

Between Interactivity, Reality and Participation : The Interactive Documentary Form

Stefano ODORICO¹

The ways in which new forms of storytelling and new technologies affect narration in documentary film remains an important issue. Theorists agree that the representation of collective and individual memories has changed and will continue to change as the process of writing a story constantly moves from traditional supports (i.e. books) to more advanced ones (i.e. tablet computers). Interactive documentaries raise key questions about conventional documentary practice and analysis, about its effect of realism, its value of truth and about its viewer's position. In this article we investigate the interactive documentary form through the analysis of two productions. We will show how different and very contemporary degrees of interactivity are changing the way in which documentary storytelling relates to reality and to its audience. Furthermore, we will apply the semio-pragmatic approach in order to identify interactive non-fiction as documentary. We will conclude with a study on the concept of community and co-participation in the creation of content in new media productions.

KEYWORDS : NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NARRATION, DOCUMENTARY FILM, INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARIES, SEMIO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH

La façon dont les nouvelles manières de raconter des histoires et les nouvelles technologies affecte la narration du film documentaire reste une question importante. Les théoriciens s'accordent pour dire que la représentation des mémoires collectives et individuelles a changé et qu'elle continuera à se transformer à mesure que le processus consistant à écrire une histoire se déplace constamment des supports traditionnels (les livres) vers des dispositifs plus avancés (les tablettes numériques). Les webdocumentaires (documentaires interactifs) soulèvent des questions clés sur la pratique documentaire conventionnelle et l'analyse du monde qu'elle propose, sur son effet de réalisme, sa valeur de vérité et sur la position de son spectateur. Dans cet article, nous enquêtons sur la forme interactive du documentaire à travers l'analyse de deux productions. Nous montrerons comment différents degrés très contemporains de l'interactivité sont actuellement en train de changer le lien unissant la narration documentaire à la réalité et à son public. En outre, nous appliquerons l'approche sémio-pragmatique afin d'identifier la non-fiction interactive en tant que forme relevant du documentaire. Nous conclurons en nous interrogeant sur les notions de communauté et de co-participation, relativement à la création de contenu dans de nouvelles productions médiatiques.

MOTS-CLÉS : NOUVELLES TECHNOLOGIES, NARRATION, FILM DOCUMENTAIRE, DOCUMENTAIRE INTERACTIF (WEBDOCUMENTAIRE), APPROCHE SÉMIO-PRAGMATIQUE

¹ *Stefano Odorico est Associate Senior Lecturer in Media à Leeds Trinity University (UK), et réalisateur de films documentaires.*

The interactive form

In the current complex world of new digital media, the issue of distributing, receiving, locating and relocating information quickly and efficaciously becomes of primary importance. Over the past few years, audiovisual production has started to introduce different degrees of interactivity that allow the user to participate and get involved. Production companies have created new platforms for interactive use capable of collecting and dispensing various type of content, in the attempt to break the linearity of classical formats. Nowadays, in the digital media context, interactive documentaries are getting increasingly popular and they are widely defined as documentary productions realised with the use of contemporary digital technology. In other words : a combination between the classic linear documentary form, with its several modes of representing reality (see Nichols, 2001) and digital media, with its interactive applications which allows new grades of user participation in the construction of meaning.

We argue that a large variety of productions fit under the umbrella of the term « interactive documentaries », also known as i-Docs as defined and theorised by the i-Doc community of scholars (see <http://i-docs.org>), including : docu-games, webdocs, collaborative docs, locative docs, trans-media, and cross-media productions. In other words, these productions all differ from each other in structure, scope, approach to reality, levels of interaction, etc., but they can all be represented using the term « interactive documentary ». For instance we could define an interactive documentary based on « hypertextuality » (see Gaudenzi, 2011), if in it the user can only click on pre-existing options. Or, we could talk about « participative » documentaries (*Ibidem*), if the user can participate actively in the production of the film (collaboration and activism) – there are of course many other examples. The term interactive represents in fact a very broad concept that includes not only the simple action of « clicking » by the user or choosing option A or B within a narrative pat, but also the idea of community and collaboration for the co-creation of content.²

Interactive documentary is a concept not yet defined but, at the same time, especially starting from 2008, the numbers of interactive documentary projects are increasing each year; many of these interactive products have been presented at film festivals and have been funded by television channels, thus gaining notoriety and visibility. Numerous public and private institutions are supporting these productions, including: NFB (the National Film Board of Canada), France 24 (French broadcaster which offers an annual web-documentary prize), IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam), DocLab (Showcase for new forms of digital documentary storytelling since 2007) and ARTE (Franco-German TV

2 On the concept of « interactivity », relating to the idea of user reception/ participation, see Andersen's semiotic definition : « An interactive work is a work where the reader can physically change the discourse in a way that is interpretable and produces meaning within the discourse itself » (1990, p. 89).

network). Examples of these interactive documentaries include, among others: *Gaza-Sderot*, *Life in Spite of Everything* (2008); *Capturing Reality* (2008); *Journey at the End of the Coal* (2009); *The Iron Curtain Diary 1989-2009* (2009); *Interview Project* (2009); *Out my window* (2010); *Undesired* (2010); *One Millionth Tower* (2011); *In Situ* (2011); and *Bear 71* (2012).

In general they are based on web interactive platforms which recreate that « documentary value » indicative of classic non-fiction films³. Interactive documentaries are characterised by the presence of distinctive recurring elements, including intuitive menus, maps, timelines, video clips, hyperlinks, forums, and direct connections to social networks. What we refer to as 'interactive' are audiovisual texts being presented in a variety of digital formats designed to offer active participation and emotionally immersive experiences (see Murray, 1997). Many of these projects demand exploration, participation and interaction while being « watched ». Interactive documentary storytelling covers all possible ways of telling non-fiction stories, presenting them not as linear plotlines anymore but as fully immersive interactive experiences. Hence, the collaboration becomes more dynamic between director, designer, composer and audiences, like in a process of transferring the cinematic language into new complex forms of describing reality. Theorists agree that the representation of collective and individual memories has changed and will continue to change as the process of writing a story (and interacting with it) is constantly influenced by progress and moves from traditional supports (i.e. books) to more advanced ones (i.e. tablet computers)⁴. However, it is relevant to point out that old and new media, in our contemporary society, often converge together creating in this way a unique hybrid medium (i.e. interactive documentary) which is able to facilitate access to the content as well as the distribution of it, quoting Jenkins : « Convergence does not depend on any specific delivery mechanism. Rather, convergence represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, and toward multiple ways of accessing media content. » (Jenkins, 2006, p. 243). The advent of new media platforms, Internet, social networks, physical supports such as mobile phones and tablet computers, significantly modified the concept of documentary. Internet is accessible, fast and is an integral part of our everyday contemporary life. From blogging, tweeting and posting to the use of mobile phones as cameras, web design in video production and GPS systems for locative films, we bear witness today to mass activity of participation in new media production – an activity that is in constant development. Non-fiction web productions, which challenge the classic concept of documentary form, offer

³ « Documentary value » was the concept John Grierson used in 1926 when reviewing Robert Flaherty's *Moana* for a New York newspaper. This is usually credited as being the first occasion on which the word « documentary » was applied, in English, to this specific sort of film (Winston, 2008, p. 11).

⁴ See Haskins, 2007 ; and Hoffmann, 2010 ; Jenkins, 2006 ; Manovich, 2001.

many different opportunities for new co-authorship narrative experiences, pursuing networks, connections and interests. The user becomes a sort of producer rather than pure receiver; the result of this contemporary variation in the process of spectatorship is not so much a rejection of authorship, but a modification of the classic concept in order to include the interests and contributions of the entity formerly defined as the audience.

We argue that the main and most visible difference between classic formats of documentary and internet documentaries is that, whereas in « standard » films sequences and content are fixed and, usually, are created at the end of the editing process, in web productions we witness the presence of what can be defined as « random access » – the viewer/user can access the narration from a large number of different « windows », thus the content and order of the narration are changeable. Furthermore the user has at his/her disposal a large variety of media to play with and to integrate to the main narrative structure. These types of documentaries demand the audience's participation and interaction and, most of the time, are made by different layers in which various modes of view are present. Interactive documentaries use a fixed model to organise their data in a perceived digital space and invite the audience to move through this data space and explore the documents provided. As a result, equivalents to classic continuity editing are almost absent in interactive documentaries and fragmentation is dominant. The audience moves through the material and gains access to information through participation in the digital space, thus interacting with the documentary and becoming cognitively engaged.

I would like now to focus my attention, in order to better explain and describe this innovative audiovisual form, on two interactive documentary productions that deal with different aspects and concepts of the interactive format. I opted to analyse the following two case studies because I believe that they represent two valuable examples of how interaction can be identified with different modalities and, in addition, they are based on completely different i-Docs structures, such as: doc-game and collaborative documentary.

The first one, *Prison Valley – The Prison Industry* (Dufresne and Brault, 2010), which shares many similarities with videogames and is significant to understand the role of the user and the second one, *Welcome to Pine Point* (The Goggles, 2011) which is based on a slide-show like structure and which deals with collective memories in a new media context, giving great importance to the design of the platform and to the concept of collaboration. Furthermore, towards the end of the article and as a natural follow up to the analysis of *Welcome to Pine Point*, we will investigate the idea of community in interactive documentaries.

Prison Valley : Time for Action

Prison Valley – The Prison Industry is a totally interactive road movie about the prison industry in North America, produced by the French company Upian.com (a leading interactive documentary producer).

The modes of user-interaction within this platform are multiple and extremely intricate; the user has to pass a series of levels in order to advance in the narrative, much like they do when playing video-games. The platform takes us as users on a journey from nearby Florence, Colorado, to experience life in Cañon City using the Riviera Motel as home base. These words appear on the home page :

Welcome to Cañon City, Colorado. A town in the middle of nowhere with 36,000 souls and 13 prisons, one of which is Supermax, the new “Alcatraz” of America. A prison town where even those living on the outside live on the inside. A journey into what the future might hold.⁵

After a four-minute video introduction, which explains to the spectator, in « classic documentary terms » what is the main topic of this interactive project : **Cañon City**, a place with one of the highest concentration of prisons in the world, the project gets interactive and animated. The user finds him/herself in front of a motel desk, the moving images stop and a typical motel registration form pops up asking him/her to insert their personal information in order to continue navigating within the web based documentary. As registered viewers we are allowed to « watch » the documentary ; every couple of minutes the platform gives us additional footage and information to watch, read and analyse. There is also a direct link to a forum to share opinions and content.

We would like to focus on the login feature of *Prison Valley*. Having a member profile does not only mean that the text automatically remembers the point at which one stopped watching ; the operation of « registration » is probably the most important innovation in terms of documentary experience, because it gives the user an identity within the project itself as well as in its community of users. At any moment of this interactive experience we are free to log out and restart from the point where we left. For example, once we have logged in as a user, we can explore all the options that the platform offers to us, we can stay in our motel room or else can decide to have a look around, and we can even leave a message for one of the « real » characters of the documentary.

5 See <http://prisonvalley.arte.tv/?lang=en>



Écran d'inscription/Screen for registration, Prison Valley, Arte, 2011.

Moreover, as another revolutionary feature, the project offers to the user the possibility of interacting directly with the protagonists of the project at fixed times, outside the narrative structure of the web platform – this strategy connects physically and directly the users to the story's subjects which are people working in the prisons and living in the town. Pragmatically⁶, as we will explain more in depth later in this article, through the use of its main features, such as : video clips, maps, data-base, pop-up windows, links to social networks and blogs, in interactive documentary, sounds and pictures are matched together to create a strong communicative context. In interactive non-fiction, the space represented in the « film » is very close to the space of the user ; the user is actively placed directly inside the fragile boundaries of the trans-medial platform. He/she helps in the creation of the story, generating content and relating with the context of the operation : the web platform and the external world (*via* dedicated forums). In other words, the interactive documentary viewer is a figure that interacts with elements of the audio-visual text, building a context that is a space in which action, interaction, participation and communication take place, concurrently creating or altering the text itself.

However, what interests us here is the fact that also the platform design (vital in our web-dominated society) plays an important part in the visual storytelling approach of these platforms. What design should an interactive documentary producer/designer/director adopt to effectively address his/her viewers ? We would like to talk now about our second case study and of a particular design form which is relatively new in the world of interactive docs, and which works around the concept of memories using a structure which is not game based, like *Prison Valley*, but more similar to an audiovisual (digital) scrapbook.

⁶ With the term pragmatics here, we refer to the space in the everyday world where meaning takes its existence from the relationship between speaker and receiver in a specific context. Theoretically, our approach mainly refers to Roger Odin's semio-pragmatic analysis.

***Welcome to Pine Point* : Design and Memories**

An important element that should be taken into account in the context of interactive documentaries and documentaries in general is the concept of memory. Scholar Ekaterina Haskins (2007, p. 401-402.) explores how the Internet has an effect on public memory. She proposes that digital memory has different implications than previous forms of public memory. In her study, the author argues :

“Digital memory,” more than any other form of mediation, collapses the assumed distinction between modern “archival” memory and traditional “lived” memory by combining the function of storage and ordering on the one hand, and of presence and interactivity on the other.

Hence, in our context of interactive docs, interactivity creates a new dimension of « memory », approaching reality and value of truth. Nowadays, we can participate and interact with memories *via* these productions and, as a consequence, the way public and private stories are remembered will never be the same. The concept of interaction, as Haskins asserts in the quote above, makes digital memory a different entity from archival or traditional memory because the user experiences, for instance, diverse levels of emotional immersion and participation. The Internet, interaction, participation, social networks etc.; all these elements change and create a new dimension of memory – everyone can interact with everyone sharing, completing and rewriting memories.

We would like to explore the relationship between digital technologies and the representation of the real world through the collective memories of a specific community. Our case study is the recent *Welcome to Pine Point* by Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge (The Goggles) and produced by the National Film Board of Canada ; an interactive documentary (originally written as a book) that is a creative linear collection of material from and about Pine Point – a Canadian town that was destroyed in the 1980s.

The small town of Pine Point was established at the beginning of the 20th century, as a settlement for families of miners, and was completely abandoned in 1988 when the mine had to close down during the 1988-1992 US economic recession. Since then, public buildings and private houses were knocked down, leaving only the streets that once connected different parts of the village as a visible reminder of its former life. The town was also removed from maps of the area. It exists only in the memories of the former inhabitants, in old photos and videos.

With a collage of material from and about Pine Point always present in the background, the story is told to us with the use of a voice over as well as photos and home movies made by former residents, government documents, commemorative paraphernalia, newspaper articles and extracts from diaries and yearbooks from

the local high school. In other words, it is a fascinating narrative work which is presented like a scrapbook that incorporates text, music, videos, and images into an interactive digital story. In an interview the creators of this platform called the project a « liquid book » because it has very close to linear narrative but the user is able to do some exploration.

Welcome to Pine Point is about real people, real events and real objects, but also more relatively abstract concepts: community and memory. The Goggles painted a portrait of something that no longer exists, a town that is not a town. They have collected ideological (videos and documents), sociological (interviews with former residents), and general material (such as memorabilia). The collected cultural data is shown in a sort of interactive slideshow, with illustrated frames and looping video and sound.

Écran d'accueil/Homepage, *Welcome to Pine Point*, ONF/NFB, 2011.



Going back to the concept of design in new media it is obvious that the author in this case opted to use a scrapbookesque visual style. In this project the old (classic) media format of the book, filled with memories encounters visual digital media. Geoffrey Batchen (2004, p. 49) has described how albums that combine photographs with things such as: concert tickets, empty cigarette packets, writing and drawing evoke more than just visual memories :

[In albums] we are witness to the creative efforts of ordinary people who, by coordinating sound and smell as well as sight and by exploiting the possibilities of a touched and touchable photography, were able to express the intricacies of their social rituals, personal dreams, and project memories in tangible visual form.

The album format becomes a storytelling device, it serves as a catalyst for events

within the story ; establishing the context through concrete artefacts and objects, and inviting the audience to make personal connections between various pieces of information. Users feel completely involved at an emotional level with the story, we (users) become part of the community of people who lived there and helped in the production of this interactive documentary, sharing their memories and love for something that has gone forever.

The semio-pragmatic approach

Using a semio-pragmatic approach as theorised by Roger Odin, we believe that we could better understand and describe the interactive documentary in relation to its viewer and, in particular, to define them as « documentaries ». It is our conviction that a pragmatic approach offers a most fruitful and well-rounded working method to tackle the problematic question of representation of reality in non-fiction films and, specifically, in new media productions. The objective of a semio-pragmatic theory of film is to understand how audio-visual productions function in a given social space, a so-called « space of communication » created between the director (at the level of production) and the reader/viewer (at the level of reception) during the production of meaning (see Odin 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Independently from the stylistic approach used by the film itself (first-person, diary, autobiographical, essay), or interactive film in our case (docu-game, slideshow, locative production), it is noticeable that documentaries are capable of organising a narrative in a way that « tells a story ».

It could be argued that what really makes a film a documentary is not only and exclusively its relationship to reality but, as Odin asserts, the way in which it produces a « documentary reading » ; in other words, the pact of confidence between the author and the audience. Semio-pragmatic theories recognise a film as a documentary when the film itself refers, as asserted above, to a definite documentary mode of reading⁷. Such a mode is characterised by the activation of three different and not independent communicative processes within the main process of creation of an enunciative structure : 1) construction of a real enunciator (in opposition to the fictive one) ; 2) the interrogation of the enunciator in terms of truth. It is of primary importance to note that a filmic text is not a documentary because it tells « the truth », but because we, the audience, interrogate it about

7 In Cognitive Semiotics of Film (2000, p. 99), Warren Buckland writes about Odin's documentary mode in these terms : « Rejecting a semiotics of realisation as a criterion for defining the documentary mode, Odin instead opts for a semiotics of reading to define its specificity. In Greimassian terms, Odin rejects a referential theory of truth (study of the relation between signs and their extra-textual reality) for a study of veridiction – the modality of truth/reality as articulated by enunciator and addressee. Most of Odin's essay is concerned with characterising the specificity of the documentary mode according to the documentarising reading strategy adopted by film spectators, and with outlining how this documentarising reading is triggered by the film and the institutions in which it is screened ».

the truth (diegetic process) ; 3) valuation of the informative value of what has been shown: what did I learn about the world?

The following passage by Odin (2010, p. 255-256) helps us to better understand the semio-pragmatic point of view :

Meaning is not everything : affect and the interactions during production and reception must be analysed. The semio-pragmatic model involves two levels. The first level concerns the modes of producing meaning and affect. What types of spaces will this text permit the spectator to build ? Which discursive impositions will it accept ? Which affective relationships are established with the spectator ? Which enunciative structure will it authorise the spectator to produce ?

The second level is the contextual. The semio-pragmatic model emphasises the institutional frame, pointing out the main determinations ruling the production of meaning and affect.

For Roger Odin, in documentaries there is always a certain amount of predictability; during the viewing of a documentary, the spectator has to decide scene after scene how and how much to be involved in the moving images. This concept becomes even stronger in interactive documentaries, in which the user can decide step by step the level of immersion, interaction and participation within the platform for example: leaving the interactive documentary web page in order to browse other webpages, or taking active part in the creation of content (blogs, forums etc.).

Traditionally one of the elements that have always been seen as a tool to involve the spectator in the narration is the use of voice-over that « helps » the spectator's enunciational involvement. Often in documentaries an explicit narrator is used and this is a recurring feature also in interactive documentaries. The narrator is normally talking from the position of an (omniscient) observer who tells the story and in some interactive documentaries gives us instructions in order to proceed into the narration and to « pass levels ». This is obviously often utilised in interactive documentaries that present a gaming structure such as Prison Valley, in which the spectator is a figure that interacts with the elements of the hybrid text, building a context as space of action and communication. The voice over is dominant especially in the video clips – a voice-over which speaks from a first person plural perspective about arriving to Fremont County and the Riviera Motel. Hence, the director's position inside the platform space as mere spectator, at the same level of the audience. During the process of viewing the author interpellates us directly: asking us questions, forcing us to make a decision to create our own story (and, pragmatically, to choose the overall length of the documentary),

giving us information to create our own story and, at the same time, allowing us to watch the traditional linear clips included in this documentaries⁸.

Welcome to Pine Point is also characterised by the presence of a voice over. The subjective « I » voice of Michael Shoebridge, who was a resident of Pine Point, leads the whole narration and allows the project to directly address the audience with deep questions about what happened there. Furthermore, it includes, from time to time, interviews with former Pine Pointers in order to create a strong communicative context which involves at the same time author, platform, and user. The semio-pragmatic real enunciator, in complete opposition to the fictive enunciator, is a figure that the spectator creates as part of his/ her world ; he/she recognises his/her enunciations as plausible. Odin (1995b) defines different types of real enunciators as recognised by the spectator in classic linear documentaries, including :

- The reader can take the cinema to be the real enunciator ;
- The reader can take as real enunciator the society in which the film is produced, in a more anthropological and sociological way ;
- The reader can take the camera operator to be the film's real enunciator (as happens quite often) ;
- The reader can take the director to be the real enunciator, creating confusion between the different figures of author, director and enunciator ;

Interactive documentaries are hybridisations of non-fiction audiovisual material and new media which present themselves as « documentaries », they interact and engage, within the semio-pragmatic documentary mode of reading, with the viewer and use interactivity as discursive strategy to describe reality. The viewer, due to external influence and experience, executes the semio-pragmatic operation of documentarisation.

Besides the use of a voice over (and often the insertion of intertitles), which is an important element in the process of the construction of a real enunciator, in interactive documentaries the user recognises the enunciator existing in the real world through the vision of particular video formats, such as: found footage or home movies, but also through the immersion in a reconstructed real world, such as the animated motel room (our « main menu ») in *Prison Valley*. In the room there is a TV, the air conditioning, a phone, a rear window that can be to opened and closed with a simple click of our mouse and, above all, in the room there are also all those elements that the user needs in order to follow the narration. Interactivity adds something more to the process of construction of the real enunciator, allowing a better and probably « more real » immersion in the audiovisual text; the enunciator and the author are completed by the figure of the

⁸ In his study *Inside the Gaze* (1999), Francesco Casetti uses the term *interpellation* to refer to the main theory of filmic enunciation and deals individually with the spectator, defining what can be recognised as the dialogue between in-screen elements and off- screen elements. (Buckland, p. 62).

designer and, all together, they are one entity that tells the truth. In other words, they guarantee the authenticity of the material that we are watching and browsing on our computer screen.

Furthermore, another pragmatic peculiarity of interactive productions is that the viewer, in addition to recognising real events, can also check in « real-time » if what he/she is watching represents the truth simply by opening another tab in his/her internet browser (the same utilised to watch the documentary) and doing a quick web-search. Odin talks also about institutions and places that help the process of documentarisation, such as : museums, schools and TV channels. This is also present in interactive documentaries because, as asserted at the beginning of this essay, traditional documentary TV channels such as ARTE are funding i-Docs and many documentary film festivals started to dedicate entire sections exclusively to interactive productions, such as IDFA (Amsterdam) with its DocLab. One of the main characteristics of interactive documentaries is the practice of inviting the audience to participate in the process of construction of reality, not only in the manipulation of the story itself. In an attempt to define the pragmatic role of the spectator, I assert that an interactive documentary production is an active medium that requires a large range of input by the user (see Aarseth, 1997). As a result, interaction, collaboration and participation are part of the construction of « reality ». To the traditional process of « looking », a new dimension is added in these particular productions: the perception, or sense of a « doing » – a concept that allows us to assert that the user/viewer of an interactive documentary has a more intimate, direct and active relationship with the apparatus itself and, consequently, with the deployment of realism.

Communities and conclusions

In conclusion, thanks to their interactive approach, the user, utilising platforms such as *Prison Valley* and *Welcome to Pine Point*, builds his/her opinion of the topic treated and experiences the actual opportunity to work on the development of the « film » itself⁹. All this also implies, in terms of the construction of reality, the inevitable creation of a community which shares opinions and information with the external world (a community which may continue to exist also outside the platform on internal or external forums dedicated to the topic treated in the documentary). Filmmakers can generate discussions with their viewers/users through those communities and promote the distribution of the content together with them. This is what Lev Manovich defines as « variability » (Manovich, 2001, p. 36), one of the main characteristics of new media, a term encapsulating the idea that projects in new-media are dynamic, open to constant modification by the filmmaker, the participants or the community. Quoting Manovich again :

⁹ From this perspective, crossing again the boundaries between cinema and Internet, we can borrow the term « open source » from web practice and talk of « (partial) open source documentaries ».

« A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions » (*Ibidem*).

In particular, in a project such as *Welcome to Pine Point*, the role of the community is vital for the construction of the story itself. Pine Point is not present in the mine or in one of its public buildings anymore, it is present in the collective memories of a community which are still alive in this virtual space. Former Pine Pointers can have access to these memories through the platform, sharing them among themselves or with the outside world. Media artefacts serve to link members of a community to their history, endowing them with a sense of identity whose roots are located in the past. Such products stand at the intersection of (social) time, linking the past with the present, and linking these two with the future.

Hence, interactive documentaries represent a contemporary documentary experience of participation/vision/interaction that moves away from the canonical relationship with ordinary media and from the classic cinematic approach, in order to create a more complex way to address and collaborate with the users who, for the most part, belong to a well-defined community in constant expansion. Furthermore, they create participating viewers able to amend the content, thus becoming platforms for conversations, rather than voices of the experts. They offer to their users a more rewarding experience that goes beyond the ordinary reception of the preconstituted narration that is typical of classic documentary films.

However, it is paramount to remember a very simple concept : in front of a TV or a cinema screen we are historically trained to watch and absorb linear content. Online, on the other hand, we are trained to browse, to jump from content to content and to participate, to take action rather than passively receive information and content.

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