# Call for Participation – Kick-Off DiD

# Digital Documentary Practices

University of Bayreuth

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**Digital Documentary Practices – Topical paradigm shifts and the potential of emerging configurations**

"Any project that starts with an intention to document the real and that does so by using digital interactive technology can be considered an interactive documentary (i-doc)." (Gaudenzi 2014, p. 282). Taking this definition of interactive documentary as a point of departure, the field of research seems to be quite clear contoured. At first sight. Because at second sight, this quote rather opens a space of probing into a variety of non-fictional practices emerging at the present moment. What does this intention **'to document *the real* with *digital, interactive* resources'** mean if we try to get more concrete? What are actual practices in the multitude of 'the Interactive' within this spectrum of configurations – and what is their possible impact?

After more than two decades of digital documentary practices, one thing has become clear: 'New media documentaries' – whatever they may be like – need not necessarily "replay the conventions of traditional, linear documentary storytelling" (Whitelaw 2002, p. 3); rather, they offer their own ways of **negotiating** 'the Real'. By doing so, emerging documentary practices not only **look** but also **feel** fundamentally different from linear documentaries, as Gaudenzi (2014, p. 283) notes, and they can offer new forms of engagement: „Not necessarily video or screen based, 'the Documentary' in 'the Digital' remediates other media, involves the user-interactor in some active way, embraces augmented forms of reality and creates virtual realities. Intersections with adjacent fields like digital journalism (Uricchio et al. 2015), serious gaming and games for change (Bogost 2007), social media activism, interventionist media making (Cizek s.a.; Zimmermann and Hudson 2015; Zimmermann and deMichiel 2013; 2018) and strategic impact documentary (Nash and Corner 2012), citizen sciences and artistic research (Fetzner and Domberger 2016) become more and more influential.

In her review of *I-Docs: The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary,* Patricia Zimmermann enumerates what 'doing documentary' – and especially 'doing documentary by means of 'the Interactive'' – stands for at the present moment:

> The "i" (in i-docs) represents a vortex of ideas spanning "**information**", "**interactive**", "**immersive**", "**intention**", "**innovation**", and "**indeterminacy**". This process flips the traditional vertical structures of media production into horizontal, iterative, never finished modes that reify the user as a participant and co-creator. (Zimmermann quoted in Aston and Odorico 2018, p. 65)

Though this quote gets at the heart of interactive documentary practices – namely the diversity and multiplicity of actual phenomena – it incites following-up questions, among others:

- What is the epistemological status of **'information'** convened by interactive documentary configurations? What has become of documentary's 'truth claim' in times of fake news and 'war on

information'? And is it perhaps time to think of interactive documentary in terms other than of 'story' (Miles 2016; Thalhofer and Nash 2016)

- What does **'the Interactive'** imply in terms of structural participation, content creation and concepts such as documentary voice (Nichols 1983)? What role does polyphony play in this context (Aston and Odorico 2018)?
- Does **immersion** – especially in the field of VR documentary – really entail greater empathy (cf. Milk 2015)? What about the hype and/or hope around non-fiction VR (Rose 2016)?
- What is the **intention** of documentary configurations? Is it maybe not rather the process of 'doing documentary' and the performance of interventionist media making than the artistic outcome that has moved into the center of attraction?
- Does technological **innovation** automatically bring artistic invention? Do we need to develop new modes and modalities of interactive storytelling – to further develop 'the language of new media' (Manovich 2001) to push the frontier of documentary making further – or is rather time to remember some of the takes on the documentary mission from documentary pioneers?
- And finally: is it possibly in documentary's **indeterminacy** that its greatest potential lies?

## About this workshop

We invite takes on these questions (and the many more questions that follow when starting probing into the field). Contributions from both theory and practice are heartily welcomed. Please send abstracts (300 words) and short bio (150 words) to documentarydigital@gmail.com till 28.02.2020.

The workshop is meant as a kick-off to further develop the research network *The documentary and the digital (Das Dokumentarische im Digitalen – DiD),* focusing on the widening spectrum of interactive documentary practices. It sets out to develop a transdisciplinary methodological instrument to analyze the potential of emerging practices to negotiate complex issues and to stimulate participation in topical discourses.

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