Coming to Our Senses beyond the Talking-Head: the Panesthetic Documentary Interview Descubriendo a través de los sentidos algo más que el talking-head: el documental como entrevista panestésica

ISABELLE CARBONELL

Is a Belgian-Uruguayan-American award-winning documentary filmmaker and a PhD Candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her work lies at the intersection of expanded documentary, experimental ethnographic film, environmental justice, invasive species, disasters, multispecies ethnography, and the anthropocene. Her scholarship has been published in the Internet Policy Review and the Cultural Anthropology Journal. She has just launched a multilinear web-based documentary called *The River Runs Red* exploring questions of suffering and livability in the anthropocene on the world's largest iron-ore tailings dam disaster in Brazil. Beyond jellyfish in Georgia, she's also working in the world of invasive jellyfish blooms and polyps in the Adriatic Sea as a harbinger for the so-called anthropocene.

Foto página anterior: The Blooming (aún sin estrenar) de Isabelle Carbonell.

Coming to Our Senses beyond the Talking-Head: the Panesthetic Documentary Interview
Descubriendo a través de los sentidos algo más que el talking-head: el Documental como Entrevista Panestésica

Isabelle Carbonell
University of California, Santa Cruz
imcarbon@ucsc.edu

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE
Interview/ senses/ panesthetic/ documentary/ talking-heads
Entrevista/ sentidos/ panestésica/ documental/ talking-heads

ABSTRACT

Documentary interview methodologies are often oversimplified and undertheorized, and talking-heads, the technique most strongly associated with the documentary interview, is often perceived as the sole technique for interviewing while it is only one among many. Alternate methodologies are possible, that take into account the sensorial world, moving beyond the talking-head. Encompassing a multisensory approach not only to interview but also to the entire filmmaking process, I have developed a new method of interviewing called the panesthetic method. *Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t, Kerry Leigh* (2013) features a talking head interview style, while in *The Blooming* (working title), I stay connected by a lav microphone for over 18+ hours on a boat to Wynn, my interviewee. In contrasting these two case studies, the panesthetic approach emerges as a methodological path to rethinking the documentary interview.

SUMILLA

Las metodologías empleadas en la entrevista documental a menudo se simplifican demasiado y no se teoriza al respecto, y los *talking heads* (cabezas parlantes), la técnica de entrevista más empleada dentro del documental, a menudo se percibe como si fuese la única mientras es solo una entre muchas. ¿Qué metodologías alternativas son posibles en un documental que tenga en cuenta el mundo sensorial y que vaya más allá del *talking head*? Desde un enfoque multisensorial, no solo para las entrevistas sino también para todo mi proceso de realización cinematográfica, he desarrollado un nuevo método de entrevista denominado: método panestési-

co. *Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t, Kerry Leigh* (2013) presenta al *talking head* como metodología, mientras que en *The Blooming* (título provisional) le conecto un micrófono inalámbrico a Wynn, mi entrevistado, durante más de 18 horas en un barco pesquero. Al contrastar estos dos casos de estudio, el método panestésico surge como una propuesta metodológica para repensar el documental.

Coming to Our Senses beyond the Talking-Head: the Panesthetic Documentary Interview

It's 2am, and I've just arrived to the docks of the one-red-light town of Darien, Georgia. It's quiet, though in mere moments the generator of the boat starts up and the pier is humming loudly, lights flickering on the large boat I'm about to get on, at odds with the black twinkling calm water and the muted fern-green hues of the marsh grass. I gather my gear and lumber over. I am about to do a long immersive interview which I call the panesthetic documentary interview where I sonically link myself to my subject for over 18 hours of a 24-hour boat trip out at sea to fish jellyballs.

Documentary interview methodologies are often oversimplified and undertheorized, and talking-heads, the technique most strongly associated with the documentary interview, is often perceived as the sole technique for interviewing while it is only one among many. What alternate methodologies are possible in the documentary interview that take into account the sensorial world, moving beyond the *talking-head*? Is the talking-head technique even still valuable? In my own fieldwork, the panesthetic method encompasses my multisensory approach not only to interview but also to my entire filmmaking process. Ironically, talking-heads, though it refers to a body part in its name, disallows the potential for documentary cinema to be a medium which *embodies* and not just *illustrates* information, in essence attempting to treat film as a text. Yet, "What if film not only constitutes *discourse* about the world but also (re)presents an *experience* of it?"(Italics in original) (Taylor, 1996, p.86). And so, though the *talking head* interview is still essential to my own process of creating meaning during fieldwork and later on screen, the imperative to represent the *experience* of the reality to be captured on film led me to develop a new sensorial method. In this paper, after a brief treatise on the problematic overuse of *talking heads*, I explore two radically different case studies in my own work: I show through *Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t*, *Kerry Leigh* (2013) how a *talking head* interview style was actually the right choice. In *The Blooming* (working title), I take an entirely different tack by leaving a continuously open channel between me and Wynn, my interviewee, connected by a microphone for over 18+ hours on a boat.

Let's begin with what a documentary interview is, if not a talking head? Much in the same way that I define whatever "documentary film" is - that is, anything that includes some indexical relationship with the real, be it fiction or non-fiction, about humans or beyond-the-human, traditional or experimental - I take a broad approach to defining the practice of the "interview." The interview, in its most basic form, is a conversation between filmmaker and subject that is instigated by the filmmaker, and since I am focusing on documentary *filmmaking*, I will add that it is a conversation between filmmaker and subject while mediated by a recording device (audio and/or audiovisual). This is similar to Honigmann's definition of interview as "having a discussion," where in final edits her voice, and even a flying hand or arm, is regularly included (Honigmann, 2011, p.76). The conversation occurs in what is usually a private or semi-private place, enabling a shared intimacy that allows a conversation to evolve uninterrupted. In my broadest definition of interview, if I'm thinking of going beyond the human, I'm not even sure questions need be asked - just a prolonged engagement with a camera or audio device towards something, with an intention of curiosity, listening, learning, worlding (Haraway, 2016). Even the most common and passive of all camera acts, the surveillance camera, interrogates a *space*, defines it and delineates it (in that case, as potentially criminal). In a sense, the act of filming a space, nevermind a nonhuman, is an interview: explorative, active, probing, defining. And so, filmmaking is much more than an act of representation or illustration. Filmmaking is an act of knowledge-creation, a method in itself to explore, research, and know the world. Going hand in hand with filming, "interviewing" is also essential to knowledge-creation, and when I'm filming, different types of interview methods which are both sensorial as well as *verbal "unlock"* and allow me to explore worlds I would never have known to search for.

Since much of my own filmmaking practice involves using a camera and/or audio-recording device almost from the first interaction with someone, or something, unpacking my approach to interviews is an important practice in itself. Obviously, the visual captures all the extra-textual information of the space/time the interview takes place in: body language, movement, light, environment of the interviewee. In a relationship with someone, especially when mediated or tempered by some device or presence other than the two bodies facing each other, knowledge is figured out and transmitted through a myriad of bodily signals: the tone of voice, the gaze, the smell, pheromones, clothes, walking gait, facial expressions, breathing rhythm, etc., signals which modulate the actual vocalizing of language.

Talking-heads often do the worst damage to the aim of capturing sensorial evidence beyond the voice since so little extra-textual information is conveyed or focused on. On average, the technique features a

single person on screen sitting in a chair somewhere usually placeless, framed on the left or right-third of the screen, medium close-up, eye-level, 3-point-lighting, and someone who's usually considered an expert or an authority on a topic, and looking slightly off-screen to an invisible interviewer. On this last point, Errol Morris for example invented the so-called Interrotron machine, a teleprompter used to project Morris' face on a screen right in front of the camera lens so that when interviewees answer, they look directly into the lens to achieve what Morris calls a "first person" effect, an illusion that people are speaking directly to the audience (Rothman, 2009, p.3-4). However, films, including those of Morris, often feature a string of interviewees appearing one after the other. Talking heads often serve as the sole purpose as *performers of information*, spewing facts, figures, and data at us, effectively *linguifying film* (Taylor, 1996, p.83). Talking-heads are treated as texts to cut and paste as fits the narrative; they are like sentences concatenated in order to create a filmmaker's argument (overtly or not). That type of talking head interview short-circuits the unique potential of cinema to produce its own knowledge in and of itself, manifestly *filming an experience by experience*: "Cinema is a sensuous object," but in our presence it also becomes a "sensing, sensual, sense-making subject" (Sobchack, 1992, p.309). All this being said, let's not throw away talking-heads altogether as the talking-head interview is a tool useful under two conditions:

1) When it tries to answer the question *who are you*? Indeed, in such an interview, the person is not representative of information but is the information, and this type of intimate knowledge can most easily be revealed verbally by inquiring about the person's past, the person's psychological landscape, the person's testimony to a traumatic event, etc., while remembering with Barthes that speech is not "...in itself fresh, natural, spontaneous, truthful, expressive of a kind of pure interiority; quite on the contrary, our speech (especially in public) is immediately theatrical..." (Barthes, 2009, p.3-4). For Eduardo Coutinho, for whom interviewing is at the center of his filmmaking method, interview questions should only be about "stories of life experiences, personal, non-transferable" (Lins, 2003) and in essence, avoiding the trap of prefixed roles and stereotypes.

2) When the filmmaker needs to find out information very quickly in a compressed amount of time and may need the "information" as a reference to orient themselves, with the caveat that they are fully aware of prioritizing only one modality of knowledge-gathering over other potential avenues, as "What the testimony does not offer, however, is a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constatation of a verdict of the self-transparency of knowledge" (Felman & Laub, 2013, p.5).

Though today interviews are used without question in journalism, it wasn't always so. Michael Schudson documents the rise of the use of the interview as a means of evidence and information-gathering from the late 1800s to the present. In the 1980s, a study of reporters in Washington found that nearly three-quarters of the stories they wrote relied entirely on interviews with no additional documents (Hess, 1981, p.1). I could argue the same for documentaries: as said above, oftentimes it feels as if documentaries are a long string of interviews and little else. Though hard to believe, in American journalism, "asking questions was not regularly practiced at all until the 1820s and it was not an activity acknowledged in print until after the Civil War. How did this practice, unknown to journalists in the early nineteenth century, become the centerpiece of the reporter's trade?" (Schudson, 1994, p.566). Schudson does an excellent mapping of the institutionalization of interviewing in journalism, both as practice and written form; a parallel mapping of the use of interview in documentary is urgently needed though beyond the scope of this paper. The fact is that today, the interview is one of the main tools used in the documentary filmmaking arsenal. As I mentioned, I cannot, despite my best efforts, "get away" from using it myself and that might seem a contradiction: I interview everyone and everything all the time, but I have however extensively redefined the practice on my own terms. There are certain situations, which I elaborate about further on, where the talking-head interview is the only tool for understanding a situation or seeking information about a subject, and this is almost always tied to the amount of time one has with a person in a place. One could get the same information in another way, but the talking-head interview is a type of heuristic device to obtaining it, or the interview is the only permissible filming action given time and/or context. Most often though, I find the interview used inappropriately, overwhelmingly, robotically. As Schudson writes, "Interviewing, for all of our familiarity with it, for all of our reliance on it, remains deeply disturbing" (Schudson, 1994, p.584).

Could it even be possible that talking-head interviews are capable of irreversible damage since once a person is interviewed this way, other ways of knowing this person or information are blocked, rendered inaccessible? What other methodologies could considerably supersede or expand the interview practice?

CASE STUDY #1: KERRY LEIGH

My short film "Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t, Kerry Leigh" (2013) is an 11 minute film entirely based on a talking-head,

whose name is Kerry Leigh. I am off-screen, and Kerry looks at me slightly off-camera at eye-level, in a wide-to-medium shot framed by a typical urban New Orleans setting complete with a stone statue of cupid drawing his bow behind her. I've framed her a bit further away than a typical head-and-shoulders shot, to include her hands, and, in post-production, I have digitally zoomed in at certain points for emotional effect and variety since this interview is the visual and narrative backbone of the 11 minute piece. Her face, youthful but tired, is bathed in a muted afternoon light. Cats, crows, and dogs make ancillary sounds in our outdoor location, the whimsical and derelict inner courtyard of an old house owned by a statue sculptor, but rented out to a raw-food recovering-alcoholic cleaning lady who isn't presently home. The only people present are my friend Krystina, me, and Kerry, all roughly the same age and all women. I have met Kerry only just the night before on the street while she tried to sell me her wares:

> Menu of Literate Services, limited only by your imagination: angry letters, obituaries, resumes, letters of introduction, letters of intent, letters of inquiry, love letters, toasts, roasts, proposals, historical fiction, biographical fiction, smut, indulgences, heretical, baby names, mysteries, set lists, grocery lists, laundry lists, bucket lists, reasons to live, and madlibs. Absolutely no poetry.

And if someone isn't sure what they'd like to order: "we can just talk about whatever is on your mind...and then I try to re-

Figure 1. Film still from *Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t, Kerry Leigh* by Isabelle Carbonell (2013).

purpose that and process it through my creative faculties, into a piece commemorative creative writing, just for you." I found this delightful, and I asked her point-blank if I could film her the next day, with few preliminaries. I'm not entirely sure why she agreed, nor why she showed up on time the next day: she says as much to me when she arrives. I've asked her to bring copies of her writing to share on screen, which she has. She sits down, and we start the ritual: I ask questions, she answers, I listen. I'm in agreement with Julian Ralph when he observed in 1903 that "Note-books and pencils frequently alarm and put upon his guard a man who would talk freely in an ordinary conversation" (Schudson, 1994, p.573). I give her a lot of space to answer, rarely cutting into her mini-monologues, which is my general style of interviewing. It is a practice I could dub, after Coutinho, a "conversational cinema" (Xavier, 2012, p.113). Speaking of conversations, with friends —when I'm not supposed to be "interviewing"— I often fall into the role anyway. I'm the listener, asking questions, acting the role of friend-therapist-coach (whether or not I want to be). In any case, though I often "give the stage" to my interviewees, Kerry Leigh more than answers my questions, she *performs* her answers. This street artist knows what it's like to have an audience, and she's good at telling stories: she does it for a living. What's different here is I'm asking specifically about her art-form and herself as an artist, and later, just about her. She becomes critical and distant towards her own work, she judges her customers as worthless, and when I ask her to read one of her favorite pieces, a beautiful piece of writing, she says at the end the client had no reaction, "she was blank of face." She begins to emotionally unravel in front of the camera during the course of the interview. I discover in the process many things, first and foremost the fact that I am dealing with a woman who performs a type of street-snapshot-psychoanalysis for a living (much like I was performing a film-snapshot-psychoanalysis on her), then spits out either her analysis and/or their desires on paper for money, exact content depending on what kind of mood she's in or how cash-strapped she is. Sometimes she's nice, sometimes mean; sometimes cheesy, sometimes all literary brilliance. I feature an entire process in the film of this "performance" on a dark cold New Orleans night: a drunk client wanting a love letter for a lost connection. In the process of interviewing him to mine for relevant information she can use to write this letter, we see her try to tease out what is really going on that he needs or wants a letter for (she turns to me and says "love letters are the *worst* - so cheesy!"). She then crafts a love letter that drips with irony, the most un-love-letter of all love-letters: "Follow your heart, and don't fuck it up... go forth willingly, willfully, and optimistically... Chew it up until its past pulpy, and then digest it and suck all of the nutrition out of it that you can. And when it's time to excrete, do it gra-

cefully. Best of luck to you both." To my surprise, the client is delighted. It sounds literary, he's drunk, she acted as impromptu-therapist, he's got a bang for his buck. I realize I'm interviewing someone who interviews others to be able to render a piece of writing/art on the spot. Instead of making a film, she makes a piece of writing; in fact we are not so different, Kerry Leigh and I. A mirror emerges, an unexpected one, where I see myself and my process reflected in her.

In the process of the interview, I ask a great deal of questions about her past, her family, her current situation, her future. I am genuinely interested, and she is seemingly so uncensored, frank and honest about her life, bared before me. Slowly she peels off the layers on screen: she dropped out of school in 7th grade. She has no self-esteem. Her parents seem like irresponsible hippies. Her dad's career advice became the title of the film: "baffle their minds with bullshit, Kerry Leigh." My final question, where she might be in ten years, provokes a response that spirals into lyrical despair:

> Hopefully I will live half the year in the Caribbean somewhere, scuba diving... otherwise I will probably have lung cancer or cirrhosis of the liver. I could be homeless under the Claiborne bridge. I could be a very cranky single mother. I would really like to be a travel writer, but with how little education I have, and how little motivation and self-confidence I have, I think that that's pretty far-fetched. So I might just be... an esthetician... forever. [pause] I might burn people's faces off with acid, for money. [long pause, locks eyes with me] To be perfectly honest. [pause]...

I wonder if her despair is performative until she pauses, looking at me. Something there passes between us, a moment of deeper connection than the rest of the interview, and it is the absence of speech which colors everything she said with authenticity. It is her face, her body, her silence which absorbs the echoes of her words. That "Questioning binds two people in *immediate* reciprocity" is quite accurate (Goody, 1978, p.23). It is this very moment that wins the audience over, if viewers weren't convinced yet, that makes everyone fall in love, care, reach out, want to nurture and protect her all in one. This is the moment that holds us all in complete suspense. Then, she catches herself, ever the performer, and the unwavering pitiful gaze turns into a smile: "We can redo that, and I can be much more optimistic..." and the veneer I hadn't realized was there comes right back up, or maybe never left, and I'm left to wonder how much of this tale she's told is actually true, and I don't much care. I'm making a film about this woman, and she can tell me whatever she wants of herself, I'm as interested by who she performs to be as much as who she "truly" is. When I send her the final piece two months later, she calls me up to tell me the piece made her cry, hard. Only a month before, in the intervening time between interviewing her and finishing the film, she had tried to commit suicide.

What was the power dynamic between us? I believe that she envied me (a college-educated woman doing art for a living) and despised me (a college-educated woman doing art for a living), and the lure of getting her moment of "real" fame, versus street-fame or local-fame, led her to say yes. Or perhaps it was needed attention after a shitty long week. I promised her free dinner too; short-term reward was in sight. But I promised no money, no TV fame, no distribution. Why did she open up to me the way she did? Upon getting to know her much better over the next few years, even visiting her mother in Eureka, Arkansas, while doing a cross country trip, I learned she had told me nothing but the truth. Again, she could have chosen to tell whatever she wanted to the camera, as I was interested in whomever Kerry Leigh said she was, not whom "she actually was". And this, for me, is the crux of the paradox of this interview: I was not seeking for truth from Kerry Leigh. I did not ask for it. Yet, she gave me what is probably the most "honest" truthful interview I have ever gotten on record in my life. She provided me a self-made x-ray of her work, her clients, her present, herself, her expectations, and her future. The interview became something else entirely than information-seeking; it became confessional, self-revelatory, mixing past, present, and future. The interview became a stage to confess failure. When she told me she had tried to commit suicide a month earlier, my mouth was agape on the phone. My thoughts raced: Did I unwittingly prompt a type of reflection of herself that cut too deep? In which case, what are the consequences of wielding an interview that evolves into a type of confessional psychoanalysis? I experienced a profound shift in my relationship to interview and the potential fallout from it. There are real consequences in setting a stage, asking questions, and listening. The interview *does something*.

Aesthetically speaking, I know today I would not repeat the choices I had made: sitting and speaking to produce a talking-head. But what if I had asked Kerry Leigh these questions while walking down New Orleans streets? Would she have opened up in the same way? Would the familiarity of her home while she was cooking, cleaning up, or gardening have been a better context? Or was her place of work with clients passing by and potentially interrupting a more authentic frame? Did the private-yet-unknown courtyard we were in help defamiliarize her surrounding enough to allow for a deeper self-reflection, one predicated on a type of suspended time and space? There was nothing there to remind her of chores to do, people to call, work to finish, clients to attract (or avoid). I didn't think it through too much, beyond wan-

ting privacy, and I had to use a location I could somewhat control fast (this unusual place happened to be where I was staying) as that afternoon and night were all I had with her before flying out of New Orleans. Moreover, a sit-down interview is easier to control the conditions of filming. I did not have a run-and-gun style technical set up available to me either, so the filming location was also partly chosen out of limitations of what equipment I had. But it's not enough to list those reasons: what else about this sit-down talking-head multi-hour interview *worked*? Does the sit-down become a kind of "office" space? A kind of visitation couch, much like psychologist Theodore Reik's couch upon which patients lie down to speak to a disembodied psychologist? Was the audience much like the disembodied psychoanalyst, "a figure between reality and fantasy" (Reik, 1983, p.109) for Kerry Leigh, which enabled her to speak? I certainly made constant eye-contact with her, but the *audience* is disembodied, symbolized by a camera. Perhaps the sitting-space in an anonymous courtyard creates a safe-boundary-line, drawn around the persons present, acting as a container and cocoon for emotion and information in a way that moving-interviews do not, with some exceptions. Car-interviews, for example, are moving, but are contained within the space of a car's walls, famous for inducing fights and reconciliations, deep conversations and philosophical musings in the way that sitting at home does not. The initial intimacy is awkward, but then it creates a temporary bond of intimacy which allows the interviewee to feel safe to reveal (confess?) her thoughts and feelings to another human being. Perhaps, it is the same with the sit-down interview in four walls: a suspended intimacy only possible through a private sit-down face-to-face question and answer session within the boundaries of four safe walls. It "worked well" with Kerry Leigh in the sense that she opened up in front of the camera about thoughts and feelings most of us would have a hard time cracking open in front of others. During the interview, I was doing everything I could to make her feel grounded enough to open up to me in conversation, as Reik notes, "The analyst must breathe the same atmosphere as the patient...The analyst must oscillate in the same rhythm with his patient within the realm between fantasy and reality, sometimes approaching one, sometimes the other" (Reik, 1983, p.116). I sat on the ground with her; I barely fiddled with my camera; I held eye-contact; I smiled when she smiled; I stayed silent and unintrusive whenever she answered my questions. She was "raw" and it is this rawness, this "emotional honesty" that I believe was enabled by the interview method as it leans towards a nihilistic confessional. Her ability to speak about these feelings - elicited through my questions and my silences - combined with her winsome quirky personality, makes it hard to stop watching her in the film. I asked questions, yes, but I also allowed her a wide berth to answer, staying silent though not mute, allowing her to fill the space, and it is "the active power of silence [which] makes small talk transparent and has a force that pulls the patient forward, driving him into deeper layers than he intended" (Reik, 1983, p.125). The ability to capture her nihilism on screen, so clearly and articulately, is what makes the film so disturbingly relatable - we all have moments of unspoken darkness like this in our lives, but she actually says it out loud. In addition, she makes reflections on the absurdity of some human behaviors which are deep and profound, with incredible insights into the mediocrity of humanity (starting with her own father). This film makes us listen with Theodore Reik's "third ear," hearing not only what Kerry Leigh speaks aloud, but also her inner voice, listening to what she doesn't say. I argue that Reik's "third ear" could be extended to include the interviewer as well (in his case, the psychoanalyst), and that while we are in the act of listening to our subject, we hear our own inner thoughts in dialogue with both the spoken and unspoken.

In summary, the talking head interview in this film was the right format being the fact that the interviewee was the subject of inquiry, that language and literary writing were the tools of her trade on the street, and that I had little time and limited equipment. But it is also important to point out that the interviewing arc made of silences as much as of questions and the comfort of the enclosed courtyard allowed to capture many layers of

Figure 2. Film still from *Baffle Their Minds with Bullsh*t, Kerry Leigh* Isabelle Carbonell (2013).

emotions and introspective thoughts. So, though, Kerry Leigh is an example of a successful talking head interview, it is also an example of space creation for the interviewee to trust the interviewer and feel safe to talk. It is highly probable that different, less cocoon-style interview conditions would have led to a different exchange, and ultimately a different film. The typical talking-head interviews, as described in the introduction, are mostly dry exchanges of spoken textual information. As such, the talking-head interview method has become an exhausted trope that is often misused. Avoiding this technique resolutely, unless there is a very good reason for it, is necessary to revitalize the potential of documentary film to be a cinema of the senses, and not a cinema of data. My second case study, of Wynn Gale, is illustrative of the panesthetic approach.

CASE STUDY #2: WYNN GALE

I now circle back to how we began. It's the middle of the night, yet the pier is bright with fluorescent light, and Wynn's boat *The Blessed Assurance* is getting outfitted for the coming jellyfish trip. The water level is high, which is good for getting out of the narrow channel of Darien, but makes the boat hover far above the wooden pier and difficult to climb into with any grace. I am this time regrettably alone, about to do an exhausting interview that is a type long-durée immersive process I call the panesthetic method. Medically, *"panesthesia"* is the sum of all the sensations experienced by a person at a given moment, while *"panaesthetics"* (Albright, 2014) has been borrowed to refer to the study of the unity and diversity of all art forms. The Greek base *-esthesiais* is used to connote 'senses', 'perception' and also to connote 'artistic beauty'. The two semantic facets of the Greek base are obviously contiguous, but nonetheless distinct. In documentary panesthetics, *-esthetic* is understood in its medical facet: the senses. Panesthetics approximates the experience of accounting for multiple senses in the process of creating knowledge through interviews.

And so I sonically link myself to Wynn for around 18+ hours of this 24 hour boat ride, during which the interview takes many shapes. I argue that this type of panesthetic, durational, sonic-observational method, interspersed with direct-address sections, enable a type of immersion and sensorial world-building and knowledge-creation that isn't possible with a talking-head soundbyte method.

Before describing the 18-hour interview, I need to explain everything which led up to these conditions. I've been on shrimping trips with Wynn before, back in June with my three female interns, each ride out to sea lasting about 12 hours. For some reason, he refused to wear a lav (lavalier microphone) and I didn't push him to on that ride or the next, as we hadn't yet developed a strong rapport and I had too much to do on the boat otherwise to be concerned it was a serious drawback. I regretted this decision not to be more insistent about the lav as being able to hear what was going on with the captain at all times would have clued me in to the ship's operations before different things were underway. I was always a bit late to film certain events, such as when the shrimp were taken up, unable to press "go" on the gopro that was rigged up awkwardly out of reach before they had started the take-up. My time on the boat felt like a fluid microcosm I was dancing around without fully getting inside: somehow, despite how small his shrimp boat was, I was not in-sync with the action. My interviews with him, all direct-address, weren't bad per se. I came back around several times and asked him different things which he always readily answered, and I gradually learned to just film him without asking questions as, extroverted by nature, he liked to perform for the camera. He helmed the boat barefoot, often steering the wheel with his toes while sitting back on his broken captain's chair which had a worn scooby-doo blanket draping to the floor. The setting certainly was no talking-head blank frame, but still my overall interviewing experience felt uneasy, fragmented, yielding just bits and pieces here and there.

The two deckhands felt outright unfriendly with me, and this probably contributed to my sense of alienation. On the second trip out to sea however, the new deckhands were the opposite: overly friendly and flirty. I sensed this the minute I met them at 3:30am in front of the boat, and I asked the older one to wear a lav. Pure

Figure 3. Isabelle Carbonell filming *The Blooming* (working title).

gold flowed from him for the next 5 hours or more; it turns out he was hungover, and after whispering to himself about the "cobwebs of a nightmare" he couldn't shake off, he began singing drunk sailor songs loudly in a Louis Armstrong voice. The second deckhand was also a revelation: a shy, chubby, and strong 15-year old tarzan-like boy, "pretty much born at sea" and who practically swung from the ropes above my head.

The older one got to work soon enough, and I was able to sync up with the crew and the boat much better for the rest of the day. I knew when drags were coming, he was able to explain and warn me of a few things from across the way, etc. I could hear him breathing, burping, coiling ropes, cleaning the deck, deheading the shrimp, and more. I was sonically immersed in a way that triggered a profound shift in my experience of the boat. The panesthetic acoustic linking changed what I shot and how long I shot, and created as many questions as it answered them. I knew I had to ask Wynn or one of the deckhands when I went out to document the jellyball fishing to wear a lav.

Though he seemed friendly, he wouldn't really speak, only smiled, and I couldn't get a word out of him on or off-camera, nevermind to lav him. I'd often come to the front of the boat and he'd find an excuse to exit the room. One of the deckhand was inimical with me, despite being named Hollywood (never did find out why), and the other deckhand Adam was a recovering meth addict who used to be a captain himself and hostile towards captain Lester's apparent bad fishing decisions (Lester was still learning the ropes of jellyballing). Adam liked me enough but was generally in a bad mood and didn't want to be filmed, much less interviewed. Though I got a lot of good footage despite a constant light rain I wasn't dressed for, I never connected with anyone, nor did a single interview of any sort. Lester was introverted, shy, and also the sole African-American captain in what was otherwise an all-white fleet from Darien, Georgia. He had none of the white-privilege southern male arrogance of Wynn, a quality I hadn't realized I depended on for my access. To end what was already an exhausting, wet, and stressful 30-hour day, for the last few hours I slept on the hallway floor totally burnt out covered in slimy and foul jellyfish juice, and my front tooth blew up in protest. Two days later I had root canal surgery. I realized I really, really could not just go out on a boat with just anyone. Once you're out there, you are stuck on an island with no way off. I also realized that Wynn was a lot more than just any captain. He had a unique set of "qualities" that helped me gain access to this entire world, a set of qualities that also included the folded up confederate flag on the front of his boat.

I went home, my intern went home. Weeks later, Wynn called me to say he was able to take his brother's boat to go out on a trip, and barely before school started up again I flew back down the same day knowing this might be my only chance to get on the boat with Wynn for jellyball fishing until next winter. It is worthy to note I was alone this time, with no intern in tow, as it was logistically too last minute to get any help. The eager crewhand

Figure 4. Film still from *The Blooming* (working title) Isabelle Carbonell.

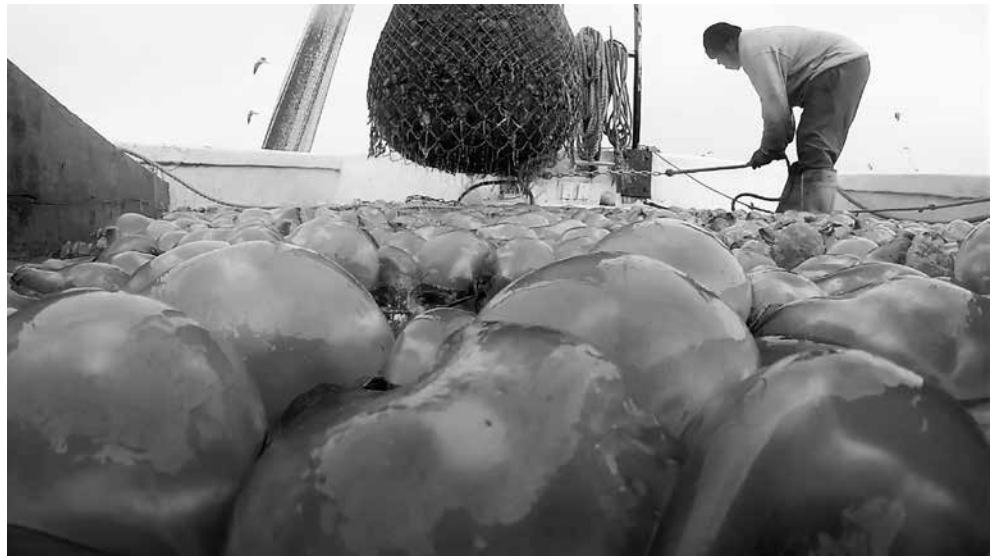

Figure 5. Film still from *The Blooming* (working title) Isabelle Carbonell.

Ack, who couldn't stop propositioning me the entire next 24 hours, reached down to help me lift the heavy gear onto the deck at 3am. It would be a long night after an already long day of travel, and this time I didn't have the buffer of an assistant against unwanted advances, but being alone turned out to have an interesting effect in my interviewing/relationship with Wynn as it created a type of temporary immersive bond. From Wynn's perspective, it was he and I on that boat, connected by sound, with enough prior meetings to have gotten to know each other a little. I opened up to him in a way I may not have done normally in a shorter interview with an intern around.

Jellyfish trips take twice as long as shrimping, and this particular ride was going to be about 24-30 hours. After the initial flurry of excitement and activity from departing the docks, the two deckhands Jack and Ack (real names) soon went to sleep as we made our way out of the marshland into the open sea. Wynn stays at the front of the boat by himself in a small room at the helm for nearly the entire trip, and the deckhands, when not working out back, stay in the kitchen or on their cramped bunk beds. After a direct-address interview where I asked some preliminary questions, I told him this time I really needed to lav him, and, to my surprise, he didn't resist. I asked him why he had said no before, and he told me I had just "asked at a bad time"; I raised my eyebrow at this and didn't ask further, awkwardly and quickly threading the wire underneath his shirt and trying to position the transmitter somewhere his big belly wouldn't bend the wire. I began with a more traditional conversation type interview as he drove out of the marsh, which takes about 2.5 hours, and later on switched into what I call "immersive observational interviewing". Regardless if I'm shooting Wynn, the key is that I listen to his lav - his sound - with headphones at all times, even when not recording with my camera. The day consisted of a few direct interviews, and a lot of observational listening while I'm shooting other things. Technically the journey started at 3:00am, and I didn't stop filming until I turned everything off at 11pm, 19 hours later, and got some sleep before we got back to the dock somewhere around 3am, for a total of 24 hours on the boat. Right at 8am, on their second "drag" of jellyballs, after he prophetically mentions, "Let's see if these bags hold up is what worries me" as they're cranking the nets up, one of the two nets breaks and unravels, like a zipper being opened. Wynn loses the entire catch, as well as his net and his tripbell. This was a major cataclysmic event in his world, one he proceeded to narrate to every living soul on and off the boat for a good part of the morning into the afternoon. Though aware of being listened-to on some level, I think he was too carried away to care and I was able to listen to many intimate phone and short-wave radio conversations:

> Lost the whole bottom part of the bag, net and all, can't catch anything. Lost my tripbell, which is $100-120 just for that brass piece. Raggedy, piece of junk shit. This is a mickey mouse fucked up operation. I'm just so sick of it. Irritates me to no end. Pisses me off, I get so fucking irritated on this shit. Now I spent $50 on groceries... I got a light bill due... everything. And dealing with this shit now. I'm so disgusted right now, I'm almost ready to go back to the dock right now.

His asthma at this point flares up, and his breathing labors - a sound I came to know intimately over the course of the day as the slightest bit of physical exertion brought it out. The boat radio crackles "Yo Wynn how's the catch going?" asks Lester, who's dragging for jellyballs on his boat within eyesight of us. Wynn says, "I'm getting half, dog. *Half*. The last drag I lost a whole fucking bag, blew off and *gone*. Fucking gone FUCKING GONE." The litany continued to a slew of friends and family; for example to his wife he said, "I pulled a bag off completely so now I'm dragging around with one net. Nope. Lost a whole bag completely... gone. Weight - too heavy, old shit, raggedy, piece of fucking shit, do I need to keep going. Fucked again. Gotta love being fucked. Bent over. Big dick right in my ass. Love that shit." Phone conversations intermixed with conversations he had on his short-wave radio with Lester, and some other nearby boat captains. He regained some sense of awareness of me mid-morning, though he didn't seem to much care that I was listening to everything: "Now people are gonna see this and think wow, he's an

Figure 6. Film still from *The Blooming* (working title) Isabelle Carbonell.

asshole. Raising hell with the crew and shit." This is the first time he directly addressed me through the lav when I wasn't present in the room with him. I realized that Wynn was in a semi-private space at the front of the boat, and that this, combined with familiar surroundings, also contributed to feeling confident and safe with my listening-in.

At each iteration of retelling his catastrophic net-snapping story, it slightly changed. At the end of one he says: "I probably would be going to the house but they just cut the cable off earlier. So I'd sit there and stare at a blank TV screen". Many of the retellings, though, focus on the deep precarity facing him and other commercial fisherman. This was tremendously useful for me to be able to listen to and record, and become aware of a myriad of topics I don't feel I would have known how to ask for or provoke. At the end of a phone call with a fellow jellyballer he says, "I can't do another year like I did this year. The boat ain't gonna hold together, just ain't gonna do it. Now I dunno what I'm gonna do but… They want to charge me $500 to park at the dock. Ain't got that. Light bill's due, water bill's due, just cut off my cable…So I don't know…" and his friend responds, "I'm just one breakdown behind you, buddy. Just one breakdown behind you, that's all. Just one breakdown and I'm out of commission."

He confesses to having a dream to "cut ties with the whole goddamn town, everybody and everything and go find a goddamn beach and just live. Fuck it. Drop anchor". He complains that he'd take a "decent-paying $15/hour job over this any day." His tirades change slightly if he's on the phone or on the short-wave radio. Over the course of the day, I was blown away by how many people Wynn was in contact with. He must have had a conversation with someone (including me) every 15-30 minutes for a good 10 hours. In comparison to Lester, who spoke to almost no one on his boat and watched movies off a computer at the helm, the litany of calls Wynn made or received began to sketch out for me a network of connections. Listening to how he describes the event differently depending on whom he was speaking with was also revealing. The short-wave radio conversations were especially interesting for me. The strength and quality of the voice of the speakers depends on how close they are. The radio works as binary module: someone is either speaking or listening one at a time. Each participant takes and then cedes the stage to speak. Wynn, in his own world at the front of the boat, barely interacts with the crewhands other than to bark them orders during the drag takeups. He lives in a world of disembodied voices, of phone calls and radio transmissions, and when that fails to provide entertainment, he turns to me.

After some hours, Wynn began understanding that I could hear him whether or not I was with him in the front of the boat. He began giving me instructions "We're going to pick up the jellyballs now" or "come get breakfast, there's sausages" or "you're filming on the wrong side". After a while however, he began to joke with me, realizing I could hear him all the time. "Hey izzy can you hear me on this? Izzybelle, izzybelle. Your gopro died. It's dead. Poor thing" This turned into an 18-hour monologue, where I was a displaced, sometimes visual, set of ears listening to his conversations, his phone calls, and whatever thoughts crossed his mind. Though the listening was one-way, he'd reach out to me wanting an answer often enough. For example,

Wynn: So just how many people is gonna be seeing this here videos of me. Cuz you know I'm a damn South Georgian retard, they goin' -…. I hope you edit out some good shit cuz it's gonna be….

Isabelle: [slides open the door to come inside to talk] What do you mean you're a South Georgian retard. You're not!

Wynn: hehehe… ooo…. Back there cussin' and raising hell with the crew – and all that – I really don't want people to see all that, *gollee*.

Isabelle: Can they see a little bit?

Wynn: Yeah they can see it, but I mean it's just going to make me look like a grumpy old ass or whatever

Isabelle: No I got a lot of other good stuff, you're well-rounded

Wynn: Well-rounded, yeah I am *well-rounded* [pats belly] alright. I try.

Wynn, being a gregarious extroverted person, tended to speak aloud many of his musings, thoughts, complaints, joys, losses: it was unnerving having his voice in my ear for the better part of a day narrating the landscape and his futurity. Indeed, I could also hear his bodily noises, him frequently gasping for breath as his asthma kicked in when he was upset, and burping anytime he took a swig of soda, or when he got up to go piss off the side of the boat. He began really enjoying speaking to me, even when I couldn't speak back literally or through some kind of body language acknowledging I'd heard him. He enjoyed testing whether I was paying attention by teasing me, "What are you doing Izzy? What are you doing? It's dark back there now. How long does the freaking battery last on this thing. How the hell do you concentrate with somebody talking in your ear all day?!" He asked me about the girl interns whom he had met on the previous trip; in a moment of tiredness, I actually told the truth that they had been very sweet and hardworking girls but not properly trained for the difficulties and strain of shooting on the boat. Surprised, he expressed that apart from the two that had gotten seasick on

the boat, green to the gills and vomiting, they seemed to work well. My unprofessional confession provoked Wynn to share about work ethic in the shrimping industry: "That's the problem there ain't very many younger generations coming into it – that's showing initiative that *wants* to come into it – you got some that try it but they don't like it. Don't make enough money at it and they go work at McDonalds and they make just as much money – and you got [health] insurance, sometimes" then I say, "But they don't have freedom" using a word he had used in the past to describe his career choice, and replies, "Nope. You don't get freedom. But freedom comes at a price, I guess."

Layers of small exchanges, formal interview moments, and hours of more monologuing led to a type of intimacy which I hadn't achieved with him during any previous rides. Carrying his voice in my ear all day also clued me in closely to what he was thinking and feeling, allowing me to match his rhythm, a true "day-in-the-life" uncut process. Though I felt like I was dancing around the microcosm of the shrimp fishing world six months ago, I now felt in tune and in sync with the goings-on of the boat. I understood the rhythm of the drags and pickups, the screeching steel ropes winding up to load the catch on deck, the soft swishing of sweeping the jellyballs into the hold, the gurgling jellyfish losing water and their hold onto life. Dolphins trailed us, playing in the waves, and seagulls called, a cloud of white flashes in the night on either side of the boat. I knew where to stand, where not to stand, I had bought myself the fisherman white boots instead of my normal shoes so my toes stayed warm and dry and I didn't slip on the boat, and my rain slicker took care of the worst of the jellyfish juice: I could finally navigate the place.

His voice was disembodied for me much of the day, a type of Chionian *acousmêtre*, though it did not inform most of what I shot. While the boat was small, there were nonetheless many complicated setups I had invented to shoot the jellyball fishing, setups that I had to try several times before getting them right. I attached a gopro to a 12-foot wooden pole to be able to film in the hold (the bottom of the inside of the boat, where they store caught jellyfish). I had brought an endoscope with me on board to try and film inside the jellyfish, and capture the polka-dot sized long-nosed spider-crabs which symbiotically lived on them. I used a hydrophone to record the sound inside the jellyfish soup, as well as in the sea. Even though I wasn't actively asking Wynn questions all day, the sonic observations often informed the questions I did ask while we were together in more traditional question-and-answer interview session, when I came back into the captain's room and filmed him directly. Wynn, sitting at the helm all day, doesn't see much action, so "monitoring" him sonically was also a good option given how much action was going on with the rest of the boat that I wanted to film. I felt sorry his net snapped, but the event caused a cascade of interactions that were useful to me, and calls I'm not sure I would have been welcome to witness in close quarters. Though he knew I was listening and recording him, I was disembodied and gave him an illusion of privacy. The event was a big part to the success of the day: in calling and complaining to so many people, a host of deeper themes arose around poverty, precarity, and an unknown future in the commercial fishing industry. It also "distracted" him and occupied his attention fully for a good six hours before he became more fully aware of me again. When we did have our direct-address more formal interview moments, I asked questions which ranged from why spider crabs lived in the jellyfish bells, to why the black gill disease - currently decimating shrimp populations - had arrived. These were topics that were not surfacing naturally in his conversations with peers, and reflected my own set of environmental multispecies interests.

As said above, Wynn is extraverted, and seemed not to mind being listened to or filmed all day. Though I dot not delve into this enough, he is a white male with the associated racial privilege a white male receives in the South. When I asked him about the confederate flag he had folded up on his shrimp boat during the summer, he answered that the confederate flag had "nothing to do with racism, and it was instead about heritage." He was a "fifth-generation Gale" and proud of it; his "grandaddy had fought in the civil war" as a confederate. Though I believe Wynn to be more progressive than most white Southern men (for example, he does believe in climate change), he was his own set of contradictions. Nevertheless, this important background explains partly why he feels empowered to be so open in front of a camera in comparison to someone like Lester. The ramifications for his behavior, like speaking ill of his wife or boss, are little to none.

In short, the long-durée interview in this example was successful in creating an immersive sensory experience for me to both "sync up" with Wynn's sonic world, and eavesdrop on conversations otherwise private, and also enabled me to stay in constant intimate contact with Wynn throughout the day fostering conversations which spanned hours. It was a type of bond that brought us closer, even though it was technically "one-way". In fact, I do question the intimacy it generated as after this jellyball trip Wynn wrote me nearly everyday on Facebook for three months about different innocuous things, something which hadn't happened previously. I sent him two cheap gopros to film anything he wanted independently from me; this gear got him very excited and we had many exchanges on his creative rigging ideas. He made a gopro-baseball-hat mount, and a boogie-board mount, becoming a filmmaker in his own right. A year later I asked him about the

experience of being listened to for that long and if that had been bothersome, and he said something which surprised me: “Actually I had fun with it. I kinda liked having you at my beck and call with the mic. It felt kinda like a secret mission thing, some 007 shit, like I was wearing a wire”.

In conclusion, though the panesthetic process is exhausting and arduous, I believe it to be a successful method with the right subject and the right filmmaker to achieve a type of immersive sensorial experience with a place, topic, human or beyond-the-human. These two case studies contrast each other in obvious ways. Kerry Leigh was a spontaneous film idea, akin to a scoop, an unexpected discovery while walking on the street of New Orleans that resulted in just a few hours of footage, whereas Wynn was an ethnographic study spanning several months and multiple trials and tribulations. With Kerry Leigh, the interview became a type of therapeutic dialogue, whereas, with Wynn, though there were a few brief moments of direct address, I essentially observed a monologue which inundated all my senses for most of a day. To both though, I never focused on information or data per se, but seeking to explore their psycho-sensorial worlds. Though I believe the talking-head interview method for Kerry Leigh was successful, I wonder what a more immersive sensorial approach to her would have yielded, had I the time to follow her day after day for several weeks plying her trade. What’s very clear is that the sit-down talking head interview with Wynn would have yielded paltry information on his way of life. And so, for now, I’m still sounding the death knell for the primacy of talking-heads and ushering in the senses, indeed, to take into account the summation of all our senses in the panesthetic interview.

REFERENCES:

Albright, D. (2014). *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Barthes, R. (2009). *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*. Northwestern University Press.

Felman, S., & Laub, D. (2013). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. Routledge.

Goody, E. N. (1978). *Questions and politeness: strategies in social interaction*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press Books.

Hess, S. (1981). Washington reporters. *Society*, 18(4), 55–66. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02701352

Honigmann, H. (2011). *Heddy Honigmann: in focus*. Hilversum: Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid.

Lins, C. (2003). Eduardo Coutinho, Cómplice de la Realidad Filmada. In P. A. Paranaguá & J. C. Avellar (Eds.), *Cine documental en América Latina* (1. ed). Madrid: Cátedra.

Reik, T. (1983). *Listening with the Third Ear*. Macmillan.

Rothman, W. (Ed.). (2009). *Three Documentary Filmmakers: Errol Morris, Ross McElwee, Jean Rouch*. New York: SUNY Press.

Schudson, M. (1994). *Question Authority: A History of the News Interview in American Journalism*, 1860s–1930s, 16. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/016344379401600403

Sobchack, V. (1992). *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. Retrieved from https://press.princeton.edu/titles/5045.html

Taylor, L. (1996). Iconophobia. *Transition*, (69), 64–88. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2307/2935240

Xavier, I. (2012). Ways of Listening in a Visual Medium. *New Left Review*, (73), 97–116.