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The Digital Panorama in Cultural Representation

This paper considers how uses of scrolling and panoramic interface in interactive filmmaking can integrate visual research and cultural representation in ways that draw viewers into the media arts/scholar's process. The technique I have been developing in the use of panorama is found in *Cultures In Webs* (2003), *Something That Happened Only Once* (2007), *Outside/Inside* (2007) and *Voyage Into The Unknown* (2008), and in my latest project, *CANYONLANDS: Edward Abbey In The Great American Desert*.

In *Another Way of Telling* (1982), in which John Berger and Jean Mohr develop text-image works that are part exposition, part narrative, and part poetic evocation, Berger describes the kind of viewership or image-reading that using photographs in sequences provides:

Eisenstein once spoke of "a montage of attractions." By this he meant that what precedes the film-cut should attract what follows it, and vice versa... In a sequence of still photographs, however, the energy of attraction either side of a cut does remain equal, two-way and mutual.... The sequence has become a field of co-existence like the field of memory. (162)

A scrolling digital interface similarly allows for multidirectional movement, while adding more diverse media elements and enabling user agency. The user navigates an environment that extends beyond the limits of a printed page. By making her own choices in navigating a multimedia work, the user also becomes more aware of the choice-making processes of the original maker(s) of the work.

Canyonlands offers users means to follow how arguments are built out of experiences and they explore some of the ways arguments may be constructed with poetry and imagery as well as through exposition. The spatial structure allows users to follow Abbey's texts as he responds to

events unfolding around him. And, it allows users to follow the mediamaker's choices. Users may follow a primary path that presents selections of materials in ways one might experience in watching a documentary film. However, the structure offers something that the linear documentary cannot: choice-making. As opposed to the inclusion of supporting materials in the common DVD, this choice-making is fully integrated in the viewing experience allowing individuals flexibility in choosing to expand or limit narrative, expository and poetic approaches to a work's primary topic and its off-shoots. Being implicated in a choicemaking process, the user engages both in an analysis of the mediamaker's path-making decisions and in self-analysis: what is learned by the choices that the user made in alternatively navigating the materials included in the environment, and toward what new questions do these paths lead?

Choice-making is one quality that once drew me to traditions of direct cinema and ethnographic cinema. There are many documentary films that are tightly scripted before shooting starts; the camera commits to image a preconceived text. However, in both direct cinema and much of ethnographic filmmaking, the researcher-maker has little control over what is happening and must make choices in filming and other data collection that might aid in the later interpretation of what is unfolding. Meanwhile the format does something more than those film traditions – I find thinking of the interface as a terrain of my media clips and other data to be a very exciting production environment that helps me to organize and create projects in ways I would not have done before, and at the same time, they open up the filmmaking process to others by essentially bringing the bins and timelines of the editor's suite into an interface. Users can see how an argument is built out of a set of resources.

Like Certeau's "walking in the streets," participation with cultures from the ground up – something that ethnographers frequently take pride in – requires continual adaptation, additions of new information, interpretation, and translation. Interactive environments offer researchers tools to gather materials and build interpretations through sifting, sorting and path-making. The production is also its presentation. The tools sustain a critical working practice that becomes part of the history of a work.

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