

THE INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY
A PROPOSED ANALYSIS MODEL

CHAPTER 5: THE INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY

5.1 The linear documentary, interactive forms of non-fiction and the representation of reality

In this chapter, we will examine the different logics and ways of organizing and constructing the documentary discourse on reality between linear documentaries and interactive documentaries. To that end, we will return to Bill Nichols' modes of documentary representation (described in the third chapter), to distinguish various different types of linear documentary, and we suggest his modes of interaction, to identify the different types of interactive documentaries based on the analysis by Sandra Gaudenzi (2009). We should take into account that the scope of the analysis is complex and quite dispersed, as many products are defined using different terminology: documentaries on new media, digital or web documents, interactive films, narrative databases, interactive explorations, virtual tours, interactive documentaries, digital essays, etc. We will conclude by offering an initial definition of the interactive multimedia documentary and a classification of its main features.

The documentary genre is one of the most powerful tools for telling non-fiction stories about reality. Its numerous applications have helped the documentary become a cornerstone of the film industry, ever since the first documentary film *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty 1922), which shows the media's powerful inclination towards immersing audiences in the lives of other people and places. Today, the documentary continues to provide audiences with unique experiences, representing life and providing in-depth observations and reflections on culture, politics, ideologies and people.

While the representation of reality can be considered a more common feature, especially in early documentaries, over time filmmakers have come to see the documentary in the terms described by Stella Bruzzi (2000) in her book *New documentary: a critical introduction* i.e. as a **negotiation with reality**, a mixture of reality in the filmmaker's experience with his/her attempts to understand it. Bruzzi, who placed particular emphasis on the role of the documentary, says that they are "performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming" (2000:4). For her, the documentary is 'a negotiation between reality on one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other' (2000:4)". The evolution of the documentary has shifted from representing reality to ordering it, and finally become a

negotiation of reality. This development should not be considered in strictly chronological terms, but instead as movements and trends that can coexist within a single documentary. But what does negotiation really mean? Bruzzi sees filmmakers as if they were invading a space and leaving an imprint on it, forgetting the dream of “objective film,” which inspired the Direct Cinema of the 1960s. For Bruzzi (2000), the interruption of reality due to the work of the filmmaker is what gives the documentary meaning and value. She sees the documentary as ‘a dialectical conjunction of a real space and the filmmakers that invade it’ (2000:125).

Meanwhile, **interactive media, virtual worlds and video games** have begun to **redefine documentary experiences** beyond the context of the traditional film. It is possible to argue that these experiences are documentaries in the sense that they provide information and knowledge on topics and subjects from real life, but unlike traditional documentaries, these new documentaries allow users to have a unique experience, and they offer their users options and control over the documentary itself (Britain, 2009:2).

The concepts of choice and control were considered something to be exercised by the documentary filmmaker. When this power is granted to the user, as occurs in interactive media, the role of the author as narrator and, consequently the perspective of the story itself, is called into question or eliminated. In the traditional documentary, the filmmaker's ability to influence the audience is taken for granted, and exercised by means of the filming and the discursive structure that is created by means of editing and montage. But what happens when this ability is given, at least partly, to the viewer of the documentary? What happens when the viewer is no longer a mere spectator, but instead becomes a creator of their documentary experience?

If the story - and by extension, reality itself - really is negotiable, there are multiple “realities” that can be extracted from a single event or situation, depending on who is telling the story. In her first research study, Sandra Gaudenzi (2009) advocates the idea that by using interactive media, we can create documented experiences that capture the many visions of reality that constitute our world, and give everyone the power to document themselves. This idea of an “open source” documentary is at a mid-point on the scale of the concept of the interactive documentary.

The objectives of the interactive documentary may be very similar to those of the traditional documentary, but instead of only **asking the viewer** for their mental attention, they require their **physical contribution** (Gaudenzi, 2009:8). By allowing a physical interaction, the interactive documentary provides users with an open means of composition to navigate the material (Choi, 2009:45). Mark Stephen Meadows in *Pause and Effect. The art of interactive narrative* (2003) suggests proposes four basic characteristics as regards interaction with the documentary: the capacity of observation, exploration, modification and reciprocity.

Meanwhile, Nichols' strategy is to define the concept of the documentary from three different viewpoints, aware that “each starting point leads to a different yet not contradictory definition.” As explained in Chapter 3, the three perspectives that he suggests are those of the director, the text and the viewer. As regards the importance of user expectations and the role of technology in the creation of a film, Gaudenzi (2009:2) says that “the user’s expectations are as important as the filmmaker agenda in defining documentary, and that technology has an active role in shaping a film, are for me the strengths of Bill Nichols’ contribution to the subject matter.”

If the film director is taken as the starting point, it is the filmmaker's position and power that provide the focus for the definition. Despite this definition possessing the advantage of emphasizing the filmmaker’s role and influence in creating the artifact, it has the disadvantage of being very vague in terms of what it means by “control.” (Control over the actors? Events? The framework? Over what could happen? Distribution? Sponsorship?). Another possibility would be to define a documentary as a film genre like any other, or in other words, as a kind of audiovisual “text” (Nichols, 1991:18). However, the problem here is to determine which typical forms should be included within this genre. This definition is based on a structuralist paradigm and according to Gaudenzi (2009:17), it cannot be considered particularly useful when seeking a definition of the digital interactive documentary. Finally, another alternative is to define the documentary from the perspective of users. One of the basic expectations for documentaries is that “its sounds and images bear an indexical relation to the historical world” (Nichols, 1991:27). That is why the documentary is often perceived as realistic: the viewer's assumption is based on the belief that things have happened in front of the camera, and that they would have happened anyway if the camera had not been there. Whether this hypothesis is true or false is irrelevant, as the audience's expectation is what matters.

The idea of **including the viewer and/or user in the definition of** a discursive device like the documentary is particularly relevant to Gaudenzi (2009:17), as it emphasizes the device as a relational object and lessens the importance of control of the device. Nichols also offers another possible approach to defining what a documentary could be. As mentioned above, instead of concentrating on its participants he focuses on their “modes” of representation. The types of representation are “basic ways of organizing texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions” (Nichols, 1991:32). A mode conveys a perspective on reality, because the logic that a documentary adopts says a great deal about the position adopted by the filmmaker and his audience when trying to intervene in reality. The emphasis is on how the documentary is produced, which is apparent in its structure and the way the various agents involved are positioned.

At the heart of Nichols's vision is the belief that “Documentary film practice is the site of contestation and change” (Nichols, 1991:12) which is a particularly relevant approach for this study. However, as we have seen, Nichols does not adopt a single definition, but instead chooses three points of view (the filmmaker, the text and the viewer) to argue that all three make up the overall logic that creates the way the documentary represents reality. We will maintain this approach when analyzing the interactive multimedia documentary and defining its characteristics. When proposing the analytical model, we will also adopt a systemic approach (using the term “author” where Nichols uses the term “producer”, “user” instead of “viewer” and “technology” instead of “text”), but introducing and reversing the crucial question. We will not consider how to represent reality, but rather how to interact with it. For this reason, Gaudenzi (2009:5) calls them non-linear modes of interaction, rather than modes of representing reality:

“because I want to enforce a view of the documentary as praxis of doing, rather than praxis of communication or representation. In Chapter 1 (the literature review) I argue that the famous *modes of representation* presented by documentary theorist Bill Nichols were relevant for linear documentaries but that it is *modes of interaction* that become key in interactive documentaries.” (Gaudenzi, 2009:5)

5.2 The modes of interaction according to Sandra Gaudenzi

Sandra Gaudenzi¹In her research initially entitled *Digital interactive documentary: from representing reality to co-creating reality* and subsequently - and finally - entitled *Interactive Documentary: towards an aesthetic of the multiple* (2009)² adopts an **original approach to the history of the interactive documentary** based on a limited series of selected examples that show how the evolution of so-called new media has created new opportunities and logics for the representation of reality. Gaudenzi sets out one of the core concepts of her research, modes of interaction, as well as the evolution of Nichols' documentary modes of representation. She argues her case as follows:

“In the same way Nichols has proposed *modes of representation* to generalize the different logics that filmmakers have adopted in linear documentary making, I will propose *modes of interaction* to illustrate the ways interactive authors have positioned their users, and used

¹Sandra Gaudenzi is a tutor on the Masters Degree Course in Interactive Media at the *London College of Media* (part of the *University of the Arts London*). She is preparing her doctorate on the interactive documentary at the Cultural Studies Department at *Goldsmiths University of London*. She has worked in television production and interactive digital television in Great Britain, but as she herself says, when she realises that interactivity on television was minimal, she decided to start investigating the relationship between the interactive media and the documentary.

²This research study is being written (and therefore may undergo considerable changes), and Gaudenzi is completing the fourth chapter, with which she expects to complete and defend her research, and thereby obtain the DEA (Diploma of Advanced Studies) in December 2010.

technology, to portray the reality they were interested in via the interactive documentary. To trace a short history of digital interactive documentaries (it barely started thirty years ago) it would be tempting to adopt a strictly chronological approach, and to assimilate different styles to an evolution of pre-existing genres (educational, simulation, games etc...) or even by topics of interest (travel, history, diary, nature etc...). But those approaches do not investigate the set of relations that are the focus of this research.” (Gaudenzi, 2009:23)

As is evident from the paragraph quoted above, Gaudenzi suggests various modes of interaction to define what she believes are the interactive ways in which authors communicate with their audience by means of the interactive documentary. When defining a history of the **digital interactive documentary** (which is what she calls them, and suggests a new nomenclature of **autopoietic interactive documentaries**), she says that it could be possible to adopt a strictly chronological approach, which would enable the assimilation of different styles based on an evolution of pre-existing genres (educational, simulation, games, etc.), or on topics of interest (travel, history, news, nature, etc.). However, she says that these approaches are not the right way to successfully undertake the research.

In order to analyse the various logics of negotiation with reality, she establishes a parallel between the way interactivity has been understood and used in existing interactive documentaries, and the relationships between the author, the user and the media that have been imposed. **The modes of interactivity** that she follows are the author's first attempt to analyse and classify the main trends in this area. These modes will be used primarily to formulate questions about the relationships between interactive digital documents and the author, the user, the production process and the media. What most interests Gaudenzi is the study of how the interaction between the user and the interface (including the programs) has been established and which idea of communication has inspired it.

From a perspective based on the terminology of Human-Computer Interaction, the author attempts to trace how the advent of personal computers has inspired various types of interaction between content and the user. Her hypothesis (2009:23-24) is that these modes correspond to different views, and sometimes preferences, of what a more or less open communication with the machine can generate, and the place where subjectivity can be positioned or be created in a digital exchange.

In general, Gaudenzi (2009) believes that the linear filmmaker is a narrator and needs control, but the interactive documentary producer is more like a deified figure that aims to create the world of the documentary, but not to influence it. She uses theory and cybernetics to illustrate the metaphor of the documentary as a living being, in which the documentary filmmaker is what gives it life, but the documentary itself is also sustained by contributions from people outside it. She calls this concept an autopoietic documentary, which means that it is constantly adapting to changes in the system in which it exists, and at the same time this enables it to survive changes

in both technology and cultural perceptions. For Gaudenzi, this is the ideal version of an interactive documentary, which exists thanks to interaction with the user and which can provide a better representation of the “truth” by enabling representation of the infinite perspectives of reality that the documentary contains.

However, although the autopoietic documentary does not yet exist, the author calls these four modes of interaction the **conversation**, **hypertext**, **participative** and the **experiential mode**. As shown in Table 5.1, each one provides a metaphor and defines its own user functions, its role as an author and its logic of interactivity. The modes are neither hierarchical nor chronological, and are much less comprehensive in the representation of a field in constant evolution. They are a way of looking at trends in a genre that is not yet clearly established (Gaudenzi, 2009:40).

Taula 5.1

MODES OF INTERACTION IN DIGITAL INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY

	INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY EXAMPLES	LOGIC OF INTERACTIVITY (DIFFERENT SOURCES)	FUNCTION OF THE USER (ACCORDING TO E. AARSETH)	ROLE OF THE AUTHOR
CONVERSATIONAL MODE (Metaphor = Conversation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The Aspen Moviemap (1980) MIT * Sim City (1989) Will Wright * The Sims (2000) Will Wright * Americas Army (2002) US Army * JFK Reloaded (2004) Traffic Software 	Inspired by Andy Lippman's 5 corollaries: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. interruptability 2. graceful degradation 3. limited look ahead 4. no default 5. impression of infinite database 	Role playing Configurative	To create a world , its rules and the user's agency
HITCHHIKING / HYPERTEXT MODE (Metaphor = Hitchhiking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Moss Landing (1989) Apple M.MediaLab * Inmemory (1997) Chris Marker * Bleeding through: Layers of Los Angeles (2003) Labyrinth Project * Forgotten Flags (2007) Florian Thalhofer * Rehearsing Reality (2007) Nina Simoes 	Inspired by Turner's algorithmic computation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * limited storage * computation is closed * behavior is fixed 	Explorative	To create possible paths within a closed database
PARTICIPATIVE MODE (Metaphor = Building or one-sided conversation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Boston Renewed Vistas (1995-2004) Davenport * Depford TV (2005-ongoing) Adnan Hadzi * The Echo Chamber Project (2006-ongoing) Kent Bye * Over the Hills website (2007-ongoing) Sunny Bergman 	Inspired by : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * interruptability * evolving database 	Explorative Configurative	To create the condition to populate a database Decide what to do with the database
EXPERIENTIAL MODE (Metaphor = Dancing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Greenwich Emotional Map (2005-6) Christian Nold * Rider Spoke (2007) Blast Theory 	Inspired by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> interactive computation (or the Super-Turing computation) * interaction with the world * infinity of memory and time resources * evolution of the system 	Explorative Role Playing Configurative Poetic	To design experiences in a dynamic environment

5.1 Modes of interaction used to articulate a chronology of the digital interactive documentary according to the analysis of Sandra Gaudenzi (2009)

5.3 Approach to a definition

While the definition of a documentary is vague and undergoing construction, as seen in Chapter 3, the definition of the interactive multimedia documentary is at an even earlier stage. Here we propose a possible approach to the concept and definition of interactive documentaries, based on arguments in the study by Sandra Gaudenzi mentioned above. She says:

“If documentary is a fuzzy concept, digital interactive documentary is a concept yet to be defined. This comes with no surprise, since it is an emergent field, but the lack of writing on digital interactive documentary has also to do with the fact that new media artists do not consider themselves documentary makers, and therefore they call their work anything but interactive documentaries. In 2002 artist and academic Mitchell Whitelaw was noticing the rise of the terminology “interactive documentary” (Gaudenzi, 2009:20).

The problem in defining a multimedia interactive documentary arises not only from its lack of acceptance or from the failure to define a main trend. According to Gaudenzi, this is clearly illustrated by the fact that many film and documentary critics doubt whether an interactive documentary can be considered as such, due to the lack of a narrative voice. Those who have tried to define the term have treated the interactive digital documentary as an **evolution of the linear documentary**, within a framework of the prevalence of digital convergence. They assumed that the interactive documentary is basically video and its associated interactivity is only one way of navigating its visual content. Among those who have attempted to describe the genre are Xavier Berenguer, Carolyn Handler Miller and Katherine Goodnow.

Xavier Berenguer (2004) sees the interactive documentary as a kind of interactive narrative that emerged alongside the hypertext and games of the 1980s. As noted in the discussion of several key concepts of the theory of interactivity in the second chapter, when the narrative becomes interactive as a result of the use of digital media, it can spread in three main directions: interactive narrative, interactive documentary and games. Carolyn Handler Miller, the author of the book *Digital Storytelling* (2004), also sees the interactive documentary as a kind of interactive non-fiction film. She says that viewers “can be given the opportunity of choosing what material to see and in what order. They might also get to choose among several audio tracks” (Handler Miller, 2004:345). From the standpoint of Katherine Goodnow, interactive documentaries are the result of initial experiments in interactive films, where physical rather than cognitive activity is used to navigate directly through existing material (video or film). Gaudenzi considers Goodnow's basic distinction between physical and cognitive functions in the following terms: “Goodnow makes a distinction between cognitive function (the act of understanding and interpreting) and physical activity (where the ‘audience must do something in order to fulfill the desire to know how the story will end, or to explore alternative storylines’)” (Goodnow, 2004:2); but she disagrees with it when she considers the interactive

documentary from the perspective of an evolution from other genres or trends, and instead comes closer to the arguments of Mitchell Whitelaw (2002:3):

“By tying linear and interactive documentaries together the tendency would be to expect them to be somehow similar, or at least in a clear evolutive relation. I personally disagree with this vision and join artist and new media theorist Mitchell Whitelaw when he says that ‘new media doco [documentaries] need not to replay the conventions of traditional, linear documentary storytelling; it offers its own ways of playing with reality’ (Gaudenzi, 2009:21)

Whitelaw gives us a clue which will be at the heart of our approach, which Gaudenzi also adopts (2009:21): the interactive documentary has its own ways or resources for playing with reality, and by extension, representing it. This researcher emphasizes the fact that his historical approach is too brief and superficial, and that much of the information is subject to constant reflection and reformulation. He specifically refers to a series of basic assumptions that are unresolved. In his opinion, considering the interactive documentary as a subcategory of interactive narrative places the burden on the definition of interactive narrative. This leads to the discussion about what interacting with a narrative, interface or with computers entails.

“Although there is a vast literature on this topic, the authors that use the term interactive media are normally not specific about what they mean by this term. Handler Miller describes digital technology as ‘microprocessors, wireless signals, the Web, DVDs, and so on. Interactivity is one of its hallmarks. Older media cannot support back-and-forth communications between the audience and the material -interactivity- and this is a radical difference between the older media and the new (Miller, 2004:XIII). Berenguer just states that the interactive aspects of the first computer ‘only acquired relevance in the cultural sphere with the appearance, in the eighties, of graphic interfaces and the consequent possibilities’ (2007:1). It is assumed that any choice made by the user, or any feed-back provided by the computer counts as interactive. The nature, the levels and the consequences of this interaction are normally ignored” (Gaudenzi, 2009:21-22).

Like this author, we believe that a useful approach would involve an initial assumption that both the linear and the interactive documentary aim to document reality, but the type of material as regards the media and the preferences of their creators and participants end up creating a very different end product. Gaudenzi (2009:22) continues by expressing a basic assumption in her work and analysis when distinguishing between the linear and the interactive documentary:

“If linear documentary demands a cognitive participation from its viewers (often seen as interpretation) the interactive documentary adds the demand of some physical participation (decisions that translate in a physical act such as clicking, moving, speaking, tapping etc...). If linear documentary is video, of film, based, interactive documentary can use any existing media. And if linear documentary depends of the decisions of its filmmaker (both while filming and editing), interactive documentary does not necessarily have a clear demarcation between those two roles [...]” (Gaudenzi, 2009:22).

In short, it seems clear that a possible definition of interactive multimedia documentary should involve the open and complex nature of this particular genre (which is always subject to changes and variations), the ambivalence between the film and interactive areas, and finally its

identification as a discourse intended to convey a particular kind of knowledge linked with reality.

By recapitulating some of the ideas set out above, and in order to focus this approach on the concept, we can provisionally define interactive multimedia documentaries as **online or offline interactive applications, produced in order to represent reality using their own mechanisms, which we will call modes of navigation and interaction, depending on the level of participation involved.**

It is an **emerging genre**, which is in **virgin format and has yet to be explored and defined, and the result of a dual hybridization: between the audiovisual** -the documentary genre - **and interaction** - the interactive digital medium - and **between information** - content - **and entertainment** - the navigable interface.

Interactive multimedia documentaries aim **both to represent and interact with reality**, which implies the **consideration and use of a range of techniques or modes** to do so (navigation and interaction modes), which in this new form of communication become the **key factor in achieving the objectives of the documentary**. The structure of the interactive documentary may be based on one or several perspectives, and may end at a point determined by the author, but a multideployment structure is also possible, encompassing various routes and outcomes.

The use in this paper of the nomenclature of **interactive multimedia documentary** is justified as follows:

Interactive: We call it interactive because the **resulting navigation and interaction takes place using an intermediary that we call an interface**, which is a crucial aspect that **links navigation and content (entertainment and learning)** and a key concept in understanding that the **interactor** plays an important role in the communication process.

Multimedia: Although other words might work well, such as “digital”, “hypermedia” and “web”, the fact of the matter is that all these concepts do not cover the genre as well as the term “multimedia”; the term “digital” is too imprecise, since most audiovisual processes today involve digital parameters; meanwhile, calling it “hypermedia” suggests networks of interconnected hypertextual information, meaning that it is not very accurate; finally, the term “web” means a type of product that can only be found on the Internet, and this does not apply in this case, as this genre can also be found in other media. Interactive multimedia documentaries can be made for other media, such as offline media (as in the examples cited by Ribas, 2000) or the case of *Guernika, pintura de guerra* (2007), which could be viewed on television, on mobile devices or on the Internet. The **use of various different media to convey information** is a feature that clearly distinguishes this type of production from those related to conventional

audiovisual documentaries, which only use sound and images. This is therefore a type of documentary format that **simultaneously uses the various means at its disposal** (multimedia). It also uses different media for distribution and exhibition.

Documentary: It is obvious that all interactive multimedia documentaries aim to **document and represent reality in a particular way** and there is therefore an apparent documentary purpose. In this respect, we are faced with the same interests as in traditional audiovisual documentaries. Taking the proposal in the first chapter as a second precondition (the document must aim to represent reality in order to document a situation in a specific way), the term documentary places the genre in the category of non-fiction film.

A second possible generic approach is the nomenclature of **interactive documentary applications** (or interactive documentary applications), since we believe that the term also fully defines the properties and attributes of the genre studied.

5.4 The distinction between linear documentaries and interactive multimedia documentaries

As suggested above, the proposals that have been made regarding the genre studied herein do not usually attempt to differentiate between the traditional audiovisual documentary and the interactive documentary, as they consider the latter to be a natural evolution of the former, just as the Web 1.0 naturally became the Web 2.0. This evolutionary approach seems insufficient to frame and define such a complex and varied genre.

The first characteristic defining the two areas is obvious: In the former, the traditional documentary presents a criterion of linearity, i.e. we go from a starting point to an end point (from A to B) and follow a path predetermined by the author of the work. The boundaries of authorship and control over the discourse are clearly defined. In the latter case, we start at a starting point proposed by the author (or we can choose), and we find forks and alternative paths along the path we follow. The last word lies with the interactor, rather than the director of the work, as in the first case. It is therefore impossible to talk in terms of a single discourse, but instead about different deployments and by extension, different possible stories. As can be seen in the latter case, **the boundaries of authorship and control over the discourse become less important**, which is a major issue that we address in more depth below.

In short, the key factor differentiating the audiovisual and the interactive spheres is clear: traditional narrative includes linearity and the order of its discourse cannot be altered, while in the interactive sphere this order can be affected and changed. As Berenguer (2004) says, there is “there is reactive behavior in automatisms, and participative behavior in certain works of

communication and expression, but according to this definition, neither one nor the other may be considered interactive.”

As a result, when defining this initial idea, linear documentaries contain reactive components (activated using the DVD remote control, such as watching scenes, subtitles, extras, etc..), while non-linear interactive documentaries contain interactive components, i.e. **it is necessary to understand the system and make decisions to move forward**. In the former, the level of interaction is weak, while in the latter it is medium or strong (in linear documentaries, we watch the film by merely pressing the *play* button on the DVD or by using the mouse, while in interactive documentaries it is necessary to perform several actions to different ends: linking to the application, choosing the language and mode of navigation and interaction, finding out how the system works, moving forward at each branch that is presented, actions related to interaction and the interface, and above all leaving an imprint of progress through the application, are actions related to interaction with the content or other interactors).

Relating the point above with Gaudenzi's idea of physical participation in the interactive documentary, and as a second major distinguishing idea from a mental and physical point of view, it is possible to state that both the linear and the interactive documentary aim to document reality, but the type of reference material in the media and their authors' and participants' preferences end up creating a very different end product. The linear documentary only requires a type of cognitive (mental) participation from its audience, which results in a mental interpretation and reflection on what is seen, while in the latter case, the interactive documentary, in addition to cognitive interpretation, requires **a type of physical participation** related to decision-making that involves using the mouse, movement around the virtual scenario, using the keyboard and writing, speech, etc.. Gaudenzi argues (2009:97):

“[...] a certain level of interaction has been experimented in linear documentary films. This interaction was only possible by acknowledging that the observer, the filmmaker, is in active relation with her shooting environment. For a long time the passage from observation to enaction only took place between the filmmaker and the participants during the filming. From the moment the film started being edited it acquired a close form. The novelty of social and participative media is to include the viewer, the third level observer, and to give her agency in the feedback loops between media, content and environment. As a result the viewer participant engages differently in an interactive documentary than in a linear one. Her agency goes far beyond the act of interpretation or empathy, typical in linear films, and stretches as far as new modes of interaction can go. What is relevant in digital interactive forms is the degree of agency that the multiple participants have on the final product and how those actions will position them. The degree of agency depends on the different modes of interaction that are possible in digital media.” (Gaudenzi, 2009:97).

Finally, linked to the concepts set out above, this physical response that is required of the interactor is carried out using elements that the interactive documentary itself presents: **modes of navigation and interaction**. Bill Nichols' modes of representation were relevant in linear

documentaries, but in this case, when analyzing interactive documentaries, it is modes of navigation and interaction which are the key elements. This perspective redirects the focus of the study of the documentary as a finished product that can be analyzed in terms of styles and conventions (camera position, the presence of a voice-over, the editing style, its political role, etc.) toward a study of the documentary as a dynamic form, as a system comprising its relationships with different realities (the people that have been interviewed, the mediation of the camera, the private thoughts of the author, the user's participation, the cultural and economic context, etc.).

Finally, the fact that the analysis of the interactive multimedia documentary is carried out based on its modes of navigation and interaction is the fourth major difference between the two types of documentaries. During the production process, a linear documentary can change constantly, but once it has been edited, this process of change stops. The production process and the viewing process remain separate in analogue media. This is not the case with interactive digital media. In interactive documentaries, the process does not stop, and by extension, they can be considered “living systems” that continue to change until while collaboration and participation is sustainable, or desired by the users or systems within it.

5.5 Loss of control over the narrative.

The biggest difference (and conflict) between the objectives of the traditional documentary and the goals of the interactive documentary are in the **area of authorship and control over the narrative discourse**. In his article *Interactive documentary: a production model for nonfiction multimedia narratives*, Inssok Choi (2009:44) points out that the documentary film exists in order for the filmmaker to tell a story, i.e. the director is the author, which means he is responsible for contextualizing the perspectives and foundations by means of the narrative. In essence, the role of the filmmaker is to create meaning from reality. The interactive documentary, on the other hand, enables its users to take control of the narrative of the story, **threatens the role of the documentary filmmaker as an author and therefore his/her ability to create meaning** (Galloway, 2007:335).

For example, instead of editing a film in a linear way, a documentary filmmaker may decide to create a database of video clips and interviews, which an interactor can use to navigate by using a graphical user interface (GUI), which allows the user to look at subjects of interest in more depth, in order to create a highly personal documentary experience. This example, which is just one of many possibilities, is disturbing for some documentary filmmakers, because this dynamic of loss of control is diametrically opposed to their goal as filmmakers, which is to tell a story based on their experience of life in a subjective and personal way. As noted by Sandra Dickson (2009), a documentary filmmaker and lecturer at Wake Forest University, it may even be

irresponsible for the filmmaker to give up this control, because without any context referred to in the film (which the documentary filmmaker usually provides), the material itself may be completely misinterpreted.

The traditional documentary is used to set out a point of view (that of the documentary filmmaker), but the interactive documentary has the potential to provide many. In short, **adding interactivity entails losing control over the meaning of the film**, and for many filmmakers this is simply not their goal. Authorship is an inherent goal of the traditional documentary and it is therefore resistant to the consolidation of interactive media and the way they construct discourse. However, this does not mean that filmmakers do not use the Internet as a platform. Instead, documentaries are discovering that this platform can be used for distribution at a time when the industry is saturated, due to the heavy competition between companies and between documentary filmmakers themselves.

However, there are several technical and bureaucratic problems related to the integration of the Internet and the documentary. As regards bureaucracy, filmmakers often sacrifice the ability to show films at festivals if they are online, and are therefore forced to decide between going on the lucrative festival circuit, or allowing the film to be shown online. Sometimes the two situations occur simultaneously and the genre coexists online and offline. Internet is usually a last resort for film distribution, and this happens when the films are not selected for the festival circuit. Meanwhile, from a technical standpoint, the main problem is that this limited use of the Internet aims to place a passive medium on an interactive platform, i.e. a project is placed online, but the potential for interaction remains low. Moreover, the computer screen does not have the features for receiving and display that the cinema screen or high definition television has (Britain, 2009:6).

5.6 The loss of perspective or narrative line

Without the standpoint of a good interactive experience, the user may wonder why he should interact with it. In short, without a specific narrative or perspective, the experience may be boring and lack meaning, whether or not the documentary is interactive. As Connor Britain points out (2009:7), a good example of this concept can be found in two examples of interactive documents, *Black Friday* (2004)³ and *Becoming Human* (1982)⁴. The first tells the story of a series of devastating fires in Victoria, Australia, while the second explores the origins of the human species. They both contain the same two levels of interactivity and allow the user to click on the entire space and explore the information of interest, but *Becoming Human*

³Available for consultation online at: <http://www.abc.net.au/blackfriday/home/default.htm>

⁴Available for consultation online at: <http://www.becominghuman.org/>

constructs a narrative around the theme itself, which is completed with the introduction of video and the inclusion of individual perspectives on the subject. *Black Friday*, on the other hand, only explains the events from a historical standpoint and does not have an overall perspective on the subject. It is mainly used to provide textual information, neglecting audio and video capabilities, and the various interactive features are loosely held together rather than bound by a general description.

The documentary ultimately works as a result of its ability to organize a story in a way that is both informative and entertaining. And according to tradition, the interactive format must try to provide similar experiences that effectively and attractively combine leisure - entertainment - with education - knowledge. By combining these two aspects it is possible to compare the nonfiction genre studied here to approaches that lie closer to fiction. Alex Gibney (2009), the film director, notes that the power of the documentary lies in its ability to use cinematic techniques to create intimate images that lead people to continue to think about the subject after the film ends. As he said in an interview with Connor Britain in October 2009: "This can't be expressed in a paper or in an essay, which is the beauty of the documentary," says Gibney. "It's a narrative account of real life. It's reality that rises to the mythic." (Gibney, 2009)

In the modern news and entertainment market, the audience's time has become the most prized commodity by the media. In Western society, people today have sufficient financial resources to consume any medium but do not have the time to consume them. Ensuring this consumption time is a strategic objective for the media. Various authors define the current market for news as a market for attention (Salaverría, 2003:37). The interactive documentary exists in an interactive environment where users spend an average of 56 seconds on any page, and retaining users' attention is thus no easy task. *Black Friday* contains information about events, but there are no characters to relate them to: there is no combination of narrative and image to force users to stay on the page and make them leave with a deep and lasting impression. The power of a film to tell compelling stories and send convincing messages is as essential in the interactive documentary genre as it is in the linear documentary, and as such it is crucial to the genre's success. Authorship is not just a foible that documentary directors want to retain in their work telling stories, but it is also this strong narrative voice that makes documentaries so compelling. If it is impossible to provide compelling experiences with interactivity, the work will not meet its objectives as a documentary. Although it is clear that the digital medium attracts a wide audience, some degree of authorship and a clear perspective must be maintained, so that the user's experience is linked to a good understanding of the subject (Britain, 2009:8)

5.7 Some examples of classifications

5.7.1 The four categories of interactive documentary described by Galloway, McAlpine and Harris (2007)

These are not to be confused with the four modes of interaction proposed by Sandra Gaudenzi (2009). Dayna Galloway (2007:325), in her article *From Michael Moore to JFK Reloaded: Towards a working model of interactive documentary* (2007), with Kenneth McAlpine and Paul Harris, produces four categories of interactive documentary. These four categories are **passive adaptation, active adaptation, immersive, and expansive interactive documentaries**.

The passive adaptation documentary is similar to the concept of the CyberBELT system, in which the user looks at the documentary and the database makes changes based on feedback from users on the subject (using technology to detect these responses). The active adaptation category simply gives the user the ability to consciously navigate within the documentary (similar to Gaudenzi's **hitchhiking mode**). The immersive category makes the user's input and feedback become fully participatory and places the user inside the world portrayed, so that they can experience the events at first hand (as in Gaudenzi's **conversation mode**). This concept uses the idea of games and virtual worlds as documentary experiences. Finally, the expansive category uses a method of mass interaction to provide a community-based documentary experience (similar to **Gaudenzi's participatory mode**), i.e. a wiki-documentary (Galloway et al, 2007: 331-335). These four categories of interactive documentary work to a large extent due to the use of virtual experiences to create documentary experiences.

5.7.2 The docu-game. Towards the immersive mode

Video games have begun to tap the potential of sophisticated simulations, thanks to modern technology and by doing so, are creating a potential new future for documentary experiences (Britain, 2009:12). The rapid growth of the video game industry has led to the creation of a number of new genre niches, but few are more controversial than the advent of documentary computer games known as “serious games”. Unlike most video games, these simulations focus on education, training or politics, and have a purpose other than entertainment (Raessens, 2006:215).

As Joost Raessens says in *Reality play: Documentary computer games beyond fact and fiction* (2006), the main objective of the “docu-game” as it is often called, is to expose players to past events and to strive for “facticity” (Raessens, 2006:215). But can a video game provide a significant view of real life events? The author highlights the docu-game’s assiduous reconstruction of the complexity of real life experiences by means of simulation of “feelings, moral decisions and sensitivity,” and that they provide the player with a sense of a situation that

they would otherwise have not had the opportunity to experience (Raessens, 2006:215-216). Galloway, McAlpine and Harris (2007:329) argue that there are enough parallels between the documentary and the objectives of the docu-game to make the comparison a fair one, and note that because the video game has an innate ability to create appealing stories and characters, it easily lends itself to the player's immersion in the simulation.

5.8 Basic characteristics of the interactive documentary

At this point, we considered it appropriate to group the main defining features that characterize the interactive multimedia documentary, based on the triple definition provided by Nichols (1991) described in chapter 3. In this new scenario, we replace the figure of the director (which is most associated with the audiovisual and film genre) with that of the **author** (because the concept of authorship is one of the major issues in the problems to be resolved); the text (deemed to be a script and a linear audiovisual discourse) for the term **narrative** or discourse (non-linear or multilinear interactive) and the concept of the spectator (passive audiovisual) for that of the **interactor** (with active, contributory and generative attributes). One of the aims of these characteristics is to concentrate, synthesize and bring together some of the key ideas outlined in the previous chapters.

5.8.1 Characteristics from the viewpoint of the author (broadcaster)

1.a. The director's loss of control and regeneration of the system

The new genre and the new methods of navigation and interaction resulting have **generative features for the user**, and at this point **the author loses control over the flow of his work** and the genre assumes unknown connotations. The end result of the documentary (what it says) and the discursive order (how it is said) may end up taking a very different form from the form that the director initially placed in the script.

1.b. The author's role of assistance

The loss of control means that the author is in a **situation of assistance** as regards the interactor. We will initially consider personal authorship, but it is not a finished product; authorship becomes shared and the director of the work grants control of linear and nonlinear flow. According to Berenguer (2004), instead of allowing themselves to be taught by the author - the basic premise in linear discourses in the traditional media - in interactive media the author assume a role that is more based on assistance and the relationship with viewers is more in terms of the latter **allowing themselves to be helped to discover**. In short, control of the discourse no longer lies exclusively with the author of the work, but instead the interactor must

learn some **guidelines and mechanisms** without which it is impossible to move forward in the narrative. Meanwhile, Ribas points out:

“A very important point to consider is the relationship between the author-reader, the ways that control is shared between them and the opportunities available to the author, by means of this transfer of control, to establish the conditions for the receiver to enjoy interacting with the application with the utmost intensity and involvement in the experience, in order to achieve the anticipated knowledge transfer objectives. [...] This unusual relationship as regards authorship has undergone a major change since the advent and evolution of the so-called collaborative web and as a result of this transformation, all genres that also depend on it have also undergone profound changes” (Ribas, 2000:8).

5.8.2 Characteristics from the point of view of the discourse or narrative (text)

2.a. Varied terminology to refer to similar projects

Projects of this nature can be **called by various names**: multimedia applications, hypermedia applications, hyperdocuments, interactive multimedia applications, or simply interactive projects and hypertext. Gaudenzi suggests other terminologies that are very far removed from the original concept, and often arise because these projects are considered **as related to the documentary field** by the industry:

“Since digital interactive documentaries is still an emerging field (it barely started thirty years ago), it is difficult to find such examples, mainly because people refer to themselves with various terminologies: new media documentaries, digital documentaries, interactive film, database narrative etc... Most of the time what I would consider an interactive documentary is not linked by the industry with the “documentary family” and is called an online forum, a digital art piece, a locative game, and educational product, a 3D world, an emotional map, etc., making my search for examples particularly difficult” (Gaudenzi, 2009:10).

2.b. Educational and documentary interactive multimedia applications

Interactive multimedia documentaries may fit within a more general interactive genre, which could be defined as **educational and documentary interactive multimedia applications**. According to Ribas (2000:7), they are “specific networks with interconnected information, produced by an author or, more significantly, by a team of authors, aimed at a specific audience in a specific context and with the basic aim of transferring to it a specific cultural content or knowledge, without an explicit educational purpose.” More specifically, these are hypermedia applications (interactive applications and multimedia or interactive multimedia applications), i.e. specific networks of interconnected multimedia information. And if we reduce the field further, we focus on “those which have a specific purpose and therefore a structure and constraints on navigation that are consciously chosen by an author with a view to achieving the objectives of the application, in accordance with the mechanisms of the interactive media” (Ribas, 2000: 94).

2.c. Format types associated with nonfiction genres

The interactive multimedia documentary is a type of format related to **nonfiction genres**. This nonfiction is **interactive** and is based on a desire to transfer knowledge using informal education, i.e. the focus is on projects with a clear aim of dissemination, but under no circumstances is the interactor obliged to learn the lesson, and there is always at least one specific way to interact with the system (the user has to make decisions to progress), and they are located on the Internet.

Formal and informal education are all the systematized and even institutionalized activities that follow a more or less exhaustive specific curriculum. Informal education is a series of ongoing permanent processes by means of which people acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills, attitudes and ways of discerning, based on their daily experiences and their relationship with their environment. As Ribas points out in his article *Cultural dissemination and interactive audiovisual communication*, from 2001:

“We will place cultural dissemination in this latter field of informal education together with, for example, television or cinema documentaries and books, magazines or educational television programs. Although, obviously, the borders are not always clear, we will analyse products characterized by an absence of an explicitly educational intention, to systemize the process from the didactic point of view and to look for intrinsic intentions in the receiver, that is, not motivated by anything other than personal interest.” (Ribas, 2001:182)

2.d. Documentation of a specific reality

One of the *sine qua non* requirements of the application for belonging to the genre studied is that it should aim to depict reality, in order to document a situation in a particular way.

2.e. Hypertext, nodes and links

From an analytical perspective, the structure of the interactive multimedia documentary is a hypertextual skeleton made of nodes, links and anchors. What varies is the type of media handled, which range from the purely textual to a mixture of various formats (image, sound, text, etc.). According to Ribas (2000:36), **hypertext** can be defined as “a network of interconnected pieces of textual information.” It is a system for organizing information based on the ability to move around within a text and visit different texts using keywords. The core elements of hypertext are nodes, semantic units that express a single idea or concept from the characteristic point of view of the content. Links are the parts of the network connecting the nodes which allow the user to move node to node. There is usually a small portion of the source node to which the link is connected. This small part, which could be a word, a phrase, a part of an image, is called the anchor of the link (Ribas, 2000:37).

2.f. Nodal and branched scheme of the narrative discourse

Interactive systems must provide more than one deployment at a time and the more varied these are, the better. The key factor that differentiates the audiovisual from the interactive areas is the former's linearity, which means that the order of the discourse cannot be changed, while in the interactive area **this order can be affected, and even changed**. The calligram is a perfect example of the intended message: its structure is designed as a very basic sample of a diversified work that enables multiple readings. For Berenguer (1998) there are four models that adapt different possible structures of non-linear narrative: branched, interrupted, object-oriented and conservative non-linear narrative.

2.h. Non-linear narrative

Non-linear narrative (comparable for an author to the **loss of control over the discourse**) is seen as a **problem** in the world of traditional documentaries. Whitelaw (2002:1) explains it as follows: 'New media forms pose a fundamental challenge to the principle of narrative coherence, which is at the core of traditional documentary. If we explode and open the structure, how can we be sure that the story is being conveyed?' Whitelaw considers the open structure of the works and the type of information transmitted. Granting autonomy to the user raises many questions regarding the transfer of control and what form the original discourse may assume, based on its constant regeneration and restructuring.

5.8.3 Characteristics from the point of view of the interactor (reception)

3.a. Online and offline reception

The two major differences between offline applications and online applications are that offline applications are located on **hardware** while online applications use an online medium such as the Internet. In terms of granting control, online genres are more flexible and open to participation by the user. Offline genres are associated with Web 1.0 platforms, using media that are closed to user contributions, while online applications are today associated with a network with **collaborative and generative** attributes on the part of the interactor. According to Sandra Gaudenzi (2009:4), when we refer to interactive documents located on the Internet, we are referring to interactive digital documents which "not only use a digital format that could be any existing medium, from digital video to mobile phones or the Internet, but which also require a physical interaction - the body - by the user - participant," a participation that goes beyond the mental act of interpretation, "in order to identify the various logics for the documentation of reality and possible new models of subjectivity."

3.b. Interaction-based decision making for progressing (modes of navigation) and relating to others (modes of interaction)

The concept of *interaction* is present in products that present any type of physical interaction: corporal, using the mouse or other devices for interaction - gloves, sensors, microcontrollers, etc. - and which encourage the user-participant-interactor (rather than a mere spectator who interprets what they observe) to participate in them and generate a specific type of content. Based on Berenguer's approach, we have divided interaction into three categories: **strong, medium and weak**. In the case that concerns us here, one of the requirements when establishing a proposal for classification is that the application must use digital technology with medium or strong interaction (it must involve the user and move towards a kind of physical response in the strictest sense of the term). Decision-making is therefore considered a basic requirement for moving forward in the story. The user can interact using the interface (and its modes of navigation) or using the content and / or other users (types of interaction).

3.c. New receivers making up a new type of audience

These receivers, to which the parameters proposed by Alejandro Piscitelli (2009) as regards his concept of digital natives can be applied, make up a **new audience** with two attributes that characterize and define it: it is **educated in interaction** and **educated in front of computer screens** rather than the television. According to Berenguer (1998), interactive narratives can excite a new audience, in the same way as a traditional narrative does. This happens because of a “digitally native” generational change, a **development of technologies** and an **interactive culture**, i.e. a culture of works of communication with the computer as a medium.

3.d. Open and generative system: a living system that adapts to an environment

We use the main contribution by Gaudenzi (2009) when considering the interactive documentary as an “autopoietic” mechanism or living organism that relates to its environment by means of various types of interaction. Herein lies the main difference between linear narrative and digital interactive narrative;

“This is one of the differences between linear and interactive documentaries: digital interactive documentaries can be seen as “living systems” that continue to change themselves until collaboration and participation is sustainable, or wished by the users, or by the systems that compose it. In order to see the documentary as a system in constant relation with its environment, and to see it as “a living system” I propose in this research to use a Cybernetic approach, more precisely a Second Order Cybernetic approach, and to see the documentary as an autopoietic entity with different possible levels of openness, or closure, with its environment”(Gaudenzi, 2009:6).

3.e. The viewer's status changes: he is an active user-interactor-participant-contributor

The interactive medium is potentially useful for helping the interactor to **discover, select, reflect, participate and even create**. The viewers of this new medium, who are no longer passive spectators but are instead active interactors, gain in terms of presence and identification, and are involved in the audiovisual experience and share it with others in turn. They become a **user** in the sense that they are part of a pre-established system and they use it for their own ends; an **interactor**, because they interact with the modes and the interface to move forward in the proposed display; a participant, as they actively participate in the display, while choosing the path that seems most appropriate to them; and a **contributor**, because they contribute to the generation of the system and contribute knowledge based on content or subjective impressions.

