

- Author(s)' life and role (gender issue);
- Blog's structure and content (genre issue);

When a blog passes from its native digital environment to paper – being printed in a codex-format – and then again to digital as an ebook, its life and function can be affected in three different ways:

- The blog continues to be updated by the author/s even after the printed/ebook versions are released (these are a spin-off of the blog)
- The blog stops to be updated by the author/s after the printed/ebook versions are released (the blog lasts on the web as a testimony)
- The blog is transformed after the printed/ebook versions are released (the blog changes its function)

At the same time, even the blogger's life and role can be subjected to shifts when his/her blog is remediated:

- If the blogger is fictional:
 - 1) s/he can maintain his/her pseudonym even after the printed/ebook versions are released, or:
 - 2) s/he can reveal himself/herself when the printed/ebook versions are released
- If the blogger is a "real" person or already a well known author, the relationship between his/her blog and the printed/ebook versions coming out of it is factual

Concerning blog's life and function, the first possibility is represented by José Saramago's blog. Saramago started to regularly update his weblog – *Otros Cuadernos de Saramago* whose title recalls his *Cuadernos de Lanzarote* – in September 2008. The posts are rather heterogeneous, but they very often relate to contemporary issues on which Saramago reflects without any restriction of time or space. In this case, the narrative development of the blog is signaled by the relationship between the posts and the contemporaneity to which they are bound; while the narrative coherence is given by the author's well-known personality. In fact, it is probably for this reason that Saramago decided to keep his real name: he wanted to be recognized even on the web, he wanted to let readers know what his opinion on the main events around the world was (the blog represents one of the many "texts" written by the author). In the second half of 2009 (with differences depending on countries), a first paper edition collecting all blog's posts written between September 2008 and March 2009 was released (in Italy this also created a "case", as Einaudi publisher – which published all Saramago's work in Italy – refused to publish *Il Quaderno* because of some political attacks to Berlusconi and his book was eventually published by Bollati Boringhieri). However, this first publication did not affect either the blog's life, or Saramago's activity as a blogger and author. Indeed, he continued to write and regularly update his blog roughly until a month before his death. Then, around the end of 2010 (again, with some differences among countries) a new printed edition was published, gathering together all posts from March to November 2009. (*L'ultimo Quaderno*, Feltrinelli Editore, Milano, 2010) So, in Saramago case, books derived from his blog represent a simple spin-off and they did not affect the survival of the blog itself.

Saramago case is also emblematic for another reason: his blog is still being regularly updated today, more than one year after the author's death. Since a month before his death *Otros Cuaderno de Saramago* has been updated by Saramago Foundation – which is concerned with keeping Saramago legacy alive – not with “new” posts, but with quotes from Saramago's books and interviews. In this case, therefore, the blog survives the physical death of his author, a phenomenon that directly questions two issues: the problem of “authoriality”; and what happens to those blogs which are later “abandoned”. Concerning the first issue, blogs are denoted by a “weak authorial closure”: indeed, although they are online texts whose production can be referred to a specific author or group of authors; they also are texts that can be accessed/modified quite easily by anybody (as administrator), implying a potential fragmentation of authoriality. This leads to the second issue: blogs (and, more in general, online social texts) are denoted by what Danah Boyd defines as “persistence”⁴ (2007), that is, an intrinsic “latent omnipresence”: given the virtual environment that presuppose them, blogs are always potentially accessible by anybody from anywhere at any time, either as reader, or administrator. This omnipresence becomes manifest when a blog is updated (independently on who does it); but it is a feature that does not disappear, even if nobody update the blog. A radical choice would be to remove the blog from the web, but this would not completely solve the problem, since there would still be – at least for some times – a whole network of links directing to the removed blog, thus reaffirming its (missing) presence. Dying on the internet is harder than it seems. Weak authoriality closure and latent omnipresence are two features that lead to suggest how the web, far from sealing the death of the author or the omnipotence of the reader, opens digital text to emancipation, intended as a form of independence, both from the moment of its production (a collaborative on-going moment, indeed), as well as from the moment of its multiple and fragmented fruition. Indeed, on the one hand digital texts on the web are opened to a collaborative construction (through comments, sharing, etc.); while, on the other hand, they can be enjoyed from anywhere and at any time.

Concerning the second possibility (death of the blog and blogger), an example comes from *Studio Illegale*, by the Italian blogger Duchesne (alias Federico Baccomo). This blog (an Italian wordplay meaning “Illegal lawyer office”) was regularly updated from April 2007 to March 2009, with posts focusing on the author's working experience within an important law firm. In this case, the narrative development and coherence to the blog is given by the author's subjectivity around which all experiences and comments turn. To be noted that in this case, the blogger preferred to adopt a pseudonym, probably because – at least at the beginning – he did not want to be recognized, since what he wrote was rather critic and sarcastic. In February 2009, the homonymous printed version coming out from the blog was released and, a month later, Duchesne wrote on the blog his farewell post. In this case, the printed book has metaphorically killed the blog, which now only lasts on the web as a testimony. At the same time, the blogger was urged by the release of the printed version, to reveal his real identity, dismissing the pseudonym. And it is not a case that in the cover of the first printed edition (2009) we find Duchesne's signature, while in the second edition (2011), besides Duchesne signature, appears in parenthesis his real name, Federico Baccomo. Then, on the cover of his second book – *La Gente che sta Bene* (2011), which does not come from the weblog – the signature is: Federico Baccomo “Duchesne”, thus witnessing a meaningful shift in the authorial self-representation. Moreover, only for the release of his second book, Duchesne wrote again on his blog – two year later – presenting the cover of his new book accompanied by few lines of comment. The return of Duchesne on his blog demonstrates again that blogs are latently omnipresent and that they can be re-actualized at any time. This has consequences for the fidelization process that blogs and author/s build with and ask to readers: to this respect it is interesting remarking that when Duchesne decided to reveal his real identity he received

⁴ In her “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life”, Danah Boyd identifies four characteristics that distinguish online social spaces from offline ones: persistence; searchability; replicability; invisible audiences.

several complaints and critiques from his web followers. Moreover, Baccomo decided to open a new personal page, <http://federicobaccomo.wordpress.com>, which has clear (self)promotional purposes, since it is not intended to actively create a new narrative story, but only to advertise the interviews/events about the author.

Concerning the third possibility (blog and blogger's transformation), I refer to *Diary of a London Call Girl*. The posts of this blog are no more accessible, but the majority can be retrieved through <http://archive.org>. Now, at the address <http://belledejour-uk.blogspot.com/> we find a website which has clearly lost the blog-format (and its content) and has acquired a promotional connotation and a more complex structure. The blog was regularly updated between summer 2003 and autumn 2004 by blogger Belle de Jour (Brooke Magnanti) and it became a real "case" because of its hot narrative content. Indeed, the author described here her daily adventures as a call girl, without avoiding sexual details. In 2005, Belle de Jour adventures were published with the title *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl*, to which followed *The Further Adventures of a London Call Girl* in 2006. Last, in November 2009 Belle de Jour revealed her real identity as Brooke Magnanti, thus solving the mystery around her identity (and the speculation of a possible hoax). In this case, the printed publications did not directly "killed" the blog and its author, but rather modified their function and role, respectively. Indeed, after the publication of the first book, the blog did not die, but it was transformed into a more structured website for the promotion of the book (thus losing its blog nature). At the same time, the publication did not urge the blogger to abandon her pseudonym and her identity was kept secret until 2009. Moreover, even now that Brooke Magnanti revealed herself, the website is still updated (with commercial/promotional purposes) and it represents a starting point to Magnanti's new blog called *Sexonomics*, which – as the author openly declares – will soon become a book.

Last, this example is also interesting for another reason: the printed books which came out from Belle de Jour's blog are also available in ebook version. What does happen in this further passage (and return) to digital? Clearly what has been transformed in ebook is not the blog, but its printed version. So the text's structure and content are that of the printed version. However, it is interesting to note that the re-digitalization of the text has not re-opened it to the potential interactivity allowed by ereaders; an interactivity which would have re-approached the text to its original nature. In other words, although (almost) all ereaders can today get connected to Internet, thus giving the possibility to browse the web like a computer, the ebook version of Magnanti books do not conceive the possibility to recreate the original web-environment in which the text was first conceived, for example retrieving the comments to each post published by Belle de Jour, or presenting the links published on the blog; or pictures; etc. This gap will be possibly overcome in the (near) future, but for the moment we still remark – at least in Belle de Jour case – that the bridge between paper and digital is incomplete, a bridge that is evidently publishers' responsibility to build, through choices that do exploit the specific characteristics of digital devices, such as ereaders and tablets. In this way, remediation can really represent a resource for publishers, as a constant (re)creation of artistic value, each time the text is transposed from one medium to another.

Duchese and Belle de Jour cases also question the gender issue, with reference to digital texts on the web. Indeed, their cases are emblematic of the way the digital environment hide the gender issue, simply multiplying the possibilities the authors have to play with their identities (adopting pseudonyms, multiple identities, real names, names that are hoaxes, etc.).

At the same time, when a blog is remediated in codex and ebook formats, its structure and content are also inevitably subjected to some changes. First, I want to point out that the distinction between structure and content only has an operative purpose, since these two levels are deeply intertwined and their boundaries

are necessarily flexible. Moreover, it is difficult to identify here a taxonomy of possible changes: when a weblog is remediated – being printed or digitalized as an ebook – its structure and content are affected in so many different ways that these two levels define the borders of a spectrum of possibilities, rather than a rigid classification. Last, how structure and content change also relates to the different editorial choices made by publishers (in different countries and even among different editions). So, what it is possible to do is to define the extremes of this spectrum; and I will do it referring to the same three blogs.

The blog's structure is the aspect that is more deeply affected by the remediation of the blog in a printed version. The printed version does not presuppose interactivity, thus disabling all the functions a blog can have as an online text (archive, comments, personal page, feed rss, hyperlinks etc.); while, as seen, even the ebook version, which could in theory allow interactivity, tends to be configured as the transposition on a digital device of the printed version (Belle de Jour case). Moreover, printed and ebook versions of blogs lose the typical scroll and chronological structure of blogs. These differences are (almost) inevitable, because they are consequences of the different media on which the blog is transposed. However, when blogs are remediated on paper or ebook, some aspect of the blog's structure can be maintained: indeed the printed and ebook versions can either maintain the fragmented "post structure" typical of blogs (Walker-Rettberg, 2008), or adopt a more organic structure in the direction of the novel genre. Concerning Saramago case, *L'Ultimo Quaderno* – at least the Italian edition – maintains the "post structure": the distinction between daily entries of the blog is maintained, accordingly to that of the blog, but posts are presented in a chronological order and regrouped within month-chapters, to make the reading easier. Moreover, no introduction is given to the book, so that readers are immediately faced to the first post, dated March, 23rd; and only at the end a table of contents is presented, so to reorganize a posteriori the whole text. Concerning Belle de Jour case, the printed edition of *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* maintains the "post structure" but it acquires a more fictional value: indeed, not only posts are presented in a chronological order, but they are regrouped in month-chapters which are not coherent to the development of the blog. Moreover, the diary-format is introduced by a fictional preface of the author, which functions as a start for the narration. The same structure is also maintained in the ebook version of *The Intimate Adventure of a London Call Girl.*, The structure of Duchesne's blog, on the contrary, is deeply affected by remediation on paper and *Studio Illegale* presents a more organic structure which has lost the "post structure" and any distinctive allusion to the blog-format. The novel is introduced by a prologue and it is divided in 48 short chapters, whose structure does not correspond to the posts of the blog. In this case the editing process has implied a radical restructuring of the blog-structure.

The blog's content is strictly related to the blog's structure and the way the former changes when being remediated, inevitably depends on how the latter changes. Indeed, in terms of style and syntax, the blog's content can be faithfully preserved when passing to paper and ebook, or it can be modified, even radically; and this depends (also) on how the structure of the blog is rendered on paper and ebook. The printed version can, for example, manifests a more organic reorganization of the content: this is the case of *Studio Illegale*, which is characterized by the fact of maintaining the narrative idea of the blog, but presenting substantial changes in the way the narration is conducted: chapters are more organic than the simple posts of the blogs and the narration is enriched either with new details, or with information taken from the blog, i.e. from the personal page of the author. This change is inevitably influenced by the choice of abandoning the "post structure" when passing to paper, thus requiring a more organic process of rewriting of the whole "story". Indeed, as Walker-Rettberg states (2008, *ibid*), in blogs "each post makes sense in itself, but read together (...) the posts tell a larger story. That story is usually partial and incomplete and does not form a narrative whole"; thus implying that blogs which are remediated on paper can undergo an editing process

with the aim to give to the printed version a more organic and novelistic organization. At the same time, the printed version of a blog cannot host a whole range of contents that usually connotes blogs, such as videos, comments, links etc. In this case, the printed version is always a simplified version of the blog, oriented to its literary aspect, more than to its multimedia aspect. On the contrary, the ebook is potentially opened to re-approach the text to its native digital environment, but if we look at Belle de Jour's *The Intimate Adventure of a London Call Girl* ebook version, we see a mere transposition of the content as it is organized in the printed version: the literary blog content is almost completely preserved in style and syntax – a part from some marginal changes – in both versions; but links, images and others multimedia contents are avoided. Saramago case represents, instead, an example of faithful transposition of the blogs literary content on paper, an effect made possible for two reasons: even on the web, the content of the blog is kept very simple and composed (almost) exclusively by words, thus facilitating its remediation on paper; the printed version is kept as coherent as possible to the blog structure and this is possible because it is, in turn, essential even on the web. All three examples show that when a blog is remediated on paper and ebook, its content can be subjected to a range of editing and rewriting choices which can affect minimally or radically the content. The main difference is that a blog is an open fragmented text which is periodically updated, while a printed book necessitates to define a more organic and close structure of its content. An ebook is potentially more opened than a printed book to periodical updating or changes, but it should not be conceived as a mere transposition of the printed book. In this sense, Saramago and Belle de Jour cases represent two examples where the (printed) novel genre is influenced by the way of writing on the web: there is no diegetic beginning or end in their books and the division in chapters and paragraphs depends on the blog structure and content. On the contrary, Duchesne book represents a case where the (printed) novel genre has influenced and asked for a radical reorganization of the content and structure of the blog.

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BLOGS AND WEBSITES

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