

THE INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY
A PROPOSED ANALYSIS MODEL

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR RESEARCH

7.1 Foreseeable evolution of the interactive multimedia documentary

In this study, we have attempted to provide an overview of the general issues regarding the documentary genre and the new interactive digital media. We have described the context in which the new format is developed, the web, and the type of product of which it forms a part, interactive applications. Based on the appropriate introductions to areas of interactive digital media, the linear documentary, participatory technologies and educational interactive and knowledge transfer applications, we have attempted to argue that this convergence has led to the emergence of a new genre, which we call the “**interactive multimedia documentary**,” with its own specific characteristics. The new logics of documentary representation in this new genre are more related to how we navigate and interact with content and other interactors, rather than the way the real object is represented by the documentarist. In short, the new indicators that identify the genre are based more on the modes and submodes of navigation and interaction than on the conventional linear representation of reality. Finally, in order to establish and define the conceptual framework in a precise and concrete way, we have constructed a possible analytical model focusing on the genre studied, which also aims to become a model for the creation and production of this type of documentary.

As a general conclusion of this research study, prior to the doctoral thesis, we would like to present a **classification and categorization of the foreseeable development of the interactive multimedia documentary**, as shown in Table 7.1. The left-hand column shows a possible categorization into four main categories or levels. The right-hand column provides a description of each category, its main characteristics and a selection of significant examples that fall within that category (most are examples mentioned in Table 6.6 of the previous chapter). The table structure is pyramidal, i.e. the further up the table, the more recent and more advanced the category is than those below it (basically the display medium, the level of openness - assignment of control - and contribution and the modes it presents). **Offline multimedia documentaries** (1) are therefore equivalent to interactive works for cultural dissemination and those of other genres on an external medium such as a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM; at a second level, **online linear documentaries** (2) are the audiovisual works in the traditional documentary sphere, located on the Internet for greater dissemination, distribution and visibility; and third,

online interactive multimedia documentaries (3) are the focus of study in this research and, finally, **online generative multimedia documentaries** (4) are at present the most highly evolved and least experienced category, in which the receiver becomes an interactor, producer and contributor to the work itself.

Table 7.1 CATEGORIES OF INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY

CATEGORY AND MODES IT COVERS	DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLES
<p>4. ONLINE GENERATIVE MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARIES <i>(Online) Multimedia Generative Documentary (MGD) GENERATIVE INTERACTION MODE</i></p> <p>+ ALL THE NAVIGATION MODES</p> <p>INTERACTION MODE WITH APPLICATIONS 2.0</p>	<p>The user is not only limited to viewing content in a linear way or navigating in different modes in a non-linear way, but instead interacts as they leave an imprint of their time in the application: This trail can lead to discussions in a forum or in the most advanced sense of making audiovisual contributions to the same itself, while adding videos and experiences to the documentary.</p> <p>They mix the modes of non-linear navigation and modes of digital interaction effectively.</p> <p><i>City of memory (2009)</i> <i>Guernika, pintura de guerra (2007)</i> <i>MetamentalDoc Multimedia (2010)</i> <i>Our First Loves (2009)</i> <i>Spacing Montreal (2009)</i></p>
<p>3. ONLINE NON LINEAR MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARIES</p> <p><i>(Online) Multimedia Interactive Documentary (MID)</i></p> <p>ALL THE MODES OF NAVIGATION</p>	<p>The website itself contains no documentary, it is the documentary</p> <p>They have one or more modes of non-linear navigation They may contain an entire audiovisual documentary, split in parts and other types of navigate the content (or other modes for navigating and organizing the information and content)</p> <p><i>BCNova (2003)</i> <i>Becoming Human (2008)</i> <i>Capturing Reality: the Art of Documentary (2008)</i> <i>Gaza Sderot (2008)</i> <i>GDP:Spacing Montreal (2009)</i> <i>Guernika, pintura de guerra (2007)</i> <i>Hope: Living and Loving with HIV in Jamaica (2006)</i> <i>Journey to the End Of The Coal (2009)</i> <i>The Big Issue (2009)</i> <i>The Iron Curtain Diaries (2009)</i></p>

	<i>Jazz Loft Project (2010)</i> <i>360degrees (2001)</i>
2. ONLINE LINEAR DOCUMENTARIES <i>Audiovisual Online Documentary</i> AUDIOVISUAL NAVIGATION MODE	Websites that contain online documents, either complete or divided into themes, sequences, chapters, etc. The documentary can be consumed in a linear way or can also be presented divided into different parts <i>Guernika, pintura de guerra (2007, TV3 a la carte)</i> <i>Saving my language (2008)</i> <i>Piraterie en Somalie (2009)</i> <i>Le corps incarcéré (2009)</i> <i>MetamentalmediaDoc (2010)</i>
1. OFFLINE MULTIMEDIA INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARIES <i>Offline Multimedia Interactive Documentary</i> ALL MODES OF NAVIGATION	This category contains various types of predecessor formats of the interactive documentary in a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM application or format: interactive essays, interactive cultural dissemination works, etc. The reader's contribution is limited to a closed offline system, which is always within the navigational parameters established by the author of the work. <i>Le Louvre (1994)</i> <i>Dotze sentits (1996)</i> <i>Opération Teddy Bear (1996)</i> <i>Joan Miró. El color dels somnis (1998)</i>

7.1 Proposed classification and categorization of the interactive multimedia documentary

7.2 Personal reflections on the state of the interactive multimedia documentary

After several years of simultaneous study in the fields of both the digital media and the documentary, I began to wonder how the processes of digitization and distribution of content (over Internet) were affecting the shape and logic of documentary filming. Some of my thoughts are based on what the documentary of the future will be like and how the new logics for representing reality using the online interactive digital media will take shape and be structured.

We believe that the **interactive multimedia documentary cannot be considered simply as an evolution of documentary films**, since this explanation is insufficient to demonstrate the nature and depth of the change. This is apparent if we consider how in the case that concerns us here, the **modes of representation cannot be considered sufficient indicators for analyzing the new genre, while the new modes of non-linear navigation and digital interaction**

resulting from it can. The issues raised by this statement are based on the question of whether there is any continuity between the linear and the interactive documentary, whether the directors who are experimenting with the new media come from different specialized fields, and to what extent the media influence the end product.

The intrinsic nature of the conventional documentary has experienced **major changes** since the advent of this new type of documentary, as a result of today's new technological landscape. Based on Nichols' argument (1991) regarding a possible definition, we specifically analyses **three trends** in depth:

- **The author** can no longer set out to create a unique, closed and subjective narrative program, and must assume to some extent that he will **lose control of his work**, and as such the new situation often works against his interests. In short, he **no longer depends on himself to convey a particular narrative program.**
- **The construction of the discursive narrative and order** involve a linear and sequential pattern in a **new scenario characterized by the multi-deployment of approaches, nodes and outcomes.** The text of the work shifts from a closed to an open structure. The end result of the documentary (what it says) and the discursive order (how it says it) can end up taking a very different form to the contents of the script of the work in its early stages.
- **The interactor** becomes a **broadcaster and contributor of content created by the author:** the new genre and resulting new modes of navigation and interaction include **generative features for the user.** These new parameters allow the interactor to become **part of the system, and even change it, as if it were a living and changing system** (the interactor becomes a co-creator of the work). In the new format, the classic viewer (now an interactor, participant and contributor), assumes **connotations associated with an author** and to a certain extent **becomes the creator of their own personal documentary,** as **they take control of the navigation** (of the order of the discourse) and **use the great power that interaction grants** (the defining feature that distinguishes digital media, thanks to its interface and the ability to relate to others).

The question, after listing all these new and interesting items, is **why the genre as such does not ultimately explode,** and why it is finding it so hard to establish itself and assume a leading role as a new type of non-interactive fiction. In our view, there may be **various reasons,** but we believe that the most important of these are:

- From the standpoint of **the issuer (author) and production,** the two main problems that we can see are first, the **loss of control by the author** mentioned above and the

problems at a subjective and discursive level that this entails; second, the need for a large team to produce an interactive multimedia documentary, as in the case of audiovisual genres - in this case there are two areas (visual and interactive) that are very different and which are often beyond the knowledge of the director of the work. In a multimedia production team, there is sometimes a vast chasm between the people working in the audiovisual and the multimedia areas. This often leads to problems in the design of the interactive multimedia documentary and misunderstandings in group communication, as the working methods and logics in the two media are very different. Some directors play various roles in a documentary, e.g. scriptwriter, director, editor, still photographer, etc. - and this tends not to happen in the multimedia field (a content author in an interactive documentary does not know how to produce information architecture, a flow chart or how to design - much less program - the application). This often leads to problems in the design of the interactive multimedia documentary and misunderstandings in group communication, as **the working methods and logics in the two media are very different**. Furthermore, the very difficulty of constructing a more complicated product in terms of viewing means that many productions are made in the traditional way.

- From the standpoint of the **discourse and type of narrative (text and script)**, having to **consider a multi-deployment system involves much more work for the team of scriptwriters and for the designers and programmers of the application**. There is therefore a considerable increase in the volume of production (it could triple or quadruple the basic work involved in a linear story with a single story), for both the people producing the more audiovisual part (scriptwriters, those responsible for textual and audiovisual content, interviewers, etc.) and for those producing the more interactive art (information architects, graphic and multimedia designers, programmers, etc.). Furthermore, **when producing a branched non-linear type of discourse, it is necessary to adopt a new narrative logic**, and as well as being viewed with considerable disapproval by **some authors** (who ultimately have the last word), this also **requires special training and skills** for successful work with this new discursive and narrative logic.
- From the standpoint of **the interactor (spectator)** and reception, at a technological level **the increase in bandwidth is not sufficient for navigation in these types of projects with the speed and comfort required**. This means that it is necessary to wait for the different parts of the application to load (not only at the beginning, but also sometimes when we activate a specific type of navigational or interactive mode). All of this falls within the modern scenario, characterized by users that demand immediate gratification, which is a determining factor in favor of traditional viewing.

From a **sociological perspective**, related to the habits of the individual or user of the application, we believe that the failure of the interactive multimedia documentary format to achieve good results as a genre has less to do with the technological limitations that the medium requires, but instead with a **trend related to consumption and its individuals. The mental (and physical) effort that the interactor is subjected to in a documentary application is much greater than in traditional viewing.** To put it in layman's terms, it is much more effort to sit in front of a computer screen and make the effort to navigate, find out how the system works and have to make decisions, than to sit in front of a television screen and be able to manipulate content in a simple and linear way. The key factor is that we are culturally accustomed to the latter option, and it is very difficult to change habits of reception. These specific habits, related to leisure and entertainment, are mentally understood as times of relaxation - moments during which the individual, after a long day's work and many hours of concentration, will be unwilling to continue thinking and making decisions, or to concentrate on a task that requires him to continue to do what he has spent the last eight hours or the last eight days doing.

Meanwhile, **the production and distribution of the interactive documentary appears to be at a standstill.** Filmmakers have **few incentives to make their film an interactive project** because doing so would entail **limiting its distribution to the Internet, relinquishing control over authorship and reducing the impact of the film due to the small screen experience**, all of which are factors that are contrary to the nature of the director of the work. Hopefully, the most recent trends, which are experiments based on **hybridization between television and the Internet** - such as the case of the interactive documentary which analyses the painting Guernica (Guernika, pintura de guerra, produced in 2007) - will soon become standards and the problem of finding and viewing this genre will be resolved¹. I agree with Galloway (2007:336) when he attributes much of the failure of the interactive film to the **high expectations of the audience which are unfulfilled due to technical limitations and incomplete aspirations.** He adds that for the interactive documentary to be successful, the audience needs to achieve a better convergence between the concepts of “interactive” and “film” (concepts related to digital literacy and the digital native - entailing a new batch of young experts on new technologies - as suggested by Piscitelli - 2009 - and Berenguer - 2004 - in their respective studies).

¹The specialisation in the format of some producers, such as Honkytonk Films and Upian, in France, or some of the interactive productions by the NFB (National Film Board of Canada), suggest that the outlook for the genre is optimistic.

Following this line of argument, we should ask ourselves **why we are so concerned about the integration of the documentary film with interactive media**. If they really are so contradictory, why not let them lead their separate lives in their own media? Personally I think this is because they **need each other**. And if they need each other, it is then a question of resolving **how to reconcile the differences between the two media**. As is well known, many films find opportunities to extend their life by making use of interactive media, based on the creation of websites, which do not only act as information centers for the film, but also as a resource for additional content and surplus material that was not used in the final montage of the film. This method retains a high degree of authorship, while maintaining the introduction of interactive elements more suitable for the Internet. According to Britain (2009:9), although this may be considered by some to be a very limited definition of the interactive documentary, it at least shows that there is no risk of overlap between the interactive medium and the documentary itself, and that this convergence may provide grounds for optimism for a promising future for the interactive documentary film. **The two media can coexist without the emergence of one leading to the marginalization or elimination of the other.**

Non-linear narrative (comparable for an author to the **loss of discursive control**) is seen as a **problem in the world of the traditional documentary**, but **in this new genre it is considered a great opportunity**. This type of narrative means that audiovisual projects can be given elements that complement and enrich them, providing numerous added values for the viewer's overall experience, so that it is more varied, complete and immersive. It is the documentary film director's job to find the midpoint at which the meaning can be maximized and the audience becomes more committed, and it is at this midpoint that the documentary film and interactive media can coexist. **By combining the power of the film medium to provide perspective and the ability of interactivity to improve the user's participation with the material**, the interactive documentary film may be able to offer more significant documentaries. The idea that interactive media can reduce the distance between the producer and the user is promising for any documentary filmmaker seeking to increase participation in their stories. However, at the other end of the scale, if this difference is diminished by too great an extent, the documentary may lose value and interest, precisely because of the lack of a strong narrative voice and a specific narrative program (this is precisely the fear of most traditional authors).

One of the essential assumptions of the traditional documentary is the desire to **organize a story in such a way that it is informative and entertaining at the same time**. In this respect, the interactive format **must follow tradition and attempt to offer similar experiences that combine as efficiently, originally and attractively as possible, an entertainment with a didactic and/or educational dimension - knowledge**. This is possible mainly as a result of the

combination of the different modes of navigation and interaction in an application, which **enables a multiple exchange between the work and the interactor**. First, the act of navigating and visiting various ideas for presenting and structuring content (information and knowledge), implies **using game strategies and resources**. As a result, using the structure of the interactive documentary, and the modes of navigation, **users to a certain extent “play” with the opportunities which are offered by the work and which can meet their basic needs: those related to fun and entertainment**. Second, this strategy, which is similar to the game experience, usually involves a **deep sense of immersion for the visitor and prevents their learning from being boring and their need for information and learning from disappearing**. The didactic approach offered is therefore attractive and dynamic, and much more so than the approach used in the majority of classic hypertexts. At this stage, **the interactor “learns by playing” and after having “learned the lesson” in a fun, original and relaxed way, can share it with other interactors, in real time or whenever appropriate**. We therefore see how **an interactive document can satisfy a triple need and/or desire: that of the player - entertainment - that of the student or the individual with an interest in cultural-educational issues and / or training, and relational concerns - at a level of communication with other participants**. We believe that **the right combination of these three aspects can make non-fiction multimedia applications as appealing as attractive as fiction-based approaches**. In this regard, Salaverría (2003) highlights the importance of being able to combine entertainment strategies with respect to the dissemination of information in the new interactive paradigm digital:

“The new media demand new ways of presenting information. The hypertextual and interactive potentialities of digital networks mean that the media must make an effort to develop information formats that take advantage of these utilities. [...] The youth of today, i.e. the readers of tomorrow - are used to consuming entertainment-based audiovisual and interactive content, and it is logical that if the media want to attract their attention they will have to develop formats that somehow include these characteristics in the information discourse” (Salaverría, 2003:36).

Another important question about the nature of the documentary concerns why there is a great interest in making a simulation look real. If we have established that we know that a documentary is not necessarily “real”, but provides value for our understanding of the world, why is it important that it appears real? Choi (2009:44) argues that **interactivity can bridge the gap between these two poles in the culture of the documentary, between the user and the producer, between production and reproduction, between authorship and research**. If so, interactivity itself has the power to enhance the perception of reality within the documentary, which in turn leads to greater effectiveness in the user's participation in projects.

In the majority of the multimedia documents analyzed, **audiovisual treatment is very important**. Unlike “computer” style products running in just another window of the operating system, these applications seek to immerse the viewer from the very beginning in the work by means of several factors, which remind us that we are entering something that is more like a film than a computer.

The entire work of the author in a linear documentary is concentrated on the focus or dominant narrative voice and the script and the interviews, while **in the case that concerns us here the work is divided between mixing content and interactive audiovisual language**. As Ribas says:

“Perhaps when this language is consolidated - if that ever happens in the same sense as it does in text - considering these applications as essays will be nonsense and we will spontaneously return to the term documentary. In any event, consideration of this point and comparison with documents about authors' wishes in other media appears to be an enriching way of thinking.” (Ribas, 2000:110).

The audiovisual medium has **reactive components**, i.e. those that react to the actions of the spectator, but they never allow them either to change the order of the discourse or to modify existing content. However, the interactive medium has **interactive components**. These components may have a **weak, medium or strong level or type of interaction**. The **weak and medium** level involves **interaction with the interface and the proposed visual metaphor**, so that the user can choose, navigate and/or progress in a non-linear way through the application, and falls within and is articulated by means of the modes of navigation (split, temporal, spatial, testimonial, branched, hypertext, preferential, audiovisual, sound and immersive). At a more highly evolved level, the **strong level** of interactive language enables **interaction in two ways**: first with **content** - contributing, debating, discussing, etc. and second, **with other interactors** - in real time or at feedback level based on the application itself or its related 2.0 applications. This strong level falls within and is articulated by the **digital forms of interaction** (generative and 2.0 applications).

A very interesting alternative for further enhancement of the interactor's power of choice and organization could be the **creation of playlists**, i.e. **lists grouped according to the preferences of the interactor**, or by establishing even more filters, we could call them **author, user or mixed categorization lists** (called “Favorites”, “Bookmarks” or “Categories”). The idea of the *playlist* (or an ordered list of preferences) has existed for some time, but has mainly been used for pictures and songs. In the latter case, creating a personalized set of favorites or bookmarks would be consistent with the above, but would involve a further step: group categorization. Before starting to navigate or at any time, it would be possible to create some categories and then include different types of media within them, in each preset category. These categories may

be established by the director of the work, by the interactor or both (along the lines of co-creation, at a more highly evolved level and one that is fully interactive in the strictest sense).

7.3 Prospects for research in the doctoral thesis

We conclude by presenting a summary of the possible lines of research that we would like to undertake in the future doctoral thesis.

First, from the theoretical point of view, **we will produce and define the proposed analytical model for the interactive multimedia documentary.** We will then **apply this approach to a significant series of case studies.** Once the approach has been created and implemented, **a thorough reconsideration of the model will be necessary to increase, decrease or modify, if appropriate, the modes, submodes and categories regarding the genre studied.**

Second, having verified the analysis model, **we will systematically classify the representative works in the genre, which we will present using a database that is open, interactive and available online.**

Third, from the perspective of interactive production, **we will consider a specific project as an example of a case study: this will consist of the theoretical and technical production (planning and production) of an interactive multimedia documentary.**

This practical creative study will enhance the intrinsic property of the interactive discourse, **its inclusion of management of user actions.** It also try to show in practice how the detection of new ways to foster the convergence of various media in the digital discourse has led to the existence of new modes of navigation and interaction, and how these two systems can establish links and connections using a modular interconnected structure. In short, the case study aims to show that **integration of multimodality and interaction is the main distinguishing feature of the digital medium.** It will also **attempt to illustrate how this convergence between content and structure occurs, and to apply innovative uses of the languages that converge in interactive digital communication.**

In short, the anticipated research lines are as follows:

- Study of **the transformation of production logics from those in the traditional linear documentary production to those in the interactive multimedia documentary.**
- **Production, definition, and justification of the proposed analytical model for the interactive multimedia documentary.**
- **Application of the proposal to a significant set of case studies.**

- **Reassessment and evaluation of the modes, submodes and categories relating to the genre studied.**
- **Systematic classification of the representative works studied in the context of an open and interactive database, available online.**
- **Undertaking of a practical project: the theoretical and technical production (planning and production) of a multimedia interactive documentary.**

Finally, the objectives of the theoretical analysis and practical implementation of a project include the following:

- **To study and analyses the inclusion of the management of the interactor's actions, as this is a key figure within the new paradigm.**
- **To identify new means of convergence of various media within the digital discourse based on the detection of new forms of navigation and interaction, or the reformulation of existing ones.**
- **To analyses and illustrate how the convergence between the structure and content takes place and to detect, study and apply the innovative uses of language that come together in interactive digital communication.**
- **To confirm that the integration of structure and content leads to new forms of user involvement and new types of enjoyment generally based on strategies for surprise and discovery.**
- **To search for ideas for ensuring the transfer of knowledge and the construction of educational applications based on game strategy, combining the axes (author-reader, control-discovery and enjoyment-difficulty) to assimilate the information in an entertaining and original way, completely unlike the classic hypertexts.**
- **To design a set of guidelines for the production of original and innovative interactive multimedia applications for educational and documentary purposes.**

