To Create Live Treatments of Actuality: An Investigation of the Emerging Field of
Live Documentary Practice

by

Julie Fischer
B.A. Wellesley College (2007)

Submitted to the Department of Comparative Media Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies
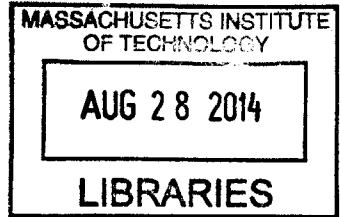
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Abstract: The field of documentary is undergoing a transformation as it collides with
digital technologies. A new arena of Interactive Documentary production is thriving, and
critics and scholars are taking note. Within this field, there is less attention to new
opportunities and new theoretical challenges for live practices within the documentary
sphere. This thesis argues for a fuller conceptualization of Live Documentary practice.
First, it questions the current state of assumptions about documentary, as a form related to
the 'document,' as a particularly film-leaning form, and as a lasting and historicizing
form of discourse. Next, it examines the historical underpinnings of two forms of live
documentary practice and exemplar projects of each: Live Performance Documentary and
Live Subject Documentary. The former is situated in the media category of live theater
and performance, and the second, the author will argue, is an instantiation of television in
its earliest configuration as a device for two-way audio-visual communications and not
just unidirectional broadcasting. The study concludes by positing a third medium-specific
form of live documentary native to the computer, the Live Data Documentary. This final,
more speculative form is defined by drawing on the meanings of 'liveness' examined in
the previous chapters and the history of real time computing to generate a suggested
framing for computer-native live documentary practice.

Thesis Supervisor: William Uricchio
Title: Professor of Comparative Media Studies

2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures
Acknowledgements
Biographical note

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

Biographical Note

Julie Fischer graduated from Wellesley College in 2007 with a B.A. in Philosophy. She has been a contributing researcher on a number of public television and independent documentary productions. Before arriving at MIT, she served as researcher for documentary filmmaker Errol Morris, whose work, sense of humor and approach to investigation is an endless inspiration.

"Theorizing about the nature and meaning of the documentary is a risky task."

J.T. Caldwell,
Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and
Authority in American Television

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2012, I saw a series of group portraits by photographer John Clang. Titled *Being There*, the photographs were of families who communicated regularly with the Internet video telephony service Skype. The pictured family members lived in different countries and sometimes on different continents, and found video chatting a comforting and satisfying way of keeping up intimate connections with their loved ones. Clang found artistic inspiration in the power of Skype to support emotional ties. For his series of family photographs, he put the technology right in the frame. Keeping both sides of these families in their respective homes, he used a projector to beam one half of the family – via live video feed – into the living room of the other. With their live video

image splashed onto the wall, he positioned the present family members near their projected relatives, and snapped a family photograph of people thousands of miles apart[1].

Figure 1. Skype family portrait from John Clang's *Being There* series, 2010.

The series spoke to me because it highlighted the emotive capabilities of live video technologies. Here was a tool for moving image production – I had just arrived at MIT with a background in documentary film production. I couldn't help thinking about how live video technologies might be incorporated into the documentary toolkit. Live video telephony has been made possible through the high-bandwidth network of the Internet. Increasingly, documentary is moving there, too. Many documentary practitioners are experimenting with web-native documentaries, both linear and interactive, rich with video content but also imagery, text, soundscapes, animation or visualization – the field of documentary is rife with experimentation and change online.

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[1] These Skype family photos were featured on several pop culture blogs, *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*. In 2013, Skype hired Clang to create more photographs as a part of a commercial campaign for the service.

Surely, I thought, live video might be an affordance of the web that documentary producers could run with.

But even before the technical logistics of how one might embed a Skype-like live video feed in a web-based documentary, there seemed to be a conceptual problem that needed to be addressed. Could something utilizing live video, not recorded video, be considered a documentary?

When first approaching this question, I was struck by the seeming tension in the phrase "live documentary." It smacks of the opposition between 'live' and something that is a 'document' – something in the moment, unfolding in real time, fleeting, and something recorded, static, complete. Weren't these concepts, by definition, at odds?

As soon as I pulled on that seemingly small definitional tangle, however, I realized there was far more to this topic. Attempting to articulate why live video – or any form of liveness – and documentary are at odds first begs the question, 'What is a documentary?' And that is a notoriously difficult question to answer. And what is 'liveness'? It's equally problematic if you're seeking a clear definition. Both 'liveness' and 'documentary' are slippery terms. But their terminological vagueness is a boon for this project. An investigation into the complexity of these terms reveals that there really isn't inherent tension between documentary and liveness, merely interesting histories and institutional practices that have tended to bound documentary to film-based forms in some places and to skirt over non-film based documentary practices in others.

Documentary as document might be suggested in its name, but it is rarely confirmed in its study or practice. The documentary discourse doesn't claim that documentary must be a record. Yet there is something intriguing, almost radical, in the

9

force of the phrase "live documentary" – radical for those who have come to documentary through film or who rely on their understanding of it as a film-based form. Some practitioners see this as a critical feature of their documentary work.

During my research for this project, I spoke with a number of new format documentary practitioners experimenting with different forms of liveness. One was Florian Thalhofer, an accomplished interactive documentary filmmaker. Thalhofer is the creator of the Korsakow System, software for creating interactive, nonlinear documentaries using rule-based connections between different clips that will unfold in various ways based on user selections. In 2012, Thalhofer began experimenting with what he's come to call Korsakow Shows, live performances of Korsakow films. At Korsakow Shows, the interactive documentary interface is projected on a screen at the front of the room, and each audience member points a laser pointer at one of a handful of clips on the screen. The clip with the most interest is played until another interactive juncture is reached. Thalhofer, sometimes with guest panelists and speakers, narrates the live performance. I see Thalhofer's work as a wonderful example of the types of projects I will discuss in Chapter 3 on Live Performance Documentary. And yet Thalhofer insists that the documentary itself is the interactive piece on the computer, the performance is just an added layer – it's not live documentary, it's a live show featuring a documentary. He said:

> Just doing the show, without recording that, I wouldn't think that the documentary is then really the thing that was done. It's a screening of it. But you could easily put the screening into the Korsakow system [as a recording]. ... But I think there is a difference between a live performance and a documentation of it.

I thought of my conversation with Thalhofer often as I conducted research for this project. His eloquent discussion of his many goals as a documentarian included not just the desire for each person to bring to his works their own complex interpretation, but to create something that is a *record* of a contemporary moment so that audiences in the future can continue to bring fresh interpretations to the same piece. I am equally drawn to the historical value of film and other representational works – even *fiction* film can offer a historical resource to future generations. What I want to tease apart in this study, however, are the personal and professional objectives of documentarians – which vary widely – from the category of documentary itself. I would like to see live forms of documentary tackled with the same artistic and philosophical fervor as documentary films and other recorded forms of documentary.

Documentary film scholar Bill Nichols notes that film has an indexical quality, the same way that photographs and sound recordings do – a direct relationship between what they represent and what was actually in the world. Of course, this is also true of the live video feeds of a Skype call, but these indexical forms are fleeting and ephemeral, and they're configured to leave no trace. Film, as a document, provides lasting evidence of their subjects. But Nichols point is that the indexical quality of film is not the primary meaning of the documentary:

> But a documentary is more than evidence: it is also a particular way of seeing the world, making proposals about it, or offering perspectives on it. It is, in this sense, a way of *interpreting* the world.[2]

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[2] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 34-35.

The scholarly discourse on documentary certainly leaves room for live practice in its definitions. However, I'll argue in the next chapter that documentary discourse today houses associations with film, associations that are something of a historical accident enforced by various industrial and critical perspectives. Not only is documentary far more than evidentiary, as Nichols says, it is far more than just film. We know this in theory, but I think in practice our language sometimes trips us up and creates associations and assumptions about documentary as a recorded media form. To clear the ground of some of these associations, I'll mobilize the long history of documentary practice in other media – media that trade in various forms of liveness. Radio documentary, for example. In a brief article in a 1949 volume of the Hollywood Quarterly titled *Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary*, radio and television critic Saul Carson wrote about some WNYC programs from the mid-1930s featuring person on the street interviews and other sounds from around New York City, "I am not sure whether the shows were then called 'documentaries,' but that's what they were – in a sense."[3] Despite not knowing whether these programs were designated documentary at the time, Carson stands a mere decade later surveying a field of radio *rich* with documentary content and documentary institutionalization: he lists radio documentaries from three major networks, and credits much of the surge in quality to the 1948 creation of the CBS Radio Documentary Unit. Carson's article speaks to an ecosystem of radio documentary that includes fully recorded programs, programs that utilize recordings and live broadcast, but also fully *live* dramatizations of nonfiction issues read by actors on the air. I will investigate this form in the next chapter.

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[3] Saul Carson, "Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (October 1, 1949): 69–74, 69.

Theater also has a sub-category called documentary theater, sometimes known as 'verbatim theater' for its use of court transcripts, oral history records, newspaper reports, or other texts or spoken words surrounding actual events into the script of the play.[4] Theater scholar Gary Fisher Dawson calls Georg Buchner's 1835 play *Danton's Death*, which drew on primary source materials to create the script, "the proto-documentary play in the modern sense."[5] He identifies documentary theater's second wave in the "Living Newspaper" practice in Weimar Germany in the early 1920s and in the US in the 1930s, in which traveling acting troupes gave public dramatic readings of the latest headlines[6].

In this thesis, I won't be able to cover the full range of non-film documentary work to mine it for live practices. I'll stick to a history of broadcast documentary, because of the rich associations of liveness with radio and television. Of course, this isn't to say that even film can't be integrated into what is described as live. Liveness, it turns out, is an even trickier term than documentary itself. 'Liveness' is deployed in different ways at different times, representing something that *seems* intuitive but actually represents complex historical and theoretical framings.

Performance scholar Philip Auslander tackles the shifting meaning of liveness in his text *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008). Auslander stresses the lack of ontological distinction between live and mediatized performance, arguing instead that persistent opposition between these two categories has more to do with "cultural and

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[4] Stephen Bottoms, "Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?," *TDR (1988-)* 50, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 56–68. 59.
[5] Gary Fisher Dawson, *Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 1.
[6] Ibid., 76.

historical contingencies" and in fact rely on one another to build themselves up.[7] He

notes that in the context of performance, the Oxford English Dictionary first cites the

word 'live' in reference to the radio. Auslander argues that the gramophone already

existed as a means of creating recorded sound, distinct from live musical performance.

But, he argues, it was obvious to audiences that they were listening to a gramophone, not

in a theater, because of the setting. With radio, however, that awareness was removed.

Auslander notes, "Radio's characteristic form of sensory deprivation crucially

undermined the clear-cut distinction between recorded and live sound," which meant

suddenly there was a need for a 'live' category that could label and distinguish one type

of radio broadcast from another[8]. Live radio and then television are not live in the

theatrical sense, which features physical *and* temporal co-presence, but generated this

category in dialogue with live performance to create the notion of 'live broadcast.'

Auslander claims:

> The word "live" was pressed into service as part of a vocabulary designed to
>
> contain this crisis by describing it and reinstating the former distinction [between
>
> live performance and recorded performance] discursively even if it could no
>
> longer be sustain experientially.[9]

Auslander locates television as a major force in inscribing concepts of 'liveness' in both

the televisual *and* in live theater practice. He highlights contemporary theater's frequent

use of screens, projected imagery and other mediatized forms, claiming, "In the theater,

as at the stadium, you are often watching television even when attending the live

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[7] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Routledge, 2008).
11.
[8] Ibid., 59.
[9] Ibid., 60.

event."[10] As I will discuss in Chapter 3, one way to produce documentary work may be to craft an experience that allows audiences to watch *documentary* even when attending live theater. In any case, Auslander's discussion highlights the constant negotiations that 'liveness' as a concept and term makes to accommodate different modes of various media. The term's shifting meaning and its importance to particular media has fueled a wide array of theoretical discussion amongst television scholars as well.

Jerome Bourdon notes that in the 1950's heyday of live television broadcasting, 'liveness' was one the characteristics seized on in order to distinguish this new medium from film[11]. Liveness was extolled as one of television's most attractive qualities. The Oxford English Dictionary's earliest usage of 'liveness' related to television is in a 1966 Washington Post article, which claims, "The greatest assets of television are liveness and immediacy. Much of the vitality has been drained out of television with the increasing use of tape."[12] I will argue in Chapter 2 that 'documentary' was applied to a certain type of pre-recorded rather than live television content because of institutional practices, further corralling documentary into the pen of pre-recorded instead of live forms.

However, as time went by, even the continued proliferation of taped materials on television didn't keep discussions and visions of 'liveness' at bay. Rather, it was propagated in the style and rhetoric of television. Jane Feuer has argued that television "exploits its assumed 'live' ontology as ideology," enforcing a sense of immediacy and all-encompassing wholeness by gesturing towards a technical liveness (that of immediate

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[10] Ibid., 25.
[11] Jerome Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," *Media, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2000): 531–56. 1-2.
[12] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Liveness, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 22, 2014, http://www.oed.com.libproxy.mit.edu/view/Entry/109320.

broadcast) that is not there.[13] Bourdon picks up this argument, noting the specific ways

television gestured to live broadcasting as "a technical possibility, translated into specific

codes, [that] remains a fundamental part of viewers' expectations" of the medium.[14]

Arguing in another direction, J.T. Caldwell warns against television scholars' own

"theoretical obsession: liveness."[15] He sees Feuer's construction of liveness as a potential

blind, distracting from other key stylistic characteristics of television. He wants to turn

Feuer's argument inside out, stating: "Whereas Feuer argues that stylistic codes produce

realism and liveness, I am suggesting that liveness is a visual code and component of a

broader stylistic operation."[16]

Caldwell cites Paul Vianello's arguments on liveness as construction used to

enforce power, for instance the power of the networks in the broadcast era. Vianello

suggests that to retain power over affiliate stations, networks focused on keeping up a

schedule of live broadcasts centered on particular, presumably socially important, events

to keep affiliates dependent. Networks could access and broadcast these events live, and

in enforcing their central importance affiliates were discouraged from branching out and

broadcasting their own pre-recorded content that was easier to produce.[17] For Vianello

liveness is *wielded* as "a weapon, not so much to be used against non-live film ... but

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[13] E. Ann Kaplan, *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches- An Anthology* (Praeger, 1983). 16.

[14] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise." 1.

[15] John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (Rutgers University Press, 1995). 27.

[16] Ibid., 367.

[17] Robert Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," *Journal of Film and Video* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 1985): 26–40. 32.

against interests competing with the network to whom film had been left as their only option."[18]

The employment of liveness by various producers as a means of control is an interesting one. In this thesis, the arguments about liveness stemming from various media-specific forms will be explored in part for the authorial control they offer to the documentarian – generating new affordances for the field through experiments with live documentary forms. But my focus here is the inherently *constructed* rather than *essential* nature of 'liveness,' a crucial framing for this entire project. Chapter 3 and 4 discuss pieces using documentary framing in live theater and live video production, and as shown above, theoretical discussions of both performance and television run deep. In the final chapter, I'll conclude my examination with an investigation of a newer form of liveness that I believe will be crucial to the live documentary scene: live documentary utilizing computational forms of liveness. Here I will do a bit more legwork to establish how 'liveness' might be conceptualized in the context of discussing documentary but in a computer-native form. The computer has associations with the term that are – I'll argue – a bit of a red herring for live documentary. Drawing on lessons from liveness in the live performance and live subject chapters, I'll argue that computational liveness seems best configured as the Live Data Documentary.

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[18] Ibid.

The Documentary Experience

Referencing Vianello's argument, I offer one form of power that liveness might provide to documentary – though it's not institutional but cultural. It could be framed as a value within the "cultural economy," a concept Auslander employs to discuss the unbalanced cultural prestige of theater in relation to mediated forms of entertainment. I argue that liveness can be seen as offering ephemerality, a term used by new media scholar Nathan Jurgenson to articulate the value of temporary photography services like Snapchat in a sea of digital photograph archiving sites like Instagram.[19] In thinking of liveness as an escape from the "deepening documentary vision" of the web (which not only hosts media but makes it available on-demand to viewers), individual documentary projects might utilize liveness to highlight themselves against the backdrop of that deepening documentary vision.

Beyond the sense of ephemerality – of fleetingness – that exists in some senses of 'live' media, I will argue in this thesis that live documentary is best considered if we change our lens for examining documentary. Rather than thinking of the form as an object of study, a 'document,' be it film or photograph, or the recording of a live broadcast, I want to urge readers to relocate their examination of any documentary by looking at its active process of *documenting*. This not only applies to the unfolding of a film in the present moment when viewed, it enables a method of address that encompasses documentary as a particular type of process that can be performed on a stage, or hosted on a livestream, or enacted in the moment in a number of different forms of live work. After all, think of Grierson's oft-cited expression that documentary is the

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[19] Nathan Jurgenson, "Pics and It Didn't Happen," *The New Inquiry*, February 7, 2013, http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/pics-and-it-didnt-happen/.

"creative treatment of actuality."[20] I think we'd do well, as a field and as audience members to a new generation of documentary work, to consider that such a creative treatment might be carried out before our eyes rather than first being encapsulated in a particular medium like film.

Changing our lens to see documentary as a more active media form, the embodiment (in many guises) of a process of documenting, we're also prompted to reconsider the role of the people who are there to *see* the documentary's process unfold. I argue this role can be, not more active, but more *activated*, through liveness – rich with interesting new potentials. I don't want to get too bogged down in the debates over notions of the active audience, a longstanding issue in mass communications studies.[21] I merely want to suggest that in thinking of documentary as a project of documenting, rather than the already completed document, we clear the ground for liveness that brings audiences into new configurations – spatially co-present and/or temporally co-present with each other, and even potentially with the subjects of the documentary. These arrangements present some interesting new possibilities for interaction.

In this sense, live documentary fits right in with the burgeoning field of Interactive Documentary. This new form, often web-based and featuring user interaction with the piece as well as user-generated or participatory content, is rapidly solidifying

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[20] Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond*, 2 edition (London : New York: British Film Institute, 2008), 14.

[21] See for example Frank A. Biocca, "Opposing Conceptions of the Audience: The Active and Passive Hemispheres of Mass Communication Theory," in *Communication Yearbook 11* (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1988), 51–80; David Morley, "Active Audience Theory: Pendulums and Pitfalls," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 13–19; Rob Cover, "Audience Inter/active Interactive Media, Narrative Control and Reconceiving Audience History," *New Media & Society* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 139–58.

into a *field*. The signs are cropping up everywhere. In terms of academic study, the i-Docs project is a center of study for interactive documentaries located at the University of the West of England.[22] Across the pond, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is home to the MIT Open Documentary Lab.[23] 2010 saw the publication of an "Interactive Documentary Manifesto" by students in Portugal, followed by a rousing performance in 2013 of the "Webdocs Manifesto" created by interactive documentary practitioners and read on stage at the Tribeca Film Festival's interactive showcase.[24, 25] I absolutely see the developments in Live Documentary, and the projects I examine in this thesis, as a part of this movement of experimentation with the documentary form and distribution.

In grounding my own study in this field, I want to acknowledge the PhD work of i-Docs co-convener Sandra Gaudenzi as a particular influence on this project. Gaudenzi's is one of the first PhD theses to address the field of interactive documentary, and offers a valuable conceptual framing of these new documentary forms – as "Living Documentaries." She sometimes switches to the phrase "Live Documentaries" to describe these works. I find her framework for the interactive documentary field engaging and energizing, particularly in that she is also interested in thinking about the meaning of the role of the interactive documentary viewer – or, as she describes them, "user." She writes:

[22] "i-Docs – About," http://i-docs.org/about-idocs/
[23] "MIT Open Documentary Lab," http://opendoclab.mit.edu/
[24] Andre Almeida and Heitor Alvelos, "An Interactive Documentary Manifesto," in *Interactive Storytelling*, ed. Ruth Aylett et al., Lecture Notes in Computer Science 6432 (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2010), 123–28.
[25] "2013 TFI Interactive: Zeega's Web Doc Manifesto," https://tribecafilminstitute.org/blog/detail/2013_tfi_interactive_zeegas_web_doc_manifesto

Interactivity gives an agency to the user – the power to physically "do something," whether that be clicking on a link, sending a video or re-mixing content - and therefore creates a series of relations that form an ecosystem in which all parts are interdependent and dynamically linked.[26]

This is strongly aligned with my own interest in the new viewer or user agency afforded by new forms of documentary. My formulation of "Live Documentary," however, is quite different (and thus generates different affordances for viewers and makers) though I think it fits well as a smaller category within Gaudenzi's "Living Documentary" category. My study establishes meanings and boundaries of liveness taken from historical lineages of particular media forms, particularly theater and broadcast media, with a concluding investigation of extrapolating concepts of liveness inscribed by these forms into a view of computational liveness for live documentary. Gaudenzi's 'living' and 'live' documentary category is far broader, anchored in the computer and its interactivity:

> It is argued that this human-computer system has many of the characteristics
>
> associated with living entities. It is also argued that by looking at interactive
>
> documentaries as living entities (Living Documentaries) we can see the relations
>
> that they forge and better understand the transformations they afford – on
>
> themselves and on the reality they portray.[27]

I hope to locate my concept of "Live Documentary" well within Gaudenzi's "Living Documentary" framework. I also want to demonstrate how exciting the

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[26] Sandra Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-Creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary" (Goldsmiths, 2013), 4.
[27] Ibid.

affordances of the Live Documentary projects I examine are to the field of interactive documentary as a whole. But to do so, I'll work with the concepts of liveness born in the broadcast era, which as Auslander points out, pitted broadcast performance against live performance and created the need for the "live" broadcast designation.[28] Both theater and broadcast structured senses of liveness against one another's, both forms also grappled with recorded materials and their relationship to 'liveness,' as radio and television made sounds and images live and audio-visual recordings became part of live theater. The swirling notions of liveness I describe here and above have collided in different ways with forms of documentary. I will argue we had recently been resting in a period in which liveness was at the outskirts, but that we have reached a point at which forms of 'liveness' are poised to return to a more prominent place in the discourse and production of the documentary form.

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[28] Auslander, *Liveness*, 60.

CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIVENESS & DOCUMENTARY

Searching for Senses of Documentary

In the introduction, I mentioned that 'liveness' and 'documentary' are slippery terms, with multiple associations and meanings rather than hard-and-fast definitions. Wittgenstein reminds us that the meaning of a category label often takes its shape from items that bear mixes of many overlapping characteristics or 'family resemblances.' In such categories, there is not a *necessary* set of feature that defines each of the items within. The 'documentary' category certainly seems to fit the bill as this type of label. It is broad, diffuse – even the attempt to define documentary as featuring 'real' or 'nonfiction' content is hard to enforce project by project, because these characteristics have a range of interpretations.

In theory, documentary is a large tent. But is it large enough to accommodate the concept of "live documentary"? In this chapter, I will first explore the historical assumptions that contributed to the marginalization of 'liveness' from the documentary category. I point to three main reasons: the frequent conflation of 'documentary' with documentary film, the perceived need for documentary to have historical distance from the events it addresses, and the connotations of the term 'document' at the heart of the term 'documentary.' In the second half of this chapter, I'll approach the issue from the other direction, to consider the documentary practices in other media beyond film (specifically radio and television) that show the potentials of liveness as an element in documentary form.

It's a difficult task to point to one fact that confirms a tendency in language and concept to associate the 'documentary' with film more than with any other medium. Rather, looking at the shape of the discourse in many places starts to suggest that we lean on film as our prototypical documentary form. Consider the Oxford English Dictionary's entry for 'documentary.' The term dates back to the 1820s, referring both to 'documents' and to forms of authentication. The OED's main media definition of 'documentary' notes it is "applied especially to a film or literary work," and the majority of the example uses provided come from film. While the entry opens the door for other documentary media, it heavily underscores film. We can see this same film bias embedded in popular notions of the term as well, for example in the entry for 'documentary' on the open-source web encyclopedia Wikipedia. A search for the term 'documentary' brings users to the entry for "documentary film," which bears a note that reads "'Documentary' redirects here For other uses, see Documentary (disambiguation)." 'Documentary' and 'documentary film' are one and the same in Wikipedia's categorization. However, if users do visit the disambiguation page, they'll find a list of links to entries for 'Documentary film, including television,' 'Documentary photography,' 'Radio documentary,' and 'Television documentary,' all under the descriptive statement "A documentary is a creative work of non-fiction." The broader, media-agnostic understanding of documentary is there, but the system reifies the dominance of documentary film in our understanding of 'documentary' by making the search term 'documentary' *mean* 'documentary film.' This kind of usage is employed in the professionalization of the term, for example the International Documentary Association is a nonprofit to support documentary filmmakers.[1]

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[1] "The International Documentary Association – About,"

This usage is found in university settings as well. 'Documentary' is often wrangled into use only for film in these settings. Stanford University offers an MFA in Documentary Film (and film only), though its situated in the university's Film and Media Studies Program. The New School offers what they call a Documentary *Media* Studies program, but again the curriculum is film-specific program, providing "an opportunity to study documentary filmmaking – production and theory." George Washington University's Documentary Institute and Columbia College's Documentary Center are both dedicated solely to documentary filmmaking. John Corner points out, "academic enthusiasm" for documentary work centers "within film and media studies," but not all media programs expand their usage of 'documentary' outside of film.[2] Thankfully, others do. The Documentary Studies Center at Duke, for instance, is a center for study of the "documentary arts" and concludes concentrated efforts in the theory and practice of documentary photography, film and other expressive forms[3]. The journal *Studies in Documentary Film* appeared in 2007 as "the first refereed scholarly journal devoted to the history, theory, criticism and practice of documentary film" – there is no equivalent for a broader documentary genre or indeed for other forms of documentary in particular (like photography or television). Of course scholarship on other forms of documentary is being generated, but I argue it doesn't receive the same centralizing focus as documentary film. The online academic journal library JSTOR returns 29,731 results for documentary film, over 17,200 for documentary television, 14,323 for documentary radio, and 12,587 documentary theater.

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http://www.documentary.org/about-us
[2] John Corner, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 1.
[3] http://documentarystudies.duke.edu/about

A quick Ngram search of Google Books provides a picture of the prevalence of the idea of "documentary film" over other forms like documentary television, radio, theater, performance or photography.
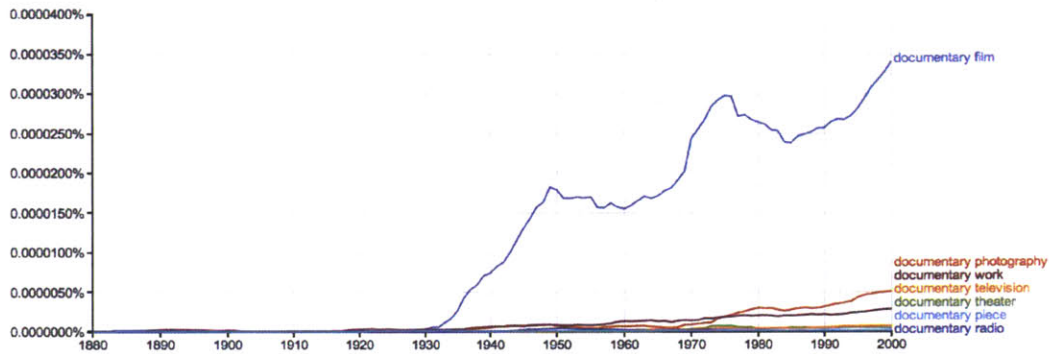
Figure 2: Google Ngram graph showing usage of "documentary film" versus other media described as "documentary."

In this search, "documentary film" is far and away the most common phrase in comparison with any other employment of documentary – "documentary photography," "documentary television," "documentary radio." I have also tried to capture more generic uses like "documentary work," but the film phrase dominates the discourse. The fact that our language has such a standardized usage for documentary as *film* above others indicates again the structure and focus surrounding the film form above all other types of documentary.

The Library of Congress Catalog also demonstrates this skew towards documentary film as the dominant type of documentary media. Below is a list of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (which indicate library holdings *about* a stated subject) and Library of Congress Genre / Form terms (which indicate library and archive holdings classified *as* a certain genre or form). Each is followed by the number of items within the category.

Library of Congress Subject Headings:

Documentary (7)
Documentary comic books and strips (1)
Documentary films (711)
Documentary mass media (8)
Documentary mass media and the arts (4)
Documentary photography (320)
Documentary plays (0)
Documentary radio programs (8)
Documentary stories (0)
Documentary television programs (52)

Library of Congress Genre / Form terms for lib & archive materials:

Documentary (1)
Documentary films (4413)
Documentary radio programs (114)
Documentary television programs (2760)

Of the library's holdings focused on the subject of various forms of documentary, documentary films make up the majority, more than 50% more than the second most populated category, documentary photography. The LOC has catalogued materials as documentary film, radio and television, but again film outstrips the other materials at nearly twice the number of documentary television programs.

What I want to demonstrate is that despite the comprehension that documentary can take many media forms, documentary film still appears in many ways to be the dominant media type in our discussions of documentary. Why should all these skews, these stereotypical associations, matter? The tendency to associate documentary with film more than any other media form leads to assumptions about the role of liveness in documentary – particularly, that film is a static pre-recorded medium not (at least not in today's estimation) accommodating liveness or related to live practices, and therefore that *documentary* is for the most part equally closed off to liveness.

In my view, problems come when the tendency to connect documentary and film is mobilized in arguments that link documentary – the genre as a whole – to characteristics of physical, pre-recorded media like film. As the Wikipedia entry, the Library of Congress catalogue, and a search of scholarly essays demonstrate, documentary television and radio are institutionalized categories. And television and radio are broadcast media capable of liveness. And *yet*, I fear there are still problematic assumptions that see documentary – even on broadcast media – as pre-recorded transmissions, not fuller engagements with the liveness of performance or of live broadcast. I believe these generalized associations contribute to how documentary is positioned contrary to live forms. This happens in Philip Rosen's "Document and Documentary," in which the author argues that documentary's function is mainly a historicizing one. He cites the lineage of the adjective 'documentary' from the noun 'document', noting that the history of the written document is bound up with making official records and versions of the past.[4] I will return to Rosen's argument in the next section, but I want to linger on other the scholarly use of 'document' in discussions of documentary. For instance, in his *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols invokes the senses of 'document' latent in the genre's label, and then assures us:

> But a documentary is more than evidence: it is also a particular way of
>
> seeing the world, making proposals about it, or offering perspectives on it.
>
> … Among the assumptions we bring to documentary, then, is that
>
> individual shots and sounds, perhaps even scenes and sequences, will bear

---

[4] Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 65 - 68, 71.

a highly indexical relationship to the events they represent, but that the

film as a whole will go beyond being a mere document or record of these

events to offer a perspective on them.[5]

Nichols makes clear that the documentary form is *more* than a document. However, the

fact that he's compelled to make this argument to me speaks to a vague anxiety in the

field. The specter of the 'document' is always there in the term we have inherited for this

type of work. What is it's meaning for documentary? For Nichols, who is discussing

documentary *film*, the documentary is something *more* than the document, but not

something *entirely separate* – since the film is physical record like a written document or

photograph, the specificity of the medium absorbs the 'document' claims while the

meaning a documentary conveys can be cast as something greater. I think this creates

messiness for the meanings of 'documentary' in general, when the discourse leans on

film and the film discourse insists on talking about documentary film's historical heritage

as 'document.'[6] In the messiness of such associations, other stronger claims can creep in.

For instance, John Corner in *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to*

Documentary makes a strong claim about the documentary's physical or medium-specific

form. In the introduction, Corner defines documentary as a form that *relies* on recording:

'Documentary' is the loose and often highly contested label given,

internationally, to certain kinds of film and television (and sometimes

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[5] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary.*
[6] In addition to Rosen, and to Nichols, Brian Winston also sets out the same lineage, In *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston begins his discussion of the term "documentary" with its 19th century roots as the adjective of "document," in order to construct a lineage from the "evidentiary status" of the written document which is "passed to the cinematograph and is the source of the ideological power of documentary film."[6]

radio programs) which reflect and report on 'the real' through the use of

the recorded images and sound of actuality.[7]

Corner's statement seems quite definitive. Where others scholars allude to the concept of

'document' as one among many concepts in the nebulous category and history of

documentary, Corner goes a step further. He bounds the documentary form as requiring

the use of recorded materials, *even* when he refers to television and radio documentary. If

Corner's statement is employed in an environment of rich concepts of liveness, in which

recorded media and live presentation, live performance, and live transmission can

mobilize or respond to recorded content, then I find his statement reasonable. If on the

other hand, Corner's words are taken in a context of opposition between liveness and the

document or mediated form, then these notions crystallize in ways that push liveness to

the periphery of the documentary category – or out all together.

And despite Philip Auslander's warning that there is a problematic and common

tendency to set liveness and mediated forms at odds, I think this tendency *is* at work in

the documentary scholarship. I return to Philip Rosen's argument, mentioned above, to

look at the full way he employs the history of the 'document' to set up the documentary

form. Rosen ties this legacy of the document to the photography and then the nonfiction

film, in its status as a physical record of events.[8] He uses this lineage to claim,

"Documentary as it comes to us from this tradition is not just *ex post facto*, but historical

in the modern sense."[9]

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[7] Corner, *The Art of Record*.
[8] Ibid., 66.
[9] Ibid.

The problem with his vision of documentary as historicizing is that Rosen argues

there is some indeterminate length of "production time and cultural time" between an

event and its depiction in documentary, which *allows* the depiction to be documentary –

for Rosen, a version of "History" and therefore documentary is only possible when this

distance is a part of the project.[10] While leaning on the materiality of the document

throughout his discussion, as Corner does with his claim that documentary must rely on

recorded materials, Rosen is also crafting a *temporal* argument about the status of

documentary. Rosen creates a case study in the 1960 live news bulletin and coverage of

the John F. Kennedy assassination. He then compares this broadcast to the 1980

documentary film *JFK: A Time Remembered.* Rosen claims that where the film is clearly

a documentary, the NBC news coverage never could be. He writes:

> In the NBC coverage, the event is just past, barely in the process of
>
> becoming History, and a sure, meaning-determining sequence is not yet
>
> formed; there has not been time. *JFK: A Time Remembered* has had both
>
> production time and cultural time to know its history and so is a proper
>
> documentary. The NBC coverage, caught between past and present, is not
>
> a "real" documentary.[11]

Rosen argues that the television's 'liveness' is opposed documentary. He defines liveness

(which he calls "the distinguishing possibility of broadcast technologies, with television

adding moving perspective images to radio's sound) as "temporal simultaneity between a

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[10] Ibid., 64.
[11] Ibid.

31

reality and its electric encoding and transmission to a spectator in a distant place."[12] Rosen looks at the news anchors' nascent attempts to explain, in the moment, the assassination and its aftermath as it was unfolding, claiming, "This is a coverage which tries to counter the effects of its own need for simultaneity or 'liveness,' its own dream of immediate presence at the real." Try as they might, for Rosen this can only amount to "tendencies driving ... toward documentary" but not a 'real' documentary. The distance of history, and the time-shifted nature of film (or other recorded media) over live broadcast, makes the documentary possible.

In this chapter, I want to complicate the meaning of liveness *and* documentary in order to refute some of Rosen's strong claims. First, Rosen simplifies the many-layered concept of 'liveness' into only one characteristic and use of broadcast media – the immediate transmission of image or sound at its source to the audience on the receiving side of television or radio. In doing so, he also ties liveness quite heavily to the news. The *news* broadcast isn't the only use of liveness in broadcast media, and it is the news that attempts to deliver world events in a timely fashion – when fused with liveness, that timeliness becomes the immediate transmission and understanding of breaking news or events. In making his use of 'liveness' exclusively about this, he creates a second over-simplification: that liveness is antagonistic to the full consideration made possible with the passage of time. What if the news anchors appeared live on television thirty years later, to tell the story of the JFK assassination live and with the full context of history? It seems to me this is fully live in Rosen's sense, but also fully historical and historicizing in its function – a live documentary as Rosen would have it.

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[12] Ibid., 60.

Part of the issue of Rosen's argument is that he seems to rely on a very particular interpretation of what liveness means and can be. However, part of that mistaken argument is that liveness is antagonistic to documentary in terms of its capability for a type of discourse – considered versus immediate. In the next section, I move to a discussion from the early period in which the 'documentary' term was being defined in its context as a genre, by *filmmaker* and critic John Grierson. The problematic roots of this notion, tying documentary to deep consideration and mistakenly positioning such an approach away from liveness, are found here. But before moving on, I want to offer a way out of some of the complexities of the documentary discourse above, all turning on assumptions about the relevance of the 'document.'

Instead of leaning on notions of 'the document,' we might, as I mentioned in the introduction, reconfigure our lens on documentary to relate to the *act* of documenting. The term we have inherited (documentary) is a mere three letters from 'document.' It's not surprising that scholars focus on their etymological connections. However, those connections come at a price, perhaps unnecessarily constraining our understanding of documentary. While the document may be something that exists through time, bound up in a sense of pastness, documents are brought into being in the act of documenting. That act can be associated with a present, an in-the-moment act. If documentary were more often linked to 'documenting,' Rosen's pastness might become something else – something far more accommodating to notions of liveness – for instance, performing live in the moment, or transmitting live in the moment, could all potentially be made *documenting* processes capable of generating documentary. Mark Williams has employed

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this verb to characterize the live television coverage of an emergency rescue of a child.[13]

"By documenting and providing arresting access to a disruption in the social "real," the Fiscus telecast can be seen to have helped to instill a desire for what Doane calls television's "lure of referentiality."[14] He cites Mimi White's argument that liveness need not be opposed to history as a form of immediacy, it can also be understood to draw attention to what is socially important locally and nationally, to what is historical. Therefore liveness becomes historicizing as well. While Williams never claims such live broadcasts *are* documentaries, I believe it's less important. The *act* of documenting becomes a framing of documentary accessible to live as well as pre-recorded media. Williams' argument also effectively demonstrates that simply complicating liveness more effectively than Rosen opens up other possible ways of meshing live broadcast and documentary. In the next half of the chapter, I will tackle that issue from another direction – examining the history of documentary in film and broadcast media, tracing the fluid and shifting associations between documentary and live practices.

The Defining Moment

Having paused for a moment to consider the way a sense of 'document' lingers in conversations of the documentary, I turn to the origins of that term and how the sense of 'document' seems to have been problematic right from the start. Credit for the originating use of the term 'documentary' usually goes to critic and filmmaker John Grierson.[15] In

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[13] Mark Williams, "History in a Flash: Notes on the Myth of TV Liveness," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, 1999, 297-298.
[14] Ibid., 294.
[15] Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 11.

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1926, Grierson wrote a review for a New York newspaper of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*.[16] Grierson was already familiar with Flaherty's work after seeing *Nanook of the North*, distinguished at the time for crafting a dramatic story with footage from the real world and not the Hollywood studio.[17] The power of film as a shaper of social consciousness was fascinating to Grierson, and he wanted to see it tackle real world issues and stories.[18] With the *Moana* review, he wanted to lend his voice to the support of Flaherty's new type of film[19]. He wrote:

> Of course *Moana*, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a
>
> Polynesian youth, has documentary value. But that, I believe, is secondary
>
> to its value as a soft breath from a sunlit island, washed by a marvelous
>
> sea, as warm as the balmy air. *Moana* is first of all beautiful as nature is
>
> beautiful. ... And therefore I think *Moana* achieves greatness primarily
>
> through its poetic feeling for natural elements.[20]

That phrase "documentary value" is perhaps the best-known part of the review. It is, as Brian Winston points out, "where conventional accounts of documentary begin."[21] Winston points out that Grierson thought 'documentary value' was only secondary to the creativity, the poetic feeling, of Flaherty's film. He argues that for Grierson, language became problematic. After giving his etymological take on the 'document,' Winston

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[16] Ibid., 11.
[17] Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (SIU Press, 2000), 27.
[18] Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 85.
[19] Ellis, *John Grierson*, 27-28.
[20] Ibid., 28.
[21] Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 11.

claims that "the evidentiary proved to be a two-edged sword. Clearly documentary needed to make a strong claim on the real, but at the same time Grierson did not want it to be a mechanical, automatic claim arising from nothing more than the very nature of the apparatus."[22] Grierson sought to ensure that the 'documentary' film was understood as *more* than a document.

In an essay titled First Principles of Documentary (1932-1934), Grierson famously offered the phrase "the creative treatment of actuality" to try to express what documentary film was, beyond an indexical record. This phrase is medium agnostic. While Grierson was a champion of the documentary *film* in particular, his desire to move it away from the indexical aligned the documentary film with other forms in the 1920s and '30s also using the word "documentary." The term was in the air. In 1926, the year Grierson's *Moana* review was published, Bertolt Brecht referred to the "epic and documentary plays" of Piscator.[23] In October 1935, Walker Evans wrote a memorandum outlining his plan to travel the American Southeast engaging in "photography, documentary in style, of industrial subjects, emphasis on housing and home life..."[24] Brian Winston even unearths a 1914 project description of "documentary works" by American photographer and filmmaker named Edward Sheriff Curtis, using the term in the "Griersonian sense" more than a decade before the *Moana* review.[25] Historian

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[22] Ibid., 14.
[23] Gary Fisher Dawson, *Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 5.
[24] Judith Keller, *Walker Evans: The Getty Museum Collection* (Getty Publications, 1995), 131-132.
[25] Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 11-13.

William Stott has written that in 1930s America there was a range of works that all hued to a style of documentary expression:

Documentary expression appeared in a host of media, including novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; government-sponsored art, theater, and dance, through the Works Progress Administration; the photojournalism of Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, and Walker Evans; and the literary journalism of James Agee and Walker Evan's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Documentary film also came to the forefront, following the example of the British filmmaker John Grierson.[26]

In one sense, Grierson's push away from the pure record of film puts his vision of documentary film in the same vein as these other works, fitting in with the day's media-agnostic usage. In his *First Principles of Documentary*, Grierson wrote that documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality," a wholly media-agnostic characterization. However, Grierson was a critic and producer of *film*. More than that, he was the documentary film's champion. Erik Barnouw's major text on documentary discusses Grierson's contributions to documentary film history under the chapter title, "Advocate."[27] Winston calls Grierson "Documentary's Adam;" Grierson is in no way the originator of the label 'documentary' – he was simply the one who pushed it into popular consciousness in the most structured sense. Winston refers to Grierson's "enormous abilities as a publicist" to market the 'documentary' term for film and to popularize his

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[26] William Stott quoted in Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia: Postwar Audio Documentary in the Public Interest*, 1st Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 15.
[27] Barnouw, *Documentary*, 85.

vision for a new style of filmmaking, which was also institutionalized in a British film

production unit under his leadership.[28]

The work of publicizing documentary film, and in tandem building a centralized

support system for its production in Britain (and later, Canada), made Grierson central in

documentary discourse.[29] And the concerted effort he made on the documentary film

seems to be one factor influencing the centrality of documentary *film* to our associations

of documentary today. I will show in the next section that in the 1930s, around the time

Grierson was getting his Herculean publicity efforts underway, the term 'documentary'

was in the air and *far* less tied to notions of film representation. At this time, the term

'documentary' was far more media agnostic – a scenario I hope to restore in this

investigation of live documentary work.

I'd also like to point to a smaller feature of Grierson's documentary marketing

mission, because it's relevant to the shape that documentary will take in broadcast forms.

Grierson went to great lengths to carve out a vision of the type of films he hoped people

would craft. He and his fellow documentary filmmakers, seeking to give their own

endeavor more shape, at times positioned themselves against the other most centralized

industrialized form of nonfiction film production: newsreels. In his "First Principles of

Documentary," Grierson wrote:

> The peacetime newsreel is just a speedy snip-snap of some utterly
>
> unimportant ceremony. Its skill is the speed with which the babblings of a
>
> politician (gazing sternly into the camera) are transferred to fifty million

---

[28] Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 11.

[29] Winston notes that even a few bold scholarly efforts to highlight Curtis' contribution couldn't topple the myth of Grierson as the hero of documentary's origin story (find page#).

relatively unwilling ears in a couple of days or so. The magazine items

(one a week) have adopted the original 'Tit-Bits' manner of observation.

The skill they represent is a purely journalistic skill. ... With their

moneymaking eye (almost their only eye) glued like the newsreels to vast

and speedy audiences, they avoid on the one hand the consideration of

solid material, and escape, on the other, the solid consideration of any

material.[30]

Grierson's peer Paul Rotha, another influential British documentarian, also referred to the

production styles of the newsreels as a way to distinguish the documentary film. He

wrote that documentary is "deeper in meaning and more skillful in style than the

newsreel," and that newsreels were produced "not with much skill it must be confessed,

for its value lay in speed, hazard and impudence. ... It was a method, albeit a crude one,

of reporting."[31] I argue that this kernel of documentary discourse – documentary as

distinct from news – was at work in other media incarnations of documentary, not just

film in all its categories at this time period: documentary was made distinct from news.

Newsreels, of course, were *not live*. They were also filmed. But Grierson and

Rotha decry the "speedy" and "journalistic" nature of the newsreels – they claim that this

is not what documentary is about. That speed in production turn-around between event

and its presentation to an audience is the same kind of speed that Rosen hints at when he

claims that documentary needs some "production time and cultural time" between an

event and its documentary portrayal. Rosen deputizes the early documentarians' critiques

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[30] John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary," 1932.
[31] Rotha, *Documentary Film.*

of newsreels into his argument, writing, "In the discourse of the original documentary film movement, the newsreel is not a documentary; and neither is television news documentary in this sense, much less emergency bulletins."[32] As I have tried to show, however, live broadcasting is not just some zenith of speedy production, the ideal of news immediacy. It's easy to mistakenly align these concepts. Jerome Bourdon raises the idea, tentatively, when he notes that *if* we do see media development as in some part a continued "effort to reduce the gap between events and media users," then "live broadcasting, in this context, is the quintessence of 'news,' whose 'discovery' has been a major break in the history of the press."[33] I've tried to argue against Rosen that live productions (in the broadcast form, or in other live practices) hold ample opportunities for slow and considered productions presented live. However, I think Bourdon's consideration suggests how easy it is to associate liveness with 'news'-only framings. I will argue in a later section that oppositional notions between documentary and news journalism may have steered documentary away from liveness on television in the 1950s and 1960s. But before there was documentary television there was documentary radio, a form that was accepted as wholly, surprisingly live.

Documentary on the Radio

The March of Time was a newsreel *beyond* the newsreel, and is frequently referenced in the literature on documentary film and television as influential. [34]. It

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[32] Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," 71.
[33] Bourdon, "Live Television is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," *Media, Culture & Society* (2000), 22:5, 192.
[34] See for example Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 86-87; Barnouw, *Documentary*, 121-122; Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 48-50.

deviated from the standard newsreel's quick snippets of film footage of world events

described in voiceover, and set about dramatizing the news through recreations of recent

events by actors whose performances were accompanied by rousing musical scores.[35]

The sense of storytelling it brought to world of fact places it in the literature as an

influence on documentary film.[36] Even Paul Rotha, who had distanced documentary film

from the typical newsreel form, praised "the continued excellence of *The March of*

Time's dramatized news" in a *New York Times* article about the appearance of

documentary film practice in the United States.[37] In scholarship and in its contemporary

critical reception in the 1940s, *The March of Time* was recognized as bearing a

resemblance to a documentary film.

But before it was a newsreel, *The March of Time* was a *radio* show. The program

first aired on the CBS network in March 1931, sponsored by *Time Magazine* as a

corporate marketing effort for their publication.[38] The original radio program also

featured scripted re-enactments of news items of the day, read by actors and awash with

music and sound effects. Most importantly to this thesis, *The March of Time* radio

program was performed live.[39]

In his study of radio documentary, historian Matthew C. Ehrlich notes that many

radio stations featured this type of dramatization of actual events in the news. Ehrlich

writes, "Today [these] would be labeled 'docudrama.' But they were called

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[35] Barnouw, *Documentary*, 122-123.
[36] This style of reenacting is quite similar to Flaherty's own use of reenactment in both *Nanook of the North* and *Moana*. He often staged scenes and shaped the action of his subjects in order to craft the dramatic scenario he wanted.
[37] Paul Rotha, "The Outlook for American Documentary Films," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1938, sec. Screen.
[38] Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 8, 11.
[39] Ibid., 8.

'documentaries' in their time."[40] These dramatizations were standard practice that was

labeled 'documentary' on 1930s and 1940s radio. In this period, CBS and NBC led in

production of such dramatizations.[41] These networks were also enforcing a recording

ban.[42] The dramatizations were therefore live broadcast performances, rather than

recorded segments.

However, the 'documentary' label wasn't consistently applied to these styles of

nonfiction radio in its earliest days. *March of Time* for instance was heralded as a

"pioneer series of news dramatizations," a "significant and refreshing new method of

depicting news events."[43] Another review called it "the premiere dramatic show of the

air."[44] In 1935, the program shifted from a weekly broadcast to become "the

unprecedented daily news dramatization" of the time.[45] *March of Time* was discussed as

both news and drama, in large part because at this time the broadcast networks

themselves hadn't quite set up a distinction. News departments had not yet been officially

instituted at the major US networks. News was certainly present in the programming:

headlines read from wire services had appeared on the air since the pre-network HAM

radio days of the 1920s.[46] In the 1930s, NBC and CBS's reporting was centered around

special events, sports events, elections and speeches, with occasional news headlines

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[40] Ibid., 5.

[41] Ibid., 80.

[42] Ibid., 30. Ehrlich notes that the recording ban was an effort by the two largest networks to "protect the networks' unique status as nationwide purveyors of live news and entertainment."

[43] Carroll Nye, *"March of Time" News Dramatizations Will be Continued*. Los Angeles Times, Jan. 25, 1935: 12.

[44] *"March of Time" Again Premiers*. Chicago Daily Tribune, Oct. 22, 1933.

[45] *Casting Directors Toil with New March of Times Names*. The Washington Post, Aug. 11, 135: M7.

[46] Edward Bliss, *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism* (Columbia University Press, 1991), 12.

thrown in.[47] In 1930, CBS hired a "news editor" but still had no official news department.[48] While radio news reports were an emergent form and fairly common feature, they hadn't been fully institutionalized in the news production units that would follow. *March of Time* was taking shape in this environment. It had been developed from earlier experiments with re-enacted news titled *NewsCasting* and *NewsActing*.[49] News and the 'documentary' would be closely associated, and not quite formerly distinguished, in this period of radio broadcasting.

While radio producers experimented with forms of news, entertainment and news drama, the content of broadcasts had to be generated live. Networks had imposed a ban on broadcasting recorded materials, because they were seen as a threat to the value and standing of what networks had to offer.[50] In this decidedly live environment, the label 'documentary' began to be mobilized to mark out nonfiction programming of a certain kind. As Ehrlich points out, these were dramatizations – taken from actual events, scripted for actors. From a contemporary standpoint, one might think the ban on recordings would have kept attempts at *recorded* sound documentary at bay in this period. But more importantly, the period simply lacked the *associations* between documentary and recorded materials. The studios were set up for live performances on the air, and if the sounds and voices of the real world couldn't be brought into the studio, they could be scripted, shaped, and then performed by actors in the studio. On radio in the 1930s, no one thought twice about applying the 'documentary' label to something re-

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[47] Ibid., 27.
[48] Ibid., 26.
[49] Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 11.
[50] Ibid., 30-31.

enacted in dramatic form, performed live, using no recorded material at all.[51] With

sound-based documentary, there also seems to have been less of an expectation of

indexicality – Flaherty's *Nanook* and *Moana* used reenactments as well, but they're what

I would call soft re-enactments, in which the people who were actually the subjects of the

film became actors acting out Flaherty's instructions. On the radio, actors didn't just give

narration, they represented real public figures, or read words created by the scriptwriters

meant to reflect man-on-the-street opinions (find citation, Ehrlich). And they were

performing those re-enactments live in the studio. It is a far cry from the type of

statement made by John Corner that documentary on film, television and radio relies on

recorded materials. To me, this period of documentary on early broadcast radio

demonstrates that the term 'documentary' has lost some of its conceptual flexibility for

labeling live projects as documentary works.

By the early 1940s, the 'documentary' label on radio was becoming more

standardized, in part because it was an important form the networks could use to

demonstrate the public value of radio. In 1946, the FCC's "Blue Book" railed against

"radio's rampant commercialism" and pushed for more public service programming on

the air.[52] Network executives could gesture to their documentary programs as fulfillments

of public service quotas. CBS and NBC led the production of radio documentaries, but

ABC and the Mutual Network were "well established" producers of documentary by

1948. But the CBS Network gave documentary of this form its first institutional home.[53]

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[51] (Grierson was at work on his media machine, but documentary film and documentary radio seemed comfortably distinct, with producers on either side of the aisle happy to utilize the affordances of their medium).
[52] Ibid., 6.
[53] Ibid., 79.

In 1946, they created the CBS Documentary Unit. At almost the same moment, in 1946 and 1947, the network recording ban was being relaxed – when Bing Crosby left NBC for ABC in 1946 because they would accept his work in recorded format, CBS and eventually NBC began to relax their ban as well[54]. But the live dramatization of real events, the period's radio documentary, had found its niche and was going strong – again, there was no assumption that the documentary *should* use recorded materials or move away from liveness in order to feature recorded actuality.

The CBS Documentary Unit had a clear vision for how its production teams would function. The "wholly autonomous group" was "free of deadlines," the point of these programs was not to give up-to-the-minute information but well researched, deeply considered reporting.[55] In this distinction, there are echoes of Grierson's and Rotha's ideas of documentary as deeply considered rather than a regularly and speedily produced form, something other than news. In the spring of 1948, *Public Opinion Quarterly* published a research report on the impact of the CBS Documentary Unit, based on studies of reach and change in listener beliefs and opinions. The report states:

> One of the most significant developments in broadcasting has been the
> documentary. Conceived of as an addition to radio's public service
> features, these broadcasts have singled out some of the most vital issues
> facing Americans today. To these issues they have attempted to bring
> information, clarification, and more importantly, a point of view.[56]

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[54] Ibid., 31.
[55] Ibid., 50.
[56] Elmo C. Wilson, "The Effectiveness of Documentary Broadcasts," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948): 19–29.

CBS expected documentary to change people's minds, and make them measurably more informed about important issues. While both news and documentary fell under the umbrella of public service programming at CBS, in-depth research for the production and the societal effects of documentary program's 'points of view' seem to have been unique to the documentary unit. The *mission* associated with documentary, as well as the production practices, set it apart from news. In his memoire, William Paley called the CBS Documentary Unit "the precursor of later television documentaries."[57] And yet this would seem to be more in their mission than in their form, as CBS radio's Documentary Unit relied almost entirely on re-enacting stories and investigations rather than recordings (an approach very different than television documentary). The 1948 impact report reviews six CBS radio documentaries, all were dramatizations performed live on the air.

However, during this period a few producers moved toward integrating recordings from the real world into their programs. In 1946, radio producer Norman Corwin traveled the world to create *One World Flight*, a radio program for CBS that aimed to let people across the world tell stories of reconstruction and progress in the wake of World War II in their own words[58]. Corwin traveled with a wire recorder, an unwieldy early recording technology which had to be transferred to magnetic tape for editing.[59] It was one of the first "major" broadcast productions to use tape.[60, 61] Ehrlich marks Corwin's

[57] William S. Paley, *As It Happened: A Memoir*, 1st edition (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1979), 191.
[58] Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 30-35.
[59] Ibid., 30.
[60] Bliss, *Now the News*, 201.
[61] Though Bliss suggests that for *One World Flight* "tape had been used in the production of a major broadcast for the first time," he seems to be arguing in context of nonfiction programming, as his text focuses on news. Matthew Ehrlich notes that Bing Crosby "was recording his weekly radio show in the studio" in 1946 (Ehrlich, pg. 31).

documentary departure, noting that he worked "with no established template for using recordings in a network radio documentary," using actors little if at all.[62] Ehrlich quotes Corwin on his primary goal, to "adhere to reportorial objectivity."[63]

While the tape was revolutionary, the way Corwin employed the recorded materials shows how deeply ingrained live performance, and a sense of liveness, was to the radio and to the radio documentary. Corwin read his narration live on air. More interesting still, he shaped his narration to frame the recordings as if they were immediate transmissions his audience was hearing in real time, with lines like, "You are standing in the Maikovsky Station..." and "You are strolling along Hallam Street in London."[64] He stressed a sense of instantaneity, of in-the-moment access to what were really time-shifted recordings.

Ehrlich traces the mixed reception of *One World Flight*. One reviewer praised Corwin's work as "a superb example of what radio documentaries in the hands of a great writer can do," while another felt the "rough edges" of recordings detracted from the piece's entertainment value.[65] Ehrlich writes, "*Variety* praised Corwin for having "broadened the scope of documentary with actuality sequences". (pg. 40). This quote brilliantly conveys how documentary had taken on a meaning in this period far from any associations of actuality sequences – the addition of recordings 'broadens' the scope of documentary in this moment, but it had existed quite well without them until this point. Ehrlich positions Corwin as far ahead of his time, arguing *One World Flight* was a "new

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[62] Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 34.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 35.
[65] Ibid., 39-40.

genre" that wouldn't appear again until "the actuality-based long-form audio program that years later would find a home on American public radio."[66]

Despite the novelty status of Corwin's use of recordings in the face of standardized documentary as dramatic reenactment, other scholars link it with stylistic shifts occurring for radio documentary in that period.[67] A. William Bluem, historian of documentary television, wrote: "Hailed as a 'new documentary,' [*One World Flight*] and subsequent efforts of the CBS unit represented a final departure from the 'stagey' drama of an earlier time."[68] Ehrlich notes that in this period a "shift away from such dramatizations paralleled a shift toward an era of "social responsibility" and what has been called "high modernism" in journalism."[69] But it wasn't a complete transformation. Bliss notes that in radio documentary of the mid-1940s, "Sound effects may have been muted, the crashing music not so crashing, but use still was made of actors – after all, "The Eagle's Brood" features Hollywood's Joseph Cotton." He stresses how markedly different these practices are from standard or accepted norms of documentary today, continuing, "Over the years, actors' participation did become less frequent – nonexistent in many documentary series – but it never disappeared and today, with its resurgence, is hotly debated."[70] What today is marginal and contested, was in broadcast era radio a standard meaning of 'documentary'. While Bliss points to the reliance on dramatics, I emphasize that these were *live* re-enactments, common in a period in which live productions and senses of liveness (as Corwin tried to craft in *One World Flight*) were

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66 Ibid., 43.
67 Bliss, *Now the News*, 200.
68 Ibid., 200.
69 Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 8.
70 Bliss, *Now the News*.

simply an acceptable part of documentary, in it's radio incarnation, at this period in the form's history.

In this period, liveness is generated on radio through both live acting (a theatrical kind of live performance) in the dramatizations, and live presentation of recorded materials as Corwin had done, less acting than presenting on the air.[71] Each style employed under the aegis of documentary, and each representing a shifting standard of liveness. Philip Auslander notes that the designation of 'liveness' actually becomes critical with the advent of the radio, because for the first time the visual sensory deprivation of the device hid whether listener's were hearing recorded media like that of the gramophone or a live performance.[72] The term is "pressed into service as a part of a vocabulary to contain this crisis," an impulse to hold up liveness as special that seems present in the CBS and NBC recording bans.[73] Radio was *framed* as live purposely, and remains so even when it mixes temporal forms of a live reader and recorded sounds. Auslander notes that with "first radio, then television – we began to speak of 'live broadcast.' This phrase is not considered an oxymoron" despite removing the spatial co-presence of the theater's liveness.[74] Documentary on radio engages with multiple forms of liveness. However, by the end of the 1940s the radio documentary was on the cusp of decline, thanks to the rise of a new broadcast technology.

Documentary on Television

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[71] In the next chapter, I will discuss live presentation as "monstration" as described by Gaudreault.

[72] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Routledge, 2008), 59.

[73] Ibid., 60.

[74] Ibid., 60.

Just as radio saw a shift from live broadcasts to recorded materials, television also

followed this trend, particularly between the 1950s and 1960s. On television, it was

perhaps an even more complete transition, because television arose to take over as the

dominant broadcast medium in the 1950s when radio was still utilizing liveness. In terms

of television's live broadcast content, Bourdon points to the "historical fact that live

broadcasting has declined between the 1950s and 1960s" on television.[75] Couldry speaks

to the boom and then decline of live television broadcasts when he writes:

> In television's early days, when all programs were performances broadcast live,
>
> television was entirely a 'live' medium, in the sense of being broadcast as it was
>
> performed. As the proportion of live performance declined, the term 'live'
>
> switched its reference, while remaining in use.[76]

The predominance of live television performance in its early days is often called

"The Golden Age" of Television, highlighting how idealized liveness is for the

medium.[77] This live environment was the form utilized by television's entertainment

programming, dramas and comedies performed in major network studios in New York.[78]

Frank Sturcken locates the end of the focus on live television in the migration of

television entertainment production to Hollywood:

> The great change in programming in 1958 came when the networks
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> junked their production and programming plans, dropped New York, and

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[75] Jerome Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled
Promise," *Media, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2000): 531–56, 532.
[76] Nick Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the
Mobile Phone," *The Communication Review* 7 (2004): 353–61.
[77] Frank Sturcken, *Live Television: The Golden Age of 1946-1958 in New York*
(Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1990), xi.
[78] Ibid.

went into partnership with the filmmakers.[79]

While Sturken's study is focused on entertainment programming rather than news or documentary, the shift from live on-air broadcasts as the majority of television content to the minority in the period Sturcken describes reflects shifts in the 'liveness' concept on television as a whole. In the introduction, I discussed the ways 'liveness' has been studied as increasingly not a technological reality of television but an ideology of the medium. As I did with radio, I want to stay away from this sense of liveness as something that might define live documentary on television. I'm not interested in arguments that simply because a recorded documentary film played in the moment on television it could be considered "live," since this reaches levels of tautology if all of television has this ideological sense of liveness. Rather, I'm interested in more technical meanings of live *production* on television – I want to examine how those practices were related to the documentary. Ultimately, I argue that these live production practices didn't seem to keep their footing in concepts of television documentary the way they did in radio documentary – with its live dramatic readings, live presentation, and mixes of live and recorded forms. On television, documentary was steered quickly into representing an entirely pre-recorded entity.

That bias is fairly clear in the way television documentary is discussed in scholarship today. I've already mentioned Philip Rosen's argument pitting live newscasts against documentary. Jerome Bourdon does this too, in a more descriptive rather than proscriptive sense, arguing that "documentary or a report on the news ... use live

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[79] Ibid.

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television as archive footage."[80] It's *playing* live, but it's not created live, it's not *documenting* live any more than film is. Bourdon continues:

> Edited non-fictional television is only represented by a small number of genres: documentaries, news reports, credits, advertising, music videos, propaganda (especially, in democracies, election programs).[81]

He specifies that by "edited" he means forms of *non-live editing*, and that news reports are distinct from live newscasts. Bourdon argues that documentaries and news reports "share many features, except for their relations with news and their length."[82] Bourdon sees news reports as tied to news, while claiming (citing Jacobs and Corner) that documentary is more outside the news category, because of its cinematic roots[83]. Bourdon takes the filmic view of documentary to assess its television form, rather than tying television documentary to the vibrant period of radio documentary in its relationship to news departments and news styles in the 1930s through 1950s. Of course other scholars refer to the "television news documentary," so Bourdon is simply leaning on the film heritage rather than stating hard fact. However, I argue that Bourdon accurately describes the state of documentary on television today – very filmic, and distinctly separate from the live broadcast news. The question is, *why* is this so? Why didn't television documentary embrace the many styles of live production featured in radio documentary? It's a difficult argument to make, but I offer a few suggestions here.

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[80] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 539.
[81] Ibid., 544.
[82] Ibid., 544.
[83] Ibid., 545.

To start this argument, I want to return us again to the environment of the 1930s

and 1940s of broadcast radio documentary, in which live production practices didn't have

the opposition to the documentary category that seem to linger today. This openness of

the category to broadcast liveness also applied to the period's visions of what

documentary could be on television – as demonstrated by Paul Rotha, champion of the

documentary film. In 1955, Rotha made a case for a television-native documentary that

utilized liveness in an article *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* titled "TV and

the Future of Documentary." Rotha highlights "the BBC's adoption of the documentary

approach in its television service," and ties that approach to "the documentary idea in

radio" in American and on the BBC in the 1930s.[84] He highlights the program *Special*

Enquiry for its "documentary-journalism style," which "every five weeks continues to

make a 45-minute investigation, using film and "live" studio inserts."[85] This program ran,

Rotha notes, under the small, underfunded Documentary Department at the BBC

Television service, which Rotha is "sad to report" would be closed as of April 30 of that

year.[86] However, Rotha envisions a future of documentary utilizing the many new

potentials of television, a vision also included live broadcast as a part of documentary.

For example, he writes:

> Another form of exchange may lie with the dispatch of scripts and filmed
>
> sequences to an other country which will reproduce the program with its
>
> own "live" sequences in whatever language is appropriate. The B.B.C.
>
> series *The World Is Ours* lends itself to this treatment. Whatever method is

[84] Paul Rotha, "Television and the Future of Documentary," *Quarterly of Film Television and Radio* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1955): 366–73, 368.
[85] Ibid., 370.
[86] Ibid., 373.

used, there is no denial that we are about to enter on a most exciting and challenging era of international exchange in television terms, an era in which every type of documentary work can find outlets of a size hitherto impossible. Documentary filmmaking as we have known it from commercial cinema release or specialized distribution will, of course, continue; but television is bound to play an increasingly vital part in documentary's future.[87]

Despite what seems to have *happened* to documentary on television, my arguments for easy inclusion of liveness into the documentary category certainly benefit from the fact that Rotha was making this argument in the television era. I turn now to a quick assessment of how live broadcast within documentary was sidelined on television.

There is a particularly television program frequently cited in the literature as a forerunner of television documentary. Historian Thomas Rosteck calls it "the prototype" for television news documentary.[88] *See It Now* appeared in 1951, a new television program produced by Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly. The idea had evolved from the duo's work on an album radio actualities paired with Murrow's narration, *I Can Hear It Now*. They updated the concept for radio with *Hear It Now* in 1950, a radio documentary series featuring recorded segments framed by Murrow's live narration.[89] But television was poised to take over radio's place as the dominant broadcast form, and

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[87] Ibid., 373.
[88] Thomas Rosteck, *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism: Television Documentary and the Politics of Representation* (University of Alabama Press, 1994), 30.
[89] Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia*, 9-10, 139-140.

Friendly was eager to iterate again for television.[90] Friendly wanted *See It Now* to employ

a mix of live *and* taped segments as well as live address from Murrow.[91] And so it did,

but in different ways over the program's seven year run.

The first broadcast of *See It Now* was a love letter to the possibilities of live image

transmission on television. It opened with a view of simultaneous live feeds from points

on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Five years later, one reviewer would recall this

display, "... was not news—just a gimmick—but it was new and different."[92] Murrow

and Friendly were playing with the live visuals of their new medium. If historical

perspectives of *See It Now* as the prototypical television documentary encompass this

liveness, then we have at least one example of interesting live documentary practice on

television. However, in its day, *See It Now* was not as clearly considered a documentary

program. Even the words of the reviewer above note that the live spectacle was "not

news," as if he expected that to be the true content of the *See It Now* program. And

indeed, the program was framed as a news show in many instances.

Friendly and Murrow described *See It Now* as a "Murrow-Friendly News Series,"

though they fought to maintain a standing at CBS *outside* of the news department.[93] Sig

Mickelsen, director of CBS-TV News and Public Affairs, had hired Friendly for the

program and thought *See It Now* would be under CBS television news, but instead

Friendly as producer reported directly to CBS heads Paley and Stanton[94]. Radio

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[90] Ibid., 9.
[91] Ralph Engelman, *Friendlyvision: Fred Friendly and the Rise and Fall of Television Journalism* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 80.
[92] Murray R. Yaeger, "Evolution of See It Now, The," *Journal of Broadcasting* 1 (1957 1956): 337.
[93] Engelman, *Friendlyvision*, 78.
[94] Ibid., 78.

documentary had associations with news departments, but documentary producers

worked autonomously and with no deadline or regular schedule – these in-depth reports

would be released when they were completed. *See It Now* adhered to regular production,

as in fact had *Hear It Now. See It Now* was also called by its producers "a newsmagazine

of the air," a nod to Friendly's vision for the show to be television's answer to *Life*

Magazine's visual, photojournalistic style.[95]

However, in its autonomous production setting outside the news department, *See*

It Now was also distinct from standards of television news at the time. As with radio

news in its early stages, early television news was not a very in-depth affair. In 1945,

during American television's 'experimental' years, NBC commissioned the first

television news program. The network hired professionals from the newsreel industry and

provided them a minimal budget to work out a formula for news that would work for

television.[96] By 1947, both NBC and CBS aired15-minute news segments in which

anchors read headlines sometimes accompanied by film clips of world events. Michele

Hilmes notes:

> Because the transition from radio to television proved expensive, all three
>
> networks allocated most of their resources to entertainment programming
>
> during the medium's first decade, allowing only occasional opportunities
>
> for experimentation in news and information genres.[97]

[95] Ralph Engelman, *Friendlyvision: Fred Friendly and the Rise and Fall of Television Journalism* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 79.
[96] Barnouw, *Documentary*, *get page*.
[97] Michele Hilmes, *NBC: America's Network*, 1 edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 176.

Many radio news professionals migrated to television news in this period.[98] The

power of live television for news had been demonstrated at the outset of the war, when

the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor could be addressed by fledgling television news network

in breaking news style.[99] The war kept television production mostly at bay, with

networks relying on tried and true radio methods for reporting. New television studios for

the most part sat empty at the height of the war.[100] When the war ended, networks were

ready to return some attention to their television studios. CBS's New York television

station, for instance, reinstated live studio broadcasting in May of 1944 – it had been used

mostly to broadcasting films for two hours on Thursday and Fridays since 1942.[101] To

reinvigorate the live broadcasts, efforts were split between newscasting and entertainment

programming. Documentary had appeared on television at this point, but as a part of

television's broadcast of documentary *films*.[102] Television's own documentary

production hadn't been declared, but stations were hiring professionals with backgrounds

in documentary film, newsreel, radio and journalism to help produce nonfiction television

programming.[103]

    See It Now is a good example of the murky boundary between news and

documentary on television, much as it had been on radio in its early years as news

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[98] Mike Conway, *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s* (Peter Lang, 2009), 106.
[99] Ibid., 86.
[100] Ibid., 93; Hilmes, *NBC*, 68.
[101] Ibid., 105.
[102] The CBS affiliate WCBW, for example, aired a documentary film about a blood bank in 1942, as the station began experimenting with showing films including snippets of major Hollywood movies *Citzen Kane* and *Dumbo*. A year later, the station broadcast a government documentary film, *War Department Report* – the first government film on the war to be shown publicly. Ibid., 87, 102.
[103] Ibid., 103-105.

dramatization. *See It Now* won four Emmys: for Best News Commentary in 1956, Best

Public Service Series in 1957, Best Public Service Program or Series in 1958 as well as

for Best News Commentary in 1958.[104] Institutionally, the program stood on its own, not

inside a news or documentary production unit. The ambiguity of how to understand it

thus seems to make sense. But this vagueness over *See It Now*'s status as documentary or

news, I think, also complicates its presence in the history of *documentary* television. The

public's understanding of the program as a news show is clear in its early days, for

instance in a *TIME* magazine review concluding *See It Now* was "television's best and

liveliest news show.[105]

As the series progressed, however, *See It Now* transitioned more into recorded

pieces. In 1952, the Christmas episode "This is Korea" was a full hour in length instead

of the usual half hour, "composed of a series of interviews and reports actually filmed in

Korea at the front lines with Murrow doing the bulk of the reporting."[106] Then, in 1953,

Murrow began a series of episodes tackling McCarthyism. The first, on an Air Force

Reserve Officer who had been discharged after anonymous accusations that his family

members were associated with communism, devoted the entire half-hour to the officer's

story. In 1956, Murray Yaeger wrote a retrospective of *See It Now* for the *Journal of

Broadcasting*, and observed that "more and more film was used as the program

progressed and with this the job of the film editors became more significant."[107] A series

of episodes on McCarthyism in the 1953 season included one episode that was almost

entirely made up of footage of Senator McCarthy's own speeches. Erik Barnouw writes

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[104] "Emmy Awards – See It Now," http://www.emmys.com/shows/see-it-now
[105] "See It Now," *Time*, November 26, 1951.
[106] Yaeger, "Evolution of See It Now, The."
[107] Ibid.

of these episodes, "They placed Murrow in the forefront of the documentary film movement; he was hailed as its television pioneer."[108] A few years later, the lengthier, film-heavy format of these *See It Now* episodes became the standard for the series – the program format switched to a once a month schedule, as an hour-long or 90 minute program.[109] In 1958, CBS cancelled the program.

See it Now may be identified as early television documentary, but I suggest that these identifications are tied more to its long-form pieces. Its live segments were more the focus of the earlier episodes, and this is when the news label hovers around the program. I suggest that in Barnouw's configuration of the show as documentary, or Rosteck's work on the McCarthy episodes, for example, the documentary label is associated more with the long-form pre-recorded episodes than with the programs' uses of liveness.[110]

This seems born out with the developments of television documentary from *See It Now's* 'prototype.' By the time *See It Now* was cancelled, documentary was more a recognized label in television – particularly, as a form of in-depth reporting that supplemented regular news broadcasts. In *NBC: America's Network*, Michele Hilmes calls the 1960s the "golden age of documentary" on television, pushed forward by NBC President Robert Kintner.[111] As television networks were highlighting news to appease FCC criticism (as radio had in its response to the Blue Book), Kintner pushed news at NBC and particularly documentary programs:

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[108] Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[109] Yaeger, "Evolution of See It Now, The."
[110] See Rosteck, *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism*.
[111] Hilmes, *NBC*, 175.

As the news division grew more active and prosperous and as government

pressure increased, Kintner also became an advocate of news specials,

often breaking away from regularly scheduled entertainment shows to

provide live coverage of important events, such as spacecraft launches,

congressional hearings, and the Cuban missile crisis. Kintner also nurtured

the network's documentary efforts, overseeing the launch of

the distinguished *NBC White Paper* series in 1960 and promoting a host of

programs dedicated to news interpretation and analysis.[112]

In Hilmes' description, news is cast as distinct from documentary. I argue that we see

some of the movement of liveness towards news and not documentary. Kintner promoted

live coverage of events, and *also* documentary efforts – not the two as a single concept.

Documentary was being produced within news, but in the news departments it was

reverting to the 'special report' status that Bourdon ascribes to news reports (which he

argues, like documentary, were recorded). Hilmes continues:

These [news] employees therefore had professional reasons to support the

expansion of news, since it would enhance their status and increase their

visibility, and they were especially enthusiastic about documentary, seeing

it as a genre that allowed them to examine important issues with a depth

and complexity that might rival the work of their newsprint

counterparts. Similar dynamics were at work at CBS and ABC: agitation

from within combined with pressures from without prompted all three

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[112] Ibid., 176.

television networks to expand their news divisions during the early 1960s,

with special emphasis on documentary.[113]

Here, there are echoes of the documentary film versus newsreel opposition, with

documentary in-depth and newsreel about regularity. As I've already made clear, this

doesn't imply one form as live and the other as recorded. However, other uses and

procedures in documentary television production start to skew toward fully recorded

forms. In part, we can locate this in the 1960s television construction of documentary as a

tradable commodity – something that had to be self-contained and on tape. Hilmes notes

this development in the documentary's use in syndication, writing:

> The [documentary] genre was also promoted as an important new addition
>
> to the television syndication market, as all three networks now used
>
> documentaries to distinguish their overseas program catalogs.

Documentaries were pre-produced items of content that could be sold, not live

productions created on the spot. This flow of documentary commodity didn't only move

from the networks outwards. In the early 1960s, networks were also slowly starting to

purchase documentary films by independent producers for broadcast on air. Producer

David Wolper pioneered this practice at the close of the 1950s. His Wolper Production's

generated fifty-eight television documentary specials and 20 series totaling 347 episodes

over forty years in business– all produced on film and sold to networks.[114] Later, public

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[113] Ibid., 177.
[114] Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film* (Continuum, 2005), 195.

61

television would continue this practice of airing independent documentary films.[115] While the documentary designation hovered around early programs like *See It Now*, which used live segments and live presentation by an anchor, in the news departments it had become more of a unit built of recorded materials. By the 1960s, its status as a recorded object within the flow of television programming seems determined in its use of a unit that can be bought and sold.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've tried to demonstrate that we must understand 'documentary' and 'liveness' as terms in constant flux, standing in for different standard practices at different periods in time. In the radio era, live production practices were rampant in the documentary form. On television, live transmission, live broadcast, was present but seems to have remained at the periphery, with the documentary category centering on not just in-depth reports, but *recorded* in-depth reports. Live nonfiction television progressed forward more associated with news programming. This history is complex, and I've only scratched the surface of examining the influences that contributed to documentary as a film-like form on television. Yet it seems to have gone that way. By 1992, J.T. Caldwell in his *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* gave a picture of contemporary views of documentary as it relates to television. Analyzing an early 1940s program *Window on the World*, he writes:

> Although a contented in-studio family watched submissively as newsreels
>
> brought the exotic world 'home to you,' the vast majority of nonfilmed

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[115] Ibid., 196.

material in the show carried with it a sense of textual and temporal *burden*. That is, live and lengthy filler surrounds what are essentially parenthetical and attenuated newsreel segments. This filler includes what seems like an endless succession of live second-rate acts: vaudeville and trampoline artists, and dancers who, like whirling dervishes, do number after number until they are sweating and breathless. In a ritual that predates power aerobics and Step Reebok by several decades, the static camera watches as the performers drive themselves toward exhaustion. It is significant in this hybrid show that television's imported modes – film and documentary – worked immediately and worked well.

In this more recent picture, documentary on television is "one of television's imported modes." Documentary here is entirely outside the native language of television, a recoded form entirely impervious to the uses of live production on television. In the fluctuations of meanings of both 'documentary' and 'liveness' I've tried to show here, I see in Caldwell's quote yet another intimation that we're currently in a period that puts live practice in opposition with the documentary.

From here, I will start my investigation of emerging live documentary projects that – I hope – signal a possible swing towards the next phase of our notions of "documentary." As I've said, the fact that many of these projects use the phrase "live documentary" to describe themselves is telling. Just as Auslander suggests radio necessitated the need for the designation of "live" to mark it out from recordings on air, today documentary practitioners feel the need to add the "live" qualifier. This wasn't the

case in radio days, when 'documentary' could stand as a term on its own for different media productions that were live or recorded. Language is important. For the sake of this project, I emphasize "live documentary" as the new form under study – I hope that the new form projects I will investigate in the next chapters are the first steps on a road towards the use of 'documentary' to once again conceptually encompass live practices just as much as any modes of media production.

CHAPTER 3: LIVE PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTARY

In the last chapter, I showed the documentary in previous periods has been clearly associated with different forms of live practices. In the context of the 1930s, radio documentary encompassed broadcasts of news dramatizations performed live in studios by actors, and the live presentation of recorded materials from *One World Flight* to *Hear It Now*. These fit easily into 1930s frameworks for documentary re-enactment (Nanook, Moana) and demonstrated that live practices could exist within its conceptual space.

In this chapter, I begin my discussion of today's live documentary practices – a category which mixes a particular form of liveness with traditional filmed documentary work. The Live Performance Documentary category demonstrates the affordances of theatrical practices and settings for documentary projects. I take a broad view of theater, using it to inscribe any performance that is carried out co-spatially as well as co-temporally with the audience.

I base my investigation on two recent projects using live theater practices for documentary: the "Live Documentary" projects of Sam Green with an emphasis on *The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller*, and *Choose Your Own Documentary* created by Nathan Penlington.[1] I'll walk-through of each project in following sections but I'd like to introduce the key characteristics that helped structure my analysis. First, both projects rely heavily on the use of film in their theatrical presentations.[2] Each project includes

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[1] Penlington spearheaded the project and acts as the on-stage performer in this Live Performance Documentary. He co-created the project with team members Fernando R Gutierrez De Jesus, Nick Watson, Sam Smail.

[2] In fact, these projects use both archival film that was converted to digital video *and* material shot digitally, both archival and original, all housed on a computer and beam

film and still images screened on large screens to an audience in a theater. Both projects

also feature a presenter on stage, who gives live narration to the filmed material on the

screen.[3]
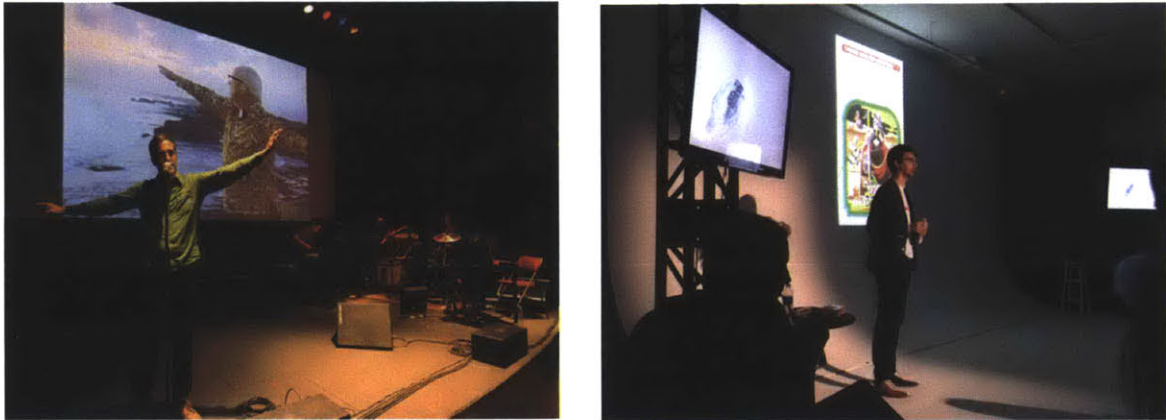
Figure 3: Left, Sam Green on stage in *Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller*. Right, Nathan Penlington on stage in *Choose Your Own Documentary*.

Why is this feature of each project so critical? I propose that both of these Live

Theater Documentary projects are best understood as works born out of the documentary

film lineage, pivoting them into the theatrical space and utilizing live performance. They

literally bring large screen projections of film content into the space of live performance.

We might place the two case studies here on one end of a spectrum, and the Documentary

Theater practices I mentioned in the introduction on the other. Documentary Theater

performances usually feature actors on stage, performing from a scripted treatment of

actual events (with lines often verbatim from the records of the events themselves). Live

Performance Documentary's performer is not assuming the role, or the present

projected onto a large screen for the audience. I refer to this as 'film' in the same way
documentary 'film' may be video, too, but here I use film to refer to the recorded moving
image material in the projects discussed here.

[3] It so happens that in each of these projects, the narrator is also the *creator* of the project.

temporality, of an actor in such a play – rather, he or she *presents* documentary material as a narrator or explicator.

Auslander tells us that theatrical spaces and theatrical performance are not opposed to the presentation of recorded materials.[4] The central, large-screen cinematic presentation of moving images in the two works discussed as Live Performance Documentary aren't, in this way, much different from the countless uses of projections, screens, images and recordings embedded in theatrical production designs. Rather, the spectrum I seek to articulate aligns well with Andre Gaudreault's distinction between narration and monstration. Gaudreault posits that the field of narratology hits a snag when it shifts from analysis of written works to other forms like theater, because the narrator is not present in the same way in non-scriptural forms.[5] He argues that while narrators in text inherently *tell*, the theater *shows* – he calls this "monstration." Monstration enforces a presentness, the showing is always in the now. Narration, as framed by Gaudreault, (and most other narratologists) implies a past, a distance between the subject of the story that is being told and the telling.

But in *film*, Gaudreault sees a bit of both. Film clearly *shows* images. Monstration, Gaudreault argues, is enabled by the camera, which has been "been delegated by the monstrator to occupy the place of the spectator during the period of the action to be recorded."[6] Gaudreault also sees film as generating a narrative, which he claims is created through the *editing* of the film into not just shown images but *told*

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[4] Auslander, *Liveness*.
[5] Andre Gaudreault, "Narration and Monstration in Cinema," *Journal of Film and Video* 39, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 29–36, 29.
[6] Ibid., 32.

sequences.[7] Documentary Theater falls squarely into Gaudreault's concept of monstration: the event is shown through the action and actors on the stage. The subject of Documentary Theater is shown in a here and now in relation to the viewer, the theatrical here and now. Live Performance Documentary is quite different. I think that like film, it involves monstration and narration. Just like in film, monstration is done through the showing of images to the audience, their subject is put in the here and now of the viewer. However, the on-stage performers aren't part of that subject matter, they stand apart to narrate, *telling* the story and not just showing the images. For Gaudreault, in film the narration is enabled by the edits that are fixed within the film. I'll discuss in later sections how the editing that drives the story along is located with the performer in *Lovesong* and with the audience in *Choose Your Own Documentary*. Now, I turn to the historical dimensions of these Live Performance Documentaries' style of narration.

A Long History of Film Performance

Both Green and Penlington received attention and recognition for their works, in part for the innovative nature of their projects for documentary. Green was invited to present two of his "Live Documentary" projects at the Sundance Film Festival's New Frontier section in 2010 and 2014, a showcase for cutting edge experimental media projects[8]. Penlington performed *Choose Your Own Documentary* at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival's Storyscapes section, which "showcases innovative and interactive

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[7] Ibid., 32.
[8] Green performed *Utopia and Four Movements* (2010) and *The Measure of All Things* (2014) as part of the New Frontier Program. See "The Measure of All Things – Sundance Film Festival," http://filmguide.sundance.org/film/14078/the_measure_of_all_things.

transmedia work."[9] However, as innovative and fringe as these projects might seem in the experience of modern audiences, both Green and Penlington are restoring a practice straight from the early days of cinema.

In the 1800s, public lecturers were a routine fixture in concert halls and town forums, supported by groups like the Lyceum movement in the American East Coast. With the advent of stereopticon or 'magic lantern' photographic projection, sets of slides could be assembled for display on the stage. These images were used on the lecture circuit, and lecturers, or exhibitors, were the key feature of projection performances, offering charismatic explanations of the images on screen. Lecturers, some of whom obtained celebrity status, transitioned from the projection of stills to film clips when these materials became available at the end of the 19th Century.[10] Film lecturers accompanied film in its earliest days, when exhibitions were dominated almost entirely by non-fiction programming, a form – like the period's dominant use of the photograph – deployed for capturing the real rather than creating fantasy. Live lecturers added explanatory information and entertaining storytelling to the moving image, swirling in the same ecosystem into which Flaherty would construct highly narrativized 'documentaries' for the first time. In fact, Flaherty himself planned a lecture tour to present his films and photographs of the Arctic north – the recorded materials that would eventually lead to *Nanook of the North*.[11]

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[9] "Here are the Five Transmedia Projects in the Storyscapes Section – Tribeca Film Festival," http://tribecafilm.com/stories/tribeca-film-festival-storyscapes-bombay-sapphire-2014.

[10] Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 38-42.

[11] Jay Ruby, "A Reexamination of the Early Career of Robert J. Flaherty 1," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5, no. 4 (1980): 431–57, 435.

Green makes an explicit connection between his "Live Documentary" method and the practices of film exhibitors and lecturers, citing in particular his own childhood experience with travelogue performers in Michigan. [12] He writes on the website for *Lovesong* that he brought his own childhood experience with travelogue performers in Michigan to crafting his style, and also points to the influence of the Japanese benshi tradition and even today's popular TED Talk lecture series as influences on his work. [13] Though Penlington doesn't claim this lineage so straightforwardly, it's clear that his work can also be seen as a return to a style in the vein of the early film exhibitors.

When we view Green and Penlington's work today in relation to the exhibitor practices of early documentary history, the documentary film looks more like an intermediary stage in a cycle from live to recorded and back to live. Both Live Performance Documentaries I discuss here are not only returns to early practices, but they use live theater practices to reanimate documentary *film* tropes that were themselves filmic appropriates of these earlier theatrical practices. For instance, Jeffrey Geiger writes that early illustrated lectures "might be seen as a paradigm for later documentary approaches in film – particularly those that incorporate on-screen filmmakers/presenters,

[12] http://samgreen.to/the-love-song-of-r-buckminster-fuller/
[13] TED Talks are lecturers delivered to an audience at the umbrella event, TED Conferences. Lecturers use projected slides as the backdrop of their talk. The talks are recorded on video and are popular with online viewers. In a review of the book *PowerPoint, Communication and the Knowledge Society* (2013) by Hubert Knoblauch, Gregory James Schneider-Bateman points to "the fact that TED Talks can be distributed digitally as *events* (not just as a document [e.g., see www.slideshare.net])" (emphasis mine). Though they are viewable live *and* as video records, I argue Schneider-Bateman's point highlights the role of theatricality and to the lecturer's engaging *performance* as a part of TED Talks' success.

instructive intertitles or voiceover narration."[14] Green and Penlington remove recorded documentary voiceover and create it instead through live narration. Green removes the soundtrack element of film and replaces it with a live performance featuring an onstage band during *Lovesong*.

The strategies that Green and Penlington use to restore 'liveness' to these film tropes are also reminiscent of some works I've covered in the previous chapter. Edward R. Murrow provided live *broadcast* narration to accompany the audio-recording actualities of *Hear It Now*. Norman Corwin of CBS Radio gestured to the liveness of radio by bringing an orchestra into the studio to give *One World Flight* and its recorded materials a 'live' soundtrack. I've employed the Live Performance Documentary label to discuss new forms of documentary experimenting with live theater practices. Their styles are also entirely plausible for a live broadcast style of liveness – indeed, I'll examine some similarities between the projects in this chapter and those in the Live Subject Documentary category. I offer this as a reminder about the trickiness of the live concept, and to emphasize that there are shared characteristics to these works across media-specific lines. I've merely chosen to examine liveness in particular media guises as one way to structure this work, because I hope to articulate some particular affordances of each live form for documentary. With that in mind, therefore, I move to a closer look at the particular affordances and insights on offer in documentary pieces engaging with the liveness of the theater.

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[14] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 45.

The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller
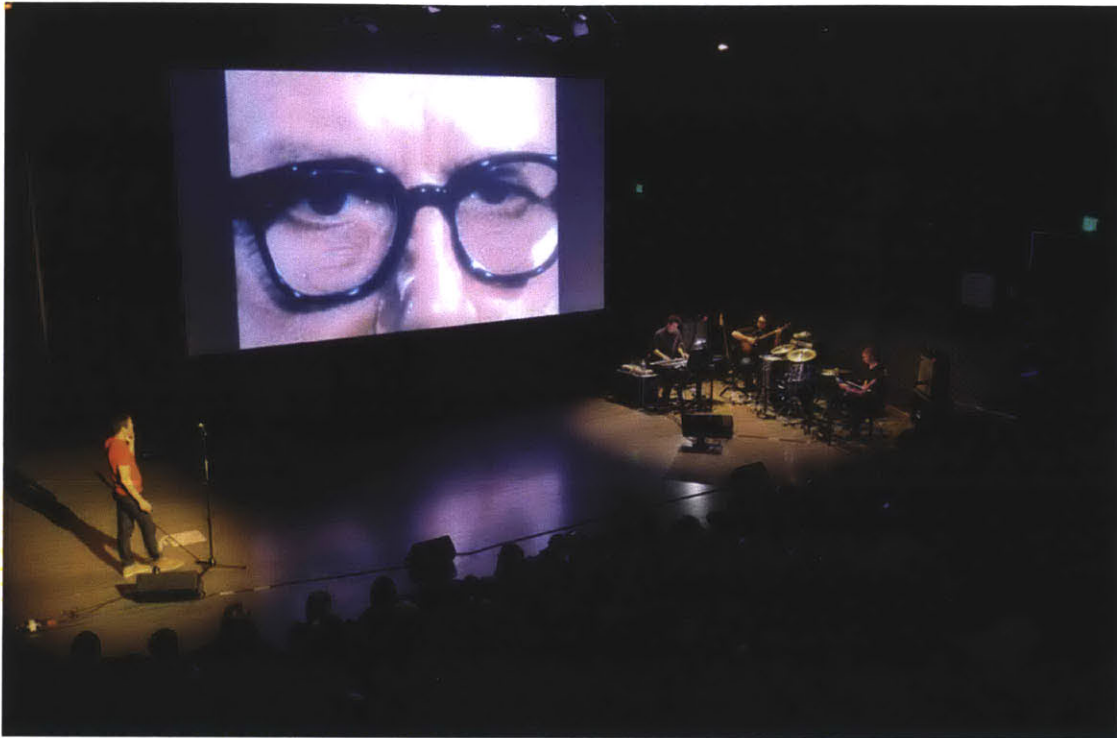
Figure 4: Performance of *Lovesong* at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, October 2012.

Sam Green premiered his second "Live Documentary" project, *The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller*, in 2012 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art[15]. The eponymous subject of the documentary is eccentric engineer and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller. The utopian optimism Fuller displayed in his life and his innovative projects makes *Lovesong* similar in tone to Green's first foray into his live documentary format, created roughly two years before. That project, *Utopia in Four Movements* (2010), was conceived as a documentary film – but accidentally became a live documentary work. Green had been working as a documentary filmmaker for most of his career. He was nominated for an Oscar in 2002 for his film *The Weather Underground*. But the story he

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[15] The San Francisco MoMA commissioned the piece as a part of an exhibit demonstrating Fuller's influence on the Bay Area.

had in mind for *Utopia in Four Movements* was very complex, tackling multiple

storylines about different utopian projects spanning the globe and jumping back and forth

in different periods of history. Green was soon struggling to edit a film that felt

compelling and cohesive. That's when an acquaintance suggested that Green present the

film material to an audience in its unfinished form – what Green described as "sort of a

live rough cut." It was in this presentation that Green stumbled on the formula he would

refine into his live documentary practice. In this thesis, I chose to examine *Lovesong* as

the first of Green's live documentaries conceived from the beginning as a live

documentary piece.[16]

Green has performed *Lovesong* in theaters, museums, art centers, and university

cinemas, but the space is always roughly the same – a standard theater or cinema set up,

with audience seating, stage, and a large screen for image projection hung in the center as

the stage's backdrop. At stage right is a microphone. This is where Green stands during

the performance, to provide his live narration. Nearby, on a stand, he places a laptop

which holds all of the recorded materials for the piece. Green cues film clips and images

from the laptop in pre-arranged order to drive the show forward. At stage left, the

accompanying band (noted independent band Yo La Tengo) performs the documentary's

original score during each performance.

The show begins with a quick introduction from Green, addressing the audience

from stage via the microphone. The house lights are dimmed but a spotlight remains on

the microphone. Green uses the shadow and spotlight to become present or absent from

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[16] During the research phase of this thesis, Green had not yet completed his third live
documentary, *The Measure of All Things,* which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival
in January, 2014.

the audience's focus throughout the piece – stepping up to the lighted microphone when giving narration, and back into the shadows when he's not speaking. In these moments, Green gazes up at the screen, another spectator in the dark. While much of the recorded material is from Fuller's own massive personal archive, and includes film clips of Fuller speaking about various subjects, many of the images Green includes in the piece are silent, at times landscapes introducing another relevant location, at others visual meditations on Fuller's various inventions and designs. In moments when neither Green nor the filmed material is providing dialogue, Yo La Tengo becomes the central auditory feature, transitioning into louder or more attention-grabbing bits of the score. Most of the content is pre-planned, but Green responds to impromptu additions from the audience, for instance when someone applauds a particular idea or shouts out to recognize a certain place shown on screen. The piece wends its way through Green's take on Fuller's life and career, and his passion as an inventor. Finally, Green concludes his narration, and opens things up to the final segment of the live documentary, a question-and-answer dialogue with the audience. Green insists that this Q&A is very much a part of the documentary itself, not ancillary. His narration or presentation simply becomes steered by whatever audience members ask about.

A Documentary Disappearing Act

Green spoke about the control of viewer experience that theater affords. By insisting that his Live Documentaries are only viewable as performance pieces, he requires that the audience see *Lovesong* in the way that he has designed it. He sees this as a corrective to the myriad ways viewers today can access recorded media: at home or on

the go with mobile devices, on YouTube, Facebook or other social media, via any number of paid distribution platforms or as a pirated digital copy, all susceptible to distractions from or interruptions of the viewer experience. Green spoke with me about his desire to create works that were impervious to this style of viewing:

> The form, in some ways is all just strategic. ... You go to church in a big overwhelming building because a long time ago people figured out that if you make a building that's big and imposing, and a person feels small, the message will resonate more. Theatrical experience is the same thing, it was designed a long time ago for maximum escape, maximum impact upon a person who's there. So that's what I love about it, it creates a more meaningful experience and I think a more lasting experience than other forms that we have today.

While he gestures towards "theatrical experience," Green's set up is actually more akin to the cinematic or movie theater experience specifically, given the prominence of the film screen. But the elements of live theater are still the crux of the project's form. In its connection to theater and cinema, the important affordance of live performance documentary here is control over the viewer experience.

Television theorist John Ellis has argued for a distinction between the cinematic gaze and the televisual glance, in which "the gaze implies a concentration of the spectator's activity into that of looking, the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking."[17] He suggests an inherently distinct mode of viewing cinema, and I don't fully subscribe to that argument. In part, I think the viewing

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[17] John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video*, 2 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992), 137.

circumstances of cinema could allocate a gaze-like experience to any other medium if

screened or presented in a theater. Moreover, the experience of 'television' today could

be as a home-theater experience of a single program episode that's nearly the length of a

standard film, has commercials removed by streaming service or TiVo, and otherwise

approximates a steady, uninterrupted, gaze-like experience. I think what Ellis's

distinction does touch on, therefore, is our attention to film versus television simply in the

different ways we usually encountered these forms.[18] As Green points out, one difference

is the dedicated space of the movie theater versus home viewing. Another is the time-

limited nature of a film, if we contrast it to the continuous flow of television[19]. The time-

limited nature of the theater, be it a trip to see a play, a concert or a film, is also contrary

to the on-demand nature of film and visual media on the web (except, of course, 'live'

web and television events) which Green gestures to. As Auslander notes, "Film is no

longer an unrepeatable experience confined to particular places and times ... Whereas

film was once experienced as evanescence, it is not experienced as repetition."[20] Green

utilizes some of the cultural trappings of live performance in theater spaces – limited

performances, a traveling show –to enforce a more limited access to the work.

Auslander refers to the 'evanescence' that was once part of the film viewing

experience when audiences accessed these works as more limited experiences in cinema

spaces. I argue that a new and similar concept in recent media analysis describes what

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[18] That is, as we usually encountered them in 1992, at the time of Ellis' argument, before
heavy Internet use, web distribution, and internet TV.
[19] Though flow is a famous argument about television, I merely want to suggest different
ways of thinking about viewing for a limited period of time. Of course time-limited
viewing can also happen in the context of TV, for instance if we simply frame the half
hour or hour episode as one, time-limited viewing experience.
[20] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Routledge, 2008),
46.

Green is striving to construct through Live Performance Documentary: 'ephemerality,' as described by media theorist Nathan Jurgenson. Jurgenson constructs his idea of ephemerality through a reading of the temporary photography service Snapchat. This mobile phone application lets users take photos and short videos and send them to contacts. However, unlike other popular photo-sharing applications like Instagram, which allow users to archive their photos and tag friends, Snapchat sends photos and videos and then *deletes* them, seconds after they are viewed by the sender's contact. Snapchat photos and videos, called "Snaps," are erased from the sender and receiver's phones, and from Snapchat's own servers. They simply vanish from view.

Jurgenson attributes the popularity of Snapchat to its offer of a respite from the glut of image and information that exists in perpetuity online. He writes:

> The likely fate of the vast majority of images today is to be briefly
>
> consumed and quickly forgotten. As well as offering relief from a
>
> deepening documentary vision, the temporary photograph also responds to
>
> this photographic abundance, which has deflated the value of images. As
>
> making more and more photos becomes easier, each individual shot means
>
> less and less. Snapchat is an attempt at re-inflation.[21]

As Snapchat is to photography, I argue that live theater documentary can be to documentary film – and indeed, to a whole documentary field leaning on associations of the record. "Temporary photography" and "live documentary" both speak to tensions between what we think of as fixed and what we understand to be fleeting. There's an attraction in this kind of contrast. But what is ephemerality's value, precisely? I argue it

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[21] Jurgenson, "Pics and It Didn't Happen."

captures the notion of fuller viewer attention described in Green's quote about theatrical viewing and the notion embedded in Ellis' 'cinematic gaze' proposal. Jurgenson also frames ephemerality as a strategy to accomplish this. He argues that, "given only a peak, we look hard."

If one accepts Jurgenson's vision of the value of ephemerality for an imagined audience fatigued by a glut of on-demand media, live documentary plays to this cultural interest. Jurgenson argues that Snapchat offers an alternative to a "deepening documentary vision," but I suggest that by embracing ephemerality, documentary *itself* reinflates its value as something of interest – a live performance documentary occurs in the here and now, requiring that it be viewed in the moment, bobbing up above the rest of the works in the archive of today's 'deepening documentary vision.' A live performance of any media work would generate this kind of ephemerality through theatrical liveness, but I find it particularly interesting for documentary because it's a fairly strong disruption of any associations of 'the document' and of documentary as film I outlined in the previous chapter. Theater is a particularly apt arena in which to construct the notion of a documentary work that disappears. Ephemerality is bound up with traditional arguments in performance scholarship of the underlying rationale and value of theater. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan writes eloquently on the ontology of performance as that which "becomes itself through disappearance."[22] By bringing documentary into this ontological stance, and emphasizing the ephemeral quality of his pieces, Green uses theater and performance to generate for documentary presentation or monstration something akin to the Snapchat experience.

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[22] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

One thing to keep in mind is that, like 'liveness,' ephemerality is a constructed rather than essential characteristic – in the case of Snapchat, and *The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller*. Snapchat users lose access to "snaps" in a set amount of time built into the application's design. Despite the company's reliance on this feature as the app's selling point, media researchers soon realized that the digital files didn't just vanish – forensic software could retrieve lingering files on some phones, Snapchat's own servers stored the files for much longer periods, and in some cases the company even handed over user photos to government officials.[23] The 'ephemerality' only described one level of user access. In Green's case, the theatrical element does make total recovery of any performance an apparent impossibility, as Phelan's quote on theater's disappearance emphasizes. But the filmic materials remain on Green's hard drive. His narration could be recovered, and re-presented by someone else. In fact, Green *could* release a standard documentary of the project if he so chose – it's not theater, but it would certainly seem to deflate the allure of the live performance as the *only* way to access the story. Green in this sense is performing the ephemerality of his project, just as Snapchat's ephemerality is performed. But for Green, the liveness of theater is what he uses to construct *Lovesong's* status as ephemeral.

Green's Live Documentary projects insist on this style of ephemerality. In doing so, I argue that Green's work in particular prioritizes the documentary as the unfolding of a process, a configuration of documentary I alluded to earlier – one that emphasizes its existence as *documenting* rather than document. Green may use recorded materials, but

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[23] "Snapchat's Expired Snaps Are Not Deleted, Just Hidden," *The Guardian*, sec. Media Network - partner zone Infosecurity, accessed August 7, 2014; Ryan Gallagher, "Watch Your Naked Selfies—Snapchat Can Turn Photos Over to Government," *Slate*, October 15, 2013.

he purposely constructs a documentary that isn't also a document. He emphasizes the primacy of the unfolding experience to his live documentary work by shifting the narration and visual content slightly from performance to performance. In a Boston performance, for example, he added a tangential discussion of Fuller's birth in nearby Brookline, Massachusetts, and showed photographs of Fuller's gravestone in the local Mount Auburn Cemetery.[24]. Fuller's daughter attended a performance in New York, she took part in the Q&A. Green said, "That was the piece, the piece was our work and *her*, on that night." Not only does he highlight that the piece is the *process* of the performance, he heightens the rhetoric of ephemerality, pointing out that each performance of *Lovesong* is unique and can't be reproduced.

Tailoring his narration to his audience recalls the work of the film exhibitors. Philip Rosen in "Document and Documentary" also mentions film exhibitors and notes that they prepared narration and interpretation for their particular audience, making the experience of a film in one theater different from its experience with another exhibitor in another location. For Rosen, this bucks the goal of documentary film to present a "centralizing" narrative in any given documentary, one that can be shared and produce a common history. Through this lens, the decentralizing of the narrative is another way Green's live documentary as ephemeral, experiential *documenting* pushes his work away from Rosen's focus on the 'document' in documentary.

It's interesting to think of Green's form of liveness as a way to push against any notion of documentary as a centralizing discourse, because other forms of liveness have been described as influences *toward* centralization. Nick Couldry notes that a major

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[24] http://dev.buckminsterfullerfilm.com/2012/11/266/

argument of how liveness is constructed on television claims "we gain access through liveness to something of broader, because 'central', significance, which is worth accessing now, not later."[25] Juxtaposing these ideas reveals again how constructed concepts of liveness are, in this case, relying on ideas about the role of network live broadcasts rather than essential characteristics of liveness. I will discuss in the next chapter the ways that other regimes of televisual liveness buck any 'centralizing' function that might be implied by the use of live broadcasting. Now, I move to a second example of Live Performance Documentary that reveals further affordances of live theater for emerging forms of documentary.

Choose Your Own Documentary

Choose Your Own Documentary is "a live choose your own adventure interactive documentary" created by writer and performer Nathan Penlington and first performed in 2014.[26] The piece tells the story of Penlington's personal fascination with Choose Your Own Adventure books, popular with children in the 1980s and 1990s, which allow users to make decisions posed by the text by jumping to different pages to follow the story. When Penlington purchased a set of 160 Choose Your Own Adventure books on eBay, he discovered a page from a teenage boy's diary tucked inside one of the books. The diary recounted a dramatic story of heartbreak and a run-away plan, and bore the name Terrence Prendergast. Penlington decided to track down the author in an attempt to reunite him with his book and his diary page, and to document the experience.

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[25] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone."

[26] "Choose Your Own Documentary," http://www.cyod.co.uk

Penlington hired three other documentary film and television professionals to film his search for Prendergast, all the while envisioning the end product: a documentary that was interactive in the style of a Choose Your Own Adventure book, in which audiences could decide how the documentary story should unfold. Because Penlington comes from the performance world, he decided to make the entire thing a theater-based, *live* interactive documentary.

Upon arrival at the theater, each audience member of Choose Your Own Documentary is handed a remote control. As people go to their seats, music plays softly, creating a space for them to settle in and encouraging conversation about their expectations for a theater performance that involves a personal remote. Penlington said, "there's always an expectation of what it might be."[27]

The show begins with an overview, which Penlington gives from onstage, of the Choose Your Own Adventure book series and its relationship to the form of the current performance. Penlington asks the audience about their familiarity with these books. The first 'choice' made by the audience doesn't effect the unfolding of the narrative the way subsequent choices will. Penlington describes his five "best and worst ways to die in a Choose Your Own Adventure book," and asks the audience to vote for their favorites. The purpose of this question is to orient the audience to the experience of using their buzzers to vote on a choice, seeing the results on the screen, and watching and listening to Penlington's story about what was chosen.

Then the main narrative begins, in which Penlington guides the audiences through moments of voting for what they'd like to see next or which option they'd like to explore.

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[27] From a research interview with Nathan Penlington, May 27, 2014.

Like Green's performance, Penlington stands on-stage to give a live narration throughout the show, which adds to and explains video and image content that is shown on a large screen. That content, and Penlington's attendant narration about it, is dependent on audience choices. The screens also display an image to mark moments when the audience votes, and then display the audience percentages for each voting session in real-time.

Rethinking Interactivity

Choose Your Own Documentary adds a new element to the live performance documentary, using an interactive media object at its center. *The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller,* by contrast, models its recorded documentary content on a linear film experience. Green plays with audience involvement in the Q&A. *Choose Your Own Documentary* brings interaction between viewer and the media element into the theater space.

The theatrical wrapper of *Choose Your Own Documentary,* in terms of environment and structure, is quite similar to *Lovesong.* In addition to sharing the similar theater layout, they share the similar theater run time. A predetermined time limitation is a part of Jurgenson's ephemerality, the countdown of the Snapchat image. Jurgenson argues it can make viewers "look hard." With a photograph that appears for only a few moments, Jurgenson argues that ephemerality enforces viewer desire to take an image in for the full length that it endures. *Choose Your Own Documentary* demonstrates that the temporal boundary, generated also through in theater, has particular affordances for interactive documentary.

Penlington realized during the design of his project that the interactivity would be

constrained by a common need or requirement of many theaters – predictable

performance run times. Whereas interactive pieces on the web are on-demand and could

be explored by different viewers for wildly different lengths of time, *Choose Your Own*

Documentary had to generate a branching narrative that fit a roughly similar run time for

every iteration. While in one sense it was a constraint, it freed his project from the

struggles of some web-based producers who find that open-ended access to an interactive

piece means shorter viewer engagement times. Many projects that feature hours of

content have user view times of only a few minutes. This seems to be in part related to a

lack of audience expectations over the time they *should* explore an online interactive

piece. The much-lauded interactive documentary *Bear71* tackled this problem by

featuring a timer that counted down twenty-minutes from the moment the visitor entered

the site, generating a concluding segment that brought the experience to a close at the

twenty minute mark.[28] This shaped viewer expectations, and generated longer site visits

for the project. As one reviewer from Australian broadcast network SBS put it:

> Where a lot of webdocs dump a range of content onto an interface and
>
> hope the viewer will spend more than five minutes poking around, Bear 71
>
> guides the journey with an overarching narrative. Right up front, there's a
>
> notice informing the viewer that the documentary will take twenty
>
> minutes.[29]

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[28] Jurgenson points out that Snapchat images display a countdown before the image is deleted.

[29] Julia Scott-Stevenson, "A Slick and Grizzly Webdoc," 2012, http://www.sbs.com.au/blog/125677/t/A-slick-and-grizzly-webdoc.

Bringing interactive documentary work into the live theater offers an alternative strategy for indicating to the viewer that there is a pre-designed time to engage the interactive project. Even if they don't know precisely how long the performance will be, audiences trust there *is* a pre-determined duration.

Lev Manovich has theorized that new media introduces the paradigm of the database, rather than the narrative, as its basic structure.[30] He argues that "many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have beginning or end."[31] The interactive documentary community struggles with balancing the freedoms of this new form with the desire for users to engage with their documentary content meaningfully – in more than a few seconds. The simple act of telling users there is an end point seems to help that user experience. *Choose Your Own Documentary* demonstrates that live performance entails a time frame for viewers – at some point, they'll be allowed to leave the theater. Penlington shaped his piece into something with a clear beginning *and* end, ensuring that his audiences always arrive at a concluding branch of the interactive documentary that wraps up the story in one way or another. For Penlington, limiting viewers to one 'play through' of the interactive piece found him with repeat audience members, back for second performances to see another version of the story.

Of course, *Choose Your Own Documentary* doesn't only generate a narrative in Manovich's sense as something finite. Penlington's on-stage narration shapes the story in the same way Green's does. In both projects, the audience participates – Green highlights the audience's role in creating the particular performance with their Q&A input. But in

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[30] I'll discuss Manovich, the 'database' media object, and database documentary extensively in the investigation of computer-native live documentary in Chapter 4.
[31] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 194.

this case, the audience also takes part in driving the film component of the project along. They are making choices that create the unfolding story. I've already argued that Sam Green acts as narrator not only through his verbal narration but in Gaudreault's sense of the filmic narrator, because he enacts the film's editing on the fly. In *Choose Your Own Documentary*, the audience takes on that role. Their votes collectively act as 'edits' that drive the narrative forward.[32]

I've argued that placing *Choose Your Own Documentary* in the setting of a live theater performance creates boundaries around the interactive experiences that offer interesting affordances, structuring audience expectations or enforcing a more narrative experience of interaction. Setting interactivity in a live performance also complicates notions of interactivity. Communications scholar Jennifer Stromer-Galley argues that "the concept of 'interactivity' is confusing because it refers equally to different phenomena."[33] She posits that those different phenomena can be summed up in two broad categories: interactivity-as-product and interactivity-as-process. Interactivity-as-product refers to the interaction between a human and a machine, in which the product encompasses the machine and particularly its interface design. It's the subject of the Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research field. But there is also, she stresses, interactivity-as-process. This second type of interaction encompasses human-to-human interaction, any communicative process, face-to-face or mediated. The field of Computer

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[32] This use of an interactive interface in a live setting is *very* similar to the Korsakow Shows by Florian Thalhofer I discussed in the introduction. While I would be tempted to label his "live documentary," and see a great deal of value in the Korsakow Shows, Florian's own philosophy of documentary as a recorded media object left for the future pushes out a place for liveness in how he understands his work.

[33] Jennifer Stromer-Galley, "Interactivity-as-Product and Interactivity-as-Process," *The Information Society* 20, no. 5 (November 1, 2004): 391–94, 391.

Mediated Communications (CMC) represents one area of technologically mediated communications, but even the brief in-person interactions between two people in a theater fit into the space of interactivity-as-process.

Penlington uses the spatial co-presence of his audience to emphasize this second type of interactivity. At every moment of voting in *Choose Your Own Documentary*, he pauses his own narration for several seconds. He also raises the house lights slightly "so people can see each other and talk to each other." As a "live interactive documentary," the theatrical liveness of *Choose Your Own Documentary* is based on interactivity-as-process *just* as much as interactivity-as-product. Live theater audiences are a site for interactivity, which I think is overlooked by both makers and scholars of interactive documentary. Performance scholars both raise and critique the notion that theater generates a spontaneous 'community' by gathering an audience.[34] Green gestured to this sense of community in his Live Documentary work. Penlington calls his project a "live interactive documentary," but the interactivity refers mostly to the interactivity-as-product in the piece. The simple act of reframing our notions of interactivity to encompass interactivity-as-process aligns Live Performance Documentary with the interactive documentary movement, making the live theater audience a valuable site of interactivity. There doesn't even have to be a high-tech element – even the Q&A segment of Green's Live Documentary projects increases interactivity between Green and his audience, and between audience members. I'm not advocating for Green to officially re-label his project an interactive piece – but it wouldn't hurt, nor would it be unwarranted.

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[34] Auslander, *Liveness,* 57; Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270-272.

Stromer-Galley provides a reframing of our standard notions of interactivity and pushes us to realize that interpersonal interaction is just as relevant as HCI.

Stromer-Galley's emphasis on interpersonal interactivity as *process* adds to the view of Live Performance Documentary itself is a process. I've argued for that process view by pushing to think of documentary from the framing of that which *documents*, rather than that which is simply a document. Sam Green and Nathan Penlington are both engaged in a documenting process in their performance for the audience, and the theater setting creates a site for audiences to take part in that process themselves. Creators of Live Performance Documentary projects can choose to build out or downplay such face-to-face interactions with their audiences to whatever degree suits their work. What I want to emphasize is that the necessary presence of an audience for Live Performance Documentary implies the opportunity for such interaction, positioning this form of live documentary as a natural fit within the interactive documentary field.

Conclusion

I have introduced two concepts, ephemerality and an expanded notion of interactivity, that together help to draw attention to key affordances of the Live Performance Documentary. In fact, they will be relevant to Live Documentary forms on the whole. But theater's status as that which 'becomes itself through disappearance' seems to be the live medium through which documentary can most radically claim the status of a process, not a product.

I've also framed the Live Performance Documentary as a form that fits into a fairly traditional theater setting: seats, stage, and screen. The centrality of the recorded

images on screen in each of these pieces is a reminder of the influence of cinematic practices as well – and mining the history of cinema, we find that Green and Penlington's role as exhibitors comes straight out of early documentary (and film exhibition) practice. *Lovesong* and *Choose Your Own Documentary* are almost prototypical practices if we view them through the lens of the theatrical medium. I'd like to note that live performances can happen in settings far more experimental than the ones described here. Any space can be the site of a live performance.

Since that's true, I'd like to consider the Live Performance Documentary in relation to a particular category of Living Documentary described by Sandra Gaudenzi. Gaudenzi uses the term "Experiential Documentary" for an emergent type of interactive documentary that embeds a documentary experience, usually relying on mobile technologies or installations, in a space that a "user" explores. On the one hand, Gaudenzi is looking at works far more open-ended and free form than the Live Performance Documentaries I've described. She isn't describing a documentary enacted by a performer on stage, either, rather the interaction is between the user and various new technologies. Her preamble to the Experiential Documentary reads:

> When the computer becomes portable and linked to a wireless network,
>
> when mobile phones allow access and creation of content from anywhere,
>
> when a Global Positioning System (GPS) can roughly calculate the
>
> position of a digital device in physical space… then locative media
>
> emerges as a technology that uses digital devices in physical space.[35]

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[35] Sandra Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-Creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary" (Goldsmiths, 2013), 62.

On the other hand, Gaudenzi sums up experiential documentaries by claiming that their "raison d'être is to position the user/participant in a physical space and to use such space as an integral part of the documentary."[36] I think both Green and Penlington might find this an apt description of their work. The liveness of the theater is both co-temporal *and* co-spatial. Bringing people together in-situ perhaps the most important defining quality of these works, and it's certainly a key element of theatrical liveness as distinct from mediated liveness. I've looked at Live Performance Documentary through a historical lens, focused on theatrical practices. However, I've also emphasizes that the characteristics of theater that push us to consider documentary as an active unfolding process. Another way to articulate this is to say they are *experiences*. Live Performance Documentary shares the primacy of the location with Gaudenzi's Experiential Documentary concept. I think, however, that *all* types of live documentary described by this thesis could fall under the notion of 'documentary as experience.' In the next chapter, I will turn to a discussion of live documentary projects using live video online to generate a whole other range of possible documentary experiences. These projects make the viewer co-present not just with other viewers and presenters of the documentary, but with the *subject* on the screen. The Live Subject Documentary is a category using interactivity-as-process to create incredibly exciting new possibilities for documentary.

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[36] Ibid., 125.

CHAPTER 4: LIVE SUBJECT DOCUMENTARY

In the previous chapter, I examined a category of work I term Live Performance

Documentary. I discussed two emergent projects in this proposed form, and recounted the

historical lineage of film exhibition practices that lend some heft to the category. I also

introduced two concepts key to the analysis of live documentary: ephemerality and

interactivity. In thinking through all possible constructs of 'interactivity' in a theater

space, Jennifer Stromer-Galley's distinction between interactivity-as-product and

interactivity-as-process is extremely useful. Theater audience members of any type of

performance can interact with one another, and from there various levels of this

interpersonal interactivity-as-process can be designed as part of the experience (for

instance, with the cues for audience interaction Nathan Penlington builds into

performances of *Choose Your Own Documentary*.)

This chapter tackles live documentary projects that use live video online. Live

video or image streams online using webcams have been around since the 1990s. Live

surveillance cameras and monitors are a fairly common feature of everyday live. This

kind of live video might be thought of as television in its purest form, an uninterrupted

flow of live imagery. However, what I'm focused on here is the use of a new generation

of live video technologies often used for communication – Skype, Google Hangout,

Facetime. These are computer-mediated communication applications, and they generate a

particular mediated form interactivity-as-process. I use the term Live *Subject*

Documentary to emphasize that the particular construction liveness I'm looking at here

enables interaction directly between a documentary viewer and a subject. That

interactivity can come in many forms, and I'll again look at two recent projects that demonstrate the potentials of this emergent live documentary form. One is an initiative, *CoPresence4Good*. The other is web-based "live documentary" project *My Neck of the Woods*, which was 'live' online for two days in September 2013. Both projects place the subject of the documentary within a live video feed accessible to an audience, and both enable their audience members to be actors or interlocutors and not just viewers within the context of the documentary piece.

Live Subject Documentary projects, those described here and projects in this style, are made possible in large part by the web, through current bandwidth standards that make live video a viable feature on the web, through its many-to-many distribution arrangement, and through the availability for most anyone with a certain level of resources to create a web-based project. However, as suggested above, the lineage of these projects originates in television. In the next section, I'll inscribe a particular regime of televisual liveness that is present in the Live Subject Documentary, providing a very particular medium-specific framing for this style of live documentary practice.

A Hidden History of Interactive Television

Live-streaming video is the web's answer to television's liveness[1]. Many major live-streaming sites, which aggregate thousands of live streams to be browsed and

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[1] Of course, the meaning of television liveness, and the style of television itself, shifts in different eras. Live-streaming video online creates the simultaneity that William Uricchio points out as "one of the long anticipated but ultimately suppressed or bypassed defining characteristics of a medium of "far seeing" (233). It's short-lived hey day, discussed in Chapter 2, was during the 1950s broadcast era when live programming dominated the air. Not only did television move away from this, Uricchio describes how it became increasingly on-demand, made possible by viewer-control technologies from the remote

viewed, highlight their relationship to television by using a ".tv" suffix instead of ".com," for instance Justin.tv and Twitch.tv.[2] Live-streaming sites that host many streams often label their streams "channels." While live-streaming video offers particular affordances distinct to the web, I argue that its televisual heritage offers a historical foundation useful in framing live subject documentary.

Televisual liveness is a subject that has been thoroughly explored by television scholars since the early days of the medium. These conversations have also branched out to compare and contrast televisual & web liveness.[3] The early days of television saw programs that didn't just use live broadcast, but called attention to it in a sort of hypermediated fashion, for example the first episode of *See It Now* discussed in Chapter 1. Early dramatic television shows referred to live theater in their design, for instance by building proscenium-style sets.[4] But not all television content was live, and as the medium developed networks increasingly broadcast pre-recorded materials.[5]

control to the TiVO and increasingly streaming internet channels and services (237-250). In this sense, a live video stream recreates the televisual liveness of the broadcast era, but also sits in an on-demand environment. Many video streams are available to viewers more at their whim than at the whim of a broadcasting network. This on-demand environment is also the environment of television today.

[2] The .tv suffix is the Internet domain specific to the islands of Tuvalu, one of many Internet country codes reserved for websites particular to that country. The .tv suffix is managed by dot.TV, an American company that pays a percentage of domain fees to Tuvalu. Dot.TV pushes the association between .tv sites and video content both live and recorded, urging buyers to "Create your own channel with .tv"

[3] See John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, (London ; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000); Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches - an Anthology*, vol. 2 (University Publications of America, 1983), 12–22; Jerome Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," *Media, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2000): 531–56.

[4] Auslander, *Liveness*, 20.

[5] John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), 27.

Scholars argue that as it developed, television's liveness became less about the fact of a truly live broadcast and more about a "mode of televisual address [that] pertains even to the various uses of prerecorded material."[6] Television theorist Jane Feuer characterizes this as an "ideology of liveness" which became the true defining characteristic of the televisual.[7] J.T. Caldwell makes a stronger claim, stating outright that any attempt to use liveness as an essential characteristic of television is mistaken, a red herring that also distracts from other important dimensions of televisual styles. He argues, "Television has always boasted liveness as its claim to fame and mark of distinction, even though the programming that floods from its channels seldom supports this air of distinction and pretense of liveness."[8]

Whether or not 'liveness' describes the ideology of television, it's true that many pre-recorded materials use stylistic or aesthetic features that seem to suggest a live broadcast even though that's not the case. One image fraught with this live-mimicking history is the "talking head" image. Jerome Bourdon argues that the talking head style in documentary film is an emulation of the live direct address of a TV news anchor. He cites John Corner's assessment that by the 1990s documentary produced for television was mostly a form of "expanded reportage" spinning out from televised news, rather than the "cinematic essay" it had been before.[9] Bourdon argues that the 'direct address' style of the talking head is the most frequently occurring sign that documentary had "submitted to

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[6] Mark Williams, "History in a Flash: Notes on the Myth of TV Liveness," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, 1999, 293; see also Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise."
[7] Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," 21.
[8] Caldwell, *Televisuality*, 31.
[9] John Corner, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester University Press, 1996), cited in Jerome Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise".

the pressure of liveness."[10] He then posits:

> The viewer probably never assumes that to be live. And yet, the 'here and
>
> now' of the mediator's living gaze is here, an indelible indicator of
>
> 'presentness'.[11]

But as live (interactive) video materializes as a viable option for web-based documentary production, it can reanimate this image. Live video restores a pre-broadcast era regime of televisual liveness, a vision of television and liveness that arose in the cultural imaginary even before television's invention. As I noted above, this is the regime of televisual liveness I will take up to examine the Live Subject Documentary.

In the 1870s and 1880s, television hadn't taken physical form, but it was alive in the cultural imaginary. William Uricchio examines such 19th-century predictions of television technology, arguing that "the televisual, as a technological construction, was born with the invention of the telephone in 1876."[12] He notes that the "wedding of telephone and photography and the consequent full-blown descriptions of live 'television' transmissions took many forms."[13] For instance, he highlights a cartoon in an 1879 volume of *Punch* magazine depicting parents, seated in their London living room, speaking through telephone receivers with their daughter in Ceylon who also appears on

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[10] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise,"
540-541
[11] Ibid., 545.
[12] William Uricchio, "Storage, Simultaneity, and the Media Technologies of Modernity,"
Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital, 2004,
123–38, 129.
[13] Ibid., 129.

a screen on the wall.[14] Other popular depictions showed fantastic machines cobbled together from bits of contemporary devices like the phonograph, telephone and image projection. While these images certainly anticipate the television, they are even more akin to the today's commonly available live video telephony services like Skype and Google Hangout. Television, as Uricchio points out, was conceptually related to the telephone, a device for live, real-time verbal interaction.

Figure 5: An image from *Punch* magazine depicting an imagined televisual communications device, Punch 75, 9 December 1878.

The story of how television stabilized as a one-to-many broadcast tool rather than an image-based telephony system is one of technological capacity, infrastructure,

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[14] "Edison's Telephonoscope (Transmits Light As Well As Sound)" (caption). From the Almanac for 1879, Punch 75, 9 December 1878. Cited in Uricchio, 2004.

industry and politics. In the late 19th century, successful experiments in electronic image

transmission were starting to appear.[15] By the 1950s, the television was not only

available in a recognizable form, it had become a fixture of American living rooms.[16] By

this time, television had settled into a unidirectional, one-to-many technology. But in the

interim, experiments with two-way television systems had appeared. In the 1930s, the

German Post Office installed a closed-circuit visual telephony system connecting Berlin

with major cities across Germany. Callers could summon the image as well as the voice

of their friend or family member and hold an audio-visual conversation. An article in

Nature noted that on the screens of the German system "the head and shoulder image of a

person is clearly produced," an instance of the "talking head" image of today's

documentaries, television broadcasts, and live video chat applications. [17] The German

system brought 19th century visions of televisual technologies to life, under a regime of

televisual liveness that was not just about the simultaneity of live broadcast, but of

interactivity made possible through its simultaneity. This particular regime of televisual

liveness, arising in the media expectations of the late 19th century and through the

experiments with television technology in the 1930s, describes television as a many-to-

many communications network, rather than a one-to-many broadcast system. The

flexibility of the Internet to accommodate a network enlivens this early regime of

televisual liveness once again, when paired with the increasing capability of the web to

host live video streams. Now, I'll turn to the two Live Subject Documentary projects that

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[15] Uricchio, "Storage, Simultaneity, and the Media Technologies of Modernity," 132.
[16] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[17] Nature 137, 391-391 (07 March 1936) |
http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v137/n3462/abs/137391a0.html

draw on the affordances of this very old regime of televisual liveness, rendered anew in the Internet environment.

CoPresence4Good

On March 3,1991, African American construction worker Rodney King was brutally beaten by a group of LA police officers. The event made national headlines and sent shockwaves through the US, not only because it was a story of deep and violent racism simmering unacknowledged in many parts of the country, but because it was seen by millions of people on television.

In 1992, musician Peter Gabriel and other activists founded WITNESS, an organization in large part inspired by the Rodney King incident, aimed at harnessing the power of video to end human rights abuse. The WITNESS model, called video advocacy or "Video for Change", relies on the value of documenting, on the emotional impact of a visual record of abuse to rouse people to take action. WITNESS defines video advocacy as "the process of integrating video into an advocacy effort to achieve heightened visibility or impact in your campaign". Video advocacy is bound up with social change or social issue documentaries, which are also increasingly at the center of larger roll-out campaigns or strategies. The question is, in a world increasingly understood as connected and immediate – in a 'real time' world – why wait for the production cycle of documentary? Why not just act now?

This is the question asked by Sam Gregory, an activist and media maker who served for ten years as WITNESS Program Director. In the fall of 2013, he launched an initiative he termed CoPresence4Good. The initiative collapses the temporal aspect of the

WITNESS model and aims to use live video and telepresence technologies not (only?) to document human rights abuses and prevent similar abuses in the future, but to *show* potential risk situations as they happen and prevent violence and abuse from occurring at all.

Gregory's vision of "real time witnessing" is not only logical, it could be life-saving.[18] The conceit of CoPresence4Good is that viewers will take immediate directed action toward the event on screen. Under the aegis of the CoPresence4Good initiative harnessing live video for next generation video advocacy, Gregory proposed a smart phone application he called the TogetherNow app, in the design stage at the time this thesis was written. The app presents viewers with activists' live streams, overlaid with graphical 'icons' that the viewer can push to find instructions on how to take action directly in aid of the protestors on the ground. A viewer might be asked to monitor the livestream for signs of police violence, and to record the IDs of the policemen involved. Or, they may be asked to contact a local official who holds power over an issue at the center of a rally or protest shown via live video. The TogetherNow design even planned functionality allowing viewers of social rights rallies and celebrations to trigger on-scene noisemakers to make their presence felt in solidarity, or "to warn those who might attempt violence that they are being watched."[19]

[18] The Institute for the Future: Sam Green. http://www.iftf.org/samgregory/
[19] Together Now: A Tool for Compassionate Activism Together
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmmxP-80yW8

Figure 6: The TogetherNow app design mockup.

A Cure for Under-Acting

The Copresence4Good initiative and the TogetherNow app are both couched in many senses of the televisual – while they align with the earlier, interactive sense, they emerge in a period already inscribed by characteristics of live broadcast television. For one thing, both the initiative and the app seem to lean on framings of live television as a universal eye on events around the world, bringing to viewers what is of critical societal importance. Philip Rosen demonstrates the inherent falsity of that view in his "Document and Documentary" discussed in Chapter 2, when he examined the "sub-textual drama of the [television] medium's struggle to depict itself" during the JFK assassination. The network anchors could report on the events live, but direct visual access to the scene in Dallas was curbed by technological capabilities.[20] But as technology's reach has

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[20] Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 61.

extended since that time, the illusion of television as an all-access view is extended, too. Mark Williams captures this sense of television as a worldwide monitor, writing "TV is 'present' in its seemingly pervasive spatiality, both in its assumed access to world events and in the saturated availability of TV sets and monitors in both domestic and non domestic spaces."[21] John Ellis characterizes our cultural mode of accessing the world as that of "witness," generated across a history from photography to film, radio to television.[22] But in Ellis's formulation, witnessing has a "specific nature which allows us to experience events at a distance, safe but also powerless, able to over-look but under-act."[23]

CoPresence4Good is an attempt to cure this under-acting. The project uses live video configured as a channel for interaction – although viewers aren't *visible* to the subjects, they're made 'copresent' not only as viewers of a live feed but through the actions they can take on the situation. The project falls within the 19th century vision of the televisual as a channel for interaction, not just a one-way transmission. This interactivity is at the heart of the rationale of CoPresence4Good, because it re-imagines action as an inherent part of the documentary experience. Part of this comes through the interaction-as-product of interface design: the buttons in the TogetherNow app give viewers a clear path to action. But the app also derives from the original WITNESS paradigm, in which a documentary video is shown as evidence of abuse, in the hopes that it will catalyze change. The TogetherNow app generates live video feeds for a community of viewers – these feeds are documentaries as process, a conduit through

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[21] Williams, "History in a Flash: Notes on the Myth of TV Liveness," 294.
[22] Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 17-25.
[23] Ibid., 15.

which viewers can take action in the moment as a part of the documentary projects. I suggest that each live video stream generated by the TogetherNow app is a Live Subject Documentary project, bringing the subject and a community of viewers into co-temporal interactivity. The configuration of a particular use or employment of the TogetherNow app dictates the degree of that interactivity – viewers are directed through the interface to take particular action, and subjects on the ground can address or signal to their live audience in various ways.

Gregory's description of CoPresence4Good as "next-gen witnessing" configures the CoPresence4Good as an improvement on the ways we use documentary media to drive social change. The interactivity embedded in the piece is held up as a new and more efficient mix of media and technology to address social ills. In many ways, I agree. The project pulls notions of interaction design into a documentary context, matches viewers with critical actions and connects them with distinct project goals. Liveness is key to the project's conceits: Gregory notes the power of video to generate empathy, and much of the power of the interaction between viewer and subject is that it happens co-temporally, in the moment.

But I also want to sound a small note of caution. While CoPresence4Good is a brilliant use of the affordances of a particular construction of televisual liveness for documentary, technologies are never a silver bullet. Broadcast technologies also had their utopian promoters, the same technologies that are now the site of Ellis' critique of 'over-looking' and 'under-acting.' When the CBS Radio Documentary Robert Heller CBS Radio Documentary Unit of the 1940s, said that the goal of the unit was "to stimulate

102

action by individuals and communities on higher and higher levels of citizenship."[24] Just like any radio or television documentary before them, CoPresence4Good projects and TogetherNow live feeds will need to be well-designed and well-organized in order to reach goals for social change.

While the mission of CoPresence4Good is to promote positive social change, it's important to remember too that these technologies are neutral until employed in certain ways. The goal of CoPresence4Good to analyze a social situation through video and to prevent an unwanted event before it happens can just as easily be understood as form of predictive policing. Any use of live video should always be considered in the vein of surveillance. The TogetherNow app creates the ability to call a dispersed group of viewers to attention. They can fix their gaze on any event in any place someone can take a mobile phone, and can be directed to take specific actions that affect that distant space. The positive and hopeful mission of CoPresence4Good can mask the need to take a critical view of any use of such technologies. With Sam Gregory is an experienced social justice advocate, and the projects he's creating are exciting steps forward for advocacy as well as *clear* demonstrations of what live video can offer to the documentary form. But the power of these tools makes it all the more reason to be critical of their uses and to consider who will employ them and how.

My Neck of the Woods

UK-based Blast Theory is an artist group working at the intersection of interactive

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[24] Saul Carson, "Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (October 1, 1949): 69–74, 70.

media and performance[25]. Their 2012 project *My Neck of the Woods* used live video streams hosted on the project website to create something that was "part documentary, part performance, part live-video experience online."[26]

My Neck of the Woods explored the lives of city teenagers through the stories of six young people from Manchester, UK. The project was live for a total of four hours, two hours per night on the 20th and 21st of September, 2013. Three of the teens were the subjects of the first night's session, and the three others were the subjects of the second night. During their live sessions, the teens were given video cameras connected to a live feed streaming into the *My Neck of the Woods* website. They walked their neighborhoods and told stories about their lives, from adolescent struggles to dreams for the future.

The audience for *My Neck of the Woods* participated by visiting the project website during those live sessions. Arriving at the site, viewers were given an introduction to each of the three teens currently live streaming, and selected whose live stream they wanted to view. Making that selection 'dropped' viewers into the active live stream. As well as watching the live video transmitted outwards by the chosen subject, audience members participated in shaping the content of that live stream by engaging in dialogue with the live subjects. The *My Neck of the Woods Interface* included a text box through which users could submit text messages to the livestreaming subjects, who received them on their mobile phones.

Blast Theory carefully crafted the *My Neck of the Woods* project to facilitate a certain style of dialogue. Conversations began with a question that the teenage subjects wanted to ask their audience. These questions were loaded into the website backend

[25] Blast Theory: Approach. http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/our-history-approach/
[26] http://myneckofthewoods.co.uk/#faqs

before the live sessions began. Some of the teens asked for advice, others about the personal experiences of viewers that were similar to their own. At any time during the live stream, a teenager could 'trigger' one of their questions. When triggered, the question appeared to the audience as an overlay of text on the live video feed in their web browser. Viewers could then send their text message responses to the live subject. If a particular response sparked the teen's interest, he or she could engage that viewer in a live, text-based web chat visible to anyone viewing the teen's livestream.
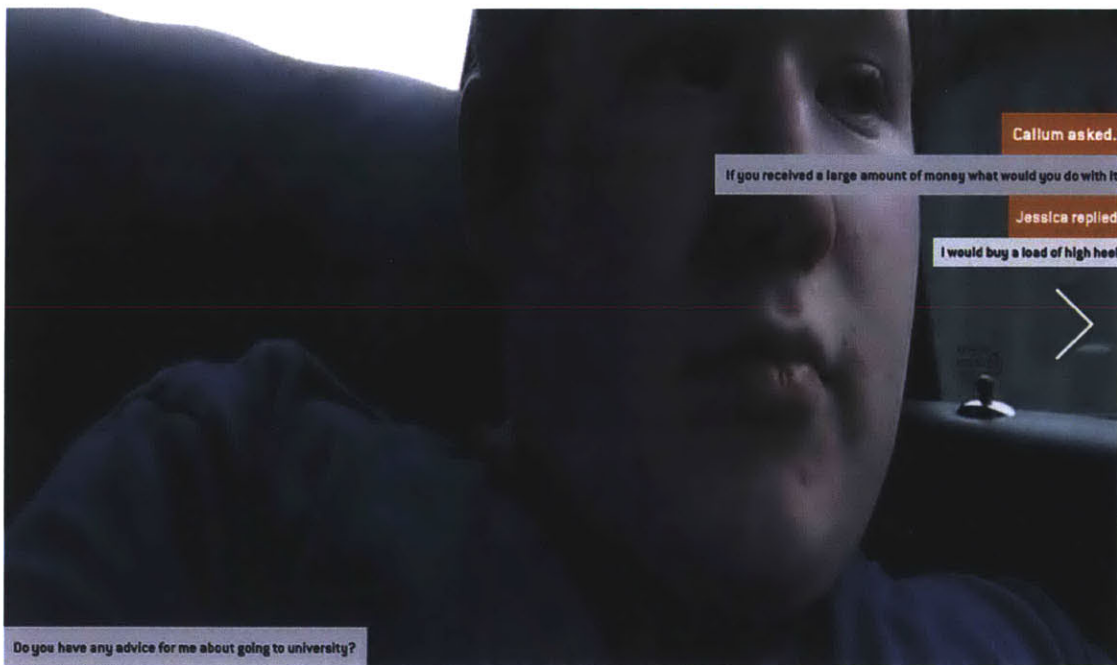

Figure 7: An image created by Blast Theory post-project to represent the text- and video-based dialogues that unfolded between viewer and subject during *My Neck of the Woods*.

Framing the Conversation

The heart of Live Subject Documentary is the interaction of subject and viewer, with the interaction at the center of the documentary experience. While

CoPresence4Good takes a social advocacy spin and encourages users to act on an environment in many ways, *My Neck of the Woods* is about the embrace of live video's affordances to create a set of conversations.

Above, I mentioned that in one sense the Live Subject Documentary is a full reanimation of the 'direct address' image found in documentary film and television. *My Neck of the Woods* is a perfect example – the teen subjects were taught to frame their faces in this common documentary style as a best practice for framing their live video feed during live streaming sessions. The image mimics a common documentary film trope as well as the typical position a Skype caller takes on screen during a video call (as a quick look at any Skype image or advertisement will demonstrate). I think this image speaks to something relevant to the Live Subject Documentary.

Documentary filmmaker Errol Morris is noted for the direct address style in which he frames his interviewees. Dissatisfied with the slight shift in eye contact an interviewee might make in looking from Morris and back to the camera lens, Morris created the Interrotron – a teleprompter that projects a live video image of Morris' face over the camera lens. Though Morris conducts the interview from further away, the interviewee speaks directly to his projected video image, and straight into the camera. The consistent "eye-contact" during the interview translates onto the film, generating a style of direct address that's often praised for creating a sense of intimacy between audiences and subjects.[27] I find the 'intimacy' of this aesthetic interesting because of the

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[27] Morris' production designer said of the Interrotron: "The beauty of this thing is that it allows people to do what they do best. Watch television." "Interrotron," http://www.errolmorris.com/content/eyecontact/interrotron.html; "Errol Morris's Secret Weapon for Unsettling Interviews: The Interrotron," *Co.Design*, http://www.fastcodesign.com/1663105/errol-morriss-secret-weapon-for-unsettling-

associations of intimacy also found in our concepts of live moving image communication. From 19th century fantasies of televisual communications to Skype ad campaigns and John Clang's *Being There* family portraits, these technologies are often framed as domestic, intimate and emotive. It may seem like a minor point, but I bring it up here to highlight how well Blast Theory matches the subject matter of their Live Subject Documentary with the affordances of the media they are working with.

My Neck of the Woods' treatment of everyday teenagers' stories fits well with the hand-held direct address through which they share those stories with viewers. In this sense, its reminiscent of another use of 'direct address' on television, the reality show "confessional" reserved for moments in which subjects reveal something about themselves.[28] There was no mechanism to edit the teen's live streams once the sessions began, so while the teens received some tips from Blast Theory on how to be engaging storytellers, for the most part they were unstructured and non-narrativized. The stories were simple – first loves, prepping for college. The interactivity of the piece was a strategy to keep viewers engaged. As the subjects told their stories, they asked viewers to share similar experiences from their lives. *My Neck of the Woods* draws on the 'direct address' aesthetic's power to suggest a conversation, a shared moment – in this case, it truly is. That visual style is reanimated to create a documentary in the 19th century sense of televisual liveness, a process of documentary communication. And the framing as documentary is important. After all, these weren't Skype calls with a family member or a

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interviews-the-interrotron; "Interrotron" from FLM Magazine, Winter 2004, http://www.errolmorris.com/content/eyecontact/interrotron.html.
[28] Michele White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no. 3 (August 1, 2006): 341–55, 347.

Google Hangout with friends. They were personal conversations between subjects and viewers who were strangers with no other reason to engage. The technology constructs the possibility for communication, but the documentary framing creates a space designed to frame a space for their conversation.

Figure 8: Production stills from *My Neck of the Woods*, showing the documentary subjects turning the camera lens on themselves to create a live direct address to their audience.

As I've discussed, in the Live Subject Documentary the interactivity between viewer and subject is fueled by a particular regime of televisual liveness, captured well by Bourdon's argument that televisual liveness hinges on the "the intervention of the televisual enunciator … in the live event, rather than the disappearance of the live event itself into the televisual representation."[29] In this case, *My Neck of the Woods* inserts itself, through a live 'intervention' into the space of the web. The Internet restores possibilities for interactivity and communication through live video. It's also a high-density network that can host unfathomable numbers of livestreams between particular parties at any time. A stream can be created by anyone with a webcam. This is the

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[29] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 184.

production environment of the Live Subject Documentary, and it's a far cry from live

broadcast television. Limited channels, professionalized equipment, powerful networks,

control and regulation meant live television was far from open access[30]. This had

ramifications for who the subjects of such live broadcasts might be. John Ellis traces

these dynamics through the lens of the 'direct address,' both on live or non-live

broadcasts. He writes, "direct address is recognized as a powerful effect of TV, one only

available to the "politically neutral" figure like the anchorman or woman, or by those

with ultimate power (i.e. heads of state). Otherwise direct address is denied to individuals

who appear on TV."[31] Ellis' remark isn't limited only to live television, but his

discussion of the dynamics of control on television gesture to another affordance of the

migration of live video online. Anyone, in theory, could create a livestream and mount a

Live Subject Documentary. This frees up the possibilities for who and what that the

subject can be. The teens of *My Neck of the Woods* weren't powerful or 'politically

neutral,' their stories were average rather than of central societal importance.

On the web, the Live Subject Documentary can employ televisual liveness outside

of the confines of the television production environment. This collides with another

construction of liveness put forward by Nick Couldry as *particular* to the web. Couldry

inscribes the category of online liveness as "social co-presence [possible] on a variety of

scales from very small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking

news..."[32] The possibility for innumerable co-present groups of various sizes to exist

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[30] Even something like Community Access Television would decrease the social barriers, but not the technological limitations of a single channel with limited time on air.
[31] Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 134.
[32] Nick Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," *The Communication Review* 7 (2004): 353–61, 357.

online at any time is again a part of the flexibility that enables Live Subject Documentary. *My Neck of the Woods* created one such co-present group at one scale, but this type of live documentary could engage groups of subjects and viewers of any size.

Michele White discusses the Internet's remediation of televisual liveness through various forms of direct address: websites that present an image or text to a user when they arrive, or use cookies to remember and greet users ("hello!" or "welcome back!").[33] She also notes the reappearance of the direct address aesthetic in online video, particularly in the live content created by 'livestreamers' who use the web and their webcam to broadcast shows about their lives.[34] The web's interactivity-as-product mimics a conversation, in a technique White sees as remediated from television's mimicry of human communication in 'direct address' that is only a pretense of communication. Live video is one means to create interpersonal interactivity-as-process in the online environment, and Live Subject Documentary is a form capable of crafting new contexts and creative treatments of the direct communication between viewer and subject.

Conclusion

Many people are familiar with the story of *The Arrival of the Train at the Station*, an early film by the Lumière Brothers. According to this "founding myth of cinema," audience members unfamiliar with the new medium of film saw the on-screen train barreling towards them and jumped out of their seats to avoid being crushed. Stephen Bottomore debunks this story as mostly exaggerated, but suggests it has remained

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[33] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 343-350.
[34] Ibid., 350.

110

popular because it's just a highly inflated version of many actual accounts from the 1890s. Reports that noted film audiences displaying nervousness, surprise, and a momentary struggle against their perceptual expectations of what they say on screen.[35] The story is a demonstration of the power of our expectations of media objects and how they shape our viewing experiences.

I'd like to offer a contemporary account that I came across in my research, which I like to think of as Live Subject Documentary's *Arrival of the Train at the Station* moment. The story comes from a screening of *The Lovesong of R. Buckminster Fuller*. During one performance, Green was performing his narration as usual, when the first filmed interview material of the piece came onto the screen. Green had filmed it himself, using the classic 'talking head' framing. When the footage appeared on screen, the audience started laughing. Green had no idea why. Then he realized – they thought it was live. "I didn't know that in some ways what I was saying and what he was saying looked weirdly in sync," he recalled.

More than just the coincidence of the timing, this reaction is made possible by a Skype-familiar audience, an audience who understands that a live video feed could easily be generated and projected into a theater. In an ambiguous situation like the performance of "Live Documentary," this classic documentary film aesthetic now reads to audiences as a form in which the subject might be speaking live – and in which the viewer might be able to speak back. Live video communication is becoming more and more a part of our daily lives and contexts. In my opinion, this can't help but alter our feelings toward static images framed in this way, our pique our curiosity about whether interaction is possible.

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[35] Stephen Bottomore, "The Panicking Audience?: Early Cinema and the 'Train Effect,'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 19, no. 2 (June 1999): 177–216.

At the very least, I think live video will be an attractive new tool for media producers of all types, including documentarians. I hope that CoPresence4Good and *My Neck of the Woods* will prove early experiments in an expanding field of Live Subject Documentary.

As with Live Performance, ephemerality is an inherent part of this live documentary practice. But the ephemerality of these live video projects is configured slightly differently. Since Live Performance Documentary is mediated, any such project could simply be recorded from the point of view of a viewer's screen. A particular use of the TogetherNow app could be recorded as it unfolds, and the recording turned into a video advocacy piece. Likewise, the livestream of *My Neck of the Woods* or any one of its subjects could have been recorded and turned into a documentary film. In fact, Blast Theory *did* record the live streams from their subjects' cameras for research purposes. As I've argued, ephemerality is just as much about access as about physical reality – storing these recordings in the Blast Theory archive still limits the public's ability to see the material of the project. Moreover, the key element of *My Neck of the Woods* is something that can't be re-experienced by watching the video record.

The particular liveness of the Live Subject Documentary entails interactivity between viewer and subject. The in-the-moment dialogue created for viewers and subjects, the process of communication, is the crux of this form. And this is unrepeatable, in the same way that a performance is. The interactivity of the Live Performance Documentary is notable because in this context, it becomes an inherent part of the documentary piece. We've always had the ability to converse with fellow members of an audience about what we were seeing, but in Live Performance Documentary, this is made a part of the documentary and the documentary becomes an experience. The interactivity

of the Live Subject Documentary is, I think, truly new. The usual veil of the screen is removed, putting the viewer and subject directly in touch.

NEW FRONTIERS: LIVE DATA DOCUMENTARY

In this project, I've examined how Live Documentary work can be created through two particular forms: theater and live online video. These forms fall within broader media categories with rich histories that inform my construction of Live Performance and Live Subject documentary. Live Performance draws on the affordances of theater, and today's representative works in this form engage with performance practices that date back to early days of cinema. Live Subject Documentary represents a rebirth of late 19th century notions of liveness and televisuality, a period that understood the televisual as a potential form for person-to-person communications, not just unidirectional transmission. Ephemerality and interactivity are useful concepts in analyzing both of these forms of live documentary, although like 'liveness' both of these concepts are constructed and rather than essentialized concepts. Both ephemerality and interactivity are configured differently in the four projects I've discussed, and I've tried to show that they offer importance affordances for both forms of live documentary.

In this final chapter, I want to end my discussion of Live Documentary by drawing on the sense of liveness, ephemerality and interactivity employed in these case study projects to posit a third category of Live Documentary. This category is harder to give form to, because it comes to us without a sense of 'liveness' we've had time to fully articulate as a culture. It is the form of Live Documentary native to the computer, a form I posit as Live Data Documentary. Of course, the computer is already implicated in the projects I've discussed here. Live Subject Documentary relies on the Internet for its form of televisual interactivity, and though it's not strictly necessary and could be

accomplished with other technologies, even the Live Performance Documentaries I discuss display the recorded materials from a computer queued with images. But as I bring this study to a close, having been able to link emerging works with well understood styles of liveness from theater and television, I'd like to suggest what such live documentary could look like if it took a computer-native form. And just like Live Subject Documentary, my concept of the Live Data Documentary also draws heavily on the *networked* computer and the affordances of the Internet. As a major cultural presence, I see the Internet as an influence on Live Documentary in any form. Sam Green spoke to his use of Live Performance Documentary practice to keep his works from being viewed in the on-demand, uncontrollable environment of the Internet. Live Subject Documentary finds a way to engage liveness within that environment, and this is also the ground of the Live Data Documentary.

In the previous two chapters, I was also provided some signposts for marking out representative works in each Live Documentary form. Most of the projects I've discussed described themselves as "live documentary" or "live interactive documentary." That language wasn't linked to CoPresence4Good, but its stance as a "next-gen witnessing" initiative from the WITNESS paradigm makes it easy to tie it into a lineage of social change video and documentary media – one that's experimenting with live video. At this point, we enter a new frontier, a territory with far fewer signposts to the computer-native form of live documentary. The projects I'll discuss in this chapter are often not identified as "live" or "documentary," so I've had to do a bit more conceptual legwork. I'll begin with the location of computer-native live documentary in the language of data and the database.

Lev Manovich argues that the computer brought about a new, digital-native media form: the database. He writes:

> After the novel, and subsequently cinema privileged narrative as the key form
> of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its
> correlate— database. Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't
> have beginning or end; in fact, they don't have any development, thematically,
> formally or otherwise which would organize their elements into a sequence.
> Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the
> same significance as any other.[1]

If the structure to be examined here is the database, how should liveness be thought of within it? There are a few different ways that I would like to put forward here. What Manovich is describing is a database-form of storytelling. I've used the language 'data documentary,' and this form is distinct from 'database documentary.' This second category is rich with examples from the interactive documentary field, and the computer-native form of liveness I will inscribe is relevant to these as well. But I'll pause for a moment to look at the database versus the data documentary in general, before I discuss what 'liveness' can mean within these styles of work.

Instead of a linear documentary, a database documentary is a web-based repository for documentary materials. *18 Days in Egypt* is a database documentary on the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The project houses user-generated content produced during the eighteen days uprising, including text messages, photographs, and videos. These

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[1] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 194.

individual units can be explored in a host of ways because they are organized as data. Users can query the database with search terms, encountering the contents organized by chronology, by subject matter, by location. These queries give rise to a new documentary encounter – rather than a re-edited version of a linear film, for instance, that creates a new narrative, the database gives rise to different experiences of the content through computation. *The Sputnik Observatory* is a database of interviews with experts on different topics from A to Z. Users can explore the videos by topic or by interviewee, or even by following the saved paths of other user. Almost all interactive documentaries that don't provide a narrative path for the user through their multiple pieces of networked content could be thought of as database documentaries. Some scholars have argued that such works have predecessors in linear films that attempt to represent a database of materials or which are produced as attempts to collect images as data. Jesse Shapins gestures to the "city symphony" films of the 1920s that "strive to represent the totality of a cityscape through capturing the day-in-the-life of a modern metropolis."[2] He cites Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera,* which displays images from the length and breadth of the Soviet Union to document the country's development, collecting this multiplicity of related images and displaying them by "emphasizing kaleidoscopic perception."[3] Jim Bizzocchi argues that the film *Run, Lola, Run* can be understood as a "narrative database," trying to tamp down Manovich's argument that narrative and database are inherently opposed. Though it's a linear film, the plot features a protagonist who runs through the same scenario three times, making different choices that effect

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[2] Jesse Shapins, "Mapping the Urban Database Documentary: Authorial Agency in Utopias of Kaleidoscopic Perception and Sensory Estrangement" (Harvard University, 2012), 5.
[3] Ibid., 6.

117

outcomes. Bizzocchi visualizes the plot as a database of scenarios and branching

decisions which Lola navigates until finding the outcome that concludes the film.[4] I'll

return to this concept in later sections to discuss the way Live Data Documentaries might

'narrativize' database content to tell a story.

In contrast to the database documentary, data documentary represents a much

smaller subset of interactive documentary projects to date. An example is *Out of Sight,*

Out of Mind, described by its creators as a data visualization and later selected for the

2013 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam's DocLab new format

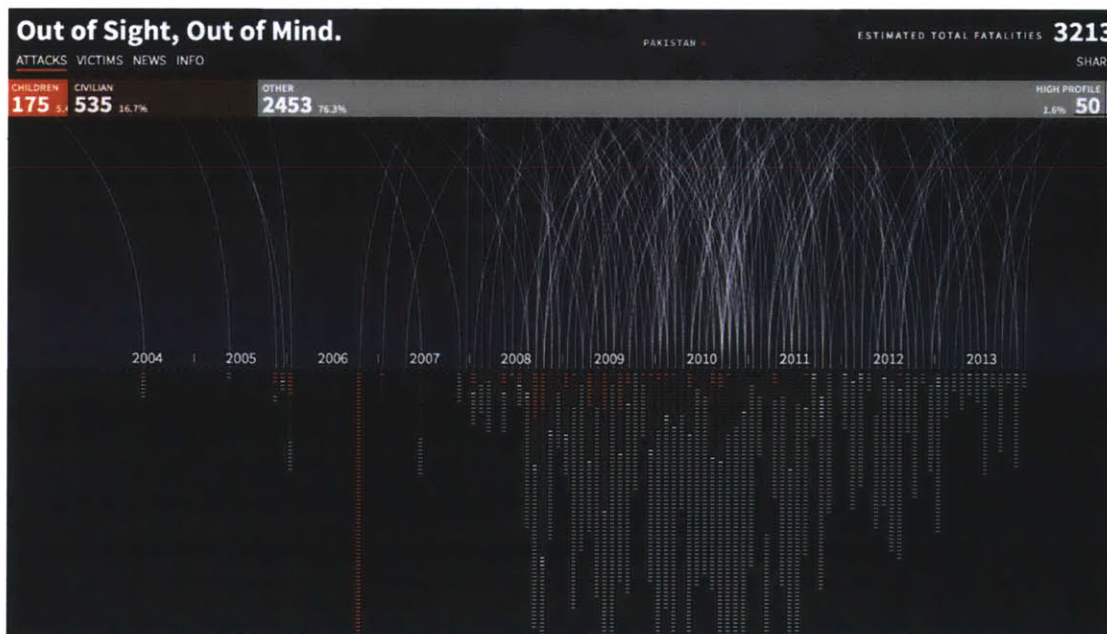documentary storytelling competition.

Figure 9: The navigable interface of *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* after the animated prologue.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind tells the story of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. The piece

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[4] Jim Bizzocchi, "Run, Lola, Run – Film as Narrative Database." Paper presented at The Work of Stories, Cambridge, MA, May 8, 2005.

begins with a series of title cards giving the viewer information about Pakistan and the US's defense policies. Interspersed with the titles is an animation that draws the above visualization before the viewers' eyes. It presents US drone strikes in Pakistan along a timeline spanning the years 2004 to 2013. When the animation is complete, the image becomes interactive. Scrolling over the completed image allows users to dive deeper into the data points that represent particular drone attacks. Clicking these points gives more specific information on the attack (including its exact date, the number of total deaths, number of child and civilian deaths, and one to two sentence description of the strike). When wrapped together, the narrativized, data-driven experience seems more documentary than document. The first segment, akin to a prologue, sets the stage for an open period of viewer exploration of data. The creative shaping of *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* leaves as strong as an impression as the data. Though the project's creators don't identify it particularly as a documentary, the project was nominated to the IDFA DocLab competition in 2013.

This chapter will investigate how such data documentaries, unique to the computer medium, can also give rise to a particular construction of liveness. In the next section, I'll stake out the grounds of what I argue 'live data' to be in the context of a live documentary. There are many meanings and senses of 'liveness' related to the computer, but I want to limit Live Data Documentary to a very particular construction. My meaning of 'liveness' in this form draws heavily on the history of computing, and also relates to the previous forms of 'liveness' I've examined within the context of the Live Performance and Live Subject documentary.

What is data?

I start down this tricky terminological road with some simple dictionary

definitions of 'data'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines data as "related items of

(chiefly numerical) information considered collectively, typically obtained by scientific

work and used for reference, analysis, or calculation." This definition also points out that

'data' is often used informally to mean 'information.' The definition given specifically

for 'computing' puts data in *contrast* with information. Here data are "quantities,

characters, or symbols on which operations are performed by a computer, considered

collectively." Information is "that which is obtained by the processing of data."[5]

Today, the common usage of the term data isn't necessarily the computational

definition, but it certainly owes much of its current popularity to the computer. 'Data,'

the concept, is at the center of cultural attention as a tool for knowledge acquisition. Lisa

Gitelman, author of *Raw Data is an Oxymoron*, brings a critical eye to today's framing of

'data' as a cultural and scientific panacea.[6] She begins the book with her own definition,

stating:

> Data are units or morsels of information that in aggregate form the
>
> bedrock of modern policy decisions by government and nongovernmental
>
> authorities... underlie the protocols of public health and medical practice,

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[5] "Data," Oxford English Dictionary (2nd Edition, Web Version)

[6] The premise of Gitelman's text (utilizing the language of Geoffrey Bowker) is that data are never purely objective, or "raw," but "always already 'cooked'" (p.2). This debate should catch any documentarian's eye. The field of documentary has long been fraught with conversations about the form's ability to be objective and whether objectivity should even be a goal of documentarians. I think Bill Nichols sums it up best in *Representing Reality*, when he tackles the topic under the chapter heading, "The Fact of Realism and the Fiction of Objectivity" (pg. 165).

and ... undergird the investment strategies and derivative instruments of

finance capital.[7]

What's clear in all three of these definitions is that one key characteristic of data is its

existence 'in aggregate'. Data come in collections. I also want to highlight the

importance, in all of the above definitions, of *usage* to define data. Gitelman sets up her

definition of data by citing the many important uses to which we put them. The dictionary

definition specifies data's use for "reference, analysis, or calculation." In computing, the

data are acted upon by the computer to generate information. Data are data because they

are used in a particular way. Understanding how data are used for documentary purposes

is less clear. Before moving into a discussion of particular projects, I want first to

describe what liveness means to both computing and live data documentary.

What is live data?

In computing, the term 'liveness' is a bit of a red herring for the current

investigation, because it's not aimed at issues of temporality. Computer scientists Bowen

Alpern and Fred Schneider offered a formal definition of this use of 'liveness,' a property

of a computer program that is characterized by reaching a goal or causing something to

happen. Alpern and Schneider call that goal the "something good" that the program is

executed to achieve. "Liveness properties stipulate that 'something good' eventually

happens during execution." An alternative type of program is characterized by the

property of "safety." They write, "informally, a safety property stipulates that some 'bad

thing' does not happen during execution." In this case, the program is executing to ensure

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[7] Lisa Gitelman, *Raw Data Is an Oxymoron* (MIT Press, 2013), 1.

121

that a certain result – the "bad thing" – doesn't occur. These good and bad things are distinct in each case, but a program that executes to ensure something undesirable *doesn't* occur versus to execute until something desired *does* occur is what "safety" and 'liveness' in computing are all about. Despite its presence in the language of computing already, I think there are other terms for simultaneity and temporality in the computer environment better suited to describe a live documentary utilizing the computer medium.

The term 'live data' also has very particular meanings in computer science. Live data can refer to data that are "written to be interpreted" and can be triggered unexpectedly with unobvious operations. The term can also refer to the actual 'real world' data meant to be run through a system, as opposed to *test* data that are used only to test that system.[8] 'Live data' in computational terms don't include the temporal elements that liveness in performance or televisual media implies.

The temporal element important to live documentary in general, and live data documentary in particular, is closer to computing notions of 'real time' systems and data. In computer science, a real time system is defined as "one whose logical correctness depends on the correctness of its outputs *as well as their timeliness.*"[9] Each real time system defines what constitutes 'timelines,' in other words it specifies an acceptable range of time between input and output[10]. Real time computing arose in the 1940s as an alternative to batch processing, the standard form of computer processing at the time. In batch, a computer's user would input instructions and data into the computer (in the form

[8] "Live Data," Oxford Dictionary of Computing (6th Edition, Web Version)
[9] Phillip A. LaPlante, Eileen P. Rose, and Maria Gracia-Watson, "An Historical Survey of Early Real time Computing Developments in the U.S.," *Real time Systems* 8, no. 2–3 (March 1, 1995): 199–213.
[10] I will discuss the implications of this range of acceptable real time functionality in a later section in regards to its implications for live data documentary.

of paper cards or tape bearing symbols representing the desired input). The computer

took hours, or more often days, to process the input and return the requested output.

Real time offered a new computing paradigm that obliterated that time delay. But

real time computing means more than immediate processing of input to generate output.

Because these systems' 'logical correctness' depends on the timely processing of data,

real time systems are constructed so that a failure to meet the time constraint is

understood as a system failure. An outgrowth of real time computing's history was a

technically incorrect association with real time as a way to describe immediately

responsive systems regardless of the presence of these fail states.

In an article on the history of real time systems, LaPlante et al. cite one of the

earliest popular definitions of real time computing:

> A real time computer system may be defined as one which controls
>
> an environment by receiving data, processing them and returning
>
> the results sufficiently quickly to affect the functioning of the
>
> environment at that time.[11]

One early example of this kind of real time system is the US Air Force's Project SAGE.[12]

The "Semiautomatic Ground Environment" air defense system was used to monitor and

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[11] LaPlante, Rose, and Gracia-Watson, "An Historical Survey of Early Real time
Computing Developments in the U.S."

[12] LaPlante contends that Project Whirlwind participants were the first to apply the *term*
'real time' to a computer system (pg. 2). The response of the computer to the trainees had
to be immediate, as well as complex enough to model real world conditions and
scenarios. Earlier meanings of real time are linked with the use of computers as
simulators, so that the computer's simulation matches precisely the timing of the real
world process it models, but this is now a particular usage rather than the computational
standard. However, it further builds the connection between *real time* and the real world,

control the environment for air defense threats, as per Martin's definition of real time. Real time systems like SAGE take data as input from that environment and present it as processed output on the computer's display. This usage characterizes real time systems from military defense systems in the 1940s or the current status of a computerized antilock brake system. In real time computing, the data is reporting back on the real world, in real time.

I ground my construction of the Live Data Documentary in this history of the real time system. While these systems required immediate processing of data, that data was understood as gathered from an environment for monitoring. 'Data' can also be applied to any object acted on by a computer, generating the simple responsiveness between a user who clicks a button and expects the computer to respond in synch. However, there is a tautological quality in calling this what I mean by live data as the subject of a live documentary piece. To me, this functionality of the computer is best described by Gaudenzi's concept of the 'living documentary' that I discussed in the introduction. For Gaudenzi, the interactive documentary lets a user and a computer co-construct a documentary representation of the real through this type of computer processing I describe above. It is a vision of Stromer-Galley's "interactivity-as-product," the interaction of the human and the machine. I've demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4 that my concept of Live Documentary is as a *process*, not a product. I argue that the responsiveness of a computer interface falls outside the formulation of liveness that this

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one I hope to carry through this chapter. Ibid; Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society: A History From the Telegraph to the Internet*, Re-issue edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 322.

thesis addresses. Any of the database or data documentaries discussed above are inscribed with this kind of computational characteristic – this seeming 'aliveness.'

The development of real time systems did produce this computational immediacy, but it was fashioned as a tool to monitor 'real world' environments – to give users a picture of the world beyond the computer, through the computer. That picture of the real world was in 'real time,' and the 'liveness' I want to infuse into the Live Data Documentary lies within this notion of immediate presentation of environmental information.

A Live Data Visualization

One project that provides a context for discussion of 'live data' in its documentary form is the *Digital Attack Map*.[13] This web-based "live data visualization" visually represents data on Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks occurring around the globe.[14] Using a world map as a backdrop, DDoS attacks are represented as arcs from the country of the attack's origin to its destination. Attacks originating and ending in the same country are shown as a circle around the central point of the country. Attacks of unknown origin are shown as lines emanating from the destination country, and the existence of attacks of unknown origin and destination are shown as additional lines clustered off to the side of the map. Types of DDoS attacks are signified through color-coding of the lines, with a key to this information in the left-hand corner.

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[13] *Digital Attack Map* is a co-creation of designers and engineers at Google's Ideas Lab and Arbor Networks, an Internet security research firm that supplies the anonymous web traffic data for the project.
[14] A DDoS attack is an internet-native type of aggressive action, defined in the project's description as "an attempt to make an online service unavailable by overwhelming it with traffic from multiple sources".
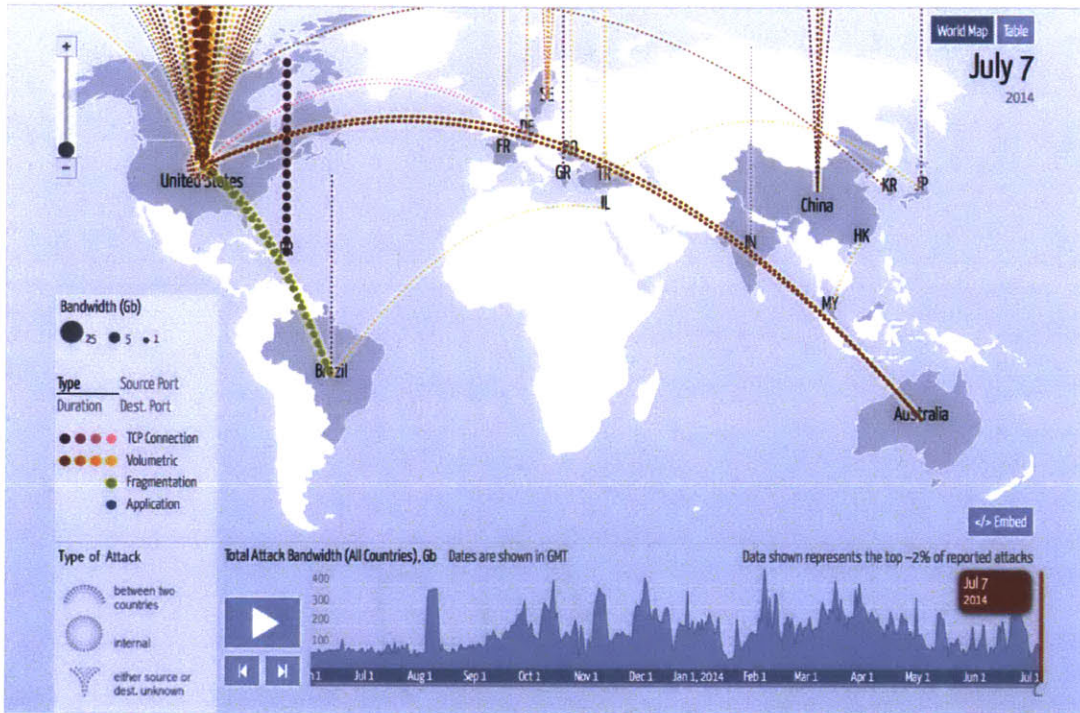
Figure 10: The *Digital Attack Map* main panel, showing the map with animated display of daily DDoS attacks. This appears at the top of the project's website.

Digital Attack Map's creators call it a "live data visualization." The interface design calls out the importance of timeliness to this project, signaled for example in the display of the current date in the top right corner. The arcs and lines indicating DDoS attack streams are animated, the dotted lines moving along the trajectories, suggesting the status of the attacks – and therefore of the data –as currently active. However, the map's visual representation is not an exact picture of the current state of global DDoS attacks at any given time. Rather, this data is collected, processed and visualized each day, to show "Top daily DDoS attacks worldwide." *Digital Attack Map*'s liveness actually adheres to a 24-hour period, with a new visualization each day.

This project doesn't offer exact immediacy between the viewer and the status of the data – unlike the temporal collocation required by live performance, or the assumption of a near-immediacy in live video or television. However, true to the history of the real time computer system, *Digital Attack Map* uses data collection, processing and output within specified temporal boundaries to monitor a situation in the environment. This sense of monitoring the real world through continuous data collection and processing is, I argue, the key to thinking about a notion of Live Data Documentary. At the time this thesis was written, *Digital Attack Map* is still gathering data as input. It's an open channel for data collection while the viewer is also able to access the system's output. Even the twenty-four hour delay between updates of the system generates a sense of the liveness consistent with the computational field's definitions and at the heart of the live data documentary. Though it only updates once every twenty-four hours, the site's concept *depends* on that continuous updating, as befits true real time systems.

In the course of my research, I found no references to *Digital Attack Map* as a documentary project. The project language uses the term 'live data visualization'. However, having discussed a few times in this thesis the way that a documentary framing can bring about a documentary experience, I think that the project can be counted amongst current live data documentaries by the critical or production communities involved with interactive documentary work. In the next sections, I'll discuss two forms of live data documentary that have been produced by the documentary community or claimed by the critical community. I hope that in this discussion of the affordances of live data documentary I'll also be able to illustrate the boundaries of the category that might help others identify and produce this style of documentary project.

The Are You Happy? Project

The Are You Happy? Project is an "experimental documentary" created in 2010

by documentary scholar and former BBC producer Mandy Rose[15]. The project

reimagines Jean Rouch's 1960 documentary film *Chronicle of a Summer* for the web. In

the original film, interviewers asked people on the streets of Paris "Are you happy?" in

order to prompt deeper conversations about contemporary situations in Europe. Rose sees

The Are You Happy? Project as continuation of his work for the Internet age, "a

collaborative piece in the context of the network."[16]

In the first phase of production, Rose used the 'context of the network' in her

project by working with video producers around the globe. She asked them to film

interviews in their own countries, asking subjects "Are you happy?" In the second phase,

Rose envisioned another way to utilize the web: drawing relevant social media content

from the web into the frame of *The Are You Happy? Project*. The documentary uses web-

crawling algorithms to search the databases of social media sites Twitter and Flicker.

Arriving at *The Are You Happy? Project* site, viewers encounter an opening

sequence that plays automatically in the browser, using text to acquaint the viewer with

Rouch's original film and the project's rationale. The text is accompanied by a

soundscape of music and blurred voices. The third title card reveals the project's method,

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[15] The project is a product of the CollabDocs research project at the Digital Culture
Research Centre, University of the West of England, with funding from the Arts and
Humanities Research Council, UK.
[16] Mandy Rose in lecture Rouch After Rouch: Reframing a Legacy, Presented by The
Center for Media, Culture and History, The Department of Anthropology, NYU,
February 2013. http://vimeo.com/64413612

"Combining videos from around the world with live web searches." This is followed by a main title that reads "Searching for Happiness." A follow-up message warns viewers, "Feeds are live and unfiltered and might include explicit or offensive content." Next the viewer sees the first use of the live web search functionality built into *The Are You Happy? Project*. A mix of Tweets (displayed in various fonts and locations on screen) and images from Flicker appear on screen. While context isn't provided, the viewer might notice that each message includes the words "happiness" or "happy." Below, a tab prompts viewers to choose a video.

Rolling over the tab reveals thumbnail images, each showing a single person and labeled with a country name. Clicking on a thumbnail triggers the corresponding video to play, preceded by a title stating the interviewee's first name, the name of the video producer, and the duration of the clip. Then the video opens in widescreen and begins to play. After a minute or two, the video pauses and a black screen appears. Quickly the word "Searching" pops up, which is then completed to become "Search for happiness in Argentina" or whichever country's video is playing. These interludes again display Twitter and Flicker content, but this time, rather than generated by web-crawling algorithms searching for terms related to happiness, they are related to the country whose video the viewer is watching. These appear in a similar style to the opening sequence, and then the video returns. Periods of video and social media content alternate until the video is completed.

Data Monstrations

The style of this project is clearly distinct from the style of the *Digital Attack*

Map, the live data visualization. David Staley argues that "visualizations are a specific

subset of all possible images, in that their purpose is to organize signs representing data

and information in two- and three-dimensional form."[17] While *The Are You Happy?*

Project represents web data, it doesn't represent it as a sign system. Instead, it draws

particular items from social media as they are – a written message or an uploaded

photograph, and places them on the screen as interludes between portions of the project's

recorded video content. Rose and Dovey argue that they use the web data mixed with

video to create a spatial montage, by overlaying and interspersing their recorded video

interviews with continually updated Tweets and Flicker images.[18]

However, building on notions of liveness I've discussed in this thesis, I'd like to

offer an alternative framing. The sequence can certainly be described as montage, as a

collection of images or materials whose juxtapositions give rise to new meaning within

the project. But what if we were to think of this presentation of data in another framing?

The Twitter texts and Flicker images are constantly new and unknown. I see this as cause

for return to Gaudreault's concepts of narration and monstration discussed in Chapter 3.

The data is presented by the system in the frame of the videos. As I've discussed,

Gaudreault argues that in film, both narration and monstration are at work. The giving of

images is a form of monstration, of showing, but the editing within a film creates a

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[17] David J. Staley, *Computers, Visualization, and History: How New Technology Will Transform Our Understanding of the Past* (M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 3.
[18] Rose and Dovey refer to Manovich's concept of the spatial montage as "the juxtaposition of images within multiple computer windows." (pg. 13). Mandy Rose and Jon Dovey, "We're Happy and We Know It : Documentary: Data: Montage.," *Studies in Documentary Film*, 2012, 14.

certain level of *telling*, of narration. Gaudreault suggests that in the film, the camera is monstrator or stands in for monstrator, to show the image to the viewer. Where can we locate it here? I argue that the monstrator is the algorithm, the set of programming rules that continuously pull the data into *The Are You Happy? Project* to be shown to the viewer. The editing and design of the piece, of when in the video the data appear, and their placement, which I argue in this context can be understood as the equivalent of a film's editing, provides a narrating function.

I discussed above notions of narration as well as database, in particular Jim Bizzocchi's notion that narration and database need not be opposed. I see the design of *The Are You Happy? Project* in its sequencing of recorded footage and data, and their relation to each other, as its form of narrative. It relies on a database to draw in data, but ultimately it seems a far more narrative project that is attempting in its design to tell some form of story.

Gaudreault's concept of monstration also involves an argument about *presentness*. Gaudreault argues that monstration is always in reference to a present during which something is shown. I agree that the algorithmic pull of data into *The Are You Happy? Project* generates a sense of presentness, but I want to stress, this is *not* the same as liveness. An algorithm could be used in the same context to pull from a database of saved photographs or text messages, data that are in a bounded collection. While this might imply a presentness, or generate what Gaudenzi sometimes calls "aliveness," it's not sufficient for the category of Live Data Documentary I want to inscribe. As I've tried to define above, what makes *The Are You Happy? Project* a Live Data Documentary is the algorithm's presentation of data that is constantly in the process of being gathered. The

131

Twitter and Flicker data serve in this project as an environmental scan of the countries they are associated with. They are data expressing the state of an environment, and they are engaged in continuous updating. *The Are You Happy? Project* draws from that stream, engaging in a showing of this data within the framing of the documentary project.

Data can be made to flow through a documentary project in any number of ways, within a visualization or through the monstration of the datum – a Tweet in this case, or a photo, but it could be many things. It's particularly interesting that *The Are You Happy? Project* focuses on social media data, moving beyond the handful of subjects captured in video and attempting to show their topic – people's happiness, from place to place – on a much larger, aggregative scale. I argue that Live Data Documentary could be thought of as an aggregative attempt at the Live Subject Documentary, a remediation of that impulse for the computer rather than video form. Rather than putting a documentary subject and viewer in a conversation, Live Data Documentary puts the viewer in direct contact with a subject that is unfolding co-temporally but is an aggregative subject: data.

We Feel Fine

Creators Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar call *We Feel Fine* "an emotional search engine and web-based artwork" (Kamvar & Harris 2005). This data visualization is dynamic, allowing users to interact with the data and explore it for various relationships. The data are sentences pulled from blogs across the web that were identified by the project's web-crawlers as including the phrase "I feel" or "I am feeling." *We Feel Fine* searches for new data every three minutes. When "I feel" sentences are identified, they are downloaded into the project's database. The scripts are capable of recognizing

132

duplicates between sentences found on a blog and those already found in the database –

this ensures the system never adds the same piece of data twice.

The data stored by the project are visualized as a colorful mass of moving dots,

playfully bouncing around within the frame. Each dot fits into a larger system of

relationships to all the others, allowing users to explore them in systematic ways. Each

particle represents a single 'feeling' sentence posted by a single individual to their blog.

The color of each particle corresponds to the tone of the feeling inside – happy or positive

feelings are bright yellow, sad or negative feelings are dark blue, angry feelings are bright

red, calm feelings are pale green, and so on. The size of each particle represents the

length of the sentence represented. A smaller number of rectangular particles represent

feeling sentences paired with pictures. In both cases, clicking on a particle reveals the

data it represents – the 'I feel' sentence and, if available, the picture posted with it.

As well as a free exploration of the dots as they move around the screen, a control

panel at the top of the frame lets viewers sort data by various metrics, including by a

particular feeling (from a list of emotions and feeling-words chosen by the creators),

gender, age, weather, or location (honing in on a particular country, state or city), and

date of the blogger's "I feel" sentence.

Figure 11: Left, the main screen of *We Feel Fine* as it loads at the beginning of the project, showing data points as animated dots and squares. Right, the panel that allows users to sort data being visualized by selecting various metrics.

Locating Liveness

We Feel Fine's creators write in the project's FAQ, "We love the openness, accessibility, interactivity, real time nature, and reach of the web." Co-creator Sep Kamvar stated in an interview for this project that one of the biggest motivators behind *We Feel Fine* was the impulse to do something new. He said:

> Real time on the web was non-existent. ... That kind of vocabulary was not there. And basically, I had been looking through blogs on the web, and realized: this is like reading people's diaries, I have to do something with this. And [We Feel Fine] felt like the most natural thing to do. I remember that friends of mine just thought it was so cool that something would be eight minutes ago or five minutes ago because at that time nothing on the web had that sort of timeliness.[19]

The real time nature is dispersed across the *We Feel Fine* experience. Because it gathers "I feel" statements into its database every three minutes, there is always a layer of data

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[19] "We Feel Fine – FAQ," http://wefeelfine.org

134

points that have been very recently uploaded to the web by a blogger and added to the system by the project script. But as live data documentary that aggregates data, that live data is mixed together with much older data points that were collected as far back as the first year of the project (2005).

In order to view *only* the most recent data in the *We Feel Fine* system, a viewer must head to the control panel of the site and click on "Date." This offers a list of years from project inception to the current year at the bottom. Selecting the most recent year would show all data points from every month of that year on return to the visualization screen. The viewer can drill down further, selecting the most recent month. Likewise, they can select the most recent day of that month, until the system is set to only display the days. The choice to hone in on the most recently generated data in the system is no different, hierarchically, than selecting a single metric from one of the other categories: "Date" is displayed at the same level as "Gender" or "Location" of the blogger who posted the "I feel" statement. In *We Feel Fine*, the data aren't organized in keeping with the time in which they were collected. Temporality in this case is *one* path through the aggregated data. It is an organizing principle. More than a use of liveness in the *We Feel Fine* project, it may be a way to understand the value of liveness to documentary across the entire span of live documentary I've discussed.

CONCLUSION

135

Liveness: A Path Through the Archive

In her 2008 Webby Award speech (the "Oscar's" of the Internet), interactive documentary maker Kat Cizek declared "The Internet *is* a documentary." This is a loaded statement, and one I've considered a great deal in the context of this research. I don't want to confirm or deny her statement. Rather, I find this statement compelling because it speaks to a need for the documentarian to configure herself towards the Internet. The documentary endeavor is changing. Of course, the Internet is disruptive across the media landscape. However, I think there is something of particular concern to documentary makers. Jurgenson captures it when he problematizes the glut of material online as a "deepening documentary vision." Again, documentary as an adjectival form of document and documentary as a genre are distinct, but the associations for our field are rooted there.

Sam Green created his Live Documentary work as a reaction against what Jurgenson calls the "deepening documentary vision," infusing his work with an urgency of viewing through ephemerality. His work can't simply be uploaded to the web, it must be experienced as it happens. However, I have argued that Live Subject and Live Data documentary offer that same benefit of ephemerality *within* the web environment. The two Live Subject Documentary projects I examined are also bounded in time, creating a documentary experience that is in the moment and available only in that moment. Moving into the future of live documentary, Live Data Documentary creates something else, a computer-native configuration of this endless collection of data or documents online. Work in the style of *The Are You Happy? Project* shows the latest data it can gather, buoying its content into continuous temporal relevance. It is a documentary whose

136

subject is always being made new, reconfigured in real time. But this computer-native type of live documentary has more than data to use, it can also structure itself as a database, not only flowing data through it but aggregating that data to continually expand its content. In this case, temporality, particularly the immediacy associated with liveness in all the forms I've discussed here, is itself an organizing principle through which viewers can guide themselves through the documentary. In this sense, 'liveness' provides the path through a viewer's engagement with documentary material, and I believe that characterization applies to all forms of live documentary.

The People Formerly Known As Viewers

In thinking of liveness as the temporal period or temporal information that guides viewers through a documentary experience, I put a great deal of emphasis on the viewer herself. Indeed, I see the Live Documentary in large part as an opportunity to create a new status for the documentary audience. Once again, the groundbreaking work of Kat Cizek was a catalyst in shaping my investigation. Cizek delivered a keynote lecture at the MIT Open Documentary Lab titled "The People Formerly Known as Subjects."[20] She shared the stories of her own participatory documentary project, *Highrise*, and how the project's participatory methodology brought the subjects into the processes of planning, media production, and community building. They were no longer merely subjects, but collaborators and co-producers. I would like to suggest that the Live Documentary provides a platform to re-examine the role of the *audience*, the documentary viewers, as well as the subjects.

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[20] http://opendoclab.mit.edu/video-of-katerina-cizek-and-gerry-flahive-the-opendoclab

This is nowhere more apparent than in the Live Subject Documentary. Here, the

viewer is an interlocutor with the very subject of the documentary. He or she is able to

reach inside of the project and interact in a way that I think holds exciting possibilities for

documentary, especially in terms of social change work. Ethan Zuckerman argues that the

utopian vision of the Internet as a means for global connection is false – that in fact,

people "flock" together online and interact primarily with others from their same social

milieu.[21] I suggest that Live Subject Documentary could be a strategy to meaningfully

engage people outside of that milieu. Just as documentary film and video is often

employed to show 'subjects' foreign to us and issues we don't have access to, Live

Subject Documentary could allow us to interact with others outside of our ken, a next

step toward meaningful dialogue. I don't want to fall into the utopian trap myself, but as

I've suggested that CoPresence4Good takes a meaningful step in designing the process of

advocacy work through documentary, I think Live Subject as a whole takes an important

step in pushing viewers to engage with people outside their own spheres – and not just to

see them, but to interact with them.

Live Performance Documentary is less radical in its role for the viewer, but it

does insist on a certain kind of viewing experience. Live Performance Documentary

requires that viewers come together, and structures an experience around their presence.

In the course of my research, I interviewed Elaine McMillion, the creator of interactive

documentary *Hollow*. *Hollow* is a web-based interactive documentary portrait of a rural

West Virginia community. In the early stages of *Hollow's* production, McMillion came

up with an innovative idea for the documentary interface: a built-in ability for viewers to

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[21] Ethan Zuckerman, *Rewire: Digital Cosmopolitans in the Age of Connection*, 1 edition
(New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

discover the email address of *Hollow* subjects (the residents of the small West Virginia town). The idea came when the production team began designing simple tools for the community to speak with each other via Google Calendar and Facebook group. McMillion realized, "It'd be great if *Hollow* could somehow open up this conversation to the broader world." McMillion and her designer Jeff Soyk sketched out a design for an email system and ran it by the *Hollow* community residents most active on the Facebook group. McMillion recalled:

> And they were saying, 'Yeah, it's interesting but, are these just
>
> strangers we're talking to? And why? And, I just don't know – I
>
> don't think I really have time to sit around and chat. When would I
>
> do this?

The residents' reaction revealed design flaws in the proposed system[22]. While *Hollow* visitors might want to email them, the subjects were skeptical of this always-on access. In addition, the potentially unlimited number of viewers to the small number of *Hollow* subjects who might have taken part in this system would have placed a burden on their inboxes and their feelings that they'd need to respond. In one sense, I see this as a rationale for the Live Subject Documentary – a single live video event is one way to concentrate a viewer and subject interaction in a particular moment. However, McMillion's solution was far less high-tech – she was able to bring subjects from *Hollow* to local screenings of the project, and there, viewers had the opportunity to speak with them. This could just as easily be reconfigured into a Live Performance Documentary, in

which materials are shown on stage and creators *or* subjects engage directly with an audience. The Live Performance documentary represents another opportunity to say definitively that a documentary experience can be one that not only puts a subject before viewers, but actually draws them into a conversation.

As I look forward to the Live Data Documentary, the role of the viewer is far more passive than these previous types. There is a heavy reliance on Stromer-Galley's interactivity-as-product, human to computer, and no interpersonal engagement, no interactivity-as-process. The fact that the Live Data Documentary is itself an on-going process – a continuous flow of data through a documentary framing or into a database framed as a documentary – at the very least, the viewer is continuously stepping in to a project that is speaking to their co-temporal environment, into a data-driven documentary view of the world in real time. To me, this is a vision of the 'liveness' of the broadcast era, the potential (or possibly specious) allure of the images coming to viewers live and in the moment. Just as the second regime of televisual liveness fell into an 'ideology of liveness,' a television environment that often mimicked instantaneous broadcast in recorded materials, I wonder: does it matter if the data is live? Will data documentary be just as satisfying in a 'recorded' state in which the data is already gathered in its entirety, and the computer shows it to us in the moment divorced from the time it was sourced? This cuts to the quick of what excites me about Live Documentary: both Live Performance and Live Subject Documentary rely on interpersonal interaction that confirms its liveness. Interpersonal interaction, in situ or live online, is to me the greatest affordance of liveness for the documentary form. If the subject of the Live Data Documentary is in aggregate, perhaps one-on-one conversation is not the point, but there

are ways it could be imagined into a Live Data Documentary interface. There are a myriad possibilities for Live Data Documentary to experiment with a direct interaction of a viewer and their world, taking action within the context of the documentary that doesn't just alter their view of the interface, but alters the real world and thus the data that is reporting back to them. This would return Live Data Documentary to the command-and-control sense of real time systems that were a function of their design from the start in the 1940s.

This project's goal has been to give a structured analysis of the emerging form of Live Documentary, in order to provide some support for the foundation of a Live Documentary practice. I hope the strategies and styles of the projects examined here, and the affordances they offer, might guide future production work. As I draw the study to a close, I want to linger on the centrality of interpersonal interaction in a documentary context to this project. While I've attempted to engage in some field building for Live Documentary, future research might take a deep dive into the effects of interpersonal interaction in a Live Performance or Live Subject Context. What can we learn, for instance, from the conversations that were produced within *My Neck of the Woods*? I don't wish to confuse the aims of documentary with the aims of a social science experiment. Documentary doesn't *need* to change the world, and the interpersonal interaction doesn't need to have any particular result. However, I do believe that documentary is a form constantly grappling with 'creative treatment of actuality.' I take actuality to mean not just actualities, but to mean reality, the real world. To create *live* treatments of actuality fits well within that mold. As Interactive Documentary rises, limiting interaction to that between viewer and computer seems an unfortunate limitation.

For individual projects, human-computer interaction and interface design can create

powerful documentaries, and I don't want to diminish their worth or their artistry. I

merely think that documentary as a field should be as open to the full sense of interaction

as it can be, embracing it in the richest sense to include interactions with people out there

in the reality we are trying to capture in our work. In this endeavor, the field of Live

Documentary is one step forward.