

‘We’re Happy and We Know It : Documentary: Data: Montage’

Jon Dovey & Mandy Rose

Abstract

This article is concerned with the social praxis of documentary in the sea of ‘ubiquitous data’ that is both consequence and driver of online social mediation. The topic is given importance by the morphing of the character of video in the context of the latest web coding language, HTML5. Until now web video has been impervious to its networked context; reproducing the conditions of the TV screen in a hypermediated space. Now existing databases and live information drawn from social media can be connected to the documentary environment, offering opportunities for the production of new kinds of knowledge and application.

The affordances of networked connectivity offer the potential to re-contextualise documentary material through mobilising the enormous co-creative potential of human discourse captured in the web. The challenge in these marriages of mass media form and rhizomatic network is to find new ways of shaping attention into a coherent experience. To do so we have to re-invent the social praxis of documentary, creating new visual and informational grammars.

Contributor’s Details

Jon Dovey is Professor of Screen Media at the University of the West of England. He is the Director of the Digital Cultures Research Centre (<http://www.dcrc.org.uk/>). He also heads up REACT, the AHRC Creative Economy Hub for Wales and the West that aims to connect arts research with the Creative Economy. He was a film maker and video artist before becoming an academic. He has been working with Mandy Rose and the iDocs team at DCRC, see more at <http://i-docs.org/> . He is the author of *Freakshows - First Person Media And Factual TV* Pluto Press July 2000 and a co author of *New Media*

- A Critical Introduction Routledge 2002/8. He is also co author of Game Cultures (McGraw Hill 2006)

jon.dovey@uwe.ac.uk

Mandy Rose is a Senior Research Fellow at the Digital Cultures Research Centre, University of the West of England. Her practice-based research looks at the intersection between documentary and the social, semantic and open web. Mandy has devised and overseen a number of award-winning interactive and participatory projects. She was co-founder and producer of BBC2's "mass observation" camcorder project - Video Nation (94-2000), Executive Producer of Capture Wales (2001-2007), a pioneering digital storytelling project in the UK. She devised Voices (2004) – a major pan-platform collaborative exploration of language, accent and dialect across the UK (Webby nominated) and MyScienceFictionLife (2006) - a collective history of British science fiction (Webby Honoree). Mandy's work as a director includes Meeting the Masai Mob (BBC 2, 2001) and the series Pictures in the Post (BBC 2,1999). Mandy blogs at CollabDocs (<http://collabdocs.wordpress.com/>) and is a contributing editor to the i-Docs website (<http://i-docs.org/>).

mandy.rose@uwe.ac.uk

Keywords

Digital, Data, Online, Web, Interactive, Semantic

1 Introduction

‘We believe that humanity is on the verge of a revolution. We’ve moved beyond the web of pages and the Internet of people. Soon, we’ll take ubiquitous data for granted. Our every glance will be augmented; our every purchase shared and analyzed. Big data, available to everyone, in compelling, convincing interfaces will change the very nature of how we

think. It will unseat and launch entire industries, hold governments accountable, and empower society. There's an industrial revolution of data coming. The power of data will change us as surely as the power of steam did a century ago.' (O'Reilly 'Strata: Making Data Work Conference' Feb 1-3 2011)

Our opening quotation is the marketing blurb for a 2011 conference aimed at the business and technology community. The aim of the event was to investigate 'the change brought to technology and business by data science, pervasive computing, and new interfaces.' In asserting that the 'power of data will change us as surely as the power of steam did a century ago' the authors offer us a useful entry point to the historical perspectives that will underpin our analysis. In this article we want to explore what might happen to documentary in the sea of 'ubiquitous data' conjured by the marketeers of Web 2.0. Classical documentary might be understood as a product of the 'age of steam', a form that evolved from the mechanical optical technologies of the 19th century combined with the operational needs of newly complex industrialized and urbanized societies to create mediated mass communications systems. As one of the innovative miracles of 19th Century technology, photochemical image making and its subsequent mechanical reproduction brought the wonders of the world to an enthusiastic public. As 'the pencil of nature' the photographic process was constructed as an indexical means of registering the visual world - its assemblage at once wonder and scientific instrument. The documentary film mission has been to mediate society to itself, to let one part of a society see another, to create a very particular kind of dialogue. In its traditional construction documentary has been understood as part of an electronic public sphere, as a 'discourse of sobriety' akin to others, science, the law, education, that shape social reality (Nichols 1991: 3-4). A privileged relationship to social reality is one of the leading 'claims' of the traditional discourse of documentary. However documentary film in the twentieth century was as much about changing the world as it was observing it. Nichols sums up this tradition in his well known position that documentary presents us with arguments about our shared world, propositions about the world that are made as part of a process of social praxis. Brian Winston has a similar sense of documentary history, when he writes about documentary finding its place on the 'battlefields of

epistemology' he captures some of the ways in which documentary film makers and critics argue about the world we share when they argue about its documentary representation. (Winston 1995). Whilst this idea about a 'documentary tradition' has been widely critiqued (eg Dovey 2001, Renov 2008, Bruzzi 2000) this article will work within the memory of documentary as social praxis in its attempt to argue for new modalities of coherence within the emergent online environment.

We are concerned with the forms of social praxis available for documentary in its emergent online modes. Never has there been more documentary material available to us; the online video world is awash with an impossible excess of documentary fragments. We have dealt elsewhere with the dynamics of collaboration as producers explore forms of co-created documentary production (Dovey & Rose 2012). Others in this Special edition deal with the emergent forms of i-Docs. In this piece we want to think about what happens when documentary imaging occurs within the new data rich contexts referred to in our opening quotation above. With the latest generation of the web coding language HTML5, video is becoming an integrated web technology rather than an add-on requiring a separate player – it is 'of the web', rather than 'on the web'. This allows for a new agility in the way that connections can be made between video and other web information sources. Existing databases and live, up to the moment, information drawn from social media can be connected to the documentary environment. What new possibilities does this unlock for documentary?

2. Footprints in the digital sand

Coloured dots dance across a black screen apparently at random. Where the cursor rests, they cluster around it, jostling to get close. The dots are of varying sizes, colours and shapes. From some dots words for feelings appear – 'disappointed', 'sick', 'great', 'real'. Sometime these are located in place; 'United States, Oregon, guilty', 'Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, Shemaissy/strong'. When you click on a dot a sentence appears in headline on the top of the page, with a curious form of attribution; "*I did feel sadness for putting my children through it, from a female, in chester, va united states when it was cloudy.*" What are these dots? What's happening here?

This is the first interface you come across in *We Feel Fine*, ‘an almanac of human emotion’, created by sampling the world’s blogs every few minutes for the words ‘I feel fine’ or ‘I am feeling’. The work, by Jonathan Harris & Sep Kamvar, made a stir when it was launched in 2005 and soon became an iconic piece. The sentence containing the words is captured, along with information relating to the author. Each dot represents a feeling. The colour, intensity, shape reflecting the feeling’s character, intensity, mood. When the user chooses from a menu of options, the dots / feelings organise themselves into one of a number of ‘playful interfaces’ relating to demographic and contextual information. These ‘movements’ present the data in a variety of ways. The section called Montage, for instance, uses images from blogs ‘to ask what happiness looks like’, Mobs shows the most frequent feelings in a population, and Mounds represents how the feelings look in the whole database.

Still live, *We Feel Fine* still impresses for its innovation and for its realisation, bringing computer science, data visualisation and storytelling to bear on content that is unlocked by tapping into the common metadata structure of blogs. The aesthetic of *We Feel Fine* combines machine and human in a manner at once witty and empathic. As Maria Popova says in reviewing the *We Feel Fine* book in 2006; ‘With its unique software-driven model, *We Feel Fine* is a revelation of emotion through a prism of rational data that only makes the emotional crux deeper and more compelling.’

Jonathan Harris became interested in storytelling through ‘the partial glimpse into somebody’s life’ that he saw in personal fragments, the scraps of presence left by our online behaviours (Harris 2007). While studying computer science at Princeton, Harris observed that, ‘suddenly people en masse were leaving scores and scores of digital footprints online that told stories of their private lives; blog posts, photographs, thoughts, feelings opinions [...] so I started to write computer programmes that study very large sets of these online footprints’ (Harris 2007). What Harris was identifying was the emergence of a new type of social information that was neither quantitative – thin data about a mass of people, or qualitative – deep data about a few. The beautifully simple

idea of sampling the blogosphere was one way Harris went about investigating this new domain, working with the human data in the snatches of self-expression being accrued moment by moment on social media platforms. *I Want you to Want Me* (2008) continued this line of creative inquiry, examining contemporary love and desire through the content that people post on dating sites.

In 1926 John Grierson defined documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’. In using the term ‘actuality’ he was referring to a specific form; the newsreels - short film observations of topical events – that were shown alongside features in cinemas then. The snatches of self-expression which are Harris’s raw material, can be seen as ‘actualities’ of the Information Age, units of content reflecting the world which can, with a creative treatment, be fashioned into a documentary artefact. We don’t have the space or the inclination to discuss whether *We Feel Fine* is art or documentary. The point we are making here is that the web is now a vast repository of social information that is potential documentary content and the live and changing nature of that data is a new affordance. *We Feel Fine* is not static, but generative. According to Harris and Kamvar’s (2012) online statement:

‘At its core, *We Feel Fine* is an artwork authored by everyone. It will grow and change as we grow and change, reflecting what's on our blogs, what's in our hearts, what's in our minds. We hope it makes the world seem a little smaller, and we hope it helps people see beauty in the everyday ups and downs of life.’

We Feel Fine ventures into a new creative territory – sculpting social media data to create what we might call a Living Documentary.

3 The Sea of Data

We Feel Fine can be understood as a ‘documentary’ response to the ocean of data that is both consequence and driver of online social mediation. The work exploits an environment that produces data in wild profusion. All of our online interactions produce

data as an almost accidental affordance. Our computers hold and transmit records of what we've been doing (with our attention) and our mobile devices hold records of where we are (or what we are doing with our bodies). Our devices can easily record our behaviours. This information can then be networked in unexpected and unplanned ways. The ocean of data offers new opportunities for the production of new kinds of knowledge and application. The entire field of mashup in which different existing APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) can be plugged into each other to produce unexpected new insights is a product of the unforeseen consequences of data profusion.

Mappiness for instance, is a research project run by the London School of Economics; a free phone app asks you twice a day to rate your level of happiness, relaxation and 'awakeness' on a scale of 1-10. This data is then collated against location of the respondents phone, time and respondents' scores. The researchers are interested in correlating feeling to environment (The project is run by researchers in the Dept of Geography & Environment). Users are asked to take and upload a photo of what's exactly in front of them so researchers can map photographs of the sites of the feelings of their participating sample at any one time.

'It turns out that people are happier in every other environment than the urban environment, and the effect appears to be between about one and five points. Mountains and coniferous forests have come out as the happiest places so far – four or five points higher than a continuous urban setting. Being in the suburbs scores about one point happier than a continuous urban environment.' (Heathcote 2010)

This evidence may not come as much of a surprise but it does serve to illustrate the unforeseen consequence for knowledge formation in our world of newly available data. A fundamental methodological problem for social scientists and historians is that almost no evidence exists of how people *felt*, the experiential grain of everyday life can be imputed from certain kinds of documentary record such as diaries, letters or mass observation records, but the evidence just hasn't been there till recent times. Nevertheless

this was considered an inevitable methodological problem, an accepted limitation. Researchers were not seeking to invent a permanently updating affect polling system. But the affordance of the mobile device, location and time data, wirelessly networked cloud computing, the database, and the cultural experience for users of ‘being polled all the time’ combine to produce an entirely new (and rather amazing) body of statistical knowledge that could not have been there before.

There is however a distinction to be made between data and communication; or perhaps, better, between data and language. Now that media exist in digital forms and language can be transmitted through our everyday communications devices there is a great deal of definitional slippage between ‘data’, ‘communication’, ‘media’ and ‘language’.

Whitelaw (2006), in Diamond (2010:1) defines data as ‘ a set of measurements extracted from the flux of the real that are abstract, blank meaningless’. Data may be extracted from the ‘flux’ of our social media but data and social media are not the same thing. We can *derive* data from language based forms of social media communication and expression, this what Harris & Kevmar do in *We Feel Fine*. This is what a tag cloud does; it calculates frequency of use and turns those numbers into a graphical form. It is this translation between searchable social media communications, to data (as numbers), to algorithms that predict behaviours and taste, that is the economic driver of Web 2.0. When Tim O’Reilly made his prescription for Web 2.0 in 2005 he declared ‘Data is the new Intel inside’, implicitly replacing the hardware of the computer chip with the software produced by user interaction as the new driver of computing in society, ‘Users add value [...] Web 2.0 companies set inclusive defaults for aggregating user data and building value as a side-effect of ordinary use of the application.’ (O’Reilly 2005). Data, he foresaw, would be the engine and the driver of the new social media internet; but by this he did not mean that our interactions, searches, likes, uploads, or tweets were the *same* as data. He meant that *what could be abstracted from these interactions* would be the gold nuggets of Web 2.0. Trends, predictions, and recommendations have made targeted marketing the main revenue option for many online operations. However this data profusion does not just create capital for Google, eBay, Amazon and Facebook. It also has the potential to create cultural, public and educational capital.

4 Video Goes Web Native

The topic is given an added dimension by the morphing of the character of video in the context of HTML5. We have been used to video sitting on the web within a player, aloof from the linked and networked character of its environment; reproducing the conditions of the TV screen in a hypermediated environment (Bolter & Grusin 1999). Even in interactive formats, though the user may choose how she navigates and orders video segments, the media players for online video has made them impermeable to the wider data riches of the web. With HTML5 this is suddenly changing. Video coded into the webpage enables a dynamic relationship to static and live web data. In the same way that a hyperlink allows a connection between a word and another location on the internet, so now such a connection can be made from a point within a video timeline or image. This changes the character of video – transforming it in the context of the emerging Semantic Web from a media on the web to a media of the web. This phenomenon has been described variously as ‘semantic video’, ‘hypervideo’ and ‘web-native’ video.

A number of tools are in development to facilitate creative work that takes advantage of these new affordances. These include Zeega and 3WDOC, both platforms for creating interactive documentaries. Among them is the Popcorn Maker, released in November 2011, an open source authoring tool built by Mozilla's Open Video Lab, Web Made Movies. According to Mozilla (2011), ‘Popcorn allows web filmmakers to amp up interactivity around their movies, harnessing the web to expand their creations in new ways. Popcorn uses JavaScript to link real-time social media, news feeds, data visualizations, and other context directly to online video, pulling the web into the action in real time.’ The Popcorn.js library first went live in Autumn 2010. The earliest demo pulled in APIs from Google, Flickr, Wikipedia, Twitter, as well as automatic machine translation from Google Translate, and attribution data from Creative Commons. Multiple windows were arrayed on a web page. A video about the internet played, and as people, places and themes appeared, related data was triggered and windows around the video player showed relevant text and stills.

The demo was clumsy aesthetically, with the numerous on-screen windows competing very uneasily for the viewer's attention. But it was an important proof of concept for a new and potentially significant affordance for web video, as Ingrid Kopp suggested, writing about Popcorn.js on the Tribeca Film Institute blog in September 2010, 'the new technology is allowing video to be part of a connected web that creates links to new sources of information and new methods of interacting with that information [...] We all know that the web is changing the way we watch films but it is also fundamentally changing the way we can tell stories.'

The Director of the Web Made Movies project is filmmaker Brett Gaylor who made, 'rip! A Remix Manifesto', the award winning 2009 collaborative feature documentary investigation into remix culture and copyright in the digital age. Gaylor demonstrated his interest in pursuing the potential of semantic video for the development of cinema aesthetics early on. In September 2010 he proposed a Popcorn.js work that would fuse Kuleshov's renowned experiment in montage with Harris and Kamvar's *We Feel Fine*. Cheekily entitled, 'Lev's alright!' it signalled Gaylor's creative ambitions for Popcorn. In the event most of the first generation of Popcorn.js projects did not push the boundaries of documentary form. The approach tended to be to take a finished factual video or documentary and use Popcorn.js to annotate or add further information. One might see this as simply analogous to adding captions or voice-over, although the live nature of some of the source content provides a significant new potential. The always historical 'document' can have always 'live' dynamic context.

The semantic remix of 'Right Wing Radio Duck' by Rebellious Pixels stands out among the 2010 Popcorn demos. This brilliant remix fuses Donald Duck footage with audio of Fox News' Glenn Beck. The Popcorn framework allows the numerous sources to be displayed, which is a pleasure to watch, as it reveals the virtuoso construction of the piece. At the same time it makes evident a politically significant function of semantic video, as the attribution of sources can provide a legal basis for quoting copyright content under Fair Use and can support Creative Commons use.

In a rougher state, but tantalising for its documentary potential, is a proof of concept for *18 Days in Egypt* - the crowd-sourced documentary that is being made from the media that people produced during the revolution in Egypt in January / February 2011. Rather than use Popcorn on a video stream with additional media around it, the 18Days team have used full screen video, offering links to details within a shot. Stills, news coverage, video content taken by participants can be accessed through hotspots within footage of a protest crossing the Qasir-al-Niil Bridge in Cairo. An extended long shot becomes an interface to explore the event. Eyewitness interviews, newspaper reports, Al Jazeera coverage, the history of the bridge and its significance in the city are all made available as a live archaeology of the document itself. The process opens up the world of the footage, offering multiple viewpoints and a sense of three-dimensionality; a powerful methodology for depicting the dynamics of those unfolding events.

After a year of development work Popcorn 1.0 was released at November '11's Mozilla Festival in London. The same Festival saw the premiere of Kat Cizek's *One Millionth Tower*, a documentary spin-off from the *Highrise* project, made with open-source tools – Popcorn and Web GL, which enables the interactive generation of 3D graphics. The work was heralded by Mozilla as 'the world's first open-source 3D documentary', and simultaneously launched on the home page of Wired.com – surely a documentary first. *One Millionth Tower* allows the viewer/user to explore a 3D environment in which animators have realised re-design ideas that Toronto tower block residents have devised working in collaboration with architects. Alongside these examples the user is invited to access related Flickr images, Wikipedia entries and even the current weather in Toronto drawn from the web. In *One Millionth Tower*, we can begin to see what HTML5 might mean for documentary. Reviewing the work on the i-Docs website, Sandra Gaudenzi (2011) relates the piece to her concept of the 'relational object', an idea of the interactive documentary as a nexus of connections, a powerful concept for thinking about semantic video; '[...]if we believe that the media is the message,' she writes, 'we can also start to see our own world differently. A world where everything is dynamically connected and where relations are the bone structure of life.'

The documentary made in HTML5 can be continually re-contextualised, updated and

amended, through content drawn in by automatic search engines and APIs. This goes far beyond the interactivity that allows users to comment or create their own mashup from the material. Here existing information online can be linked to the video footage. Tweets being sent in a 10 mile radius of the video's location, Wikipedia entries within the same radius, blogs linked by thematised search or newspaper archives from the date of recording can all be made available to elucidate the video fragment. In *The Are You Happy?* Project experiments with Popcorn Maker, which we will discuss, it is these connections that interest us.

5 Start Making Sense – Towards Semantic Documentary

The question arises, 'Why is this potential interesting or useful in the field of online documentary production?' Watching work online is, some might argue, already difficult enough, finding it in the first place is already a challenge. Then viewing in a permanently interruptible multiple windowed screen with other information ever available at the click of a mouse might be said to challenge the film's address to its audience. The 'documentary' might just drown in the sea of 'data'.

We argue however that there are ways in which these affordances can address some of the problems of the online viewing environment rather than compounding them. These problems have to do with the apparent randomness of navigation, with the lack of perspective produced by the excess of millions of documentary video clips, the dominant temporal logic of online communication that tends towards the perpetually unedited present. The proposition that our current practice-based research explores is how an online documentary might encompass data to take advantage of the new forms of social knowledge that are emerging, reflecting community and lived experience that can be seen and represented (in video), but *also* making visible alongside that those other wider contextualising forces (hiding within the data and the web).

Fifty years ago, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin filmed French people answering the question, "Are you happy?" in what became an early sequence in the seminal

documentary, *Chronique d'un Ete*. That film harnessed the latest sync sound technology to explore the lives of the 'tribe of people living in Paris'. The *Are You Happy?* Project is finding out what happens when we ask the same question in the global environment of the web today. Filmmakers and enthusiasts have been invited to restage or reinterpret Rouch and Morin's sequence and upload the results to the video sharing site Vimeo. Thirty or so sequences have now been gathered from diverse locations across the world.

In the second stage of *Chronique d'un Ete*, Rouch and Morin followed a number of individuals across the Summer of 1960, staging exploratory dialogues about life and society with them, individually and in groups. In the second stage of *The Are You Happy? Project* we are replacing that temporal enquiry with an enquiry across the network of the web. Using Popcorn Maker, we are juxtaposing the vox pop sequences that have been submitted with images and text on related themes drawn from social media platforms. We also want to choreograph a coherent documentary experience for the user. As the Popcorn Maker has just been released at the time of writing we offer some early observations from this work-in-progress.

Experimenting with the Popcorn Maker on this footage is a quite heady experience suggesting an array of creative possibilities and emergent documentary poetics. The first shock is that the authoring tool makes the montage of video and content from the live web, side-by-side within a screen, as easy as cutting two images together in sequence in iMovie. This in itself is a revelation. It is over a decade now since Manovich (2001) came up with the concept of spatial montage to describe the juxtaposition of images within multiple computer windows. Manovich defined spatial montage in opposition to temporal montage, the mode of cutting images into a linear sequence initiated in film editing, which became the dominant practice of 20th century moving image culture.

While spatial montage is common now in computer based culture – in interactive documentary, for example - and there has been a flowering of multiple screen installations in the art world, creating those juxtapositions in computer based work has until recently involved a process where the visual experience of the juxtaposition had to

be imagined, planned through storyboards and wireframes, and brought into being through hard coding by developers. While it's now technically possible to create multiple streams in various desktop-editing systems, this is not everyday expertise. So it is remarkable that the Popcorn Maker allows you to try out combinations of video and live web sources as readily as sketching. In 1948 Alexandre Astruc published his essay calling for the 'camera-stylo', a system of cinema that would have the flexibility of the written word. With the emergence of video recording as a function of mobile phones, this vision has been realised in the realm of shooting. Popcorn Maker gives a foretaste of how spatial montage that includes types of web data can become a vernacular, a 'camera stylo' for web documentary.

But what logic should govern the combination of edited video and social media fragments drawn in algorithmically? What is the value of combining these sources? And what does the interface contribute to the effect of their combination? How does spatial montage affect meaning making?

It can be argued that the filming process effectively lifts individuals out of context, metaphorically deracinating them. As we have observed, documentary makers adopt a variety of strategies to address this problem. Beyond the street interviews, *Chronique d'un Ete* can be seen as a series of dialogues which illuminate the lives of the main characters through and in relation to various contexts – work, family, memory, current events. Semantic video might allow an alternative response to the challenge of context. In our experiments with The *Are You Happy?* Project we are harnessing the Popcorn framework to re-inscribe the social and cultural context of the interviews.

As described earlier, a number of early experiments with Popcorn involved adding information to finished documentary content. Web pages and Wikipedia entries would appear in windows alongside video, making for uncomfortable, if not impossible, viewing. Our objective is not to create an informational layer. Our interest is in the potential for spatial montage, where montage is understood in the cinematic sense, as in the "Kuleshov effect", with a third meaning being produced through juxtaposition, in the

blink of an eye. We have therefore customised the Popcorn Maker interface, losing the spaces outlined for other content, so that the video sits within a black surround. A number of sources – Flickr, Twitter, Google Maps – are defined so that they can appear in spaces around the video, but these destinations are unmarked, so that the content appears as the next shot appears in a linear edit - unannounced.

The first experiments are with Twitter. The *Are you happy?* Project interviews feature both common themes and noteworthy particularities. In Mongolia many people mention ‘country’, saying, for instance, “I am happy to see my country prosper” and “I am happy I was born in Mongolia.” But what does this mean to the viewer who knows little about Mongolia? It is not self-evident. The words alone do not tell you what is happening there politically or economically, or where these sentiments might sit on a spectrum from post-colonial relief through national pride to rampant nationalism. Pulling in Tweets tagged Mongolia alongside the video can play a significant role here. “Gobi Mega-mine puts Mongolia on brink of worlds biggest resource boom”. “Mongolia cuts short Dalai Lama lecture tour under China pressure.” Tweets offer considerable information in a few words.

Figure 1 Tweets about Mongolia from “The Are you happy? Project”

Asked in diverse cultural contexts, the question “Are you happy?” elicits revealing particularity, such as this, but also gathers certain universal responses. People everywhere say that happiness comes from family, children, grandchildren. It might seem that we are all the same. Playing a twitter feed alongside the video disrupts this cosy impression. A twitter search on ‘Mongolia’ and ‘children’ produces micro-narratives behind which lie economic hardship and deprivation. Some Mongolian children are clearly adopted out of the country. Street children are a social challenge. Life is very different from in the UK. Video creates an illusion of nearness, of similarity. Juxtaposing that with web data can re-inscribe specificity, difference.

However, experimenting with Twitter also entails editorial and aesthetic challenges. Incorporating written social media content into a global project is problematic. First and foremost, social media platforms are not universally accessible and uptake is very uneven. There is also an issue of language. While there are Twitter comments available in Mongolian, for example, a system for live translation is not. For now the experiment is with tweets in English, bearing in mind that these are likely not to be indigenous content.

From an aesthetic perspective, tweets work well playing alongside visual sequences, but *The Are You happy?* Project is mostly sync sound interviews, and neither tweets nor subtitled content get the viewer attention they need when they are on-screen simultaneously. So we plan to explore alternative ways of incorporating Twitter. What would the effect be if the frame filled with the micro-posts for a few seconds before the video started to play? What would it be like to replace the main video image with tweets at certain points? The idea is to use the text in a creative tension with the video rather than as explanation, to combine word and image in the spirit of Godard rather than current affairs.

Working with visuals – combining edited video with Flickr images – immediately feels fruitful and less problematic than text. The interviews produced by John Barry in Trinidad for *Are You Happy?* are dominated by spirituality and Christian imagery. For these Caribbean interviewees happiness is inextricably linked with the presence, absence and search for God. When an interviewee in Trinidad mentions the church, we tag the video ‘Trinidad’ and ‘church’, and pictures from the photo sharing website Flickr are called up. This has an interesting effect. If one illustrated the word church with one church this might be so literal as to be comic. The profusion of churches that is called up produces quite another effect. The catalogue of grand buildings dominating the landscape and images of rapt worshippers speak of history, power and awe. To borrow a term from the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, this ‘thickens’ the visual/auditory ‘description’ provided by the video. This is the work that the director generally does in making a documentary,- through in-depth interviews, shot selection, cut-aways, voice-over. Here that work is co-created, and left somewhat to chance. The stills have been

created by authors not known to us, who have uploaded and tagged their images, and made them available through a Creative Commons license. We have identified themes in the filmed content and tagged the videos accordingly. The images are then drawn in through an algorithm. As the Flickr feed is live, the particular juxtaposition of still and video is left open, introducing an element of unpredictability. That this co-creation is productive is a value judgement that people may disagree over. The random quality will however be an aesthetic feature of HTML5 documentary, and deserves further consideration, which space does not allow here.

The crowd-sourced Flickr images then add context and texture to the video content. The fact that they sit side-by-side, that they are montaged in space plays a part in what effect that has. For Manovich, temporal montage represents “a logic of displacement”, while spatial montage represents “a logic of addition and co-existence”. In the Trinidadian example, the images of places and people drawn in from Flickr don’t replace the interviewee on the screen. They are alongside her, with her, placing her in a cultural context. Thus we can see how spatial montage lends itself to the presentation of connections – in this instance between individual and community, but equally between places and across cultures.

Manovich (2001) predicted that spatial montage would return to prominence in the 21st century, citing a prescient statement by Foucault to suggest why this aesthetic is so apt for our networked, globalised world, ‘We are now in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.’ Popcorn Maker points the way for documentary making in this environment.

Figure 2 Interviewee in Mongolia with Flickr images from “The Are you happy? Project”

7. Conclusion

The conclusions for the arguments and speculations in this paper are contingent on the results of further experimentation with Popcorn. However we have established here the

start of a process, which, we argue, will transform the potential for documentary and see another new stage in its history. Video content ‘of the web’, live to the affordances of networked connectivity, has particular attractions to the documentary producer. It has the potential to introduce different voices into a linear text, to offer in-depth investigation of particular sequences, and to re-contextualise documentary material through mobilising the enormous co-creative potential of human discourse captured in the web. It offers the potential for new ways to construct argument and bring evidence to bear in documentary’s attempt to shape our shared world.

However we are also cautious and careful. For our aspiration to be realised HTML5 requires the development of a whole new form of visual and informational grammar. Our technological moment produces the need for a new generation of Kuleshovs and Eisensteins to develop montage aesthetics for the database. This development will need rigour and care if the documentary project is to survive in a recognisable form in the chaotic environment of online mediation. This is a rigour that will require a new set of understandings of the politics of search, that is to say the way in which meta tagging and search engines can combine to produce useful, challenging, argumentative insight rather than bland ‘trending now’ updates. Such new forms will be predicated on new literacies for the attention economy, in which Search becomes a function that producers can write as well as read, an active intervention rather than a passive subjection.

It seems likely that these forces will shape a different kind of documentary in which the control over material assumed by a particular strand of its history will be challenged. In this domain the user experience of a body of documentary material may change from person to person and moment to moment. The exact nature of the experience will *emerge* from the interaction between the search terms active in the text and whatever is available online to respond to them. In this sense the documentary becomes a more open text, available to polyvocal annotation, its authority to *name* the world replaced by an understanding that naming, defining, arguing, is always an *encounter* that is relational, contingent, specific and emergent.

5949

Works Cited

Bolter, Jay and Grusin, Richard (1999), *Remediation: Understanding New media*, Cambridge Mas. and London: MIT Press, pp. 20 - 51

Bruzzi, Stella (2000), *New Documentary; A Critical Introduction*, Routledge London & NT
 Burgess, Jean & Green, Joshua (2009), *You Tube*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press .

Dovey, Jon (2000), *Freakshow*, London: Pluto Press.

Dovey, Jon & Rose, Mandy (2012) 'This great mapping of ourselves – New Documentary Forms Online' in Brian Winston *The BFI Companion to Documentary* London: BFI London, Forthcoming.

Diamond, Sara (2010), 'Lenticular Galaxies: The Polyvalent Aesthetics of Data Visualisation' in *Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies*, CTheory.net, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=651>
 Accessed 3 July 2012.

Elsaesser, Thomas (2009) 'Tales of Epiphany and Entropy: Around the Worlds in Eighty Clicks' in Pelle Snickers & Patrick Vondereau (eds) *The You Tube Reader*, Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, p.181.

Foucault, Michel (1954-1988), 'Dits et Ecrits: Selection Vol 1', in Manovich Lev (2001) *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, US: The MIT Press, p325.

Gaudenzi, Sandra (2011), 'The i-Doc as a Relational Object'
<http://i-docs.org/2011/09/08/the-i-doc-as-a-relational-object/> Accessed 3 July 2012

Harris Jonathan (2007), 'The Web's Secret Stories' *TED Talks 2007*,

http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_harris_tells_the_web_s_secret_stories.html,
Accessed: 6 December 2011.

Harris, Jonathan and Kamvar, Sep (2012), 'We Feel Fine',
<http://wefeelfine.org/mission.html>, Accessed: 30 May 2012.

Heathcote, Elizabeth (2011), 'I can measure how happy you are and why',
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/feb/13/bright-idea-mappiness-happiness-app>, Accessed: 21 October 2011.

Kopp, Ingrid (2010), 'Tribeca Film Institute blog',
<http://www.tribecafilminstitute.org/blog/102928684.html>, Accessed: 30 May 2012.

Manovich, Lev (2001), *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, US: The MIT Press, p. 325

Mozilla (2011), 'The Mozilla Blog', <http://blog.mozilla.org/blog/2011/11/05/popcorn-1-0-launch-and-world-premier-of-one-millionth-tower/> Accessed: 3 July 2012

Nichols, Bill (1991), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*
Indiana: Indiana University Press pp. 3-4

Popova, Maria (2009), 'We Feel Fine Review'
<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2009/12/03/we-feel-fine-book/>, Accessed: 6
December 2011.

O'Reilly, Tim (2005), 'What Is Web 2.0 ?'
(<http://oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=3>, Accessed: 17
October 2011.

O'Reilly, Tim (2011), Strata: Making Data Work Conference, 1-3 February 2011,
<http://strataconf.com/strata2011/public/cfp/122>, Accessed: 6 December 2011.

Renov, Michael (2008), 'First Person Films: Some Theses on Self Inscription' in Austin T & de Jong E *Rethinking Documentary New Perspectives, New Practices*, Maidenhead: McGraw Hill, pp.39 – 51.

Whitelaw M 'Art Against Information: Case Studies in Data Practice' *Proceedings, Fibreculture* ed Murphy A (Perth : Digital Arts & Culture Conference, 2006):12

Williams, Raymond (1989), *Resources of Hope*, R. Gable (ed.), London and New York: Verso, p 116.

Winston, Brian (1995), *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, London: British Film Institute pp. 226 - 230

Works Cited

18 Days in Egypt, Popcorn Demo, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YLxDLEGJN4>
Accessed: 3 July 2012

Cizek, Kat / NFB (2011), *One Millionth Tower* <http://highrise.nfb.ca/tag/one-millionth-tower/> Accessed: 3 July 2012

Cizek, Kat (2010), *Highrise* <http://highrise.nfb.ca/> Accessed 3 July 2012

Harris, Jonathan & Kamvar, Sep (2005), *We Feel Fine*
<http://www.wefeelfine.org/>, Accessed: 6 December 2011.

Rebellious Pixels (2010), *Right Wing Radio Duck*,
<http://www.rebelliouspixels.com/semanticremix/> Accessed; 3 July 2012

Rouch, Jean (1961), *Chronique d'un Ete*, Paris: Argos Films.

