ARTICLES

INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES AS COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

DOSSIER: "ETHNOGRAPHIES AT THE TOUCH OF A SCREEN – EXPLORING ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODS, ETHICS AND KNOWLEDGE WITH SMARTPHONES"

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes two platforms that use the potential of new technologies as a possibility of production, transmission, and awareness on social and political issues. The documentary Hollow is partly produced by smartphones and shows the possibility of bringing together several elements to deal with the rural exodus in an American city. The Quipu Project offers new perspectives on the representation and preservation of memories of women and men who were forcibly sterilized in the 1990s in Peru. The documentary uses the possibilities of smartphones to drive the narrative. The idea of the documentary is initiated through a free telephone line made available to the deponents. In both productions, the combination of audiovisual elements with technological devices can contribute to

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the development of ethnographic research and enable the participation of communities in politically important themes of society.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, the relationship between Anthropology and new audiovisual production technologies can result in innovative practices for the construction of anthropological knowledge, in addition to bringing to light important issues in society, such as migration, rural exodus, forced sterilization policies, human rights violations, among other issues. The adoption of audiovisual elements in Anthropology enables proximity to those who are distant from us and provides subsidies for a greater understanding of the cultural aspects of the world around us.

Therefore, the article analyzes two web platforms that use the potential of interactive storytelling as a strategy for communication and awareness in social and political issues. The documentary Hollow[2] addresses the population decline in rural areas of West Virginia in the USA. The problem of the documentary is to show that many young people, when becoming adults, leave rural regions in search of better job opportunities. There is, therefore, a movement of emptying the cities of the countryside, a rural exodus that entails the abandonment of traditions and cultural roots.

The content present in the multiplatform includes more than 3 hours of recording with more than 30 characters. The project uses the narrative potential of new audiovisual production technologies to spread the importance of people not forgetting the past to build the future. The documentary combines video portraits, data visualization, photographs, soundscapes, infographics, and community-generated content to bring individual and collective stories to life.

The Quipu Project[3] is an interactive documentary about women and men who have been sterilized in Peru. In 1995, the Peruvian government of then-President Alberto Fujimori created a national family planning and reproductive health program. The program was created to provide access to a wide range of birth control methods, including voluntary sterilization. According to data from the platform, at that time, the measure was well received by feminist groups, the international community and received as a positive intervention for women, as a possibility for poverty reduction. However, sterilizations were carried out aggressively on indigenous and rural communities and on economically vulnerable people.

2 Available at: <http://hollowdocumentary.com>.
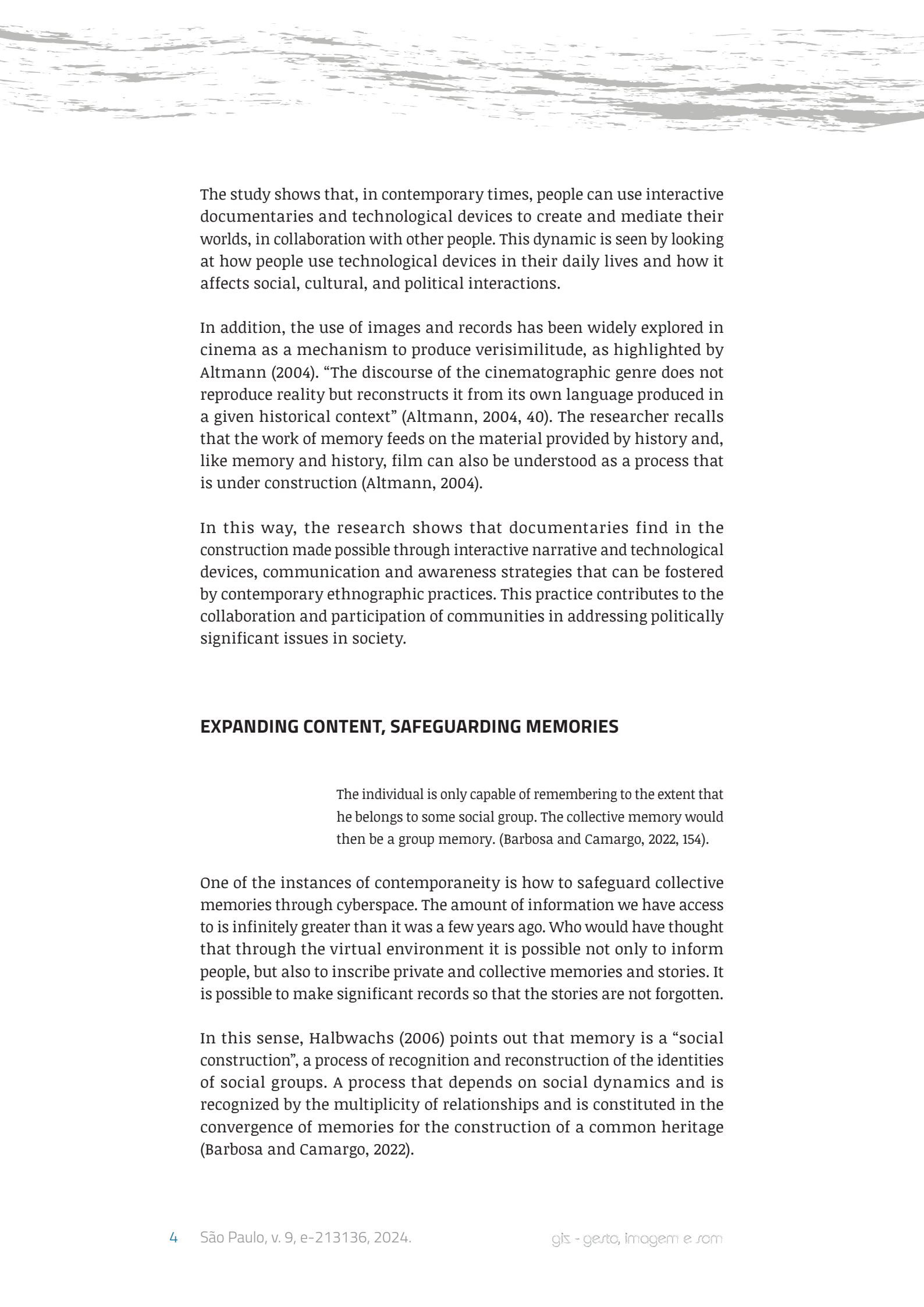3 Available at: <https://interactive.quipu-project.com>.

In this way, the multiplatform brings the memories of people who were impacted by those political actions in Peru. The project brings together hundreds of sound files that narrate the human rights violations committed in the 10 years in which Alberto Fujimori was president of the country. More than gathering collective memories, the platform shows that, even after twenty years, the remnants of this policy continue to affect lives. According to information from the project, countless people affected at that time still suffer from trauma and pain.

FIGURE 1. Victims of forced sterilizations are still seeking compensation from the state. **Source:** bbc.com/mundo (Feb. 10, 2021)

In both projects, the narrative present in the interactive documentary is there as a strategy to expand the contents and recover the collective memories of the people involved in the documentary productions. The research shows the possibilities of promoting the production of audiovisual works of horizontal, non-linear projection and that promote the user's interactivity when dealing with social or political themes, such as rural exodus and forced sterilization.

The question that arises is: how does the interactive documentary manage to safeguard the individual and collective memories of the residents of these communities? Beforehand, through interactive storytelling strategies, it is possible to preserve social memories, in addition to allowing stories not to be forgotten and to be disseminated in cyberspace.

The study shows that, in contemporary times, people can use interactive documentaries and technological devices to create and mediate their worlds, in collaboration with other people. This dynamic is seen by looking at how people use technological devices in their daily lives and how it affects social, cultural, and political interactions.

In addition, the use of images and records has been widely explored in cinema as a mechanism to produce verisimilitude, as highlighted by Altmann (2004). "The discourse of the cinematographic genre does not reproduce reality but reconstructs it from its own language produced in a given historical context" (Altmann, 2004, 40). The researcher recalls that the work of memory feeds on the material provided by history and, like memory and history, film can also be understood as a process that is under construction (Altmann, 2004).
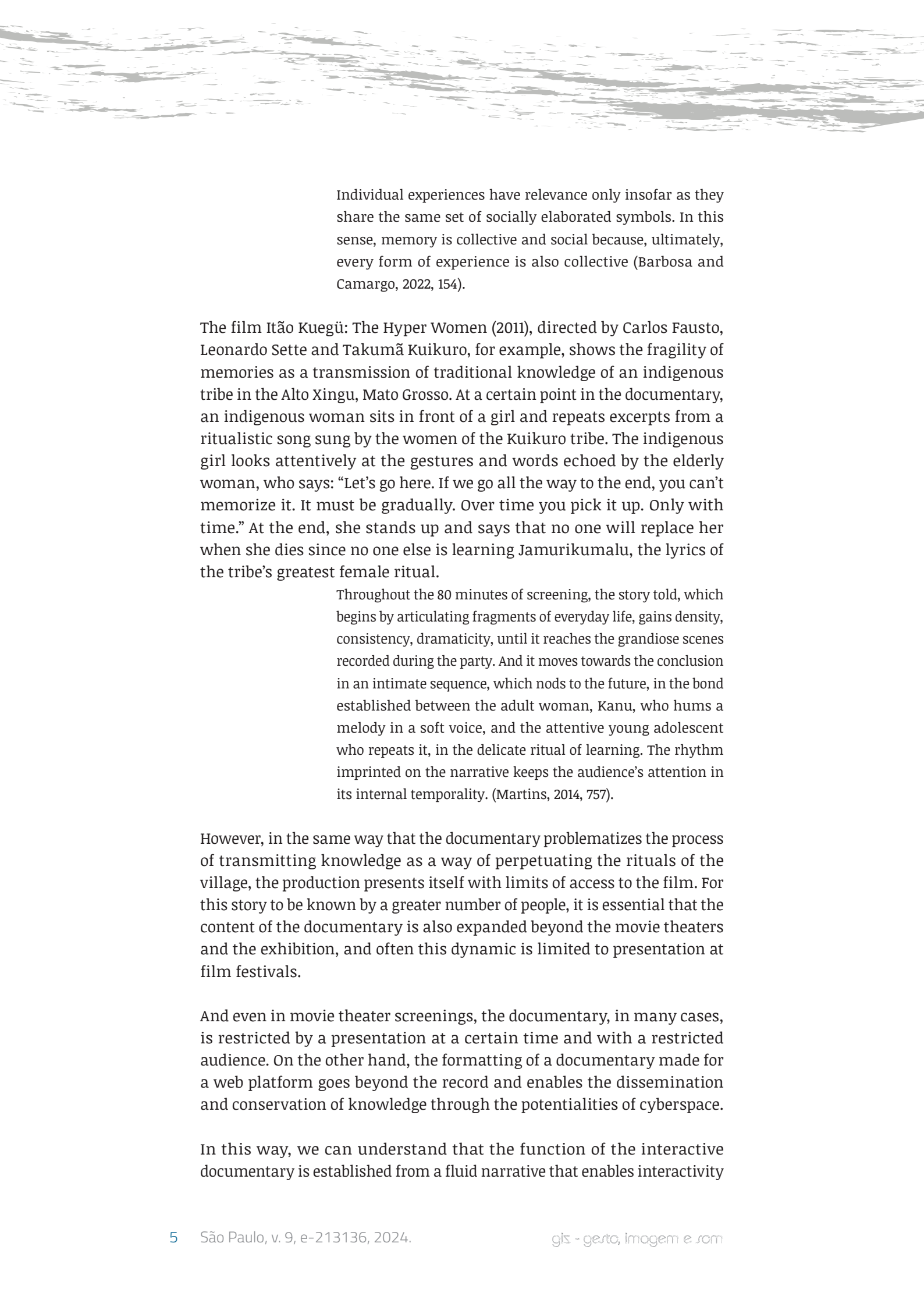
In this way, the research shows that documentaries find in the construction made possible through interactive narrative and technological devices, communication and awareness strategies that can be fostered by contemporary ethnographic practices. This practice contributes to the collaboration and participation of communities in addressing politically significant issues in society.

EXPANDING CONTENT, SAFEGUARDING MEMORIES

> The individual is only capable of remembering to the extent that he belongs to some social group. The collective memory would then be a group memory. (Barbosa and Camargo, 2022, 154).

One of the instances of contemporaneity is how to safeguard collective memories through cyberspace. The amount of information we have access to is infinitely greater than it was a few years ago. Who would have thought that through the virtual environment it is possible not only to inform people, but also to inscribe private and collective memories and stories. It is possible to make significant records so that the stories are not forgotten.

In this sense, Halbwachs (2006) points out that memory is a "social construction", a process of recognition and reconstruction of the identities of social groups. A process that depends on social dynamics and is recognized by the multiplicity of relationships and is constituted in the convergence of memories for the construction of a common heritage (Barbosa and Camargo, 2022).

> Individual experiences have relevance only insofar as they share the same set of socially elaborated symbols. In this sense, memory is collective and social because, ultimately, every form of experience is also collective (Barbosa and Camargo, 2022, 154).
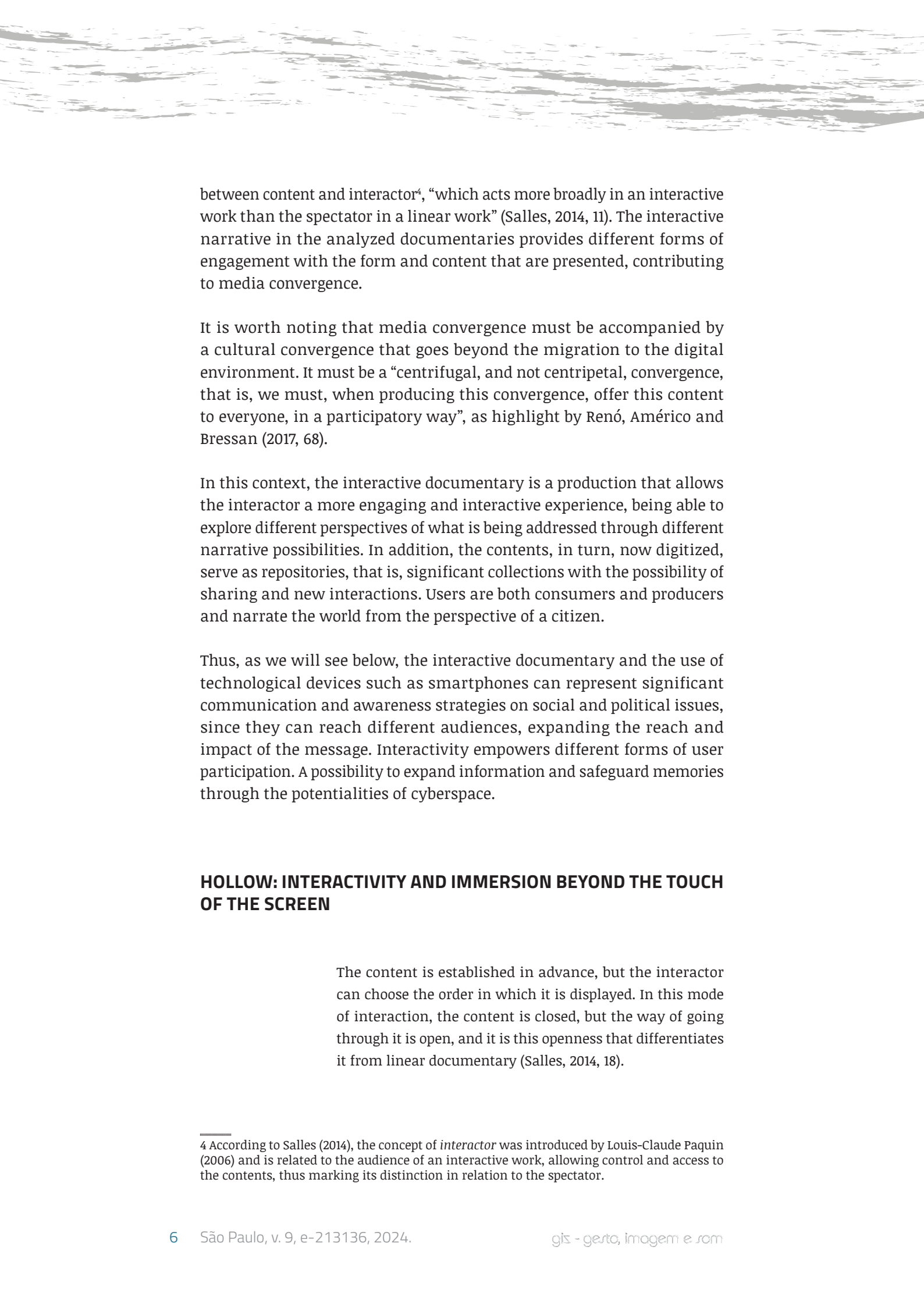
The film Itão Kuegü: The Hyper Women (2011), directed by Carlos Fausto, Leonardo Sette and Takumã Kuikuro, for example, shows the fragility of memories as a transmission of traditional knowledge of an indigenous tribe in the Alto Xingu, Mato Grosso. At a certain point in the documentary, an indigenous woman sits in front of a girl and repeats excerpts from a ritualistic song sung by the women of the Kuikuro tribe. The indigenous girl looks attentively at the gestures and words echoed by the elderly woman, who says: "Let's go here. If we go all the way to the end, you can't memorize it. It must be gradually. Over time you pick it up. Only with time." At the end, she stands up and says that no one will replace her when she dies since no one else is learning Jamurikumalu, the lyrics of the tribe's greatest female ritual.

> Throughout the 80 minutes of screening, the story told, which begins by articulating fragments of everyday life, gains density, consistency, dramaticity, until it reaches the grandiose scenes recorded during the party. And it moves towards the conclusion in an intimate sequence, which nods to the future, in the bond established between the adult woman, Kanu, who hums a melody in a soft voice, and the attentive young adolescent who repeats it, in the delicate ritual of learning. The rhythm imprinted on the narrative keeps the audience's attention in its internal temporality. (Martins, 2014, 757).

However, in the same way that the documentary problematizes the process of transmitting knowledge as a way of perpetuating the rituals of the village, the production presents itself with limits of access to the film. For this story to be known by a greater number of people, it is essential that the content of the documentary is also expanded beyond the movie theaters and the exhibition, and often this dynamic is limited to presentation at film festivals.

And even in movie theater screenings, the documentary, in many cases, is restricted by a presentation at a certain time and with a restricted audience. On the other hand, the formatting of a documentary made for a web platform goes beyond the record and enables the dissemination and conservation of knowledge through the potentialities of cyberspace.

In this way, we can understand that the function of the interactive documentary is established from a fluid narrative that enables interactivity

between content and interactor[4], "which acts more broadly in an interactive work than the spectator in a linear work" (Salles, 2014, 11). The interactive narrative in the analyzed documentaries provides different forms of engagement with the form and content that are presented, contributing to media convergence.

It is worth noting that media convergence must be accompanied by a cultural convergence that goes beyond the migration to the digital environment. It must be a "centrifugal, and not centripetal, convergence, that is, we must, when producing this convergence, offer this content to everyone, in a participatory way", as highlight by Renó, Américo and Bressan (2017, 68).

In this context, the interactive documentary is a production that allows the interactor a more engaging and interactive experience, being able to explore different perspectives of what is being addressed through different narrative possibilities. In addition, the contents, in turn, now digitized, serve as repositories, that is, significant collections with the possibility of sharing and new interactions. Users are both consumers and producers and narrate the world from the perspective of a citizen.

Thus, as we will see below, the interactive documentary and the use of technological devices such as smartphones can represent significant communication and awareness strategies on social and political issues, since they can reach different audiences, expanding the reach and impact of the message. Interactivity empowers different forms of user participation. A possibility to expand information and safeguard memories through the potentialities of cyberspace.

HOLLOW: INTERACTIVITY AND IMMERSION BEYOND THE TOUCH OF THE SCREEN

> The content is established in advance, but the interactor can choose the order in which it is displayed. In this mode of interaction, the content is closed, but the way of going through it is open, and it is this openness that differentiates it from linear documentary (Salles, 2014, 18).

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4 According to Salles (2014), the concept of *interactor* was introduced by Louis-Claude Paquin (2006) and is related to the audience of an interactive work, allowing control and access to the contents, thus marking its distinction in relation to the spectator.
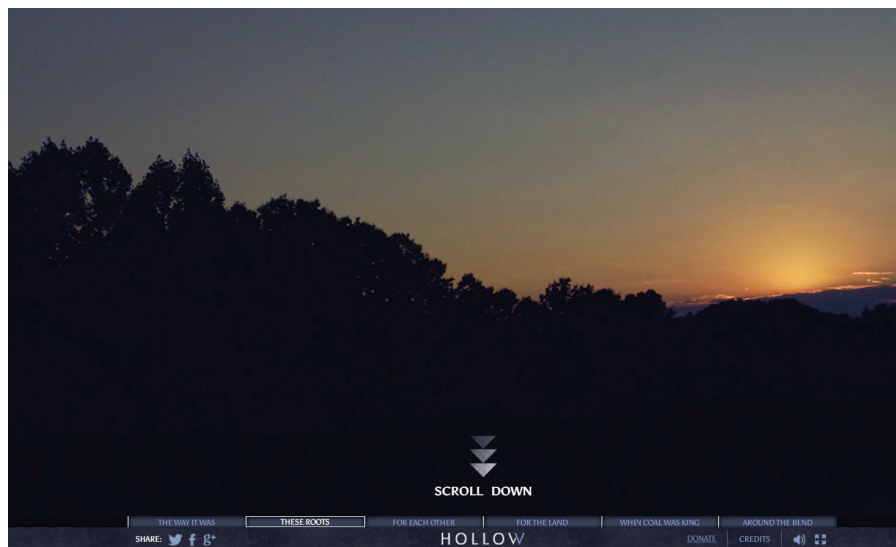
A few years ago, the ways of telling a story were being transformed according to the new technological possibilities that were emerging. In the past, to narrate a story, only one way was told, and few resources were used to broaden the user's understanding. In a book, for example, no matter how dynamic the story is, the limit of the narrative lies in the use of photographs, illustrations, and infographics.

Nowadays, it is possible to expand the ways of telling a story through the multiplicity of media resources available. In addition, the way the user relates to the narrative is also modified. In this scenario, there is a culture of convergence, since the way the user relates to the media is modified and, consequently, the formatting of the media also starts to be rethought.

FIGURE 2.
Menu offers the user navigability paths through the stories.
Source: http://hollowdocumentary.com/

In this way, when accessing the Hollow project page, the user is informed in advance that for an even more immersive experience, the use of headphones is advised. Not for less, when starting the navigation, it is possible to check some information about the population decline of McDowell County, a city that belongs to the West Virginia region, in the USA, since the 1940s. At the time of the platform's launch (2013), the population of McDowell County was 22,000 people, compared to 100,000 in the city during the 1940s.

Many young people from West Virginia — including project director Elaine McMillion Sheldon — left the state upon reaching adulthood to seek opportunities elsewhere, a phenomenon that is still happening throughout rural America. The Hollow documentary team is made up of 10 professionals who, for four months, immersed themselves in the stories of McDowell County residents to make the production. The result is an

interactive documentary that combines videos created on smartphones by the community with images filmed by the director, as well as audios, infographics, and photographs.

According to the project, the history of the city also represents part of the history of small towns, which are facing changes beyond their territorial control. The invitation is to explore the city through the stories of residents who still live there. In total, there are more than thirty video testimonials from McDowell County residents distributed in five thematic sections that address issues such as health, community activism, and the influence of the coal industry. The project is based on dynamic visualizations of information. Statistical data is alternated with personal narratives that bring the numbers to life.

FIGURE 3.
"These Roots" section shows the history of county residents. **Source:** http://hollowdocumentary.com/

Right from the start, population data emerge, which are alternated with audio and images of the city's residents. To access this information, the user needs to scroll down the navigation bar. To naturalize the interactivity present in the platform, the project's design team makes extensive use of a parallax scrolling technique that gives the story an idea of uninterrupted flow. Renó, Américo and Bressan (2017) point out that the user chooses navigation paths that go beyond the touch of the screen, as they provide new possibilities for apprehension and action in the world.

> These environments and their interfaces have a certain magical power, of maximum extension (so far) of the human body, where the user navigator can not only simulate a touch, but also touch all the digital content existing on the device's screen. However, we cannot consider it exactly as magic, but as an aesthetic and digital construction that provides a high level of experience and, in turn, a certain cognitive "magic". A magic that has changed the ways of thinking and acting of

users, accustomed to changing pages no longer by scrolling bars, but by a simple click to develop a horizontal navigation. (Renó, Américo and Bressan, 2017, 71).

The authors, when analyzing the results of the use of the interactive narrative present in the Hollow platform, highlight that it is "a model that is supported by the concept of gamification to justify the ludic in the real record, strengthening the new spaces and formats of documentation and knowledge" (Renó, Américo and Bressan, 2017, 64). And speaking of the use of a playful language as a possibility of reconstructing the real, in many testimonies present in the documentary, the images are superimposed with the story told through audios and texts, shown from the interactivity of the users.

> I recently resurrected the McDowell County Historical Society to help preserve the rest of the history here in the county. My husband and I worked on a photoblog project about the empty churches in McDowell County. With each visit, I take pictures, write about our experience in that church, and try to find a bit of history about the church if it is not provided for me (Renee Bolden).

FIGURE 4.
Testimonial is overlaid with images, sounds, and noises from the environment. **Source:** http://hollowdocumentary.com/

As in any project, the dynamics of the testimonial consist of scrolling down so that the images appear. In the image above, for example, there is a montage from a photograph of resident Renee Bolden, which is overlaid with images of the ruins of the McDowell County Historical Society. An ambient audio gives the feeling of immersion in the place, even knowing that it is two static images, and the testimony is recorded through characters. There are layers of audiovisual records that allow users to immerse themselves interactively in the resident's story. This narrative training given through memorization processes is one of the potentialities found in the documentary and enables

individual and collective participation in the approach of sensitive themes to the community.

One of the sessions, "When coal was king". shows the relationship between mining and the development of the city in the 1940s. The region is in the Pocahontas coal field, a place that produces metallurgical coal used in steelmaking around the world. Over time, coal ceased to be the main source of energy and the repercussions were visibly felt in the community. Among the impacts are diseases resulting from mining, lack of employment, drug use, among other consequences.

Initial funding to produce Hollow came from crowdfunding with a raise of $28,000, as well as grants from the New Media Fund, the Tribeca Film Institute, and the West Virginia Council on the Humanities. In an interview with the MIT Open Documentary Lab and published in Filmmaker Magazine, the project's director, Elaine McMillion Sheldon, highlights the particularities and challenges of adopting interactive storytelling. According to the director, the behavior of users changes, since "they are active participants in the experience. A level of engagement is expected and necessary for them to learn about the stories", and continues:

> There is no guarantee that your users will reach these "key points" because you have allowed them to choose from many different paths to reach a unique destination. With non-linear storytelling, you must learn how to reach your viewers with these impacts from many different directions, because they're accessing all the content in a non-linear way. (Sheldon, 2013).

This idea of working the content of the documentary in a non-linear way is one of the main characteristics of the narrative present in the project. In addition, for greater dynamism of the language employed, the material is partially produced by smartphone cameras of the residents of McDowell County themselves. In this way, the platform shows the possibilities of bringing together various elements such as audios, photographs and statiical data and promoting the production of audiovisual works to deal with the North American rural exodus, a phenomenon in which rural inhabitants lose their social bond with the rural environment, causing internal migrations to large urban centers.

In this scenario of migratory social processes, dealing with the convergence of contents and languages is the basis for understanding another process that, according to Lorenzo Vilches (2003), is part of a social migratory dynamic in the digital age. However, the author points out that in the geographical configuration of cyberspace, "migrations to the connected society will not suffer the problems faced by immigrants in search of employment and better material living conditions" (Vilches, 2003, p. 39). There is, therefore, a new

social dynamic. If in the modern age the idea of migratory processes was in property and in the market, with digital migration, trade shifts from the export of products to transactions around ideas (Vilches, 2003).

Finally, it is worth remembering that we live in times of important reflections on digital inequalities and democracy. In this sense, Nestor Canclini (2022) warns that even with the potential of cyberspace and in the face of technological empowerment, it is possible for people to be users, including producers, to produce within uses. However, this does not mean that they are citizens. In this way, the interactive documentary Hollow is an efficient communication and awareness strategy to address politically important issues in society and shows that the people who participate in the documentary take the lead in the story, narrating their own stories.

The collaborative work provided by the interactive documentary finds, in the process of memorization of the city's residents, a space to deal with the intangible culture of the community through the descriptive and imagistic record. An interactive and immersive possibility for the community to strengthen itself as a producer and user of information, in addition to individuals recognizing themselves as citizens.

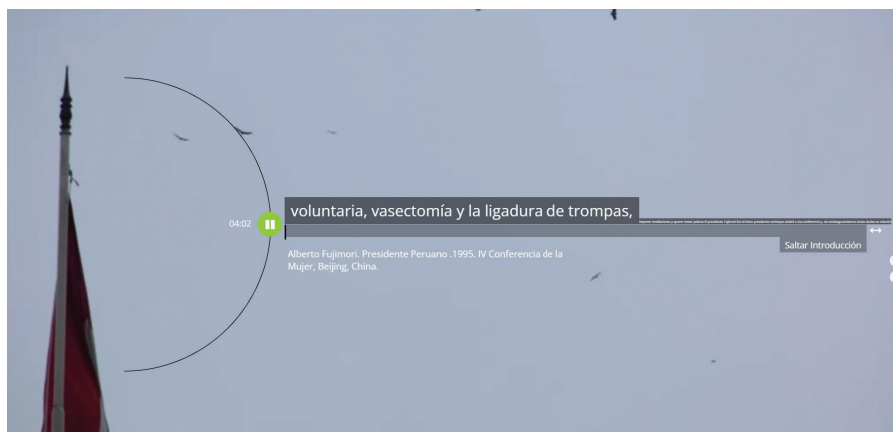## THE QUIPU PROJECT: THE SAFEGUARDING OF MEMORIES IN CONTEMPORANEITY

> Quipu is an ancient Inca accounting system. It was made with ropes and knots and used to store information in a predominantly oral culture [...]. The choice of Quipu as a symbol of the project is because it seeks to collect oral information that activates collective memory and helps prevent forced sterilizations from being forgotten (Lemos Jr and Gosciola, 2020, 156).

As presented above, the Hollow platform shows the importance of re-signifying social processes resulting from the rural exodus and finds in the combination of interactive media elements the possibility of telling the stories of residents who still live in the North American city of McDowell County. The Quipu Project, on the other hand, shows the importance of representing and preserving the memories of people who, in the past, were impacted by forced sterilization measures in Peru.

In 1995, then-President Alberto Fujimori implemented a family planning and reproductive health program. At the time, the program was well

received, but little by little people realized that sterilizations were being forced. This policy has affected thousands of people and "led to serious human rights violations classified by the Peruvian Judiciary and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as crimes against humanity" (Almeida and Reis, 2022, 570).

Sterilizations were aggressively promoted in indigenous, rural, and economically vulnerable communities. On many occasions, consent has been manipulated or non-existent. There are testimonies on the project's platform from people who were forced by doctors or sterilized while in the hospital for other reasons. In the year 2000, more than 270,000 women and 20,000 men were sterilized by Fujimori's program.

> In this way, the multiplatform brings the memories of these people with hundreds of sound files that narrate the human rights violations committed in the 10 years in which Alberto Fujimori was president of Peru. Twenty years later, the legacy of this policy continues to affect lives. According to the project, many of those affected still suffer from trauma and pain (Lemos Jr and Gosciola, 2020, 154).

In common, both projects use interactive documentary and the possibilities of smartphone functionalities to drive the narrative. However, if in Hollow the documentary often uses images to drive the narrative, in the Quipu Project the basis of production is the sound documentary. The initial concept of the documentary is initiated through a toll-free telephone line made available to the deponents (Lemos Jr. and Gosciola, 2020). The idea is to give a voice to people who have been affected by forced sterilization policies in Peru, as well as to promote the continued search for justice and the recognition of human rights violations.

In addition to the deponents telling their stories, users can also record a response message in the testimonies. These messages are translated,

recorded, and sent to the deponents, informing them that the testimony has been heard.

At the beginning of the project, there is a sequence of audios that talk about Fujimori's sterilization program and the consequences of these actions. Then, it is possible to choose the paths of the narrative through the testimonies, which are divided into four subcategories: Sterilization Program; operations; Life After and In Search of Justice. Each category has a node of a different color: yellow, red, blue, and green, respectively. In each subcategory, the testimonials are organized by colors and by a registration number, followed by the indicative of the total number of audios.

For the creators of the project, this open structure reflects the fact that for the deponents the story continues without end until justice is achieved. Therefore, the objective of the Quipu Project is to indicate a possible solution to the cases of forced sterilizations, taking people's testimonies to a wider audience, through a tool that seeks the recognition and reparation of the human rights of that community.

At the beginning of the navigation, there is a brief introduction explaining the meaning of quipu. According to the platform, quipu is an ancient Inca accounting system. It was made with ropes and knots and used to store information in a predominantly oral culture. The ropes were made of cotton, alpaca, or llama wool. Quipus were used for many functions, from tax accounting, census, and crop registration to a writing system, where knotted strings served as a mnemonic tool to remember events that had occurred. Quipus were used as a physical memory, an archive.

FIGURE 6.
The narrative is driven by users choosing navigability paths.
Source: https://interactive.quipu-project.com/

According to the creators, the choice of the quipu as a symbol of the project is because the platform seeks to collect oral information that activates the collective memory and helps prevent forced sterilizations from being forgotten. The structure of the platform is also inspired by the shape of a quipu. The presentation of the collected information represents each testimony on a rope and each testimony responds to a knot.

In this way, the platform casts new perspectives on the elaboration of interactive documentaries in contemporary times and on processes of digitization and creation that singularize and constitute themes about the preservation of memories. It is worth noting that even today, twenty years after Fujimori's political measures, the people impacted are still seeking justice. Using a phone line and a web interface, the project makes available the testimonies of some of those affected, giving them a tool to tell their stories. The story emerges as the archive of testimonies and responses grows.
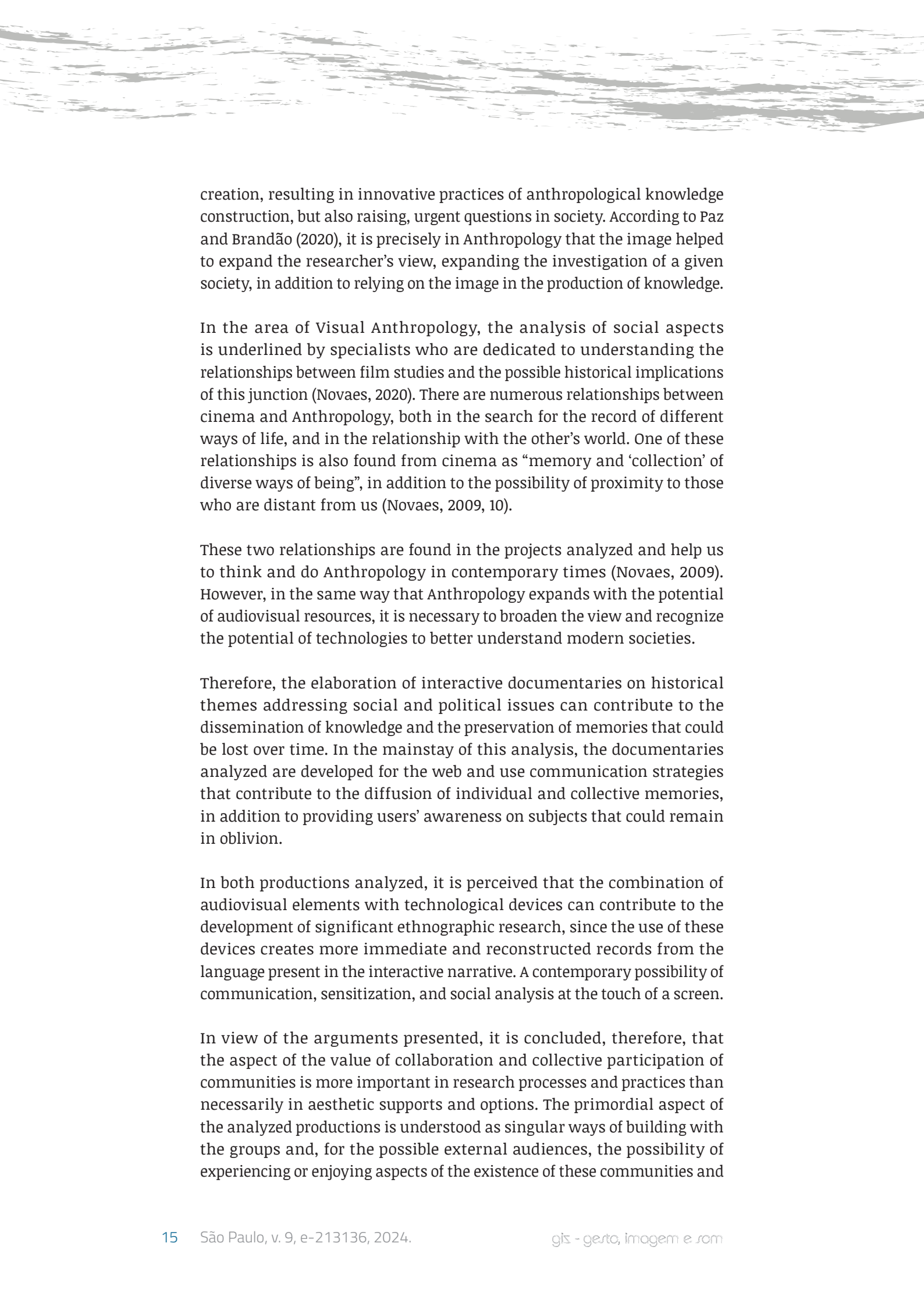
The potential of the use of narrative allows the memories of women and men who have been affected by numerous human rights abuses to find in cyberspace the possibility of recording and legality based on the process of individual and collective memorization. An expectation to echo politically important themes of the community through the creative use of expressive forms and technologies.

An ethnographic possibility at the touch of a screen and that starts to be developed with interactive technological resources as a driving force, promoting "new looks at the cultural practices of the different subjects that coexist in the contemporaneity marked by interculturality, hybridity and plurality" (Lemos Jr and Gosciola, 2020, 157) and that they find in the collaborative production of knowledge of the respective communities, the opportunity for reflection and reverberation on politically significant issues in society.

CONSIDERATIONS

Widely known, the documentary is an effective form of recording, an interpretation of the world in which we live, through a clipping on a certain theme that is intended to be addressed, bringing information and knowledge to the viewer (Lemos Jr and Gosciola 2020). Images are present in various contexts and, as Sylvia Caiuby Novaes reminds us, since the beginning of humanity individuals have produced and contemplated images (Novaes, 2020).

The relationship between Anthropology and the new technologies of audiovisual production has often stimulated interactive modes of

creation, resulting in innovative practices of anthropological knowledge construction, but also raising, urgent questions in society. According to Paz and Brandão (2020), it is precisely in Anthropology that the image helped to expand the researcher's view, expanding the investigation of a given society, in addition to relying on the image in the production of knowledge.

In the area of Visual Anthropology, the analysis of social aspects is underlined by specialists who are dedicated to understanding the relationships between film studies and the possible historical implications of this junction (Novaes, 2020). There are numerous relationships between cinema and Anthropology, both in the search for the record of different ways of life, and in the relationship with the other's world. One of these relationships is also found from cinema as "memory and 'collection' of diverse ways of being", in addition to the possibility of proximity to those who are distant from us (Novaes, 2009, 10).

These two relationships are found in the projects analyzed and help us to think and do Anthropology in contemporary times (Novaes, 2009). However, in the same way that Anthropology expands with the potential of audiovisual resources, it is necessary to broaden the view and recognize the potential of technologies to better understand modern societies.

Therefore, the elaboration of interactive documentaries on historical themes addressing social and political issues can contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and the preservation of memories that could be lost over time. In the mainstay of this analysis, the documentaries analyzed are developed for the web and use communication strategies that contribute to the diffusion of individual and collective memories, in addition to providing users' awareness on subjects that could remain in oblivion.

In both productions analyzed, it is perceived that the combination of audiovisual elements with technological devices can contribute to the development of significant ethnographic research, since the use of these devices creates more immediate and reconstructed records from the language present in the interactive narrative. A contemporary possibility of communication, sensitization, and social analysis at the touch of a screen.

In view of the arguments presented, it is concluded, therefore, that the aspect of the value of collaboration and collective participation of communities is more important in research processes and practices than necessarily in aesthetic supports and options. The primordial aspect of the analyzed productions is understood as singular ways of building with the groups and, for the possible external audiences, the possibility of experiencing or enjoying aspects of the existence of these communities and

their issues through aesthetic and cognitive means, which are provided by technological platforms and tools.

The interaction present in the analyzed productions allows the adoption of different narratives, which can contribute to an even greater understanding of sensitive topics such as rural exodus, migration, forced sterilization policies and human rights violations. This dynamic finds in the processes of individual and collective memorization the fuel for its documentary constitution.

In this sense, the research shows the importance of the possilities of collaborative work with communities, and the creative use of interactive forms and technology in addressing politically important issues in society. A tangle that starts from social and cultural aspects of a community to find in cyberspace the possibility of investigation and recording.

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