

# STORY, HISTORY AND INTERCULTURAL MEMORY

## CAN A TRANSMEDIA APPROACH BENEFIT AN ARCHIVE-BASED DOCUMENTARY PROJECT?

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**Abstract:** The transmedia approach to archive images in contemporary space invites spectators to effectively interfere in the historical narrative—as a real-time scriptwriter and editor. In this article we introduce a transmedia documentary project, *História(s) do Brasil* (Anita Leandro and Marida Di Crosta). In so doing, we revisit and expand an unfinished pedagogical project by 1970s filmmaker Glauber Rocha. Based on the analysis of current experiences like the European interactive cross-media documentaries like *Farewell Comrades!*, our study focus on how transmedia can benefit an intercultural television tie-in archive-based documentary.

**Keywords:** intercultural memory, archive-based filmmaking, transmedia storytelling, interactivity, participation, collaborative writing, *Farewell Comrades!*

### 1 Introducing *História(s) do Brasil*, a Transmedia Intercultural-Documentary Project

In what qualitative and conceptual ways can transmedia storytelling improve an archive-based documentary? How may it enhance the interplay between present and past, increase intercultural engagement and deepen the audience experience, thus broadening their participatory possibilities and motivations? These are the underlying issues at the

heart of *História(s) do Brasil* (*Brazil's History-ies*), a transmedia documentary currently being developed within a Euro-Brazilian-coproduction framework. Born out of the meeting (in France) of two researchers focused on audiovisual-content creation (one Brazilian, the other Italian), the project merges our respective skills and research fields: archival documentary filmmaking and transmedia collaborative scriptwriting. As the title suggests, this nonfictional transmedia project aims to build on the work commenced in the 1970s by Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha in his documentary *História do Brasil* (*History of Brazil*, 1974).



Figure 1. A frame from Rocha's film *Barravento* (1962) which occurs several time in *History of Brazil*.

A key figure in the *Cinema Novo* movement and one of the all-time most influential Brazilian directors, Rocha fled his country in self-imposed exile in 1971, during the Brazilian military dictatorship, to reside in different European, African and Central American countries.<sup>1</sup> *History of Brazil* was thus produced while abroad—nowhere near Brazilian archives—and in fairly precarious conditions. Based on a script originally written in Paris in collaboration with the sociologist Marcos Medeiros, the editing of the film could only be done later on in Havana and Rome, for both political and economic reasons. All the images and sounds Rocha used in the film come from the archives of the ICAIC, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry.

Blacklisted by the totalitarian military regime for over ten years, the film was left unfinished and has never been shown or broadcast in Brazil. Nevertheless, given the approach to narrating history and archive-use, Rocha's documentary was visionary in its anticipation of contemporary debates on the pedagogical role archive-based films and television programs can play in the exploration of history and cultural memory.

Moreover, Rocha had already envisaged the opening-up to audiences of the historiographical documentary through different forms of collaborative writing and the socialization of archives. In a letter sent from Portugal in the late 1970s, the director encourages the Brazilian professor and film critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes to 'appropriate' *History of Brazil* with his students, by adding further information and footage. Rocha suggests the film be considered a screenplay for Brazilian history: 'I'm positive that based on this film you can leap to a screenplay that can give interested parties a more precise and scientific understanding of Brazil'.<sup>2</sup>

From Rocha's point of view, the work, undertaken while exiled abroad, lacked Brazil's colour and sonority. Rocha thus suggests Salles Gomes's film students seize ownership of his documentary and add livelier, more Brazilian images and music. Further, given how the story told in the film ends in 1973, it was now the task of these new 'spectator-film editors'<sup>3</sup> to correct and update the narrative with new information and voiceover. Thus the movie narrative, already open to interaction and participation as well as to a form of collaborative and multimodal meta-writing, seemed to naturally lead in to the follow-up (multiple) history-writing effort of *História(s) do Brasil*.

## 2 From History to Histories: When History's Layered Depth Allows Radical Intertextuality, Textual Poaching and Gap Filling

The plural of 'history' added to the transmedia documentary title, however, also alludes to the work and approaches of Jean-Luc Godard, another great filmmaker concerned with (film) history—the two directors having an opportunely met in 1969 during the filming of *Vent d'Est* (*East Wind*, 1970). Through *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (*History-ies of cinema*, 1988–1998), his film in eight 'episodes' to which our work in progress refers, Godard has shown how cinema can participate in the development of narratives about the past. Made almost entirely of archive-based footage, in an endless interweaving of Foucault's type of series,<sup>4</sup> *Histoire(s) du cinéma* ultimately writes history in a way that opens the events of the past to a constantly renewed reading. Rather than conveying 'a world already filmed', Godard jokes, quotes and compares historical facts in such a way as to make the relationship with both history and archive footage, and also with cinema cultural memory, lively and dynamic.

Although Godard's monumental *History(-ies) of cinema* does not carry the process as far as a true archaeology of the document, it still represents a series of transverse and discontinuous narratives which intersect constantly in a

1 The brutal oppression reached institutional opponents, artists, journalists and other members of civil society, through the infamous 'Operation Condor' (in Latin America) and the entire repressive apparatus created within the Armed Forces. See: John J. Crocitti, *Brazil Today: an Encyclopedia of Life in the Republic*, ABC-Clio, 2012; Robert M. Levine, *The history of Brazil*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1999; Daniel Aarão Reis, Marcelo Ridenti and Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (eds), *A ditadura que mudou o Brasil. 50 anos do golpe de 1964*, Zahar, 2014; Denise Rollemberg, *Exílio. Entre raízes e radars*, Record, 1999.

2 See : Glauber Rocha, *Cartas ao mundo*, Companhia das Letras, 1997, p. 585.

3 See : Consuelo Lins, 'Do espectador crítico ao espectador montador', *Devires*, 7, 2, 2010, 132–138.

4 Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1974 (1969).



Figure 2. Quote of Roberto Rossellini, superimposed over a photo of the film-maker, one of the several inlays from Godard's *Histoires(s) du cinéma*.

stratigraphic layering of documents, presented as relics of the past. The editing process presents itself as an experience capable of resurrecting the past while transforming memories in thoughts. In other words, it is the editing that determines 'the networks of these traces'.<sup>5</sup>

Godard's history of cinema thus restores vitality to the works it quoted, affording them new, more versatile possibilities for editing: the images' beat, the slow motion, the freeze frame, the wavering between the completion of a movement



Figure 3. The video clip's form as a way for Godard to tell the story of Italian cinema.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Aumont, *Amnésies. Fictions du cinéma d'après Jean-Luc Godard*, P.O.L., 1999, p. 18.



and its backwards rewind, or the repeating of the same plane or of the same sequence in various episodes of the series. Breaking from chronological history, the editing of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* offers a vertical path through the documentary sources, a route with infinite ramifications that awakens in the viewer a new awareness of time. But editing and quoting are specific functions that interactive design principles can delegate to the viewer-user. On the other hand, content depth, as an encyclopaedic dimension and the database logic of multi-platform productions, allows the kind of audience's practices of 'textual poaching' and 'radical intertextuality' that Jenkins associates to 'drilling' and 'gap filling'.<sup>6</sup>

### 3 Archive-Based Documentary, (Trans)Media Representation and Intercultural Memory

But this plurality also refers to Rocha's 'transcontinental' approach to the history of a multi-colonised region of the world that guides the intercultural approach of our project—itself designed as an international coproduction.

From our perspective, transmedia 'synergistic' storytelling becomes a way of performing cultural memory, not unlike the historical representation of the Holocaust in Dutch multi-platform television documentaries *13 at War* (2009–10) and *The War* (2009) analysed by Berber Hagedoorn.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the same definition proposed by Marita Sturken (quoted by Hagedoorn) seems to apply here: cultural memory being regarded as 'memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning'.

However, this definition raises the question of which 'culture' comes entangled with the shared memory, especially in a transmedia multilingual experience meant to apply to different media, values and communication cultures. As interculturalist Milton Bennett notes,<sup>8</sup> Gregory Bateson already suggests that the idea of culture is at any rate constructed by human beings in order to reflect on their group experience. In his wake, Maturana and Varela describe 'cultural level of perception' as being our descriptions of reality as part of the reality that we experience.

According to this point of view, a group's particular ideas about itself—including its history—will become 'memes' that perpetuate their shared experience. The way we describe ourselves culturally thus creates the 'culture' that we are describing. For Bennett, this idea of self-constructing culture is a kind of update of Marshall McLuhan's idea that 'the medium is the message'. Media representations, as we know, are far from being neutral. Television and social media are not simply neutral channels through which things happen. They themselves are generating a construction of reality, which is particularly obvious in social media. But most of the time we forget our authorship of the media and lose the critical view of the 'reality' that the media represent. This lack of criticism is an even more real risk within the framework of transmedia practices where User Generated Content, social media 'Stealth Marketing' campaigns as well as 'ambiguous design' techniques are massively employed, often in order to blur the limit between real facts and imaginary story elements. As semantically blurred, the term 'transmedia' points out in fact different practices, devices and strategies for producing as well as consuming audio-visual content through several media and platforms. The fuzziness surrounding Jenkins' notion thus could prevent a systematic approach to it, making problematic any attempt to put 'transmedia' in a critical perspective.

Like many other politically and empirically engaged filmmakers or cultural studies researchers in the 1960s (and beyond), Glauber Rocha was very acutely aware of cultural values, baggage and practices and the way they relate to the wider system of power and control through media representation. All his New Cinema's critical works demonstrate his struggle to denounce oppression and power abuses at a time when this engagement could cost one's life. His film *Terra em transe* (*Earth Enraptured*, 1967), censured by the Brazilian dictatorship - but shown and awarded in the Cannes Film Festival -, shows to the world the political experiences of the Latin-American countries, between the ancient oligarchies and the great imperialistic companies, the populism and the politic mystification.

6 Henry Jenkins, *Transmedia 202 Further Reflections*, August 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).

7 See: Berber Hagedoorn, 'Performing Cultural Memory: The Holocaust in Dutch Multi-Platform Television Documentary,' in Axel Bangert, Robert S. C. Gordon and Libby Saxton, eds, *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, Legenda, 2013, pp. 148–168.

8 See: Milton Bennet, 'The Ravages of Reification: Considering the Iceberg and Cultural Intelligence, Towards De-reifying intercultural Competence,' Keynote presentation for FILE IV, Colle Val d'Elsa, 2013, [http://www.idrinstitute.org/allegati/IDRI\\_t\\_Pubblicazioni/77/FILE\\_Documento\\_Inter-cultura\\_Reification.pdf](http://www.idrinstitute.org/allegati/IDRI_t_Pubblicazioni/77/FILE_Documento_Inter-cultura_Reification.pdf).



Figure 4. Oil painting by Tarsilla do Amaral (*O Mamoeiro*, 1925), shown in black and white in Glauber Rocha's *História do Brasil*.

In *História do Brasil*, the cinematographic language is used even more effectively to reveal and denounce this mystification. While the voice-over provided access to historical events in a chronological order within each chapter, a dialectical montage contradicts – in perfect accordance with Eisenstein’s theory –, all the pieces of knowledge provided by the oral comment. Thanks to the montage, slavery, for example, does not end in the late nineteenth century but persists inside images. Within each sequence, a different type of montage – closer to Vertov’s one – relies on the documentary value of each plan, on the duration of the moment captured in each archive-based image, in order to bring up to the surface of the present these ‘crystals of time’ evoked by Gilles Deleuze.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 5. The image of a Brazilian footballer as a historical document.

#### **4 History, Micro-History and Memories’ Sharing: *Retratos de identificação (Identification Portraits, 2014)***

Another way, particularly original and effective, to approach archival material is to switch the traditional witness/viewer’s position, like in Anita Leandro’s documentary (*Identification Photos*, 2014).<sup>10</sup> The film deals with a rather important chapter in Brazil’s recent history, the 21 years of military dictatorship – from 1964 to 1985 –, when martial law was imposed. Essential for understanding the present and central to Rocha’s *História do Brasil*, this difficult period is at the heart of the archival work we undertook in Brazil between 2010 and 2014. *Identification Photos*, has been made using Brazilian political-police archives. Its raw material consists in the prisoners’ photographs taken by the police during the dictatorship, ‘capturing’ them in all different situations – while stakeouts and banishments, in prison and in court, during interrogations and necropsies, or even while being tortured. The narrative is organised around testimony from two survivors of armed resistance in Brazil, who address a crime committed by the police and the suicide of one of their counterparts in exile, a consequence of her torture.

9 See: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II Time-Image*, Bloomsbury, 2013 (1985), p. 129.

10 Selected for the 2015 international FID competition in Marseille, the film won first place at the Cachoeira.Doc documentary festival in Brazil.





Figure 6. Snippets of archive photos cut during editing, revealing otherwise imperceptible details of the historical event (*Identification Photos*, Anita Leandro, 2014).

Like in Rocha's and Godard's serial *Histoires*, the montage method adopted by *Identification Photos*, is already an opening to the development of an interactive multimodal approach. Rather than a traditional interview, the witnesses become spectators to their own history, due to the presence of archive material on set. In the chronological order of the events, they were given, one by one, photos in which they appeared. Unaware of these documents' existence until then, the witnesses reacted with emotion upon seeing them. Rather than answer (a director/historian) questions, they themselves formulated questions about the past. Similarly, the editing solicits active participation from the spectator in



interpreting the documents. The emphasis is always on editing as a meta-writing tool, as well as on the socialisation of archives' uses and practices. We thus come at the heart of our transmedia archive-based documentary project. For one of the aims of *História(s) do Brasil* is to directly place the spectator/internet user at the centre of an experience in research, discovery, selection, cutting, editing and circulation of files via the Web. It's a way of offering technological and conceptual means for embarking and expanding on the work of a historiographer interested in the micro-occurrences found hidden in the vestiges of the past.

In the wake of Anita Leandro's archival film *Identification Photos* (2014), *História(s) do Brasil* aims to expand on Rocha's and Godard's work and intercultural approach on not just a chronological and educational level, but an aesthetic and political one, as well.

As a transmedia media approach inevitably relies on the specificity of each medium, it shares with cinema and television a certain number of characteristics, such as the editing techniques, the seriality form, the involvement of the audience, the encyclopaedic ambitions or the creation of diegetic extensions on other media. In regard to the multi-platform strategy, our project focuses on interactions between online documentary and TV documentary series, both of which centred on the exploitation of audio-visual archives, like that initiated by a recent European production.

## **5 Personal and Public Archives. A Case Study of the Cross-Media Documentary *Farewell Comrades!***

As both fiction and non fiction TV public service productions have shown - such as the groundbreaking Swedish experiment *The Truth about Marika* (2007) or the French *Manipulations* (2011), an interactive journalistic archive-based inquiry about a rather intricate state affair -, one of the most interesting possibilities offered by the transmedia storytelling approach consists in mixing broadcast television and digital culture, including gaming practices.

The combination of these writing approaches and modes of delivery could in fact broaden participation modalities via Internet and social networks, as well as in the physical/urban public space. Thus, even starting from montage theories and practices specific to the documentary form, an innovative spectator experience involving audio-visual documents can be developed within the framework of a television series connected in several ways to an online interactive documentary experience, and in some cases even to assorted forms of gaming.

This approach partially corresponds with the one adopted by some recently aired European cross-media documentary productions, i.e. Andrei Nekrasov's *Farewell Comrades!* (2012). In an attempt to achieve an effective combination of both television series and Web content characteristics, this nonfiction interactive and cross-media experience applies, more or less successfully, some of the aesthetic and narrative principles specific to transmedia storytelling. A close look at each component of this multiplatform production should allow one to highlight the possible benefits to such an approach to transmedia and archival footage, and thus help us with the ongoing definition of *História(s) do Brasil*'s narrative and production strategy.

As a European cross-media documentary on the final stage of Eastern Europe communism, *Farewell Comrades!* provides a handy opportunity for both scholars and practitioners to experience and analyse a tangible form of transmedia storytelling based on audio-visual archive documents—official as well as personal. Extracts of Soviet films, dissident songs and other private archives allow one to explore the hidden side of the Eastern bloc twenty years after the USSR's demise. Audiences are thus empowered to (re)discover this historical period through either or both a six-episode documentary and a (slightly) interactive Web documentary.

To round out the experience, there is also a quiz in Augmented Reality and a two-hundred-page history book along with audio-visual TV and Web content. Following its television broadcast, the series was edited for DVD. Lastly, there was a media event featuring an interactive exhibit curated by Christian Dirks, consisting of a room designed to resemble a three-dimensional walk-through website. At its centre, a ground-covering map lets visitors explore an investigative journey through history, from 1975 to 1991.

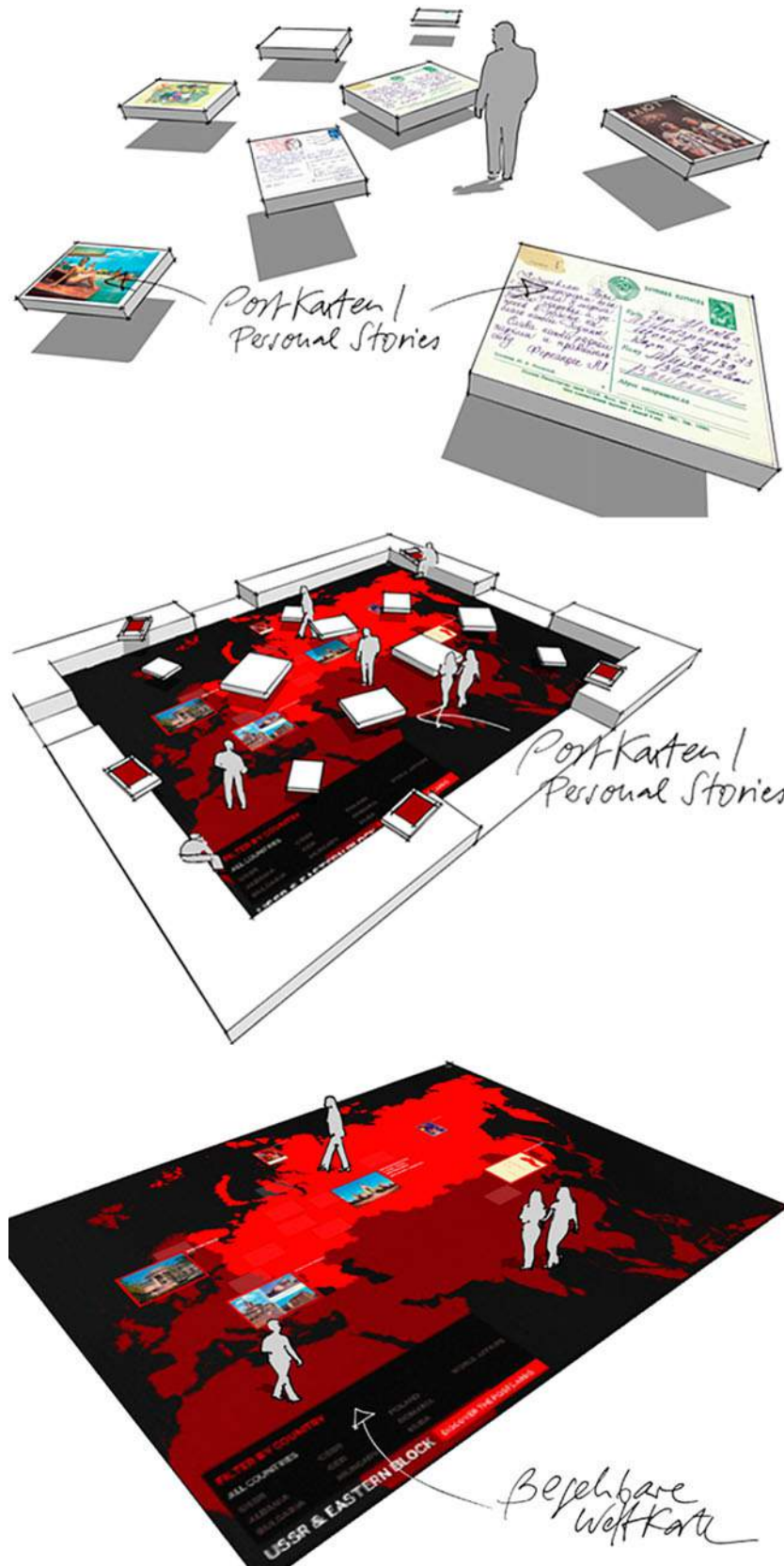


Figure 7. Sketches of the exhibit's project (Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion).

By embracing the new media aesthetics of multi-windowed surfaces, combined with the metaphor of the navigable interface and meandering through content, the exhibit's design refers specifically to the Web-documentary, while remediating its data-driven architecture. As Anna Wiehl notes,<sup>11</sup> the shift from temporal montage to spatial montage specific to many interactive documentary, demonstrates the remediation of pre-digital media forms to new ones. It is in fact a further result of the 'converging screen' cultures and practices: well-established features like multi-windowed screens, animated pop-up inserts, scrolling text—in other words, the dynamic coexistence of unity and fragmentation in hyper-connected screen-design principles— actually applies to both fiction and nonfiction productions.

Combining different cultures and approaches to content delivery and archive-based documentary, the cross-media production of *Farewell Comrades!* took more than three years, to film in twelve countries of the former Eastern Bloc, collect testimony from celebrities and regular folk alike, and to unearth rare archives. Beyond this deployment of production means and the multiplication of delivery devices, however, what is the 'added value' of the transmedia narrative approach? How does the TV series interact (or not) with the online documentary to enhance the viewer experience?

### **5.1 Mixing Historical Events from a Pre-Digital Lost Era and the Fictionally Interactive Narrative Device of Today: *Farewell Comrades!* – the TV Series**

Produced by Artline Films (France) and Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion (Germany) for ARTE,<sup>12</sup> YLE and thirteen other European networks, developed and distributed with the support of the European Union MEDIA Program, the TV series *Farewell Comrades!* consists in six 52-minute episodes, each showing, from the perspective of the people who experienced it, caused it or even tried to prevent it, how the Soviet Empire's 1991 collapse unfolds over the course of just 16 years, starting from the 1975 historical climax of communist expansion.

Mixing history and personal memories, and fiction and nonfiction audio-visual material, the documentary series ushers the viewer through a reconstruction of one of the most meteoric accelerations world history has ever seen. Put in perspective with extraordinary images from local archives of the period, this chronicle of a lost world takes the form of an introductory journey punctuated by each episode's theme and timeline: 'Apogee (1975–1979)' 1:1; 'Threats (1980–1984)' 1:2; 'Hope (1985–1987)' 1:3; 'Awakening (1988)' 1: 4; 'Rebellion (1989)' 1:5; 'Collapse (1990–1991)' 1:6.

Nekrasov tells it through several persons' trajectories and narratives, the true protagonists of this story/history being to him neither heroes nor servants, but major players in the political arena as well as simple folk—from an East German border guard to a female worker from Gdansk, a KGB member from a far-off corner of Siberia, a Bulgarian scientist in Kazakhstan, a teacher from Estonia. From the director's point of view, each plays their part in history, helping to demonstrate that communism was destroyed not from the outside, but from within, through the force of their will. The collapse could happen thanks to the conviction of these men and women promised a bright future, but for whom it all had become no more than oppression and tyranny.

The series narrative starts at the end, the first episode, 'Apogee (1975–1979)' 1:1, opening with archive footage of the USSR's flag, a sickle and hammer on red background being removed from the Kremlin, followed by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announcing his resignation in a televised speech. The narrative of this historical reconstruction carried by archive images, however, is embedded within a second, spoken narrative, a first-person voiceover:

**It's the end. That is what I said to myself. The memory I keep of it is of a frightful sharpness. It was December 25, 1991, I was 33 years old and something died in me. For me, it was the most powerful ideal since Christianity. Death, Communism was dead. It was born of the primordial dream of justice and fraternity, it had been for centuries reduced to utopia, but we, we had brought it to power. Its end has been banal, announced on the TV news. A bald sexagenarian with a provincial accent [Mikhail Gorbachev] admitted the final defeat.**

11 Anna Wiehl 'ARTE : French-German experiments in crossing the border', in *VIEW* volume 03 issue 06/2014.

12 ARTE France broadcasted it in 2012 in three times two episodes, on January 24th and 31st and February 7th.



Right from the start, therefore, the tone is set. A native of Leningrad—today again St. Petersburg—, Andrei Nekrasov grew up with the USSR proclaimed values of justice and solidarity, and as every other Russian child and young adult, he firmly and sincerely believed in them.

However, while a nostalgic documentary seems to take shape on screen where the series title *Farewell Comrades!* appears superimposed on the image of Karl Marx's statue in Moscow's Revolution Square, a jump cut brings an abrupt change of direction. In the following sequence, a young woman addresses the camera directly, videoblog style, calling the first narrator 'Dad'. A history student in Berlin, the young European woman seems to be searching both for her father's past and the reasons for the fall of the Soviet Empire.

This change of tack brings two generations of narrators face to face: a 'character' born in the 1950s and brought up in the Soviet ideal (Andrei Nekrasov himself), and his daughter (actress Tatiana Nekrasov, the director's own daughter) who grew up in the West in the 1980s.

Nekrasov, who wrote the script in collaboration with Frenchman Jean-François Colosimo and Hungarian György Dalos, follows the red thread of his own background and personal memories, avoiding the conventional methods of featuring a succession of archival footage of major events with commentary from accredited experts.

On French television, for example, the intensive use of archival footage has been made popular recently by the documentary series *Mysteries of the Archives* (*Mystères d'archives*, 2009–2015). Created by Serge Viallet<sup>13</sup> in collaboration with historian Cedric Gruat, the series lasts for five seasons, relying on Viallet's concept that as pictures tell stories, the serial documentary tells the story of these images. The audio-visual document thus becomes evidence, an exhibit needing to be questioned. At the point where by scanning and dissecting the image on screen, the programme often directs the viewer's attention away, beyond what was initially seen or expected by the cameraman. An approach to archive footage that has earned Viallet the FOCAL International Award for Best Use of Footage in a gold Education Training Production in 2009.

Compared to *Farewell Comrades!*, however, the French documentary series represents a more classical TV documentary style and narrative structure. Built as a survey, each episode of *Mysteries of the Archives* covers a topic of contemporary history that marked the collective memory and imagination, without really articulating the more personal or intimate experiences of ordinary people.

Narrated in first person by the director who addresses his own (real-life) daughter, *Farewell Comrades!* on the other hand becomes an enthralling story that clearly targets a younger generation of viewers. Both a historical evocation and an intergenerational dialogue portraying a father justifying his life choices to his grown-up daughter, the TV series strategy of narration allows for an interweaving of macro- and micro-history.

Nekrasov speaks to his daughter Tatiana, whom he had with a West German woman (before reunification) and who grew up on the other side of the Wall. He explains why he chose to stay in the USSR then, after the collapse, in Russia. Meanwhile, the young woman, who has always lived in the West, inquires about his father's freedomless life there, yearning to understand his motivations.

While the daughter addresses him very directly, though, looking straight at the camera, the father remains off camera, represented mainly by his voice and a few images from the past. Episode by episode, their asymmetrical dialogue retraces the five decades leading up to the USSR's disappearance from the map, the end of a world where millions of men and women shared the old socialist dream, most often sincerely believing the official propaganda.

Illustrated by rare audiovisual archives from the former Eastern Bloc and major Western media, the TV episodes manage to articulate major events from collective history and minor personal stories, as well as cultural memories. *Farewell Comrades!*' main attribute as a TV documentary lies in the richness of the archive documents and the

<sup>13</sup> Serge Viallet is also the author of the remarkable archive-based documentary on the War of the Pacific *The sacking of Nanjing* (*Le sac de Nankin*, ARTE, France, 2007).

approach to them. It's the playful and creative way it stages the mass of archival images that, combined with an adequate narrative strategy, makes this panorama succeed in pedagogically restoring life to a bygone era. The chain of events leading to the Fall is told through both official archive images—from television news and military services—and 'stolen' images. According to the production company, the latter include those from the secret service—like the outstanding reels stockpiled in Berlin over the years by espionage units from the four powers.

*Farewell, Comrades!* also uses images taken by cameramen from behind the Iron Curtain, as well as several home movies shot by ordinary people. In this regard, the six episodes of the series present an unprecedented selection of archive-based audiovisual documents from every country in the Soviet Bloc.

Ultimately, the TV production involved 70 days of shooting in 11 countries and over 70 interviews in 13 languages. A dense network of researchers from numerous Eastern European countries took part in development and production. In addition to the archive coordinator (Cécile Croizat), 12 archive researchers—Russian, German, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak—are credited for *Farewell, Comrades!*. Thirty-three public archives and 35 private archives in the East and West were searched to obtain over 360 hours of archive material.<sup>14</sup> The invaluable collection of exceptional archives and unpublished testimonies and the way they are embedded in the narrative have earned Andrei Nekrasov the 2013 Grimme Preis—a prestigious TV award regarded as the 'German TV Oscar'. *Farewell, Comrades!* thus achieves its goal of allowing us to reconsider our recent past and better understand the other Europe which, now more than ever, represents part of our culture and our destiny.



Figure 8. *Farewell Comrades!* Web-documentary topographic interface.

14 See: Arteline films Press Kit.

## 5.2 Interactive Postcards from Past- and Present-Day Witnesses: *Farewell Comrades!* the Web-Documentary

Available in five languages, the Web-documentary was designed by Lena Thiele, produced by Pierre-Olivier François and published by the Berlin Web agency Moccu. It serves as a sort of invitation for (young) European audiences to access the daily lives of thirty characters from the past. This exploration is made possible through thirty postcards—memory fragments, archive documents—sent/received between 1975 and 1991. More minimalist than the TV series, the Web-documentary, with its *à la carte* structure, allows a random access to both the postcards and the video testimony associated with each of them. The portraits can also be accessed/searched by topic—22 subjects for over 200 text pages with historians' commentary—or via a graphical interface where the postcards are displayed on a USSR map. Gradually, by watching and exploring the material, the symbolic and historical convergence of these Soviet destinies emerge, as well as the authors' intimate bias. The postcards bring to life fragments of former comrades' life experiences of all kind—from ancient power brokers to great athletes to anonymous citizens.

As German producer Georg Tschurtschenthaler from Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion explained during a public presentation,<sup>15</sup> the cards were recovered from anonymous persons who had guarded them preciously. *Farewell Comrades!*'s production team has undertaken to reach and interview the people who had written or received the thirty original postcards. From funny and uplifting—like the one from St. Petersburg's biggest Beatles fan, who managed to obtain the Beatles' autographs by mail—to more dramatic and poignant ones, these postcards and the memories they evoke in the now-grownup witnesses of today, all tell extraordinary stories, revealing multiple details of social and cultural life under the Soviet regime. Each postcard is presented along with any document or information to which it refers—the card's picture, translation of the writing on the back of the card, video testimony, details about context and associated themes, links to other maps. Its title is a quotation from the interview, a small detail that makes the historic events evoked even more personal and personalised. Like the catchphrase 'I Wanted Jazz and Music' associated with a Women's Day card ('8 MAPTA' – March 8<sup>th</sup>) received in 1988 by Elena Bogas, a music teacher born in Siberia now living in Berlin. The postcard features a festive cake baked by a man, on Woman Day—also the first day of spring—is a major occasion in Russia.

By selecting Elena's card, the Internet user can access different sections of her Web-page, from 'Profile' to 'Personal Archive' (showing a photo of Elena at six, her piano degree from the Siberian Conservatory of Irkutsk, her passport declared invalid in the GDR...), or even 'Related Postcards' (like the Soviet Army Day one). One can also play the video, and watch Elena's testimony, interlaced with personal and institutional archive documents and images, while three different topic entries—Youth, Counterculture, Escape—become accessible as her story unfolds.

Thus, starting from an apparently anodyne personal message, we gradually learn not only about the music teacher's personal life, but also about how it interweaves with historical events—1988 March 8<sup>th</sup>, most particularly. From the age of 20 Elena had lost faith in the propaganda about the USSR supposedly being the best and most beautiful country. Music, especially jazz, became her personal alternative to the all-pervasive political party culture. When a jazz course was introduced at Irkutsk music school in the 1970s, it was the equivalent of a small revolution, and was watched skeptically by the KGB. It was there that Elena met both her future husband, a jazz pianist, and the Ovechkins, a family of jazz musicians which became infamous on March 8, 1988 for trying to hijack a passenger plane to escape to Western Europe. The incident left nine people dead—the Ovechkins included—and 35 wounded.

Elena's husband's love of jazz music drew the attention of the KGB, and he was asked to play 'more appropriate' music, like Russian popular music. This convinced the young family to flee in 1990, when they managed to emigrate to West Berlin with the help of Polish passports and visas for Yugoslavia.

Video 1 Elena Bogas' testimony 'I Wanted Jazz and Music'. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch the video

If the postcards play a central role in this Web-documentary, it is because they represent one of the few means of communication within or even beyond the Iron Curtain in a relatively free, safe and accessible way under the Soviet

15 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rcrrD0l5Go>



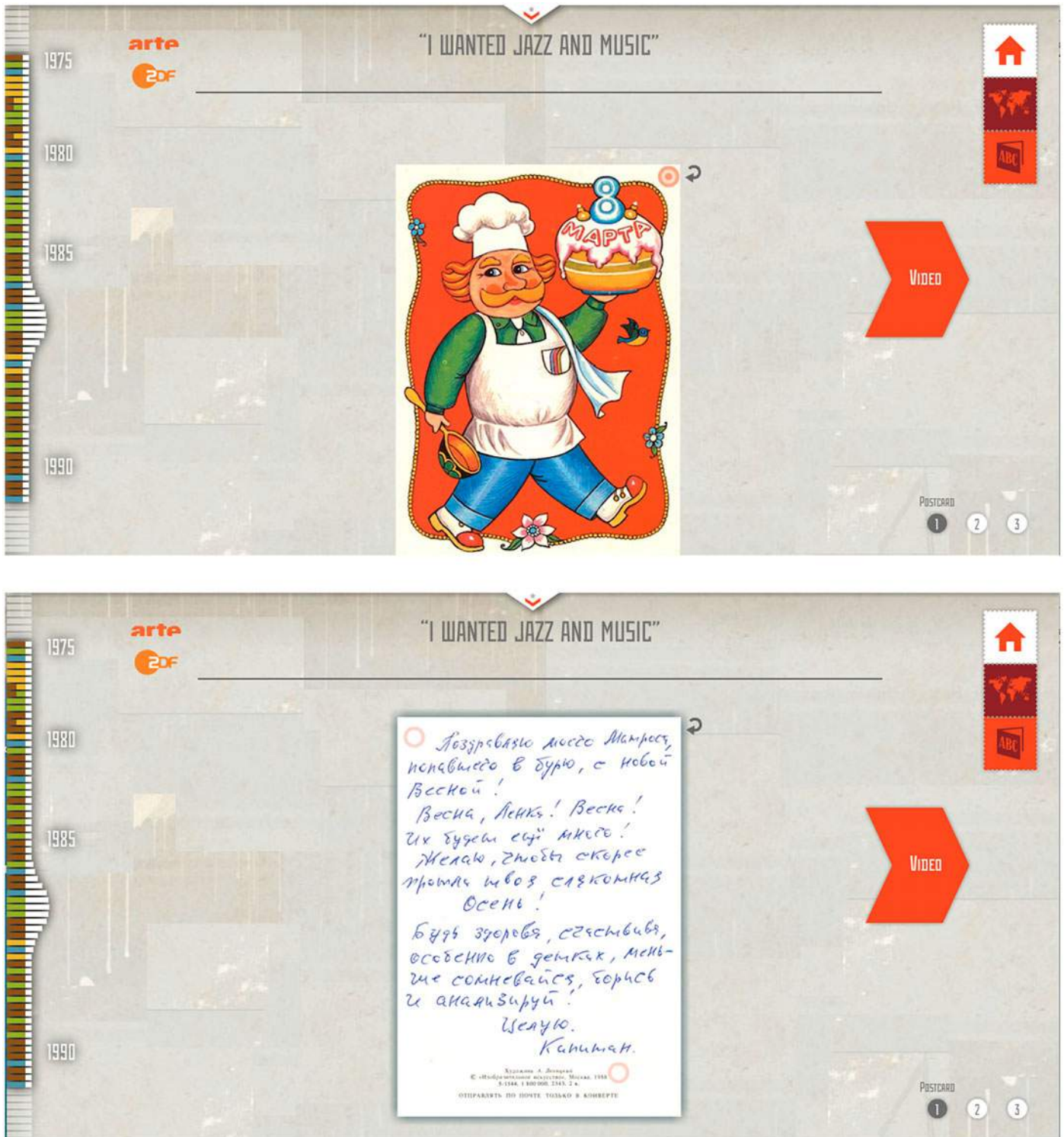


Figure 9. Elena's Women Day postcard both sides.

regime. They are also an effective means for showing the immense distances within this sort of parallel world which went at that time from East Berlin all the way to Vladivostok. Today, they have become the remaining vestiges of a lost empire, working as 'History bearers'. The strong sentimental nature and cultural memory value conveyed in these personal messages alone are enough to justify their use in the interactive documentary. Moreover, the present-day



Figure 10. The witness becomes the viewer.

reunion of former comrades through these postcards from Soviet times has a specific narrative function in the development of the historical discourse. It brought together witnesses of the USSR in a documentary tracing their past.

But in doing it *live*, the authors' choice permits them to avoid letting the witness a pre-fabricate the narrative. The advantage of this filming device is that it highlights the singular discourse of the oral source, as well as the material dimension of the documentary source. Thus it prevents the reduction of the narrative to mere information, and the reduction of the image to simple illustration of historical content. The same kind of interaction can be seen in some other historical documentaries in which the document's are mediated to ensure the witnesses have a form of detachment from the true story they have lived, sometimes rather a traumatic one. The analysis of archival material by the witness provides them access to an underlying history, the one from the document, of its own production. As Carlo Ginzburg notes:<sup>16</sup>

The materials themselves suggest a mode of writing and reasoning

In order to achieve the quality of conceptual relationship advocated by the Italian historian and proponent of micro-history, though, the document must be seen by both the historian and the documentary filmmaker as a full witness, as a living object. Few documentaries take ownership of the archive in this perspective of valuing the trace moment, making the director of *Farewell Comrade!*'s attitude towards these old postcards all the more honourable.

## 6 From Bi-Media Documentary Productions to 'Synergistic Storytelling'

In terms of media representation, though the roles seem reversed in *Farewell Comrades!*, as noted by director Xavier de la Vega in a French documentary blog, the presence of the young daughter in the TV series works as an element of

<sup>16</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, 'De près, de loin. Des rapports de force en histoire,' *Vacarme* 18, January 2002, pp. 4–12.

disruption to the classic archive film narrative. Hyper-connected, alternately provided with a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone, she seems to embody a new relationship to the images of the past (to history?). On the TV screen, the audio-visual archives appear as though she examines them from her terminal, according to her questioning. If this digital native character is not always plausible, she indeed introduces tension between two eras, claiming an emergency for the young generation to understand the Soviet past, even if its existence is now erased from the map. But using this artifice, *Farewell Comrades* showcases on television a Web 2.0 style use of audio-visual archives—informal, instantaneous, user-centric and *à la carte*. As a specific narrative approach to content design, the combination of fiction and historical material, traditional and new media, reflects the will of the authors to draw on this issue the attention of young audiences and demographic groups. Indeed *Farewell Comrade!*'s challenge is to tell the story of the Soviet era, a story which hardly survives in the collective memory, above all to those who have never heard of it—the young generation born after the 1980s. Compared with the series though, the online documentary illustrates paradoxically a much more intimate and nostalgic, less hectic way of interacting with selected archive images.

On the one hand, because of its low-level, rather old-fashion interactivity style, as well as their more distanced gaze (external to the father and daughter's tense dialogue), the Internet users won't feel as rushed and compelled as the girl on TV. On the other hand, the interactivity and the ergonomics of the Website make it possible for the Internet user to connect directly to her/his favourite domain—something you still can't get on 'classical' TV series.

However, the Web-documentary doesn't allow its user to actively search the archives, questioning the past following the thread of her/his own intuitions or misunderstandings. Whereas this is precisely the kind of experience that made more interesting the other recent TV series tie-in Web-experience we mentioned earlier, the French non fiction production *Manipulations*.

Despite its qualities in terms of recovery of archive footage, though, *Farewell Comrades!* fails to use the transmedia approach in a relevant way. Not only are the documentary television series and the website not designed to really interact with each other, the online component does not exploit the creative potential for interactively recovering archival documents when brought to life in a networked environment. Moreover, the interactive design doesn't envisage the possibility for the user to share, link intertextually or 'spread' the experience via social media, nor to generate content and/or integrate her/his own personal archival documents.

Indeed, as Berber Hagedoorn underscores,<sup>17</sup> mixing media cultures and practices is more than a simple matter of multiplying delivery modes or shifting from broadcasting to narrowcasting. Applied to *História(s) do Brasil*, the transmedia approach is a question of targeting the coordination of the serial writing, format and temporality specific to the television medium with the proposal of interactive content, archive-based documents and participatory forms of user engagement. As Rocha would have done it for his film, the television series allows the viewer to resume, create and add new chapters, relying on personal archives as well as other databases accessible online. The relationship between images and discourse then will be constantly interrogated, since the digital content online allows interactive constructivist or deconstructivist approaches to the assembly of film footage to music and voice-over comments.

At the end, the project questions the benefit of unity and fragmentation, the social-media communication modes and the stand-alone-but-interconnected dimensions specific to transmedia, while proposing forms and levels of engagement and interaction with historical documents. Offering a collaborative-scriptwriting approach, institutional film archives combined with amateur collections as well as multiple ways and entry points for experiencing the non fictional content, *História(s) do Brasil* becomes a tool for facilitating the audience involvement in the assembly of documents and the constitution of the archives themselves. In Hagedoorn's words, 'increasing opportunities to share private memories through a variety of public platforms, means that popular media forms and practices—in television, film, literature and

17 Hagedoorn, 'Performing Cultural Memory'.



digital media—function ever more as dynamic agents of history and memory'.<sup>18</sup> If the flood of images and sounds irrigating the media landscape has never before been so large, it seems necessary to deliver more effective analytical tools to question it while (re-)activating our desire to share our collective memory.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.