

Interactive Documentary as a New Media

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Abstract. An Interactive Documentary is web and multimedia documentary with interactivity that present non-linear narratives. These features are based on new media which is combination of cinema and digital technologies. Modes of Interactive documentaries are summarized

Keyword .interactive documentary, new media, cinema technology, digital technology

1 Introduction

An interactive documentary, web documentary is a documentary production that differs from the more traditional forms—video, audio, photographic—by applying a full complement of multimedia tools. The interactive multimedia capability of the Internet provides documentarians with a unique medium to create non-linear productions that combine photography, text, audio, video, animation and info graphics.

The fundamental difference between a linear and an interactive documentary is not the passage from analogue to digital technology but the passage from linear to interactive narrative. Both linear and interactive documentaries try to create a dialogue with reality, but the media they use afford the creation of different products. A linear documentary that is distributed through the Internet is digital, but if it is not interactive it does not affords new types of construction of reality. The introduction of interactivity, through new media, brings with it new dynamics which, with time, creates new possible aims and therefore new epistemologies.

This paper is composed as follows: We look into the contents of DMZ Docs in Chapter 2, analyze modes of interactive documentary in Chapter 3, and summarize the relation between interactive documentary and new media in Chapter 4

2 Movie and Digital

Manovich considers the relations between cinema and new media in terms of two vectors. The first one goes from cinema to new media and the second one goes opposite direction from computers to cinema. He summarizes the effects of computerization on cinema as following lists. [1]

- 1 Use of computer techniques in traditional filmmaking
 - 1.1 3-D computer animation/digital compositing. Ex) *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *The City of Lost Children* (Marc Caro and J. P. Jeunet, 1995)
 - 1.2 Digital painting. Ex) *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994)
 - 1.3 Virtual sets. Ex) *Ada* (Lynn Hershman, 1997)
 - 1.4 Virtual actors/motion capture. Ex) *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001)
- 2 New forms of computer-based cinema
 - 2.1 Motion rides/location-based entertainment. Ex) rides produced by Douglas Trumbull
 - 2.2 Motion Graphics, or *typographic cinema* : film + graphic design + typography. Ex) film title sequences.
 - 2.3 Net.cinema : film designed exclusively for internet distribution. Ex) New Venue, one of the first online sites devoted to showcasing short digital films.
 - 2.4 Hypermedia interfaces to a film that allows nonlinear access at different scales. Ex) *WaxWeb*(David Blair, 1994-1999), Stephen Mamber's database interface to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Mamber, 1996-)
 - 2.5 Interactive movies and games structured around film-like sequences. Ex) *Johnny Mnemonic* game, the *Blade Runner* game)
 - 2.6 Animated, filmed, simulated, or hybrid sequences that follow film language, and appear in HCI, Web sites, computer games, and other areas of new media. Ex) *QuickTime* movies in *Myst*, *FMV* openings in *Tomb Raider*.
- 3 Filmmakers' reactions to the increasing reliance of cinema on computer techniques in postproductions.
 - 3.1 Films by Dogme 95 movement. Ex) *Celebration* (Vinterberg, 1998)
 - 3.2 Films that focus on the new possibilities offered by DV (Digital Video) cameras. Ex) *Time Code* (Figgis, 2000)
- 4 Filmmakers' reaction to the conventions of new media.
 - 4.1 Conventions of a computer screen. Ex) *Prospero's Books* (Greenaway)
 - 4.2 Conventions of game narratives. Ex) *Run, Lola, Run* (Tykwer, 1999), *Sliding Doors* (Howitt, 1998)

3 Modes of Interactive Documentary

3.1 The conversational mode

The *Aspen Movie Map* (Lippman, 1978) is often referred to as the first attempt to digitally document an experience. By using videodisc technology, and three screens, the user was able to drive through a video reconstruction of the city of Aspen. The use of digital technology to simulate a world where the user has the illusion of navigating freely has also been used in video games, MUDs and sandbox games, so it is with no surprise that journalists, and new media artists, have been inspired to create 'factual games', or 'docu-games', such as *Gone Gitmo* (Peña, 2007) or *Americas Army*

(Wardynski, 2002). This type of i-doc, which uses 3D worlds to create an apparently seamless interaction with the user, lends itself to the Conversational mode because it positions the user as if 'in conversation' with the computer.

3. 2 The Hypertext mode

One of the first digital artefacts to be officially called an interactive documentary was *Moss Landing* (Apple Multimedia Lab, 1989). During one day several cameras recorded the life of the inhabitants of Moss Landing's Harbour. Those assets were then organized as a closed database of video clips that the user could browse via a video hyperlink interface. This logic of hypertext documentary has later been applied to CD-ROMs (such as *Immemory* by Marker, 1997) and DVDs (such as *Bleeding Through the Layers of Los Angeles* by Klein, 2003). Currently a multitude of projects that follow the same logic of 'click here and go there' are being produced for the Web; those are often referred to as web-docs. *Inside The Haiti Earthquake* (Gibson and McKenna, 2011), *Out My Window* (Cizek, 2010), *Journey to the End of Coal* (Bollendorff, 2009) and *Forgotten Flags* (Thalhofer, 2007) are just a few examples of this style of interactive documentary. This type of i-doc lends itself to the Hypertext mode because it links assets within a closed video archive and gives the user an exploratory role, normally enacted by clicking on pre-existing options.

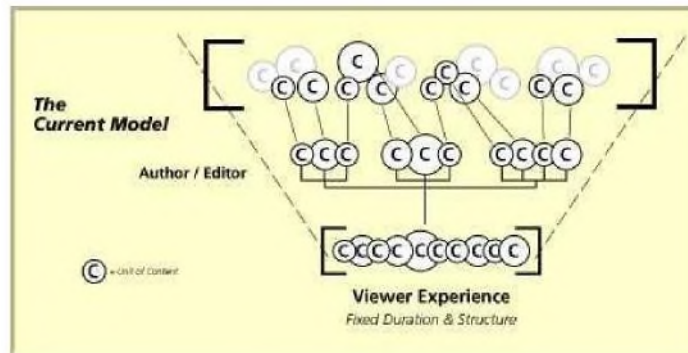


Fig. 1. The hypertext model

3. 3 The Participative mode

The advent of Web 2.0 has, however, allowed people to go further than browsing through content: the affordances of the media have made possible a two-way relationship between digital authors and their users. Although in the late 1990s the MIT Interactive Cinema Group, led by Gloriana Davenport, tried to develop 'Evolving documentaries' where 'materials grow as the story evolves' (Davenport and Murtaugh, 1995: 6), it was only after 2005, when the penetration of broadband in western countries reached a critical mass, that interactive documentary producers started exploring ways to actively involve their users within the production of their

digital artefact. In what is often referred to as collab-docs, or participatory-docs, the documentary producer 'is called upon to 'stage a conversation', with a user community, with research subjects, with participants, co-producers and audiences' (Dovey and Rose, forthcoming 2013). In other words, in participative documentaries the user can be involved during the production process – by for example editing online (see *RiP: a Remix Manifesto*, Gaylor, 2004–2009) or shooting in the streets (see *18 Days in Egypt*, Mehta and Elayat, 2011) – or during the launch and distribution process (e.g. by answering questions online, like in *6 Billion Others* (Arthus-Bertrand, 2009), or by sending material and helping translating it as in the *Global Lives Project* (Harris, 2010). This type of i-doc is described here as being Participative, as it counts on the participation of the user to create an open and evolving database.

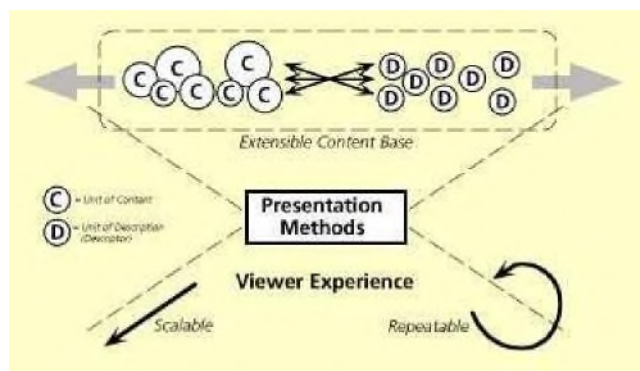


Fig. 2. The Evolving Documentary model

3. 4 The Experiential mode

Finally, mobile media and The Global Positioning System (GPS) have brought digital content into physical space. *34 North 118 West* (Hight, Knowlton and Spellman, 2001), allowed people to walk in the streets of Los Angeles armed with a Tablet PC, a GPS card and headphones. Depending on the position of the participant, stories uncovering the early industrial era of Los Angeles were whispered into the ears of the urban flâneur, accompanied by historic illustrations on the computer screen. In 2007 Blast Theory created *Rider Spoke* (Adams, 2007), a bicycle ride where people could record very personal answers via the use of a mobile device (Nokia N800) mounted on the handlebar of their bicycle. Those testimonies were then made accessible to any other participant passing in the area where the message was first recorded. This type of locative documentary invites the participant to experience a 'hybrid space' (De Souzae Silva 2006: 262) where the distinction between the virtual and the physical becomes blurred. I-docs of this nature tend to play on our enacted perception while moving in space. As the participant moves through an interface that is physical (although enhanced by the digital device) embodiment and situated knowledge are constantly elaborating new situated meanings. This category is named as being Experiential because it brings users into physical space, and creates an experience that challenges their senses and their enacted perception of the world.



Fig. 3. Rider Spoke's participant using the earplugs

4 New Media and Interactive Documentary

Definitions of linear documentary have changed over time. The term still means different things to different people. We have followed Bill Nichol's approach[4], using a systemic definition that sees documentary as a set of relations forged between the author, the viewer, the media and what is around them. Those relations are changing with time; they are influenced by social, political and technological change. Those modes are ways to 'frame and organize (reality) into a text' and therefore they are symptomatic of a modes of 'negotiation' with reality. It is the idea of logics of negotiation of reality that I have retained to analyze digital interactive documentaries claiming that, once the user is demanded an active participation in the documentary, the negotiation happens through interactivity.

Until now, four main modes of interactivity have been used in interactive documentaries: hypertext, conversational, experiential and participatory. Those modes come from different visions of what the human-computer relation might be.

Interactivity is more than a simple action-reaction, human-machine process. Instead, It can be considered as a transformative force with autopoietic behaviors that creates infinite dynamic links between all the entities that are related to it and to each other. In this light, the interactive documentary becomes a relational object that has a life in itself.

References

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