

Images for the Interpretation of the Past: Uses and Abuses of Memory in Documentary Film

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Introduction: Constructions of the Past in Documentary Films

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of theoretical studies exploring social, collective, historical, and media memory from a wide range of perspectives, including sociological, historiographic, cultural, and semiotic. The question of memory has also been the subject of debates between various social actors, finding a place at the very center of cultural and political dialectics.

In light of the huge number of representations of memory in various types of documentary films, and of the consolidation of memory studies in the field of historiography, there is clearly a need for analysis of a context so saturated with visual representations of history. It is a context that has resulted in the gradual appearance of a “culture of memory”, which, paradoxically, seems little more than a symptom of contemporary social amnesia, of a rootless society that projects its anxiety over its lack of points of reference onto a heightened concern with history. This can be easily confirmed by the current frenzy of activities involving the recovery and documentation of the past in a wide variety of media, in what could be described as a 2.0 update of Derrida's famous “archive fever” (1997).¹

Collective memory has been defined as a reconstruction of the past based on memories shared by a community, associated with the identity of the social group concerned.² Visual documents constitute one of the most solid symbolic foundations on which to build the contemporary digital memory of a society that has entered an age of *late visibility*. However, documentaries have a long tradition of employing discursive operations aimed at making the knowledge they supposedly contain “seem true”,³ thereby changing the essence of the document into a spectacle, because “nothing in the world is accessible without stories”.⁴ We turn to documentaries to endorse, refute, or expand on what we know about an event. Although the document (audiovisual, photographic, cinematic, audio) retains its evidentiary value, we need to question the extent to which it actually serves as the faithful reflection of reality that we

expect to see in it,⁵ or how our reading of it affects the complex and paradoxical relationship that contemporary individuals establish with reality and their history.

The process of constant mediation with reality that we experience in the so-called *post-truth era* has completely transformed our relationship not only with the present, but also with the past. This mediation takes place in a context of multiple meanings, unfolding in a virtual connective universe where the omnipresence of the document-image serves as a foundation for different ideological discourses on the present, identity, and the past. However, since we know that reality is not single, true and immutable,⁶ but a construct that is “multiple, fragmented and subjective, resulting from different interactions mediated by language, culture, inter-subjective agreements and the point of view of the individual”,⁷ there can be no univocal image of history, or any single perspective on any past event.

Image, History and Narration: Materials and Methodology

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to define certain key concepts, without which our understanding of the object of study would be prone to error. The first is, of course, the concept of memory, which is understood here as a privileged space for the analysis of images because it constitutes a domain where the image and history overlap. Memory is defined as a symbolic construct founded on numerous stories, representations, desires, drives, personal recollections and remnants of the past, or interconnected fragments of completely disparate narrations. It is also a political weapon, which can be used to prevent the elimination of evidence of dissenting views.

Todorov warns of one of the most serious dangers faced by contemporary society: the threat of the erasure of memory, not because of the suppression of information, but because of its overabundance. The extraordinary proliferation of the culture of memory in democratic states could lead—less brutally but more efficiently—to the same fate as that of the worst totalitarian dictatorships. Moreover, by sheer repetition, “the constant appeal to memory and the ritual doom of oblivion in turn end up being problematic”.⁸

The construction of memory “entails processes of selection, ordering a hierarchical structuring of memories, documents or texts, together with the use of technical devices [...] that boost the mnemonic capacities of individuals”.⁹ It is therefore necessary to understand the logic behind these selection processes before we can explore the processes of transmission and construction of historical events in the present through an analysis of the audiovisual products that support such operations. The selection process itself entails ordering, hierarchically structuring and narrativising fragments for the purpose of creating a particular *truth effect*, which in turn raises the question of the traditional confusion between the concepts of *history* and *story*.

On the other hand, documentary images are problematic from the outset because we know that “their meaning depends on what is expected of them”.¹⁰ The ambivalence of a documentary image makes us simultaneously believe and doubt “both the reality represented and the reality of the representation”.¹¹ The variety of uses and significations contained in the same image in the context of the relations that constitute a communicative act makes them highly manipulable visual elements. Indeed, their malleability possesses a unique capacity, as they can be adapted to an emotion that encapsulates an entire story, as Kuleshov demonstrated. Audiovisual media thus occupy a central place in the re-construction that societies make of their own past, even to the point of displacing other representations like those traditionally transmitted through the school, the family or the social group.

Cinéma vérité, in particular, participates actively in the disputes over the meaning of the past inherent in any process of collective memory construction. This article will attempt to identify (even if only obliquely) the relationships between the elaboration of meaning in audiovisual documentary products and the different modes in which our societies preserve, evoke, remember and interpret their past. A textual analysis of a documentary will not reveal the reality of the events related, but it can identify the mechanisms and ideologies through which we accord meaning to that assumed reality. In short, careful analysis will help tease out our own relationship with the forms of representation of reality and, consequently, with reality itself.

Between Document and Spectacle

The narrations referred to above and the elements employed in these films in their particular construction of memory will be identified here through a textual analysis of certain enunciations that will help tease out their strategies for

producing meaning. In order to establish a distinction between the different rhetorical elements analyzed, they will be organized along two axes: (1) a temporal axis that will help clarify the evolution of documentary treatment and make it possible to locate the visual significance of its various transformations; and (2) an esthetic axis that condenses the two ways to conceive of reality posited by Edgar Morin (i.e. to pretend that you can present reality to be seen; and to pose the problem of reality, which requires a more open attitude toward it than a mere declaration of objective facts). The aim of this analysis will be to show the evolution of documentary approaches to the past and their consideration as “prostheses” of memory.¹²

From a semiotic perspective, reality, like truth, is above all an effect of meaning inherent in the discursive objects that we call documentaries. The documentary is a persuasive strategy aimed at making its interpreter believe that the content it offers comes from extralinguistic reality, that it is objective and authentic, asserting “this happened this way”. It is therefore a discursive phenomenon that involves making what is stated seem true.¹³ It is a referential system that is sustained on mimetic strategies and its rhetorical potential is based on the signifying power of the document.

As Català explains, etymologically the word “documentary” (derived from “document”) refers to reliable data that can serve as proof of something, and that is ultimately related to an idea that reality, in its transformation into filmic material, always leaves an objective trace of the truth, which we accept as evidence. This is what has been called the *indexical base* of the photographic image and, by extension, the film image. However, the idea that these documents can be taken as reliable evidence is highly questionable, given that “more than proving the reality to which they refer, they describe the subject and the institution that produces them”.¹⁴ As Comolli argues, the cinematic document is, above all, a document of its own production, and represents a challenge to the historian because it mixes several types of gaze (of the filmed subject and of the spectator) through the displaced gaze of the camera.¹⁵ There is therefore no document without a gaze, just as there is no cinema without a spectator, no communication without feedback. Unless some human or social agent engages with it, the document is mute, deaf and blind.

In the traditional conception of the documentary, cinema was understood as a reflection of reality and became a key tool of war propaganda. There are numerous examples of this idea in film history, such as *The Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934), *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942–1945) or *The Battle of Midway* (John Ford, 1942). However, the focus in this article will be on one particularly emblematic example of the WWII war documentary: *Desert Victory* (Roy Boutling, 1943). An analysis of this film’s creation, production and narrative strategies effectively challenges every certainty about the genre. Produced by the AFPU (Army Film Production Unit) and the RAFFPU (Royal Air Force Film Production Unit), and distributed in the United Kingdom by the British Ministry of Information and in the United States by 20th Century Fox, the film depicts the battles waged in El-Alamein (Egypt) during the Second World War, between July and November 1942. On first glance, *Desert Victory* looks like an archetypal propaganda film; however, an analysis reveals a network of discursive operations aimed at making what was being represented *seem true*. Obviously, as an institutional propaganda film in the context of war, its objective was to give hope to the allied soldiers and civilians in the face of the still very powerful military might of Nazi Germany.

Given the strategic importance of the film as allied propaganda, the triumphalist rhetoric of its discourse was made explicit from the outset in the promotional poster that claims it contains “the most thrilling scenes ever taken under fire.” Of course, there was no shortage of media resources for its production, as at least thirty teams of reporters (each including a photographer and a film camera operator) were sent to the Egyptian front to shoot the bloody battles. While these teams filmed the conflict each day, the raw footage (film reels) was sent to London to be developed and put together in the editing room. This is where problems began, as while viewing the raw footage, the editors discovered numerous defects that complicated the editing process. For example, the shots filmed by the English camera operators did not respect the continuity of the direction of the troop and tank movements; whole reels therefore had to be inverted by turning the negatives around so that they could be used in the final edit of the sequences with movement. If we look closely and study the clouds in the background of the two images, the operation is exposed as a cinematic trick.

Another of the serious problems faced by the editors was the complete absence of close-up shots or detail shots of the moment of the attack, resulting in a distancing effect for the spectator because the soldiers filmed are not clearly identified; in other words, they are not “characters” in the story. Moreover, because the offensive was launched in the middle of the night without taking into account that the film speed was not sufficient to shoot without the aid of lighting, the operators only managed to capture a few flashes and bursts of explosions and bombings. All these limitations

hindering the film's editing process reveal the inadequacy of the raw document to construct a specific meaning, and demonstrating that the document by itself is incapable of producing a spectacle.¹⁶

To make up for these deficiencies, the film's producers used Pinewood Studios in London to shoot the detail shots that darkness and distance had prevented them from filming on location. Shots of soldiers advancing in a particular direction, sappers at work, close-ups of an officer looking at his watch as he waits to enter the fray, faces of soldiers during the (simulated) attack, and other scenes filled in for the real action. These soldiers filmed up close were actors, dressed up in real army uniforms, with real sand, real guns, illuminated with spotlights whose lighting effects were carefully calculated to produce a credible continuity with the original wide shots that were in fact genuine documents. In the film, every element fulfills its role and responds to the needs of spectacular, rhetorical efficacy. The studio shots were completed with all kinds of strategies and inserted into the real footage of the battle, even though many of the real shots came from other battles, other deserts and even other wars. The result was so satisfactory that many of the close-up shots in the studio (just like in a fiction film) were subsequently used in other documentary films, presented as "real" battle images. As a result, this fake footage has appeared on movie screens all over the world representing "real" images of different battles. This is the paradox of the iconography of memory, which, unbeknownst to the viewer, is filled with fake images.

Desert Victory thus exemplifies a contradiction resulting from the combination of the most spectacular effects of images with their potential to be accepted as real, as these shots were constructed, paradoxically, because it was impossible to film them. They are all a work of fiction, produced to create a documentary truth more powerful than the real documents, constructing a memory on the basis of a clearly identifiable rhetorical operation.

This combination of true and fake images was necessary not only to conceal their heterogeneous origins but also to organize them into a narrative that appears seamless, continuous, unified, coherent and believable. Of course, this is far from the biggest scam in film history, but it is a case in which the trickery is more successful and less identifiable, as it constructs a truth that is truer than reality itself. The need for spectacle won out over the virtues of documentary. The footage taken by war reporters was too cold on its own; it needed pretense, suspense, drama. The spectacle is everything; even whatever cannot be filmed for real will be filmed anyway. The place of that soldier, that gun, that mound of sand in the world does not matter at all; it is its place in the film that counts. The documentary thus constitutes an assault on reality through the fabrication of a spectacle that is more realistic than realism itself,¹⁷ memory as a visual product manufactured for political propaganda.

The Film Essay and the Interpretation of the Past

As noted above, another object of interest for this study is contemporary *cinéma vérité*. For the purpose of this analysis, *cinéma vérité* is understood as a broader understanding of the traditional concept of documentary, expanding its boundaries to incorporate a subjective turn in the nonfiction esthetic in the form of personal reflections, private memories, essays, and a high level of self-consciousness as a device for constructing meaning (meta-reference).

The contemporary documentary is more a hermeneutic (i.e. interpretative) device that observes reality from within to reveal its constructed nature. It does not attempt to reduce reality to a cognitive ambiguity, but to study it and expose the problems with truth-sustaining mechanisms.¹⁸ There are numerous examples of this kind of contemporary *cinéma vérité*, including films like *The Gleaners and I* (Agnès Varda, 2000), *Monos como Becky* (Joaquín Jordà, 1999) or *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988). However, one film which, due to its unique character and radical modernism, exhibits features that are of particular interest for this study is *Casas Viejas: El grito del sur* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1996). All of Martín Patino's work is a jigsaw puzzle not only of the potentialities, but also of the limits and boundaries of visual representation, based on the assumption that visible reality can never be an end but only a starting point.¹⁹ His filmography is an extensive palimpsest of voices, images and visual reflections that reinvent his language in each new project, exploring paths rarely taken in Spanish cinema. with a transgressive, unconventional, iconoclastic approach. Several of his films arguably reflect his status as a precursor to many of the vectors that have characterized *cinéma vérité* in the last forty years. However, if there is a film that stands out especially as a broader encapsulation of the range of narrative experiments and strategies used by Patino to explore memory, it is *Casas Viejas*.

The film is an episode of the series *Andalucía: un siglo de fascinación*, Patino production for Spanish television that explores the tragic events that took place in the town of Casas Viejas in Cádiz during the Spanish Republican era, in January 1933. This town was the site of one of the most gruesome episodes in the history of the Second Spanish Republic, when an uprising by a group of peasant farmers affiliated with Spain's National Confederation of Labor (CNT) was brutally repressed by the government's assault forces, resulting in the shooting of 22 civilians. The Casas Viejas massacre, as it came to be known, is considered the black legend of the Republican government, enshrined in the Spanish collective memory as one of the most important precursors to the Asturian mining strikes of 1934, which would in turn lead to the Civil War. In this film, Patino attempts to reconstruct the episode through a reflection on both the nature and the visual representation of history and memory. Using an essay style that fuses different visual reflections and procedures, the film brings together diverse esthetics that focus more on the process of investigating reality than on offering an objective testimony of it. The analytical, distancing tone of the narration contrasts with the presence of other voices that are essential to the articulation of the story, while the enunciation mobilizes certain textual strategies aimed at constructing a particular truth.²⁰

With this objective, the film combines three different strategies of representation that are expressed using three different sources. The first is a Soviet source, a communist newsreel supposedly produced by Lenin Films. Its script, titled "*Casas Viejas: Andalucía heroica*", reflects the conventions of Russian propaganda films of the 1920s. Formally organized around the static nature of the compositions, contrasted lighting and aestheticist angles, epic music and intertitles, this footage assumes the role in the film of the official Russian version of events. The second is a British news report, with an esthetic similar to the British realist school founded by John Grierson. It was filmed with a shoulder-mounted camera, with spontaneous compositions, conveying a sensation of live footage, soft focus, deteriorated film, formal defects like unsynchronized sound, an observational attitude and a naturalist style. This is the alternative, Western version of events, in opposition to the official one. Finally, the third source is footage taken by Patino himself: reporting, interviewing, direct testimony, experts, documents, quotes, articles, etc... all the elements that can articulate truth, the regime of veridiction in our society constructed by the media (although in fact there are also fake characters). It is quite another matter to bring the spectators into the story, to get them to suspend their disbelief as they would with any supposed documentary and accept the version offered by the filmmaker, as Patino himself asks: "Do you think that the spectators will truly believe that they're watching an old documentary from seventy years ago?"²¹

These three different sources within the film constitute the expressive tools used by the filmmaker to interrogate the meaning of reality, questioning the real through the fictitious and the fictitious through the real.²² This is why the film appropriates the canonical codes of each of the three approaches to documentary represented by the three different sources: to present a discourse that does not seek to represent the truth (given that it offers different versions of it), but that does protect its realism with all manner of discursive devices. It is precisely this obsession with realism that guarantees the credibility of the text; a lie is presented as if it were true because of the way it is told. The adoption of these cinematic forms reinforces the realism of the story through a simulacrum of supposedly authentic archive images, film grain and soft focus, interviews (whether fake or not), experts and testimonies, representing a whole range of seemingly veridical elements that sustain a particular interpretation.

In this way, the filmmaker anticipates at least two kinds of interpretations of the same visual enunciations. The first is a semantic interpretation, which the spectator infuses with meaning based on the material expression of the text, valid for a basic interpreter. The second is a critical and more elaborated interpretation that attempts to explain the structural reasons behind the production of those specific semantic interpretations, valid for a more perceptive interpreter who goes further than the obvious meaning to interrogate the procedures that place this knowledge within everyone's reach (in this case, the clues that Patino leaves throughout the film for this type of spectator are numerous, such as the reference to Lenin Films, or the director of Filmoteca Dadaísta). In this way, while constructing a referential truth, he encourages a reading that takes an interest in the textual mechanisms that have produced this meaning effect that we call truth, subverting the persuasive reasoning of the discourse.²³

Obviously, this is a fake documentary *avant la lettre*, like *F for Fake* (Orson Welles, 1971) or *Zelig* (Woody Allen, 1982), with a visual mechanism of reflection on the image itself that constructs a dual enunciation: on the one hand, it lays the foundations for an unquestionable cinematic truth; on the other, it seeks a spectator who will resist the impostures of some of its discursive operations, who will distrust the narration and interrogate the rhetorical ruses believed by those spectators who are carried along with the rush of the dramatic action. In *Casas Viejas*, Patino

reflects on the image through the image itself. The representation folds in on itself, turning into a game of Russian dolls that can only be worked out through a critical analysis. The memory mediated by the images, the history of the experts, consensus and representation become objects of reflection. Debates are opened through the dialogue with the film, in questions that the author poses to us in the form of visual enunciations.

Web Documentary and Non-linear Articulation of the Past

Interactive documentaries also play an important role in the construction of the collective imaginary, thanks to their extraordinary capacity to assemble a wide range of documentary modes (video, photo, audio, text, illustration, graphics, online applications, links, nodes, anchors, menus, etc.) around a re-construction of a lost memory or memories. The strategies to represent history implemented by these new audiovisual products propose a critical look at the past, attempting to recover it using hypertextual tools that adapt more naturally to memory processes and their notably interpretive nature.

As Gifreu explains, the uniqueness of web documentaries lies in their specific capacities for organizing the meaning of a story narrated in multiple media, even simultaneously, in an effort to structure it as a multifarious narrative open to user participation and interpretation,²⁴ potentially extendible to other media or formats. Due to the inherent diversity of the Internet (where most of these products operate), the construction of their enunciations exhibits certain common features, such as formal hybridization, meta-reference or self-consciousness, narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, transmediality, and the use of a wide range of experimental stylistic resources.²⁵

This convergence of media and narrative strategies, interfaces and interactivity creates new layers of meaning that make the web documentary a complex signifying object, open to multiple readings and interpretations. It is also permeable to the intervention of a new kind of agent, the *spectator*, who can modulate the narrative experience in accordance with her/his involvement in it. In this way, the structure of the web documentary breaks with linearity, adopting different forms depending on the choices and the enhanced role of the reader, the degree of interaction, and the levels of plot variation. In a sense, the web documentary makes its own discursive condition visible through elements that are not organized in a logical order or in response to a predetermined reading. The enunciative act is thus shaped by the interaction of the user, who is the trigger for the generation of meaning. This stretches the limits of documentary film representation to construct meaning in a different place, with other media.²⁶

There are many examples of interactive works dealing with memory, including *Imatges de un bombardeig. Barcelona bàrbarament bombardejada* (Julián Álvarez, 2004), *The Johnny Cash Project* (Chris Milk, 2010).

0 responsables (Barret Films, 2014), *The Iron Curtain Diaries* (Matteo Scanni, 2009) and *Las Sinsombrero* (Intropia Media/Yo la Perdonó/RTVE Lab, 2015). However, the focus of this study is on a project developed in the context of the Master's program in Creative Documentary at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona titled *Seat: The Shadows of Progress* (Ferrán Andrés/Cristina González/Sabrina Grajales/David Moya/Marina Thomé; UAB, 2012). This project deals with a metalinguistic reflection on the role of collective representation in contemporary iconographic memory construction.

Seat: The Shadows of Progress documents the anti-Franco workers' protests that took place under military-style working conditions at the SEAT car factory in Barcelona during the Franco dictatorship. In order to effectively convey the repressive environment of the era, and specifically in the factory, this documentary takes an immersive approach a step further, turning the user into the generator/protagonist of the story through a range of techno-rhetorical devices, photographic resources, and an interface design consistent with the discursive articulation of the text. The central design of the application is a drawing of an assembly line along which the user can scroll horizontally to view the different assembly stages of the car company's biggest commercial success, the SEAT 600. By following the graphic image intuitively with the mouse, different topics and characters appear, immersing us in the story of the worker struggle at the militarized factory. Despite the range of exploration options offered by the website, its structural organization is quite simple, exhibiting a certain formal minimalism that is part of a discursive strategy intended to encourage the user to explore the different possibilities for further reflection, supplementary information, or analysis.

This design makes the structure of the interactive application quite conventional. The segmentation of the sequences is consistent with the design of the interface, the potential user interactions and the graphic configuration of the story, based on the way the different elements are visually organized at the core of the application. However, the in-

terviews that make up the audiovisual material have the distinctive feature of being filmed in a way that foregrounds the enunciative marker that breaks the transparency of the representation, as the direct gaze of the interviewees to camera appeals directly to spectators and calls for their attention. Like a game of mirrors, or of POV shots, the spectator adopts the point of view of the camera, which receives the character's direct gaze, like a medium between the recording and the gaze of the two parties involved (spectator and character). The webdoc is very much a product of the liquid modern era, when every cultural product has a fleeting existence, and when the consumption of information and entertainment is increasing, along with the volatility of memory. This may be why Andrew Hoskins defines connective memory (alluding to the "connective turn" that memory has undergone in the digital age) as "one that would be structured around digital networks and constituted not only by social subjects and institutions, but by technological means" (Hirsch, 2015, 43). *Seat: The Shadows of Progress* is a web documentary whose main objective is to recover the connective memory of the trade union movement during the Franco regime.

The initial cinematic interface resulting from the combination of different textual pieces which, despite their heterogeneous nature, convey a sense of fluidity and heterogeneity, is combined with a home page where the user can begin the interaction by choosing how to navigate through the different elements offered. Organized around the use of the aforementioned drawing as a graphic browsing index, it contrasts with the video or photographic content that constitutes the main body of the narrative. This duality, used as a way of referencing both the past and present of a struggle, constitutes the essential organizing element of the narration, establishing the drawing as the means of navigating through the different text and video options. It is a visual expression of the dialectic between memory and the present, between history and story.

The main browsing option offered displays a certain linear tendency, probably derived from its original conception as a traditional documentary. Paradoxically, the hypertextual construction of the narrative pathway is founded on a uniform structure that allows users to resume the documentary narration at any moment from the point they left it before activating the interactive elements. However, this linear nature of the main narration, structured into different chapters for each character, contrasts with the side trips offered along the pathway in the form of links and anchors in the different scenes. In addition, the dialectic generated between the remembrance of the union struggle of the past and the present of some of the protest's leaders is conveyed in interviews whose mise-en-scene reflects the expressive simplicity that characterizes the whole design. This establishes an opposition between history and the present that is made evident in the use of black and white photography as a reference to the past, as well as the video footage that shows the current conditions of the site of repression.

From the home page, the user can access the different parts of the story, as well as additional content that does not appear in the documentary despite its direct relationship with the plot of the film. In this way, the application offers supplementary graphic and visual material that connects with the narration as an anchoring element and establishes semantic links with other iconic components of the story. On the other hand, the integration of narrative content and navigation is made clear through the prominence of the authorial axis (author/reader) and of the degree of control given to the reader. In this respect, the webdoc contains all three types of interaction based on the importance of the decisions to be made. Weak (reactive) interaction is the least common, present in the choice of language on the home page and the access to specific places on the application that do not offer an exit option or browsable elements. Medium (interactive-configurative) interaction is present in much of the film and is made constantly clear in the interactive options provided at the end of certain sequences, allowing the user either to expand the experience with elements such as forums, videos, photographs, graphics, etc., or to continue along the pathway, progressing to the next sequence of the documentary. It is precisely this type of interaction that organizes the story as a whole, as the browsable tabs on the interface ("assembly line", "my story" and "characters") also fit into this model. Finally, the presence of strong (generative) interaction gives the webdoc a distinctive character. This is evident in the moments of greatest narrative condensation, when the user's generative action acquires full meaning, as occurs in the *cinematic interface* represented by the moving panoramic illustration of the assembly line and its different stages, which give users access to the corpus of the application.

The application also offers a technological innovation in the form of a game for users. The "my story" section is a space where *spectators* can write their own stories of up to 90 characters in a dialogue box specifically designed for the purpose. Through these lines and the use of algorithms based on keywords, the application generates an automatic, random assembly of images, and the user obtains a video with the archive images subtitled with their own text. Although it is only incidental in relation to the narration, it is more central in terms of spectacle, as it maintains the reader's attention by means of very different mechanisms. In a digital ecosystem populated by hypertextual narrations

and formats that mold our subjectivity and expand discursive universes, the webdoc performs an essential role among cultural products designed to transmit a particular iconography of memory. Perhaps we are witnessing the natural evolution from the age of representation to the age of programming, although its cognitive consequences are not yet within the scope of our knowledge.

Conclusions: Images and Modulation of Meaning

This article has considered the documentary film at different points in its history to evaluate how its rhetorical tools have shaped our reconstruction of the past at three specific moments in its formal evolution.

While acknowledging the particularities of the expressive devices used in each film analyzed here, the modulation of meaning and the consolidation of memory in each specific period are all based on documentary principles. As has always been the case in the documentary genre, in the realm of representation, neutrality, objectivity and impartiality are referential illusions. In every discourse, there is a subject of the enunciation who speaks while silencing, who shows while concealing. Both the cinematic frame and the iconography of memory are direct heirs to the behavior of this subject. Although to conceal while showing has always been the main task of *cinéma vérité*, this analysis reveals that its strategies have evolved, mutating in accordance with the historical and esthetic context. Its role has been shifting toward the periphery, and its nature has been subjectivized, expanded, transferred to other media. Its relationship with the transmission of memory has become exponentially more complex with more representations populating our collective imaginary, accumulating layers of meaning, losing control over narrative devices and breaking out of their institutional constraints. Perhaps the key to this evolution has been the innate capacity of visual creations to break out of the limits that were once imposed on documentary films by media institutions.

Memory, meanwhile, is taking part in this liberation. In fact, it has even been liberated from the traditional mechanisms of its production, just as the documentary has been liberated from the pretense of objectivity. Once a symbolic construct produced by the institutional powers, presented as an incontrovertible account that reveals the truth while concealing the act of its own elaboration (aided by the fascination that the moving image holds for spectators), it has now come to be decentralized, emancipated, constructed collectively, bringing together subjective voices around a story with no bounds on its interpretation. Finally, as a more recent manifestation of *cinéma vérité*, the web documentary format represents the crystallization of a new mode of making *cinéma vérité*, involving a new conception of the relationship between visual enunciation and the recovery of the past. The multimodal mechanisms of the format, the infinite layers of meaning generated by the parataxis of different media, disruptive narration, the meandering nature of the reading and its markedly interpretive capacity all make it a kind of hypertextual extension of the memory, which by nature is zigzagging, discontinuous, selective, narrative and profoundly subjective. The signifying potential of these structures appears to be acquiring a central role in the constant re-creation to which memory is subjected in the post-truth era.

Notes

1. Derrida, *Mal de Archivo*.
2. Halbwachs, *La Memoria Colectiva*.
3. Zunzunegui and Zumalde. "Guía Para Escépticos."
4. Comolli, "El Riesgo de lo Real."
5. Comolli, "Mauvaises Fréquentations."
6. Watzlawick, *¿Es Real la Realidad?*
7. Baer, "El Testimonio Audiovisual."
8. Todorov, *Los Abusos de la Memoria*, 15.
9. Aprea, "Documental. Historia y Memoria," 31.
10. Pericot, *Mostrar Para Decir: la Imagen en Contexto*, 15.

11. See note 4 above, 14.
12. See note 9 above 21.
13. See note 3 above.
14. Català, “La Necesaria Impureza Del Nuevo Documental,” 49.
15. See note 5 above.
16. Comolli, *Voir et Pouvoir*.
17. See note 5 above.
18. See note 14 above.
19. Ibid.
20. See note 3 above.
21. Bellido, *Basilio Martín Patino*, 209.
22. See note 14 above, 209.
23. See note 3 above; Zunzunegui and Zumalde, *Ver Para Creer*.
24. Gifreu, *El Documental Multimedia Interactiu*.
25. Arnau, “Derivas Contemporáneas Del Cine de lo Real.”
26. Ibid.

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