

Webdocumentary and historiographical issues

At first glance, the webdocumentary could be classified as a media form that enjoyed an intense but ephemeral craze around 2010. However, its use continues to develop at the turn of the 2020s, but outside of its initial foothold, a particular interest in this heterogeneous and delinearised audiovisual form is gaining ground within research in the humanities and social sciences. This leads us to raise methodological questions and to identify issues that have to do with both the writing of history and public history.

The webdocumentary makes it possible to aggregate testimonies (sometimes provided by Internet users themselves), archival images, historical data (in some cases, massive) etc. It differs from writings and other forms of historical films by its delinearised and incomplete structure. It is up to the users to design their own path through the contents on offer; in return, the designers must provide for the possibility of selective and therefore partial viewing. Access to the content made available and entry into the possible pathways often depends on consultation of a home page based on a visualization: a proposed chronology with junctions, an entertaining animated sequence, a map that includes audiovisual content or a conceptual map highlighting notions. Sometimes this visualization fully assumes the non-linearity of the format (and therefore of the historical intention) or, on the contrary, leads to a return to a more classical form of presentation of the contents (a succession of short audiovisual sequences, for example). The arrangement of the various elements used (text, sound, still or moving images) is also an issue, as the conceived interface is more or less reflective. Thus, it sometimes reveals the database in which these elements are indexed, whereas in other cases there is real effort to render these sources invisible.

Handling and making sense of these heterogeneous sources is a new task for many historians, while at the same time it raises recurrent questions about the selection, editing and consideration of aesthetic and ethical aspects in the use of documentary sources. These choices not only concern the software in use and the technical skills of the creative teams, but also the historiographical orientations adopted in a conscious or unconscious manner. It is, in fact, possible to create webdocumentaries by inscribing them in models as varied as those of quantitative history, oral history, microhistory, local history, the history of representations and sensitivities, etc. This has consequences for their format and the space given to their sources.

These questions must be read in the context of the production of a web object oriented towards dissemination, designed to reach audiences outside the walls of the university. Two consequences are of particular interest to us here: the role given to users in setting up the project, especially in the so-called "participative" webdocs, and the need to work on the accessibility of the content between writing history and conveying memory. In the second case, the webdoc can serve a marginalised group in order to become a vector of visibility of the memory carried by the latter (here we are thinking of decolonial, feminist perspectives, etc.). When the webdoc works in this way to put the presuppositions of the present into perspective, it moves along a fine line between simplification and tightening-up of the subject (for the reasons mentioned above, to make it more attractive or more effective) on the one hand, and a desire for complexity on the other. The question then arises as to who are the actors in these processes of simplification or maintenance of a form of complexity. It is then relevant to reflect, without hasty presuppositions, in terms of the composition of the different domains gathered around the conception of research webdocumentaries (research group, webdesign team, representative of institutions, associated persons and groups, etc.)

and to understand the role of researchers in the setting-up, around a historical theme, of a space and time for creation.

Working in this way to create conditions conducive to the creation of the webdoc also implies adapting the production processes in order to integrate the relationship with the passage of time, whether this concerns the events themselves - and the transformation of their reading over time, the temporality of historical research or the circulation of the webdoc and its reception, which must also be thought through over time. For the webdocumentary and its tools to accompany the long-term work of research, the latter must be able to adapt to the short and ever-changing temporalities of digital environments.

In short, the proposed issue will be an opportunity to observe, in a sort of feedback effect, the changes and learning induced by these projects on the modes of mediation of the past. The exchange of methods, concepts and tools within the production teams appear to be ways of diversifying the practice of history and more generally of transforming a form of gaze (audiovisual, informed and rigorous) on the past.

Among the subjects covered by this call for contributions:

- feedback on projects carried out in research-creation and/or public history;
- historiographical or epistemological reflections resulting from the practice of designing interactive documentaries;
- feedback on methods developed to ensure the sharing of authority between the different actors of the creation teams and the realisation of such historical projects in "shared authority";
- perspectives on the tools and forms of work specific to its web objects with the help of existing documentary projects (carried out inside or outside the university framework);

- explorations of particularly relevant uses of sources in webdocumentaries (critical fabulation, anarchivage, oral history, media archaeology);
- studies on the choices made for the circulation of historical webdocumentaries and on the different methods of conceptualising and implementing the dissemination of projects at different stages of their realisation.

Proposals (maximum one page) and a brief biographical note should be sent before April 1, 2022 to remy.besson@umontreal.ca and martin.bonnard2@mail.mcgill.ca. Papers may be written in English or French. If selected, the article, which should not exceed 35,000 characters, must be written by August 31, 2022.

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