

9.7 How to Read a Film

We have seen the future of interactive multimedia. It is a DVD disk called “How to Read a Film Multimedia Edition” by James Monaco. James Monaco is a film expert, author, former university professor, and president of UNET, a multimedia software firm. The How to Read a Film DVD contains the PDF version of four of Monaco’s books on film theory. But that’s just the start. Using Acrobat as the platform, Monaco has created hundreds of additional PDF documents that are all linked to the PDF books. These PDF files contain film clips illustrating the various lessons in the book, audio interviews with the author and noted members of the film industry, and interactive diagrams. How to Read a Film is not just an exceptional way to learn about film theory, it is a great lesson for anyone interested in using PDF for delivering multimedia content.

The following is adapted from the hilarious 12-page account (featured on the disc) of how James Monaco created *How to Read a Film Multimedia Edition*. The story is an excellent lesson in how a project can be stymied by problems with new technology and legal issues. Yet, the irony is that without all the delays, James would never have used Acrobat as the platform for *How to Read a Film*.

Back in 1991, James Monaco has lunch with a friend who ran a multimedia publishing company. The friend suggests that the book, *How to Read a Film*, that James had written in the 1970’s would make a good multimedia project. James immediately agrees!

James goes to the the publisher of the printed book who rejects the idea. The publisher says they feel that the CD-ROM rights belong to them. (This is despite the fact that the electronic media such as CD-ROM didn’t exist back in 1975 when the original book contract was signed.) Regardless of the dispute with the publisher, James decides to go ahead with the project.

In 1993 James decides to ignore the legal

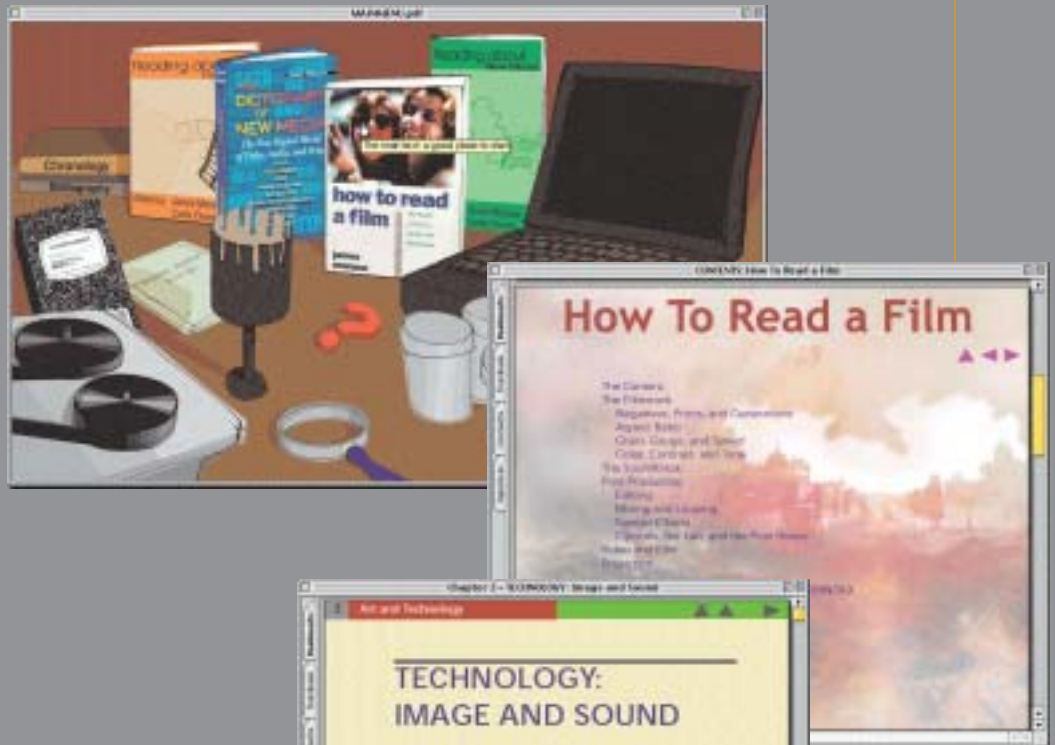
issues. The multimedia company starts work on the disc.

By 1994 James has hired a production crew. They plan to produce multimedia enhancements such as a short film that will provide the footage for the various labs on the disc. James records audio notes for the chapter introductions.

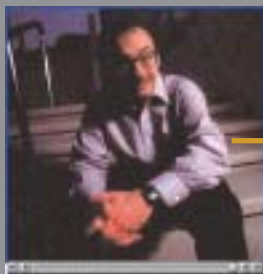
By June of 1995 the production team has finished editing the film for the labs and has assembled the rest of the film clips. All the source material is delivered to the multimedia company. A few sample elements are sent to James. He is not pleased. There is too much text and the graphics make it hard to read. The animations aren’t right. As little as eight seconds of animation makes readers impatient. A few months later Apple introduces QuickTime Virtual Reality. James’s team is one of the first to buy the equipment to shoot panoramic images of Hollywood studios.

In December of 1995 the team decides they need a new platform for the presentation. They choose Oracle Media Objects over HTML.

These shots show some of the pdf documents in How to Read a Film. Each area of the splash screen has a link object that takes you to a different part of the book.



The small icons in the margins of the text pages link to diagrams, movies, and interviews that illustrate the main text. Here the author offers introductory comments on the chapter.



All pages that contain a movie open with a short click sound effect. This sound cues the viewer to place the cursor over the image to trigger the movie.



Movies such as this one of the sky-cam in action and the zoetrope help illustrate parts of the text in ways that no print text and still photos ever could.



In June of 1996 the team feels the disc is sluggish and buggy. Fortunately just a few months later Oracle kills the Oracle Media Object software. But by December the disc is on its third producer. James sends an ultimatum to the multimedia company. They must finish the disc or step aside.

In 1997 the multimedia company bows out of the project and James and his team reformat the disc in HTML. Their theory is that HTML has become the standard for multimedia content. The problem is that they have little control over how a reader views the product. However, by June they have a working version of the disc in HTML. James is pleased and feels they should have gone with HTML the year before. (Why didn't the team use Macromedia Director like most multimedia producers did at that time? The answer is the large amount of text in the four books on the disc. Director doesn't handle text very well.) By July the DVD format has been introduced. This proves to be a fortuitous development. Rather than produce the book on CD-ROM they decide to switch to DVD-ROM. DVD has a greater capacity than CD which means they should be able to fit more than three hours of video on the disc. DVD also has a faster speed which makes it better to handle the movie content. The added space means the artwork can be resaved at "millions of colors" instead of 256. The question still remains, will anyone have DVD-ROM drives to play the disc? The industry promotion is that by early 1998 most PCs will ship with DVD-ROM drives.

By June of 1998 computers are not shipping with DVD-ROM drives the way everybody said they would. The team takes the opportunity to redo all the film clips since the newer compression codecs are superior to the ones they used four years ago. There are still some

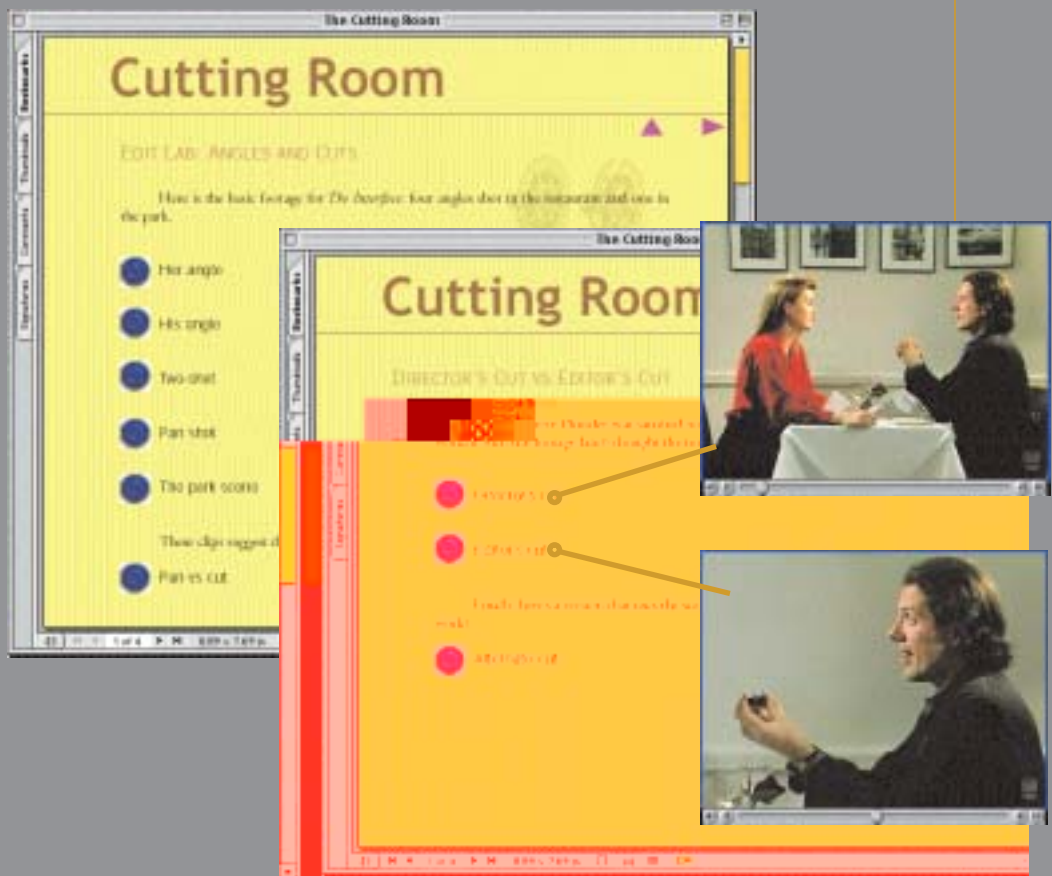
browser issues—especially the lack of control—which makes it difficult to choose either Netscape or Internet Explorer. However, for the rest of the year the project is put on hold.

By the middle of 1999 James has solved his legal issues with his book publisher. They will publish the book version, James can publish the multimedia edition. In the fall, James makes an important decision. He decides to eliminate the browser issues entirely and shift the delivery platform to Acrobat. James had been thinking of this choice for several years. Acrobat gives a publisher the control over layout and fonts that is missing with HTML. Acrobat 4, released in the spring of 1999, seems to have solved all the production problems. Even better since the team has used Framemaker to format the four books on the disc, they can easily be exported as PDF files. Although all the parts of the disc are in place, it is going to take several months to reshape the disc. There are four huge books, thousands of illustrations, over a hundred movie clips, and assorted notes and pop-up elements.

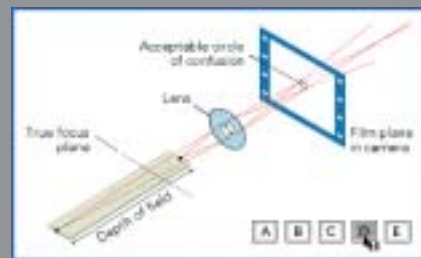
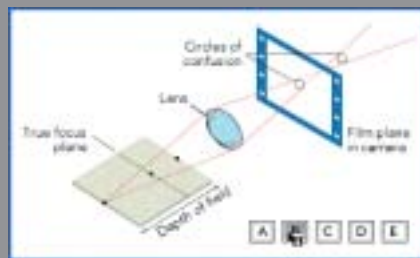
Six months into 2000 the team is still working out the kinks in the disc. Although Acrobat is cross-platform, there are issues with how the software works on Macintosh and PC. In the fall of 2000 the disc is finished and sent out for replication.

Since publication, the disc has received high praise from critics who have called it "The best visually rich, interactive and stimulating eBook available. Highly recommended!"—Shlomo Perets, MicroType. "...the closest thing to a film school in a box that you're likely to find for \$39.97."—Orlando Sentinel. The disc also received the DVD Excellence Award for 2001 from the DVD Association. For more information on How to Read a Film, visit www.readfilm.com.

One of the most extensive uses of movies in the PDF files is the Cutting Room section. This contains the unedited footage for the various types of shots used in the short film produced for the disc. These shots let the viewer see the differences between angles, two-shot and pan. The disc also shows the difference between a director's cut and the editor's cut. The raw footage is also included on the disc so students can create their own edit of the movie.



The disc also takes advantage of the interactive features of QuickTime movies. For instance, the diagrams are movies that consist of several static graphics. The viewer moves over the QuickTime triggers to see the difference between the illustrations.



Not all interactive elements are movies or sounds, though. Footnotes are displayed as links that open small separate PDF files.

