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Visual research and the new documentary

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon theoretical, practical and ethical issues facing the production of interactive documentary cinema projects that are based on in-depth, disciplinary, intellectual and/or artistic research questions, such of those concerning anthropological observation and visual studies. The paper considers ways in which perceptions of how documentary images function in digital environments impact documentary practice and production. The interdisciplinary paper draws upon writings in poetry, philosophy, visual studies, cinema studies and art with special attention given to the writings of Dai Vaughn, Nelson Goodman, Charles Bernstein, John Berger, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Michael Renov, as well as to cinematic and digital works by Sharon Daniels, the Labyrinth Project, Jean Rouch, Samuel Bollendorf and Abel Segretin, among others.

KEYWORDS

interactive
documentary
anthropology
worldmaking
editing
reflexivity
realism
panorama

Documentary always exceeds its makers' prescriptions.

(Vaughan 1999)

... (Y)ou can't make bacon and eggs without slaughtering a pig.

(Charles Bernstein's mother as remembered by
Bernstein 2011)

1. For more on how computing is impacting the terms of research, and hence, disciplinary frameworks, see *Switching Codes: Thinking through Digital Technology In the Humanities and Arts* (Bartscherer and Coover 2011). In this volume, scholars and artists in diverse fields discuss how the terms of their practices are being altered through computing. As researchers and artists become trained on the same tools, they understand each other's practices and incorporate terminology that was once alien. However, these tools and terms may hold differing implications and result in surprising evolutions due to the varied contexts of their uses.

1.

Charles Bernstein's collection, *The Attack of the Difficult Poems* (2011) may not say much to directly guide readers to make sense of any particular, or particularly, difficult poem. Rather, through shape-shifting arguments, Bernstein reminds readers in this era of presumed, shortened attention spans that not all ideas are quickly digestible, and he cautions that some poems may seem easy simply because they are not saying anything. Bernstein's proposition, which applies across the arts and most certainly to those interactive documentaries that are developed through extensive research, is that works which challenge the easy consumption of ideas may require time and effort on the part of the receiver, just as they probably did on the part of the maker. Experiencing concentrated engagement, duration, immersion and the gathering of ideas over several sittings even may be of the *essence* of such works, both in form and content. While there do still exist readers and viewers who are eager to plunge into works that are challenging, the entertainment industries may not always appreciate works that slow down either the rush to consume or the speedy dissemination of a capitalist logic, which may be embedded as much in the clicking function as in any content. The rhetoric of ease and brevity pervades discourse on digital media design including that of digital, cinematic media arts, where short-lived design aesthetics often prefigure how innovative questions get asked.¹

At a recent conference dedicated to interactive documentary, for example, a discussant leading a panel on documentary research projects announced displeasure at failing to quickly make sense of (or, indeed, stay with) the works to be discussed when attempting to digest them the evening before. She felt that the works demanded too much of the viewer, and she proposed that such interactive documentaries should, like entertainment works, be tested on focus groups to improve usability. The presumption was that an interactive documentary project should be readily consumable in a single sitting, even a hybrid one that may be the result of many years of research and production. Beyond the momentary surprise of her response given the academic conference context in which research projects are more often the rule than the exception, the question provided illumination upon significant differences in expectations about what documentaries are or do, even if, in practice, borderlines between different documentary modes and genres are frequently blurred. This article responds to these concerns to articulate some of the issues facing interactive documentary cinema projects that are based on in-depth, disciplinary, intellectual and/or artistic research questions.

2.

There are many kinds of cinematic works that might be considered documentaries or which incorporate documentary forms. For example, there are documentaries that tell stories or build arguments; there are those that picture places or record events; there are essay films that present personal observations and subjective viewpoints, activist media, community documentary projects, expressionist studies (including, famously, city symphonies), nature films, reportage and films that grow out of scholarly or artistic research questions. In addition, there are numerous hybrid forms such as *mockumentaries*, which blur borders of fiction and non-fiction, and mixed media or multi-monitor installations, which may set documentary films or segments in juxtaposition with other forms. While defining what is or is not considered a documentary is unrealistic, the understanding of how images of actuality function in human

processes of making sense of existence is both challenging and evolving in the digital age.

Film projects based in visual research, such as those that are frequently produced in fields such as anthropology and visual studies, are themselves richly varied. They range from documentary studies that attempt to present empirical data, such as those of the Britain's Mass Observation Movement of the 1930s, to highly expressive and artistic approaches, such as anthropologist Robert Ascher's hand-painted, animations based upon Tlingit myths such as *Blue: A Tlingit Odyssey* (1991). There are countless works that use original recordings as well as many, such as Vincent Monnikendam's *Mother Dao: The Turtlelike* (1995), which are made entirely from archival recordings. Many of these projects grow out of and through years of research, and in many, film-making may be complemented by other kinds of practices such as writing, quantitative and qualitative data, language acquisition and participant observation. Many incorporate reflexive questions about the relationships between subjective experience, research models and representation.² One of the exciting features of electronic media is how such diverse practices, processes and content may be simultaneously presented to allow users insight into relationships between documentary representations and the contexts from (and by) which they were constructed. Makers can combine observational and reflexive media, and users can follow how films emerge out of lived experience and the data it offers.

Documentaries are *constitutive* (Vaughan 1999: 82). There is far more content in a motion image that a viewer can digest; the viewer, not unlike the maker, constructs understanding from the information flashing by.³ Film viewing mirrors, and perhaps articulates, a fundamental human process by which the mind distinguishes, sorts and connects sensory information in time to construct, and continually reconstruct, a more or less cohesive sense of whole. Following upon works by Ernst Gombrich (1969), Rudolf Arnheim (1954) and others, Nelson Goodman defines these largely unconscious processes of making sense out of visual and other sensory stimuli as *worldmaking* (1978). According to Goodman, seeing is motivated, and it is built upon memory. The human mind chooses what to look at and what to ignore, making sense of information through at least five processes: (1) composition and deletion, (2) weighting, (3) ordering, (4) deletion and supplementation, and (5) deformation. Through these processes, new realities are built out of old ones.⁴

The question of how film stimulates these kinds of perceptive and cognitive processes has shaped a century of film theory and production beginning with works by luminaries such as Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Hugo Münsterberg and Rudolf Arnheim (see e.g. Arnheim 1954; Eisenstein 1975, 1977; Kuleshov 1974; Münsterberg 2002; Vertov 1984). Eisenstein, in particular, demonstrated the capacity of film to build meaning through contrasting forms and visual qualities, both in framing and in montage. That Eisenstein's writings on film, which were written in the context of film-making after the Russian revolution, have more recently impacted fields of cultural research in works by James Clifford (1988), George Marcus (1990) and Michael Taussig (1987) among others, suggests how cinematic characteristics have illuminated broad questions about the nature of perception and cognition in technological societies. Meaning in documentary is mediated through technologies, and any student film-maker soon learns that the mind, after a period of production or intense spectatorship, starts dreaming in close-ups, pans and match-cuts. However, the lens and camera are not like human sight.

2. There are many works that address the reflective turn in ethnography such as James Clifford and George Marcus (1986).
3. If images didn't offer more than what could be imagined and controlled, Vaughan points out, ethnographies could be entirely made in studios with actors (1999: 82).
4. For more on Nelson Goodman's theories of worldmaking and their relation to cinematic practices of editing and anthropological theories of tropes, see Coover (2001; 2003).

5. As a result of the conditions of video tape, analogue video editing makes greater use of logs that are referenced to stacks of time-coded tapes.

The human eye is active, continually participating in a process of seeking out information and making choices in what and how it sees.

The constitutive condition in cinema occurs throughout production and in reception. The documentary film-maker chooses where to direct attention, what to frame and focus upon and when to turn the camera(s) on and off. Every film-maker knows the excitement (and foreboding) of watching rushes and discovering how an original experience has become rendered (or translated) through the camera and its elements – film stock, analogue tape, bits, etc. Films are assembled for what feels right as well as what seems to make sense on paper. In watching a documentary, the viewer constitutes meaning through perception and reflection. Consciously or not, the viewer interprets the visual experience based on prior experiences. No two viewers, therefore, will see a film in exactly the same way. The primacy of constitutive processes to single channel documentaries (aka films, videos, television programmes) may not hold true for interactive documentaries, or at least not in the same way.

3.

In their book *Another Way of Telling* (1982), John Berger and Jean Mohr present a 142 page photo sequence that is part narrative, part expressive montage and part visual essay. They argue that their montage of images, while appearing cinematic, operates differently from cinema because of the opportunity afforded to readers to turn back and forth across the images. This navigation allows users to expand their understanding of the photographs by seeking out correspondences and other relationships in the visual content and composition. This is a kind of non-digital hypertextuality that results in many possible versions and readings of the same work. The effect is not unlike that of using *key frames* in cinematic storyboarding and editing.

Film editing is, and, has always been, hypertextual. In celluloid editing practices, clips are examined as discreet physical objects that hang from bins or are coiled on cores. They are arranged and often re-arranged into sets, which are spatial configurations, and they are given tags and annotations through logs.⁵ The clips are gathered, taped and later glued in various physical variations. The editor fingers and scrolls through these, at times making cuts as much by the physical lengths of the clips as by their contents. Likewise, digital editing environments also arrange clips, or more correctly icons that signify clips, spatially. Bins, timelines and menus represent forms of spatial organization from which temporal experiences of actually watching clips are triggered. Where time-based viewership largely stimulates spontaneous constitutive processes (or, worldmaking), editing and other hypermedia activities more significantly emphasize conscious and reflexive constitutive processes in which questions that are raised by one image get explored through another, or another, or another. The editing process requires choice-making and selection. The editor may imagine and create sequences from clips in almost infinite variations, even if, in the final result, all but one of those variations are discarded, and the rejects are forgotten along with the myriad lessons and alternatives they may have offered.

As has been written elsewhere, hypermedia offers a superior form of editing (Coover et al. 2012). In providing diverse ways of moving between the spatial organization and temporal expression of clips, digital and interactive tools expand the editor's reflexivity and choice-making. Digital technologies enable the inclusion of materials recorded or organized through differing

modes as well as the incorporation of other kinds of research materials such as text, maps and photographs. They can allow for continual updating and offer opportunities for using algorithms to create versions generated by the computer or user inputs. Further, in locative media projects, virtual 'edits' may even be created by users physically walking among actual places, conjoining located materials en route. Therefore, the editor may also be a theoretician, technician, writer, explorer, researcher and designer, and this may result in projects that are equally experiential or intellectual.⁶ There is a risk, however, that structural and technological advances are not developed in relation to in-depth content; in such cases, the exhibitions of technological innovation are primarily self-serving to the technological apparatus of which they are a part, and as such there is less opportunity for a two-way exchange, apt application of metaphors or structures, and creative growth.

For the creators of digital works, navigation-based forms of interaction are shaped by computer interface, program metaphors and design possibilities. Materials, such as icons, videos and text are displayed spatially. Just as icons are moved about the desktop on personal computers, so, too, are icons pertaining to video clips moved between folders, bins and/or timelines in programs like Adobe Premiere®, Adobe After Effects®, Avid, DVD Studio Pro®, Final Cut Pro® and Media 100®, and they may be placed in other programs that are designed for other kinds of creative and critical practices such as Microsoft Word® or Eastgate Story Space®. Furthermore, the nature and form of the documentary image itself is transformed through spatial arrangements such as juxtaposition, layering or compositing (Coover 2011b; Coover et al. 2012; Manovich 2001, 2006). However, it should be added that the arbitrary assignment of film terms by software companies poses challenges for new makers of motion images. The assignment is presumably designed to make software terms recognizable. However, it shapes ways in which clips are gathered, named and placed within a project based on the logics of prior media not new ones. As few film students under the age of 30 have ever seen a bin or actually cut a piece of celluloid, the assignment of such terms is abstract and obscure, yet their designs impose constraints that direct users in familiar directions. Other terms for the sorting and conjoining practices might expand thinking about what time-images are and how they might work together.

Berger and Mohr stress that an important difference between viewing (or reading) images in a book and watching such images in a film is the forward temporal force of the technology, which Berger characterizes as producing a kind of temporal anxiety caused by the technological provocation to attend to each forthcoming frame. Berger writes,

Eisenstein once spoke of a 'montage of attractions'. By this he meant that what precedes the film-cut should attract what follows it, and vice versa. The energy of this attraction could take the form of a contrast, an equivalence, a conflict, a recurrence. In each case, the cut becomes eloquent and functions like the hinge of a metaphor ... Yet there was in fact an intrinsic difficulty in applying this idea to film. In a film ... there is always a third energy in play: that of the reel, that of the film's running through time. And so the two attractions in a film montage are never equal. ... In a sequence of still photographs, however, the energy of attraction, either side of a cut, does remain equal, two way and mutual. ... The sequence has become a field of coexistence like the field

6. This by no means rejects the importance of film, video, photography or other media; there remain expressions far better articulated in an optically printed film or a silver nitrate photograph, for example, than through a digital work. Each stimulates differing perceptive and cognitive responses and each expands the world in differing ways, articulating and engaging life's experiential ambiguities.

7. The relationship of visual montage, language and walking was developed through a four way conversation between Larry McCaffery, Lance Newman, Hikmet Loe and Roderick Coover (Coover et al. 2010) relating experiences of walking in desert landscapes to the development of the interactive, browser-based documentary Canyonlands (Coover 2011c) and works of literature and land art. How spatial metaphors relate to montage and movement is also addressed in Aston (2010) through a discussion of works by Wendy James.

of memory ... Photographs so placed are restored to a living context: not of course to the original context from which they were taken – that is impossible – but to a context of experience.

(Berger and Mohr 1982: 288–89)

In short, this kind of interplay maximizes the conscious, constitutive characteristics of documentary images in ways that resemble the experience of navigating among clips in editing programs, browsers and various other interactive media environments. Video clips like photos may be accessed at various times and for diverse reasons. In similarly discussing the sequencing of photographs, Berger continues, 'The world they reveal, frozen, becomes tractable'. The choice to use a navigational technique is particularly apt for Berger and Mohr because they are making a project about navigating among the associations, desires and ruptures of memory. Navigation allows users to cross-reference images to discover formal, tropic, narrative and expository significations. The ability to juxtapose and link diverse kinds of materials expands the potential for reflexivity. The navigable spatial arrangement of the book enables choice and subjective temporality, where the instant forward motion of single-channel cinema does not. Interactive documentaries may accommodate both forms of cognition by offering a mix of temporal and navigational experiences.⁷

Environments that bring together differing kinds of research materials can enable users to follow the media maker's process, whether by allowing users to read field notes and supporting documents or to follow how particular sets of materials led to the development of an edit or argument (Coover 2003). When supporting materials and data are available, the user can see how choices were made and consider alternatives (Coover 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, Coover et al. 2012). The media maker is not deprived of the power to make an argument and have a voice (expressing one's ideas is among the important reasons that individuals make works). In fact, the maker may offer many arguments that would not fit together in the logics of a single-channel work. As evidenced in works by Jeffrey Shaw, Pat Badani, Flavia Caviezel, Nitin Sawhney, Kurt Fendt and Ellen Crocker (see Coover et al. 2012; Shaw et al. 2011) among many others, such works can express relationships between the user, maker and subject that raise interesting ethical questions about single-channel media and the messages they may convey through form.

As exemplified by the Quicktime Virtual Reality (QTVR®) based media arts work, *Mysteries and Desires: Searching The Worlds of John Rechy* (Rechy et al. 2001), interactive environments can employ modal shifts that clarify relationships between maker, viewer and subject. *Mysteries and Desires* is an interactive DVD produced by the Labyrinth Project out of the University of Southern California. The DVD presents a sort of autobiography of the writer John Rechy whose works articulate, among other issues, the conditions of being queer in 1960s LA. The project combines scrapbook collections of interviews and drawings, dance, cartoon and interactive play to present a multimodal expression of some of the author's life experiences. A short introductory video loop links users to one of three sections, the themes of which are 'Memories', 'Bodies' and 'Cruising'. In these sections, viewers navigate QTVR environments, choosing links that lead down interactive paths or into collections of materials. The participation required of the user to discover links in the panoramic environments is thematically important in a work about the concealed methods of expression in gay cultural life in that place and era.

Forms of expression represented in the project include exposition, interviews, audio of Rechy reading excerpts from his books, photographs, graffiti, stained glass imagery, dance and a comic strip narrative, and locations include a lonely path in the woods, urban barrooms, a back alley and a church confession booth, among others. In short, Rechy demonstrates, there is no one mode of expression good for all seasons. Some of Rechy's experiences are best expressed through narration, while others require comic illustration, dance movements and user participation. The interactive approach enables both the inclusion of, and the movement between, these forms. The mode-shifting blurs conventional borders of documentary representation and art as well as challenging distinctions between viewing, reading and other forms of engagement.

While documentary images are constitutive and may draw upon diverse modes of experience and representation, documentary conventions may expand or limit this constitutive potential, as for example, when images primarily serve to illustrate a narration. This issue is central to Berger and Mohr's discussion of how their collection of photographs maximize the ambiguity of the documentary image. Identifying ambiguity in images, they argue, engages the imagination. The reader involves herself in the act of making meaning and in so doing, she internalizes those images and animates them within the context of her own life experiences – her memory. The reader makes meaning. By contrast, the authoritative voice (whether an actual voice or a productive mode) limits choices in how to read images and their meanings. To some degree, a viewer of such works receives a message rather than building and engagement. The supposed pay-off in exchange for this decreased activity is ease: authoritative works frequently seem to be more easily (and passively) received.

There are significant ethical considerations involved in the relationship between these differing forms of representation – ethical considerations that concern relationships between form and content. For example, in his essays 'New novel, new man' and 'From realism to reality' (1963), French New Wave era fiction writer and film-maker Alain Robbe-Grillet challenges that naturalism claims an unfair monopoly on the real. Robbe-Grillet explores relationships between subjective observation and intellection construction (or rationalization).⁸ Making a claim for the ethical necessity of a new approach to writing and the relationship between form and content, Robbe-Grillet counters what he considers to be misconceptions about the vanguard writing of the era, that the new novel: (1) imposes methods of writing, (2) erases the past, (3) expels humans, (4) aims a perfect (yet presumably unobtainable) objectivity, and (5) the novels are just too difficult. His responses might as well apply to the uses of interactive media in documentary arts of this era.⁹ Adapted slightly for this article, his approaches essentially argue for the creation (1) of works that are defined as a quest, not a theory, (2) of works that participate in an evolution of a form (or with multimedia, of forms) without merely recasting old forms in new clothes, (3) of works that create participation by drawing attention to the ambiguity of appearances and false sense of authoritative truth that genres (including documentary genres) can impose on them, (4) of works that maximize subjectivity, (5) of works that insist on depth and specificity as a basis for creating works for broad consumption (notably, in the relation to popular documentary, this might also be suggested as respecting the intelligence of viewers and their capacity to participate as opposed to dumbing down works to some presumed lay – or lying down – audience), and (6) of works that do not offer ready-made meanings. Robbe-Grillet argues

8. In Robbe-Grillet's works, it might be added, the fictional observers are always untrustworthy or unsure of their own experience, a condition that is also true of informants of documentary research.
9. As happens equally these days to digital media artists presenting imaginative and often complex digital projects to audiences who may not be familiar with digital structures, Robbe-Grillet finds himself fighting off common preconceptions about reading experiences of novels written in new ways. The resistance may result from a seemingly natural human tendency to settle for experiences that are familiar and comfortable, even when, in the back of the mind there may be an awareness that there may be serious implications for subsuming oneself in the apparatus of mass media, whether through cinema, tv, the Internet or mobile technologies.

10. Such characters in these films soon find their lives shaped by a series of accidents rather than actions.
11. There are practical, technological conditions why such practices might have seemed constrained in the era of single-channel production, despite the efforts of many groups to make film accessible as a tool of exchange rather than one of observation. Such efforts are wide ranging and include initiatives such as the participatory film and video projects such as the National Film Board of Canada Challenge for Change, that was active 1967–1980, to community video collectives, such as Philadelphia's Termite TV Collective (1992–). Common issues include limited access to equipment and materials, access to distribution and access to screening or broadcast facilities.

that any other choices for a writer would simply reaffirm old worlds and the powers that maintain them.

Reflecting upon the vanguard artistic positions of European 1960 and the French New Wave in their essay 'Cinema of appearance' (1972), Gabriel Pearson and Scott Rhode argue that the New Wave film-makers countered naturalism's tendency to resolve differences into a stable and single reality by depicting an unstable world. Cinematic realism (or naturalism) obscures the flux and instability of actuality by neatly resolving events into single and totalizing representations. By contrast, Pearson and Rhode argue, in works of the French New Wave such as *Breathless* (Godard 1959), individuals construct worlds through improvisation. With no stable reality, the characters respond to the conditions at hand – to a surface of appearances. Characters must come to decisions in response to conditions of actuality for which there are no preconceived rules. Where there are no stable realities, traditional moralities are untrustworthy and cannot be relied on; rather they must be continually created and negotiated through action and exchange. Each character must therefore define his or her own ethics and live with the moral implications of choices that are made; characters that do not sustain this engagement become objects in a system and powerless to it.¹⁰ Pearson and Rhode argue that this similarly offers conditions for more ethically aware engagement with images by the viewer (and, indeed, the maker) who must make choices. When viewers participate in making judgments about scenes that may be unpredictable and open-ended, the issues are internalized and made meaningful within the viewer's own internal frameworks of world-making and reflection, just as images become internalized and animated through the imagination in Berger and Mohr's model.

Such subjective engagement in meaning-making is central to ethical arguments raised by numerous visual research and documentary theorists (see e.g. Gross et al. 1991; Renov 2004). For example, in addressing the representation of the subject, documentary theorist Michael Renov writes:

In the ethical context, greater value may be attached to the circumstances surrounding the creative process ... than to the final product, understood in the commercial arena to be the 'bottom line.' In the instance of some ethically charged works, the openness and mutual receptivity between filmmaker and subject may be said to extend to the relationship between the audience and the film. Open exchange may begin to replace the one-way delivery of ideas. This ethical challenge in the field of documentary practice echoes those in contemporary art and philosophy that question models of mastery or absolute certainty, placing greater emphasis on open-endedness, empathy, and receptivity.

(2004: 130)

The ethical position challenges the authority implicit in documentary cinema's illusion of verisimilitude, which might rather be described as the imposition of one version, carried out through the authority of the camera, over the perspectives and subjectivities of others. However, the struggle against such authority in single-channel film-making has long been framed in relation to how technological characteristics of film production and distribution constrained this kind of exchange.¹¹

The technological limits are fast changing (albeit faster in the developing and developed world). Projects such as Sharon Daniels' *Public Secrets* (vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/) or those based on an individual's experiences

such as Samuel Bollendorf and Abel Segretin's *Journey to the End of Coal* (www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/webdoc/) maximize fragmentary information and navigation structures to draw users into intellectual (and empathetic) participation, to engage the worlds being represented by acting within them to search out information and hear opinions that one might not otherwise have access to, such as American female prisoners in *Public Secrets* or Chinese coal miners fearful of being identified talking about working conditions in *Journey to the End of Coal*. That these two works, notably, mix audio, text and photography, demonstrates how blurred borders become in new media. In addition, there are projects such as those of Pixel Press (www.pixelpress.org), AKA Kurdistan (<http://www.akakurdistan.com/>), or 360 Kurdistan (<http://360.tizianoproject.org/kurdistan/>), that demonstrate potential for the direct inclusion of diverse voices. Not all works that create participatory conditions need to directly include other voices or feedback however. These direct and immediate responses, which have proven to be very valuable in some circumstances such as gaining reports on breaking news or identifying old photographs, may be less helpful in works offering deep research in an area of the author's (or authors') specialization. Responding meaningfully to extensive research projects often calls for comparable levels of engagement, just as meaningful reader response to a complex book may take on forms such as critical writing, research, art response or group dialog. Participation may be contained within a work; or a work may stimulate and engage participation as part of broader cultural processes. This issue is pointed out famously in *Chronicle of a Summer*, the 1961 film by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. In that film, students posing broad and abstract questions to passers-by on Parisian streets predictably received broad and abstract answers. When the film-makers reflexively focused attention on a few subjects, they developed a middle ground between the various participants, and a search for answers resulted equally in a reflexive examination of the questions and questioners. The result was an open-ended work that lead to further works and discussions about the research process. Documentary is a quest, and it can take many forms. Reception, too, may be framed as a quest, and quick user-feedback responses may not be the valuable ones.

4.

In his reflection upon frequently voiced resistances to difficult poetry, Charles Bernstein points out that a reader might not find the experience of easy consumption quite so trouble-free if the reader paused to consider the apparatus, conventions and attending ideologies that have resulted in that feeling of ease. However, in terms of the cinematic experiences, context is also important. There are times when readers and viewers alike may seek out attention-demanding and intellectually stimulating experiences, and there are other moments when viewers seek spontaneous, sensorial spectatorship. These are different, although richly complementary, human needs and cinema touches upon both by differing degrees that are often anticipated by context. Interactive documentaries may also be created for engagement in specific contexts, however convergence has resulted in the common condition that works made for one form or context are often viewed in another. The multitasking conditions of casual Internet use may not provide as appropriate a context for looking at projects that demand attention as, say, a museum, a dedicated library kiosk or a classroom, and many Internet-based interactive documentaries may not do enough to frame, or reframe, reception contexts.

12. Works such as Loss Pequeño Glazier's *Digital Poetics* (2001), Lev Manovich's *Language of New Media* (2001) and Stephen Johnson's *Interface Culture* (1997) propose ways in which forms of media alter terms of understanding and use, and that these terms, in turn, alter practice, product and modes of enquiry.

The discussant's response to complex works cited at the beginning of the article demonstrates that there are patterns of using media that come from differing traditions such as viewing television, reading books or looking at gallery exhibitions. The discussant's difficulty in satisfactorily digesting a multimedia documentary the night before the conference may have been a condition of context. Looking at works on the Web brings them into a multi-tasking environment of distracted engagement that is very different from looking at an interactive work in a dedicated space, just as viewing a movie on a mobile device while travelling about a city on subways offers a very different experience from watching the same movie in a cinema. As with many kinds of scholarly and literary books, non-fiction visual research projects often take a lot of time and attention to make, and they often take plenty of time and attention to view as well. Many cannot be viewed in a single sitting, while others may require a combination of viewing, reading and/or other intellectual activity. As media converge, it therefore may be necessary to establish conditions by which once differing media are framed for reception and engagement.¹²

Digital juxtaposing, layering, merging and manipulation expand ways to draw out and articulate significations within and between images. Such methods may draw users into active processes of building connections and making choices. Such methods may blur and reframe the activities of reading, viewing, *worldmaking* and meaning-making. In research, they enable a mixing of such modes to bridge the experiences of production and presentation, and they allow users to engage with those same processes and choices. While creating these conditions for deep reads and viewing experiences may be all the harder to do in the age of multiple, simultaneous and streaming media, that may signal all the more reason to do it – to escape from distraction to attention.

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