

Growing Documentary: Creating a Collaborative Computer-Supported Story Telling Environment

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Figure 1. Growing Documentary workflow implemented in the production and performance of "lenses + landscapes"

Introduction

Technological innovations in the fields of digital video production, distribution as well as broadband network access and speeds have made creating and sharing digital video contents into a simple process that can be performed by anyone, anywhere. Although the process of sharing contents has undergone a great change with respect to traditional distribution models, the contents themselves still tend to follow traditional linear narrative structures, construction and production workflows.

We believe the Growing Documentary concept can support and encourage more people to tell their stories together in new and innovative ways. The Growing Documentary is a platform for computer supported cooperative work (CSCW) using user-generated content to produce digital video productions that can be remixed, reworked and built upon as the story and story tellers change and adapt.

Motivation

The idea and concept for the Growing Documentary came about as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami which occurred on March 11th, 2011. Not only did this event have an impact on Japan and the rest of the world because of the unprecedented level of damage caused by both terrestrial and oceanic natural disasters; but also because news of the impact was delivered to people with unprecedented expedience and quality via a variety of media to people everywhere. Traditional media outlets were utilizing new social communication tools to broadcast their contents. People in the most devastated areas who had no electricity or public services were using their smart phones or feature phones to receive information and communicate their stories to the outside world.

Inspiration → First Prototype

The first iteration of the Growing Documentary was a short documentary about the devastation and aftermath of March 11th from the point of view of three amateur and professional photographers from different walks of life who were all affected by the earthquake and tsunami. The film, "lenses + landscapes", was produced by crowd-sourcing the photographers, translators and audio via social networking services (SNS). As the Growing Documentary is a social platform for individual and community cinematic expression, 4K (4096x2160) was chosen as the output

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resolution. Through the use of a cloud-based file sharing system, the photographers' raw still images were combined with multi-framed HD video to render a very high resolution movie clip through the use of community resources. (Figure 1)

Hands-on Non-linear Narrative Collaboration

The Growing Documentary is an important step in furthering the field of interactive documentaries [Ursu, M. F. et al.]. The Growing Documentary platform allows collaborators to not only interact with one another in the production of a story, but also the elements of the story. Moreover, the story itself becomes an interactive experience: ideas, images, videos and sounds can be shared by the story tellers as well as the audience.

By incorporating SAGE OptIPortables [Renambot, L. et al.] into the creative process of the Growing Documentary, digital contents over gigabit pipelines around and throughout the world, people, regardless of location, have the potential to collaborate at any time in order to produce high-quality digital contents by and for the global community.

Implementation and Demonstration

The flexibility in the narrative structure of the Growing Documentary allows for freedom in implementation. After "lenses + landscapes" was shown at a special screening during the 2011 Tokyo International Film Festival, attendees also had a chance to interact with the film via SAGE. Multiple SAGE "walls" were connected in San Diego at CineGrid 2011 and participants had a chance to immerse themselves in the images, videos and sounds of "lenses + landscapes" while interacting in real-time with others in Japan to create their own versions of the story.

References

- RENAMBOT, L. ET AL. 2004. SAGE: the Scalable Adaptive Graphics Environment. In *Proceedings of WACE 2004, (The 4th Workshop on Advanced Collaborative Environments)*
- URSU, M. F. ET AL. 2009. INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARIES: A GOLDEN AGE. *COMPUT. ENTERTAIN.* 7, 3, ARTICLE 41 (SEPTEMBER 2009)