Digital Interactive Documentary: A new media object

Spectatorship, authorship and interactivity

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Thesis for MA in Film & Photographic studies
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Preface

"I've come up with a set of rules that describe our reactions to technologies:

1. Anything that is **in the world when you're born** is normal and ordinary and it's just a natural part of the way the world works.

2. Anything that is **invented between when you're fifteen and thirty-five** is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it.

3. **Anything invented after you're thirty-five** is against the natural order of things"

<div align="right">

Douglas Adams
(Author, *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)

</div>

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the emergent field of *Digital Interactive Documentary (DID)*. Digital interactive documentary – also mentioned as web documentary, webdoc and interactive documentary – corresponds to a novel form of documentary production; it applies a full set of multimedia tools, thus giving possibilities for a new way of documentation and representation of reality. The aim of this thesis is to present an argument on this new emerging form of documentary and to describe its functions and attributes through case studies, in order to compare it with the already existing forms of documentary. The goal will be to identify the web documentary's impact in authorship, narrative, product completion and audience engagement. Therefore, in order to distinguish the main characteristics, aspects and differences of the web documentary, this thesis will concentrate and elaborate on the main features of the DID: Digital Media and Interactivity.

Consequently, in order to analyze the web documentary as a new media object, a thorough examination of its features will be required: digital media, interactive storytelling and interactivity respectively will be placed under the 'microscope' and definitions, forms and strategies will be drawn out.

The digital realm and its interactive feature challenges fields of documentary that range from the aesthetic experience of the viewer to the pre-existing power relationship between the person behind-the-camera and the viewer; a relationship that has arguably been asymmetrical. Since the interactive documentary provides the user with agency – the ability to physically 'do something', to interact by watching a video or flipping through a series of snapshots, or click on a link –there is a new set of relations created, which are interdependent and dynamical. To what extent then, do these relationships change the author/filmmaker, viewer/user, /code/text and the linked components of a digital interactive documentary?

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Introduction

The notion of 'documentary', as we perceive it today, emerged in the 1930s and continues to develop in the present, changing forms or styles according to the changing technological and social conditions of our world. Photography and film, proved effective mediums in reaching a great number of people and therefore were well established as the dominant mode of media communication. Likewise, documentary relied on those media. It was the most efficient way to have the greatest possible reach in documenting reality and communicating to the public, using numerous ways, styles and modes to support and portray argumentation.

Today, there are other ways to reach an even larger public by the use of digital media. Starting in the 1990s, with the emergence of the World Wide Web and in accordance with the rapid advance of information technology, the media landscape altered permanently and created new ways of channeling information were created. Technologies such as high-speed broadband internet which are now available in every household, peer-to-peer networks, web 2.0, the omnipresent digital mobile phones[1] (smartphones) tablet computers and so forth, have taken the reach of media to a whole new level. Respectively, in the realm of video production, the Internet changed from a delivery platform of secondary use for video producers to an essential platform of production. In the same vain, the World Wide Web has proven to be an important – if not essential – way for documentary film makers to reach through the public[2].

Lev Manovich, in his book *The Language of New Media,* speaks about the revolutionary impact that the printing press in the 14th century and the photography in the 19th century had on the development of the modern society. In the same sense, today we are in the mid of a new media revolution - the transferal of our culture to a computer-mediated form of distribution, production and communication (43). Undeniably, the introduction of printing affected one phase of cultural communication, namely, the distribution of media. The introduction of photography affected also one type of communication, namely still images. However, the computer media revolution that Manovich describes effects or will affect all stages of communication and all

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[1] An example of the rapid mobile tech advance is that as of 8th October 2014, there are more active mobile phones than the world population. Source: www.bbc.com
[2] It is a rather common practice for modern documentary filmmakers to 'upload' their material to YouTube, Vimeo and other relevant websites that provide the user with the video stream option. In that way their material has a greater reach through the public and at the same time it can be tested and commented upon, due to the aforementioned websites' option to post comments and video responses.

types of media; from manipulation, distribution, and storage to sound, text, still and moving images. He argues, that this revolution will have a much greater impact on our society, however it is too soon to see its effects as we are still at its beginning. Yet, Manovich wrote *The Language of New Media* book a dozen years ago, and even more rapid changes have taken place in the technological world in the years following the publication of his book, much as they were taking place in 2002. Now we are experiencing even more connectivity and communication through the media world with technologies such as Cloud Computing[3]. Furthermore, the Internet is no more a 'place' with static web pages created and operated by specialists.[4] It is inhabited with greatly networked content created everywhere on the globe; and that content is not made necessarily by digitally skilled individuals with an advanced knowledge of programming or web designing. In other words, the contemporary digital media are accessible to almost everyone and can be operated by almost anyone. And the more the digital media are interconnected, the larger is the interconnectivity amongst the ones using the digital media. Considering the above, one can understand that in such an interconnected and networked techno-cultural milieu, people involved and interested in factual narrative will choose digital media as the alternative to film and photography – which are (were) the traditional media for documentary making.

Recent technological developments and their relation to documentary practices raise a complex and intricate series of questions to be answered: What will the future of documentary be? What will be the form of the documentary of the future? Will the digital media create a new set of systems and characteristics in the documentary making? Will the digital media apply a new set of rules or code in representing reality? And these questions are just a few to name. However, there is a certain problem with answering the above questions: They all relate to the future, whether it is distant or near. And with the rapid advance of technology, it is difficult to hypothesize or theorize possible answers that relate to the future. Furthermore, they correspond to an anticipatory approach that is opposite to the critical and theoretical approach of this thesis. Returning to the present, I grasped that what I really need is to look for certain 'tools' – methods – to help me orient in my research of new

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[3] Cloud Computing is a new innovative platform for delivering services and distributing information over the Internet. It is an online centralized data storage that allows access from anywhere in the Internet and it splits into public and private clouds. A good example of a public cloud would be the Amazon Web Services cloud. This technology is fundamental to the use of digital interactive documentaries.

[4] A 'static' web page is delivered to the user exactly as it is stored, while the opposite, a 'dynamic' web page, is usually generated through a web application.

documentary-making possibilities and the impact of new media technology in the documentary world. These methods will provide the fertile ground to expand on my arguments and answer my questions. Thus, the scrutiny of the relation between reality and representation in documentary making, will provide me with the first problem to explore.

Reality is what the documentary filmmaker has always been occupied with. To be precise, the documentary filmmaker is concerned with the representation of reality and the ways to channel this representation to the public. Thus, the documentary maker has the primary task to interact with reality, to mediate it through filming and editing and finally presenting a version of this "reality" to the public. John Grierson, who coined the "documentary", describes it as "a creative treatment of actuality" (*Grierson on Documentary* 11). Thus, to the viewer, documentaries may not describe what exactly reality[5] is or merely represent it; documentaries engage in a series of relationships with the viewer: The way the viewer relates to the represented actuality and how the viewer's knowledge, beliefs and opinions are forged around this representation. And that relationship between the viewer and the documentary brought me to discover my second question through a look at digital media and how this relationship has been changed by digital technology.

What can be said about digital media and their omnipresence in present-day society except from the interconnectivity and the overlapping of media platforms as it is mentioned above, is that they are able to give an agency to the user of the media; the ability to physically do something, to interact with them. The action of clicking on a hyperlink in the web or streaming a video and then uploading a series of pictures is already an interaction between the human and the digital medium. And that notion of interactivity is a basic element of this research.

According to Manovich, the concept of interactivity in computer-based media is a tautology (71). What Manovich explains, is that modern Human Computer Interface[6] (HCI) is by its very definition interactive. In contrast with earlier interfaces[7], modern HCI permits the user to control the computer in real time by manipulating all

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[5] An epistemological question can be raised here: Does "reality" exist as a given fact before representation or is "reality" a constructed fact on the basis of representational practice?

[6] HCI also refers to Human Computer Interaction and it will be mentioned in chapter II. An Interface is of interest here because it refers to a system. According to Merriam –Webster dictionary, it refers to a system that is used for operating a computer - a system that controls the way information is shown to a computer user and the way the user is able to work with the computer (source: http://www.merriam-webster.com)

[7] An earlier interface is, for example, batch processing. This interface executes a series of programs that are numbered as 'jobs' on a computer without any human interaction.

the information that appears on the computer screen (71). Thus, when an object appears on the computer screen, it becomes automatically interactive. Plausibly, interactivity in the digital media world – even if argued – creates a new set of relations with the user.[8]

Thinking about the future of documentary, it is inevitable not to consider the series of interrelations that will be generated when digital media assume a central part in the conceptualization and production of a documentary. Taking into account the interactive nature of digital media[9], the existence of a platform that offers this type of interactivity would consequently drive the documentary maker to experiment with new forms of documentary making. Think about a documentary switching between linear and non-linear on the viewer's demand, or a film/video-based documentary that would now be multimedia based.[10] This type of platform would therefore guide the documentary filmmaker to experiment with interaction. Works such as *Highrise* (2009 – ongoing),'*Prison Valley*' (2010) and *Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (2009 – ongoing) that will be examined below, are examples of such a platform. All three provide examples of the Digital Interactive Documentaries (DID) that I will discuss in this thesis.[11]

If, to use a phrase of Bill Nichols, "documentary is a fuzzy concept", it's understandable that it will be hard to define what exactly a digital interactive documentary is. I will attempt to conceptualize it by drawing on the given literature on documentary film and the juxtaposition of this literature with contemporary works in the field of digital interactive documentaries. I shall specify the functions and methods of digital documentaries through the analysis of case studies. However, since this is an emerging field, there is a lack of definitions and classifications that make difficult the charting of digital interactive documentaries as a fully established documentary genre.

Hence, the aim of this thesis is not to map the genre of this emergent documentary form, but first to define it and examine why it is a novel platform for

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[8] Arguably, interactivity promises more than it can offer. One never has a total freedom of choice; it is the algorithms that control the options.

[9] Digital Media are considered in this thesis as any media that are encoded in a computer-readable format. They can be created, distributed, viewed and modified on a computer.

[10] Multimedia is a computer-delivered electronic system in which the user has the options to control, combine, and handle various types of media, such as text, sound, video, images, computer graphics, and animation.

[11] It is important to clarify that in this thesis, web documentaries, interactive documentaries, webdocs & idocs, all fall under the same category of the digital interactive documentaries and when mentioned in the text, they will all mean the same thing.

documentary makers. Second, is to find and analyze the set of interrelations that are shaped between the viewer and the documentary due to interactivity. Finally, to argue notions of documentary such as authorship, spectatorship and narrativity and how is this altered in digital documentary works.

The interrelations created among the participants in a Digital Interactive Documentary (DID) are of great interest in this research. In order to portray my argumentation I will take a 'systemic' approach towards the web documentaries.[12] A systemic approach means that I accept this form of documentary as a system with components that are directly related to each other and also as an interacting entity (relational entity) that can be shaped by other heterogeneous beings. These can be computers or technology and in their interaction with the DIDs, all the components whether human or machine, are codependent. I will argue that the very nature of interactive documentaries requests the user to participate and to join, to share and to contribute to the documentary; therefore the viewer is not just a viewer anymore; he is an (inter) active participant, a user or 'doer'.[13]

Moreover, while the user/viewer interacts with the modules of the web documentary, he is well aware that is navigating in a virtual world and not in a fictional space, such as a computer game. The virtual environment and interactive world is portrayed in *Prison Valley (2010)*, one of the digital interactive documentaries that I will thoroughly analyze. Although the user might have a set of similar attributes that correspond to a computer game like exploring, viewing and changing, this time he is using these game attributes to explore the reality that is presented for him to interact, through the web documentary.

The main difference from the previous forms of documentary is that the viewer is not only watching the material 'externally', but through interaction he becomes a part of it, he becomes 'internal' (Gaudenzi 2013). Therefore, since the viewer has to interact with the DID he becomes a part of that system of relations[14], meaning that he is connected through a series of actions and reactions with the DID and he helps it transmute while the viewer transmutes also himself to a user. The interactions and relations between them two creates a conceivably infinite set of

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[12] Systemic: of or relating to an entire system. (definition: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/systemic)
[13] The viewer in this thesis will transform to a 'doer', who will also be described as a 'user'. In *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, Galloway speaks about the transformation of the two-way relationship involving the 'text' (as Nichols describes text in *Representing Reality*) and the reader, to the direct relationship between the game and the 'doer', the gamer. (Galloway, 105)
[14] These relations are also a result of an algorithmic structure.

possibilities. So, the digital interactive documentary arguably falls far from the $static$, ready product of the pre-existing documentary forms.

The focal questions of this thesis that formulate therefore are, a) how does the viewer become a user in a web documentary and what does this mean for the documentary b) how does interactivity affect spectatorship in terms of audience engagement and c) how does interactivity affect the notion of authorship and product completion? In the following chapters I will answer the above questions by concentrating on the digital interactive documentary as a form and on the user of the documentary. Therefore, in the first chapter of this research I will start by defining what the digital documentary is, why is it an emerging form and compare it with traditional documentary using a 'systemic'[15] approach. In chapter two, I will analyze the notion of interactivity, as well as its strategies and how it affects the viewer of the web documentary in regards to user control over the material and in regards to interactive storytelling. Finally in the third and concluding chapter, I will scrutinize the concept of authorship, agency and interactivity in web documentaries as it was presented in the previous two chapters and present my conclusive arguments, in order to see to what extent does the web documentary qualify as a new media object.

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[15] A 'systemic approach' means that I would have to accept this form of documentaries as a system with components that are directly related to each other and also as an entity, as an all-changing and interacting being that it can be shaped dynamically by other heterogeneous beings.

CHAPTER I: Digital Artifacts and media objects: The digital interactive documentary as an emerging form.

A systemic approach to the definition of documentary

Bill Nichols, the 'father of documentary theory', has stated two things about the nature of documentary, in his book *Introduction to Documentary*: First, that "every film is a documentary" (1) and that "it is a fuzzy concept" (21). Both of the above statements hint that the documentary nature of an artifact – whether it is film or photography - is not easy to define. And that is because every (moving) image arguably pertains a certain documentary value, which is culturally and historically determined. Depending on when the artifact is viewed, it can be decided if it portrays cultural and/or societal evidence of the time that it was made. In the same vein, the way the documentary is received by the viewers can lead to certain cultural reactions and can influence society. John Grierson's phrase that documentary is a "creative treatment of actuality" (*Grierson on Documentary* 1971) takes the point of view of documentary making to the side of the maker; the creative treatment of reality is somewhat fundamental to the documentary maker.

Nichols, in his 1991 book *Representing Reality* proposes a set of vantage points that help define what documentary is: a) the maker, b) the 'text' and c) the viewer.[16] Using these three points, Nichols supports that this is a method to define a difficult, multilayered concept as the documentary.[17] This approach is systemic[18], since documentary cannot be defined by just looking at one of the three points, but by looking at them together and in relation to each other – as a system of relations. In short, the documentary consists of a set of relations between the author, the viewer and the medium which encapsulates that. The viewer is in direct relation with the maker and the text and vice versa. For the sake of this research, I will use the vantage point of the viewer in relation with the filmmaker and the text.

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[16] The notion of 'apparatus' could replace point (b) here, since "text" is a concept that derives from semiotic film theory and is a more limited term. However, for the sake of Nichols' theory, and for the purposes of the argument, I will maintain the "text" as point (b).

[17] Nichols is best known for his documentary modes of representation, which help describe and define what documentary is. For the sake of the systemic approach, I use in this thesis his approach towards the parts of documentary system, as described in his 1991 book, *Representing Reality*.

[18] Systemic = a "system-wide" effect on a group or system. Examples of a system can be the human body, economy, market.

The viewer of a documentary considers what is represented to him from as real, as an event that has truly happened. Even if the camera was not there filming the events as they originally happened, the spectator is convinced that the events would have taken place anyway. Thus, reality for the viewer is an "illusion" that he is willing to accept while watching a documentary. So the viewer's consideration is in other words what Nichols mentions: "documentary sounds and images have an indexical relation to the historical world" (*Representing Reality* 27). At this point a distinction between the "indexical" nature of the photographic sign and the "reality" effect of the documentary film has to be made. Since the index is an intrinsic property of a sign, the indexical nature is not the same as 'naturalism', 'realism' or 'documentary truth'. The former is a physical and existential fact while the latter is a cultural convention. Now, considering the previous statement by Grierson, evidently the viewer might not see the real but a representation of it that is altered partially or fully by the filmmaker. Since its beginning, documentary has been 'creative' in enhancing its reception by the public and portraying a specific point of view. Dramatic narratives and editing (continuity, evidentiary) to name a few are measures to ensure that the documentary point of view of the maker will be conveyed to the viewer.[19] Even in the Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema of the 1960s, the filmmaker had the chance to alter the material by editing it according to the way he wants to portray his arguments and points of view.[20] Although the filmmakers of that period tried to adhere to strict rules of conduct regarding editing, they had the final say in the way they wanted to portray their arguments in their film. Moreover, Brian Winston in his 1995 book *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations*, questions documentary's relation to reality. He deems that reality is not a matter of immediate representation for the viewer, but an issue of subjective interpretation (1995). And Nichols continues in *Introduction to Documentary*, "documentaries may represent the world in the same way a lawyer may represent a client's interests: they put the case for a particular view or interpretation of evidence before us" (4). We can evidently see that the viewer has a value as high as the one of the maker in this systemic approach due to the viewer's subjective relation with the material.

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[19] A good example is *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty, 1922) that is considered to be not only the first documentary but also the one with altered narrative in order to meet the dramatic needs of the audience. (Nichols, 2001)

[20] Frederick Wiseman's *Highschool* (1968) and D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967) are representative of the Direct Cinema of 1960s.

To continue, Nichols believes that in a system where the three points of view – viewer, maker, film – are interdependent, the system is subject to changes. And that is possible because if the position of one of the three elements alters, then it affects the other two. "Documentary is the site of contestation and change", (*Representing Reality* 12) he states. Although Nichols means to say that documentary challenges our conception of reality itself, it could be derived by this statement that documentary itself is subject to contestation. Hence for Nichols, documentary is not a ready-made, final product. In *Introduction to Documentary*, he mentions that "for every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker's, the film's and the audience's" (61). So, for every artifact with a documentary value, one has to take in account the three stories and the three points of view.[21] Thus, the viewer becomes a part of this system of stories and of vantage points, a system subjective to change due to the changeable interrelations of the system parts. And due to this systemic approach, the documentary cannot be considered or defined as an end product.

What is a 'Digital Interactive Documentary'?

If traditional documentary is somewhat difficult to define, one can think that the digital interactive documentary sounds equally – and possibly more – complex to delineate. Not only because of its novelty but more because of its complicated technical structure; digital media is a 'brave new world' of its own, let alone interactivity. Furthermore, if this thesis approaches documentary as a system, then DID is probably an intricate technological and cultural system of its own. But let us take things from the beginning: a documentary in order to be a DID must contain two aspects: a) digital technology and b) interactive character. A documentary may be digital; for example, a digitalized version of Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* for online streaming view. However, that does not make it interactive. By adding the value of interactivity to the digital documentary, the DID is given its true meaning. When the viewer has the option to interact with the digital artifact, then we have works like *Prison Valley*, and *The Global Remake*.

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[21] The question that is raised here is: at what stage of the documentary production does one take into account the three stories and the three points of view? Even though that the most plausible answer here would be that one takes all the stories and the points into account during the editing, before the deliver of the final product, we are concerned here with the reception of the final product from the viewer. So, the answer would be, that all the above is taken into account at the moment of the final product's reception from the viewer.

The works however are much more than the literature; something that is in total accordance with the contemporary techno-culture. A reason to that asymmetry could be the fact that a lot of digital interactive works are made by media artists that do not consider themselves documentary makers (yet). Another reason could be the belief that a digital work lacks the linearity of a documentary. Or it lacks the narrative voice of the documentary. But it is argued that a narrative voice or linear narratives are the basics of a traditional documentary. Regardless, various authors wrote the first views on interactive documentaries almost ten years ago. In order to approach the new artifact, they made the following assumption that led them to more molds of definitions: That every new medium – the DID in this case – is mimicking its predecessor.[22] By this assumption, they placed the interactive documentaries as the continuation of the traditional documentaries. At that point, it would be useful to see early and later characterizations and approaches on the notion of digital interactive documentaries:

In 2004, Carolyn Handler Miller is one of the first to speak about multiplatformed media and their effect in narrative. She characteristically mentions in her book *Digital Storytelling,* "Transmedia storytelling, which also goes by the name of multi-platforming integrated media, and cross media productions, is a relatively new approach to narrative. In this approach…a single entertainment property is merged over multiple forms of media, at least one of which is interactive" (47).

In 2007 Dayna Galloway et al. in their article "From Michael Moore to JFK Reloaded: Towards a Working Model of Interactive Documentary", write about artifacts that use digital media and interactivity to create a linear documentary. And they characteristically write about the interactive documentary: "At face value, the definition of interactive documentary is very straightforward – we may define it as any documentary that uses interactivity as a core part of its delivery mechanism" (330).

In 2009, Maria F. Ursu et al. in their article "Interactive Documentaries: A Golden Age" write about interactive television and the analysis of a TV interactive documentary about the arts of the Renaissance in England, driven by the new possibilities in the documentary world due to the recent advances in information and

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[22] Nichols believes that new media behavior is closer to cross-pollination than to a literal expansion or direct continuation of the old media. "Related media trade conventions and borrow techniques from one another". (2001, xvi). Marshall McLuhan as well as Bolter & Grusin have written about the theory of 're-mediation'.

communication technology (41:1). They speak about the development of interactive storytelling or interactive narratives as a way that merges narrativity and interactivity into a single space (41:3).

In 2012, Hussein K. H. Abd El Sattar writes in his article "State of the art in Interactive Storytelling technology: An approach based on Petri Nets", that interactive storytelling is a promising form of new media development and digital entertainment. And he defines interactive storytelling as, "the endeavor to develop new media in which the presentation of a narrative, and its evolution can be influenced, in real time, by the user" (12:283).

While the above authors do not exactly define what a digital interactive documentary is, they start to describe its attributes by trying to map (and understand) the new evolution in the documentary realm due to the new technological developments. Before excerpting key parts from their definitions that would help us understand what a DID is, it is useful to mention some of the efforts to define it:

Kate Nash, in her 2012 article "Modes of Interactivity: Analyzing the Webdoc" speaks about "a growing collection of documentaries that are made for broadcast on the Internet" (196). In addition, she defines web documentary as a body of documentary work distributed via the Internet that is both multi-media and interactive" (197). She continues by comparing it with traditional documentary in terms of style and approach except one 'constant' variable, which is interactivity. And furthermore she sets to define the web documentary (digital interactive documentary) in relation to interactivity by giving it 3 structures or types: the narrative, the categorical and the collaborative (2012).

Insook Choi in 2010, in a more technical approach, gives a user-centered definition on what an interactive documentary is in his article "From tradition to emerging practice: A hybrid computational production model for interactive documentary" (2010). He writes, "interactive documentary is here defined as a documentary production model with interactive author functions for constructing a narrative voice as a document of reality itself" (105).

Lastly, Sandra Gaudenzi and in her 2013 article "The interactive documentary as living documentary" gives the following definition: "Interactive documentaries are digital non-linear narratives that use new media to relate and describe reality" (10).

Moreover, the difference in the rate of development in theories, definitions and mapping of the interactive documentaries comes in accordance with the rate of

development of the digital media and the merging of the media platforms. In other words, the way the digital media technology advances, the same way the digital interactive documentary world is advancing. The DID field possibly moves too fast to be documented and mapped. Therefore it cannot be clearly defined as a specific documentary type, style or method. Arguably, the only way to be defined would be in relation to its components. Therefore, a systemic approach would be really useful in order to identify what an interactive documentary is. As the traditional documentary can be approached and analyzed systemically as we have seen before, in the same way the DID can be approached systemically. But before I analyze the system components and the layers of the digital interactive documentary it would be useful to answer this: So, what is a digital interactive documentary?

Attempting to give an overall definition to the DID, given the above authors' descriptions, a web documentary/interactive documentary/digital interactive documentary is

A documentary production model that entails a combination of digital media platforms, placing at their core the element of interactivity in order to deliver interactive storytelling which can be accessed primarily through the web.

While my definition on the web documentaries could possibly be contested by a number of authors, I would like to clarify that it is a definition derived from the existing literature in the field. Nonetheless, it appears that web documentary is in harmony with the current technoculture; it uses a 'language' (interface) that is acceptable and understandable by the new digitalized world. Furthermore, documentaries like *Highrise* (started in 2009 and is ongoing) and *Prison Valley* (2010) as well as other examples, made me realize that by the use of digital media, they can create digital artifacts that even just ten years ago would have been impossible to be created, let alone conceived.

What is most important here are the essential concepts of the web documentary's platform: digital media and interactivity. They are mentioned by the above authors and moreover, they are placed in the center of their descriptions. Before elaborating on interactivity, it would be necessary to compare the two documentary forms – traditional documentary and the interactive documentary – in a systemic

approach, for two reasons: First, to identify the components in the system of the digital interactive documentary as they were identified for the traditional documentary and second, because of the questions that arise by the statement that since a traditional documentary is not considered as a finite product[23] what will the DID be considered as, in terms of product completion and of viewer, with the insertion of the value of interactivity.

Comparing traditional documentary with digital interactive documentary: From Dziga Vertov to… Dziga Vertov.

So, what are the main differences between the two documentary forms? Considering the definitions above, there are a few things to alter, if we are to move from one form to the newer form. Going back to the systemic approach of the traditional documentary, an attempt to systemize the digital interactive documentary in comparison with its supposed predecessor could be useful. The system formed by the traditional documentary – as mentioned before and derived from Nichols' *Representing Reality* – is the following:

1.Maker = 2.Film (analog) = 3.Viewer

Where we to add specific attributes to each part of the system, it would appear as this:

1.Maker = Control and authorship
2.Film = Linear narrative
3.Viewer = Cognitive participation/interpretation

As stated before, every component of the system is related with the other component and if something changes in their relation, then the whole system changes. Now, since the DIDs use digital media as their platform instead of just film, the system would change for the web documentaries as following:

1.Maker = 2.Digital Media = 3.Viewer

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[23] Systemic approach should be considered here, as it is described in the introduction of this thesis, regarding the "open-ended" nature of a DID.

How would the attributes change the system of the web documentary? In traditional documentary, the narrative structure of the 'text' is linear, meaning that it starts from one point with the aim to reach to another point, e.g starting from A to reach Z, reaching Z according to the filmmaker's techniques, which here is authorship and control over his/her material. Therefore, since the story sequence is pre-determined and set by the author for the viewer, the boundaries of control and authorship are also easy to distinguish. As for the viewer, in the traditional documentary an (optional) mental participation is required from him with regard to the documentary film material. [24] In other words, the viewer is at least required to reflect on what he is been viewing.

According to Gaudenzi, Ursu et. al and El Sattar, web documentaries are non-linear artifacts and their key mechanism – interactivity – merges with the narrative structure. So according to them, there is no clear, predetermined and controlled narrative plot (sequence) by the author, meaning that the boundaries of authorship and control become blurred. Additionally, Nash, Galloway et al, speak about a documentary that uses digital media and the World Wide Web for its distribution. That could be interpreted as the fact that the author has no subsequent control or authorship of his/ her material once it is a) uploaded online and b) due to the interactive nature of digital media, it is altered by the viewer's interaction. And lastly, as Insook Choi mentions, the web documentaries give the function of the author to the viewer by interactivity, for the sake of the creation of a narrative voice. That could be interpreted here as that the viewer does not only require to participate cognitively in the documentary system but he/she is required to physically act on it, to do something with it, e.g click on a hyperlink or upload a picture or an audio recording to an already existing digital interactive documentary online (Aston, Gaudenzi 2012). Thus, the different attributes that appear in the DID system, would be the following:

1.Maker = no or minimal control over material

2.Digital Media = Non-linear/Linear narrative

3.Viewer (user) = Physical participation/digital interaction

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[24] 'Linear' or classical text does not necessarily require the participation of the reader. Moreover, the term 'linear' is clear enough as a term but there is a more developed conception of narration in the literature. (See: 'narrartology'). For the sake of this research, I use the linear term with its generic form as a line from A to Z, similar as a relationship of numeric 0 and 1, placing 0 where A is and Z where 1 is.

Therefore, the system changes from the traditional documentary to the digital interactive documentary in all its attributes. That change can create a set of arguments about the DID being a new media object and a possible successor of documentary. And that is because, in the new system, documentary's fundamental values such as authorship and linearity change. Moreover, the viewer by physically participating uses the digital media and their interactive substance to alter – or create – a narrative structure. (see also chapter two, interactive storytelling) So, 'viewer' would not be the appropriate word anymore for this system and should be changed to 'user' (Aston, Gaudenzi, 2012).

"Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake"

Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is considered to be one of the first and most significant documentaries (or a film of documentary nature) even though Vertov's work is still under scrutiny regarding if and to what extent does *Man with a Movie Camera* qualify for a documentary or it should be considered a fictional narrative of urban life. Irrespective, the film examines the transformative power of the coordinated masses in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union. (*Introduction to Documentary* 90) In short, the story of the film is a life in a day in the USSR, including shots from Kiev, Odessa and Moscow as well as other cities. The film is a pioneer in editing techniques and a key characteristic is the way the juxtaposition of shots takes place in order to jar the spectator and produce new insights from the way different shots are brought together. (*Introduction to Documentary* 92)

After a search online on Vertov's film, the accessibility and the view ability is eminent: It can be easily found on the page of www.archive.org or YouTube, complete, free to watch, in various screening qualities and there is also a DVD release of it from 2006. Therefore, the film has its digital, online and accessible form. So, according to the above-mentioned notions, *Man with a Movie Camera* exists today as a digital documentary, but not an interactive one. However, one of the most renowned interactive documentary projects is the interactive remake of Vertov's film, under the title, *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake.* (see fig. 1) It can be accessed online, as it exists as a digital video form on a website.

"Every day a new version of the film is compiled from shots uploaded to the site", as it is mentioned in the website's front page under the box where the remake of the film can be viewed.[25] According to the makers, *The Global Remake* is a participatory video that is shot by people who may be anywhere in the world. People who want to participate are invited to record images and video parts by interpreting the original script of *Man with a Movie Camera* and uploading them to the website of *The Global Remake.* Literally anyone can upload footage and by the online streaming of the individual contribution, the 'uploader' – which is the viewer/user in this case – becomes a part of a 'worldwide montage'.[26] Thus, the constant uploading of the participants creates a new version of the film every day.

In order to view the material – uploads plus the original film – the following system is used: A video where on the left of the screen the original version of Vertov's film is shown and on the right side of the screen the relevant shots that are uploaded by the participants. (see fig. 2, 3 and 4) Since the number of participants is growing everyday, the makers rotate the uploaded shots per day, so the re-made film can never be the same. All the above is possible due to the development of a software by the makers that archives the uploads from the users, then sequences them, then submits them and finally streams them as a film.

Juxtaposing the two documentaries, its easy to point out the components in the system of Vertov's original film, having Dziga Vertov as the maker, the film/text would be the *Man with the Movie Camera* and the viewer cognitively participating in his/her attempt to interpret Vertov's film. Moreover, Vertov as the maker has the full control of its material and the film's story has a narrative coherence, the storyline that is the portrayal of a day in the life of former Soviet Union.[27] The components in the system of *The Global Remake* can be elucidated as this:

a) The maker – which in this case would be Vertov and the creators of the remake – has no overall control over the film, since the images uploaded by the users are randomly operated by the designed software and then appear on the video that changes every day.

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[25] source: http://dziga.perrybard.net/
[26] source: http://dziga.perrybard.net/
[27] Dziga Vertov, except control over his material, wanted to "activate" the viewer by a dialectical manner.

b) The digital media that are the webpage, the embedded video feature, the digitalized version of the original film, the uploaded video and pictures from the users and the combined video that occurs after the randomization of the software, are all combined in the creation of a narrative voice.

c) The viewer, because of his physical participation to the documentary and his interaction with the software by uploading material, becomes a user and is partially given the function of the author.

How does the viewer become a user in *The Global Remake*? The instructions on how to interact with the software are given to the viewer once he visits the website. A set of functions is described to the viewer, such as the starting point 'where you come in'. The *Global Remake* authors explain, that there is every shot contained in the website, with a thumbnail on each one mentioning the start time and end time of the shot. In order for the viewer / user to upload a video or a picture, a shot needs to be selected, as shown in figures 5 and 6. (see fig. 5) Next to the shots, there is a detailed description of what the shot entails, the duration of the shot and the specific uploads from other users on that shot. (see fig. 6) In addition, the authors give another option for the user to upload material, by looking at tags of the shots. There, the tags are listed alphabetically and by clicking on one tag, the user can see the relevant uploads. (see fig. 7) Finally, the user by clicking on each of the above options continues to the upload screen, where the video or picture can be uploaded and the video can be from any possible format, including cameras from mobile phones and other low-resolution equipment; as long as the user can access the web, any relevant material can be uploaded. (see fig. 8) Therefore, *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* invites its users to interpret Dziga Vertov's work on their own and express themselves with the upload of their videos and images, giving the viewer control and authorship to the material through interaction with the software mechanism of the web documentary.

However, does the *Global Remake* accomplish what Vertov's original documentary does? One could argue that by uploading various materials as described above, Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* is not conveyed anymore in the same way of the original film. Vertov's original logic – whether making a documentary or a fictional narrative of urban life – seems to disappear in the digital interactive remake,

thus making the remake difficult to stand alone; in order for Vertov's logic to be understood both the original film and the uploads have to be played together. Even then though, the viewer might lose or ignore certain aspects of the original film. Mostly, Vertov's effort to make cognitively the viewer active through montage could be ignored, which at the time of the original film was at least a form of democratization, without the politics. The *Global Remake* could be argued as a formalistic remake of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Since, the film represents a reflection at a moment in time, data collection – which is uploaded and ordered in the remake – does not seem to convey this reflection.

The *Global Remake* is an ongoing project, with new material uploaded every day, thus it arguably does not equal the idea of a finalized 'product' with a notion of authorship; and that is feasible due to the use of digital media and due to the interaction between the media and the viewer. The interaction of the viewer with the software is the fundamental change in the system of the digital interactive documentary, transforming the relations among the components of the system and changing the viewer to an active/interactive participant, to a user. But what does interactivity really mean in digital interactive documentaries?

The idea of interactivity is a complex and arguable notion of the contemporary techno-culture and in the interest of understanding its significance in the web documentary, its strategies and key concepts will be developed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II: Interactive media, Interactive World, Interactive Storytelling: Interactivity under the microscope.

Interactivity is simultaneously complex and simple and moreover a topic big enough to constitute a thesis on its own. Its notion is debated by many authors, with the example of Lev Manovich that considers it as a tautology and furthermore a 'myth' in his book, *The Language of New Media*. (2002) In the interest of understanding how interactivity affects the system of the digital interactive documentary, I will have to narrow down the research to specified facts about interactivity and moreover to spot out the web documentary's structure and the strategies that are used in the web documentary in regards to storytelling. Therefore, a set of rules has to be mentioned in this thesis and that would help pin down the elements that I would be looking for in the case study that will be described further in this chapter.

Ground Rules

1. "To understand the logic of new media, we need to turn to computer science. It is there that we may expect to find the new terms, categories and operations which characterize media which became programmable" (*The Language of New Media* 65). In the same vein, to understand the logic of interactivity, we will have to focus on computer science, the novel science of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and to the technological aspects of the interaction between the human and the multimedia system, which in this case is the digital interactive documentary.

2. Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture*, speaks about the complexity of the interaction among media, and media interactivity due to the convergence[28] culture after the digitalization of media (Jenkins 2006). As interesting as this is, it is not relevant to this thesis, because the goal here is the interactivity in terms of user (human) and machine (computer).

3. Henry Jenkins, in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media education for the 21st century* distinguishes between the culture of participation and interaction due to our culture's complex relationships with technologies. For him,

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[28] Convergence according to Lev Manovich, is the digital convergence of all media in one platform that combines them and all the media are ruled by the binary code of 0 and 1.

interactivity is a property of technology, while participation is a property of culture (8). And this is the approach that it will be used for interactivity in this chapter.

4. Lastly, Mitchell Whitelaw, Mark Guglielmetti and Troy Innocent describe in their article "Strange Ontologies in Digital Culture" that the new digital systems give a great opportunity to develop and formulate novel methodologies in the structuring of human experience. They propose that "these systems are significantly shaped by their underlying formal structures and relations; that is, their ontologies. Moreover, as these systems are often interactive, their ontologies inform modalities of subjectivity in relation to a player or user" (4:2). Here, Whitelaw et al, propose what is necessary for the studying of interactivity in this chapter, the systemic approach with a view on the relationships of the user with the media.

On interactivity

Were we to look for a definition of interactivity in the internet, this would be the first answer on the definition: "Across the many fields concerned with interactivity, including information science, computer science, human-computer interaction, communication, and industrial design, there is little agreement over the meaning of the term interactivity".[29] Ironically enough, the all-interacting medium, the computer and its new 'counterpart' in search – and not only – Google, is unable to provide a clear answer. The same answer is included in the digital online encyclopedia, the Wikipedia.[30] The complexity of the notion and its use, applies to all kinds of social and technological layers of the contemporary society, thus making authors in various fields unable to clearly delineate it. Looking for a dictionary definition in Merriam-Webster online, interactivity appears as the noun of interactive and it refers to a system designed for responding in actions of a human towards a machine[31]. Same in dictionary.com, interactivity is defined as the "extent to which a computer program and a human may have a dialogue" [32]. Thus, the generic definition of interactivity includes an interchange of actions between human and computer.

Since a few ground rules are set, a look on how literature approaches interactivity is illuminating. In 2003, Manuel Castells in *The Internet Galaxy:*

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[29] Source www.google.com
[30] Wikipedia is considered to be an 'interactive' encyclopedia with collective access.
[31] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interactivity
[32] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/interactivity

Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society defines interactivity as "the ability of the user to manipulate and affect his experience of media directly and to communicate with others through the media" (201). The part of this definition that is of interest to this thesis is on the user's ability to directly manipulate the media. For the rest of the definition, the distinction between participation and interactivity in the ground rules set above comes handy here, as the communication with others through the media lies mostly in the cultural realm. Furthermore, Kate Nash, in her analysis of the effects of interactivity in the webdocs, does not provide an exact demarcation but considers that interactivity is defined depending on the context it appears and its definition is susceptible to social and technological contexts (Nash 2012). While the social dimension of the term is ruled out, for Nash when interactivity is associated with the documentary, it should be understood in relation to the user and his ability to employ control over the content, the 'text' (2012, 199). Already we can see that interactivity is defined here in terms of user control on the media. In *Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*, the authorship control seems to pass on from the maker to the user, due to the interactive software platform of the documentary in the same way that the viewer becomes a user, as described in chapter I.

How does this interchange of actions between human and computer take place? And how does interactivity evidently gives a certain authorship control to the user? The proximate answer is that interactivity gives an agency[33] to the user – the ability to physically do something with the documentary. Or, in other words, in the interactive documentary the user is given an agency. Even more precise, the user needs to have an agency. In *Arte TV's* production '*Prison Valley*' (2010) the user is given an agency right from the start.

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[33] Agency: "The satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (*Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* 126). The term 'agency' is used mostly in computer game design and it helps in signifying the arrows of choices that the user has while playing the computer game. Here, Murray's definition is of certain use for this thesis, as it marks out the notion of 'power'.

'Welcome to the Prison Valley': interactive world

In 2010, *Arte TV* [34] released its award-winning [35] web (DID) documentary titled *Prison Valley,* [36] created by French journalist David Dufresne and photojournalist Phillipe Brault (and produced by Alexandre Brachet).[37] *Prison Valley* is primarily a road movie with a interactive prospective, as it integrates user response and user discussion into its story. Furthermore, it is a cross-platform multimedia prison reform project that tells the story of Cañon City in Freemont County, Colorado. Freemont County, better known as 'the prison valley', is a tiny patch in the southwest of USA and home to thirty-six thousand locals, fourteen prisons and around seven thousand incarcerated convicts. The local economy of the county revolves around its incarcerated populous – and many of the convicts are in fact the county's own residents. "If the prisons weren't here, there would be nothing and nobody, because there is nothing else to offer", says the Sheriff of Cañon City characteristically, meaning that the town has literally grown up around the 14 prisons it encapsulates.

Interesting to mention is that, the creators travelled initially in 2009 to the documentary's location, Cañon City. They filmed and photographed the town, the prisons, interviewed prisoners and locals, thus gathering a great amount of material. And that material was edited and eventually released in the form of a traditional documentary. However, the makers' idea was to create a documentary that would initiate a discussion regarding prison reform and the traditional linear documentary did not do enough justice to the topic, according to their statements.[38] Therefore, the creators of *Prison Valley* decided to start the documentary in a traditional manner and then went on to use a multimedia platform in order to engage their audience.

Prison Valley begins with a movie clip that drives the viewer down to Cañon City with the addition of a voice-over. (see fig. 9) The road clip finishes upon arrival in the city and exactly to the point that the road clip takes the viewers to a hotel in the city, where they can check-in. That is the point where the viewer changes to becoming a user. This 'transformation' takes place primarily with the webdoc's

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request to ask the user to check-in. In order to register at the hotel, the user has to fill in details of his email account, twitter account or his facebook account. In that way, the user can create his own personal account so he can login and become a part of the wider community of users that are simultaneously logged into *Prison Valley* and most important, the user can pick up where he left off, since he/she now has an account. Thus, the user can co-explore the world that the webdoc creators have constructed, which consists of an overlap of media platforms, including film, photography, sound and animated graphics.

Once the user has completed the 'registration process', the next screen from the webdoc takes the user to his/her hotel room. From there, the user has the freedom to select his path and navigate through the information and material provided by the webdoc makers (see fig.10). Taking a closer look at the image, we can see that the user has now the ability to interact with the material of the web documentary and select various paths that will lead him to pre-recorded interviews (only sound), video interviews of inmates, photographs, historical information about the city and reports on the penitentiary system of the United States of America. The user's hotel room is the gateway to all the available information in the webdoc.

In the *Prison Valley's* hotel room there is also a gateway, which has amplified interactive potential for the user; the user is never alone in the *Prison Valley* as other users are logged in at the same time. And at various points - in the world that the webdoc has created around the city – the user can access 'interactive zones', where other users of the webdoc have access to and there is the ability to create or participate in a 'live' discussion with other users, on specific topics that are addressed in the documentary. Furthermore, while the user is logged in the webdoc with his social media account (facebook, twitter), the story and the paths that the user follows within *Prison Valley* are being 'told' to the followers of the user in his social media account profiles; when one visits *Prison Valley* and creates an account, he or she accepts that *Prison Valley* will be posting on his/her behalf posts on social media. Thus, the individual paths (stories) that a user might engage into while navigating through *Prison Valley,* can be also viewed by people that have no participation in the webdoc. However, these 'outside' views of the story through social media are merely a version of what the user has constructed while logged in and wandering around *Prison Valley.* Furthermore, at the end of each chapter that the user can explore in the webdoc, there is a possibility to follow a different path or access forums that appear

as options at that point. So, the story of *Prison Valley* is resonating even after its end, through social media and forums.

This type of digital interactive documentary therefore, includes the following attributes: a) a video-game style website that recreates hotel rooms, cities and prison cells b) archival material, videos, photographs, statistics, sound files and c) interactive discussion platforms. How does the user – the audience – engagement take place in this case?

As mentioned before, the user engages in the documentary when he is given an agency, right from the start, by logging in. *Prison Valley* is intuitively designed and it works in accord with Internet activity anchors.[39] Furthermore, the user interacts with the material, by exploring it like a video game, since the webdoc is set up in that style (or at least a big part of it). Also, he interacts with other users that are logged in at the same moment with him, through forums. And finally the user has the option to select his own path, as the digital world of the webdoc is vast and with plenty of paths and options. The authenticity of the webdoc stimulates curiosity and the interiors of the motel room, the prison cells and other parts are very detailed in design, creating an atmospheric and immersive environment for the user.[40] The World Press Photo jury - which awarded the documentary in 2010 - comments state the above: "This production is a magnum opus visually, conceptually and in terms of the reporting and information offered. It is also an example of immersive interactivity, where the viewer can take a journey that they control, learning new information along the way. This work should be a challenge to everyone producing non-linear multimedia to raise their standards in terms of how the technology can be utilized".[41]

Strategy of interactivity and structure in web documentaries

Since interactivity in this case is the fundamental value for user engagement, how is this conveyed? And what are the specific strategies of interactivity that are expended

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[39] *Prison Valley* by 2010 had already more than 250000 followers in Facebook, in twitter and it also has developed an iPhone application. It also had been viewed 600000 times by that time. (source: http://thepixelreport.org/2010/12/10/prison-valleys-story-is-shaped-by-user-engagement-and-interaction/)
[40] The design for the digital documentary interior areas was based on Phillipe Brault's photographs.
[41] Source: http://www.worldpressphoto.org/video/prison-valley

in *Prison Valley*? As mentioned earlier in this thesis, a platform that affords interactivity can change the form of documentary from linear to non-linear. Academic and artist Mitchell Whitelaw writes in "Playing games with reality: Only Fish Shall Visit and interactive documentary" "…new media forms pose a fundamental challenge to the principle of narrative coherence, which is a the core of traditional documentary. If we explode and open the structure, how can we be sure that the story is being conveyed" (1)? While Whitelaw questions the fundamental aspect of digital interactive documentaries, he concurs that the webdocs implement a non-linear narrative that stands opposite to the traditional documentary's linear narrative voice. Since web documentaries are non-linear artifacts and their key mechanism – interactivity – merges with the narrative structure(Gaudenzi, Ursu et. al and El Sattar) there is no clear, predetermined and controlled route by the authors of *Prison Valley*. Therefore, the user rather than receiving a predefined linear narrative seems that he/she is able to create his own personal, tailor-made narrative. And moreover the user becomes an active explorer of the narrative space provided by the makers of *Prison Valley.*

Nash, in "Modes of Interactivity", gives the answer to the above statement of Whitelaw. Using the example of film and television documentary (she mentions them characteristically as 'cousins') she speaks about their structural patterns and how these patterns help to support contentions about the world (203). Additionally, these types of documentaries create associations and empower events with dramatic meaning, by the temporal ordering of their elements (203). While the film and television documentary structures are pre-determined before they are released and made available to the viewer, the digital interactive documentaries, as we have seen above, appear with an open structure and the user has a central role in the ordering of the elements of the DID. As described in *Prison Valley,* the makers of the documentary have employed chances for interaction, when the webdoc asks the user to react or comment at specific parts and at the end of specific chapters to participate in interactive forum discussions. These chances for interaction have a significant influence in the elements of the web documentary and in the way that they are structured. Even though that structural patterns of film and television documentary are clear in the *Prison Valley* (like the opening and ending film scene or the voice over) it seems that in *Prison Valley* the user has the ultimate role to the final structure of the documentary. In other words, the user is the one that does the final 'personalized'

montage for the web documentary. Therefore, interactivity is the key to the structure and furthermore the meaning of *Prison Valley*. And in most cases of digital interactive documentaries, interactivity is the mechanism of their structure and their noema. Thus, the user by making the ordering in the weboc is able to adjust its noema and therefore to personalize it.

Interactive Storytelling

To continue, we see that the viewer in a webdoc becomes a user and by interacting with the material he is able to create a narrative structure, or at least to adjust the narrative structure of the web documentary. Since web documentaries are non-linear artifacts and interactivity merges with the narrative structure (Gaudenzi, Ursu, El Sattar) it would be interesting to analyze how the interactive storytelling is delivered in *Prison Valley*. Going back to chapter I of this thesis, El Sattar defines interactive storytelling in a web documentary as the presentation of a narrative, which its evolution can be influenced, in real time by the user. And how can the storytelling be influenced in real time? The evident answer is that it happens through interaction of the user with the material. But, furthermore, in what sense does this interaction happen? And in what kind of environment? As mentioned earlier above, one of the main attributes of Prison Valley is the game-like setup of the webdoc; the motel room, the map, the numerous actions that the user can take to explore in the virtual world of *Prison Valley*. The user can explore, view and change in the web documentary. Moreover, all these attributes are similar attributes that correspond to a computer game. But this time, the user is utilizing them for the continuance of the storytelling in *Prison Valley*.

Dovey and Kennedy in their 2006 book *Game Cultures: Computer games as new media*, describe computer games as a new mediated and mediating world in which a learning process occurs to the users (players); the users learn how to navigate effortlessly between the actual and the virtual in computer games, which are by their very nature interactive (2006). Furthermore, according to Sherry Turkle, computer games provide an astonishing kind of intimacy of the user with the machine, especially in games that are immersive by providing a virtual environment with countless possibilities [42] (*The second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* 1984).

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[42] A video game that resembles the motel room of Prison Valley, is 'Resident Evil' – 3rd person video game but similar in the exploring, mapping of the area and accessing rooms. For a 1st person video game, there are similarities with a lot of video games starting from the 90s and continuing even nowadays with the so called 1st

Now, according to this thesis, a digital interactive documentary is considered as a new media object. And following Dovey and Kennedy's statement about computer games as a new mediated world, it would be interesting to take Carl Rogers' analysis of characteristics of new media objects in account. In his book, *Client-Centered Therapy*, he describes the three main characteristics that new media environments have in common: demassification, asynchronicity and interactivity (1951). These characteristics are in relation to the transmission of messages from the new media environment towards the person, in this case the user. Roger describes that messages used to be transferred to large groups with homogenous content, something that does not happen anymore since messages have the possibility to be transmitted personalized and in a heterogeneous mass. The asynchronicity of message transmission is also relevant to him, since he believes that knowledge can be transferred anytime and when the person (user) feels the necessity to receive knowledge. Computer games, while obviously have a common message to transmit to the user, are at the same time able to provide a personalized experience. In *Prison Valley* the user is able to create a personal narrative in that sense. Leah Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone in *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Social Consequences* describe interactivity related to messages as a central characteristic of new media but not a unique one (2002). They associate interactivity with a set of terms, such as hypertextuality, control, and responsiveness among other terms. In a computer game and likewise in *Prison Valley*, these characteristics are outshone by the fact interactivity could be considered a result of player/user actions in combination with the Human Computer Interface mediating process. Sheizaf Rafaeli in *"Interactivity: From New Media to Communication"* (1988) believes that interactivity is measured in terms of the relation of previous exchanged information with the messages transmitted between computer and user and where the sender and receiver roles become interchangeable. Interactive storytelling systems have this attribute, as we have seen in *Prison Valley's* attributes that the user can pick-up where he left off, for example. Moreover, in the web documentary, the user's actions are analyzed and afterwards posted in the user's social media accounts, as described above.

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person shooters that use the same setup like in Prison Valley: the 1st person view that can rotate in 360 degrees, while exploring an area and uses a pointer to click and access new areas of the game.

The makers of *Prison Valley* have constructed a virtual, interactive environment for the user. Jonathan Steuer in "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence" (1992) has stated that interactivity in a virtual environment should be comprised from a) range, b) speed and c) mapping (15). Range corresponds to the number of characteristics and attributes that can be modified by the user, Speed refers to the time of response of the virtual world and Mapping[43] is referring to the type of controllers that the user has available in order to interact with the virtual environment (15). The range in *Prison Valley* can be considered in the amount of attributes that the user can modify and manipulate, e.g. the amount of different paths that a user can take in order to continue the story, or the different types of material that he will be able to examine (photographs, sound files of interviews). Speed, as response time, can vary depending on the bandwidth of the Internet connection, since *Prison Valley* is a documentary distributed on the web. Finally mapping can be considered here as the options given to the user by utilizing the mouse or the keyboard of his Personal Computer (PC) to access and navigate through *Prison Valley*.

To continue, Jens Jensen in "Interactivity: Tracing a New Concept in Media and Communication Studies", defines three levels of interactivity: a) user to user, which refers to interpersonal communication b) user to content, which content here can be referring to documents and c) user to system, whereas system refers to computer (1998). For this thesis it would be useful to take into account the user-to-system interactivity. User-to-system corresponds to HCI, which refers this time to the science discipline of Human Computer Interaction.[44] As computer games can be classified as user-to-system interaction, since the player makes his selected choices from the already presented information to him, same classification would apply in *Prison Valley* and in *The Global Remake*.

Rafaeli defines three levels of interactivity also in the same context. Namely, he classifies interactivity in level one: non-interactive, level two: reactive and level three: responsive (111). Thinking about web documentaries, we could describe a non-interactive documentary as a traditional documentary that the content is provided and

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[43] Mapping: an operation that associates each element of a given set (the domain) with one or more elements of a second set (the range)

[44] Main aim of HCI is to improve the communication and the interaction between user and computer. But not only using computer science for it, but a range of other science disciplines such as cognitive psychology, design, architecture and sociology.

acknowledged without the viewer's input, e.g Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*. A reactive documentary could be described as a web documentary like *Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*, that the webdoc provides content, which is in direct response with the input of the users. Finally, a responsive documentary would be the web documentary *Prison Valley,* because it responds in a way by taking into account the previous and also the latest inputs and actions of the user. Interactive storytelling is more relevant with the responsive type, in this regard; a constant flow of messages from computer to human and vice versa, based on the user's actions and inputs in the web documentary. In that way interactive storytelling, deploys a form of control over the content of the documentary and provides the user with the opportunity to tailor personalized narratives, like in *Prison Valley*.

Interactive storytelling is the key concept that makes the trade-off between narrativity and interactivity. Moreover, it has been a key development in computer games in the recent years and a significant development in digital interactive documentaries, considering the ludic aesthetics of *Prison Valley*. Within interactive storytelling, lies an important concept that is a challenge for digital entertainment: the interactive drama.[45] This is a challenge due to the complexity of generating dynamic narrative events and integrating the user actions into that generation simultaneously. But the bigger challenge is the attempt of interactive storytelling in a DID to convey the initial arguments of the web documentary authors. Is the critique of *Prison Valley* on the United States penitentiary system conveyed more efficiently through the interactive and immersive environment created in *Prison Valley* than in the traditional documentary of *Prison Valley* that was released?

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[45] According to Barbaros Bostan and Tim Marsh in their paper *Fundamentals of Interactive Storytelling* (2012), the interactive storytelling systems include a Drama Manager, a User Model and an Agent Model.

CHAPTER III: Scrutiny and conclusions

Recalling the definition of digital interactive documentaries from Chapter I, it would be useful to split it in parts and see how the attributes of the web documentaries were elucidated in the previous two chapters. Web documentary was defined as a documentary production model that entails a combination of digital media platforms, placing at their core the element of interactivity in order to deliver interactive storytelling, which can be accessed primarily through the web. Therefore a DID includes a) an overlap of digital media platforms, which we experienced in the case studies of *The Global Remake* and *Prison Valley* including video, photography and sound b) it delivers interactive storytelling as we experienced in *Prison Valley* c) it can be accessed from the Internet and d) the fundamental value of the web documentary's mechanism is interactivity; and through that notion, there are significant changes in the nature of the DID which consider it different from a traditional documentary.

Authorship

As mentioned earlier, through interactivity there is a new set of relations created in the web documentary by a change in the documentary's attributes in terms of authorship (control). The main attribute that is altered, as seen in *The Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake* and in *Prison Valley*, is that the viewer now becomes a user since he is given the physical ability to do something to the material, to interact; the user is given an agency (Aston, Gaudenzi 2012). And from that point on, a fundamental change in the relations of the system of the web documentary takes place: the authorship (control) passes on from the maker to the user. Furthermore, the boundaries of authorship and control become blurred (Ursu, Gaudenzi, El Sattar). Does indeed interactivity change or blur the authorship of the digital interactive documentary? Were we to scrutinize the above statements, we could take into account the documentary's 'voice', which was initially proposed by Nichols in 1983 in "The Voice of Documentary." Nichols' 'voice' is the one that seizes the documentaries methods that are used to portray argumentation towards their audience (1983). The editing (evidence presentation) and style among other elements comprise the concept of voice, which stands as a metaphor for documentary authorship. Remembering the

'cousins' - film and television documentary - of web documentary, the documentary's voice reflects the documentary maker's point of view. The maker 'spoke' about or for those that he wished to represent, fostering thus queries regarding the ethics and the politics on the process of representation (*Representing Reality* 1991). Kate Nash, in her article "What is Interactivity for? The Social Dimension of Web Documentary Participation" in 2014, mentions that "the potential for participants and audiences to 'speak for themselves' has been at the heart of much enthusiasm surrounding interactive documentary" (4). She continues to describe that the web documentary has the potential to reflect both the different perspectives of the users and the aim of the maker, thus creating an intertwined 'voice'. And that now, webdoc makers describe the process of webdoc's authorship as one of 'giving voice' to the user, by providing the tools and the context in which the user's voice can be heard (4). Furthermore, authorship in web documentaries turns to a process of framing the audience/user actions. (see fig 11) In 2013 Jonathan Dovey and Mandy Rose in "This Great Mapping of Ourselves: New Documentary Forms Online" mention that the framing takes place by inviting particular forms of engagement and positioning of the user in relation to the documentary content (19). Stefano Odorico has also mentioned that interactivity creates new forms of documentary authorship but he also directs his attention towards Dovey and Roses's framing (Odorico 2011). Moreover, Andrew Barry in *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society* (2001) mentions characteristically that interactivity is 'the concealment of expertise' (150). He elucidates, "The authority of expertise is partially hidden in order to maximize the possibilities for interaction. The imagination and expertise of the ordinary citizen is worked with rather than contradicted by the voice of authority" (150). What Barry mentions here can be compared to the user of the webdoc as the ordinary citizen and the voice of authority as the 'voice' in documentary. It is a rather meaningful statement as it scrutinizes, in accordance with the previous authors, the entire concept of co-authorship or user authorship in the web documentaries. Finally, web documentaries are in their basic essence computer programs, where programming code has been used to create the ludic aesthetics in *Prison Valley* or the uploading and categorizing of video and images material mechanism in *The Global Remake*. And, unless the authors of these web documentaries have provided the code of their program – the algorithm – available freely on the Internet, then they are the ones that maintain the primary authorship of the web documentary. In other words, access

does not necessarily mean collectivity. Therefore, the idea supported by a number of authors in this thesis, regarding a notion of communal, collaborative authorship or blurred boundaries between authorship in digital interactive documentaries is highly argued.

Agency

Furthermore, the approach of an agency - the physical ability to do something – that is considered to be fundamental in digital interactive documentaries can be problematized. A central argument to Aston and Gaudenzi's (2012) notion of interactivity is the importance of physical participation through HCI. They argue that the user, by taking physical actions towards the digital artifact, is able to alter it and alter its components. In this thesis, it is one of the key arguments that turn the viewer of the documentary to a user of the web documentary. In addition, case studies of this thesis are interrogated with the physical participation of the user and the way the user influences the content of the documentary and moreover the way the user influences the evolution of the narrative, through interactive storytelling. Vivian Sobchack in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and the Moving Image* (2004) speaks about a distinction between interpretation and interaction regarding the documentary spectatorship (2004). She speaks about interpretation as a mental action, while interaction as a physical action. But she considers the human body – the physical presence – as a spectator in documentary, as a sense-making visual subject that interacts with the documentary through a complete set of human senses. Therefore a complete set of human senses and a collaboration of the physical and the mental is necessary for the spectator to be able to 'make sense' of the documentary's material. Additionally, Nash believes that there are complexities in distinguishing interpretation and physical action (2014). And given the existing literature it appears to be problematic and possibly too early to focus on physical action as a key concept of interactivity in digital media and respectively in the digital interactive documentary realm.

'Highrise': Variety, product completion and the simplest form of interactivity

Another attribute of the DID that is under scrutiny here is the level of product completion. In other words - and as stated in chapter one – a web documentary falls far from a ready (static) product of pre-existing documentary forms, as we experienced in *The Global Remake*, which is an ongoing project with new material uploaded everyday. The webdoc as "a new media object, is not something fixed but can exist in different, potentially infinite versions" (*The Language of New Media* 56). Taking into account this statement, one can understand that there is no generic type of a digital interactive documentary; therefore it would be difficult to generalize the idea of a web documentary as non-finite product. And that is potentially valid because there are examples of other webdocs that are different in concept and in mechanism from *Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*. One different example is *Prison Valley* with its interactive and immersive environment and moreover the framing of options for the user to navigate in the webdoc's environment. That specific framing of options presents arguably a complete product ready to be accessed by the user. Thus, the user has simply to interact with the material and not alter it or continue its authoring. More interesting would be to take the example of *Highrise* (2009 – ongoing).[46]

  Highrise is a multimedia project about the evolution of urban life in residential highrises (the authors describe it as 'vertical living'). Produced by the National Film Board of Canada (and Emmy awarded), it can be accessed through a website, which contains a set of interactive documentaries: *A Short History of the Highrise*, *Out my Window* and *One Millionth Tower* among others. In each of the links for the above documentaries, there is a different title: 'watch', 'explore', and both 'watch or explore'. That signifies the authors' intention to speak about the possibilities of different types of web documentaries, which correspond to the same topic. *A Short History of the Highrise* is an interactive documentary with a timeline, which ensures linearity and can be interrupted anytime by the user, in order to access additional material relevant to the narrative. It includes New York Times photos, animation and games. The user receives instructions in the start of the documentary and s/he is guided throughout the story with voice narration (and text in some cases). (see fig.12) *Out my Window* is a '360 degrees documentary', describing the life in a highrise from

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[46] *Highrise* can be found here: http://highrise.nfb.ca/

the inside of an apartment in various locations in the world. The user can navigate in a 360 degrees angle through each apartment and can select specific attributes of the apartment and its tenants that s/he wishes to explore. The presentation setup of the interior of these apartments is similar to the motel room of *Prison Valley* that was described in chapter two. There is no narration, just the option to select a highrise apartment in the start of the webdoc. (see fig. 13) Lastly, *One Millionth Tower* provides both options to the user: watch or explore. It invites the user to take an interactive journey through a fictional, animated virtual landscape or to watch a six-minute documentary that unfolds in the animated virtual space. (see fig. 14) In all the examples, the framing of the user's options is evident: the narrative voice and the timeline in *A Short History of the Highrise,* the apartment selections and the 'scripted' choices with specific attributes in *Out my Window* and lastly the double option of linear documentary viewing or the option of exploring a predefined virtual space in *One Millionth Tower.* Therefore, these web documentaries differ in terms of product completion from Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake. Moreover, regarding the question if they are finite or not lies mostly with the user's (viewer's) interpretation, similar to the original film of Vertov, *Man with the Movie Camera.*

Evidently, in the web documentary the viewer becomes a user as described in the webdoc examples. And that does happen through interaction with the material. But, it appears that the user is not able to claim authorship, or co-authorship, at least with the types of web documentaries described in this thesis. Furthermore, the user does not seem to claim what Gaudenzi describes as co-creation of reality through the fundamental value of interactivity (2013). Whilst the user is able to interact with the material s/he is not able to change it and therefore change or create a new reality rather than the one represented to him in the first place. Of course, the user is able to make assumptions and individual interpretations on the material and the topic of the web documentary, but that does not seem to differ much from the way a user engages in a traditional documentary. Lev Manovich, while elaborating on the myth of interactivity, he speaks about the concept of branching-type interactivity (*The Language of New Media* 57).[47] He explains, "this term refers to programs in which all the possible objects which the user can visit form a branching tree structure. When the

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[47] It is also referred as menu-based interactivity in *The Language of New Media* (2002). What Manovich describes, is the so-called tree of information that is encountered in other types of interactivity such as hypertext, while Manovich explains it as hypermedia, a new media structure and a concept close to branching-type interactivity.

user reaches a particular object, the program presents her with choices and let her pick. Depending on the value chosen, the user advances along a particular branch of the tree" (57). He continues, "In the case of branching interactivity, the user plays an active role in determining the order in which the already generated elements are accessed. This is the simplest kind of interactivity" (59). In other words, by the concept of branching-type interactivity explains how the interaction between the user and webdoc takes place in most of the cases described in this thesis; specifically in *A Short History of the Highrise* and in *Prison Valley*. Finally, Manovich continues to describe two other types of interactivity that can be useful for this thesis: He speaks about open and closed interactivity (59). While open interactivity is a more complex term that can be applied in AI (artificial intelligence) and which we sometimes encounter in computer games, closed interactivity is a more clear concept that encapsulates the branched-type interactivity; fixed elements are used in fixed branching (tree) structure and then are accessed (interacted) by the user. Therefore, the user in a web documentary navigates in a pre-defined tree of information, which will allow the user to advance through a series of pre-determined options. Thus, the possibility of co-authorship or co-creation of reality in a web documentary is highly debatable. The reality represented to the user is, as always, subject to interpretation as in traditional documentaries.

Conclusion

While this thesis is concluded, the critical studies on digital interactive documentary continues to develop with webdoc makers and media artists working next to film and photography scholars, attempting to re-conceptualize or re-think the documentary form, taking in account the advances of media technology. By interrogating the web documentary in terms of authorship, viewer participation and audience engagement we have seen that DID can be considered a new media object. What does it convey though? Is a web documentary more real because we can interact with it? Does it qualify as an educational device? And is that still a documentary? Is it a database organized by an algorithm or a digital archive with a perspective on the world? And does it minimize the distance between the audience and the material? Multi-platform, multi-layered concept as it is, encompasses notions that are yet to be clarified

precisely and can be argued from cultural, social and technological perspectives. Interactivity, which is a property of new media and furthermore placed at the core of the web documentary's mechanism is a difficult concept to analyze and seems to be as 'fuzzy' as the concept of documentary itself. Manovich elucidates, "…to call computer media interactive is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers" (*The Language of New Media* 71). We have seen that it is more probable to spot out the different interactive structures that appear in web documentaries and thus understand how their mechanism works in terms of audience engagement. But to understand or theorize the audience experience in a web documentary it seems more difficult. In the aim of understanding the user experience, theories have to be drawn from existing traditional documentary scholarship, which – at least for the moment – seems to be adequate to provide answers and arguments on the new media concept of digital interactive documentaries. However, this time the analysis on documentaries does not only need to focus on the intentions of the documentary makers – as in film and television documentary – but also on the opportunities of the audience that wishes to experience and participate this time through interacting with the documentary.

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Appendix

Figure 1: Starting web page of *Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*

Figure 2: Juxtaposition of material from the original documentary and the webdoc.

Figures 3 & 4

Figures 5 & 6: Scene splitting and archiving in *The Global Remake*

Figures 7 & 8: Scene splitting and archiving in *The Global Remake* and instructions

Figure 9: Introduction clip with voice – over of *Prison Valley* (2010 ArteTV)

Figure 10: the motel room of *Prison Valley* (2010 ArteTV). The number 4 down left, corresponds to how many users are logged in at that time.
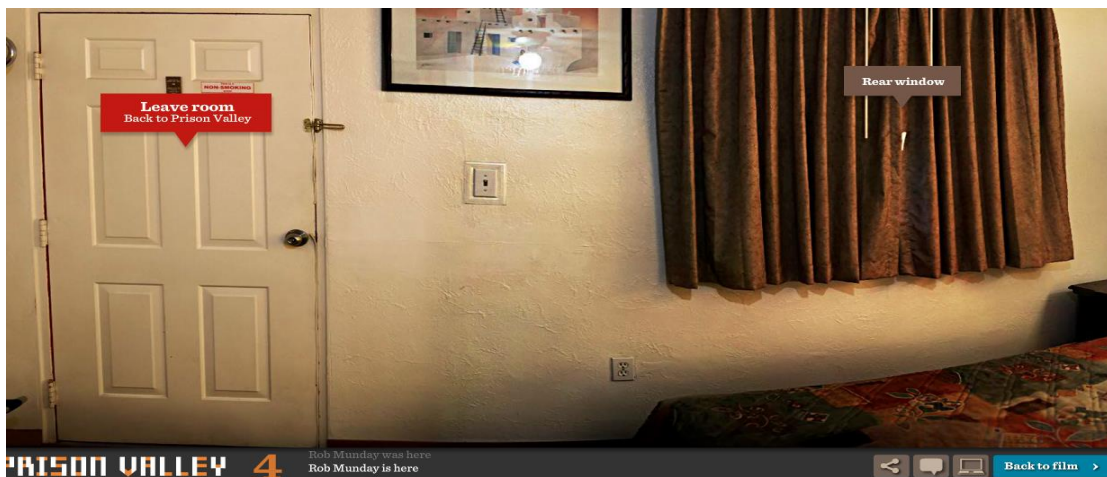

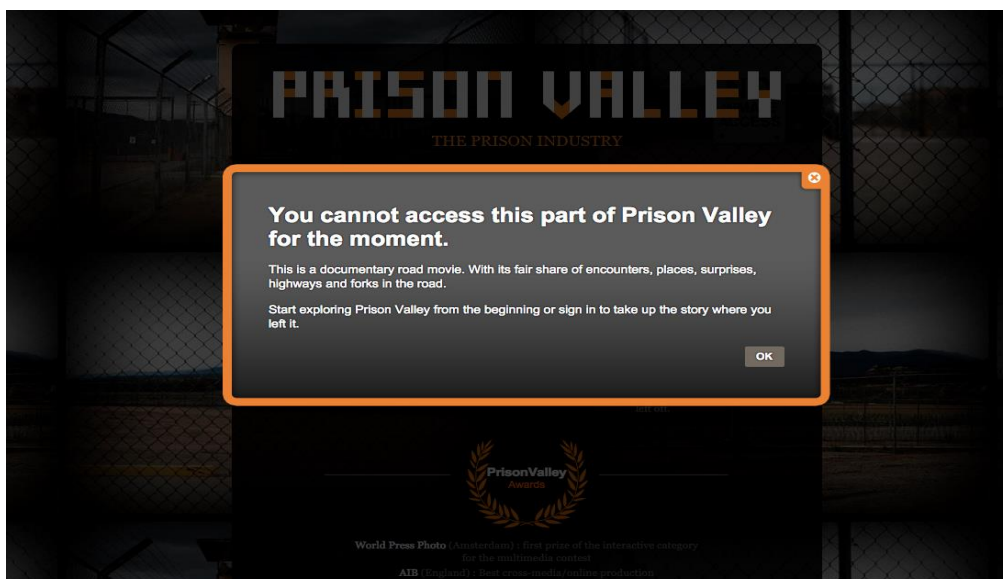Figure 11: The 'framing' of user options in *Prison Valley*.

Figure 12: Intro scene of *A Short History of the Highrise.*
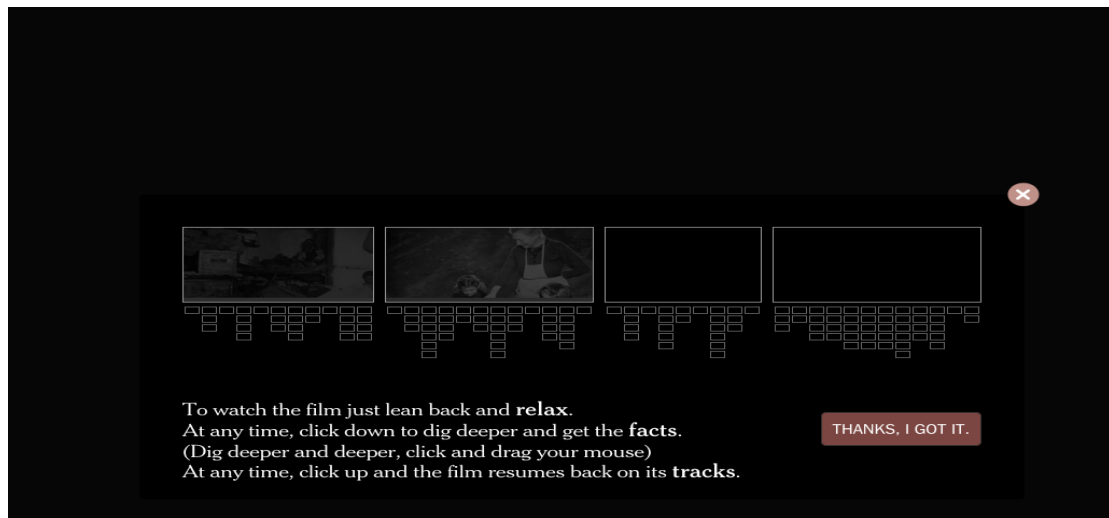

Figure 13: Apartment selection in *Out my Window*

Figure 14: The double option of 'explore and 'just watch' in *One Millionth Tower*