

This special edition presents a collection of articles that came out of i-Docs 2011, the first international symposium exclusively devoted to the rapidly evolving field of international documentary-making. The symposium was held at the Watershed Media Centre in Bristol, on behalf of the University of the West of England's Digital Cultures Research Centre. Its aim was to showcase recent projects and discuss the artistic, economic and political implications of new forms of factual representation. The articles, case study and interviews in this edition represent the range of themes and debates that were raised and that can be seen as a unique snapshot of a complex and diverse field of study that is in its early stages of development.

Whenever we try to understand the impact of the digital world on media and culture, we begin by trying to distinguish between the genuinely novel and the continuing traditions of media cultures. Our specific interest in this project has been in seeking the continuation of a shared idea of 'documentariness' in the miasma of factuality, data and information circulating through the ecosystems of digital media. This is a deliberately ambiguous mission. Emergent fields always elicit competing attempts to define and taxonomize, to make manifestos and stake territorial claims. Whilst the sense of discovery is a motivating force in much of the material in this special edition, we have sought to keep the space open. Of course we need to develop some useful discursive protocols that will help us to speak in commensurate critical tongues – but we also want to shape the field as an inclusive and dynamic conversation. The speed of platform development alongside the force of aesthetic endeavours to wrestle reality into documentary form ensure that i-docs are moving all the time. So we include considerations of the linear and the database formal arrangements of documentary material, and the debates around authorship and collaboration, navigation and discovery, which rehearse the grounds of hypertext theory as applied to documentary materials.

However we also include audio, immersive and mixed reality projects that use actuality, reportage, oral history and poetry to open up whole new terrains for documentary away from the histories of visual screen practices. Theatre, cinema, television assume certain things about their audience; you will be sitting in a seat, more or less silently, quite probably in the dark, attending to the experience as it unfolds. In the developing arena of Pervasive Media, participants are often not in the theatre or sitting room. Instead, they are out in the world, moving in and out of buildings, following a route, making a journey; their sensorium open to a whole range of stimuli competing for their attention. In these instances, designers are required to make work that can respond fluidly to a constantly shifting context, a work that is defined by people's actions. The environment is less controllable, already a *mise-en-scene* populated by the demands of everyday life. This approach to i-docs puts audience into the midst of a relational signification system where their actions shape the experience. In so doing it promises to move documentary studies from its obsession with representation to a wider focus on documentary systems. From questions of what does documentary mean to questions of what does documentary do?

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Judith Aston, Jon Dovey and Sandra Gaudenzi