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Interactive documentary: setting the field

ABSTRACT

This article articulates the authors' combined vision behind convening i-Docs, the first international symposia to focus exclusively on the rapidly evolving field of interactive documentary. In so doing, it provides a case study of practice-driven research, in which discussion around the act of developing and making interactive documentaries is seen as being a necessary prerequisite to subsequent theorizing in relation to their impact on the continuing evolution of the documentary genre. As an essentially interdisciplinary form of practice, the article provides a conceptual overview of what interactive documentaries (i-docs) are, where they come from and what they could become. The case is made that i-docs should not be seen as the uneventful evolution of documentaries in the digital realm but rather as a form of nonfiction narrative that uses action and choice, immersion and enacted perception as ways to construct the real, rather than to represent it. The relationship between authorship and agency within i-docs is also considered as being central to our understanding of possibilities within a rapidly evolving field of study.

KEYWORDS

interactive
documentary
constructing reality
authorship
agency
enactive knowledge
collaboration
activism
ethics

THE CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF THE I-DOCS GENRE

In order to begin the discussion, a definition of i-docs is needed. The position taken in this article is that any project that starts with an intention to document the 'real' and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this intention

1. The reasons for such a broad definition of i-docs are explained by Gaudenzi in her interactive documentary entry of *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media and Textuality* (forthcoming).
2. Draft version of all the chapters available at: <http://www.interactive-documentary.net/about/me/>

can be considered an interactive documentary.¹ This is a deliberately broad definition of i-docs, which is platform agnostic. Whilst it is in part attuned to Galloway et al.'s definition of interactive documentary as 'any documentary that uses interactivity as a core part of its delivery mechanism' (2007: 330–31), the definition provided here recognizes the fact that interactivity in i-docs often goes beyond a 'delivery mechanism' to incorporate processes of production. In addition to this, most of the current literature (Gifreu 2011; Crou 2010; Hudson 2008) confines i-docs to web-docs (documentaries that use the World Wide Web as a distribution and content production platform) but the i-Docs symposia have expanded the definition to include any digital platform that allows interactivity (such as Web, DVD, mobiles, GPS devices and gallery installation). As such, interactivity is seen as a means through which the viewer is positioned within the artefact itself, demanding him, or her, to play an active role in the negotiation of the 'reality' being conveyed through the i-doc. This view of interactivity requires a physical action to take place between the user/participant and the digital artefact. It involves a human computer interface, going beyond the act of interpretation to create feedback loops with the digital system itself.

A brief historical overview of how the evolution of digital technology has allowed the emergence of different types of i-docs demonstrates that a variety of i-doc genres is already established, and that each of them uses technology to create a different interactive bond between reality, the user and the artefact. As yet, there is no formal consensus on how to classify i-docs – with Gifreu (2011) and Galloway et al. (2007) having already proposed their own suggestions. This article builds on the taxonomy proposed by Gaudenzi in Chapter 1 of her Ph.D. (forthcoming).² Her approach is to analyse i-docs through their interactive logic, rather than through the digital platform that they use, their topic or their message. She draws upon some key understandings of interactivity and argues, similarly to Lister et al. in *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (2003), that different understandings of interactivity have led to different types of digital artefacts.

By selecting four dominant understandings of interactivity – as a conversation with the computer (Lippman, in Brand 1988: 46), as linking within a text (Aarseth 1994: 60), as interactive computation in physical space (Eberbach et al. 2004: 173) or as participation in an evolving database (Davenport and Murtaugh 1995: 6) – Gaudenzi proposes four interactive modes: the conversational, the hypertext, the experiential and the participative. These modes were used as a starting point from which to discuss our approach to the i-Docs symposia, out of which further debates and ongoing discussions have emerged.

1. The conversational mode

The *Aspen Movie Map* (Lippman, 1978) is often referred to as the first attempt to digitally document an experience. By using videodisc technology, and three screens, the user was able to drive through a video reconstruction of the city of Aspen. The use of digital technology to simulate a world where the user has the illusion of navigating freely has also been used in video games, MUDs and sandbox games, so it is with no surprise that journalists, and new media artists, have been inspired to create 'factual games', or 'docu-games', such as *Gone Gitmo* (Peña, 2007) or *Americas Army* (Wardynski, 2002). This type of i-doc, which uses 3D worlds to create an apparently seamless interaction with the user, lends itself to the Conversational mode because it positions the user as if 'in conversation' with the computer.

2. The Hypertext mode

One of the first digital artefacts to be officially called an interactive documentary was *Moss Landing* (Apple Multimedia Lab, 1989). During one day several cameras recorded the life of the inhabitants of Moss Landing's Harbour. Those assets were then organized as a closed database of video clips that the user could browse via a video hyperlink interface. This logic of hypertext documentary has later been applied to CD-ROMs (such as *Immemory* by Marker, 1997) and DVDs (such as *Bleeding Through the Layers of Los Angeles* by Klein, 2003). Currently a multitude of projects that follow the same logic of 'click here and go there' are being produced for the Web; those are often referred to as web-docs. *Inside The Haiti Earthquake* (Gibson and McKenna, 2011), *Out My Window* (Cizek, 2010), *Journey to the End of Coal* (Bollendorff, 2009) and *Forgotten Flags* (Thalhofer, 2007) are just a few examples of this style of interactive documentary. This type of i-doc lends itself to the Hypertext mode because it links assets within a closed video archive and gives the user an exploratory role, normally enacted by clicking on pre-existing options.

3. The Participative mode

The advent of Web 2.0 has, however, allowed people to go further than browsing through content: the affordances of the media have made possible a two-way relationship between digital authors and their users. Although in the late 1990s the MIT Interactive Cinema Group, led by Gloriana Davenport, tried to develop 'Evolving documentaries' where 'materials grow as the story evolves' (Davenport and Murtaugh, 1995: 6), it was only after 2005, when the penetration of broadband in western countries reached a critical mass, that interactive documentary producers started exploring ways to actively involve their users within the production of their digital artefact. In what is often referred to as collab-docs, or participatory-docs, the documentary producer 'is called upon to 'stage a conversation', with a user community, with research subjects, with participants, co-producers and audiences' (Dovey and Rose, forthcoming 2013). In other words, in participative documentaries the user can be involved during the production process – by for example editing online (see *RiP: a Remix Manifesto*, Gaylor, 2004–2009) or shooting in the streets (see *18 Days in Egypt*, Mehta and Elayat, 2011) – or during the launch and distribution process (e.g. by answering questions online, like in *6 Billion Others* (Arthus-Bertrand, 2009), or by sending material and helping translating it as in the *Global Lives* Project (Harris, 2010). This type of i-doc is described here as being Participative, as it counts on the participation of the user to create an open and evolving database.

4. The Experiential mode

Finally, mobile media and The Global Positioning System (GPS) have brought digital content into physical space. *34 North 118 West* (Hight, Knowlton and Spellman, 2001), allowed people to walk in the streets of Los Angeles armed with a Tablet PC, a GPS card and headphones. Depending on the position of the participant, stories uncovering the early industrial era of Los Angeles were whispered into the ears of the urban flâneur, accompanied by historic illustrations on the computer screen. In 2007 Blast Theory created *Rider Spoke* (Adams, 2007), a bicycle ride where people could record very personal answers via the use of a mobile device (Nokia N800) mounted on the handlebar of their

3. Aston began her career working with the BBC Interactive Television unit in the mid-1980s and then went on to study for a Ph.D. in interaction design and cross-cultural communication at the Royal College of Art (2003). Gaudenzi worked for ten years in television production before doing an M.A. in interactive media at the London College of Communication, which lead her to teach there. She then started a Ph.D. on the topic of interactive documentaries at Goldsmiths that is, at the time of writing, in its completion stages.

bicycle. Those testimonies were then made accessible to any other participant passing in the area where the message was first recorded. This type of locative documentary invites the participant to experience a 'hybrid space' (De Souza e Silva 2006: 262) where the distinction between the virtual and the physical becomes blurred. I-docs of this nature tend to play on our enacted perception while moving in space. As the participant moves through an interface that is physical (although enhanced by the digital device) embodiment and situated knowledge are constantly elaborating new situated meanings. This category is named as being Experiential because it brings users into physical space, and creates an experience that challenges their senses and their enacted perception of the world.

WHY ARE SUCH MODES IMPORTANT?

Since each interactive mode creates a different dynamic with the user, the author, the artefact and its context, the argument presented here is that each one can be seen as affording a different construction of 'reality'. While experiential i-docs can add layers to the felt perception of reality, to create an embodied experience for the participants, conversational i-docs can use 3D worlds to recreate scenarios, therefore playing with options of reality. Participative i-docs allow people to have a voice and to participate in the construction of reality, while hypertext i-docs can construct multiple pathways through a set 'reality' to provide a range of perspectives on a common set of themes or issues. In this sense, each form of i-doc seems to negotiate reality far beyond Stella Bruzzi's vision of documentaries as 'performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming' (2000:7) because the 'moment of truth' is now also placed into the actions and decisions of the user/participant. We see this way of thinking about i-docs as offering a tool as much for the co-creation of reality as for its representation. This is a position that has led us into placing debates around the relationship between authorship and agency within i-docs at the centre of our discussions.

THE FIRST I-DOCS SYMPOSIUM AND ITS TIMELINESS

First meeting in London at the Documentary Now! conference in January 2009, we found common ground in having worked within the field of interactive documentaries for a number of years, both in the emergent industry and through Ph.D. study.³ We noted that over the previous two years there had been a real explosion of productions in the field. Big productions such as *Highrise* (Cizek, 2009–ongoing) from the NFB, had been launched, and the television company Arte had created a portal at <http://webdocs.arte.tv/> which hosted a variety of projects, from the recent *New York Minute* (Rochet and Venancio, 2010) and *Prison Valley* (Dufresne and Brault, 2010) to a whole series of twelve web-documentaries dedicated to the 50 years of independence of Africa. French television France 5 had also produced 24 web-documentaries, part of a series called *Portraits d'un Nouveau Monde/Portraits of a New World* (Hamelin, 2010).

These were big projects produced for mainstream audiences leading to our conclusion that i-docs were no longer a niche form. Whilst the National Film Board of Canada had also invested in an impressive portal of interactive documentaries – of which *Highrise* and *Out My Window*, from Kat Cizek, are probably the most well known – but there were also others such as *Welcome to Pine Point* (Simons and Shoebridge, 2011), *GDP* (Choquette, 2009–10), *Waterlife*

(McMahon, 2009) and *Mapping Main Street* (Oehler, Heppermann, Shapins and Burns, 2009–ongoing). Finally, a range of independent productions were emerging: projects such as the French *Brève de Trottoirs* (Lambert and Salva, 2010), pervasive games such as Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (Adams, 2007), and university research projects such as *Gone Gitmo* (Peña, 2007).

Given this observation, it seemed a logical next step to create a community of like-minded people by organizing a conference on the subject. Whilst there were new media awards attached to larger documentary festivals, there were no events dedicated to interactive documentary. The focus of the i-Docs symposia was not to be about debating the merits of linear versus interactive formats, but more about understanding the new opportunities that were being opened up by the development of interactive technologies within a twenty-first century context. At the heart of our combined interest in the field was a fundamental belief in the human need to try to make sense of the world around us, using whatever tools are to hand, and in the role of narrative and storytelling in that process. In accepting the idea that, in our contemporary times, digital media plays an important part in shaping culture, and in influencing the ways in which we relate to the world, our aim was to explore how interactive technologies might offer new ways to help us both to understand the world and to shape it. The Digital Cultures Research Centre at the University of the West of England⁴ agreed to host the conference and fifteen months later in March 2011 the world's first symposium dedicated to the interactive documentary genre was held.

4. Where Aston has been developing teaching and research programmes in interactive documentary since the mid-1990s.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PANELS AND KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Our Call for Papers for i-Docs 2011 was deliberately broad, to accommodate a range of approaches to i-docs and stimulate debate around the full range of possibilities. Given her background in anthropology and intercultural communication, Aston in particular wanted to make sure that there was space to push at the edges of taxonomies, and that consideration of authorship, intent and purpose remained central to the discussions. This was based on her belief that the most interesting work in i-docs often arises when genre is transcended and boundaries are blurred. Our two different starting points in relation to the analysis of i-docs created a strong dynamic for discussion, through which we created our structure for the first two symposia. The common ground that we kept returning to was our belief that the analysis of i-docs should be seen as an open and interdisciplinary process within a field of endeavour that is necessarily fluid, dynamic and in constant flux.

Based on our discussions around modes of interaction, authorship and agency within i-docs, we decided that the panels and keynote speakers would be organized around four main themes. These were: participation and co-collaboration; cross-platform and transmedia production; locative, pervasive and game logics; non-linear strategies and database-driven documentaries. In addition to this, we convened two additional sub-panels around conceptual approaches to i-docs and the relationship between archives and memory in the creation of i-docs. In terms of establishing the field and raising awareness of the current state of play with i-docs, we felt that this was a good reflection of the state of play and that it would stimulate discussion around a wide range of work and issues. Discussion around taxonomies was included in the Call for Papers with the deliberate intention to test Gaudenzi's

5. www.watershed.co.uk/
6. www.pmstudio.co.uk
7. <http://www.dcrc.org.uk/projects/fluid-interfaces-narrative-exploration#>

proposed modes. In an emergent field such as that of interactive documentary it seemed appropriate to involve the early adopters of the genre (both practitioners and academics) in mapping the field. In the same way that user-testing is needed in interactive design, it was felt that peer approval was essential to accurately map such a participatory field.

From the range of proposals that were submitted, it soon became clear that the themes that we had set for the symposium did indeed reflect a shared understanding of emergent genres and debates. Given that the first of these themes related to documentary intent, whereas the other themes were more focused on structural approaches to i-docs, we began the day with the participation and co-collaboration panel. The symposium was a one-day event, held at the Watershed Media Centre⁵ in central Bristol, with a follow-up discussion in the Pervasive Media Studio⁶ on the next day, around where to take it next. The event was very well attended and had a strong international flavour, with many of the delegates commenting on how it had offered a condensed and clearly defined snapshot of an exciting new field of practice and study.

KEY ISSUES AND DEBATES RAISED BY THE SYMPOSIUM

What follows is our interpretation of the key themes that emerged from that first symposium, followed by a discussion of how these themes led into the planning for the second symposium. The key themes that are discussed relate to the ethics and nature of participation, whether encouraging participation was an innately good thing, discussion around transmedia storytelling and multiplatform production, questions around the imperative to categorize a fluid field of study, and discussion on the place for authorial communication in i-docs where the inter-actant becomes an active agent in the construction of the documentary 'reality'. These themes are discussed below with particular reference to our own views on i-docs and to the issues raised by the four keynote speakers, whom we selected to reflect the range of debates that we wanted to stimulate.

As CEO and Interactive Producer for Upian, Alexandre's Brachet's presentation focused on two of his company's seminal web-based projects – *Gaza Sderot* (2008) and *Prison Valley* (2010). Both of these projects combine authored narrative with a fluid and intuitive interface to create a meaningful and engaging experience for the user. This represents a real step on from many of the problems around the stop start nature of the point and click style interfaces of earlier hypertext-based works. As part of his presentation, Brachet was keen to point out that good interaction design is integral to the successful delivery of content and to the creation of meaning. In this sense, finding a common language to connect computer programmers with designers and producers remains one of the key challenges for i-docs production. If design *is* part of the content, then the authorship of an i-doc does need to include the designers as part of the editorial process.

Gaza Sderot was of particular interest to Aston, given her work around the development of fluid interfaces for narrative exploration⁷, developed through her ongoing collaboration with the Oxford anthropologist, Wendy James (Aston 2010). What makes *Gaza Sderot* so successful for her is that it negotiates a happy medium between temporal narrative and spatial juxtaposition, with the fluid interface playing an important role in conveying meaning through its ordering and presentation of video segments. This is achieved by using a split screen technique, by which the user can compare and contrast a series of

film clips from across the Israeli/Palestinian divide recorded over a set period of time. The viewer is offered various ways to engage with these recordings, through a timeline, through a map or through a thematic approach. This represents a significant development on from Manovich's work on spatial montage (2001), in that it moves beyond his interest in random juxtaposition to create a more authored and cohesive approach, out of which documentary meaning can be generated.

In addition to this, both projects offer a limited degree of user participation, with *Gaza Sderot* encouraging discussion of issues raised through an integrated forum and *Prison Valley* going a step further by inviting users to send messages to the subjects of the film, thus breaking the conventional border between film-makers (observers) and subjects (observed). Given that *Prison Valley* is a more recent production than *Gaza Sderot*, Brachet was asked if his work is gradually moving towards facilitating a greater degree of participation in i-docs. His response was that each of his i-docs projects has its own integrity and that participation around an i-doc can be just as valid as participation within an i-doc. This became an important theme, which re-surfaced on several occasions over the course of the day and is one which is central to our own ongoing discussions around different modes of interactivity within i-docs.

As Multiplatform Commissioner for the BBC, Nick Cohen focused on his insights into transmedia storytelling gained from his work at the BBC as multiplatform commissioner for factual and art programmes. Working his way through a number of recent projects, he described his intentions to move audiences away from observing the world through the knowing eyes of the programme-maker towards a logic of gaining understanding through more active forms of involvement and participation. For him, a strong transmedia concept needed to be platform neutral, with such projects benefiting greatly from a single creative lead across the different platforms. Encouraging people to participate was still a major challenge for institutions such as the BBC who need to create strong motivational drivers, such as tapping into peoples' emotions, offering them some form of personal gain, the opportunity for self-expression and recognition or appealing to the greater good. He referred to the 90-9-1 principle, as cited by Jacob Nielson (2006), which suggests that there is a participation inequality on the Internet with only 1% of people creating content, 9% editing or modifying that content, and 90% viewing content without actively contributing.

Cohen's intervention was important in showing how much broadcasters are very much aware of changes in consumption patterns of their younger audiences. It is not true that the born digital watch less television than their older generation, it is just that they watch their favourite programmes on demand and on their computer rather than on a television set. In order to keep their audience tuned in, broadcasters are increasingly commissioning multiplatform projects, in which a television programme has an interactive counterpart. This is making broadcasters one of the major transmedia producers of the market. This view of transmedia production contrasted with an earlier comment made by Brachet, who stated that his projects were created first and foremost for the web. Whilst many of them existed across a range of different platforms, for Brachet a good web-doc would always be conceived first and foremost for that medium. This raised an important point about transmedia production, as to whether one platform would always drive the others or whether a genuinely equal relationship could be established in terms of the content being conveyed across the different platforms.

Transmedia storytelling and changing habits of audience engagement is linked to the wider issue of convergence and changing media literacies. As digital technologies are evolving, we are witnessing the development of a widespread assumption that consumers of media content are gradually becoming more active participants in the creation and interpretation of content. However, it is our view that this assumption is not a foregone conclusion and that, authorial communication is not necessarily being replaced by a logic of shared participation. We believe that it is more fruitful to envisage a creative tension between these two imperatives, with each i-doc taking an approach to authorship and participation which is appropriate to its aims and intentions. In addition to this, authorship should be seen as something that can exist on several levels, from the more traditional approach of the author as subject expert, through the author taking on a more curatorial approach, to the authorship being genuinely distributed through a user generated process.

As co-founder of Blast Theory, Matt Adam's deliberately positioned Blast Theory as 'just a bunch of artists'. This was in keeping with our observation that many of the works that could put into the i-docs basket are not called as such by their creators. This may be partly because the term is not well established enough, but it is also linked to the fact that the creators often come from other worlds than the documentary one (as artists, game designers, new media producers and so forth). For such new media authors the use of video, and of a traditional narrative structure, might not be essential at all to mediate reality. If what is asked of documentary is to present an authorial point of view, then the link with a longer tradition of documentary making is clear. However, digital and participatory media are also affording new goals, one of which is to position the audience 'in the place of' a character – and therefore finding meaning in a 'what would I do if' logic – rather than 'this is what has happened'. In this new logic, a pervasive game experience (such as *Rider Spoke*), or a locative art project (such as *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant*) is not even aiming to represent reality because it is creating real-time lived experiences that bring the participant in a position of spatial and personal discovery. This links back to a core theme within this article that i-docs offer new ways not only to represent reality but also to construct it.

In a world where it is understood that reality and perception are subjective terms, a valid approach to i-docs is to focus more on our ethical choices than on illusory objective facts. As Adams explained, Blast Theory's work plays with the blurred distinction between the real, the fictional and the imaginary. His claim is that, since universal 'truth' does not exist, it is our position in relation to the truth that matters. Blast Theory's work elegantly leads users/participants to those moments of choice – that will effectively say more about themselves than about the world around us. As such, the role of immersion and play as effective tools for creating dialogue around ethical questions is a key area for further development.

Blast Theory's work illustrates how participants can engage in an active experience, which is embodied and which evolves through a dynamic interactive process. The idea that enacted perception – as opposed to an interpretation of a pre-authored version of reality – can be at the centre of the documentary experience is one of the aspects which is new and exciting about i-docs and which is elucidated upon in Gaudenzi's writing around the *relational object* that adapts to its environment and transforms itself while changing its environment too (Gaudenzi 2011). In this sense, pervasive and immersive games should not be seen as being superficial forms of entertainment, but rather as offering new ways to position ourselves within nonfiction stories.

Florian Thalhofer's description of his difficult experience in editing his first linear film *Planet Galata* (2011) for Arte television, raised issues relating to the affordances of both the linear and non-linear form. As the inventor of Korsakow (an authoring tool for interactive video), he claimed that 'the film' (the linear *Planet Galata*) made him lie. He used humour and provocation to explain how the Aristotelian narrative form – with its need of a beginning, a complication, a middle and a resolution at the end – 'forced' him to construct a story that was not fitting with his real life experience. Contrary to the argument that most documentary makers have about the use of interactivity in documentaries – that the lack of authorial voice ultimately leads to a multitude of meaningless stories – Thalhofer argued that interactivity can set up scenarios whilst at the same time freeing the author from forcing a point of view onto his audience.

I-docs certainly do afford new ways to present multiple points of view – whether from the perspective of a single authorial voice or from the perspective of a community of authors working collaboratively around a common theme – and they can be used to present contested points of view, allowing users to come to their own conclusions. Aston takes the position in her own work that, whilst this is still achievable within documentary films, i-docs can offer more scope for in-depth engagement with a set of complex ideas through the presentation of multiple entry points and simultaneous storylines. This is an area that she has been concerned with for a number of years, given her ongoing engagement with ethnographic archives and multilayered narrative (Aston 2008). For her, authorial intent remains central to these debates, with some i-docs adopting a linear and didactic approach to their storytelling, and some documentary films doing everything they can to create more open-ended and non-linear forms of storytelling.

Aside from the issues raised by the four keynote presentations, a series of other important contributions were made by the panel presenters of the day. Although it would be impossible to give justice to the richness of the debate, here are a few points and contributions that are relevant to the ongoing debates among the i-docs community that were established through the 2011 symposium:

- A taxonomy of i-docs is very much needed, as it is the only way to avoid confusion when speaking of emergent genres within the i-docs family. Peter Dukes (Westminster University), Sandra Gaudenzi (Goldsmiths) and Arnau Gifreu (Universitat de Vic) have different propositions and are continuing the academic debate on this subject.
- The array of participatory projects presented at i-Docs reinforced the feeling that both transmedia and collaborative documentary are very current themes. Siobhan O'Flynn (Toronto) gave a concise overview of the key issues within her presentation and Kerric Harvey (Washington) raised important questions about the ethical consequences of user collaboration in documentaries. The point was made that it is necessary to consider both who is held responsible for the content of a collaborative i-doc and to also clarify what participation really means and what are its limits in terms of the documentary genre.
- In opposition to this current trend, the question was asked by Rod Coover (Pennsylvania) as to whether there is a place for long-form scholarly texts in i-docs, in which users are invited to enter into a pre-authored world, which combines spatial exploration with narrative organisation to deliver

a sustained argument through non-linear means? If so, is it legitimate for these texts to have a single authorial voice or should they always present their ideas through a multitude of voices?

- Given that i-docs need to create meaning, questions were asked around the role of user testing in the design and development of i-docs, and at what stage in the development process is user testing most appropriate. Is user testing more appropriate to some types of i-doc than others and how important is it to create pleasurable and engaging interfaces? These questions led to a somewhat heated debate around the purpose of an i-doc and whether or not artistic expression is a valid form of enquiry within the genre. Rod Coover (Pennsylvania) presented the view of the individual artist, whereas Matt Adams saw his role as an artist as being very much part of a collaborative and iterative process involving feedback from participants.
- User generated content has emerged as particularly powerful when paired with social and activist causes. By transforming watchers into users, and then users into doers, the combination of a shared cause and social media is very effective. Could this mean that i-docs might become a new form of activism, where information and action can finally meet? Sharon Daniel (Santa Cruz) provided a moving example of this, describing herself as a context provider who works with communities, collecting their stories, soliciting their opinions, and building online archives to make this data available across social, cultural and economic boundaries.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO THE SECOND I-DOCS SYMPOSIUM

The interest generated by the first symposium, and the discussion that ensued from it, suggested that i-docs are flourishing and here to stay – even if they might be given other names such as web-docs, collab-docs, trans-media docs, cross-media docs, database docs and hypertext docs. As the convenors of the i-Docs symposia, it was no longer necessary for us to proclaim that interactive documentary exists as a genre, since this is now a given. Instead, the ongoing aim became to provide a space where new trends can be explored, concerns can be debated and critical questions can be shared. It was with this view in mind that four main questions were established as starting points for debate at i-Docs 2012. These were questions that came directly from the issues that emerged at i-Docs 2011 and from our own knowledge of the sector. We were also keen to make sure that the multitude of authoring and content management tools have emerged in the last two years (Klynt, Popcorn, W3Doc, Zeega to state a few), were represented at i-Docs 2012. Our aim was to establish a set of ongoing conversations between the authors of these tools and with the practitioners that are using the various tools to make i-docs.

The four central questions for i-Docs 2012 were:

1. User participation in i-docs: how can the act of participating change the meaning of an i-doc and what is the role of authorship in this process?
2. Layered experience, augmented reality games and pervasive media: are locative i-docs changing our notion of physical experience and space?
3. Activism and ethics: how can i-docs be used to develop new strategies for activism?
4. Open source and the semantic web: how are tagging video, HTML5 and the semantic web opening up new routes for i-docs?

The second symposium, held in March 2012, adopted a fluid form to respond to these questions, with a mixture of panels, workshops, labs and feed-back sessions providing the right setting to generate in depth and critical debate. To facilitate these debates, the symposium was set up both to look forwards at emerging possibilities and to look backwards at ongoing concerns within the wider field of documentary endeavour. Central to this approach was our belief in the value of establishing an arena for constructive debate based on the principle of grounded research. This research is practice-led and predicated on the establishment of a community, through which core theoretical concerns and their connection to a longer history of documentary making can begin to be identified within an interdisciplinary context. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the outcomes of this second symposium, space was specifically provided for reflection on the place of i-docs within a wider continuum of documentary making.⁸

8. The programme and speaker details for both i-Docs 2011 and i-Docs 2012 can be found on the i-docs web-hub, along with an evolving series of blog posts in relation to the ongoing development of the genre: <http://i-docs.org/>

CONCLUSION

It is important to us that the community that has sprung up around the i-Docs symposia remains open to new technologies and ideas, whilst at the same time recognizing strong areas of continuity with the wider tradition of documentary making. Our view is that interactive media creates a dynamic relationship between authors, users, technology and environment that allows for fluidity, emergence and co-emergence of reality. One of the things that we find to be new and exciting new about i-docs is the relations of interdependence that they create between the user and the reality that they portray. Feed-back loops that are not possible in linear narrative can give the opportunity both to participants and to the artefact to re-define themselves and to change. Where this is the case, it is through enacted engagement with the artefact that the reality being portrayed comes into being. 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. Whilst contemporary debate around i-docs does seem to be focused on user generated content and participatory processes, we want to position these approaches alongside equivalent discussion of the role of expert knowledge and more artistic forms of expression within i-docs.

I-docs that follow a hypertext, a participative, an experiential or a conversational logic will vary in terms of their look and feel, but also in terms of their political impact. Whereas hypertext i-docs offer new ways to access and engage with a pre-authored set of ideas and arguments, collaborative i-docs can fundamentally question the role we want to have in society to give us active choices that can re-define who we want to be. Locative i-docs, on the other hand, can add layers to the felt perception of reality by transforming the user into an embodied enactor, while conversational i-docs can be good at placing the participant in front of hypothetical ethical choices. These are just some of the distinctions that we can already see in the burgeoning family of i-docs and that the i-Docs symposia have been able to highlight. No doubt, many more forms will emerge in the coming years to challenge our views of participation by creating new opportunities to negotiate and co-create reality. In these times of constant flux, it is hoped that i-Docs will remain the place to debate, ponder and anticipate where the tides are bringing us and how to navigate the waves.

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What defines African cinema? Is there an African identity, and if so, how is it represented in film? *JAC* explores these questions while examining the interactions of visual and verbal narratives in African film. It explores how identity and perception are positioned within diverse African film languages, and how Africa and its peoples are represented on screen.

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