



Lucilla Lopriore<sup>1</sup>

## BEING THERE: TRAVEL DOCUMENTARIES

“The documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other.[...] The documentary structures unstructured moments through a journey [...] Documentaries are performative acts.” (Bruzzi 4)

### 1. Introduction

A very special dimension in tourism exists when people travel around and visit faraway places without even moving from their own houses. It is the dimension provided by travel or tourist documentaries that people watch while sitting comfortably in their armchairs in front of their TVs or computers, without taking the trouble of spending their money. It is a safe experience and it allows people to reach destinations otherwise unreachable. Unlike Macon Leary, the travel writer portrayed by Ann Tyler in her book *The Accidental Tourist*, who hates travelling and does so “only with his eyes shut and holding his breath”(10), the accidental tourists who cannot afford long and expensive journeys thoroughly enjoy the experience of watching documentary.

The growing success of TV travel documentaries lies in this unusual way of travelling and in the fully engaging experience that its multimodal dimension offers. Travel documentaries have the power of nullifying time and space, making Star Trekian fictional teleportation possible. If these documentaries represent the only way of visiting places and encountering new peoples and cultures for those who are unable to travel, for many others they trigger the desire to travel and plan exotic itineraries. For both types of audiences they represent the first visual and auditory encounter with a new destination and its reality. The way the sequencing of images and the accompanying spoken texts integrate determine the individual viewers' engagement with the tourist destination.

Whether shot for promotional purposes or for the travel programs of specialised TV channels, or for personal memories of a journey (travelogues), travel documentaries have experienced an unprecedented worldwide diffusion in the last few years. They have reached a variety of audiences while adding yet another dimension to the principal media of tourism communication (Dann 1996, 2001; Coltman), thus allowing the would-be tourists to add that special flavour of virtually 'living' the travel experience without being actually there.

The strength of the immediacy and of the quality of travel documentaries challenge the same notion of authenticity<sup>2</sup> salient in most sociological studies on tourism (McCannel 1973, 1976; Urry). If tourists are looking for authenticity of places, people and culture, travel films respond to the tourists' quest for authenticity (Wang) since they provide a unique feature of objectivity in showing real places (Pearce) at a very close distance. Travel documentaries are a powerful way of closing the gap between the viewing audience and distant tourist destinations. Thanks to the wide diffusion of technology and social networks, these types of documentaries are more accessible today than in the past by everyone everywhere. Travel documentaries are so diffused that they are often viewed beyond the initial purpose, as for example, in the case of individual travel memories shot by improvised film-maker tourists that are regularly featured either in TV programs or on tourism websites. Derived from the genre of documentary films, travel documentaries

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<sup>1</sup> Lucilla Lopriore, ([lucilla.lopriore@uniroma3.it](mailto:lucilla.lopriore@uniroma3.it)) is an Associate Professor at Roma Tre University. She holds an MA TEFL from Reading University, and a PhD in Italian as a Foreign Language from the University of Siena. Teacher-educator since 1988, in PSLs, SSIS, TFA, PAS, CLIL courses. Her fields of interest are: ELF, Assessment, Early language learning, CLIL, Terminology. Among her most recent publications, “ELF and early language learning”, in *Current Perspectives on Pedagogy for English as a Lingua Franca*, edited by Yasemin Bayyurt and Sumru Akcan (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton 2015).

<sup>2</sup> It is argued that rather than authenticity, most tourist representations are based upon a form of staged authenticity (McCannel 1976; Urry). Authenticity is currently under discussion because of the difficulty of actually measuring it (Cohen; Pearce).



have developed their own genre with specific features and organisation: a genre used by the tourist industry to persuade the target audience or by TV channels to sell tourist products ranging from videos to travel tours. Documentaries offer both the logic of immediacy and that of hypermediacy typical of remediation since they heighten the viewer's experience of the event as authentic. This contribution illustrates how in the last two decades changes in travel documentary visual format, organisation and use of new technologies have remediated both their language, their information structure and their impact on universal audiences.

## 2. Documentaries: The Creative Treatment of Actuality<sup>3</sup>

The history of documentaries starts with the origins of cinema when the Lumière brothers recorded daily life in various documentaries, the most famous of which was the one about the train entering the station. By so doing, they had placed life itself upon a screen. It was back in Paris in 1895 when Louis Lumière showed the short film *Workers leaving the Lumière Factory* (*La Sortie des Usines*)<sup>4</sup> in order to present his invention: cinema. "In the end it was Louis Lumière who made the documentary film a reality," Barnouw (5) and it was since then that documentary has been acknowledged for its capacity to promote and persuade.



Fig.1 – Lumière "Entrée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat" (1896)

The representation of workers proposed by Lumière was later also the object of Soviet Union social films, but it was not until Robert Flaherty's silent film *Nanook of the North* (1922) that the documentary as such clearly emerges and establishes itself as a genre. Flaherty wanted to narrate a story and to document the life of a people, the Inuk, through the story of Nanook and his family in the Canadian Arctic. Flaherty succeeded in what most current travel documentaries do: he represented an exotic culture in an otherwise difficult to reach, if not impossible, location. A whole series of films followed Flaherty's model and further expanded the documentary genre, particularly in the Thirties. But it was not until the Sixties that the first documentaries representing far away places developed with the clear purpose of engaging and entertaining the audience. They have since then experienced a growing success first in cinema, then in home videos.

Since the beginning, documentarians, as rightly pointed out by Barnouw (7) in his history of documentaries, were performing many different functions: they were explorers, travellers, ethnographers, reporters, chroniclers, observers, artists and poets as well. They represented all that a documentary implied in terms of purpose, filming techniques and creativity. "Documentaries occupy a complex zone of representation in

<sup>3</sup> "In documentary we deal with the actual, and in one sense with the real. But the really real, if I may use that phrase, is something deeper than that. The only reality which counts in the end is the interpretation which is profound" (Grierson).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE-G4kqTmoc>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



which the art of observing, responding and listening must be combined with the art of shaping, interpreting or arguing” (Nichols 2001).<sup>5</sup>

Documentaries have been differently described: most of them have been compared to films and almost always in a negative or diminishing way. The idea underlying these negative definitions is that a documentary cannot be a film because it is not fictitious, thus implying that all films do not represent reality and that, on the contrary, all documentaries are representations of reality. That is why documentaries are usually described as ‘not being films’, as it clearly emerges from the following extracts by two experts in the field who have extensively written about documentaries.

[a documentary is ] A non fiction film about real events and people, often avoiding traditional narrative structures. (Corrigan 206)

A non-fiction text using ‘actuality’ footage, which may include the live recording of events and relevant research materials (i.e. interviews, statistics, etc.). This kind of text is usually informed by a particular point of view, and seeks to address a particular social issue which is related to and potentially affects the audience. (Wells 212)

The two authors emphasize the documentary non-fictional aspects, the uniqueness of reality representation and the existence of a point of view and of a clear purpose. But it is this very non-fictional nature that makes the documentary take on real meaning in contrast to fiction films; it is a tangible representation of aspects of the world we inhabit and that we would like to visit. Documentaries are films representing actual events where real people, not actors, are involved. They are an account of lives, cultures, traditions and events constructed for the benefit of the audience, particularly when they present faraway destinations. A documentary represents the observable world; it makes social reality visible and audible in a distinctive way since it engages with the world by representing it. As John Grierson wrote, documentaries are “the creative treatment of actuality” (8).

The documentarian draws on past and present actuality — the world of social and historical experience [...] Embedded within the account of physical reality is a claim or assertion at the centre of all non-fictional representation, namely, that a documentary depiction of the socio-historical world is factual and truthful. (Beattie 10)

In documentaries, people, places or events are usually actual or contemporary: they use non-actors, they are shot on location, no sets are constructed, no special lighting is needed, they record social and cultural phenomena, and narrate current or historical events. They do not make up content, nor do they employ plot or characters; their form depends on purpose, subject and approach. They offer their audiences aural and visual likeness or representations of some part of the world they will most probably never see. They offer a likeness of the world that carries a recognizable familiarity. A tourist documentary records situations and events with reasonable fidelity. We see people, situations and places that we might also see for ourselves outside our home or at the cinema we are in. Nevertheless, documentaries often put the case for a particular view or interpretation of evidence before us; they stand for or represent the view of individuals, groups or institutions.

The documentary has a hybrid nature, if compared to traditional films (Austin and de Jong), and, as a consequence, it is a very versatile genre mainly because of the diversity of purposes it may be created for and because of the variety of its users. As John Nichols writes: “Documentaries are what the organizations and institutions that produce them make” (2010, 16).

In his work *In Theorizing Documentary*, Michael Renov outlines the fundamental tendencies of documentaries and highlights four central functions (12-36).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://filmsound.org/film-sound-history/documentary.htm>. Last visited 16/10/2015.

<sup>6</sup> Another subdivision, closely linked to Renov’s functional documentary modes, was the one proposed by Bill Nichols (2001, 99) who defined six types of documentaries: poetic, expository, observational, participatory,



- to record, reveal or preserve reality for the future;
- to persuade or to promote;
- to analyse or to form one's point of view;
- to express or trigger emotions.

Over a period of time, the original meaning or the definition of documentary as non-fiction films has been re-invented. In the past ten years the documentary has evolved in its form and in its models of distribution due to the advent of new media. The development of the Internet and online publishing has created new possibilities for individual documentary filmmakers. New generations of documentary makers have challenged the forms and conventions of documentaries.

In recent years, documentaries have also had an unprecedented commercial success at the cinema with films like *Super Size Me*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *March of the Penguins* or *An Inconvenient Truth*. It has been argued that the commercial success of documentaries has changed the nature of documentary films over the past 20 years. However, their growing success confirms the audience acceptance of the use of creative treatment in the documentary genre. Among the new types that have slowly but consistently marked a change in the history of documentaries are travel documentaries.

### 3. Travel Documentaries: Being There

A 'travel documentary' is a documentary film or television program that describes in general in a non-commercial way. In the past, the genre was represented by TV 'travelogues' produced by third parties, or by occasional presentations of those same travelogues in theatres and other venues.

The typical format of travel documentaries is composed by the sequence of images, a combination of voice-over narration and interviews, and by social actors, i.e. real people accompanied by on location sound-recording. These people continue to live their lives even when the camera is not there.

Travel documentaries are of different types according to their purpose, content and function. The most common ones are those presenting an area or a region, aimed at promoting tourist journeys or visits; these films are general presentations or are based upon the account of journeys, the narrator usually being the main protagonist of the journey. Some of these narrators are usually very famous people, as in the case of Sir Richard Attenborough, Michael Palin, Anthony Bourdain, Louis Theroux, or experts in a wide variety of fields, as Bruce Parry, Monty Don, Andrew Evans, Piero Angela etc., who have now become very familiar faces that accompany the audience in their journey or in their visit. The narrative of each of these documentaries usually unfolds through the voice-over as a constant dialogue with the audience, where the narrator speaks directly to the viewers over the flowing images of the documentary and thus ends up being part of the travel.

Travel documentaries are often organised as a sequence of episodes matching the different stages of the journey. The areas being promoted are usually famous archaeological sites, regions, cities, national parks, etc. or lesser known villages, mountain chains, rivers or lakes. The documentaries may illustrate overall features of the areas or may specifically investigate aspects such as typical food, festivities, wildlife, cultural traditions, religious ceremonies, specific historical events, or special communities.

Other types of travel documentaries are the accounts of adventurous journeys where the narrator is the main character. He is usually filmed on spot while involved in adventurous and extreme actions. These narrators are either sportsmen or explorers whose faces have become familiar to the general audience.

### 4. Travel TV Channels and Websites

Travel documentaries are produced by professional film-makers and they are usually broadcast either by a TV broadcaster or by a film company, also available on tourist websites. The success of these documentaries is witnessed not only by the growing number of TV channels and of websites specialised in tourism, but also by the unprecedented growth of self-made documentaries produced by non-professional film-makers, usually tourists after a tour-holiday, who make them available on (most) TV documentary

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reflexive and performative, where one of the main significant variables is the use of the voice-over, because it is through the voice-over that the narration of the event unfolds.



programs<sup>7</sup> or on travel websites. The most famous TV channels that broadcast travel documentaries are *The National Geographic Channel* (US), *BBC Knowledge* (UK), *Travel Channel* (USA), *DOC The Documentary Channel* (USA), *Documentary Channel* (NZ) etc... Since they are accessible from all over the world, some of these are offering country specific channels and websites where information and programs are available in the local language, they are thus 're-mediated' and localised.

Most TV channels have their own websites offering a variety of products and services; videos are usually available for free instant view or for sale. Each channel has different ways of categorising the available videos, some (*Travel Channel*) ask the viewers to select the destination they are interested in, others (*The National Geographic Channel*) show a display of types of films to select from, such as *Adventure*, *Animals*, *Kids Video*, *Environment*, *Science & Space*, *NatGeo Wild*, *Travel & Culture*, etc., each one with further subdivisions. The *Travel and Culture* section, for example, comprises the following sub-categories: *Countries*, *Regions*, *Cities*, *Cultures*, *Parks and Nature* etc.. The existing variety of video categories on TV channels specialised in travel accounts for the expansion of the two notions of travel and tourism, offering a wide range of topics, from traditional travel destinations to wild adventurous journeys.

Parallel to the official TV channels, travel documentaries can also be viewed through *YouTube*. Due to the vast number of cable and satellite television, the travel documentary audience is now fragmented over hundreds of channels. Unfortunately, little can be said about the viewers' average age or social group belonging, since no actual form of monitoring has ever been carried out.

Travel programs are those popular programs on commercial television where the documentaries are regularly broadcast. What would make a travel program a 'real' travel documentary? According to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (7), it should:

- bring the viewers new understandings into an area or its people;
- have an overarching narrative;
- have an enduring appeal.

One of the most famous travel programs is Michael Palin's travel series<sup>8</sup>, a program including guidebooks, special travel videos and advice to travellers available either on payment or for free. The spirit of this type of travel programs is in his introductory video where he says:

The idea behind *Palin's Travels* is that you can share information about travel all across the world (...) it's not so much about me, but me as some sort of mirror reflecting the world for all of you out there who want to travel, and maybe haven't travelled or have travelled and want to talk about it. (...) the great thing is that this is interactive, you can talk about it (...) and this will create a travel community.

The notion of travel community, promoted by most TV travel channels and websites, is a common feature of those travel videos where the speakers are themselves in the video taking the trip, talking directly to the audience, sharing their experience, involving viewers so that they end up being part of the travel. In this context tourists are not regarded as passive consumers, rather as more independent decision makers.

## 5. Travel Documentaries: Structure and Scripts

A documentary, like any film, has limited time in which to convey a multitude of things and tell a story, so all the components within the film must be specific and meaningful in order not to waste precious screen time. The three elements of cinematic syntax – Visual, Sound and Story - are central in film-making, even more in a travel documentary where the script is almost always written after the shooting. A documentary film is made up of a series of sequences – visual and audio - of varying durations connected to each other in some way. Sequences determine the type of documentary script and the language choices for the accompanying voice.

The travel documentary is usually characterised by 'talking heads', including interviews of people on camera or people talking directly to the audience, even the filmmaker sitting behind the camera.

<sup>7</sup> Documentary program is a creative treatment of actuality other than news, sports, infotainment or current affairs programs (Australian Broadcasting Authority).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.palinstravels.co.uk/>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



Since in travel documentaries there is no previous script for the interviews, and these are very often accompanied by subtitles, a very careful work of integration of the narrative commentary with the visuals is required. The filmmaker usually shows the interviewee talking and cuts to visual images while continuing the voice of the interviewee over the images that may support or supplement what the person is saying (Das 2010).<sup>9</sup>

Travel documentaries are informative genres, with narrative, descriptive, persuasive and expository functions; they almost always fulfil a persuasive function, either to inspire a change or an action or to gain the audience's trust or to trigger emotions. These functions emerge in the language choices of the accompanying script and in the way the script combines with the images and the soundtrack.

The main characteristic of travel documentaries is the interplay between image and sound, between verbal and non-verbal elements (Espasa 190). The spoken text has to back up visuals rather than overpower them, thus writing the scripts for documentaries is completely different from writing for films, since the visual always comes first and narration is secondary to it. The choice scriptwriters have when writing a documentary script is to either use a first-person narrative where the narrator is a character in the film or the filmmaker himself, or use the third-person narration, sometimes called 'the voice of God,' an omnipresent entity that narrates the story. Good narration in documentaries is kept as simple and as clear as possible to allow images to speak.

Since in travel documentaries an initial script is usually lacking, different ways of developing the accompanying text are used; the most common one is when the filmmaker experiences the film as he makes it. Many documentary makers write a 'paper-edit' in place of a script immediately after shooting, while they have clear memories of the shooting sequences. But, the post-shoot script is also used in documentary script writing, when the shooting involves unexpected changes of camera movements or unpredictable events as in wildlife documentaries. This type of script combines conceptual elements along with audiovisual information gathered at the production stage and may also include any new information collected along the way.

Differently from tourist guidebooks or from travelogues, travel documentary scripts are characterised by a reduced number of adjectives in the spoken commentary since the image itself already highlights the qualities of the destination or event that is presented. The dialogic sequences that accompany interviews to experts or local people are usually composed of short interactive exchanges where the interviewer traditionally has a very limited role.

The narrator in a travel documentary is often the protagonist of the journey or sequence of events, where he or she is an internal narrator with various degrees of involvement in the documentary. These types of narrators are becoming more familiar to the travel documentary audience since they establish a direct exchange with the viewers. They often talk directly to the audience guiding the viewers through the sequences while narrating their personal experience in the distant location in a *hic et nunc* dimension. For the viewers the narrator is there the moment they see him, as things happen.

## 6. Travel Documentaries: A Form of Re-mediation

Travel documentaries provide both a focused and a shifting glance, they make the viewer reach and experience reality as authentic and they do so also through the experience of the medium. They transform viewers' experience through digital media (digital photography, photorealistic graphics, virtual reality etc.) and they take the viewers to the scene but they also contemporarily lead them to a multimodal fruition of hyper-texts, images, videos, voice-over, captions and subtitles. Travel documentaries have changed in time and, particularly thanks to technologies (2005), they have been 're-mediated' enhancing new and different ways for viewers of 'being there.' The notion of travel community, promoted by most TV travel channels and websites, is a common feature of those travel videos where the speakers are themselves in the video taking the trip, talking directly to the audience, thus re-mediating their whole experience with them

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme\\_doc\\_documentary\\_script.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme_doc_documentary_script.pdf). Last visited 16/10/2015.



## 7. Maps and Territories

Intertextual forms have always constituted the scaffolding of the documentary narration: maps, moving itineraries, voice over or windows with follow-up comments and virtual reality. One of the constant and central features of documentaries as visual representations of reality, is their use of maps. Maps are often displayed to take the audience by hand to and inside far away places, allowing viewers to make the unreal real, to eye-track the journey, to sustain their experience of 'being there'. And maps, in their own way, are themselves forms of re-mediation. Drawing on Alfred Korzybski's "The map is not the territory"<sup>10</sup>, the use of maps in travel documentaries further highlights the mismatch between reality and its representations. One of the oldest examples of maps is retraceable in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1921)<sup>11</sup> where the audience is visually led to the land of the Eskimos through a map and the journey traced via arrow signs (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 – Flaherty *Nanook of the North* (1921)

Robert Flaherty, when shooting his film, had the needs and habits of his audience clear in mind. He described the aim and the development of his documentary in one of the full screen texts of the film, partly conceived as a book where written pages alternated with shootings and background music. The texts were shown for the time the audience needed to read them, slowly moving from one shooting to the following, adjusting to the turning of pages of what looked as an illustrated book, allowing enough time for the viewers to locate places in the maps that were used. He reported his own experience as an explorer in his 'on screen' introduction to the film:

This film grew out of a long series of explorations in the North (... ) from 1910 to 1916. Much of the explorations was done in journeys lasting months at a time with two or three Eskimos as my companions. This experience gave me an insight into their lives and a deep regard for them.  
(1921)

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950) coined this expression at the, meeting of December 28, 1931. *Science and Sanity*, 1933, p. 747–61.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4kOlzMqso0>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



The use of maps is still now, after almost a century, a regular feature of most travel documentaries as for example the one representing the route from Delhi to Agra in a *National Geographic* short documentary of a group of tourists travelling by train in India. The map is animated with the image of a train that moves from Delhi to Agra on the map, a minimised representation of the journey the tourists in the film are doing and that the audience is watching. (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 – From Delhi to Agra by train (*National Geographic*)

The fast growing innovations in graphics and in film making have contributed to develop augmented reality and projection mapping. Special effects highlight the tele-transportation effects of most recent travel documentaries, as the 3D representations used by the former Monty Python, now travel documentarian, Michael Palin who literally takes us to the Himalayas starting from his desk drawer at home, through projection maps, photorealistic graphics, virtual reality and being there himself, marking the continuous shift from virtual to represented reality (Fig. 4 and 5).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 4 – Himalaya with Michael Palin: a passage to India-1

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nw3qLhopPzY>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



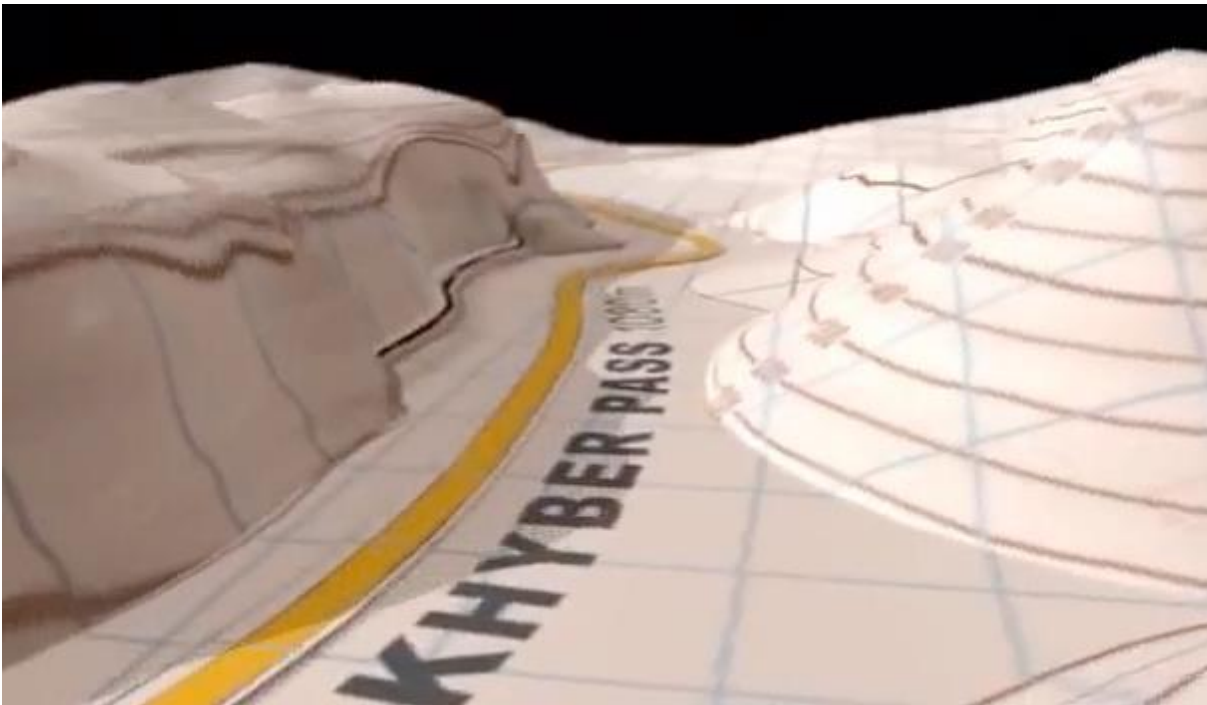


Fig. 5 – Himalaya with Michael Palin: a passage to India - 2

The shift from the notion of visiting places without moving and of visual travel narratives addressed by travel documentaries is well represented by the documentarians' words as Robert Flaherty's introduction to *Nanook of the North* reported above, or Michael Palin's most recent presentation of his travel program:

The idea behind *Palin's Travels* is that you can share information about travel all across the world (...) it's not so much about me, but me as some sort of mirror reflecting the world for all of you out there who want to travel, and maybe haven't travelled or have travelled and want to talk about it.(...) the great thing is that this is interactive, you can talk about it (...) and this will create a travel community.<sup>13</sup>

## 8. Exploring Travel Documentaries

The analysis of the language of travel documentaries is a multimodal analysis that is inevitably linked to the way the script interacts with images and sounds (De Greef and Hesling; Kress; Kress and van Leeuwen; Ellis).

In order to investigate the language and organisation of travel documentaries a corpus of ten travel documentaries for a total of 21.37 minutes, was composed for a small scale analysis in the light of one research question:

- What are the main features of the *composition*<sup>14</sup> and of the language of travel documentaries?  
The ten travel documentaries were selected on the basis of three different criteria:
- documentary source: all documentaries were produced and shown by the same TV channel (*National Geographic Channel*)
- documentary purpose: five are traditional travel documentaries aimed at presenting and promoting a geographical area and they belong to the category of *Travel & Culture Videos*, the other five belong to those documentaries where the narrator is the protagonist of the journey or he carries out extreme tasks in the wilderness while directly interacting with the audience, these last ones are part of the *Wild Videos Series*

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.palinstravels.co.uk/>. Last visited 16/10/2015.

<sup>14</sup> Reference here is to the notion of composition as presented by Kress and van Leeuwen, that is "the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole (181).



- presence of different types of narrators, voice-over or interviews: all documentaries have a variety of narrators.

While general observations are reported for all documentaries that constitute the corpus, the overall structure of the documentary composition is presented only for a few documentaries.

#### *Main features of the travel documentaries composition*

The average length of all traditional *Travel and Culture NatGeo* documentaries is between 2.40 and 4.20 minutes each, while the number of words is between 240 and 380 each.<sup>15</sup>

They are usually organised into sections; the first section is introduced either by a voice-over or by the official narrator and it often shows sketch-maps of the region with references to the area of the world, or at times the images show a moving sketch of the itinerary. The following sections show some of the most important locations while the accompanying script is delivered by the voice-over or by one of the narrators who is on the spot and standing to the side of the video next to the main locations. Images of local people or of tourists visiting the places flow in the background. Most documentaries – except for the *Destinations A-Z* series<sup>16</sup> - alternate narration with live interviews to local experts whose voice is left in its original version, thus adding a touch of authenticity.

In the *Destinations A-Z* series, as for example in the two videos in the corpus - *Destination: India* and *Destination: Laos: Luang Prabang*, the official narrator appears only at the beginning, but her voice is the voice-over all through the film, thus accompanying the audience, now familiar with her face. In the other travel videos of the corpus - *Machu Picchu*, *Death Valley*, *Taj Mahal* - viewers never actually see the face of the voice-over, but are offered interviews to the local people or experts. In three of the corpus travel videos – *Animal Language*, *Unusual places*, *Festivities* - the narrator is audible and visible for more than half of the video since he is part of the narrative.

The language used in the *Destination Series* is characterised by its primary persuasive and promotional function, it sustains the viewer by providing short statements accompanying images and using key words that are highlighted in the images. In the other videos, particularly the ones with the first person narrator, whether he is talking about his journey or involving the viewers in his adventurous experiences, the primary function is to trigger the viewers' emotions. Adjectives are mostly descriptive, generally positive, and nouns have a low level of specialisation (Gotti 20). In a way, as for the language of tourism, the discourse tends to be similar to general language. It is mostly in the narrative sequences of personal travel accounts that the language of travel documentaries develops some sort of unique flavour since it is closely linked to the dialogic interaction with the audience, as the following extracts show.

In the extract 'Festivities'<sup>17</sup> the narrator is the filmmaker himself who has been travelling through India and is visiting a family during the feast of Diwali. After a short formal introduction to the main topic (... *Diwali is the festival of lights.*), the narrator switches into a personal reference (...*Monica's aunt has invited us over.*...) introducing the visit to a local family. The tone and mode change and the narrator alternates the sequence times (...*it was something special to be here.*), his comments (...*I love learning new things.*...) and his participation, by including himself in the narrative sequence (...*so basically we are lighting these candles...we want to invite the Gods.*...) while images of the celebrations inside the house and those taking place in the outside streets flow in a unique sequence.

#### *Festivities 1:30*

Diwali is the festival of lights and it's probably the holiest and most important day in the entire Hindu calendar.

Everyone lights off fire crackers, lights candles and the entire city is lit up at night.

Monica's Aunt has invited us over.

Every culture has something that brings us all together and for India it's Diwali.

I love learning new things about the culture and this is the big one, this is the biggest thing of the year.

It was something special to be here, in a home, doing this whole process and seeing this whole ceremony.

<sup>15</sup> The corpus of ten documentaries contains slightly below 3000 words.

<sup>16</sup> <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations-a-z>. Last visited 16/10/2015.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/search/?q=Festivities>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



It's really something else to be able to see all these different cultures and religions travelling around and, and to see how close we all are.

The lighting of the crackers is actually got a made tradition. The tradition is lighting these. So basically we're lighting these candles to show that we're celebrating and to show that we're happy and that we want to also share this thing with other people.

And also the reason we're doing it outside the door is that we want to invite the Gods in and have them bless it on this special day.

More sweets.

For you, all of love you.

The following extract "Animal Language"<sup>18</sup> is an example of yet another type of narrative sequence, where the narrator informally alternates the description of what is taking place (...*Ha, ha, out goes the trunk... And here they come...*) with his personal comments (...*What a treat!.....Oh I love it!...*) or explanations (...*a little bit of greeting...*), while directly addressing the audience (...*guess who's here to meet me?...*), interacting with the viewers posing questions (...*So why is she back?...*), formulating hypothesis (...*maybe because she's feeling hungry...*) and engaging them (...*Just look at them!...*) at the same time.

The script is a very short episode from a travel documentary where the narrator is visiting an elephant orphanage in Africa he had already visited a year before.

#### *Animal Language 2.15*

It is my first time back in Tsavo for over a year and guess who's here to meet me?

What a treat!

It's Emily, this is the biggest of the orphans an orphan that's gone back to the wild and just the loveliest creature. She's a giant and yet she's only 12 years old, gentle, powerful, wise.

So why is she back?

Maybe because she's feeling hungry, wants to see if there's a few tit bits.

Because any minute now, the other orphans are gonna be here and you know what?

I bet you anything you like, she knows that.

That rumble was probably a communication between her and the other elephants.

And here they come, I wonder how they react when they see who's here.

Ha ha, out goes the trunk.

A little bit of a greeting.

It's almost as if they've come to pay their respects.

Just look at them, oh I love it.

And it's almost like hero worship at times the way these younger elephants just they're so chuffed to see Emily.

Those throaty sort of growls, those rumbles.

Emily came to the orphanage when she was just four weeks old and now she's living as a wild elephant.

### **9. Translating Travel Documentaries**

The unique nature of documentary films and the specificity of travel documentary scripts emerge especially when it comes to translating them into different languages. Tourist or travel documentaries are among the most widely sold and distributed films all over the world and they pose several problems in the translation process. It is not always easy to maintain the so-called 'objectivity' of the documentary film in translating while adjusting from one culture to another. There is a degree of compromise that often results in a deviation from the original documentary, this is what makes documentary translation an extremely delicate process particularly when it comes to the use of voice-over. It is the type of audio-visual translation usually associated with non-fiction films, such as documentaries: the original voice is usually heard under the translated version and finishes a few second before, thus lip-synchronization is not a real problem since all is needed is a degree of synchrony between text and image. Translators of documentaries can be working at

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.animalplanet.com/search/?q=tsavo&pg=1>. Last visited 16/10/2015.



different levels, for the pre-production stage, usually without a script but with the video sequence, or for the post-production phase where they usually translate finished documentaries using a transcript (Ceruti and Lopriore).

Translating a documentary is certainly not an easy task since there are several elements to be simultaneously taken into account: a limited number of voices, a script that is often developed only after the shooting of the documentary, interviews carried out on location, the supporting role of the images and the use of voice-over. Voice-over – a typical feature of travel documentaries - is “similar to simultaneous interpretation in that the voice does not aim at total replacement of the source text, as in dubbing (...). It is also similar to subtitling, where source and target language coexist, although in different codes” (Espasa 189).

Translating documentaries is thus a challenging process, according to Eva Espasa (194), from the “fuzzy definition of this protean genre across different times and audiences,” to the interaction of text and image. “The documentary, as a protean institution (...) entails translation and research needs which are still largely unexplored.”

## 10. Conclusions

Travel documentaries represent an important part of the media repertoire. They mirror the language of tourism while using the multimodal iconic perspective typical of the medium. They are a unique form of visual as well as spoken text, a special discourse made up of diverse types of shootings, forms of voice-over, narrations, different types of interviews, combinations of sound and vision, use of music, and retrospective sequences.

Travel documentaries offer both the logic of immediacy and that of hypermediacy typical of re-mediation since by providing a window through (*immediacy*) the live event and a window at (*hypermediacy*), i.e. the use of multiple media to achieve the mediated experience, they heighten the viewer’s experience of the event as authentic (Bolter and Grusin; Dobson). The emergence of the documentary as a recognised cinematic genre in the 20’ gained the trust of the audience in the veracity of the image as an authentic representation of the real. Even if now, we are much more skeptical, even with documentaries, their language allows us to play with the real time-space-sound dimension. The social nature of the documentary genre makes its language more authentic, since; it also allows us to establish a dialogue between what we are and what we see.

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