

Interactive/Transmedia Documentary: convergence culture meets actuality storytelling

Documentário Interativo/Transmídia: a cultura da convergência encontra a realidade da contação de histórias

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Abstract:

This article explores actuality storytelling's development through the vehicle of immersive, participatory, user-driven, multi-platform interactive documentary. What emerges is an evolving mediated literacy in response to emerging storytelling technologies and the rise of 'convergence culture' that is remaking how we experience stories. The result is a reclaiming of storytelling from the Culture Industry and the rise of a new ecology of narrativity for compelling, interactive stories. Furthermore, the participatory nature of this evolving narratology assigns different roles to 'author,' 'subject,' and 'audience/user'—each of whom are immersed in the narrative discourse and actively engaged in co-constructing the actuality (i.e., 'truth') through the act of storytelling itself.

Keywords:

Documentary; Actuality; Storytelling; Convergence; Interactive; Transmedia.

Resumo:

Este artigo explora o desenvolvimento da realidade da contação de histórias através do veículo de documentário interativo imersivo, participativo, dirigido pelo usuário e multiplataforma. O que surge é uma alfabetização evolutiva mediada como resposta às tecnologias emergentes da narrativa e o surgimento da "cultura da convergência" que está refazendo a maneira como vivenciamos as histórias. O resultado é uma recuperação da narrativa da Indústria Cultural e o surgimento de uma nova ecologia da narratividade para histórias atraentes e interativas. Ademais, a natureza participativa dessa narratologia em evolução atribui papéis diferentes a 'autor', 'sujeito' e 'público / usuário' - cada um deles imerso no discurso narrativo e envolvido ativamente na co-construção da atualidade (isto é, 'verdade') através do ato de contar histórias.

Palavras-chave:

Documentário; Atualidade; Narrativa; Convergência; Interativo; Transmídia.

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1 Introduction

Everyday human communication revolves around stories. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that we believe the stories we tell are important, ‘they give shape to our experiences, they document our humanity, [and] they cultivate our sense of possibility’ (Alonge, 2017). When relating his perspective of what a good storyteller needs, David Pinaridi, novelist, screenplay author and professor of narratology at Politecnico di Milano, observed that, ‘[a] storyteller doesn’t need as much to be able to tell stories—but rather human condition and therefore worlds, conflicts, problems, people, dilemmas, contradictions, emotions... in other words: telling life. But before telling, [the storyteller must] be able to listen... to be able to see. The best stories are hidden in the eyes of others’ (Pinaridi, 2016).

The goal of actuality storytelling (reality-based or factual stories; *i.e.*, documentary and journalism) has always been to ‘tell life,’ to reveal to the audience the stories hidden in the eyes of the ‘Other.’ Almost since the birth of documentary as a genre, two perspectives emerged on how to achieve this goal. One, championed by American documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty, was ‘...to make the unfamiliar, familiar; to discover and reveal... what was distant and past’ (McLane, 2012, p. 87). The other perspective was articulated by John Grierson—often considered the progenitor of British and Canadian documentary—who believed documentary should ‘...find new meanings and excitements in the familiar through applying the *creative treatment of actuality*... to the close-to-home work a day modern world’ (McLane, 2012, p. 87, emphasis added). Their respective views represent the defining poles in the documentary tradition that every documentarian since has had to find their place (McLane, 2012). The common goal of both approaches—and all those in between—is to bring audiences as close to events as possible, to have them experience the story. For many documentarians and journalists, the *raison d’être* for telling stories is to create an emotional connection with the audience and hopefully, stimulate insights and encourage or influence action.

Presented here is an exploration of the technological and social forces wrought by immersive, participatory, user-driven, multi-platform interactive documentary

melding with the rise of ‘convergence culture’ (Jenkins, 2006). What emerges is a new mediated literacy, one that is building a new syntax and vocabulary for telling compelling stories and evolving a new storytelling ecology. Complicating the ethics of this new form of storyworld building is the assignment of different roles for the traditional ‘author,’ ‘subject,’ and ‘audience/user’ of the story. Each of these participants are immersed in the narrative discourse and actively engaged in co-constructing the actuality through the very act of storytelling.

2 Storytelling & the Culture Industry

The coming sea change at the dawn of the 21st Century—wrought by the forces of modern communication technologies and the ability of individuals to potentially distribute their stories to a global audience—could not have been foreseen at the dawn of the 20th Century. Yet, the advent of ‘modern’ mass media that ushered in the 20th Century had a similarly profound impact on the role of storyteller in popular culture; a shift in control of the ‘story’ (and who tells it) from the individual to the ‘Culture Industry’ (*cf.*, Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969; Adorno, 1975; Hirsch, 2000). This socio-cultural apparatus was developed to produce meanings and pleasures, involved aesthetic strategies and psychological processes bound by its own set of economic and political determinants, and was made possible by the technical capabilities of the day (*e.g.*, film, the camera, the projector, and sound recording). In their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1969), Horkheimer and Adorno examined the characteristics of the Culture Industry and observed that the result was the standardization and rationalization of ‘cultural form’ (*i.e.*, storytelling) with preconceived expectations of the story itself possessing a style and form identical to all others—plots told the way we ‘think’ they have always been told; with heroes and heroines, villains, and a side that we can take (Fulford, 1999). Adorno (1975) argued that this process weakened, atrophied, and perhaps even destroyed the capacity of the individual consumer of ‘mass’ or popular culture to think and act in a critical and autonomous way. Perhaps channeling Adorno’s angst, Richard Stone described modern culture as ‘de-storied’—

as in, deforested—and that the various contemporary efforts at reclaiming story and storytelling are a process of ‘restorification’ (Stone, 2000). Having become ‘de-storied’ through the Culture Industry’s monopolization of the means and mode of production (Adorno, 1975), mainstream media influenced how we, as ordinary citizens, compose our own stories. This ‘says less about what a person knows from their own experience and cultural perspective, and more about how they expect [mediated stories] to function—as high-impact action drama, or happily resolved melodrama’ (Lambert, 2013, p. 19). Thus, we can no longer see how our daily lives provide us with rich content for meaning making through creating and sharing stories—we equate the idea of good story with high drama, compelling characters, exciting challenges, plot twists, and an ending that provokes insight (Lambert, 2013).

3 Convergence & Participatory Culture

In the waning years of the 20th Century and the nascent years of the 21st Century, humanity witnessed extraordinary changes in digital media technologies that transformed the means and mode of producing and receiving mediated narratives. It began with the diffusion of affordable technology combined with audience frustrations with traditional media, and pressure for a more engaging mediated story environment. The watershed moment arrived when the first World Wide Web page was uploaded to the internet by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN on 20 December 1990 (Fingas, 2015). Today’s ‘mediascape’ (Appaduria, 1990) has evolved to include mobile multimodal devices and an exponential growth in messages conveyed through multiple platforms via a multitude of channels. Likewise, the Millennial (Pew Research Center, 2010) and Post-Millennial (McCrindle Research, 2016) Generations’ disillusionment with mainstream media (top-down) and the rise of ‘participatory culture’ (bottom-up), has undermined the Culture Industry and disrupted the notions of authority and authorship (Burnett, 2011). As observed by Axel Bruns (2006), the increasing prevalence of user-led content production facilitated by Web 2.0 has signaled a shift from industrial-style content production to post-industrial style, or what Bruns described as *produsage*—

“the collaborative, iterative, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer, or *producer* role” (p. 275). As a result, a growing number of, ‘producers’ are now actively engaging with new topics and pushing the boundaries of on-line storytelling and distribution. This has, in turn, allowed for the development of spontaneous practices of engagement through collaborative creation and the collective consumption of narrative worlds as people easily cross the boundaries of single-line stories (Murray, 1997). With the convergence of media and information technologies, the emergence of the ‘producer,’ and the concomitant liberation of the means and mode of production and the multi-channel circulation—or ‘networked spread’ (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013)—of mediated storytelling, ‘producers’ can distribute and engage with (and within) the multiple media incarnations of narrative—*i.e.*, storyworlds—across multiple media platforms (Ryan & Thon, 2014). It is important at this juncture to point out that an audience’s engagement with story and storyworld are different experiences; although, stories are usually set within storyworlds. Stories are self-contained arrangements of causal events that come to a resolution and are typically time bound. Storyworlds, by comparison, are mental constructs shared between ‘producers’ and audience in which new storylines can emerge. Storyworlds are dynamic models that evolve over time in which the audience can immerse themselves and participate in the meaning-making process (Wolf, 2012). Thus, storyworld is used purposefully to represent the ecological evolution of narrative away from a linear, self-contained representation of traditional language-based narrativity (*i.e.*, the processes by which a story is told) and to acknowledge ‘...the emergence of the concept of “world” not only in narratology [the pattern of codes that operate within a narrative and affect perception] but also on the broader cultural scene. Nowadays we have not only multimodal representations of storyworlds that combine various types of signs, and virtual online worlds that wait to be filled with stories by their player citizens [‘producers’], but also serial storyworlds that span multiple installments and transmedial storyworlds that are deployed simultaneously across multiple media platforms resulting in a media landscape in which creators and fans alike constantly expand, revise, and even parody them’ (Ryan & Thon, 2014, p. 1). With the profusion of Web 2.0 and the exponential growth in social media engagement, the ever-

increasing role and importance of multi-platform media in daily life has led to a strong sense that ‘understanding media’ (McLuhan, 1964) is key to understanding the dynamics of culture and society.

As defined by Henry Jenkins, media convergence is ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want’ (2006, p. 2). Earlier, Jenkins had coined the term ‘transmedia’ in referencing the trajectory media convergence was taking (Jenkins, 2003). A decade later, Jenkins, Ford and Green refined and expanded on media convergence and transmedia with the introduction of the idea of ‘spreadable media’ as a ‘...shift from distribution to circulation [and signaling]...a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined’ (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 2). Simply stated, transmedia means ‘across media;’ while the notion of ‘spreadable media’ introduces the active engagement of ‘participatory culture’ (Jenkins, 1992). But, when combined with the powerful human impulse of storytelling, ‘[transmedia] storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a [story] get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience [*i.e.*, storyworld]. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story’ (Jenkins, 2011).

When referring to the multi-platform nature of constructing transmedia storyworlds, media convergence has an air of technological ‘inevitability’ by which the media are entering a new phase of influence over culture, society, and perceptions of our place in both. But, this also begs the question; what is (trans)media converging around? Ignoring the technological convergence of almost all media becoming indistinguishable packets of binary data; like Pearson and Smith (2015), Ryan and Thon (2014), Apkon (2013), Lambert (2013), and Page and Thomas (2011), narrative—*i.e.*, story—is placed at the center of this (trans)medial convergence, and the ‘produser’ as an active partner in the building of interactive storyworlds. Likewise,

due to digital media's ubiquity and global reach, 'convergence' also recognizes the permeable boundaries separating nation from nation, medium from medium and audience from production. 'Key concepts such as those of convergence ...and remediation [that transmedia achieve their cultural significance by paying homage to, &/or the refashioning of, earlier media; see, Bolter & Grusin, 1998] ...demonstrate the need to move beyond fixed categories and boundaries in attempting to respond to the ever shifting and evolving practices and affordances facilitated by new technologies' (Page & Thomson, 2011, p. 7).

The Culture Industry has been quick to pick up on this trend and equally quick to find ways to appropriate (*e.g.*, 'franchise,' 'brand' or otherwise market) audience engagement to their own ends—'moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling' (Jenkins, 2003) and, certainly, more profitable. Even the Producers Guild of America, in April 2010, recognized transmedia narrative projects (or franchises) as an integral part of the expanded media environment and categorized transmedia in their *Code of Credits* (Producers Guild of America, 2016). The Guild points out that these extensions of narrative are not the same as repurposing material from one media platform or channel to another. The Guild's use of the term transmedia '...denotes a design strategy of distributing narrative content across platforms rather than a distinct and singular model of production' (O'Flynn, 2012, p. 141-142). As such, the Guild's ideas regarding 'user-generated content' and 'branded platforms' completely ignores the intention of transmedia storytelling and the power of participatory culture, and merely attempts to define collaboration wholly on corporate terms (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Likewise, heretofore, most of the scholarship on interactive transmedia storyworlds has revolved around the 'fictional universe' &/or the cross-media 'branding' of Hollywood franchises (*e.g.*, the Marvel and DC expanded universes of the comic book worlds into films, animations, video games, and Broadway productions). Likewise, early aspects of participatory culture focused mostly on manifestations of 'fan-fiction'—for example, the 2009 parody novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith which was adapted for film in 2016. As can be seen, the transformative influence of the internet on narrative storytelling and storyworld

building is still working itself through both the global Culture Industry and participatory cultures; yet in the background, and at virtually the same time, similar ‘disruptions’ brought on by interactive and immersive technologies were taking place in the genres of actuality storytelling—namely, journalism and documentary.

4 Interactive & Transmedia Documentary

Whereas, the impact of the internet on journalistic storytelling has been well documented (*e.g.*, Pavlik & Bridges, 2013; King, 2010; Newman, 2009; Stuart, 2006) and the evolving forms of transmedia journalism (described as an actuality reporting project designed to ‘unfold across multiple media in an expansive rather than repetitive way,’ Moloney, 2012) are still being tested against journalistic ethics and best practices (Zion & Craig, 2014), the primary focus here is on the emergence of interactive and transmedia documentary which, as a form of actuality storytelling, ‘...positions itself as documentary re-mediated for the internet age’ (Nash, 2012, 195). The emergence of interactive actuality websites and virtual or augmented reality installations as documentary storytelling has attracted much enthusiasm from such stalwart film festivals as: Tribeca *Interactive*, South by Southwest *Interactive*, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival’s *Big Sky Interactive*, Sheffield Doc|Fest’s *Alternate Realities*, and the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam *DocLab*. For many film festival venues, digital interactive storytelling is opening intriguing new avenues to explore and audiences seem eager to experience them. Other entities, like the US Army, the New York Museum of Modern Art, the Film Board of Canada (arguably, the leader in interactive actuality storytelling), the *New York Times* (with their VR mobile App), and numerous US public television stations have also been venturing into interactive documentary storytelling (Aufderheide, 2015).

To be sure, ‘[documentary] has always responded, in an often dynamic fashion, to the possibilities afforded by new technologies’ (Hight, 2008, p. 3), and has done so practically since the beginning of film itself when the Lumière brother’s first turned their camera to recording scenes of everyday life. John Grierson first used the term

‘documentary’ when reviewing Robert Flaherty’s film *Moana* (1926) for the *New York Sun* and described the film as, ‘being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, [*Moana*] has documentary value’ (Forsyth, 1966, p. 13). Grierson later provided an interpretation of his use of the term documentary as meaning, ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (Forsyth, 1966, p. 13); a definition—of sorts—that has been much debated, modified (*cf.*, Nichols, 1991), but never replaced in its simplicity and clarity. Reflecting on the evolution of documentary storytelling nearly 30 years after Grierson coined the term, Basil Wright—an early British documentary filmmaker, film historian and critic, and best known for his films, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) and *Night Mail* (1936)—observed that:

[The] documentary thesis offered, apart from anything else, a chance of freedom from the irons of the commercial cinema. Because documentary was concerned with the new use of film...it provided immense opportunities for experiment with the film medium. New uses involved new techniques... [These] new uses and new techniques involved new methods of diffusion. It was a case of new producers creating a new market based not on box-office receipts, but on audience needs and audience reaction (1951, p. 321).

In recent years, audiences are choosing more and more to seek out nonfiction programming. As Bill Nichols suggests (2010), it is perhaps sufficient to simply consider the movies that have been awarded an Oscar for Best Documentary from the mid-1980s to the present to realize the extent to which documentary has risen as a compelling form of storytelling and the level of interest it has aroused in the general public.

Although the relationship between ‘the audience’ and ‘the documentary’ has often been framed with references to storytelling practices derived from European observational cinema and its legacy of ‘referent’ and ‘index’ (Barthes, 1981), or the belief at the heart of American direct cinema that any documentary could or should be ‘objective’ (Bruzzi, 2006), the more contemporary relationship between documentary and digital technologies offers the potential for a far more extensive and transformative (re)interpretation of the fundamental aspects of actuality storytelling. According to Hight, such transformations involve:

...the very materiality of [the documentary narratives] themselves, as their constituent elements are transposed into computer files able to be easily

accessed, distributed, combined and manipulated for a variety of ends... The production base of documentary culture itself is broadening as digital platforms foster far more direct, if not yet fully democratic, forms of participation... Both professional and amateur filmmakers are also exploiting the varieties of forms of interactive, cross-platform engagement through... [immersive websites, interactive social media, or factual 'docu-games'], as well as using these media as new avenues for distribution of more conventional documentary texts (2008, p. 3).

As Nichols observes, '[documentary] has become the flagship for a cinema of social engagement and distinctive vision. The documentary impulse has rippled outward to the internet and to sites like *YouTube* and *Facebook*, where mock-, quasi-, semi-, pseudo- and bona fide documentaries, embracing new forms and tackling fresh topics, proliferate' (2010, p. 2). However, unlike more traditional documentary forms, interactive documentaries exist simultaneously as an 'artifact' and a 'process.' They are relational objects that invite (some would argue, demand; *c.f.*, Gaudenzi, 2011) the audience to interact and participate in various ways (Nash, 2014). This is an important distinguishing feature that identifies the interactive documentary (I-doc) from just a documentary done with digital technologies and 'shoveled' to the web with a veneer of interaction by way of audience paratextual 'click-through.' Judith Aston and Sandra Gaudenzi, in their article, *Interactive Documentary: Setting the Field* (2012), suggest that their rather broad and platform agnostic definition of what constitutes an I-doc—'...any project that starts with an intention to document the "real" and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this intention' (p. 125-126)—recognizes the fact that interactivity should go beyond being just a delivery mechanism, and incorporate processes of the story's production. The relationship between authorship, actor, and agency within I-docs is considered central to positioning the subjects and participants within the storyworld and insisting they play an active role (along with the author/curator) in negotiating the 'reality' being conveyed (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012). In their conclusion, Aston and Gaudenzi passionately present their perspective on what interactive documentary should, or could, be:

Our view is that interactive media creates a dynamic relationship between authors, users, technology and environment that allows for fluidity, [and the] emergence and co-emergence of reality. One of the things that we find to be new and exciting... about I-docs is the...[relationship] of interdependence that they create between the user and the reality that they portray... At the same time, it is also important to consider where the

authorship lies in an I-doc and to recognize the fact that some I-docs are developed through a more collaborative process than others (2012, p. 135).

‘Emergence and co-emergence of reality,’ and the collaborative process of I-doc authorship hints at a read of ‘actuality’ (*i.e.*, ‘truth’) in storytelling that is a negotiated construct between the author’s perspective of the ‘reality’ captured, the technological interventions necessitated by the mode of acquisition and delivery, and the interactive contributions (machinations?) of the collaborating ‘producer’ that leaves many documentarians feeling uneasy. The conventional meaning of the word ‘documentary,’ they fear, becomes misleading. This is the universal problem of representation—how to articulate the relationship between the author, the subject, and the audience—and is a fundamental challenge facing every documentary storyteller. Whereas most people understand that all documentaries are constructed representations of ‘truth’ from the ‘realities’ recorded, in the transaction of meaning in most documentaries ‘there is [also] a *de facto* agreement—a secret contract between the author and the spectator—where it is accepted that the [documentary] filmmaker is the heroic protagonist, as well as being a moral shield for the spectator. This secret contract allows for a comfortable, disengaged and highly moralistic (even prurient?) reading of almost all documentary films’ (O’Rourke, n.d.). In challenging this ‘*de facto* agreement,’ Australian documentarian Dennis O’Rourke coined the phrase, ‘documentary fiction’ as a form of documentary which relies on some of the techniques of traditional documentary, but also ignores and subverts the naturally accepted implications of ‘truth,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘objectivity’ which these techniques engender. For O’Rourke, documentary fiction should ‘feel’ like real life, is taken from real lives, but also clearly asserts its own aesthetic in which its ‘truth’ is entirely subjective. In other words, instead of being concerned with what is ‘real’ about the ‘truth’ in a documentary, we should be concerned with how our sense of what is perceived as ‘real’ constructs its own ‘truth’ through the act of storytelling. Here, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* may provide some guidance through his discussion of *potentiality* and *actuality* (Aristotle, 2015; see particularly, Book IX, chapters 6-8); in that, the ‘real’ (physical existence or ‘thingness,’ *i.e.*, the *potentiality*) constitutes the ‘truth’ (creative arrangement of the signification of ‘thingness,’ *i.e.*, the *actuality*), but the ‘real’ is not identical to the ‘truth’ it constitutes. Therefore, extrapolating Aristotle

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to O'Rourke's perspective of 'documentary fiction,' it is possible to see how an I-doc is not limited in its scope or trajectory but that its potentiality is multiple and only actualized '...through artful practices that weave together words, acts, objects, meanings, perceptions and people' (Denora, 2014, P. 125). Likewise, the I-doc actors (author/curator, subject, audience/produser) are equally engaged in the (co)construction of the resulting 'truth' that is '...ever in flux, subject to negotiation and renegotiation' (Denora, 2014, P. 149).

Like O'Rourke, most interactive and transmedia documentary authors reject the '*de facto* agreement' and purposefully engage the 'produser' in discovering the 'truth' (*actuality*) contained in the co-construction of larger storyworlds from the 'realities' (*potentiality*) presented. Therefore, interactive and transmedia documentaries are hybrids of form and function, actor and agency and, represent 'constructed truth'—or, maybe more accurately, 'negotiated truth'—where the lines, intent, and methodology blend elements of 'reality' using techniques associated with fiction and documentary to reveal a 'truth.' Where the subject/content, the author/curator, and the 'produser'/audience move between 'observation and instigation, life and art, the actual and possible, translation and interpretation, presence and performance, construction and deconstruction, evidence and hearsay, authorship and plagiarism, meaning and abstraction' (Turner, 2016).

There is a feeling of vibrancy in the field of interactive documentary and evidence of enough variation in form found in I-docs produced in the past decade that the field is already differentiating into sub-genres by form and function and by the nature of their interactivity (Nash 2014; Gaudenzi, 2009 & 2011; Auston & Gaudenzi, 2012). As such, the organic development of several variations based upon the different bonds that exist between the interactive actuality, authorship, 'producers,' and the subjects themselves, calls for at least a descriptive classification of the stories &/or storyworlds:

Web or connected documentaries. Web-docs use the web, essentially, as a 'broadcast' platform for more or less linear—sometimes serialized—documentaries that may or may not have interactive paratextual components.

Interactive documentaries. I-docs are a relational actuality narrative that requires the use of digital interactive technology to both tell and distribute the story. In her PhD thesis, Gaudenzi (2009) describes four dominate

modes for classifying the interaction: conversational, hypertextual, participative, and experiential.

Collaborative or community documentaries. ‘Documunities’ rely almost wholly on crowdsourcing for their content and seek to leverage social media platforms and Web 2.0 technologies and associated application programming interfaces to invite and curate wider content contributions from their ‘producers.’

Transmedia documentaries. Transmedia docs are designed with narrative content distributed across multiple platforms as part of an expansive, non-repetitive storyworld. As such, interactive components may be enabled via Web 2.0 technologies, particularly in the context of social concerns that stimulate discourse &/or invite content contributions.

Despite the articulation of these evolving sub-genres, there is still no single template for production in terms of either design or interface (O’Flynn, 2012); including structured or unstructured interactivity (Nash, 2014), multi-platform distribution (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), or social media usage. Like Grierson’s broad definition of documentary, ‘interactive documentary’ has emerged as a broader, more inclusive moniker of the new documentary form. But, however defined, it is certain that interactive documentaries do not bare the hallmarks (or baggage?) of traditional linear documentary. What should be clear is that interactive and transmedia documentary narrativity creates a different dynamic between the ‘producers,’ the author/curator, the subjects in the storyworld, and the actuality (negotiated ‘truth’). Therefore, ‘the [I-doc’s] “moment of truth” is now ...placed into the actions and decisions of the user/participant ...this way of thinking about I-docs ...[offers] a tool as much for the co-creation [from the realities presented] as for its representation’ (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012, p. 128).

5 Under Construction: ‘Spreadable’ Actuality

Written in the manner of an online manifesto entitled, *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*, Jay Rosen—like Neo at the end of the first *Matrix* movie (1999)—is alerting the Culture Industry of the coming sea-change, ‘The people formerly known as the audience wish to inform media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes with the platform shift you’ve all heard about’ (2006). Also like Neo, Rosen is not saying how this shift is going to end, but how it is beginning;

or, to paraphrase Neo himself, the process of ‘restorification’ ushers in a storytelling world ‘...without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible.’ The ‘former audience’ has, for a long time, been at the receiving end of a media system that mostly runs one-way (Rosen, 2006) in a ‘one to many’ delivery model with a high bar for entry and strong corporate control over the storytelling voice. Convergence has propagated ‘restorification’ and taken us back to our ancestral roots—in a way—ushering in a ‘second orality’ (Ong, 2002) with a new screen-based narrativity afforded by the multi-platform modes of delivery available via the internet. As the ‘former audience’ becomes the ‘producers’ of today’s interactive and transmedia storyworlds, ‘[we] now have a democratic reach of media on a level never before possible in human history. A lone thinker... can post an idea in the new worldwide marketplace of the moving image and quickly command an audience that would fill dozens of sports stadiums’ (Apkon, 2013, p. 242). This is no longer a ‘one to many’ communication model, the Millennial and Post-Millennial generations have already made clear their desire for participation in the storytelling process. Thus, the reach of interactive and transmedia narrative ‘...is closer to the Socratic model that values the development of ideas through dialogue... [with the] power of the discursive form... clearly established in [the] storytelling. [It is] “talk’d of” knowledge and is primarily conversational in tone’ (Youngs, 2013, p. 95).

As so eloquently stated by Stephen Apkon, ‘[one] thing will never change, no matter what kind of new technology emerges in the coming century: we are story animals. And we need to tell our stories in as direct, as unmediated, and as emotionally resonant way as possible. The development of communication, language, and technology—and the evolving nature of literacy that follows—needs to be seen... as a way to quench this insatiable thirst for story’ (2013, p. 248-249). The potential of interactive and transmedia actuality is the emergence of storytelling that blurs the line between the physical and digital worlds, that provides new story structures, venues, and attracts new audiences. It is storytelling with greater reach, capable of delivering richer, more immersive experiences that encourage active audience engagement with, and participation in, co-constructing the ‘truth’ found in actuality storyworlds.

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