The 'New'
Documentary Nexus

The 'New' Documentary Nexus:

*Networked/Networking
in Interactive Assemblages*

By

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To my family

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Before getting started—Or:
Two disclaimers *en route*

Increasingly, as we adapt to these new socio-technical assemblages, these new socio-technical assemblages will adapt us. […] What these networks do matters, and being able to identify, describe, and understand what they do requires participation in them, a going native as it were. This is harder to achieve than it appears […]
Miles 2018b, 6–7

You must work within your media to know how to work with your media.
Miles 2017a, 7–8

When *writing* about interaction and complex, interrelated assemblages, one is always facing a dilemma: Does my act here of producing a linear text not stand diametrically opposed to the nature of the research subject? Although this text might—at least at first sight—evoke the impression that I am going to analyse separate points one after the other, I would like to underline that this exploration does in fact try to emulate the interrelatedness and dynamics of networked documentary. Thus, this 'text' tries to reflect the 'textuality'—or rather the mediality—of its topic. It therefore resembles hypertext, always in the hope of encouraging an active, critical reading that incites further academic argument as well as practical experimentation within the documentary nexus.

As such, this text should be read as an experiment in scholarly thinking, working and writing. It is an experiment in so far as it tries to explore the potential of hypertext in this regard. It takes the best of 'working in and with the medium' to explore the potential of densely networked essayistic writing, whilst nonetheless holding fast to scholarly scrutiny. The goal is to open up horizons in research—with regard to theory, methodology and transdisciplinary exchange. The point of departure is by examining how they work *together* to emulate the ideal that form and content do not *follow* one another but are actually deeply interwoven and interdependent.

This means that the dynamic non-linear nature of interactive documentary configurations will be approached through a 'hypertextual' non-linear piece of writing—and that the interrelatedness of issues will lead the active

reader through this text.

Though there are still many research desiderata (and their number keeps growing with the expansion of interactive documentary practices and configurations), both academic and practice-orientated writing on the phenomenon does already exist. Yet, these trains of thought are still insufficiently brought into context with each other and are seldom read in their relatedness. Without the claim to present an all-embracing literature survey or to fathom the phenomena once and for all, this text—on a meta-level—connects existing research. It interrelates with the evolving trains of thought of the transdisciplinary and transprofessional research worknet on documentary networks of the University of Bayreuth; it also points out so far 'unmapped' spots of research and tries to map a previously only partly explored academic field. Thus, the first chapters on theoretical-methodological questions are interlinked with the case studies that follow afterwards, and with external sites which host publications on these issues.

This mode of experimental writing becomes even more relevant in the second part of the text when I suggest 'diving deep' into paradigmatic networked|networking documentary configurations.[1] Proposing an approach contoured by methods from discourse analysis and semio-pragmatics, the cross-references in these chapters invite readers to explore the interactive assemblages themselves and thus either follow the line of argument developed or to object to it—to jump back and forth, to actively engage with the text and take some stance towards it, to try the cases presented in the analytic part of the book—which hopefully leads to a more vigorous reaction with the topic than a 'merely' cognitive, interpretative reading with a text 'consumed' in a kind of 'lean-back' mode. The idea is to follow the endeavour of post-structuralism and to close the circle of theory, methodology, critique and practice, and to experiment with innovative ways of 'doing' critical (new?) media studies.

Maybe, jumping from link to link, from cross-reference to cross-reference, from keyword to keyword, leaves readers-interactors with the feeling

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[1] The specific notations of networked|networking and networks|worknets imply the interdependence of the two concepts presumed here; one allowing reflections upon the other—thus the 'mirroring' straight dash. The slightly different views of networkedness and networking are discussed in the following chapter, cf. p.50.

As to the concept of 'networks', I would like to point out right from the beginning that this transdisciplinary research refuses to submit to any scientific 'school' or to use the term in (ideologically) restricted ways as is partly the case with the lately re-hyped Actor Network Theory. In order to avoid the pitfalls of making the concept of the 'network' an 'absolute' one and ending up with an empty metaphor, I will clarify exactly what the essential aspects of what the worknet and networking are with regard to *our* focus of interest—i.e. the networked|networking in the documentary nexus.

that they could have missed some vital aspects. Still, this text is set up in a manner to make sure that despite the fact that readers are invited to individually unfold the argumentative line of the text, these passages do make sense—regardless of the specific path the reader has chosen.

And again—also in this regard—form and content amalgamate, and subject matters and academic writing merge. Unfolding the threads of thought of this text evokes feelings similar to those when exploring interactive documentary configurations. Often, these configurations leave the interactor with a feeling that there might have been 'something more' or rather: something else. 'What if I had followed the other link? Where might I have continued my exploration and in which ways would this have changed my interpretation? Might it have changed my further path? What have I potentially missed? Might I have responded differently to the argument, in terms of both affective and cognitive reaction? And might this have transformed my view of things?' These feelings of incertitude and transformative wondering are quite similar to the effects that arise once one reaches the (presumed, however only provisional) ending of a 'journey' through an interactive documentary. There is always something more that confronts us with the unfathomable complexity of 'Reality' and the 'chaosmis' (Guattari 1995) of 'unrealised' potential, of not actualised virtuality.[2] This experience lies at the heart of most of the pieces explored in this contribution—and it lies at the heart of this scholarly engagement with the phenomenon itself.

Finally, there is a further parallel between interactive documentary assemblages and this piece of writing. Though one might *think* that reading this contribution in its linear sequence prevents one from missing some aspects, it is probably the other way around. Despite the fact that some passages will be left unread if one follows the crosslinking references, the reader-interactor potentially gains an awareness of the *potential* of networked|networking documentary and gets at least a feeling for the deep interrelatedness and dynamic complexity of issues. Hence, this publication challenges the established standards of scholarly publishing in the context of habilitation research projects—and it challenges the active reader.

These disclaimers prepend the actual exploration of the nexus of networked|networking documentary configurations. I hope for courageous reader-interactors and an exciting, inspiring exploration of the dynamics of evolving practices within this field.

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[2] This theme will be further explored in the methodological chapters on 'capturing the evasive', the theoretical chapters on concepts of interactivity and the case studies—as well as in the excursion on Lévy's notion of the 'virtual' and the 'actual', cf. p. 46 f.; cf. p. 501 f.; cf. also the explanation in footnote 73, p 79.

Contouring the 'new' documentary nexus

Introduction:
'A dip into the new documentary nexus'

Emerging documentary phenomena:
Transformations and modulations of a cultural practice

Interactive documentary is such a nascent form that it can be all things to all people.
Gaylor, Betty 2015

Ever since its beginnings, 'documentary' has been a highly volatile and multifaceted phenomenon, especially if one conceptualises the field as a 'documentary nexus'—not only as a corpus of documentary productions, e.g. documentary film, TV documentary or web-documentary. Thus, I suggest conceiving of 'the Documentary' as a network of practices and discourses that are interdependently linked and actively inform each other. I approach 'the Documentary' as a relational nexus—a network of dynamic socio-technological configurations or assemblages[3] resulting *from* and resulting *in* cultural techniques which manifest themselves in audio-visual, textual and at the same time experiential 'interactive factuals'. These medial 'artefacts' as kinds of 'sedimentations' of documentary practices are, however, not standing as monolithic pieces of work alone. They are instead to be conceived of as synchronously and diachronically interrelated practices, as network*ed*

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[3] In the following, the terms 'assemblage' (as coined by Deleuze and Guattari and extended by DeLana, and also used in Slack and MacGragor's articulation theory), 'configuration' and 'network' (as used by Latour and Law to delineate not only technological setting but techno-cultural and socio-political interdependencies) will be employed to describe complex hybrid, human and non-human, interrelational and fluid, dynamically networked and networking networks or rather worknets. In the sense of Guattari and Deleuze, assemblages forge relations with other assemblages—and are at the same time forged by them. Cf. among others Deleuze and Guattari 2011 [1980]; Latour 1990; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Callon, Law, and Rip 1998; Slack and MacGragor 2006.

and network*ing* worknets, as *primarily*—but *not only*—digital configurations encouraging transformation, change and interaction.

Since roughly the 2000s, significant evolutions can be observed within this nexus. In the context of 'networked society' and cultural techniques stimulated by so-called 'new media', documentary configurations have kept evolving and new(?) documentary practices kept arising. Keywords in this context are 'interactivity', 'interaction', 'participation', 'collaboration' and 'networking'. This affects not only the aesthetics of documentary formats, but it also impacts *'doing'* documentary. It affects documentary practices, the relationship between 'authors' and 'audiences/user-participants/co-producers/collaborators' as well as the attitudes and expectations as to what 'the Documentary' is. It affects notions of 'documentary evidence', 'documentary voice' and documentary's transformative potential—it is more or less explicitly formulated as a 'collective call to action'—as well as the idea of 'participatory' and collaborative working on and in documentary configurations.

The phenomena which are (provocatively) gathered here under the notion of the '*new* documentary nexus' certainly need clarification as to their (questionable) novelty, as we will see when summarising some of the most urgent research desiderata. One important issue in this regard is the question whether emerging interactive documentary assemblages should be regarded as a continuation or a modulation of 'traditional' documentary practices—namely, documentary *film*—or whether they rather form a 'species of their own'. However, as this research project sets off to challenge dichotomies, the (assumed) 'new' qualities of interactive documentary will be critically reassessed, always contextualising them both synchronically and diachronically—a stance that is reflected in the theoretical-methodological approach combining three differently focused lenses to explore the documentary nexus. [4]

Still, what leads to additional confusion in current research is the fact that the various manifestations of documentary reconfigurations and practices are eclectically and rather arbitrarily labelled as 'web-documentaries',

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[4] As to the issue of the assumed 'new' qualities of interactive documentary and whether they are to be regarded as a continuation of documentary film or whether they are a 'species of their own' cf. theoretical desiderata (cf. following explanations). Not least due to the fuzziness of concepts of what 'interactive documentary' is, 'labelling' currently emerging and diversifying documentary practices and discourses as 'new' necessitates a clarification in which specificities and the (assumed) 'newness' consists, to what degree there are continuations or modulations of 'documentary traditions' and to how far we are witnessing phenomena that can be considered as something that so far has not been part of documentary practices.

'interactive documentaries', 'transmedia documentaries', 'digital documentaries', 'expanded documentaries', 'living documentaries', 'experiential documentaries' or 'database documentaries'. Peter Wintonick avoids the term 'documentary' altogether as the inheritance to documentary *film* always resonates in this notion. He prefers speaking instead of 'docmedia' under which he comprised emerging forms such as 'cyber-docs', 'digidocs', 'crossdocs', 'netcast docs', '3D-docs' and 'made-for-mobile-docs', as well as 'softdocs', 'datadocs' and 'dynamic docs' (cf. Wintonick, quoted in Winston 2017, xv).

In their "Interactive Documentary Manifesto" from 2010, Almeida and Alvelos decry this phenomenon as a "semantic abuse" which has labelled emerging documentary practices "with all sorts of prefixes", explaining this tendency by ascribing the "secular cinema tradition inherited whenever the word 'documentary' is evoked" (Almeida and Alvelos 2010, 124). And in fact, interestingly, most terminology that appears together with the first manifestations of the phenomenon in one way or another draws attention to the continuity with the filmic documentary tradition—carrying their 'documentary legacy' in their name. In the last three years, more alternative terminology has been coined. Though interactive networked|networking documentary practices are still underlining the factuality of discourses, at the same time they claim to specify media practices of their own, such as 'computational non-fiction', 'interactive factuals', 'database documentary', etc. This might be seen in the fact that we are currently witnessing a broadening of conceptualisations of what networked|networking documentary *is,* how emerging documentary practices *relate* to other media practices and what specific modes of experience they *afford*.

And yet, *especially* with the widening of the spectrum and the still missing consensus whether interactive documentary assemblages are a genre, a medium or a cultural technique, there exists an urgent call for a revisiting of concepts of 'the Documentary', 'the Interactive' and the newness of 'new media' as well as their performativity and dynamic medialities. The lack of a precise terminology can be seen in this context as just another expression of the fact that there is a lack of clear conceptualisation of the emerging nexus of networked|networking documentary practices. Terminologies such as 'new media documentaries' (Gifreu Castell 2012), 'webdocs' (O'Flynn 2012; Ochsner, Fahle, and Wiehl 2016), 'docu-games' (Whitelaw 2002; Raessens 2006), 'cross-platform documentaries' (Scott-Stevenson 2011) and 'interactive documentaries' (Aston and Gaudenzi 2012; Galloway, McAlpine, and Harris, Paul 2007; Almeida and Alvelos 2010) are mixed up without a clear understanding of either their differences or their interrelatedness. And in fact—apart from a small number of exceptions (among them the

publications by Gaudenzi and Aston)—the definitions and taxonomies proposed so far contribute to a confusion as to the core of interactive documentary assemblages rather than to an enlightening of the interrelated epistemological, ontological and aesthetical complexity of the phenomenon.[5]

   This is all the more the case as—regardless of 'labelling'—the spectrum of manifestations is immense: interactive documentaries employ all modes of representation by which we have been familiarised through linear audio-visual documentary (e.g. poetic mode, expository mode, observational mode, participatory mode, reflexive mode, performative mode; cf. Nichols 2001) and they appear as hybrid forms drawing from essayistic genres and theatrical practices, as well as (digital) journalism. They explore experimental audio-visual modes of expression, featuring amongst others 360° augmented reality and virtual reality, and they rely on the potential of 'established' strategies and rhetoric of documentary (e.g. "to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express"; Renov 2012, 21). They also experiment with elements one is more familiar with in the context of multimedia installations, socio-politically motivated interventions, artistic research or theatrical performances. Quite often, they remediate concepts and approaches of digital storytelling and world-building which are informed by hypertext literature as well as serious gaming. They range from industrial or institutional productions to (semi-)amateur productions and activist media projects. They 'address' and involve individual 'viewers' as well as collective viewing communities, and they require (inter)active users, co-creative prosumers, co-producers and committed participants. Some of those emerging practices try to reach larger audiences, others specific (online) communities, and some are worknets intended for experts or special interest groups. Interactive documentary practices and their discursive 'sedimentations' comprise social media platforms, but they also go beyond the 'realm' of the web, embracing the affordances of mobile, locative media, 'live-logging', ubiquitous computing, ambient media and smart environments, and not a few of them are trans-, cross- or inter-media configurations.[6] In short: the currently emerging documentary nexus is vast and manifold and it keeps continuously evolving.

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[5] For a comprehensive literature review, cf. among others Gaudenzi 2013b, 30 f.

[6] As to general conceptualisation of cross-, trans- and inter-media phenomena, cf. among others the work by Rajewsky who defines intermediality in terms of (questionable) media borders: "Intermedia references by definition imply a crossing of media borders, and thus a medial difference." (Rajewsky 2005, 54)
For a more differentiated approach especially with regard to dimensions of intermediality in digital media as to "interrelated interplays of surface phenomena, recyclings, remediations and deep-structure interactions" cf. Müller 2010.

'Mapping blind spots':
State of the arts in theorising emerging documentary phenomena and three interrelated research desiderata

Documentary practice has a longstanding tradition of looking at how we can make 'the strange familiar' and 'the familiar strange', with interactive documentary in its many guises surely having a key role to play in helping us find the deeper structures or connections that lie beneath the surface of cultural difference.
Aston 2015

As seen, with regard to this heterogeneous variety of networked|networking documentary, attempts to analyse, to 'map' or to 'classify' the emerging nexus are numerous, yet still unsystematic, either lacking theoretical-methodological depth or operationalisation and concrete exemplification.

Though one can state a rising interest in digital documentary practices, if we take academic and transprofessional publications as a seismograph, most analysis is limited to single articles and shorter publications so far and only a small number of them avoid getting trapped in one or other of the pitfalls which we have delineated with regard to research desiderata (e.g. Nash 2012b; (Nash 2014); Aston 2013; Aston and Gaudenzi 2012; Jaeger and Klinger 2014; (Wiehl 2016). The majority of these articles are to be found in collections of loosely bound together reflections (Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes 2014b; Ochsner, Fahle, and Wiehl 2016; Rose, Gaudenzi, and Aston 2017; Miles 2018a) or in the form of research posts published online on specialised platforms as well as specialised blogs (e.g. i-docs.org, MIT docubase, le blog documentaire, vlog 4.0). Recently, there have also appeared several special issues on emerging documentary practices in general (e.g. *Alphaville Journal of Film and Screen Media,* Issue 15, 2018; *Interfaces Numériques,* Issue 7, 2018), which are, however, not especially focusing on what is covered by the here applied notion of networked|networking documentary. Notwithstanding the kaleidoscopic picture that these resources present, one drawback of the diversity of different contributions on such sites lies in the fact that they can only hint at the complex socio-technological and cultural interwovenness of contemporary documentary practices and they most often lack a contextualisation within the spectrum of academic discourses.

Exceptional publications in this regard are Gaudenzi's PhD thesis *The Living Documentary* (Gaudenzi 2013b), the collection of essays, interviews and case studies in the volume *New Documentary Ecologies* edited by

Hight, Summerhayes and Nash (2014b), and the volume *i-docs—The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary* by Aston, Gaudenzi and Rose (2017a), as well as Odorico's reflections especially on the aesthetics of emerging documentary practices in *The Interactive Documentary Form* (2018).

Gaudenzi's thesis is the first and only comprehensive monograph on interactive documentary, presenting a taxonomy of the genre based on the idea of *modes of interactions*. Though Gaudenzi's overview of the genre can be regarded as one of the founding pillars of research in the field of interactive factuals and though it has been of great value for the present study, I however tackle the issue from a slightly different perspective—not only, but foremost, with regard to the three research lenses and their focus (cf. p. 14 f.).

Also, the ideas proposed in the collection by Hight, Summerhayes and Nash, *New Documentary Ecologies*, present inspirational trains of thought due to the diversity of approaches which are juxtaposed. Still, the edited book can only be seen as a first departure into a new direction of research: as the authors admit themselves, their aim is "to bring together diverse perspectives on emerging documentary discourses and practices" and not "to present a totalizing vision of new documentary forms" (Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes 2014a, 3), which with regard to continuously emerging 'new' (or hybrid) practices would in fact be impossible.

The same goes for the volume by Aston, Gaudenzi and Rose (2017a), *i-docs—The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary*. Although one section of this collection of contributions by practitioners and academics is dedicated to co-creation (which will also be a key notion in the context of different dimensions of network*ing*), the emphasis is slightly different as the nuances of participation and interaction are not as explicitly outlined as is the case in this project. Moreover, as the title indicates, the volume presents a momentary glimpse on the still *evolving* nexus of 'i-docs', and given the nature of the case-study-orientated contributions, the certainly otherwise valuable volume does not set out to present a coherent methodological or theoretical frame as this research project attempts to provide.

Hence, given the diversity of phenomena, their networkedness in terms of their diachronic dimensions as well as their actual synchronic embeddedness in a complex networking media cultural ecology, and given the current deficiency of coherent yet expandable approaches, there are at least three major research desiderata. The first two are regarding the *theoretical* conception of 'networked documentary' and 'documentary networking', the third one is of *methodological* nature:

1) Often, as already mentioned, emerging interactive documentary practices are sub-complexly labelled as 'new' without an adequate problematisation of the concept of 'newness'. The same goes for the notion of 'documentary', especially in the context of 'new media documentary'.

2) There are still blind spots in research with regard to the procedural, dynamic nature of documentary configurations and subsequent issues with regard to interactivity, interaction, participation, co-creation, agency and the transformative potential of interactive documentary.

Especially this second desideratum goes hand in hand with a third so far unanswered question in fathoming the emerging documentary nexus—a question of *methodology*:

3) We still lack methodologically sound approaches to analyse interactive documentary assemblages in their dynamic complexity and their nature as ephemeral configurations, as they tend to evade description and in-depth 'reading' due to their procedural, interactive nature.

The first desideratum arises from the fact that a subliminal dichotomist division of 'linear' vs. 'non-linear', of 'old media' vs. 'new media' persists—regardless of the growing awareness of media in their *mediality* and constant *processes* of mediation as re- or intermediation. Already the urge to define what one conceives of by speaking of 'new' and 'old' media does in fact point towards problems when thinking in terms of technological and social progressivism. Its teleology underlies many current discourses and it seems to be especially virulent in documentary studies. Still, many approaches are based on the opposition of *'l'héritage du cinéma'* vs. 'new media studies'. As to the first paradigm, the focus mostly lies on epistemological categories, on discussions about genres, narrative structures, modes of representation, rhetoric, questions of authenticity and 'visual evidence', and interpretation, as well as institutional structures, audiences and reception. Without doubt, documentary *cinema* theory is certainly valuable in the field of *interactive* documentary studies and will thus inform one of the three lenses through which we will explore the emerging documentary nexus; yet, this lens only allows insight into the nature and working of interactive documentary if it is combined with other perspectives. Elsewhere, approaches remain stuck

in what Parikka (2012) describes as media theory's tripartite universe of audiences, texts and institutions.[7] On the other hand, discourses focusing on issues which are prominent in new media studies, platform studies and software studies tend to lose sight of the synchronic and diachronic embeddedness of interactive documentary practices in a larger medial nexus.

Not unrelated to this issue is the question what 'the Documentary' as a specific stance to 'Reality' means in terms of practices and formats in the context of 'new media' ecologies in which they are embedded. This problem already arises with regard to linear documentary production but is aggravated in the field of emerging interactive documentary. There are different starting points to approach this issue—most of them based on the questionable assumption of an underlying dichotomy of fictional and factual register. Still, these approaches fail when it comes to inter-subjectivity in interactive documentary assemblages and therefore need to be supplemented by other theoretical considerations—in this research project, by what has been termed the lens of performative medialities of documentary assemblages.[8]

The second desideratum—the still not sufficiently explored specific affordances of 'new media documentary' in terms of a differential approach to the 'Interactive' with a capital 'I'[9]—might seem to stand in contradiction to

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[7] Parallels with Nichols' major players in documentary cinema (2001) are obvious—as are parallels with Hansen & Machin who in their major introduction to research methods note that there are "three major domains of the communication process and of media and communication research: 1) Institutions/Organisations/Production; 2) Content/Representation; and 3) Audiences/Consumption" (Hansen and Machin 2013, 8). Though these 'instances' are not central in documentary theory, these categories are still eminent if one considers works on new production models (cf. Coffman 2014; Gaudenzi 2014; Soar 2014; Dovey 2017), possible taxonomies and classifications (Hight 2008; Gifreu Castells 2012; Gaudenzi 2014) and audiences (Nash 2014); Gantier 2016; Odorico 2011).

[8] Cf. the discussion of performativity in the chapter on 'new' media ecologies, p. 74 f.

[9] Being aware that a multitude of concepts of 'interactivity' and numerous classifications of the differences between (again diverse) forms of 'interactivity', 'interaction', 'participation'—or 'co-creation'—are currently discussed in various discourses, I suggest making a general differentiation between 'Interaction' respectively 'the Interactivity' with a capital 'I' and its different dimensions—among them 'interaction' (which in the following will designate the interrelational exchange entailing human agency). As to documentary discourses and 'Interactivity'/'Interaction', Nash provides a concise survey of current discourses in the form of a meta-study as well as applied research (cf. Nash 2012b; (Nash 2014)), and also the work by Carpentier is certainly relevant with regard to interactive factuals, documentary practices and their inherent 'call to action' as he points to the difference of access, participation, actions/activism and empowerment (cf. Carpentier 2015). For a differentiation between the different concepts that are essential in this work, cf. the chapter tackling a definition of 'the Interactive', 51 f.

the first pitfall delineated—the issue of 'new' vs. 'old', 'fictional' vs. 'factual'—and it might seem to contradict our claim to avoid a dichotomist stance. Yet, this second 'blind spot' in interactive documentary theory also reflects the ongoing absence of consideration of interactive documentary as complex dynamic assemblages—not as platform-specific phenomena or simple remediations of 'traditional' documentary techniques in digital environments. Thus, one research axis shall be the exploration of what sets networked|networking documentaries apart from both documentary film and other 'new' media practices. What is their unique approach and what, at the same time, connects them to what one might call the 'documentary tradition'? Where are the intersections with other digital practices or media practices 'beyond the screen'?

One of the problems hereby stems from the fact that so far only a few research projects find a balance between the necessary specificity of analysis, i.e. an awareness of the modalities of interactive documentary configurations, on the one hand, and to contextualise emerging phenomena in the wider field of culture—media culture and beyond, in the sense of 'Culture' with the capital 'C' of Cultural Studies[10]—on the other. Though there are approaches that state there is a "[n]eed for a re-examination of documentary theory itself in the light of an expanded 'realm of the real' and, in the process, to engage critically with the claim made on behalf of emerging media technologies" (Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes 2014b, 2), most research projects so far still focus on "new channels of distribution" and "new tool" (Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes 2014b, 2) or "new modes of audience engagement" (Nash 2012a, 31) with regard to the interactive documentary's modes of 'the Interactive'[11]—the questions of how "new *tools* [are] changing documentary production", whether "*audiences* [are] engaging in new ways with documentary *content*" and in how far the "assumed abundance of *new channels* of distribution provide greater access to documentary"? (Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes 2014b, 2) Undeniably, these issues are of concern. And yet, by focusing on the specificities of interactive configurations on that understanding *only*, one runs the risk of restricting oneself again to the tripartite of audiences, texts and institutions. Thus, a crucial question certainly consists in challenging these assumptions as to their 'newness', their 'toolness' and their platform-boundedness without leaving out of sight the performative mediality. All these aspects call for a closer look and a critical re-

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[10] With regard to different approaches to what is generally termed 'Cultural Studies' and for a discussion of how 'Culture' is defined in different contexts, cf. among others Hall 1992; Barker and Willis 2012; Assmann 2012.

[11] For a clarification of the concept of 'the Interactive' and differentiation I hereby suggest cf. the chapter on the challenge to define 'the Interactive' p. 51 f.

assessment, considering them as factors in complex networks rather than a short-hand term describing a theoretical black-box.[12]

This brings us to the third research desideratum, which emerges from the two previously mentioned 'blind spots' in the 'mapping' of emerging practices within the larger documentary nexus. However, in contrast to the first two desiderata which are primarily of theoretical-*conceptual* nature, the focus hereby lies on theoretical-*methodological* aspects—the question of how to 'capture the evasive' as interactive documentary configurations are deeply relational, highly complex and in a constant flux.

Given these facts and their implications, one of the aims of this contribution is to develop vectors or *axes de pertinence* of how to approach interactive documentary and to meet the requirements of their dynamic, procedural nature. Presently applied methods either privilege structure *or* discourse*,* text *or* practices; and even approaches which claim to work within a media ecological 'framework' precisely take media ecology as a *frame*work that as such restricts an extension of thought. Quite often, the concept of 'ecology' is uncritically used as a vague umbrella term, and often, it consequently leads to an oversimplifying technological determinism. Moreover, such conceptualisations tend to take interactive documentary assemblages as ready-made constructs and not as dynamic continuously evolving assemblages. Still, though textual 'sedimentation' of networked|networking documentary practices are in their core dynamic and complex entanglements, they cannot be studied as finite artefacts *only* but need to be seen in a larger, semio-pragmatic, praxeologic context: as ephemeral manifestations which result *from* and result *in* cultural techniques and dynamic, interrelated processes of exchange and transformation. Yet, so far, most approaches show a lack of really *tackling* the issue and proposing an alternative to conventional methodologies which in fact come short if one tries to understand emerging documentary practices in terms of the interdependence of networkedness and networking.

Without claiming to develop a fit-all methodological approach, and without doing away with (certainly necessary) distinctions altogether, this research strikes an alternative path and proposes fathoming the potential of a mixed-method approach—a combination of semio-pragmatics, critical

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[12] In this regard, Miles certainly makes an important point when "naively yet seriously" he asks what the "'tool' in 'new tools' is from the point of view of any claim that a theory may wish to make upon it. Is it anything practical like a hammer? Perhaps it is closer to an instrument, such as a violin? Is there a scale of 'toolness' in interactive documentary's concept of new tools that wanders between the hammer and violin?" (Miles 2017b, 6).

discourse analysis and 'networking-methodology', putting the focus on me-
diatisation and the performative medialities of documentary assemblages as
networks and worknets. This approach implies that what a configuration *is*
has to be understood in terms of what it *does* and how it comes to 'live'—
including its embeddedness in larger socio-cultural networks.

As we will see later when assessing the documentary nexus in terms of
networked*ness* and processes of network*ing* (cf. p. 74 f.), the concept of
Actor Network *Theory* (ANT) needs to be reviewed. As both Latour and
Law underline, ANT has become an empty metaphor, a label for 'this and
that', unspecific and reducing original trains of thought to some aphorisms.
In this regard, Latour also proposes seeing ANT rather as a *method*—not a
theory proper (cf. Latour 1999, 20-21; cf. also Law 1999a). This implies
that this research modifies essential principles of ANT in order to come up
with a form of AN*M*—an Actor Network*ing Methodology*. Hence, this track
shall supplement the semio-pragmatic approach proposed here to dynamic
documentary configurations, as it allows one to follow actors and action,
the processes *and* their sedimentation in audio-visual discourses, and to *sit-
uate* them in the larger picture of the complex, interrelated documentary
nexus. As such, an anti-essentialist diving into the universe of interactive
documentary will be possible.

Last but not least, this multimodal approach tries to bridge the gap be-
tween rigorous cerebral academic research and its adjacent methodological
considerations, on the one hand, and the actual analysis of the currently di-
versifying spectrum of networked|networking documentary, on the other.
Alongside a theoretical contextualisation of documentary discourses and
practices with regard to the affordances of interactive environments, the
specific methodological challenges of the research project will be ad-
dressed, before attention will then be directed to three paradigmatic docu-
mentary configurations: *Public Secrets* (Daniel et al. 2008), *Racing Home*
(Hoffman and McMahon 2014) and the *Highrise* series (Cizek et al. 2010-
2015). By exploring these assemblages—by 'diving deep'—we will focus
on different dimensions of the paradigms discussed earlier. This double-
track allows one to relate questions of the *epistemological* status of docu-
mentary practices and the *ontological* status of their discursive manifesta-
tions and their performative medialities to tangible, paradigmatic cases.
Hence, light shall be shed on emerging practices in their socio-cultural com-
plexity as interrelated, interactive—i.e. network*ed*—environments which
are manifest through dynamic, generative creative processes of network*ing*.

'Unfolding the field': Three central research axes

> *The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends*
> *on the density of [their] texture.*
> *Adorno 1984*

Though the emerging field of interactive documentary practices presents numerous research desiderata, this project is focused on *one* central research question concerning the specificities of configurations of the emerging 'new' documentary nexus:

> How do 'new media'—understood as complex digitally network*ed* and network*ing* socio-cultural configurations—affect emerging documentary practices and what are the implications as to their *epistemological* status as well as to their *ontological* status?

This main track of exploring phenomena of the 'new' documentary nexus can be broken down into three interconnected research axes which span out a web of following sub-questions and are threads of the texture of thought.[13] These sub-questions again are parallel to the aforementioned research desiderata and theoretical grounding:

1) Who are the different interactors within the 'new' documentary nexus and what are presently emerging media *practices*?

   How far do these emerging configurations affect 'traditionally' assumed roles and functions of author and audience/user in the complex, partly instantaneous process of documentary meaning-making?

   On which 'layers', to what degree, and in which ways do different forms of network*ed* and network*ing* practices 'manifest' themselves in documentary 'texts'?

   Which frames of reception are activated? Do user-interactors engage within networked|networking documentary on the basis of their previous experiences with documentary film, 'new media', ex-

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[13] In this context, research axes are to be understood as theoretical, methodological heuristic vectors that only point into certain directions without fixing any restricting frame. Thus, they delineate the field of research and enable us to follow our main research question without getting lost in the complex nexus of documentary practices; yet they are still so flexible that they allow for 'unexpected' findings which cannot be derived from the theoretical framing alone.

perimental works of art or social networking in the form of inter-
personal interaction? What kinds of communicational spaces are
opened up?

2) What are the epistemological status and ontological status of these
   emerging documentary configurations?

   What does 'documentary' mean in interactive 'new'(?) media ecol-
   ogies? How can we conceptualise interactive documentary prac-
   tices as dynamic encounters and interactions within digital media
   culture and beyond?
   How far can we grasp the ontological dimension of interactive doc-
   umentary assemblages? And how far does a holistic account of net-
   worked|networking nonetheless *necessitate* thinking in terms of
   emerging documentary assemblages, not only with regard to their
   epistemology but also their inherent ontology?
   What are the consequences of interactivity, interaction, participa-
   tion and co-creation as to the 'authority' of the 'documentary argu-
   ment', the 'documentary voice' and 'documentary evidence'? And
   what are the implications as to the different interactors' agency, the
   legitimisation of discourses and the ethics within documentary net-
   works|worknets in this context?
   How can we understand 'the Documentary' in its shift assumed
   from a *representational* paradigm towards a *performative* and *ex-
   periential* paradigm?

3) How can this dynamic nexus in its constant flux be methodologically
   approached?

   How can one cope with the evasiveness of interactive documen-
   tary, as the whole 'text' is most often never completely available
   within one experience because it only comes into 'life' existence
   through interactivity? How can one deal with the fact that each ex-
   perience of the always changing relational assemblage is unique
   and subjective due to the navigational choices of the user/interact-
   ant?

From these three research axes, three—again—interconnected aims of re-
search derive. Hence, in the course of the exploration of the emerging doc-
umentary nexus:

1) a first aim consists in designing an anti-essentialist, anti-dichotomist, transdisciplinary theoretical conceptualisation of interactive documentary configurations as part of the current networked|networking documentary nexus;
2) a second aim is the critical discussion of the epistemological and ontological dimensions of documentary networks|worknets and networking; and
3) a third aim entails developing a coherent and expandable operational set of methods in order to describe and analyse paradigmatic cases from a semio-pragmatic, practice-orientated and media ecologically informed perspective that considers processes of mediatisation and the experiential as well as transformative dimension of networked|networking.

The objective of this endeavour is not to generate an all-embracing theory of 'the new documentary nexus'. Such universalisms and generalisations cannot be applied, not least because of the just delineated width of the spectrum of configurations and its continuously increasing diversification of which we are momentarily just witnessing the beginnings. Yet, the fact that we are dealing with phenomena that are still in their early phase of development also has a theoretical 'surplus' which is of interest. This comprehensive, synchronic as well as diachronic approach generates research of just-emerging phenomena that can be extremely valuable for rethinking established discourses, practices, formats and genres and their functions. At this early stage of the genesis of new practices, specificities of remediations, of morphing and of hybridising elements of configurations are still apparent. And, at the same time, as they are in the process of fathoming their own potential, they often 'think through' their digital nature in self-reflexive ways and problematise their own mediality.

'Zooming-in and zooming-out':
Exploring the documentary nexus through
three differently focused lenses

One of interactive documentary's problems is being in No Man's Land, a place in-between different knowledge areas [...] and it is not likely that any of them will find the answer alone.
Almeida and Alvelos 2010, 124

Despite the fact that we are setting off on an exploration of so far only partly charted territory, we are starting from a promising point with regard to pre-

liminary research in different neighbouring fields of media studies and adjacent disciplines. Both audio-visual documentary studies and research in 'new media', especially new media *cultures*, have set the groundwork, and especially since the 2010s,considering media environments as media ecologies or *espaces de communication* (cf. Odin 2016) with a performative mediality has been gaining momentum.[14] As such, we are able to draw back on a large spectrum of differentiated theories and of methodological approaches that cover a wide range from aesthetical to socio-political aspects, and economic, technological, psychological and historical issues. And still, so far, no extended comprehensive exploration of emerging interactive documentary practices as complex configurations has been undertaken—at least not from a holistic perspective in a more extended publication.

To fathom and map this nexus, I propose—metaphorically—constructing a kind of sextant: an instrument that serves as a magnifying glass, as a telescope and as a compass at the same time. This theoretical-methodological tool allows one to 'zoom *out*' to study the currently emerging documentary nexus in its interrelated complexity and its dynamics; and it allows one to 'zoom *in*' into particular paradigmatic practices and their discursive sedimentations, and to follow the various agents and the (inter)actions which these documentary configurations afford. These two viewpoints will then be brought together.

Using this conceptual tool-set, we will navigate through the nexus of currently emerging documentary practices. It will help us to keep our research questions in sight, and we will not run the risk of falling into the 'trap' of dichotomies: the aforementioned 'either/or' paradigm of old media vs. new media, and—as will be particularly relevant in the case studies—structure vs. performance, database vs. narration, the part vs. the whole.

This sextant for 'zooming in' and 'zooming out' is based on the set of three lenses which are coming from the aforementioned well-researched areas. These are sharpened by research in audio-visual media, by queries in 'new media' culture and by media ecological reflections. The three lenses can be readjusted to focus either on the 'larger picture' or to study nuances of interactive practices in their dynamics, and they allow us to capture emerging practices in their syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions as

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[14] Especially the currently (re)proliferating interest in digital media *cultures* and theories of (medial) interaction and participation, as well as in network concepts, promotes this endeavour. In this context, it is certainly favourable that there is a re-focalisation in research that approaches media in terms of medial *configurations* or *assemblages* and which draws attention to *processes of mediation* (e.g. Odin 2011; Sprenger and Löffler 2016; Krieger and Belliger 2014; Vagt 2016; van Boomen et al. 2009; Kember and Zylinska 2012; Schrickel and Stürmer 2016).