

ON REMEDIATIONS OF REALITY AND POETICS OF PHILOSOPHY.
WORKING THROUGH COMPLEXITY AND THE STRANGE CASE OF
KORSAKOW DOCUMENTARY

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*Documentary has always been a question of making sense of the world.
In the process, documentary has not only challenged the sense
of the world, but the sense of sense itself.
Have digital and networked media changed documentary's making sense
of the world? Have they changed the sense of sense itself?*¹

INTRODUCTION – OR: DIVING INTO THE OCEAN OF QUESTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY *IN*
AND *THROUGH* INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES

Within the context of ‘digital culture,’ hybrid genres, practices and configurations of documentary keep emerging and various forms of so-called ‘interactive factuals’ are developing – all with “an intention to document the ‘real’ [using] digital interactive technology to realize this intention.”²

This contribution explores in how far the partly algorithmically edited Korsakow documentary, a highly experimental type of interactive database documentary, (re-)mediates ‘reality’/reality³ and its medial representations/constructions.⁴ In contrast to other tools for creating interactive documentaries which work towards a the building of pluri-linear coherent factual textures, which help those formerly known as documentary authors (which are now rather curators) to craft ‘well-built stories’ and which afford satisfactory, consistent documentary experiences for the ‘viewers’ (which now rather become users or (inter-)actors), Korsakow is quite demanding for authors and users alike: On the one hand, due to the algorithmic editing, it means a loss of control over the narrative structure, its dramaturgic unfolding and the line of argument – which affects the documentary author when creating the interactive documentary and the user-interactor when exploring the material; at the same time, however, it promises a potential gain of unforeseen insight due its unpredictable turnarounds.

One key question will be in how far the epistemology and ontology of such complex configurations enable users and authors to think *about* and to think through digital practices as well as philosophical issues. In this context, Korsakow, which radically plays with non-linearity and contingency in order to challenge usual causality, will be considered as a documentary “counter-practice.”⁵ Hence, it not only breaks with the expectations of the user-interactors and documentary authors; it also serves as a litmus test for the reliance of narratology, linearity and epistemological insight in times of multiple entanglements.⁶

Many Korsakow documentaries do not only tackle philosophical issues by *addressing* them in form of an interactive documentary essay / essayistic documentary; rather, they also afford individual reflection on the process of doing philosophy *through* the configuration which can only be accessed online and thus by its nature promotes personal, sometimes even intimate moments of epiphany in a private space – moments of revelation which are much more difficult to achieved in the setting of cinematic screenings as it is the case with linear documentary film. Still, what does it mean – ‘doing philosophy?’ ‘Doing philosophy’ is hereby understood in the sense of posing general and fundamental questions as to our being in the world, as to what we know and how we perceive ‘the world around us’ – and what we make out of these perceptions.⁷ In this contribution, there will possibly more *questions* be raised than *definite answers* provided – though at least *provisionary* answers or rather propositions will be presented. How, for example, can the complex assemblage of authors, user-interactors, documentary subjects, historical material, found footage, poetic audiovisual vignettes and algorithms be used as a prompt for philosophical considerations? Does this – at first sight – unwieldy form instigate the agents involved to ponder on the relatedness and contingency of a deeply intermingled ‘being in the world?’ In how far do the specific characteristics of digital environments such as non-linearity, interactivity and contingency affect our notions of authorship and argument? And in how far are Korsakow documentaries an invitation to fathom the potential of the form of documentary essay/essayistic documentary as genre and as a ‘tool for thought’?⁸ Does the shift from linearity in narrative to non- or post-linear forms and the following shift in ‘making sense’ alter our notion of narrative – maybe even alter our sense of sense itself?

To tackle these issues, traditional documentary theory connected with the striving for ‘truth,’ theories of making sense⁹ will be brought into dialogue with positions deriving from so called ‘new media studies’¹⁰, especially considerations on interactive factials.¹¹ Thus, we will examine the different ways in which interactive documentary assemblages of the Korsakow-type figure as art, as representations/constructions of some sort of ‘reality’ (subjective? objective?) and as an agentic interactor in the world – and in how far all this meets philosophical thinking.

The multi-authored, poetic, self-reflexive, interactive assemblage *Racing Home*¹² will be a test-stone for our hypothesis that due to its algorithmic editing and narrative multi-layeredness, the Korsakow configuration opens dimensions of intertwined ‘realities’ that are otherwise difficult to access. In this process, following Hoffman and McMahon, we ourselves will dig deeper and deeper through the complexity of the documentary endeavour as such and the specifically ‘strange case of Korsakow documentary’ – whereby complexity will not be reduced by moving from layer to layer, but, on the contrary, further augmented. We will move from philosophies *of* documentary to philosophical thinking *through* documentary practices. Thus, we will equally be concerned with the epistemology of documentary as documentary ontology – especially when the ‘documentary moment’ is to be found in ‘the digital.’¹³

So let us enter the complex world of heterogeneity, non-linearity, contingency, complexity and thematic density of Korsakow and of *Racing Home*.

RACING HOME – A STORY OF LOSS AND FINDING

The story behind the documentary project *Racing Home* reads like a story of failure and loss: Originally, *Racing Home* by the Canadian filmmaker Marian McMahon was meant to become a linear documentary film on highly complex philosophical issues: McMahon was interested in the metaphysical implications of ethical, political and psychological concerns connected to identity, race and belonging. However, the project could never be finished – at least not as a linear documentary essay. In 1996, Marian died of cancer and left an apartment full of 8mm and 16mm footage – factual cinematic vignettes but also highly personal reflections, sound recordings and archival material she had collected. Apart from this *filmic* legacy, she also bequeathed boxes full of diaries and notes, maps, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings and objects from everyday culture which had become meaningful to her – either with regard to her research for the film or to her own identity forming the past which she, in the process of making the film, had become to explore.

Thus, after Marian McMahon’s death, her partner Phil Hoffman found himself confronted with a large array of different artefacts. Being a filmmaker himself, Phil made Marian’s project his own, trying to edit Marian’s footage. Still, he never managed to come up with a linear documentary film: Neither was he able to select footage, nor did he feel in the position to force the amount of the material into the form of a documentary film which in his eyes would neither be truthful to Marian’s (potential) intentions or the ‘truth’ of the material. Foremost, however, he wanted to somehow express the epistemologic twists the journey had taken: for both Marian and himself, due to the new

doubled meaning of belonging with regard to Marian's death. Thus, he faced the problem to be truthful to his potential audience, truthful to Marian's original project and truthful to his relationship with Marian which he thought should be brought into the documentary as well as the process of making the documentary. The mediality of thinking through these matters should have an adequate place in the final result.

For almost 20 years, Phil struggled with the material and his own place in this ethical as well as very personal entanglement. His restless search for finding a form and for gaining control over the material ended when he discovered an alternative way of convening documentary experience and when he started embracing the loss of control which was inherent to his mission. This was the case when Phil learned about a documentary editing tool named Korsakow, developed by the German media artist and documentary maker Florian Thalhofer.¹⁴

This was a turning point in Phil's search – mainly due to two features of Korsakow configurations. First of all, Korsakow offers an elegant possibility of not only juxtaposing factual and fictional discourses and oscillating between objective and subjective perspectives but also of complexly entangling them. This allows a self-reflexive probing into an issue which has accompanied documentary discourses since their beginnings, namely the specific relation of documentary to 'reality' and its inherent truth claim. Secondly, Hoffman was finally able to realize his project, because Korsakow frees the author from the pressure of creating a linear documentary narrative. Thus, he was able to come to terms with issues which evade linear narratability such as the functioning of reasoning and memory, what it means to lose one's own place in the world, to lose a beloved person, how commemoration works – and on a meta-level: how all this can be rendered 'truthfully' experiential "counter-narratives".

And yet – how can these issues already highly complex in themselves be brought together? How can the heterogeneous material and the different approaches to different facets of personal and collective 'realities' be combined in one documentary project? As *Racing Home* already proves within the first sequences, the answers to these issues are as complex as the questions, as the material and as the philosophical implications of the issues negotiated. And they do not go without ruptures in what can be described as the documentary texture.

ENTERING *RACING HOME* – A COMPLEX NETWORK OF INTERWOVEN MATERIAL POSING MORE QUESTIONS THAN PROVIDING ANSWERS

When accessing the interactive documentary *Racing Home*, the user is confronted with a first breakup of the usual textuality of documentary. The opening scene of *Racing Home*, accessible on

<http://racinghome.ca/>, presents a wide angle shot in sepia, probably shot on 16mm film (fig. 1). The shot itself and the first 30 seconds are highly subjective and can be characterized as ‘poetic’ in Nichols’ sense.¹⁵ But what follows disturbs the users’ expectations of what ‘documentary is.’

In the opening scene of *Racing Home*, the camera follows a person walking from the right to the left behind enormous columns of an Egyptian temple. From far away, one can hear the atmospheric ‘white noise’ captured by a microphone presumably turned on accidentally. Interestingly, the frame in which the short sequence is shown does not fill the full screen, even if one activates the ‘full-screen’-mode; instead, it runs in a small frame in the centre of an otherwise black screen. Below the window with the clip, an excerpt from a text written by Marian McMahon appears in white letters – maybe an entry taken from her production notebook, a passage from her personal diary, or a letter to a friend or her partner Phil:

In this film, I begin with my own experience, my own ethnicity and background. In doing so, I return to my hometown, Windsor, Ontario, to see how this landscape, this location has worked to produce a ‘raced’ identity. I was especially interested in examining how I was living this past. What if geography is a wound, but equally a place we call home?

I wanted to know how I have been taught to see myself as white, what were the specific dimensions of this identity and how were they shaped in this specific landscape – a border town facing a large U.S. city and separated by a river. To get caught up in histories of which we are largely unaware is inevitable. Yet we have a historical responsibility – the past shapes us in ways that are still with us.

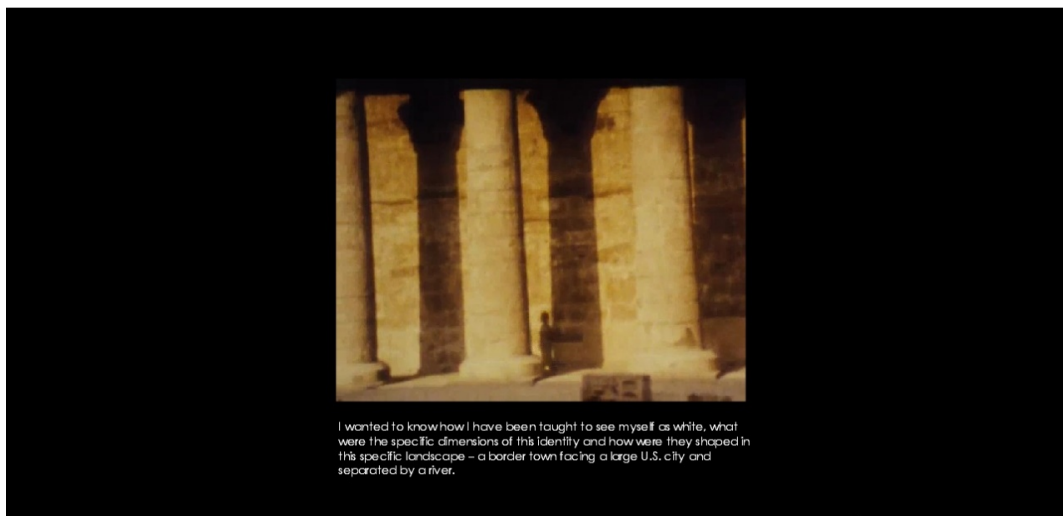


Fig. 1: Screenshot from the opening sequence of *Racing Home*

This rather enigmatic visual impression which is accompanied by the mysterious sound of wind and at the same time the rather straightforward textual inserts introduce the user to a documentary project that questions the documentary mission from the very first shots: What can images, sounds and texts – and especially their combination – tell us about ‘reality?’ And if so – which form of ‘reality’ do they relate to? The represented reality or the reality of representation – the process of exploring the phenomenological world through doing documentary? Can images, sounds and texts go beyond the surface, can they come close to the core of issues, can they allow us to travel in time, to change perspectives? Are there answers to the questions Marian asked herself when she set off on her enquiry, and are there – on a meta-level – answers to the questions concerning the whole endeavour and its mediality? Or is it rather the process of making these queries that is the key to what documentary means in the 21st century? Is this reality of doing documentary maybe the ultimate goal in itself? All these questions set the tone of the following experience – an experience which is marked by challenging the mainstream documentary expectations – and to some extent also the expectations user-interactors have with regard to interactive documentary.¹⁶

The next rupture of the conventions of documentary texture occurs when the users have to notice that ‘playing the film’ is actually to be understood in a sense that deviates from the ‘normal’ expectations such a labelling triggers. To access the world seen through Marian’s and Phil’s eyes, it is them who have to actively play the film. The film doesn’t ‘play itself.’ It is up to the users to interact within the assemblage and to co-develop a fluid documentary text as in fact, there is no film or coherent pre-figured documentary to be receptively ‘consumed.’ This means, as Judith Aston and Sandra Gaudenzi put it, that “the viewer is positioned within the artefact itself, demanding him, or her, to play an active role in the negotiation of the ‘reality’ being conveyed through the i-doc.”¹⁷ In this sense, text – or rather documentary texture as an ephemeral sedimentation of the user’s interactivity within the configuration – can be characterized as dialogic and dynamic.¹⁸

A first intervention from the side of the user is required right after this opening sequence: Towards the end of this clip, a small thumbnail still appears on the right side of this image. By ‘mouse over,’ it offers the option to activate this frame, which then moves into the large frame, substituting the previous clip. This sequence, filmed by a shaky handheld camera in a first-person perspective, presents a slightly untidy room. The perspective is that of the person handling the camera – Phil, as one learns later – who explores a room in which the objects Marian left to him are kept. After a panning point-of-view shot, the still unsteady handheld camera shows some close-

ups: a small figurine, earrings, a button, a timber box (fig. 2). The narrating voice contextualizes the actions seen so far and currently performed.



Fig. 2: Screenshots from the second clip of the Korsakow documentary *Racing Home*

When the clip ends, the frame in which the video has just been played becomes smaller and three thumbnail stills of potentially following clips appear (cf. fig. 3). Though the stills do not give away factual information of what clip might lie beneath the thumbnails, they clearly show that the users are on the threshold of entering into a complex interactive environment that entangles material from many sources – ranging from more or less objective to highly subjective clips – adding up to a plurivocal chorus modulating on the themes of loss, race, ‘History,’ memory and identity. In this tempting exploration, the users will encounter various materials: material shot by Marian herself, found footage, material from her family archive, old newsreels, sketches from her travels and videos shot in the style of *cinéma vérité* questioning the documentary mission to represent reality as such, as well as interventions in a highly participative mode, are combined with enigmatic atmospheric shots, poetic reflections and sequences which seem to be b-roll material, presenting Marian commenting ‘in private’ on her project. All these elements will be contingently woven into material shot posthumously by Phil Hoffman. A round-dance of more and more questions – and again more referral of meaning than definitive expository statements starts.



Fig. 3: Screenshot from one of the potentially presented arrays of audio-visual material of Racing Home

KORSAKOW AS AUTHORING SYSTEM: SPECIFICITIES OF ALGORITHMIC EDITING AND THE UNRULY USE OF DATABASE LOGICS

However – which choreography stands behind this? Or in other words: Why was coming across the authoring software called Korsakow a turning-point in Phil Hoffman’s so far unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with the legacy bequeathed by Marian? In what does Korsakow as a software and as a ‘tool for thought’ consist precisely, and what sets it apart from other digital tools to create interactive documentary?

The key idea in Korsakow is that it flips the database logic around, that it allows to find alternatives to the epistemological value of deliberately crafted narrative and linearity, and that it probes into the beauty of contingency and complexity. The system works on the basis of short video clips, so-called ‘smallest narrative units or short ‘SNUs.’¹⁹ Such SNUs can be made up from more than one cut or dissolve: the unity of a SNU consists in the coherency of a thought, not a formal unity of film or video. The fact that a medium is made of SNUs and that these are to be regarded as undividable wholes which form units of their own is also known as “modularity”²⁰ of a medium or its “granularity”.²¹ Essential hereby is that the clips maintain their independence. Though they form (as will be seen) conjunctions with other SNUs, these couplings are flexible. In contrast to linear film where material is brought into one fixed linear order, Korsakow (as well as many other interactive database documentaries) probe into multi- or even non-linearity which relies on the multiple possibilities of how and when clips are integrated into the texture of the filmic experience. Each time the user clicks on one thumbnail representation of a SNU, the otherwise disparate SNUs

are organized into different combinations – a process that Seth Keen described as “connecting granules of video together into a web of relations.”²²

This brings us to the second aspect which sets Korsakow configurations apart from most other manifestations of emerging interactive documentary: the unruly ‘use’ of “database logics” (Luers 2014).²³ To be retrieved from the database, each SNU has two sets of ‘points of contact’ or short ‘POCs’: one set of in-POCs and one set of out-POCs. A POC is a set of keywords allocated to a SNU. These POCs can be metadata concerning the content of the SNU, but they can also hold information about formal properties, e.g. dominant colours, information on the camera angle, on the location or date it was shot etc. The two sets of data – of the in- and out-POCs – define the potential connections between clips. However, in contrast to usual keyword allocation in functional databases with un-ambiguous sets of keywords (‘one keyword – one destination’), one and the same keyword can be an in- and an out-POC in Korsakow. Thus, the user-interactor is confronted with an asymmetry of keywords. Moreover, as the first interactive sequence of *Racing Home* has shown, the user-interactor can only form assumptions on what expects him or her, but the key-wording itself and the logic behind the linking are hidden to the user and thus appear haphazard; there is no clear ‘labelling’ of the clips on the surface of the database documentary. The only possibility of experiencing the material is by tentatively probing into what might be ‘hidden’ under the thumbnail. Thus, the users are invited “to explore the pleasures of engaging with the combinatorial possibilities of audiovisual documents.”²⁴

What enhances the feeling of free floating in a complex network that evades clear structural analysis is also the fact that keywords in Korsakow are unstable as to their temporal validity. Each keyword has only a limited lifetime – i.e. a defined number of times that it can be displayed. Depending on the process of viewing, keywords are ‘weighed’ as to their ‘relevance’ for the unfolding of the documentary. This makes clips more or less likely to be presented as options.

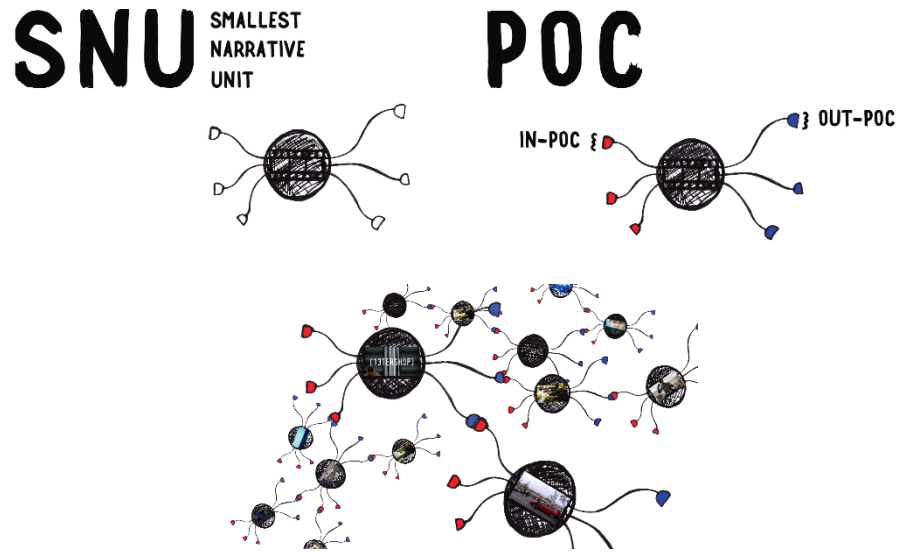


Fig. 3: SNUs and POCs in Korsakow

From this follows the third specificity of Korsakow. In contrast to determined and deterministic databases relying on a symmetry of in- and out-keyword, keywords in Korsakow are ‘fuzzy’: any keyword, set of keywords or parts of a set can be shared by more than one clip. Consequently, there exist many possible connections between the out-keywords of one SNU and the matching in-keywords of another SNU. Clips in Korsakow simultaneously have multiple destinations and thus, they can figure at various positions in the viewing experience.

As such, Korsakow’s all-over default behaviour obstructs linear sequencing of clips. The documentary does *not* expose a clearly structured chain of (mono-causal) cause-and-effect, of unidirectional relations; and it does *not* allow for creating a strong narrative line to develop a documentary argument and to make some sort of truth claim about ‘reality’. Rather, the interpretation of database in Korsakow as ‘combinatory engines’ brings forward a complex network of affective narratives which are explicitly *not* instructive or informational, but which open *a field* of perspectives through a heterogeneous variety of material. In line with the primary requisite for asking the right questions vis-à-vis audio-visual documentary material in order to more self-reflexively approach one’s own thinking, Korsakow allows both the users and the authors to work (and think) through evocative modes to approach complex issues in a way that differs from documentary *film*. Due to the system’s “simultaneous multiplicity”²⁵ and the multi-directional, syntagmatic and paradigmatic density and depth, the procedural nature of the documentary configuration based upon the interaction of all ‘authoring’ instances (curators/authors, interactors/producers²⁶ and algorithms) and of the unique procedurally produced experience based

upon Korsakow offers an alternative to linear continuity and narrative coherence as the usual default organizing principles of documentary film. Korsakow documentaries hereby disrupt the often morally biased didacticism that has been dominant in different variations of documentary in the tradition of documentary film, especially in documentaries of the type the Nichols describes as ‘expository mode.’²⁷

As various documentary scholars like Plantinga and Renov state, there exists rising scepticism against “the mainstream documentary tradition’s ‘self-assurance’ with misplaced modernist certainty.”²⁸ This sceptical position stems from “a general suspicion about any ‘optimistic’ or positive accounts of knowledge (the target has various labels, including positivism, rationalism, scientism, but the core view can usually be characterized as some form of epistemic realism).”²⁹ The unsettling momentum that Korsakow poses has at least the potential to open new horizons for doing documentary – and for doing philosophy through and in documentary. It offers possibilities of exploring techniques that are aligned to essayistic pondering, intellectual *flâneuring*, *écriture automatique* or performative artistic interventions as in the tradition of Dada or the Fluxus movement.

RACING HOME AND QUESTIONS OF EPISTEMOLOGY – THE AFFORDANCE TO ASK QUESTIONS GENERATIVELY

As the first glimpses into the world unfolding in *Racing Home* have already shown, not only the issues negotiated in this documentary project are intricate and of highly philosophical nature – also the way in which these issues are convened are complex and multi-layered.

But let’s take one step after the other to analytically disentangle the conglomerate of concerns. If one takes the array of topics first, they all touch upon essential issues of what it means ‘to be in this world’ – and the project into how these issues can be audio-visually convened.

First of all, there is the theme of loss – personal as well collective. This theme of course also falls into the field of individual and social psychology, but in the end, it all comes back to the essential question of what it means to live, not only as a monad, but as a social being. The same goes for History, especially in the context of public commemoration and the representation of the past. What can documentary contribute to this endeavour? To what extent can documentary film be part of what can be called collective memory? What epistemologic insight can documentary media offer? How objective can documentary be, how subjective is it by its very nature? How does ‘multiple first-person documentary’³⁰ figure in this nexus of practices? And last but not least: What is identity? What do we know about ourselves? What do we know about ‘the other?’ What does, in

this context, belonging mean? Belonging to a place, to a community, to another person? To what extent do personal history and experiences play a role at least as important as presumably ‘factual knowledge?’ And what about the inter-actional, para-social contact-building through the dialogic nature of the procedural documentary experience?

The configuration – *Racing Home* as a complex performative texture – does, however, not really present answers to all these questions which arise in the exploration of the material and its double movement to the core of belonging – private as public, individual as collective – as well as memory and commemoration. Rather, the configuration dares to ask questions, to trigger thought – and to do so interactively. As already said, the ‘film’ does not play ‘itself;’ rather, the material needs to be actively explored by the user-interactors.

Which brings us to the second point: the formal, aesthetic as well as the algorithmic realization of *Racing Home*. As has been shown, not only does *Racing Home* dare to ask more questions than it answers, with each time ‘playing’ the documentary, it also creates new questions – accruing from the always novel contexts that are generated in the interplay of SNUs and their strange dance evading any obvious mono-causal logic. Moreover, due to the granularity of material, each element “retains the sum of all possible relations it might share with others even after the work is distributed, supporting a ‘future-oriented’ rather than a ‘backward-looking hermeneutics.’”³¹

Nonetheless, at first sight, from an epistemological perspective, the approach of *Racing Home* is rather unsatisfying as the project does not provide answers (and in fact many users of Korsakow documentaries criticize the lack of coherence and complain about a stale feeling of disorientation).³² The configurations necessitate an attentive exploration, a willingness of the user-interactors (as well as the curating ‘authors’) to surrender control and to engage in openness. Korsakow “challenge[s] the easy consumption of ideas” and “may require time and effort on the part of the receiver, just as they probably did on the part of the maker. Experiencing concentrated engagement, duration, immersion and the gathering of ideas over several sittings even may be of the essence of such works, both in form and content.”³³ In this sense, despite the frustration generated by the complex rhizomatic associative worlds that Korsakow opens, the configurations can probably be regarded as highly productive at a different level. In fact, Korsakow documentaries can be characterized as decidedly dialogical as proposed by Aston and Odorico in their work on interactive documentary and Bakhtin’s dialogism.³⁴ There is no story that unfolds, rather the user-interactors have to create texts themselves – together with the material, the algorithms lying at the deep-structure of the computational configuration and the author.

But if the author does not suggest any answers – where then do (provisionary) responses to the issues brought forward arise? Do they come from the audiovisual material? Are they ‘in the SNU’s?’ Or is the process of ‘making sense’ transposed rather somewhere else?

POETICS OF PHILOSOPHY IN KORSAKOW: THE AFFECTIVE INTERVAL AND THE STRIVING FOR MAKING SENSE IN HYPERMEDIAL ENVIRONMENTS

This question and Miles’ observation about a ‘future-oriented hermeneutics’ bring the discussion of philosophy in Korsakow documentary to a meta-level and lead us to the concern of how documentary – how film in general – makes meaning and conveys sense. And they bring us to the question that serves as an epigraph to this contribution – the question that probably stands at the core of any documentary project: the question of the notion of ‘sense’ of in the specific context of documentary’s striving for ‘truth’ and ‘insight’, for entangling complex matters and for coping with complexity – or, as Murphie puts it: “the sense of sense itself.”³⁵

Though it has so far rarely been employed in the context of interactive documentary, Bergson’s thoughts on perception, interval and the living image as well as Deleuze’s specifications as to cinematic movement images can be highly productive in this context, and they can serve as a bridge between media philosophical consideration on film and the actualization of these thoughts in new media. In this sense, they can be seen as a direct link to what new media scholar Adrian Miles describes as ‘affective assemblage’³⁶ in networked media: the interdependence of human and non-human agents, knowledge, expectations, affect and (inter)action that is often summarized as the process of both making meaning and making sense.³⁷

As delineated in detail elsewhere,³⁸ according to Deleuze’s ‘ecological’ reading of Bergson’s concept of the universe and the world of images, everything reacts to everything else and everything is interrelated and in a constant flux, a movement of interdependent action and reaction. These flows, however, are not predetermined; still, they are not absolutely hazardous either. For Bergson, “movement is reality itself.”³⁹ This approach to ‘reality’ leads Deleuze to the concept of a ‘world-in-a-flux’ which he combines with a conceptualization of the world as a series of kaleidoscopic and multifaceted ‘living images.’ Foremost, however, this train of thought inspires Deleuze’s understanding of perception in relation to affect and reaction and makes him focus on the interval between them – a phenomenon which he describes as the sensory motor schema. Although the interpretation of images is virtually open and undetermined, the perception of a *particular* living image in a *particular* situation always invites a reading and a *particular* action. Or in other words: neither making sense in terms of semiosis nor in terms of ‘making meaning’ are to be found in the

audiovisual sign *only* (in the case of Korsakow, the ‘reality’ represented in the SNUs) nor is interpretation absolutely undetermined. The epistemological moment can rather be detected in the interplay of the individual clips by themselves and their always volatile new contextualization through the process of ‘doing documentary’ in terms of tentatively exploring the material. While all facets of the living image are still co-present in the image, only some are actively and consciously perceived, filtered, and only those aspects which seem to be relevant guide our reaction – whereby ‘action’ in the case of (linear) film is to be understood as ‘interpretation,’ while in the case of interactive media, this also comprises physical action, for example a ‘click’ to play the next SNU.⁴⁰

In linear documentary film, this interval is bridged by temporal montage – the flow of images linearly arranged in time. All ‘gaps’ between shots are overcome by the film itself. From this follows that indeterminacy and consequently complexity are at least partly reduced (partly, as they are still subliminally present if one considers alternative interpretations or subversive readings of a film). In interactive audio-visual media, by contrast, the viewer must assume the role of an *active interactor*, which makes her/him much more engaged in the process of producing meaning. The “ongoing site of indetermination” is now mainly located in the user who becomes “an affective relay between perception and action, watching and clicking.”⁴¹ The experience of the user-interactor is based on the oscillation between the cinematic flux within the single SNUs and the rupture between them – the moment at which one clip ends and the user-interactor has to choose the next one. In a dynamic assemblage this engagement produces the immersion in the vignettes as well as a dissociation from the narrative when the next action of the user-interactor is required. This double-take on the material – the interdependency and oscillation between perception and subjective experiences – suggests a psychodynamics that brings together conscious and unconscious levels of sense- and meaning-making. Users potentially get immersed in the flow of images and thereupon, they are thrown back on their own when the SNU stops, forced to step back and reflect on what they have just perceived. In this gap – the affective interval – something that has not been there before comes into being. This ‘new’ third can be neither found in the single SNUs, i.e. the audio-visual material, nor in the key-words allocated to them but it bares the performative dimension of ‘being made’ at the moment of interaction – the moment Miles describes as the triad of “click, think and link.”⁴² This moment can be described as ‘poetic’ in the philosophical sense, based on the ancient Greek term ποιεῖν which means ‘to make.’⁴³

In Korsakow, the affective intervals are driven to the extreme. Moments of indeterminacy are prolonged, complexity is enhanced rather than reduced, and the situation opens for an affective relation to the items perceived and experienced. One reason for this lies in the fact that all links

which appear on the surface of the interface – i.e. the computer display – are ‘opaque’ in Korsakow documentaries. ‘Opaque’ in this context means that the thumbnails of the clips are unlabelled: there is no information by sort of a visualized ‘keyword’ like the inscription of functional links in classic hypertext-environments. Thus, ‘navigating’ the material becomes a tentative exploration of the universe of a database. Intentionally following dramaturgic or argumentative lines as in ‘well-plotted’ (rather didactic) interactive documentaries becomes impossible. As such, the experiences afforded by Korsakow are quite often intimate and individually touching, as at the end of each SNU the user-interactor oscillates between personal decisions and indecisions, wondering and struggling. Within the Korsakow configuration, each experience is unique, co-creatively formed by the organization of the single SNUs and their ‘inner truth,’ partly dictated by the database logics that drive the combination of POCs and to a large extent dependent on the individual decisions by the user-interactors. This leads to a manifold ‘Chinese-box’ situation in which each ‘story’ and (subjective) documentary glimpse is a miniature narrative in itself (a SNU in the literal sense – a ‘smallest narrative unit’) which at the same time exists within a larger uniquely told story keyed to the interaction of the producer/curator, the user-interactor and the database – which again is situated in an even much more complex ‘story-world’ of potentialities – i.e. the configuration as a whole.

This stance, which is also inherent in some modes of representation in documentary film, particularly the poetic and the reflexive mode according to Nichols, draws attention to inherent ambiguities and contradictions, to the unsaid and the often otherwise unacknowledged of documentary experiences. It underlines the mediated nature of all experience – whether mediated through our senses (which are for example challenged by the white noise in the very first clip) or through media ‘in the narrower sense’ of technical *apparati*. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin not only ponder on what makes new media ‘new’ (or rather to which extend new media remediate ‘older’ media such as film), they also introduce the term ‘hypermediacy.’ “In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy,”⁴⁴ i.e. our longing for really getting to the core of things. “In all its various forms, the logic of hypermediacy expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as a ‘real space’ that lies beyond mediation.”⁴⁵

As such, there is more to the hypermedial interface of interactive documentary – and this goes for such opaque and poetic, self-reflexive interactive documentary forms as Korsakow documentaries in particular: They are more than only a functional retrieval surface (which is led to absurdity in Korsakow due to opaque key-wording) or an aesthetic feature. Rather, the interface can be considered as being part of the ‘documentary argument’ (or the special kind of argument Korsakow documentaries suggest, considering their non-linear and non-causal layout)⁴⁶ – and

maybe, this is not too inadequate a way to help one find provisional answers to the essential questions of life is to ask the right questions and to be aware of the mediated nature of the propositions we get through the complex openness of impressions and experiences – given the complex and volatile nature of such issues?

RACING HOME AS PHILOSOPHIC THINKING THROUGH KORSAKOW

These considerations on epistemology bring us right into the core of issues of philosophical thinking *through* and *within* the Korsakow configuration – namely what it means to author material with a fuzzy algorithmic authoring tool and to explore this material as user-interactor. And it brings us to two further interrelated issues. Firstly: Are we dealing here with a digital *tool*, a means to convey documentary experiences? Or does Korsakow rather present a *method*, a way of thinking through things by thinking through media?⁴⁷ And secondly: Does the experience of ‘doing documentary’ (as *process*) with and through interactive, procedural documentary have the potential to be more ‘truthful’ to the functioning of our reasoning and the complex entanglements of issues ‘in the world’ than efforts to force material and ideas into a linear sequence, a ‘*line* of thought?’ This ultimately leads to the question: Are we on the threshold of a realm where we are moving from a *representational* paradigm of documentary to a *performative* one?

All these issues are related to the question of the algorithmic nature of Korsakow – its medial algorithmic ontology.⁴⁸ In Korsakow, the role of the author significantly changes: The author passes control to the system and to rule-driven automatized algorithmic editing procedures. Though it is still the author who assigns strings of key-words to the SNUs, and though it is still the author who edits the linear sequence within the SNUs – which means that she/he can make micro-arguments in these audio-visual vignettes –, a large part of the agency is handed to the system. Which SNUs are actually matching when the Korsakow documentary is ‘performed’ is only *partially* visible and ‘trackable’ for the ‘author’ or curator, as she/he loses the *total* overview of the multiple combinations of possible connections. As Gaudenzi observes, a “field of possible relations”⁴⁹ is opened – for both user-interactors and authors –, and as Nash describes it in the case of interactive documentary, the potential of such configurations does not lie in “the temporal ordering of elements” but rather in “the comparisons and associations that the user [as well as the author] is invited to make between the documentary’s elements.”⁵⁰

This is also the idea that initially motivated Florian Thalhoffer, the creator of the Korsakow system, to develop Korsakow. He wanted to develop a tool “that can re-shuffle your mind; even as an author I want to do this, to change my thoughts so that I get a different angle on things. [...]”

[W]hen I make a documentary with Korsakow, I don't really structure a single reality, I just think about the connections between things and then different experiences come out of that."⁵¹

This ultimately brings us to the core of doing documentary with Korsakow. One can argue that Korsakow becomes a *method of thinking* – a 'tool for thought' rather than a digital editing software. Korsakow provides a framework for pondering about things differently from in a linear philosophical treatise with a line of argument or a linear documentary film. This relates both to the interaction of the documentary 'author' and the experience and the user. In its contingency and due to the opaque key-wording in Korsakow, there is also a certain serendipity: user-interactors can only *guess* what the selected SNU might bring; definite *knowing* beforehand is never possible. The same is true for the documentary author: she/he can only specify and determine *probable* connections – but the *actual realization* of a documentary experience is always a unique momentum.⁵² As such, Korsakow emulates in its logics the (il-)logics of life: though certain actions might lead to certain re-actions, one can never be sure what will come next. Life in fact is not working on the base of linear, mono-directional one-hundred percent predictable chains of cause and effect. As such, the seemingly 'un-plotted' but deeply networked Korsakow documentaries emulate the logics of 'reality'. That said, despite the serendipity user-interactors have to give themselves to, Korsakow documentaries are still not *completely* arbitrary.

The configuration becomes a kind of laboratory to think *through* digital media – a feature that is important for the material Marian McMahon gathered when trying to come to terms with her hometown's racial past, when digging into the collective memory of her town and her own childhood memories, and which was essential for Phil Hoffman, his tribute to his partner and his grieving over her death. Hence, with regard to concepts of interactive storytelling, memory and commemoration, of perception and cognition as well as existential topics as death and remembrance, Korsakow opens options to (re)mediate material and to meditate on it at the same time – both as an author and as a user-interactor. Or as Thalhoffer puts it: "Korsakow is a method of arguing, a tool to make sense of the world. *Watching* Korsakow Films, and even more *making* Korsakow Films is an exercise for the brain to see different connections, to find new patterns in things."⁵³ At this point, the train of thought comes full circle – presenting the idea that Korsakow despite its non-linearity and despite the non-causal train of thoughts which are triggered, can be considered a very specific but potentially insightful method or tool for thought and unexpected emerging 'lines' or rather 'serpentine of argument'.

CONCLUSION – COMPLEXITY, CONTINGENCY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL-ONTOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENT IN THE STRANGE CASE OF KORSAKOW DOCUMENTARY

In the introduction, I postulated that Korsakow documentaries do not only question the representation of ‘the real’ – they question the documentary endeavour and contribute to what Murphie has described as the “changed [...] sense of sense itself.”⁵⁴ As the discussion of both the epistemological and media-ontological nature of Korsakow documentary as a very specific case of interactive database documentary has shown, documentary practices in new media ecologies potentially provide a fresh perspective on the documentary endeavour as such as well as upon classic and post-modern concerns of philosophy.

Renov notes that many strands in currently emerging documentary *theory* (especially in the field of interactive documentary and new media documentary)⁵⁵ are rather interested in the “contingency, hybridity, knowledge as situated and particular, identity as ascribed and performed” and how documentary potentially can overcome the modernist rationalist’s “dreams of universal reason.”⁵⁶ Instead of trying further to find “Truth in History”, instead of trying to develop protocols of inquiry, and instead of a belief in “disinterested knowledge,”⁵⁷ in Korsakow documentaries, one potentially explores ways to convey the complexity of experience; they experiment with alternatives to exposing some straight forward, logically unfolding documentary argument with ways of thinking *in* and *through* documentary in ways that are more adept to the actual working of our cognition and reasoning.

Due to the algorithmically complex ontology of the configuration, the stress of the affective interval and the unruly application of database logics which circumvents the possibility of linear, transparent causal storytelling and narration and which includes the loss of control over the narrative on the part of the ‘author’ as well as the serendipity of the exploration of an ephemeral texture on the part of the interactor – in short: due to this very nature of Korsakow documentary, both author and user are thrown back to the post-modern condition of contingency and disconcerting experience of *not*-knowing. Self-reflexivity as well as the hypermediacy of the medium are employed as “means of counteracting the tendency of documentaries to wear the mantle of epistemic authority, and to counteract the supposed gullibility of spectators,” as Plantinga puts it, and as he continues: skepticism “often favor[s] reflexive techniques that remind spectators of the mediated nature of documentary discourse, make the implicit perspectives of the filmmakers apparent, and perhaps even introduce a bit of epistemic humility into the film.”⁵⁸

In Korsakow, authors and users have to face the contingency of life, the multi-layeredness of realities and the fact that in order to detect some kind of meaning in seemingly random patterns, to make sense of things and sense of sense itself, it is sometimes as vital to find the right questions as it is necessary to strive for definite answers. What kinds of temporal propositions about vital questions of our being in the world will arise from this intersection of philosophy and new media documentary practices is an open-ended question. Whatever the case, in these strange times of global precariousness – whether political or social, whether pandemic or environmental – the need for ‘tools for thought’ such as Korsakow which can facilitate engagement with uncertainties, contingencies and the fact that one can never predict what the flux of life will bring, is surely stronger than ever.

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¹ Andrew Murphie, “Making sense: the transformation of documentary by digital and networked media,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 3 (2014): 188.

² Judith Aston, and Sandra Gaudenzi, “Interactive documentary: setting the field,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 126.

³ In the following, we will differentiate between ‘reality’ in inverted commas as a universal philosophical concept and different facets of reality in the sense of experiential phenomenological world around us that we encounter in life (respectively subjective constructions of what one experiences to be real).

⁴ Cf. Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁵ Franziska Weidle, “Korsakow Perspective(s): Rethinking Documentary Knowledge in Digital Multilinear Environments,” *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 10, no. 5 (2016): 110.

⁶ As especially Miles and Aston and also Gaudenzi observe, multiple, complex and fluid or ‘messy’ entanglements are the heart of interactive documentary. In their view, “interactive media creates a dynamic relationship between authors, users, technology and environment that allows for fluidity, [the] emergence and co-emergence of reality.” Miles even goes one step further when he postulates that interactive documentary – especially those of the Korsakow type – do “not seem to feel a need to domesticate this messiness [of the world] by accounting for it by attributing some sort of theoretical or explanatory *primum movens*.” In these observations, we find condensed the existential problem that faces any work defined as ‘documentary’ – whether interactive or otherwise: those who perceive the documentary artefact usually expect that there is some form of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ that anchors the storytelling, and even Aston and Gaudenzi, as already said, characterize interactive documentary as works that are based on “an intention to document the ‘real.’” As will be shown in the following, the key to a better understanding of this paradox lies in taking into account both the level of the documentary narration and what is represented *and* the reality of the process of documenting – which includes in interactive artefacts *per definitionem* the active

engagement and participation of all agents involved – also the ‘viewer’ or rather user-interactor, who in contrast to a cinematic audience in a traditional screening plays an essential role in the unfolding of the documentary experience.

Adrian Miles, “a murmuration is not a story,” in *The Material Turn and Interactive Documentary*, ed. Adrian Miles (s.l.: UnPublish, 2017), 3.

Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”, 126.

⁷ Due to this quite comprehensive approach to philosophy, the focus of this paper examines the interrelations between philosophy, digital media, interactive documentary practices and the making of sense. Hereby, the discussion will range from metaphysical issues (being concerned with the fundamental nature of ‘reality,’ existence and being as such and their representation/construction in/through documentary) to epistemology (the question how we think to know things, closely connected to the documentary truth claim but also to the question of how we know things by doing documentary); further, we will touch upon logics (namely what has been described as ‘database logic,’ aesthetics, historiography, narratology and ethics.

Cf, William Luers, “Plotting the database,” in: *DNA Anthology*, ed. Matt Soar and Monika Gagnon, published 2014, accessed December 17, 2020, <http://dnaanthology.com/anvc/dna/plotting-the-database>.

⁸ For the concept of tools for thought, cf, Howard Rheingold, *Tools for thought. The history and future of mind-expanding technology* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); cf, also Judith Aston and Stefano Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary,” *Alphaville. Journal of Film and Screen Media* 15, (2018) 63-93.

⁹ Cf, among others Michael Renov, *The subject of documentary* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); cf, Michael Renov, “Towards a Poetic of Documentary,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012) 12-36; cf, Carl Plantinga, “Documentary,” in *The Routledge companion to philosophy and film*, ed. Paisley Livingston (London: Routledge, 2009) 494-504; cf, Tia DeNora, *Making sense of reality. Culture and perception in everyday life* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

¹⁰ Cf, Lev Manovich, “Database as Symbolic Form,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 5, no. 2 (1999): 80-99; cf, also Lev Manovich, *The language of new media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); cf, Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*.

¹¹ Cf, Adrian Miles, “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 67-82.

Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”; cf, Matt Soar, “Making (with) the Korsakow System: Database Documentaries as Articulation and Assemblage,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 154-218.

¹² Phil Hoffman, and Marian McMahon, *Racing Home*, interactive documentary launched 2014, <http://racinghome.ca/>.

¹³ In this context, it needs to be said that though interactivity, non-linearity and procedurality are defining characteristics of ‘the digital,’ these properties are not *exclusive* features of digital media or works of art. This becomes clear if one widens the scope and thinks of (post-)modern novels (such as Borges formative *Garden of forking paths* [1941] or Calvino’s *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* [1979]), of surrealist works of art such as Buñuel’s *Chien andalou* [1929], of non-linearity and complex plot structures in movies which Buckland (2009) and Elsaesser describe as puzzle film or mind game movies (such as Nolan’s *Tenet* [2000] or *Memento* [2001]) or artistic interventions in the style of the Dada movement which still live on in current movements of performance art. However, one cannot deny that there is a tendency to non-linear complex works in correlation with the proliferation of digital media practices. More and more complex plot structures and non-linear serial narratives emerge if one thinks of many *Netflix* productions or pluri-linear cross- and trans-media narratives which comprise television on online communities (e.g. HBO’s notorious *Lost*).

Cf, Thomas Elsaesser, “The Mind-Game Film,” in *Puzzle Films*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 13-41.

¹⁴ Korsakow, released in 2009, is a software for creating browser-based dynamic documentaries. Thalhofer programmed this tool to produce a documentary essay about the consequences of alcohol abuse. In the course of his research, Thalhofer came across the medical diagnosis of the Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome – a form of neurologic consequential dementia due to heavy alcoholism. This syndrome is characterized by short-term memory loss accompanied by confabulation (i.e. the production of fabricated,

distorted or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world) and a compulsion to invent stories which – however – seem to be out of adequacy and focus. Thalhoffer borrowed the name for his both his first Korsakow film *Korsakow Syndrom* and for software which emulates at first sight the production of confabulated, difficult to access ‘stories.’

¹⁵Cf, Bill Nichols, *Introduction to documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ As will become clear in the following, non-linear interactive documentary configurations of the Korsakow type differ not only from linear documentary *film* but also from more straightforward pluri-linear (but still linear) didactic forms of interactive documentaries. The most obvious feature of Korsakow documentaries is that they rely on contingency and probabilities which are generated by the programmatic engine that drives the documentary experience. This causes a non-linear experience (which is to be distinguished from pluri-linear experiences which are less complex as they ‘only’ offer more than one path through the story-world – but in this story-world, paths are still distinguishable). As Miles notes, “Korsakow is not an engine for building informational, didactic, instrumental interactive documentaries, but kludges together, within the constraints that programmatic media requires, a system to enable generative, associative patterns to emerge amongst its parts while the work is being authored and played.”

Adrian Miles, “Materialism and Interactive Documentary: Sketch Notes,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 3 (2014): 211.

¹⁷ Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”, 126.

¹⁸ As will be seen in detail later, this shifts the focus from the epistemology of the documentary ‘content’ and its relation to some existing ‘outer reality’ to the ontology of the documentary process – the reality of doing documentary. This again, stresses the role of the user-interactor without whom this facet of the documentary ‘reality’ would not come into existence, and it adds a further twist to multiple authorship in Korsakow: As Cohen proclaims in his essay which already in its title “From Authorship to Authoring in Remediated/Remixed Documentary” carries his main argument (and as other new media documentary scholars observe), the status of authorship as well as individual agency need to be rethought in interactive documentary configurations. The role of an interactive documentary producer is closer to that of a *curator* or designer rather than to that of a classic filmic *auteur*, and the opening of the form to a ‘live’ response and productivity by user-interactors changes the role of the authorial presence in the work and the nature of the work itself – especially with regard to documentary texture and its narrative logic: The multiplication of authoring instances (primary authors, user-interactors and algorithms) and the stress of contingency and process disrupt the temporality of the narrative delivering the ‘story’ in the ever-present ‘now’ based upon the choices made from that presented by the narratology of the software. Cf, Hart Cohen, “Database Documentary. From Authorship to Authoring in Remediated/Remixed Documentary,” *Culture Unbound* no. 4 (2012), 327-346.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis see Anna Wiehl, *The ‘New’ Documentary Nexus. Networked|Networking in Interactive Assemblages* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). Excerpts from the chapter of the book regarding the description of the working-mechanisms of Korsakow are published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²⁰ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 27.

²¹ Adrian Miles, “Programmatic statements for a faceted videography,” in *Video Vortex reader. Moving Images Beyond Youtube*, ed. Geert Lovink (Amsterdam: Inst. of Network Cultures, 2008), 149.

²² Seth Ken, “Netvideo, Nonvideo, Newvideo: Designing a Multilinear Nonnarrative Form for Interactive Documentary,” (PhD diss., RMIT University, 2014), 26.

²³ Though Korsakow in this aspect deviates from most other emerging interactive documentary practices, it is nevertheless extremely illuminating to have a close look at this kind of doing documentary, as it self-reflexively ponders on the documentary mission and the (im)possibility of representing ‘the Real’ – or rather (re)constructing documentary realities. As will be seen, the self-reflexive nature of most Korsakow configurations – and of *Racing Home* in particular – highlights the potential and the challenges of interactive documentary as an emerging phenomenon and it questions – in ultimate consequence – the hegemony of the concept of the narratability of ‘the Real’, the concept of the linearity of thought in doing documentary and the status of documentary text itself.

²⁴ Craig Hight, “Software as co-creators in interactive documentary,” in *i-docs – The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary*, ed. Sandra Gaudenzi, Mandy Rose, and Judith Aston (New York: Wallflower, 2017), 88.

²⁵ Miles, “Materialism and Interactive Documentary”, 209.

²⁶ Cf. Axel Bruns, “From presumption to produsage,” in *Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy*, ed. Ruth Towse, and Christine Handke (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014), 67-78.

²⁷ Cf. Nichols, *Introduction to documentary*.

²⁸ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 499.

²⁹ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 499.

³⁰ Actually, in *Racing Home*, we are dealing with a multi-authored first-person documentary: Marian’s original view of her sense of home, as well as Phil’s coping with Marian’s death – not to forget the at least co-authoring and co-producing instance of the user-interactor who tentatively explores the glimpses on ‘reality’ presented in the SNUs and who makes his/her very individual ‘sense’ of the material.

³¹ Miles in an interview with Weidle, 26 October 2015, quoted in Franziska Weidle, “Gaining control over the loss of it. Software as focusing media in digital visual ethnography,” *Social Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2019): 24.

³² For a critique of the reception of web documentaries cf. among others Siobhan O’Flynn, “Documentary’s metamorphic form: Webdoc, interactive, transmedia, participatory and beyond,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 141–157.

³³ Roderick Coover, “Visual research and the new documentary,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 204.

³⁴ Cf. Aston and Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony”, 64 f.

³⁵ Murphie, “Making Sense”, 188.

³⁶ Miles, “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies,” 204.

³⁷ Hight underlines that it is useful to make a distinction between “‘making meaning’ which is possible through the spatial and temporal combination of any variety of media elements, and the more difficult strategic exercise of encouraging users to ‘make sense’ through their engagement with specific pathways through media fragments.” This distinction points at the difference between the epistemic driven striving for deeper insight and the mere cognitive deciphering of information. (Hight, “Software as co-creators in interactive documentary,” 89.

³⁸ Cf. Anna Wiehl, “Beyond ‘Toolness’: Korsakow Documentary as a Methodology for Plurivocal Interventions in Complexity,” *Alphaville. Journal of Film and Screen Media* 15 (2018): 33-48; cf. Wiehl, *The ‘New’ Documentary Nexus. Networked|Networking in Interactive Assemblages*.

³⁹ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. by Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946): 169.

⁴⁰ These re-actions can at least partly be directed by the documentary author if one thinks back to the possibility of photographic framing which is e.g. the case in the close-ups in the second SNU.

⁴¹ Miles, “Click, Think, Link: Interval and Affective Narrative.”

⁴² Cf. Miles, “Click, Think, Link: Interval and Affective Narrative.”

⁴³ In the context of *living documentaries* Sandra Gaudenzi even speaks of *auto-poesis*, which she directly relates to inter-activity as a sort of making, of ‘acting’: “Inter-activity is therefore seen as our fundamental way of being, our way of relating and existing through doing. If we extend this logic to interactive artefacts, such as interactive documentaries, then our interacting with them is a way to relate, and construct, our world. Also, if life is defined as self-organisation, adaptivity and change through inter-action, then the interactive documentary can be seen as a living entity.” (Sandra Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary. From representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary,” (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, London, 2013): 21.

This train of thought again strengthens the argument of ‘the reality of documenting’ – which has to be distinguished from ‘the reality documented’ (which, according to many post-modern thinkers is rather elusive. As not only Foucault stresses, any form of knowledge is always to be seen as a medial effect deriving from cultural techniques, institutions and ‘the poeology’ of the medial.

⁴⁴ Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*, 34.

⁴⁵ Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*, 14.

⁴⁶ For the notion of ‘interface as argument,’ cf. among others Soar, “Making (with) the Korsakow System”, 156

⁴⁷ For interactive documentaries as research method, cf. Aston and Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony.”

⁴⁸ In this context Miles speaks also of the material side. For a detailed analysis of his media ecological considerations which are influenced by new materialism and Actor-Network-Theory, cf. Adrian Miles, *Digital materiality: making, networks, media*, (Melbourne: Australian Screen Production and Education

Research Association, 2013); cf, also Miles, “Click, Think, Link”; cf, Miles. “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies”.

⁴⁹ Gaudenzi, *Living Documentary*, 87.

⁵⁰ Kate Nash, “Modes of Interactivity: Analysing a Webdoc,” *Media, Culture and Society* 34, no 2 (2012): 205.

⁵¹ Kate Nash, and Florian Thalhofer, “An Interview with Florian Thalhofer, Media Artist and Documentary Maker,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 195.

⁵² The concept of the duality of form and matter, of the real and the virtual, of the actual and the potential connects to the reflections by Lévi which again link back to Greek scholastics, especially Aristotle and his *Metaphysics*, particularly Book IX, chapters 6-8. Lévi’s line of argument is based on the assumption that what is currently described as the virtual and what is usually called ‘the Real’ (or in philosophical terms the actual) are only two sides of the same coin: “Le mot virtuel vient du latin médiéval *virtualis*, lui-même issu de *virtus*, force, puissance. Dans la philosophie scolastique, est virtuel ce qui existe en puissance et non en acte. Le virtuel tend à s’actualiser, sans être passé cependant à la concrétisation effective ou formelle.”

Pierre Lévy, *Qu’est-ce que le virtuel?* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989): 12 ; cf. also Aristotle, *Metaphysics. Book Theta*, translated by Stephen Makin (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 2010).

Though both sides are interdependent, one needs to discriminate between them: Aristotle differentiates in his *Metaphysics* between ‘the Real’ as the physical existence or ‘thingness’ and ‘the Truth’ or creative arrangement of the signification of ‘thingness,’ i.e. its actuality. At the same time, he introduces the distinction between matter and form in terms of synchrony: The matter of a substance is the materiality it is made of; the form is the way this material is put together so that a whole is formed which then features certain characteristics. Yet, applying this differentiation *diachronically*, across time, it connects the duality of matter and its composite form to another key Aristotelian distinction – that between potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*entelecheia* or *energeia*) – which leads to the procedural nature of interactive documentary.

Moreover – as to the question of the documentary argument and the documentary truth claim – one must not forget that in this scholastic tradition, ‘the Real’ is not identical with ‘the Truth’ it constitutes. Transposing these ideas into our evolving (media) culture, DeNora deduces from this in *Making sense of reality* that “realities are often multiple and are realized through artful practices that weave together words, acts, objects, meanings, perceptions and people” (DeNora, *Making sense of reality*, 125). This matches the central idea of Korsakow configurations that a multiply layered ‘reality’ or rather co-existing realities (with different probabilities) are in a never-ending flux, subject to mediation and remediation, performative dialogic negotiation and renegotiation in which the database logics, the (inter-)actions of the agents in the configuration and the material itself constitute the (potential) range of actualized or now focused trains of thought in the complex assemblage.

For the notion of actuality and potentiality as well as Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, see also *Stanford University*, “Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” accessed December 12, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu>.

⁵³ Florian Thalhofer, “Korsakow Film – Korsakow Institut,” accessed December 12, 2020, <http://korsakow.tv/formats/korsakow-film/>; emphasis A.W.;

⁵⁴ Murphie, “Making Sense,” 188.

⁵⁵ What is important to note is that we are speaking here of documentary *theory*, not so much of practices, as experimental documentary approaches such as Korsakow or projects at the intersection of artistic intervention and artistic research are nonetheless far from being mainstream and have to face reluctance on the part of audiences/users. In fact, one rather can observe a rise of factual entertainment formats which still pretend to provide a direct access to ‘truth’ and ‘life as it is.’

⁵⁶ Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” 136.

⁵⁷ Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” 136-137.

⁵⁸ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 501.