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Participative Interactive Documentary as a fragmented and "deterritorialized" archive

Once upon a time… there was a king in a faraway land who ordered the kingdom's cartographers to draw a perfect map[1] with every single topographic detail. The cartographers measured all the places, worked hard and drew up a draft. "The Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province"[2]. But still the cartographers were not completely satisfied, and they produced an even more accurate map of the empire, seeking for the perfect map. Finally, the "cartographer's guilds struck a map of the empire whose size equated that of the empire, and which coincided point for point with it"[3]. They called the king to the desert and showed him the map. It transpired that the map of the empire was exactly the same size as the empire itself. The map was so detailed and so big that it was useless.

Once upon a time… there was Web 2.0, which allowed human beings from all over the world to document and share every single moment of their lives; travel landscapes, holiday idleness, job duties, pictures of pets and of every minute and mundane event, including meals. These digital archives, stocked with digital glimpses of their lives, allowed the audience to perform various operations: to search, navigate and watch, and also to create and upload their own content. Thus the Internet facilitated the creation of an overgrown Borgesian map of human lives, a database without a hierarchy of values nor a comprehensive organization.

Participatory culture has enabled an increasing number of archives to become available online and encouraged collaborative environments where almost everyone can add his or her own videos to the web. Therefore, the Internet has extended the notion of archives, both in conceptual terms and in material dimensions, and raised various questions concerning authorship, distribution and aesthetics.

The rapid evolution of technologies has allowed users to become creators of content and not just consumers. The result of such participation is a fragmented scenario, presenting what Lev Manovich calls *database logic*. For this author, just like the cinema "privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its correlate – the database"[4]. In fact:

Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have a 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.[5]

Therefore, we may question whether these databases may be considered as archives, since the traditional concept of archive refers to the past, and the accumulation of historical records in a physical place as an organized and catalogued collection. Contrariwise, most of the digital archives generated by Internet users are just random materials, a cacophony of images and voices without context or relevance, uploaded to online platforms.

As Mary Ann Doane states, with the anxiety of recording "real time" archives end up without any significant moments, that is to say, "if everything is recordable, nothing matters except the act of recording itself"[6]. Doane also suggests, inspired by Kittler, the property of new technologies to generate indexical glimpses of life comprises both the appeal of preserving the past and the threat of preserving too much, of generating only an "archive of noise"[7]. In reality, the online content generated by users is malleable, evolutional, mostly disconnected and decontextualized, and it could also be considered "deterritorialized"[8], since its "code" is separated and confined from its original milieu or territory, disconnected from its original meaning.

Considering that Web 2.0 is at the apex of the remix culture, democratization, and decentralization of "conventional" strategies for data sharing, it may then be portrayed as significantly postmodern. In this new worldview, content consumers have become content creators. New methods of imparting and scattering content now emphasize the proceedings and highlight how knowledge is progressively

aggregated and managed. . Web 2.0 is clearly changing our interactions, decentralizing knowledge and even reconfiguring our very identities. Such transformations have triggered an opportunity for thinking about archives from a new perspective.

Once upon a time… there was Participative Interactive Documentary[9], a work of art that presents a subjective perspective of reality and introduces an evolving open database in which the users can add their contents and include their points of view to the documentary. To be classified as a documentary, the literature says a film must present a unique and personal perspective about the world, a "voice" and "an argument, as well as convey a point of view"[10]. In fact, as the term has evolved over time, the documentary genre has been contaminated with various influences, increasingly moving away from a factual representation and approaching "personal essay films"[11].

Therefore, an interactive documentary is considered to be a non-fiction work clearly defined by the author's point of view, which provides the audience with the ability to interact with the contents and shape the narrative within the interaction.

We may argue that all interactive documentaries comprehend a participatory approach, in the sense that once the documentary includes interaction and requires a physical action or performance from the audience (choosing contents, following pathways, shaping the narrative) the users are already participating. By Participative Interactive Documentary we understand it to mean interactive documentaries that provide the audience with the ability to include content, and thus contribute to the interactive documentary footage. The sharing platform becomes what Umberto Eco defined as a "work in movement"[12], a privileged space for collaboration which creates an "unfinished work" due to its "openness".

At a conceptual level, participative interactive documentaries allow the audience not only to create content, but also to set up a presence in the narrative and become visible to other viewers. These digital archives involve literally digitizing oneself and creating a "museum of me," mediated by devices and screens. What I argue in this paper is that interactive documentary genre creates an orderliness in the digital archive chaos and provides meaning to fragmented archives, which otherwise could only be interpreted as random material.

To do so, I will analyse the interactive documentary *A journal of Insomnia*[13], which presents a collaborative strategy to assemble the contributions of insomniacs from all over the world, building a digital database. The videos from the participants comprise an evolving archive with more than 2,000 contributions, and continues to grow every night. Such artwork may be considered as a means to create communities around a topic of mutual interest and as vehicle to enhance the sense of belonging among participants. Also, as we will see, audience participation is regulated by a set of rules established by the documentary's creators. In order to participate, the users should either be insomniacs or, at least must experience a sleep disorder during one night.

I.   A Journal of Insomnia

An immersive voice, with minimal mood music over a dark background invites the audience to dive into a night of insomnia. The voice is accompanied with a digital sound wave vector, pulsating out from centre screen. The interface of *A Journal of Insomnia* induces a feeling of dyssomnia in the audience and sustains a surreal experience. According to the company that designed the documentary interface: every element of graphic design is in a direct link with the visual identity; intense colour contrasts, shrieking elements, glitches... Anything to make a user the most uncomfortable, just like as sleepless night would.[14]

This disembodied voice is followed by a resonant sound effect in a vacuum, baffling, dreamlike, crossed with a ticking clock sound. The sound designer Philippe Lambert explains that he used and manipulated actual sound from the webcams: "You can take a sound and pitch it down and it becomes a dark bass note, a melody or choir effect. I was using *musique concrète* techniques to create a soundtrack"[15].

As the creators tried to enhance a sense of surreal darkness, the voice uses narration as a rhetorical mode of discourse to communicate directly with the viewer, and speaks in the first person to create an intimate and personal story as a testimony of an insomniac. Also, it relates to the audience in the second person, addressing the viewer directly by "you", to boost what Morin[16] describes as a projection-identification: in developed countries 30 percent of people are insomniacs like me. Since the fall of 2012, privately, under the cover of darkness, I have been meeting them and collecting their stories. Welcome to *A Journal of Insomnia*[17].

The opening sequence works as a welcoming introduction to the documentary content, divided into an "open access" section for all viewers and a "closed digital archive" available only to "insomniacs". The voice delivers this information, warning that "only by making an appointment and coming back tonight will you receive the full experience. It's your turn now to invest part of your night"[18].

The open access content is accessible to anyone during daytime, consisting of four stories produced and filmed by the National Film Board of Canada to introduce the subject of insomnia. The screen is divided into four parts comprised of the faces of four subjects, while the voice asks "Who will you join?" The hands of a clock move over the screen, setting the pace in slow seconds. "The whole effect is made all the more surreal in those early interactive moments as the user is drawn toward the computer screen, like Max Renn in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*"[19].
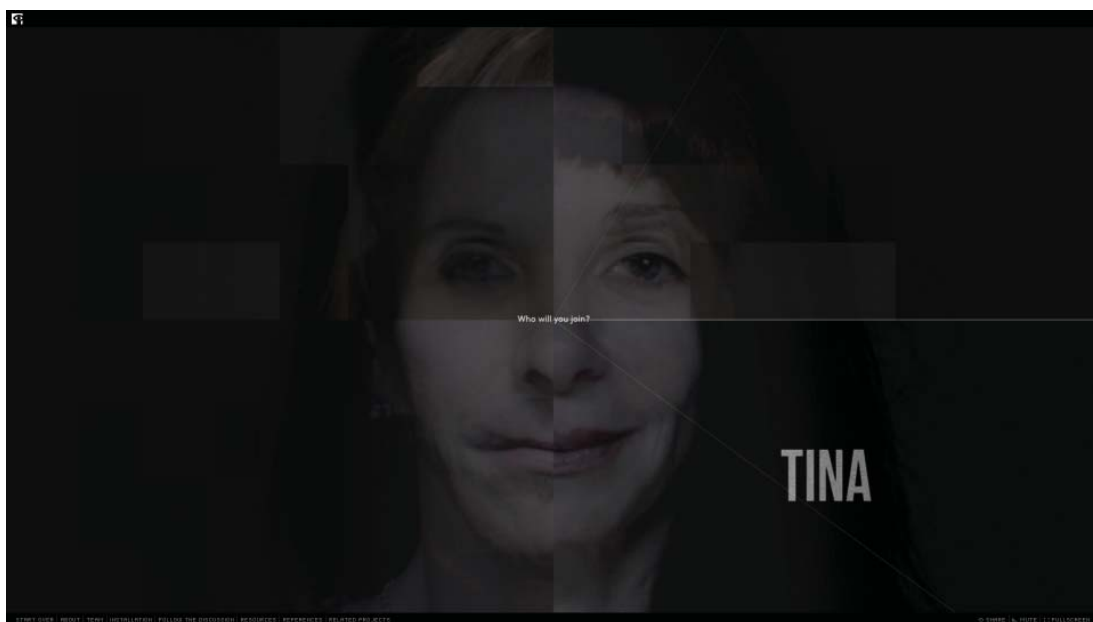

Fig. 1 | *Welcome screen, with the four individual portraits of the protagonists*

The four individual portraits combine into a single face, visually conveying that although each story is unique all the stories have something in common: insomnia. These four stories work like an invitation to a deeper experience in the interactive documentary. Tina, Sarah, Francis and Fatiha share their intimate thoughts to promote identification with the audience, while images of their empty bedrooms overlap with a close-up still portrait of each subject.

It's a blend between movement and stillness, just as Tina describes her nights: "thoughts running through my mind, images constantly streaming through my mind, words… Ghostly thoughts… thoughts and images. Movement. Motionlessness, which is hard to bear at night". For her "insomnia is a space-time

continuum that must be tamed, in order to surrender to it. Otherwise, insomnia drives us mad"[20].

The inevitability of the continuum of space and time in life is suspended in film. While reality traps us in place and time, film has the peculiarity of interrupting time, of displacing us to another world, leading us to forget about reality. Furthermore, in an interactive documentary the concept of time is even more discontinuous, since the contents are fragmented to allow the audience to navigate through the database and experience a multilinear narrative, leading to a complex process of reception, interaction and interpretation, which Sandra Gaudenzi describes:

While in linear documentaries meaning was created by framing shots and editing them together, in participatory interactive documentary meaning is shared and layered: there is the meaning of individual clips (not controlled by the interactive documentary author), the meaning of the interface (normally conceived by the author) and the meaning of the browsing (the narrative route and association generated by the user, while jumping between videos).[21]

All the images from *A Journal of Insomnia* are dark, accentuated on a black background, tilting slowly, and interrupted by drop-outs similar to ones we are familiar with from videotape playback. In an interview for The Creators Project, the director of photography Thibaut Duverneix explains that he shot the room images with a Red camera and then transferred the footage to a VHS tape to degrade the look as a way to represent what the subjects' described as their experience of insomnia. Duverneix explains he had some doubts considering the aesthetic: "I was really pushing it far from interactivity. Far from making it look good, honest and intimate"[22].

Fig. 2 | Documentary footage with VHS drop-outs

The four protagonists complain that sleep deprivation is disrupting their lives. Fatiha describes insomnia as "hell", and all of them affirm that their minds are over-busy. If that's not the case, Francis discloses, he tends to "dwell on something that wasn't there". Meanwhile, the night represents an emptiness, a vacuum, when "nothing happens," as Sarah resignedly says.

Once we have watched and interacted with the open access database, we are invited to return later. To participate in the interactive documentary and to record our insomnia experience we must return during the night in our own time zone. Also, the confessions' archive, which is the result of crowdsourcing, is only

available during the night. In order to experience the full participative interactive documentary the user is invited to embody the point-of-view of an insomniac, interacting with the archive and simultaneously experiencing a condition of insomnia during the night. The spectator's role is deconstructed during the interaction process, since he ceases to be merely a viewer, to become one of the characters, and vice-versa.

II.   At night…

It's night. The dark sky above our heads tells us it's time to sleep. Most of the lights from the houses are off. Only the street lights punctuate the urban landscape. It's silent. Probably everyone is sleeping, or at least I assume so. I feel like I'm the only human being on earth that is awake. Thoughts are streaming into my mind that do not allow me to just forget about day time. The feeling of loneliness is suddenly interrupted by my phone ringing. It's a call from the National Film Board of Canada.

This could be the beginning of a story, the beginning of a true story out of the interactive documentary *A Journal of Insomnia*. The interactive work is a crowdsourcing documentary in which insomniacs are encouraged to provide insight about their sleepless hours and to share their affliction. The Internet is probably the best place to talk about insomnia. The World Wide Web disrupts our concepts of time and place, and as Jonathan Crary states in his book, "24/7 announces a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence"[23]. We can be online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and in some place in the planet there will be daytime and there will be someone online.

The interactive documentary *A journal of Insomnia* plays with this specific Internet attribute to contradict it, requiring the audience to be online during the night time. In order to give their testimony it is required that participants make a night appointment and receive a call from the National Film Board to guide their participation. On the other end of the line the voice conducts the interview, guiding the participants through the predetermined questions. The answers can be recorded through the computer webcam, typing out text and by drawing sketches.

Fig. 3 | Drawings by participants to answer questions about insomnia

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Since the fall of 2012, participants have been answering the call and confessing their thoughts about insomnia. While the oral and typed answers are insightful, the drawings unveil the deepest intimate worlds, as the producer Hugues Sweeney relates:

Most of the drawings were especially affecting. I didn't expect them to be so personal and so natural. There's one that asks, "how does the insomnia make you feel towards the people around you?" And that person really drew themselves as completely separate from the world. That touched me. I was impressed with the ways that people would create themselves. The medium is a website and they talk like they would to a real person.[24]

More than 2,000 contributions have already been collected and archived in the interactive documentary database. Each video may be regarded as a personal territory, a space of affinity that is built by its participant to mark his/her place in a virtual world of insomniacs. The individual stories are both produced and presented as discrete experiences, disconnected from one another, and connected through common subject matter. When ephemeral stories captured by our digital artefacts become part of a heterogeneous assemblage they find their space within a narrative and draw a map, delineated from the emotional virtual bonds. The combination of these contributions collaborate in constructing a specific territory for its users based on an affective geography, and generating a map of experiences. The archive keeps evolving and the map keeps growing every time someone contributes with a new personal story. This is a process that goes beyond the projection-identification defined by Edgar Morin[25]. While in his Imaginary Man writings Morin defines the spectator as outside the *mise-en-scène*, deprived of actual participation and without the ability to change the narrative, in the interactive documentary the user is able to shape the story and, furthermore, to include himself as an active participant in the artwork.

The filmmakers also invite the audience to participate because they are aware that this strategy can engage them in a process of self-representation. "There's a real need for these people not only to come out as an insomniac, but also to share how they feel", Sweeney states[26]. By accepting to participate in the documentary and including their stories the users become "both spectators and actors"[27]. They not only navigate and watch the contributions from other insomniacs, creating a personalized narrative, but also they face themselves, literally, while interacting with the contents, like a reflection in the mirror.

Documentaries representing the self are a trend not only in the interactive Internet environment. According to Pat Aufderheide[28], since the mid 1980's personal essay films, which the author entitles as "first-person documentaries," have been populating as a trend. "There is the confessional video, a first-person diary or meditation, drawing on a long history of independent and art film"[29]. Such works present an intimate approach, narrated in the first person, blurring the borders between private and public life.

But in interactive documentary the process of self-representation goes beyond the director's voice and story. In fact, the spectator becomes a character, a part of the world represented through inscribing himself in the narrative. By seeing themselves in the documentary content participants are transferring themselves to the screen and interacting, physically and conceptually, with their own beings.

As we alluded to, *A Journal of Insomnia* overcomes what Morin describes in The Imaginary Man[29]. For Morin, cinema is an aesthetic experience because it is meant for a passive spectator "who remains conscious of the absence of the practical reality of what is represented"[30], by converting the magic crystallization into an affective participation. While, in participative interactive documentary the participant contributes to building a world that is not merely imaginary, even though it is always intersubjective.

Simultaneously, since the moment when the platform started incorporating the contributions of individuals the database was shaped according to the participants' inputs, which made the creative team adjust the project itself. Therefore, we may infer that the documentary participative archive reflects the artwork's concept, since by including the participants' content, the documentary will be constantly evolving.

III.   From deterritorialization to cosmopedia

We are living "in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."[31] While we become more and more embedded in the new digital neighborhood, connected through cultural and personal interests, we are also becoming more rootless in our physical space. As networked beings, we are becoming intellectual and social nomads, moving through a virtual, mobile and discontinuous territory.

I'm borrowing the concept of "nomad" from Pierre Lévy, who considers that "this new nomadism will not develop within any known geographical territory, institution or state, but within an invisible space of understanding, knowledge, and intellectual power"[32]. Therefore, digital archives, framed in interactive documentary, may be considered as a process of "Collective Intelligence", which according to Lévy has the ability of reintegrate the fragmented knowledge and aggregate the dispersion of space[33].

The digital participative archive of *A Journal of Insomnia* provides a complex map of sleeplessness, mapping the sleep disorder in an artistic rather than in a clinical perspective. The database works as a "sounding board" for insomniacs' confessions. Each one of the participants presents a unique story and contributes to creating a multi-perspective, multidimensional, and multilinear map of insomnia.

In a prophetic statement, Foucault[34] imagines the networking of individuals as a means to constructing geographies of human interaction. The Web 2.0 and collaborative digital environments appear to reanimate a spacialization of thought and experience, and simultaneously gather individual experiences to enhance collective memory.

Digital archives cannot be seen as an organized collection, but like traditional archives they are preserving our cultural, social and historical identities. Instead, they should be regarded as an articulation of personal and private memory, rather than a global history. In the fast-paced world of work and leisure, digital archives appear to ensure that personal and collective memories are maintained and preserved. However, these memories are juxtaposed with the global and impersonal archives which populate on the Internet, converting the notions of memory and identity as coterminous.

Also, since sometimes insomnia conducts to a feeling of extreme loneliness, participative interactive documentary brings people closer together and connects them through sharing their stories. If only in a figurative sense, by bringing the users closer to each other through identifying with an issue in common and through a displacement of archives to the user's screen, the digital artwork presents a "reterritorialization"[35] of images, building a map that provides the digital archives with a new context and meaning. Even if the archives were deterritorialized from their original territory, in participative interactive documentary the images are resituated in a new territory of knowledge to assume a different function.

While the structure of a film is determined by the sequence of its elements, in an interactive documentary the film's narrative is no longer determined by the filmmaker. It is the user that re-arranges the items of his choice to create a personalized narrative. Therefore, the narrative logic seems to be opposed to the Lev Manovich's concept of *database*:

As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world.[36]

As coherent as the archives may be, navigation through the database will be always based on random access. However, non-linearity doesn't mean that authorship is passing on to the viewer. Authorial intention is the key element that sustains the interactive documentary as a consistent artwork. Without authorial intent, we would only have a mere conglomeration of random components ready to emerge from chaos.

Unlike most random digital databases, in an interactive documentary the digital archives encompass multiple perspectives with different approaches to the same subject, such as insomnia, and together these perspectives build a broader point-of-view, or as Pierre Levy calls it, a "Cosmopedia", in which

knowledge is not in the possession of a few, but a form of "*universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills"[37].

IV.   Drawing a map

Although the interactive documentary is a fairly recent *genre*, the number of interested, interacting and participating users of these digital artworks manifests a growing migration of people from a linear narrative to multilinear storytelling. Focusing on the participative interactive documentary mode, we may argue the real step forward is the digital self-representative archive. In such a context the archive is not a static and closed database, but an evolving and growing repository, extending *ad infinitum*.

Also, the conventional cartographic territories don't seem to be able to seize the human digital encounters. Traditional maps tell homogeneous, linear, narratives, ignoring the invisible and sensitive geographies of affinity, while participative interactive documentary goes beyond the demarcations defined by cartographers. Digital archive maps aren't drawn considering geographical borders, but taking into consideration the emotional and affective geographies of virtual affinities. When accessing the archive, the audience is creating new "neighbourhoods," exploring virtual landscapes, navigating through imaginary worlds, reconstructed in the spaces of connection and exchange between users.

Nowadays, we are still far from the map in Borges' novel, but the evolving archive keeps growing and gathering contributions from insomniacs, which may drive the audience to a sense of "incompleteness." While in psychology the feeling of incompleteness is heavily associated with an Obsessive–Compulsive Personality, such as the emergence of registering every detail of our lives, philosophically the same term can be related to something that is meaningful only in a specific context. So, the incompleteness of the digital database finds its meaning when the fragmented archives are contextualized in a broader body of work such as the participative interactive documentary.

In Borges' story the following generations, who were not as fond of the study of cartography as their forebears had been, abandoned the kingdom's map. "In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars"[38]. Maybe one day we will find the living and evolving archives abandoned by future generations in a virtual desert, but in the meantime mapping this network of image propagation constitutes a living memory for the future and nurtures a "sense of belonging" among the participants.

<div align="right">Patrícia Nogueira</div>

Notes

1. The idea of a perfect map, described by Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science" (1998), and quoted by Lev Manovich (2001), was originally anticipated by Lewis Carroll in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893).
2. Jorge L. Borges, "Museum, on Exactitude in Science", in *Collected Fictions*, Grove Press, New York 1998, p. 325.
3. Ibid
4. Lev Manovich, *The language of New Media*. The MIT Press, Massachussetts 2001, p. 218.
5. Ibidem.
6. Mary A. Doane, (2002) *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2002, p. 66.
7. Ibid

8. Following Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Edipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Univ. of Massachusets Press, Minneapolis 2000.

9. Participative Interactive Documentary is a classification proposed by Sandra Gaudenzi, in Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi, "Interactive documentary: setting the field" in Studies in Documentary Film, Taylor and Francis, London, *6*(2), pp. 125–139, as one of the modes of interactive documentary, to address the non-fiction interactive works which comprise User Generated Contents, through a crowdsourcing technique.

10. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2001, p. 43.

11. Following Jack C. Ellis, Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film,* Continuum, London 2005, pp. 262-265.

12. Following Umberto Eco, *The open work*, Harvard University Press, Massachussetts 1989.

13. Bruno Choiniere, Philippe Lambert, Thibaut Duverneix, Guillaume Braun, "A Journal of Insomnia", National Film Board, Canada <http://insomnia.nfb.ca/#/insomnia> (last accessed October 8, 2016)

14. Akufen: Web, branding and design, "A Journal of Insomnia", <http://akufen.ca/en/projects/a-journal-of-insomnia> (last accessed October 6, 2016)

15. DJ Pangburn, "A Journal of Insomnia Is A Surreal Interactive Documentary Experience" <http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/a-journ> (last accessed May 29, 2016).

16. Following Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, Or, The Imaginary Man,* University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota 2005.

17. Bruno Choiniere, *op. cit.*

18. Ibid.

19. DJ Pangburn, *op. cit.*

20. Bruno Choiniere, *op. cit.*

21. Sandra Gaudenzi, "Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries", in Kate Nash, Craig Hight, Catherine Summerhayes (eds), *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses,* Palgrave Macmillan UK, London 2014, p. 138.

22. DJ Pangburn, *op. cit.*

23. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Verso, New York 2013, p. 29.

24. Karen Kemmerle, "Hugues Sweeney on Journal of Insomnia", <https://tribecafilm.com/stories/hugues-sweeney-journal-of-insomnia> (last accessed May 30, 2016)

25. Following Egar Morin, *op. cit.*

26. Karen Kemmerle, *op. cit*

27. Bruno Choiniere, *op. cit.*

28. Following Patricia Aufderheide, *Public Intimacy: The development of first-person documentary*. *AfterImage*, New York 1997, *25*(1), p.16.

29. Egar Morin, *op. cit.*

30. Ivi, p. 97

31. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias", *Architecture, Mouvement Continuité*, (5), 1984, p.46

32. Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence*, Perseus Books, Massachussetts 1997, p. XXV

33. Ivi, p. 108

34. Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*

35. Following Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *op. cit.*

36. Lev Manovich, *op. cit.*, p. 199

37. Following Pierre Lévy, *op. cit.*, p. 13

38. Jorge L. Borges, *op. cit.*, p. 325