

**REALITY STRIKES BACK: PERFORMING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH  
THE NEW FORMS OF TRUTH  
LA REALIDAD CONTRAATAACA: ACTIVANDO EL CAMBIO SOCIAL A TRAVÉS DE LAS  
NUEVAS FORMAS DE LA VERDAD**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Keywords:**

Communication, digital media, new formats, social change, non-fiction.

The concept of reality is in crisis. To be more precise, the mediation of reality is in crisis due to issues such as fake news, the emotional dissemination of content that appears to be informative, posturing on social media, the virtualization of experiences, and synthetically generated content. In parallel, new formats, heirs of non-fiction, have emerged in recent years to account for a different relationship with the real. Beyond journalism, there are creative non-fiction narratives, interactives, 360° documentaries, VR documentaries, and documentaries through Instagram Stories. The aim of this research is to delve into the characteristics of these new formats and their relationship with the real through Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The sample includes six avant-garde projects that address topics such as climate change, sexism, cultural repression, suicide, sexual diversity, and identity. It is concluded that most of the analyzed projects present a symbiosis of form and content to enhance their messages. The strongest link to the real lies in the revelation and elevation of the authorial voice. These forms are committed, purposeful, and combative in representing reality, but somewhat conservative in the performativity for change that opens up in the connected digital context.

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**RESUMEN**

**Palabras clave:**

comunicación, medios digitales, nuevos formatos, cambio social, no ficción.

El concepto de realidad está en crisis. Para ser más precisos: la mediación de la realidad está en crisis por cuestiones como las *Fake News*, la difusión emocional de contenidos con apariencia informativa, el *postureo* en las redes sociales, virtualización de las experiencias y los contenidos generados sintéticamente. En paralelo, nuevos formatos, herederos de la no ficción, han surgido en los últimos años para dar cuenta de una relación diferente con lo real. Más allá del periodismo, se encuentran narrativas creativas de no ficción, interactivos, documental 360°, documental VR, o documentales a través de Instagram *Stories*. El objetivo de esta investigación es profundizar en las características de estos nuevos

formatos y su relación con lo real a través del Análisis Multimodal del Discurso. La muestra incluye 6 proyectos vanguardistas que abordan temas como el cambio climático, el sexismo, la represión cultural, el suicidio, la diversidad sexual y la identidad. Se concluye que la mayoría de los proyectos analizados presentan una simbiosis de forma y contenido para potenciar sus mensajes. El vínculo más fuerte con lo real reside en la revelación y elevación de la voz autoral. Estas formas son comprometidas, propositivas y beligerantes en la representación de la realidad, pero algo conservadoras en la performatividad para el cambio que se abre en el contexto digital conectado

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## Introduction

### ***Fake, live, believe***

#### *The crisis of truth*

Social networks and their derivative effects show today how it is sometimes complex to discern between what is real and what is not. There are certain projects and movements that go in this direction, making present the device that distorts reality. For example, the project 'Instagram vs reality' shows us two very different faces of reality: the modified one and the real one, without filters. Those two layers are minimally distinguishable still, but we wonder what will happen when that layer overlaps with more perfection and becomes indistinguishable from reality? At some point in the near future, we may lose our ability to distinguish fact from fiction, no matter how many forensic tools we can devise. Thus, we face an immense challenge regarding the propagation of truth and its concept of representation. If we go one step beyond social networks and get into incipient generative AI, we begin to observe how society gives it a 'truth' value that even today's science does not possess, and that conditions the field of reality and questions its 'factual' value.

"There is no worse mistake than to take the real for the real", states Baudrillard (1993). And he adds: "And it is the media that teach us never again to take the real for the real" (1993). The argumentative belligerence shown by the French philosopher responds to a concrete context, with an innovative 90's *hyperrealism* of the television image introducing distant wars, told by Westerners, in Western homes. Baudrillard declares the death of the referent in which the radical value of the sign is denied. With the loss of analog processing, the continuous representation of physical signals disappears. The materiality of content is transformed. The media and social systems themselves are transformed (Sánchez-López, 2021). In this new contemporary wave, the status of "the real" is threatened by a series of multipolar situations/actions, such as:

- Faking (the facts)
- Sharing (personal beliefs)
- Posing/showing off (the daily)
- Virtualizing (the existence)
- Synthesizing (the truth)

#### *The 5 vectors of contemporary simulacrum*

The concern about the dissemination of false information is recurrent in academic research, rather than a novel phenomenon (Finneman and Thomas, 2018). There is a long history of hoaxes designed and disseminated by media actors. The journalistic profession is nevertheless presented as an epistemic authority as a guarantor of truth (Carlson, 2017). The introduction of social networks and websites in the information flow has propelled an increase in the consumption of news through these channels (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016), eroding the journalistic role as a verifying mediator. This is coupled with self-interested uses that 'fabricate and disseminate information with the intention of misleading and confusing the population' (McGonagle, 2017). This leads to a 'new wave of fake news that has different levels of factuality and intent' (Tandoc et al., 2018).

In the new media landscape, content and news are not only broadcasted and received, they are also shared. And in this action of sharing, there are two key factors: personal beliefs and emotions. According to Lewandowsky et al. (2012), people share information that evokes an emotional response, regardless of whether it is true or not. In Vosoughi et al. (2018), it is found that fake news spread faster and more.

Furthermore, the democratization of media uses causes an increase in the dimensions of reality that can be narrated. Under the cover of social media, and following a prosumer logic (Aparici and García-Marín, 2018), personal and social media exposure reaches new quotas. One of the underlying currents is digital posing (Livingston et al., 2020), which can generate a dissociation between idealized exposed events (and bodies) and the everyday reality.

With gradual digitalization, virtualization extends into personal and social environments, with a projection towards surrealism in which the physical and virtual worlds eventually merge, representing 'the final stage of the coexistence of physical-virtual reality' (Lee et al., 2021). A projection that predetermines the existence of a new type of sign devoid of referent, a sign-referent, with an autonomous spatial-temporal existence. In addition to the effects of virtualization, the phenomenology of truth is altered by the generative capacity of AI. As Bucknall and Dori-Hacohen states: "AI-powered synthetic media – including, but not limited to, deep fakes – pose an entirely new level of challenge that society has yet to fully reckon with" (Bucknall and Dori-Hacohen, 2022). AI is capable of generating synthetic reality. And it can adjust it to the forms of truth: "erroneous references, content, and statements, may be intertwined with correct information, and presented in a persuasive and confident manner, making their identification difficult without close inspection and effortful fact-checking" (Bubeck et al., 2023).

Social networks and their derivative effects show today how it is sometimes complex to discern between what is real and what is not. There are certain projects and movements that go in this direction, making present the device that distorts reality. For example, the project 'Instagram vs reality' shows us two very different faces of reality: the modified one and the real one, without filters. Those two layers are minimally distinguishable still, but we wonder what will happen when that layer overlaps with more perfection and becomes indistinguishable from reality? At some point in the near future, we may lose our ability to distinguish fact from fiction, no matter how many forensic tools we can devise. Thus, we face an immense challenge regarding the propagation of truth and its concept of representation. If we go one step beyond social networks and get into incipient generative AI, we begin to observe how society gives it a 'truth' value that even today's science does not possess, and that conditions the field of reality and questions its 'factual' value.

### *The real as mediated representation*

This crisis of reality that is currently occurring and will be accentuated in the near future has its origin in the concept of reality and its mechanisms of representing it, that is, of generating the nexus with the indexical footprint. The relationship between these two dimensions has been widely discussed by semioticians and structuralists. Peirce (1974) himself suggests that reality can only be known through the sign, because it is already semiotized. In addition to the journalistic tradition, there is another media modality that has been persistently concerned about its link with reality: the documentary genre. It is a complex, elusive relationship. With a certain consensus around a macro categorization that presents itself as an opposition: nonfiction. "A negative category that designates a terra incognita, the extensive unmapped zone between conventional documentary, fiction and experimental", explains Weinrichter (2004).

One of the major concerns of documentary discourse and in general the genres and formats of narrative nonfiction has been the relationship between what it represents and what is represented, understanding that we are referring to discourses of reality and sobriety in relation to the representation of the world. The indexical trace or index in

nonfiction narrative establishes the direct relationship between the representation (what is being represented) and the real object (that which is represented). On an indexical level, we refer to the image of a person, a place, or an event, for example. One of the major concerns is how to detect and differentiate the 'indexical trace' and its associated veracity and documentary evidence (Plantinga, 1997). Documentary veracity is essential to maintain the integrity of the documentary genre and for the public to trust the information. Documentary evidence is the visual and auditory evidence that supports and sustains the claims and representations made in the documentary (images, archive, interviews, data and statistics).

According to Genette, "the event (history) in the communicative act, for the speaker and for the listener, is always reborn in the form of discourse. Discourse creates reality, orders and organizes the experience of the event" (1966). Furthermore, the biotechnological evolution between orality and digitality has taken place. Media modalities have proliferated. Each new form implies a re-telling, or a trans-telling. Access to reality is not neutral, and mediations add layers of form and content. Nichols elaborates on the idea of representation of reality, stressing that the power of documentary lies in its ability to make timeless issues seem like burning issues to us. "We see images of the world and what they put before us are social issues and cultural values, current problems and their possible solutions, situations and specific ways of representing them" (1997). A link that is not neutral. The documentary is the record of a particular gaze, of an authorial vision. With a direct implication. And in this discourse, "the style bears witness not only to a vision or perspective on the world, but also to the ethical quality of this perspective and the argumentation behind it" (1997). Within this framework, the objective of this research is to analyze and characterize new contemporary formats that pursue the narration of reality, delving into the relationship established between these forms of telling and social change.

Numerous studies have approached the social transformations brought about by the advent of social media and the Internet (Firth et al., 2024; Evans-Zepeda, 2020). There are also various attempts to catalog new formats for addressing reality, especially in journalism (Das & Upadhyay, 2024; Pérez-Seijo & Silva-Rodríguez, 2024) and documentaries (Borjan, 2020). However, specific work integrating formats that address reality and their link to social transformation is practically nonexistent.

## **Methodology**

To achieve this objective, the selected methodological approach has been the technique of ADM (Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). This paradigm extends the study of language in its combination with other resources such as images, music or sound. O'Halloran (2011) specifies that it deals with "the theory and analysis of the semiotic resources and semantic expansions that take place as, in multimodal phenomena, different semiotic options are combined". Also, the inter-semiotic options. The basic model used is the one employed by Pauwels (2012) for the analysis of cultural expressions, but adapted and focused on the objective of this research. For data extraction and categorization, the Atlas.TI tool has been used, which facilitates the processing of information in qualitative research.

The ADM will be built upon Grounded Theory along with the CCM (Constant Comparative Method). Grounded Theory is a data analysis methodology that uses a set of systematically applied methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area (Glaser, 1992). Through the CCM, inductive categorization and simultaneous comparison

of units of meaning are conducted (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Following an initial review and general annotation, patterns were traced, and categories were identified using Atlas.TI software. In a second review, main categories of significant convergence across projects were established, allowing the generation of a common analytical framework. In a third iteration, peculiarities of each work were sought for this convergent framework. In the final version of the analysis, these categories were labeled as "Mise en Scène Keys", "Aesthetics Keys", "Discourse Keys", and "Link to reality".

For the selection of the sample, non-probabilistic sampling was introduced. Specifically, what Corbetta (2007) calls 'subjective sampling by reasoned decision', in which the sample units are chosen according to their characteristics. A list of 50 projects was drawn up and screened (<https://acortar.link/O329Es>) according to the main criterion determined by the objective:

- A. New multimodal formats that narrate reality.

And a series of conditioning factors to offer a plural perspective in the display:

- B. Authorial diversity.
- C. Thematic plurality.
- D. Productions from different territories and socio-economic realities.
- E. Variety in media modalities.

After filtering the 50 initial projects, the final sample consisted of the representation showed in Table 1:

**Table 1**  
*Projects filtered for the application of MDA*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Selection criteria (Form and content)</b>
<i>Homestay</i>	Paisley Smith, 2018	Creative non-fiction narrative that uses a 3D video game engine to reflect on cultural codes and suicide. A, B, C, D, E.
<i>Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia</i>	Juan Manuel Cuéllar, Paloma Torrecillas, 2023	Interactive web project that shows explicit sexist content from the media according to the user's year of birth. A, B, C, D, E.
<i>Fogo Na Floresta</i>	Tadeu Jungle, 2017	360º documentary video about the indigenous population of the Waurá and their issues with fire and deforestation. A, B, C, D, E.
<i>Reeducated</i>	Sam Wolson, 2021	VR animated documentary about China's re-education camps in the Xinjiang region. A, B, C, D, E.
<i>Otherly</i>	Mirusha Yogarajah, Em Yue, Jess Murwin, Tristan Angieri, Grace An, Joanne Lam, Jackie! Zhou, 2021	Short documentaries in Instagram stories format that delve into identity and social issues, with love, inclusion and loss at the core. A, B, C, D, E.
<i>Do not track</i>	Brett Gaylor, 2015	Interactive web documentary series that analyzes the phenomenon of tracking based on the personal use of the Internet by the receiver and voices of experts. A, B, C, D, E.

## Results

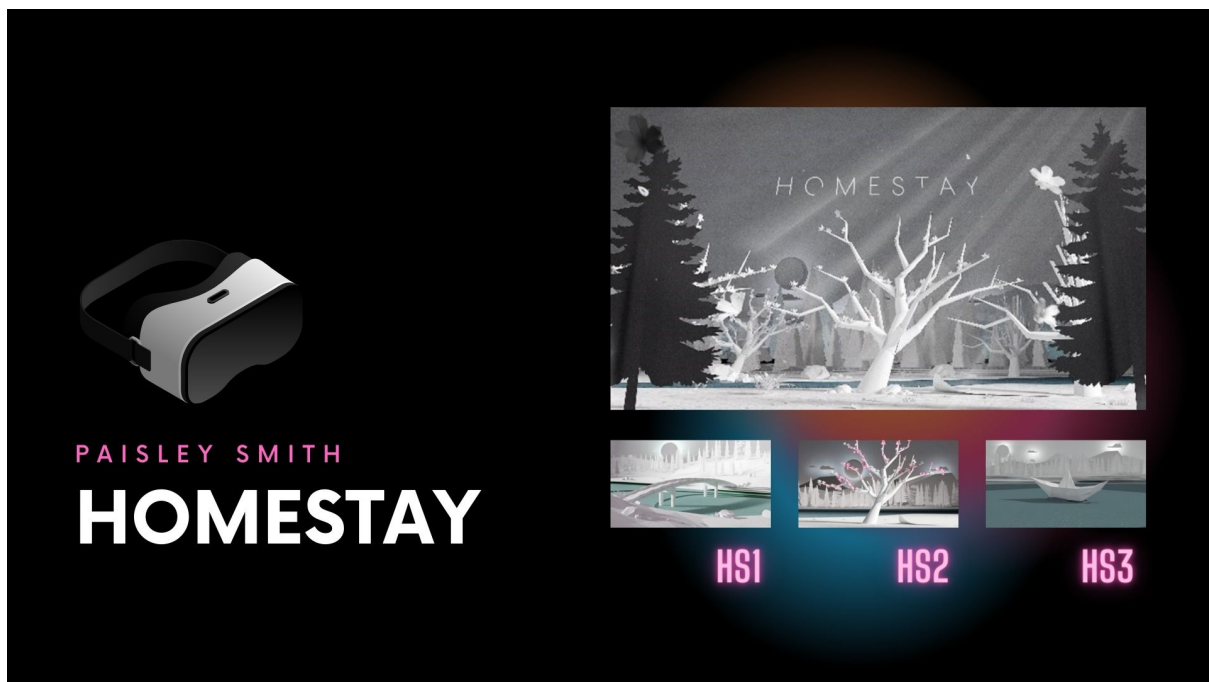
To facilitate the reading of the results of the MDA, a series of summary files have been elaborated. These summarize the information obtained, categorized according to the different fields related to the objective.

### *Homestay*

*Homestay* constitutes a multifaceted experiment that leverages state-of-the-art VR technology to advance the domain of interactive narratives within an audiovisual framework. The meticulously designed paper-craft world symbolically represents the garden visited by the narrator, Paisley Smith, during a period of mourning for the loss of a friend and "family member." This representation underscores the inadequacy of cultural symbols in encapsulating the full complexity of individuals. The data file shown in Table 2 summarizes the findings following the implementation of Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

#### Figure 1

*Excerpts from "Homestay" project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (Paisley Smith/NFB Canadá)*



**Table 2**  
*Summary of MDA applied to the “Homestay” Project*

Link	<a href="https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/homestay/">https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/homestay/</a>
Creators	Paisley Smith
Producer	NFB Canada
Platforms	HTC Vive and Oculus Rift
Format	Creative non-fiction narrative
Year	2018
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Immersive subjective shot.</li> <li>* Interaction with the environment makes the oral discourse to advance.</li> <li>* Internal movement inside the frame + movement of the frame.</li> <li>* User sometimes loses control of events.</li> </ul>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Japanese garden (Nitobe Memorial Garden (HS1).</li> <li>* Paper-craft, Origami style (HS3).</li> <li>* Music: minimalist.</li> <li>* Subjective voice, emotional adequacy.</li> <li>* Effects:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressive use for interactions.</li> <li>• Expressive recreation of sounds of the reel.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Aesthetic symbolism appeals to the loss that runs through the story. Also, to the incomprehension between cultural codes (HS2).</li> <li>* Ambience and reactions to interactions recreate emotional states and connect with deep reflections.</li> <li>* Interaction (or the impossibility of interaction) tells something.</li> </ul>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Tragic event as a point of connection with the emotional and deep.</li> <li>* Respect for the event.</li> <li>* Non-fiction is used as a memorial space.</li> </ul>

***Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia (How Sexism Shaped Our Adolescence)***

Media have been and are a window to the world. During our adolescence, TV, radio, magazines (and now, the Internet) gave us a glimpse of adult life as we discovered who we were. However, many of the messages we received were not innocent: they tried to create a model of woman into which we had to fit. "Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia" is an interactive project where each user, after entering his/her year of birth, can relive the cultural impacts that marked him/her. In Table 3, the key filtered data derived from the analysis is presented.



**Figure 2**

*Excerpts from “Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia” project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (J.M. Cuéllar y Paloma Torrecillas/RTVE Lab)*



**Table 3**

*Summary of MDA applied to the “Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia” Project*

Link	<a href="https://lab.rtve.es/8m-machismo-adolescencia/">https://lab.rtve.es/8m-machismo-adolescencia/</a>
Creators	Juan Manuel Cuéllar Paloma Torrecillas
Producer	RTVE Lab
Platforms	Web
Format	Interactive
Year	2023
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Static homepage with interaction.</li> <li>* Scroll down with text driven story.</li> <li>* Archive content inserted as multimodal elements (MA2).</li> <li>* Constant movement through animation</li> </ul>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Recognizable design: typography, color, graphic elements. Identity.</li> <li>* Purple Text and grids.</li> <li>* Patterns and graphic elements vary by content block. Design evokes the era (MA3).</li> <li>* Combination of cropped stock photography with hand drawing (digital collage).</li> <li>* GIFication of the proposal.</li> <li>* Language points, denounces, evidences, demands.</li> </ul>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Archive directed from an incisive, scathing and formative textual script that evidence sexism and its temporal and multipolar extension.</li> <li>* Starting point: interaction based on a personal trait (date of birth). (MA1).</li> <li>* Aesthetics of photography + collage connects with the historical uses of this technique associated with activism/social demands.</li> <li>* A new discourse is elaborated from the connection and contextualization of multimodal archival elements.</li> </ul>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Archive material: multimodal media content contextualized and recontextualized from the present.</li> <li>* Documentary value of the archive materials.</li> <li>* Appeal to a shared reality between creators and users based on their common media consumption.</li> <li>* New significance of the contemporary reality from:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The awareness of the incidence through the memory with an emotional character (adolescence).</li> <li>- The directed and intentional historical perspective.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### ***Fogo Na Floresta***

The film, made with indigenous people, is composed of 360-degree scenes that take the viewer inside the daily life of the indigenous community and presents a threat that hovers over the Waurá and all the peoples of the Amazon: uncontrolled fire. Managed for millennia by the indigenous people in the opening of their subsistence plots, fire now advances over the forests in an uncontrolled way, due to the deforestation of the surroundings of the Xingu and to climate change. The data file about this project is compiled in Table 4.

**Figure 3**

Excerpts from “Fogo na floresta” project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (Tadeu Jungle/ISA, Academia de Filmes)



**Table 4**

Summary of MDA applied to the “Fogo na Floresta” Project

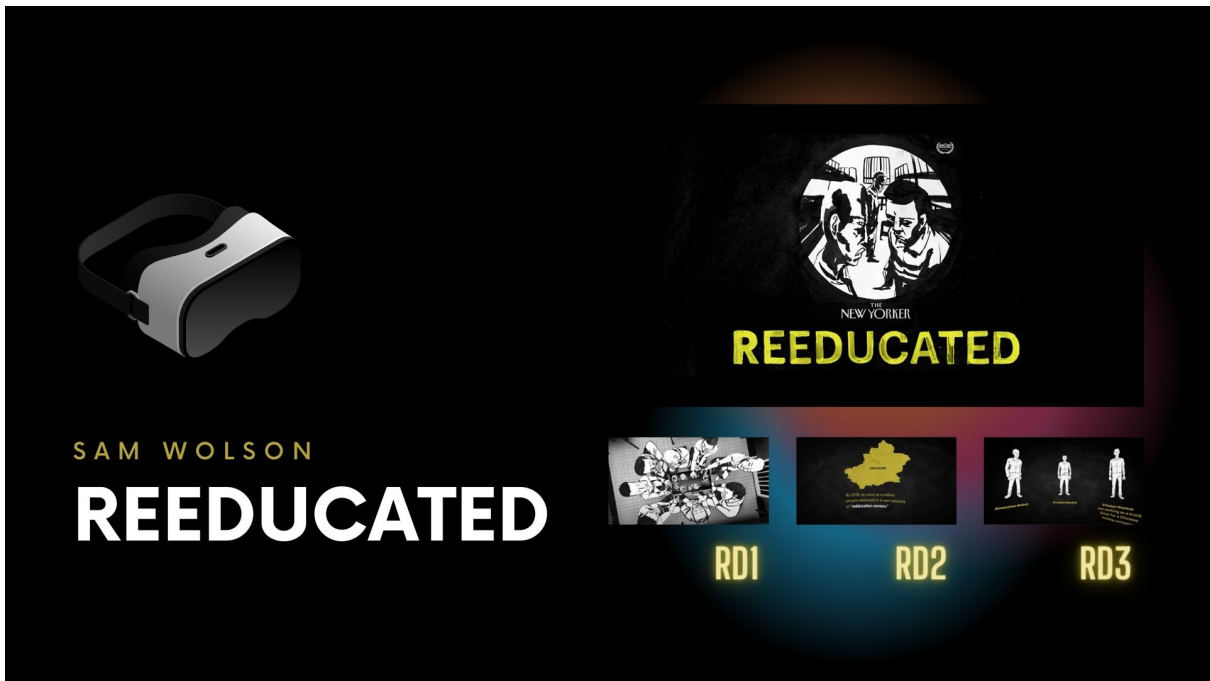
Link	<a href="https://apps.apple.com/us/app/fire-in-the-forest/id1230093632?ls=1">https://apps.apple.com/us/app/fire-in-the-forest/id1230093632?ls=1</a>
Creators	Tadeu Jungle
Producer	ISA and Academia de Filmes
Platforms	Appstore, google play, Youtube
Format	360° Documentary short film
Year	2017
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<p>* The camera moves to the territory, emphasizing actions and events that the director considers relevant (FF2).</p> <p>* The 360° offers amplitude to the view of the space. Although only in certain shots is used its expressive potential, as in the one in which the components of the community surround the device (FF1).</p> <p>* The voice-over directs the discourse over the visual story or the voices of the community.</p>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<p>* A subjective shot is not recreated: there are unusual points of view, such as a counterplane at ground level.</p> <p>* Possible control of the viewer's angle of vision within each sequence.</p> <p>* The ellipses are maintained, but the out-of-frame is transformed.</p> <p>* There is a desire to reinforce the evocative condition of the territory and traditions, glimpsing a certain aesthetic tension confronted with everyday life.</p>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<p>* Empathy is positioned on the villagers and their territory in the face of the threat of fire due to deforestation and climate change.</p> <p>* The message is reinforced by a voice from outside the community in a scripted speech.</p>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<p>* The real territory penetrates the digitized images (FF3).</p> <p>* The direct sound testifies to a past presentiality, recorded and reproduced.</p> <p>* The combination of both offers a testimonial value.</p> <p>* The purpose of the discourse, which is based on a real event (the threat of fire), directs the actions on the film.</p>

### **Reeducated**

This virtual-reality documentary immerses spectators into the confines of one of Xinjiang's "reeducation" camps, providing a guided narrative based on the reminiscences of three individuals—Erbaqyt Otarbai, Orynбек Koksebek, and Amanzhan Seituly—who shared imprisonment at a facility in Tacheng. Over recent years, governmental authorities have systematically transformed Xinjiang, the largest region in China, into a highly sophisticated police state, ranking among the most advanced globally. Data highlights are represented in Table 5.

#### **Figure 4**

*Excerpts from "Reeducated" project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (Sam Wolson/The New Yorker).*



**Table 5**  
*Summary of MDA applied to the “Reeducated” Project*

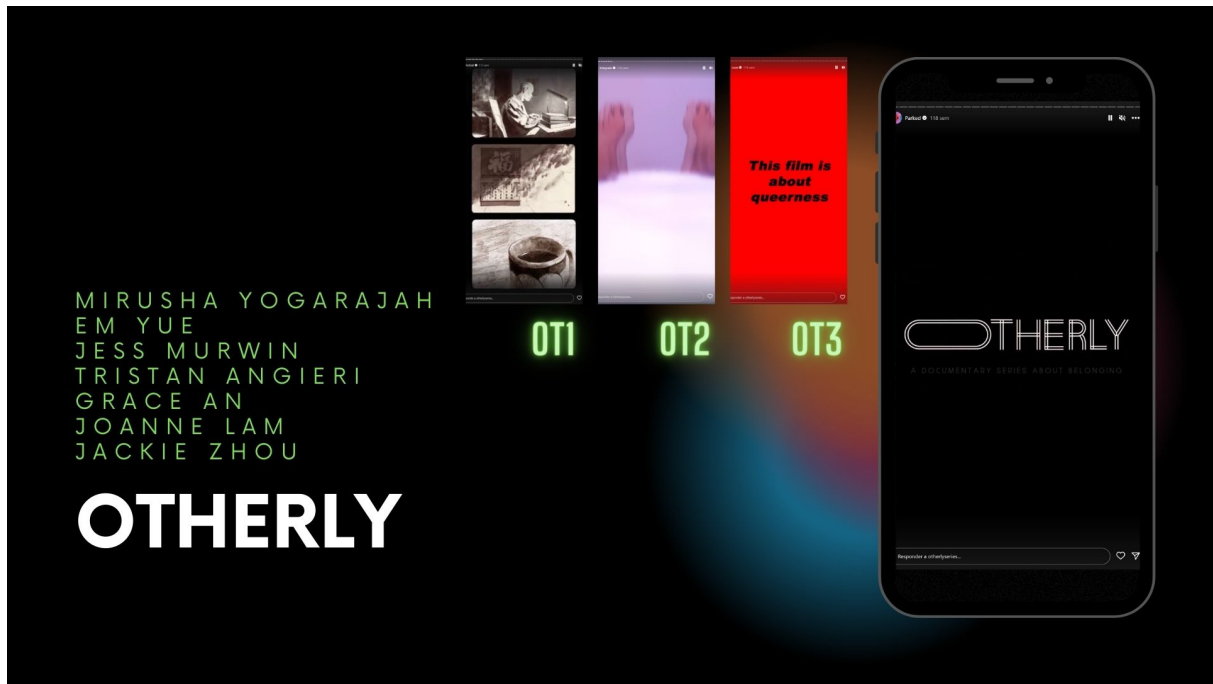
Link	<a href="https://www.newyorker.com/news/video-dept/reeducated-film-xinjiang-prisoners-china-virtual-reality">https://www.newyorker.com/news/video-dept/reeducated-film-xinjiang-prisoners-china-virtual-reality</a>
Creators	Sam Wolson
Producer	The New Yorker
Platforms	Oculus, Carboard Viewer, Phone or Tablet, Computer
Format	VR documentary
Year	2021
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<p>* The immersion places the viewer in a Chinese "re-education center", but the telepresence is not from a subjective plane; the experience is shared from a certain privileged position, with a sensorial participation and a possible intervention through the manipulation of the camera movement.</p> <p>360° "camera" positioning to emphasize the dramatic and expressive value of the story (RD1).</p> <p>* The narrative events provoke the movement of the user's privileged gaze (and interaction).</p>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<p>* Use of drawing and animation for the reproduction of an experience and the aestheticization of an emotional state.</p> <p>* Visual identity, black and white drawing and image, yellow letters and extradiegetic graphics (RD2).</p> <p>* Recreation of visual and sound ambience with a strong expressive value and creative licenses in the sequential composition to reproduce a story and an emotional state endorsed in the oral testimony.</p>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<p>* The voices of the testimonies are the driving force of the discourse on the experiences lived in a "re-education center" in Xinjiang.</p> <p>* An experience lived in the past is retold to inform about a present situation.</p> <p>It is told in an integrated way: the emotional component envelops the informative narrative.</p>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<p>* The voice of the memory of a real experience has a testimonial value.</p> <p>* The video of the bodies of the people (protagonists) in their new inhabited spaces connect with a non-re-created story.</p> <p>* The creative licenses grant a value of dramatized presence to the memory (RD3).</p> <p>* The aestheticized documented recreation acquires a value of truth - dependent on the validity of the sources.</p>

***Otherly***

Debuting on Instagram Stories, *Otherly* represents a collection of seven concise documentaries exploring the quest for identity in the 21st century. Employing universal themes such as love, inclusion, and loss as narrative entry points, these seven creators have produced films that are simultaneously timeless yet inherently ephemeral due to their form. Tailored for Instagram users, the *Otherly* project amplifies perspectives from a cohort of underrepresented creators, specifically focusing on women, non-binary, and genderqueer identifying individuals. Main analyzed data is exposed in Table 6.

**Figure 5**

*Excerpts from "Otherly" project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (Mirusha Yogarajah, Em Yue, Jess Murwin, Tristan Angieri, Grace An, Joanne Lam, Jackie Zhou/NFB and POV Spark)*



**Table 6**  
*Summary of MDA applied to the “Otherly” Project*

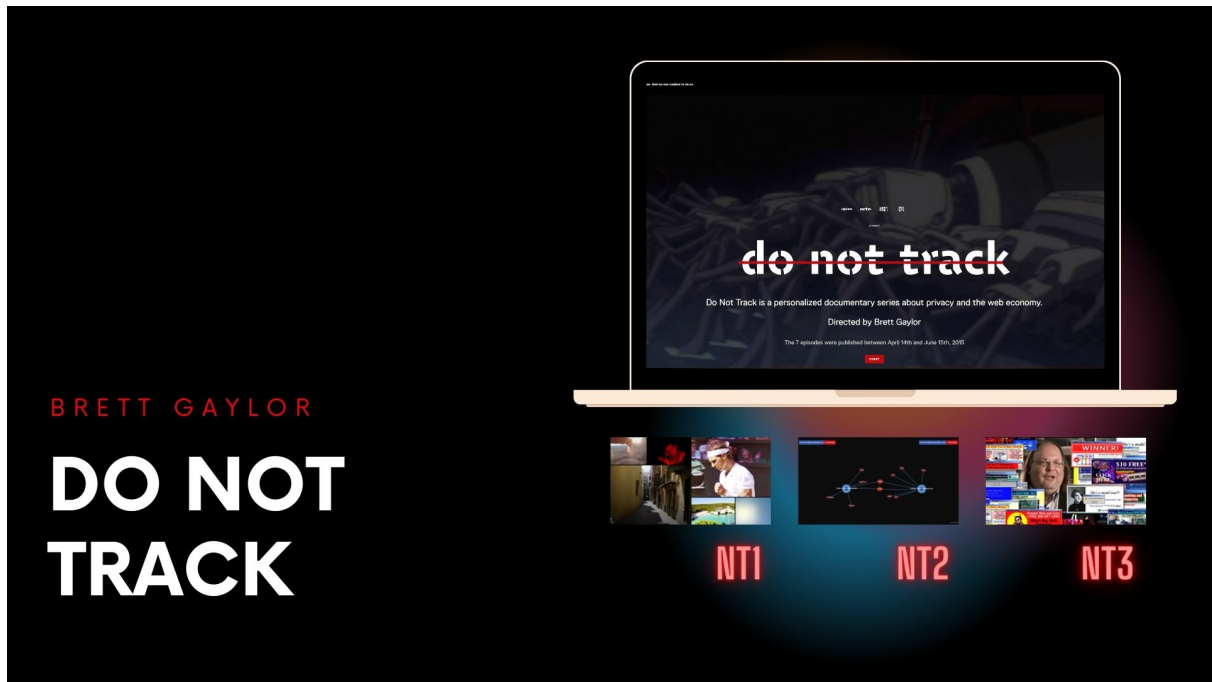
Link	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/otherlyseries/">https://www.instagram.com/otherlyseries/</a>
Creators	<p>Parked: Seeking Refuge in Our Cars</p> <p>by Mirusha Yogarajah Elaine Is Almost</p> <p>by Em Yue Love Is the First Sacred Lesson</p> <p>by Jess Murwin Integrate.Me</p> <p>by Tristan Angieri Papier Accordéon</p> <p>by Grace An A Portrait of Tracy</p> <p>by Joanne Lam FaceTime</p> <p>by Jackie Zhou</p>
Producer	National Film Board of Canada and POV Spark.
Platforms	Instagram stories
Format	Short documentaries
Year	2021
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Multiple.</li> <li>* Evidences the authorial vision in a collective project.</li> <li>* Shared styles: highlights the personal voice (off, interview), aestheticism of the composition, portrait in image or metaphorical, strong presence of the self.</li> </ul>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Multiple.</li> <li>* The diffusion platform conditions the verticality and the cut between stories (OT2).</li> <li>* The real image, the testimony of the self, is combined with the expressive (poetic) representation of uprooting and the search for identity (OT1).</li> <li>* The image (video and animation) tends to be suggestive and connotative, rather than explicit and denotative.</li> </ul>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Love, otherness, identity search, inclusion and loss are the main subjects.</li> <li>* It loses its theoretical ephemeral idiosyncrasy when preserved.</li> <li>* Different formulas are used to reveal deep, personal truths.</li> <li>* The expression of otherness seems to function as a cathartic element in the search for identity.</li> </ul>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Authorial truth: commitment and care with the representation of the self (OT3), of what is loved and what is feared.</li> <li>* Authenticity arises from the expression of the intimate, the personal and the profound.</li> <li>* There is an emotional respect for the issues being addressed.</li> <li>* Self-expression as truth: honesty.</li> </ul>

**Do not Track**

This documentary series delves into the mechanisms of data collection and utilization pertaining to individuals. Biweekly, personalized episodes were unveiled, each dedicated to investigating distinct facets of the contemporary web as an evolving landscape where actions, expressions, and identities are progressively documented and monitored. Table 7 highlights the main results of the analysis.

**Figure 6**

*Excerpts from “Do not Track” project (for research purposes only). All rights reserved to the owners (Brett Gaylor/Upian, Arte, NFB Canadá, Bayerischer Rundfunk with the participation of Radio-Canada, RTS, and AJ+).*





**Table 7**  
*Summary of MDA applied to the “Do Not Track” Project*

Link	<a href="https://donottrack-doc.com/en/intro/">https://donottrack-doc.com/en/intro/</a>
Creators	Brett Gaylor
Producers	National Film Board of Canada, Upian, Arte and Bayerischer Rundfunk with the participation of Radio-Canada, RTS and AJ+
Platforms	Computer-web
Format	Personalized documentary series
Year	2015
<b>MISE EN SCÈNE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Combination of idiosyncratic materials from the Internet and content produced ad-hoc to transfer authorial experiences or professional criteria.</li> <li>* Self-produced materials combine traditional formal aspects of the documentary (talking heads) with cuts recorded on cell phones or from the computer camera.</li> <li>* Voice-driven storytelling, determined by interaction.</li> </ul>
<b>AESTHETICS KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Aesthetic mimesis and Internet rhythm.</li> <li>* Use of web materials: Gif's, memes, popular culture.</li> <li>* Music reinforces rhythm and tone of the discourse.</li> <li>* Graphics for real-time data representation.</li> </ul>
<b>DISCOURSE KEYS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Metanarrative: the tracking experience is told by tracking the user.</li> <li>* Personalization of the user experience and adaptation of the discourse based on the tracking (also of the voice-over).</li> <li>* The chapters are concatenated, each one delving into a specific aspect of the subject, with cliffhangers that give continuity to the experience.</li> <li>* The language is apparently light-hearted, but it leads to shock with the revelation of information about the subject matter.</li> </ul>
<b>LINK TO REALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Synthetic truth: visualization of real time data exposed through tracking algorithms and programs.</li> <li>* Prescriptive description by experts.</li> <li>* Exposition of facts by quotation of founts.</li> <li>* Interactive information reveal: data is offered through the exchange user-project's interaction.</li> </ul>

## Discussion and Conclusions

From the in-depth analysis of the sample, a series of common tropes emerge in the new formats inherited from the non-fiction tradition. In the formal dimension, it is worth highlighting the use of multimodality in all its extension with purposes that move away from banal aestheticization to pursue the reinforcement of the message. Here we can appreciate a tendency towards expressive and poetic composition, moving away from the notion of neutral objectivity, beyond the threat of the loss of realism from indexically-based photography referenced by Borjan (2020), and appealing to the narrativity of the formal factor (Sánchez-López, 2020). At this point, technologies that are usually employed for instrumental purposes, acquire an expanded semiotic value. For example, this happens in the use of 360° in "*Reeducated*", increasing empathy towards the testimonies from the immersive reproduction of their experiences. In general, there is a symbiosis of form and content to achieve the purpose of each work. Exceptions are found in the verticality of the format in "*Otherly*", or the use of 360° in "*Fogo na Floresta*", where the form does not add significant extra value to the discourse.

The emphasis on current problems, and social and cultural issues to which Nichols alludes (1997), remains a constant. Also, the will to leave a testimony, the search for social awareness and the promotion of action for change. Here, however, and in contrast to the experimentation in *mise en interface*, a version of performativity anchored in the

principles of Web 2.0 is registered. Beyond the reference to a web page, the possibilities of the connected digital environment for mobilization and social change (Themba, 2018) or transmedia activism (Ortuño and Villaplana, 2017) are practically obviated (except in the case of "*Do not Track*", which executes a performativity for change by skillfully integrating interactivity).

Without the pursuit of neutral objectivity, how is the link with reality generated in these new non-fiction formats? The first, and most obvious, is through the revelation and the elevation of the authorial voice. It is assumed that there is someone behind the storytelling. There is no kidnapping or substitution of the real, as Baudrillard (1993) would denounce. There is a person responsible for a discourse and its vocation of truth. And this responsibility is linked to ethics, honesty, respect and, in cases such as "*Otherly*", even to care and self-care. In this sense, the dramatization and the environmental and emotional recreation of a story is not treated as a distancing from the facts, but as a way of figurative approximation.

In addition, there are some traditional resources typical of documentary genre, such as expert testimony, direct testimony of experiences, archival material, or the record in territory (not so the subsequent editing) that continue to maintain their induced status of "truth", highlighting the need for verification of the source, along the lines of fact checking of journalistic texts (Ufarte-Ruiz et al., 2018). It is interesting, however, to observe how these settled conventions are handled. In the case of "*Cómo el machismo marcó nuestra adolescencia*", the archaeological recontextualization of archival materials deploys a dialogic path with the editorial line of the project, impacting on the user's interpretation, and resignifying the content itself. New sources of veracity are also incorporated, arising from algorithmic processing in real time. It is a synthetic, hyper-quantified truth that responds to the invasive (and accepted) monitoring of our uses of technology.

The new order of the real is brewing with a whole series of tensions at its core. Fake News, emotional sharing, social media posing, virtualization, synthetic generated content, etc. The contemporary crisis of the real is, in fact, a crisis of the media systems inherited from the twentieth century (combined with the emergence of multiple new media systems). Especially, of the monopoly of truth of journalism and big media companies (as said in Levitskaya and Fedorov, 2020). The field of non-fiction, however, has continued in its dynamic of confronting the mediation of reality from a constant experimentation, both in the formal and discursive dimensions (Gifreu-Castells, 2015). Beyond the use as a strategy for survival in the media market, as noted by Das & Upadhyay (2024), we observe here proposals that, through their aesthetic and narrative construction, manage to enhance their communicational objectives.

Summarizing, we could state that the new forms of the real remain belligerent in their representation, but somewhat more conservative in their factual performativity for change. In any case, if we were to take for granted the axiom of "*Les travellings sont affaire de morale*" (Godard, taking up Moullet in Domarchi et al., 1959), we could assert that these new media forms would address reality as an aesthetic representation of an author creative commitment and responsibility as mediator of facts.

The main limitations of this study are related to the number of projects included in the sample and the reference model used for conducting the MDA. Among the lines of future research, it would be advisable to expand the sample to include a greater number of projects and formats that address reality in contemporary times. A review and validation of the applied MDA model would also lead to more relevant results in relation to the stated objectives.

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