



MONASH University

Beyond Story: Ricoeurian Hermeneutics and Interactive Documentary

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Bachelor of Arts (Photography) with Distinction
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Abstract

While interactive documentary offers a rich and refreshing approach to documentary, there is an important way in which interactive documentary theory can be meaningfully extended. The thesis asks this question: what is interactivity in interactive documentary? Existing approaches to interactivity in interactive documentary tend to stem from the fields of new media and documentary studies. These fields are able to broadly account for the material relations inherent in the interactive documentary. While these fields offer a nuanced and detailed examination of interactive documentary technologies and the physical capabilities they provide their audiences, the fields of new media and documentary studies are less adept at capturing the user's lived experience. This thesis argues that such lived experience is an important aspect of interactive documentary that is under-represented in the current literature. The importance of the user extends beyond how meaning is construed from their experience of the interactive documentary—the user's role cascades into technical and material considerations as well. Given that certain interactive modes rely on physical user contribution, the technical capacity of these interactive documentaries thus remain latent without a user.

This thesis takes as its theoretical grounding the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, which offers a powerful combination of hermeneutics and phenomenology, along with an extraordinarily thorough treatment of narrative. Through developing and redeploying Ricoeur's concepts of mimesis, time, narrative, history and fiction, an interpretative method for understanding and

producing interactive documentary can be structured in a way that can account for both diverse digital and non-digital formats and narrative complexity, without sacrificing the analysis of documentary's sociopolitical context or the materiality of interactive documentary.

A reworking of Ricoeurian thought intervenes precisely in those ways in which existing theory requires buttressing; a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective provides the conceptual tools to address questions around how the user makes sense of the interactive element in interactive documentary. The benefit of this thesis is not just as a contribution to interactive documentary theory, but also as an examination of how interactive documentary can challenge and extend Ricoeur's philosophy through interactive documentary's myriad new avenues of storytelling.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Introduction

I. Setting the scene

You slip a backpack and headset on, and suddenly it's the 6th of June 1944.

You are on a boat headed to Omaha beach, filled to the brim with other terrified recruits. You turn to the young (underaged?) man next to you and try to tease out as much information as possible. He tries to answer your questions as well as he can, which range from the philosophical to the mundane. Where are we? What role does the army serve? How many water bottles were you issued with?

The sound of guns and smell of smoke gets stronger. You reflect on how lucky you are to be able to take the headset off whenever you would like. Despite this, you cannot help but get caught up in the anxious energy now gripping your boat. A loud bang causes you to jolt. Turning, you see your new friend lying lifeless on the floor of the boat, as the rest of the group charge past him through to the beach. You rationalise that he was just a virtualisation, but you feel a pang of sympathy nonetheless. After all, 'this really happened'.

You pause here, and ask to see a general. The sound of gunfire ebbs away as one materialises in front of you, beginning to fill you in on the intricacies of amphibious warfare in the 1940s. Not quite your cup of tea, so you blink and are now standing in a German bunker. You ask nobody in particular how many bunkers were on that particular coast, and you suddenly find yourself flying high above the ground with a birds-eye view, your vision augmented with facts and figures. Curiosity sated, you then ask to resume your journey, and suddenly you return to your compatriots from the boat, now staring down a machine gun nest. White knuckles on your rifle, you prepare for the whistle. Here you go...

How much of the above experience would you— should you— call ‘documentary’?

What parts would you call fictional? And is the scenario described above more or less fictional than a film?

Is it closer to Robert Capa’s photographs of the D-day landing, or to *Saving Private Ryan*?

Does your ability to choose your own path through this experience and to pause its inhumanity at will trivialise such a sober, historic event?

The term ‘interactive documentary’ has recently been coined to describe texts in the genre of documentary that achieve this documentary status in a way that empowers the user to click, write, speak, draw, walk or otherwise navigate and explore the text.¹ While current interactive documentaries are not yet at the technical level of my D-day example, interactive documentaries allow the user² to alter what would be fixed relations in other media with more traditional modes of interaction. Instead of sitting down and watching a 90-minute documentary with a set order (this scene follows that scene, follows that scene), the interactive documentary is predicated on the user’s ability to choose their own path— to varying degrees.

While interactive documentary offers a rich and refreshing approach to

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the term text to refer to the interactive documentary. Text does not exclusively refer to the black words on the white page of a book.

² As much as a book has a reader, much of the interactive documentary literature uses the word ‘user’ to describe the human interactor fulfilling the role of reader/ viewer/ listener in other texts such as the novel/ movie/ song.

documentary, there is an important way in which interactive documentary theory can be meaningfully extended. This thesis aims to address interactivity in interactive documentary, providing a new theoretical account of its nature that is richer than previous conceptions.

Existing approaches to interactivity in interactive documentary tend to stem from the fields of new media and documentary studies. These fields are able to broadly account for the material relations inherent in the interactive documentary. Kate Nash writes of an environment in which “technologies, modes, platforms and infrastructures offer the potential for new ways of conceptualising the documentary project and new means for ‘audiences’ (as viewers, navigators, users or collaborators) to engage with these forms”.³ While these fields offer a nuanced and detailed examination of interactive documentary technologies and the physical capabilities they provide their audiences, the fields of new media and documentary studies are less adept at capturing the user’s lived experience. This thesis argues that such lived experience is an important aspect of interactive documentary that is under-

³ Nash, Kate, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes, “Introduction: New Documentary Ecologies.” In *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, edited by Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes, 1-7. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 2.

represented in the current literature. Consider the D-day example. Without a user, there would be no progression of the story — no increased understanding of the historical events, or even the phenomenological pang of pity at seeing the soldier on the boat die. The importance of the user extends beyond how meaning is construed from their experience of the interactive documentary — the user's role cascades into technical and material considerations as well. Without the user, the interactive documentary is thus stranded at the first stage. Given that certain interactive modes rely on physical user contribution, the technical capacity of these interactive documentaries thus remain latent without a user.

Interactive documentary theory has intersected with other theoretical positions, such as new materialism. Adrian Miles uses the new materialism to “sketch a method for how to think about the material specificity of what interactive documentary is”.⁴ Miles' approach examines the materiality of “this dance between the programmatic, video, sound, author, user, and the processual logic of the computational”.⁵ While all of these areas do interact

⁴ Miles, Adrian. “Materialism and Interactive Documentary: Sketch Notes.” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 3 (2014): 205.

⁵ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 216.

with each-other, this thesis argues that the user is more than a mechanism fulfilling a role (as new materialist thought tends to suggest), but that instead their phenomenological experience is a vital component to understanding interaction in interactive documentary. The aim is thus to introduce another theoretical position in order to generate conceptual tools to better describe what interaction is in interactive documentary.

This thesis takes as its theoretical grounding the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, which offers a powerful combination of hermeneutics and phenomenology, along with an extraordinarily thorough treatment of narrative. Through developing and redeploying Ricoeur's concepts of mimesis, time, narrative, history and fiction, an interpretative method for understanding and producing interactive documentary can be structured in a way that can account for both diverse digital and non-digital formats and narrative complexity, without sacrificing the analysis of documentary's sociopolitical context or the materiality of interactive documentary.

By examining the human aspect of interactivity in the interactive documentary, there is the potential to entirely reorient how we look at

interactive documentary holistically. By understanding what interactivity is in interactive documentary, we are able to understand how we make sense of interactive documentary. Nash elaborates on this, writing that in order to understand what links interactivity to documentary “we look for continuity at the level of social function, rather than in terms of textual conventions or production practices”.⁶ While this is helpful in order to establish a link between documentary status and interactive documentary, if the connection between interactivity and social function is not made explicit, then questions are raised — Nash herself asks “to what extent [do audiences experience a sense of agency when they interact with documentary] and what are the impacts of this on documentary reception? Similarly, how are we to evaluate the relative importance of structural and content participation in documentary?”.⁷ A reworking of Ricoeurian thought intervenes precisely in those ways in which existing theory requires buttressing; a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective provides the conceptual tools to address questions around how the user makes sense of the interactive element in interactive documentary. The benefit of this thesis is not just as a contribution

⁶ Nash, Kate. “What is interactivity for? The social dimension of web-documentary participation.” *Continuum* 28, no. 3 (2014): 384.

⁷ Nash, “What is interactivity for?”, 393.

to interactive documentary theory, but also as an examination of how interactive documentary can challenge and extend Ricoeur's philosophy through interactive documentary's myriad new avenues of storytelling.

There are several elements to this approach which we must first address in this introductory chapter. First, the Ricoeurian approach of this thesis will be explained and justified. Then, the thesis will be briefly oriented in terms of disciplinarity and areas of concern. Finally, the argument of the thesis will be presented, chapter by chapter. The introduction will close with a brief discussion of the significance of the research conducted, as well as the value it brings to the broader disciplines in which it is situated.

II. On Ricoeur

This thesis puts forth the argument that the material substrate⁸ of interactive documentary should not be the only theoretical consideration, because phenomenological experience and hermeneutics are also vital components to understanding what interactive documentary is and does. I will briefly provide some context here, in order to show why Ricoeurian

⁸ Such as the "computational architecture... its media, network, authors, users, screens, operating systems, servers, and protocols". (Miles, "Sketch Notes", 207.)

thought is particularly adept at addressing the question ‘what is interactivity in interactive documentary?’.

Ricoeur’s approach blends phenomenology with hermeneutics, his main influences being Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel.⁹ Ricoeur was a contemporary of Emmanuel Levinas and Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Ricoeur shares links to Husserlian structural phenomenology, he broadened the notion of a text to cover the entire scope of human experience— thus rendering the world not something which can have its essence grasped directly, but instead as a text full of symbols. This approach— Ricoeur’s hermeneutic turn— emphasises the role of interpretation as central to how we phenomenologically understand the world around us.

Ricoeur’s phenomenology is able to speak to the experience of freedom and self-determination,¹⁰ themes crucially important for interactive documentary. The phenomenological experience of an interactive documentary describes the

⁹ Charles E. Reagan provides a substantial philosophical biography of Ricoeur.

¹⁰ In *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricoeur develops what he terms an “eidetic of the will”— a phenomenological investigation into consciousness, body and world. (Ricoeur, Paul. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Trans. Erazim V. Kohak. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966.)

user's interpretation of the documentary according to what they experience (whether, for example, they perceive themselves to be making free choices in navigating through the text), not based on the latent possibilities within the text itself. In this way Ricoeur's phenomenology can account for the experience of absence— when a user must choose one pathway over another. This interweaving of traditional textual analysis and a renewed approach to the role of the reader (or user) lends itself to the development of an interpretative structure for interactive documentary.

Ricoeur presents a particularly suitable field of thought for this thesis to draw on. While names like Derrida and Deleuze are now mainstays of documentary and film theory, Ricoeur has not enjoyed the same popularity. From his massive body of work, to his tendency to synthesise two or more preceding arguments, to his detail-oriented and exacting writing style, to his dearth of writing on digital and connected forms of media, Ricoeur has been under-utilised. This thesis aims to encourage further exploration of Ricoeurian thought. There is much potential for transposing and transforming his ideas

to generate new knowledge within current media environments.¹¹

Many of Ricoeur's ideas make him appealing to an exploration of interactive documentary. His writing is structured according to a perpetual dialectic of explanation and understanding¹²— where we are constantly interpreting the polysemic nature of the world and of the text, which accounts for the myriad pathways through interactive documentaries. Ricoeur's work on semantic autonomy¹³ allows for us to take into account the phenomenological impact of the interactive documentary as a discursive whole, even when constituted of varying elements. Holding the experiential

¹¹ Fanfan Chen's 2014 paper, "Toward a Hermeneutic Narratology of Interactive Digital Storytelling" stands as an example of applying Ricoeur to contemporary media environments. Within this paper, Chen describes Ricoeur's threefold mimesis as a key insight into how "the player's real world fuses with the configured virtual world". (Chen, Fanfan. "Toward a Hermeneutic Narratology of Interactive Digital Storytelling." In *Interactive Storytelling*, 125–133. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*. Berlin: Springer, 2014 132). While this paper does not speak directly to interactive documentary, Chen demonstrates a compatibility between Ricoeur and broader interactive fields, which this thesis aims to build on.

¹² Explanation and understanding stand for dual claims. For explanation, the claim that "there is no epistemological break between the natural sciences and the human sciences". (Reagan, Charles E. "The dialectic between explanation and understanding." *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 3 (1989): 289.) On the other hand, 'understanding' claims that "social sciences are irreducible to the natural sciences". (Reagan, "explanation and understanding", 289.)

Transposing this idea onto Ricoeur's own work, we find that a Ricoeurian hermeneutics "[moves] between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism", showing that it is "always possible to argue for or against an interpretation", to "confront... arbitrate... and to seek for an agreement" between these interpretations. (Reagan, "explanation and understanding", 290.)

¹³ The separation between author (or producer), text and reader (or user).

and phenomenological component of interactive documentary together with the interpretative and hermeneutic elements puts forward a complex and considered view of interactive documentary.

III. On disciplinarity

This thesis is focussed on what interactivity is in interactive documentary. The multidisciplinary nature of this thesis is a consequence of the fact that none of these individual disciplines alone can solve the problem I am addressing. While the multidisciplinary approach offers many benefits through establishing dialectical relations across multiple fields to generate new and important knowledge, it also requires that some attention be directed towards disciplinary boundaries, locating the thesis within the extant corpus of academic work with which it engages.

This is not a thesis squarely in the field of new media studies, documentary studies, or Ricoeurian studies — although all three fields contribute to the conversation. It is easiest to show the position of this thesis through indicating some specific conversation partners. One of these is Kate Nash, who describes herself as interrogating “the concept of interactivity in the documentary

context, exploring existing thinking across documentary and new media studies”.¹⁴ This thesis is delivered in much the same context— engaging with the question ‘what is interaction in interactive documentary?’.

This thesis engages with and develops the work that has already been done on interactive documentary,¹⁵ and this work in turn draws on the fields of documentary studies and new media studies. In other words, this thesis engages with these two fields as a consequence of where the extant work on interactive documentary is situated. It is this conversation that I am joining— and their insights that I develop and occasionally question. The main participants in this conversation in addition to Nash are theorists like Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi and Adrian Miles (among others). Aston and Gaudenzi suggest that their work “provides a case study of practice-driven research, in which discussion around the act of developing and making interactive documentaries is seen as being a necessary prerequisite to

¹⁴ Nash, Kate. “Clicking on the World: Documentary Representation and Interactivity.” In *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, edited by Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes, 50–66. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 51.

¹⁵ Main anthologies here include *I-Docs: The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary* edited by Aston et al., *Digital Media and Documentary: Antipodean Approaches* edited by Adrian Miles, *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses* edited by Nash et al., and the upcoming *Documentary Culture and Interactive Media: Clicking on the Real* edited by Kate Nash.

subsequent theorizing in relation to their impact on the continuing evolution of the documentary genre”.¹⁶ Several years after publication of their article, this thesis meets their suggestion, building on the existing practice-driven research in order to theorise interactivity in interactive documentary. While Miles is uninterested in “audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects that can be examined for what they mean socially, culturally, politically and hermeneutically”, his “ontology of media... to address why, and how, the material and immaterial physicalness of all media matters” stands as a challenge to an integration of Ricoeurian thought.¹⁷ The materiality-driven ontology that Miles proposes has little in common with this thesis’ Ricoeurian approach, but demands a hermeneutics that respects the materiality of interactive documentary. The approaches of hermeneutics and materiality can be seen as complementary — each exploring different facets of the interactive documentary.

This project is not about interactivity in general — this would lead to discussion around call and response, interactivity between humans and

¹⁶ Aston, Judith, and Sandra Gaudenzi. “Interactive Documentary: Setting the Field.” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 125.

¹⁷ Miles, Adrian. “Matters of Concern and Interactive Documentary: Notes for a Computational Nonfiction.” *Studies in Documentary Film* 11, no. 2 (2017): 105.

objects, philosophy of ‘the same’ and so on, and would quickly balloon to the size of a whole shelf of books. The secondary literature on interactive documentary provides an incipient conversation to join which offers rich rewards for an extended theoretical approach as articulated in this thesis. We cannot use documentary studies or new media studies alone to adequately explore interactivity, as they do not fully consider the role of the user. So then, for pragmatic and strategic reasons, interactive documentary stands as an elegant way to narrow interactivity into a suitable thesis area.

Beyond this is my personal interest in interactive documentary. As a cinematographer, although not focussed on documentary or interactive documentary, I have a strong practical knowledge of image-making, and the power such images can have. I come to Ricoeur by way of a desire to understand how these images are narrativised and incorporated into our own experience. My interest in interactive documentary started as I desired to push the limits of this Ricoeurian approach to narrative. This thesis is a continuation of this desire, and encourages a robust relationship between interactive documentary and Ricoeur—allowing each to feed into a greater understanding of the other.

Ultimately, the value of the current exploration is in addressing the question of ‘how do we theorise interactivity in the context of interactive documentary?’. By taking the existing work on Ricoeur and deploying it in a new area, namely interactive documentary, this thesis solidifies the work being undertaken by the theorists such as those mentioned above, while also renewing and extending Ricoeur through this deployment to an area where he has not been used before.

IV. On examples

The field of interactive documentary is rapidly evolving and maturing; what was considered impossible a few short years ago is now common practice, and the 2020s will no doubt see the field progress in ways of which we have little inkling today. Foregrounding this rapid evolution is thus a requirement for theory which will not rapidly fall out of date. We must not theorise based on the current moment and whimsically believe that this will stand the judgement of time. Instead, at the risk of immediate irrelevance the current theory generated must be future-proofed to a degree, in order to extend theory to better account for the potential future formats of interactive

documentary. I intend to address this issue by exploring the limits of Ricoeur through thought experiments, rather than through current interactive documentaries.

This thesis has a strong theoretical focus, and many concerns raised in the thesis are speculative and future-facing. Within this thesis is a small number of limited cases, which are generally positioned as thought experiments rather than specific examples. My contention is that numerous examples of existing interactive documentaries would undermine my desire— and the need— to push the theoretical limits. They would not push these theoretical limits in any meaningful way, and their inclusion could contribute to the assumption that interactive documentary is unquestionably digital in nature.

The thesis aims to explore the limits of interpretation and narrative for both current and future forms of interactive documentary— establishing a theory with room to expand and grow as the interactive documentary format matures and changes. Interactive documentary is still a young field, and many interactive documentaries can appear quite rudimentary, compared to the narratological possibilities explored by the thesis. It is the role of the examples

to contextualise and ground the theory presented. However, as these case studies do not represent the hermeneutic limits of interactive documentary, to focus the discussion around specific examples runs the risk of limiting the theoretical possibilities afforded by a Ricoeurian hermeneutic.

It is, therefore, important to emphasise that the examples which do appear on occasion throughout the thesis do not represent limit cases by any means, and that for the demonstration of particular limits, I adopt thought experiments instead. I must emphasise that the primary function of the existing interactive documentaries presented in this thesis is to illustrate the argument.

The aim of this thesis is not to catalogue existing interactive documentaries. It is academically positioned to create and explain a theoretical framework for understanding interactive documentaries based on Ricoeurian hermeneutics. The thesis stands as a complement to what Aston and Gaudenzi term “practice-driven research”, and as such does not need to traverse the ground already covered through extended dialogue with

examples.¹⁸

V. Chapter overview

Part of this thesis' approach is to consider the cumulative power of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic. While interactivity in interactive documentary is explored in several stages (which the chapters mark), each chapter builds on the previous one(s) to develop an advanced and nuanced position. It is important to keep in mind the general aim of this thesis, which is to adapt and develop the hermeneutic method of Ricoeur in order to generate incisive and impactful new ideas in discussion with the interactive element of interactive documentary. The broader notions of Ricoeur's approach to time, narrative, history and fiction will be used to discuss how interactive documentary demands an alternative approach to narrative, textuality, heuristics and linearity.

This thesis is separated into five body chapters, as well as an introduction and conclusion. The thesis begins with a definition of interactive documentary. As part of this approach, the current state of scholarship is

¹⁸ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 125.

mapped, and potential areas which may benefit from a Ricoeurian analysis are highlighted. The remaining body chapters each take on an aspect of Ricoeurian thought, and are: 'Mimesis', 'Narrative', 'History and Fiction' and 'Time'. These four themes provide four perspectives on the present and future of interactivity in interactive documentary, and are ordered in such a way to address the hierarchy of concerns in developing a theoretical framework using Ricoeurian thought. These four themes should be seen as dimensions or aspects of the examination of interactivity in interactive documentary, rather than as separate treatments.

V. Chapter 1: Defining interactive documentary

In this chapter, interactivity is shown not to require a digital support¹⁹—instead, interactivity is conceptualised as a relationship between user and interactive documentary. This chapter reconciles some key definitions in a manner that is open to the potential manifestations of an interactive documentary. The general approach has been to tightly link the definition to

¹⁹ Gaudenzi's definition of interactive documentary is "any project that starts with an intention to document the 'real', and that does so by using digital interactive technology". The first chapter aims to disentangle interactive technology from the assumption that this must be exclusively digital.

Gaudenzi, Sandra. 'The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary'. PhD diss., Goldsmiths University of London, 2013. 69.)

the user's ability to alter, negotiate, explore or otherwise change the documentary artefact. This is a good starting position.

The first chapter acts to both orient our discussion through defining interactive documentary, and to argue that interactive documentary does not have to be digital, because this assumes an impoverished and artificially limiting sense of what an interactive documentary can be. By showing that current definitions of interactive documentary do not need to be predicated on a particular media format, this chapter encourages a definition based on structure.

A definition of interactive documentary is important to establish in the thesis. Because interactive documentary varies so wildly (to the point of occasional contradiction) under current definitions, the first chapter has the dual function of delineating the boundaries of study, as well as building a networked definition that is capable of sustaining an application of Ricoeurian thought. Beyond a general definition of interactive documentary, this chapter fosters a greater understanding of interactive modes. It will argue that the concern should be how the user constructs meaning from this interaction, thus

concretising the concept of a platform-agnostic approach. What results from this is an understanding of how different modes of interaction (with different levels of participation²⁰) can render different experiences of the interactive documentary. There is a diverse spectrum of both modes and intensities of interactivity.

Documentary has had to bear many burdens linked to technology well before the advent of interactive documentaries. Even now there remains a complicated relationship between the denotative capacity of the medium (and its power to suggest authenticity) and the connotative functions of perspective and narrative. I argue that this split remains relevant to the problem of defining interactive documentary today. Here, interactivity is seen as a connotative act— despite facilitating different denotative elements (as an example, clicking on a clip results in the clip's contents being played on screen), the interaction itself has no denotative capacity. It is an action of structuring content, not of content itself. It is through the phenomenological

²⁰ For example, clicking amongst several options presented on a screen, to cycling around a city, to filming a video to contribute to the interactive documentary. The term 'modes of interaction' is taken from Gaudenzi, who describes it as "ways of conceiving the relation between users and [content]; they give different levels of agency to the user and they set the parameters of the interaction between the users and the interactive artefact". (Gaudenzi, Sandra. 'The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary'. PhD diss., Goldsmiths University of London, 2013. 18.)

question of audience engagement that the concepts of mimesis, narrative, history, fiction and time can be explored. This is why a definition must be established before Ricoeur's concepts can enter into a conversation with interactive documentary. The hermeneutic approach can reveal the connection between the world of the text and the world of the reader— how do the two influence and interact with each-other? This relationship is important to reveal as it is through this relationship that meaning is constructed, and the documentary aims are carried out.

To simultaneously navigate and be affected by the database of an interactive documentary, the user is less “in control of” the artefact, but more “[a] part of it”.²¹ The interactive element informs structure— what clips you see in what order, and the documentary element informs content— what the clips themselves show. To unnecessarily restrict the definition of interactive documentary is unproductive. It can gear discussion to a specific type of interactive documentary which may not fully represent the broad spectrum of its modes. I argue that we should not insist that an interactive documentary must be digital, but rather adopt the more productive approach of judging the

²¹ Gaudenzi, Sandra. ‘The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary’. PhD diss., Goldsmiths University of London, 2013. 75.

field based on its narrative complexity, and the panoply of interactive options it provides to the user. Moreover, the user must be under the impression that they are interacting, and that this interaction can be seen as a narratological structuring. This eases confusion about the nature of interactivity in interactive documentary — in that it is no longer tied to a specific medium, and is instead seen as an act rooted in phenomenology.²² This approach offers an accounting for interactive documentaries which may transcend digital boundaries in the future, while providing clarity and emphasis on interaction as action.

The broad corpus of interactive documentary theory approaches specifically digital interactive documentary (otherwise there would be no need for me to argue that interactive documentary is not necessarily digital). This makes finding examples of non-digital interactive documentaries difficult — if digital was previously seen as a requirement for interactivity, then there will not be any extant writing on non-digital interactive documentaries.

Thus, to illustrate my point, I have two options— to provide an example of

²² To clarify: I am saying here that no *one* specific medium has a claim on interactivity, not that interactivity has no material effect.

an analogue piece and argue that it constitutes an interactive documentary, or to provide an example of an interactive documentary and argue that it can be constituted non-digitally. I have chosen the latter approach— given the thorny nature of a documentary definition, it is much clearer to present a text which has already been deemed an interactive documentary, and argue that the digital elements within do not constitute a foundation of the interactive documentary itself.

In Judith Aston and Stefano Odorico's "The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary", the authors present *Choose Your Own Documentary* (2013) as an interactive documentary. Although this interactive documentary retains some digital elements (otherwise it would not have been considered an interactive documentary in the extant literature), we will imagine this interactive documentary non-digitally.

Choose Your Own Documentary centres around Nathan Penlington's quest to trace the owner of a diary he acquired via Ebay. The documentary contains just over 1500 separate possible pathways. In terms of delivery mechanism, it

was first presented at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2013, and consists of three elements. The first is a screen, playing a digitally projected documentary. The second is Penlington himself— in person and on stage, helping to facilitate. The third is multiple choice buzzers that are handed out to the users, on which they are able to vote. Essentially, Penlington runs video clips on screen, stopping occasionally to allow the audience to vote on multiple choice questions. The majority answer to the question posed determines the path taken through the interactive documentary.

Of the three elements presented above— the projector, Penlington and the buzzers, two of these are digital— the projector and the buzzers. I must mention here that of course, digital technologies help to facilitate the creation and use of interactive documentaries— so much so, that there is now a purely digital version of *Choose Your Own Documentary*, titled *The Boy In The Book*. This replaces Penlington's non-digital presence with digital prompts, mediated through the user's computer, and navigated through using the mouse. However, just because digital technologies make the creation of interactive documentaries much easier, does not mean that digital technologies are a requirement of interactive documentary.

The projector operates digitally, and projects film that has been filmed digitally. However, we can imagine this occurring non-digitally. Even today, cinemas still project some films through an analogue projector— swapping different reels out. The reels can be seen as the database— so for 1500 pathways, there can be 1500 reels of film, with the audience determining which of the reels are selected and in what order. *Choose Your Own Documentary* was shot digitally— which allowed the camera crew to capture a large amount of footage with minimal cost and quick post-production. But they could have shot on analogue cameras— nothing in *Choose Your Own Documentary*, beyond pragmatic and practical reasons, requires a digital camera to capture footage.

Finally, the buzzers are all synced, and a computer processing this data allows for Penlington to comment on specific data— knowing, for example, that 44.3% of people chose a certain pathway. But this too can be analogue— the simplest possible option would be getting the audience to raise their hands for each choice, and Penlington simply having to count the hands. With these minor changes— in terms of filming and projection, and in terms of

replacing the buzzers with raising hands, we can imagine an entirely analogue interactive documentary.

VI. Chapter 2: Mimesis

This thesis' exploration of Ricoeur's mimesis advances our knowledge of interactivity in interactive documentary in several ways. Critically, this chapter shows that the user must recognise the interactive nature of an interactive documentary in order to hermeneutically interact. Understanding this condition of interactivity also helps to clarify which user inputs can be considered as interactivity— we are thus able to separate interactivity in interactive documentary from non-interactive controls such as pressing pause or rewind on a remote control. This will be discussed in depth later in the thesis, but briefly put, interactivity and control are separated by the user's phenomenological understanding— for interaction to have hermeneutic weight, the user must understand that they are interacting with the documentary, and must know how to end this interaction.

Ricoeur's mimesis follows a threefold schema— from prefiguration, to configuration, to refiguration. These steps will be used as a springboard to

discuss the user's action in interactive documentary. This allows us to establish two conditions of user interaction— that the user understands that they are interacting, and that this interaction can be viewed as a narratological structuring. Ricoeur's mimesis accounts for how meaning is generated and changed, and how an audience interacts with a text and consolidates it with their own experience. Mimesis maps out a Ricoeurian approach to interpretation, in that mimesis forms a system in which Ricoeur sets out his other concepts. As an example— Ricoeur places his discussion of fiction at a particular stage of mimesis. This thesis adopts the same approach, by discussing mimesis early in the thesis, it is able to better situate subsequent Ricoeurian concepts. It describes the relationship between user and text, which helps to consider the interactive documentary as a discursive whole.

Mimesis is also where I locate my discussion of the user's agency. This is a three-part discussion showing how a hermeneutic approach can begin to consider the user's inputs and outputs, and finally to establish an trans-linguistic hermeneutics, through discussing interaction as having similarities to a speech act. The mimesis chapter ultimately shows that the category of prefiguration can describe the hermeneutic 'end' of an interactive

documentary in a way that cannot be covered by a purely material approach.

What distinguishes Ricoeur's mimesis from a general concept of a mimesis is the construction of an endless dialectic of explanation and understanding, rather than limiting interpretation to either a non-event, or a single moment. By establishing a conversation between mimesis and interactive documentary, we can understand how the user's "power to physically 'do' something", forms part of an ecosystem in which "all parts are interdependent and dynamically linked".²³ Ricoeur's mimesis emphasises that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence".²⁴ This approach charts a hermeneutic spiral of interpretation that extends from prior experience, to interpreting the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference (of the text) back to the sphere of human action. Ricoeur places the reader (or user) as the site for the operations of meaning and reference, which means that the reality eventually described through the hermeneutic arc belongs to

²³ Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary", 3.

²⁴ Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 52.

the “world of the reader”.²⁵

Briefly summarised, prefiguration expresses existing competencies— of knowing *how* to interact with an interactive documentary. This stage allows for a comparison of interactive and non-interactive documentaries, and establishes that the user must understand that they are interacting, and how to end the interaction. This effective separation of the user and interactive documentary is a prerequisite for developing a Ricoeurian hermeneutic, and suggests that control of the interactive documentary is not a substitution for interaction itself.²⁶

Configuration gives a structure to textual elements under the categories of both sense and representation. By encouraging the lexicon of acts and action, I demonstrate that this approach remains open to engaging with media outside of representation. Ricoeur’s use of ‘sense’ as a synonym for meaning underlines the relevance of mimesis to interactive documentary.

²⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 71.

²⁶ Control refers to functions such as play / pause / rewind / fast-forward / mute. These functions can be performed on non-interactive documentaries.

Finally, refiguration stands opposed to the idea of a hermeneutic circle, where “the end point seems to lead back to the starting point or, worse, the end point seems anticipated in the starting point”.²⁷ Instead, Ricoeur suggests an “endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes”.²⁸ Ricoeur’s endless spiral is challenged through the interactive documentary. Given that “repetition [has become] an expected norm as some viewers will return to the same [interactive documentary] several times”, refiguration is where we situate a hermeneutic account for the experience of re-interacting with a documentary.²⁹ This section shows that texts change the user and their outlooks in real and tangible ways— the user’s world after their mimetic arc is significantly different to their understanding of the world before the text, the separation of text and user intersecting through interaction, and the user’s capacity to relate the text back to their own world and experience— allowing for engagement with meaning beyond the text itself.

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 71-72.

²⁸ Ibid 72.

²⁹ Keen, Seth. “The Documentary Designer: A List of Propositions...” In *Digital Media and Documentary: Antipodean Approaches*, edited by Adrian Miles, 49-68. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 61.

Having established two conditions of user interaction (that the user understands that they are interacting, and that this interaction can be viewed as a narratological structuring) through discussion of Ricoeur's mimesis, we can then address the difference between control and interaction. As an example— we are able to play a DVD of a documentary *simpliciter*,³⁰ and we have the functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward / mute and so on. Mimesis allows us to subordinate these functions— what I term controls— to the stage of refiguration, allowing the stage of configuration to describe interactivities which are compatible with the Ricoeurian act of reading. This results in the following terms to describe how the user might interact; extra-action (beginning or ending the interactive documentary), interaction (actions of the user which phenomenologically affect the unfolding of the interactive documentary), endo-action (actions of the user which have no effect on the interactive documentary, perceived or otherwise), and controls (actions of the user which are not consistent with the Ricoeurian act of reading).³¹ This greatly clarifies the role of the user in a way that is not specific to any one

³⁰ I use the term 'documentary *simpliciter*' to refer to documentaries that are not interactive. These have been called 'conventional documentary' or 'traditional documentary' in existing interactive documentary literature. The reason for this phrase is to avoid passing judgement on non-interactive documentary— conventions change over time, after all.

³¹ The terms 'extra-action' and 'endo-action' are terms created by me in order to better understand the broader term of interaction.

interactive approach.

Ultimately, the discussion of mimesis renders two original contributions to knowledge. The first is that the user must recognise the interactive nature of an interactive documentary in order to hermeneutically interact with it. If the user does not understand that they are interacting with an interactive documentary, then the interactive capacity of the interactive documentary has no bearing on how the user understands the interactive documentary. But this is only half of the story. If I tear up a novel, I am interacting with it to a certain extent. If I change the source code of a documentary that I am watching online, I am interacting with it to a certain extent. Ben Moskowitz supplies another layer of complexity regarding the difference between control and interaction. He examines the “development of personalised and procedurally-generated web media – that is to say, media that adapts itself based on what it can learn about the user”.³² This evolution emphasises why the hermeneutic perspective is important. Ultimately, these levels of interactivity cannot be addressed from the side of the interactive documentary — attempting to discern some “logic of the medium itself” will only restrict the variety of ways

³² Moskowitz, Ben. “Look Who’s Watching: What storytellers can learn from privacy and personalisation” In *I-Docs: The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary*, edited by Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi and Mandy Rose, 170-186. New York: Wallflower Press, 2017. 170.

in which we interact.³³ Instead, the difference between these functions and ‘intended’ functions lies within this question: does it “[organise] together components... gathering all [the] actors... [to make] the plot a totality”?³⁴ This is a significant clarification of the role of the user. This thesis will continue to argue that even if “personalisation is likely to become even more magic and less detectable”, it is precisely the point that the user must be under the impression that they are interacting in order to hermeneutically and phenomenologically account for interactivity in interactive documentary.³⁵

This chapter’s overarching argument is that the user of an interactive documentary is not merely a catalytic surface which remains unchanged by the interaction. The user plays an important role in the interactive documentary, and a hermeneutic approach shows the importance of the relationship between user and interactive documentary.

³³ Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2001. 228.

³⁴ Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative.” In *On Paul Ricoeur*, edited by David Wood, 20-33. London: Taylor & Francis, 2002. 21.

³⁵ Moskowitz, “Look Who’s Watching”, 183.

VII. Chapter 3: Narrative

A discussion of narrative shows the relationship between interactivity and hermeneutic understanding. Through bringing hermeneutics to bear on interactivity, interactivity is shown to not have a strict correlation to hermeneutic freedom. Specifically, expanded physical agency through interactivity can result in a potential hermeneutic diminishment of the text through a restriction of re-reading (or re-using).

This chapter argues that interactive documentary theory has oversimplified concepts of narrative in order to accentuate the contrast between documentary simpliciter and interactive documentary. The second chapter, on mimesis, clarifies the nature of the user's interactivity. The narrative chapter builds on this, explaining in more detail the user's relationship with the interactive documentary and separates this relationship into the hermeneutic and the physical. Mimesis represents a hermeneutic spiral of interpretation that extends from prior experience, to interpreting the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference (of the text) back to the sphere of human action. In a narrative context, this allows the third chapter, on

narrative, to consolidate the endless hermeneutic spiral with the possibility that the text no longer retains the same point (that is to say, identical constituent elements).³⁶ Recursive viewing of the interactive documentary retains the different ‘altitudes’ of hermeneutic experience, but is complicated by that ‘same point’ instead shattering into a myriad of potential clips.³⁷ This presents a complication to a Ricoeurian approach, in that the interactive documentary can vary between uses not just by the user having a different phenomenological interpretation each time, but also through the constituent parts of the narrative changing.

In suggesting that this characteristic makes narrative a weak tool to describe the interactive documentary, there is a risk of imagining the interactive documentary as an impermeable and incomprehensible artefact, resistant to hermeneutic examination. A Ricoeurian approach presents plot as an action performed by the user, rather than a static system. This step helps us

³⁶ As an example: when one re-reads a conventional novel, although the reader’s experience may be fundamentally different given what they have learned since the first reading, the text on the page does not change— it remains in the same order, and has no material subtractions or additions. In an interactive documentary, the process of re-using may be complicated as different elements may be added, subtracted, reordered, or otherwise changed. This results in a different experience both phenomenologically and materially.

³⁷ Recall here Ricoeur’s evocation of an “endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes”. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 72.

to view the interactive documentary database as a text in which we hermeneutically (as a function of grasping together the disparate strands) *and* physically (through actual interaction) forge our own path. This reigns in all that ‘could have been’, and grounds the text in a phenomenology of the actual experience. The user of an interactive documentary makes sense of polyphonic and unstable meaning through the process of contextualisation.³⁸ This account of narrative helps to structure interpretation of the interactive documentary — where narrative does not impose conditions of finality, and retains the “irreducibly diachronic character of every narrated story” through viewing plot as an action undertaken by the user.³⁹ This also resonates with the first chapter, defining interactive documentary, as narrative can be considered in a platform-agnostic context. Recall here *Choose Your Own Documentary*, which exists digitally, but is able to be conceptualised as entirely analogue— but each version retaining the same narratological possibilities.

The narrative of *Choose Your Own Documentary* is not contingent on being

³⁸ This polyphony is approached by Judith Aston and Stefano Odorico, who build on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony. The Ricoeurian approach, of the user reigning in all that could have been, provides an interesting supplement to Bakhtin via Aston and Odorico — Bakhtin writes that polyphony is constructed “as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other”. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 18; See Aston, Judith, and Stefano Odorico. “I-Docs as Intervention: The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony. Editorial.” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 15 (2018): 1–8.

³⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 56.

either analogue or digital in nature.

By using narrative to split the interactive documentary into hermeneutic and physical pathways, we push up against the limits of current terminology deployed to discuss interactive documentary. Specifically, this chapter addresses the vague evocation, common in interactive documentary studies, of ‘linear’ to mean sequential, and ‘non-linear’ to mean non-sequential.⁴⁰ A redeveloped approach to narrative in interactive documentary highlights how the terms ‘linear’ and ‘non-linear’ do not do justice to the ways in which one can engage with an interactive documentary. By the same token, it is argued that linearity does not set out terms which evoke a difference between the interactive documentary and the traditional text, as all texts are experienced with a sense of both linearity and non-linearity. The task of the user is not to “[enumerate] events in a serial order”, but instead to “organise them into an intelligible whole”.⁴¹ An intelligible whole has no requirement of linearity or

⁴⁰ Of course, this is a recognised issue in the field, and there are extant debates around this— or recognition that interactive documentaries have both linear and non-linear components. Anna Podara et al. write that “i-docs exploit the new digital technologies and present stories that document reality either in linear or nonlinear participatory ways”. Podara, Anna, Dimitrios Giomelakis, Constantinos Nicolaou, Maria Matsiola, and Rigas Kotsakis. “Digital Storytelling in Cultural Heritage: Audience Engagement in the Interactive Documentary New Life.” *Sustainability* 13, no. 3 (2021): 4.

⁴¹ Ibid 65.

non-linearity.

This chapter, on narrative, builds on the work of the previous two chapters. It first rejects the idea that narrative is located solely within the text, thus imposing a sense of finality (or allowing for theorists to describe an interactive documentary as “non-narrative documentary”).⁴² This approach to narrative’s openness is bound within a discussion of mimesis, which describes the interpretation. It was here that the issue of repetition was broached. Repetition under Ricoeurian mimesis was accounted for, but the limits of Ricoeur were reached when interactive documentary was seen to restrict the hermeneutic act of re-reading.

What this chapter adds to the overall argument of the thesis is that re-interaction can be hermeneutically restricted in the interactive documentary. This acts to temper the view that interactive documentary unilaterally and unconditionally opens the narratological potentialities available to the user.

⁴² Brasier, “Moments of Noticing: ‘I See You’ as a Speculative Work” In *Digital Media and Documentary: Antipodean Approaches*, edited by Adrian Miles, 13-28. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 25.

Ricoeur describes the status of reading as “at once a stasis and impetus”.⁴³ This impetus can be instantly fulfilled by interactive documentaries in a way that is a physical refiguration of text. The chapter contextualises this, outlining that physical refiguration may come at the cost of the hermeneutic refiguration. The user’s choice is in a sense truncated by the interactive documentary.

VIII. Chapter 4: History and fiction

This decisive chapter argues that interactivity introduces a new capacity for fiction. This is done through demonstrating that interactivity can be seen as both an action performed and an action inscribed. This is important, as this view highlights the connection between hermeneutics and interactivity—where the physical praxis of interaction leads to creative poesis through fiction. This chapter also positions fiction not as a failure of documentary, but instead as an important phenomenological tool. Fiction here is presented as a device to help us understand the interactive documentary.

The ‘document’ of documentary is tempered and mediated through fiction. This chapter shows that interactive documentary introduces a new capacity

⁴³ Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Vol. 3, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 179.

for fiction because of its interactive element, and I argue that this is beneficial to its documentary import. Ricoeur's writing on fiction emphasises fiction's capacity for creative reconstruction. By reimagining fiction's place in documentary, we can establish that interactivity is fictionalising— and this interactivity requires both an action by the user, and a reaction from the interactive documentary.

Separating the link between Ricoeur's existing work and the idea of interactivity as fictionalising force into four stages allows each section to perform the dual work of applying Ricoeur's writing on fiction to a different mode or medium, as well as discussing the capacities of that particular mode or medium to affect how we understand interactive documentary. The four stages of this chapter step between image and photograph, photograph and moving image, moving image and documentary and finally documentary and interactive documentary. This pathway must be taken in order to adapt Ricoeur's concept of 'productive reference' and bring it to bear on interactive documentary, thus allowing us to critically examine the productive capacity of interactivity in the interactive documentary.

Aston and Gaudenzi suggest that “each form of [interactive documentary] seems to negotiate reality far beyond” typical approaches, as “the ‘moment of truth’ is now also placed into the actions and decisions of the user/ participant”.⁴⁴ However, Ricoeur’s concept of fiction requires a radical shift, demanding that the actions of the user be seen not as moments of truth, but instead as fictional forces, thus allowing for creative reconstruction. To do this, interactivity is presented as a form of action and reaction. This concept of action and reaction articulates how an interactive documentary inscribes an action, developing a hermeneutics of interactivity which transcends writing, speech acts or reading. This is a defining characteristic of interactive documentary, and cements an approach which accounts for the fictionalising and ultimately productive force of interactivity. Describing the roles of history and fiction in the interactive documentary allows us to consider interaction as both an action of the user, and a reaction of the text.⁴⁵

This approach to interactivity shows two stages: the action of the user, and

⁴⁴ Aston and Gaudenzi, “Setting the Field”, 128.

⁴⁵ Although I use the terms ‘action of the user’ and ‘reaction of the text’, I do not argue that the primordial, originating action occurs from the side of the user. This will be explained later in the thesis, but simply put, ‘action’ and ‘reaction’ in this context refers to the reliance of the text on an action of the user — and that this action may be preceded by many different actions from both user and text.

the reaction of the text. Action is a user contribution. The inscription of that action forms a *reaction* from the text. Before an action of the user, the interactive documentary does not have a perlocutionary force — it is without interaction. As soon as it is engaged by a user, then this relationship between user and interactive documentary is formed. This is why I use the terminology of action and reaction, even though the user's action is not necessarily the primordial, originating action. By discussing interactivity in terms of action and reaction, we can not only recognise the importance of the fictionalising force of interaction, but also the epistemological realities of the interactive documentary. This helps to distinguish the truly interactive documentary from documentary simpliciter, as the reaction and inscription is unique to the characteristic of interactivity.

IX. Chapter 5: Time

In this final body chapter, interactivity is shown to have both temporal and spatial elements. Temporality helps to present interactivity as an inscription of phenomenological experience upon the interactive documentary. This relationship between user and interactive documentary is highlighted through the concept that the beginning and ending of an interactive documentary are

phenomenological states.

It is important to engage with time due to the pervading confusion around the temporality of the multiple possible pathways of interactive documentary. We must establish how temporality relates to the creation of multiple possible pathways. This chapter aims to disentangle the ostensible dichotomy between ‘temporal or spatial’, and instead encourages a view of temporality in interactive documentary that has hermeneutic significance, and that helps to account for interactive documentary’s temporality in a way that less nuanced approaches have not been able to.⁴⁶ The challenge here is to conceptualise temporality in a way that can account for the diverse formats of interactive documentary. Do these formats have different temporalities? Is this a unique consequence of interaction?

This chapter introduces the hermeneutic importance of temporality to interactive documentary. This thesis has already discussed the poverty of language around the term non-linear, which artificially constricts debates around what constitutes an interactive documentary. Linearity itself is a

⁴⁶ Aarseth, Espen. “Nonlinearity and Literary Theory.” In *The New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, 762–80. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. 769.

problematic term, in that it can refer to either a spatial or a temporal structure. Much of the writing on interactive documentary has focused on structure; in *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich writes of a “spatial montage”, which “represents an alternative to traditional cinematic temporal montage, replacing traditional sequential mode with a spatial one”.⁴⁷ This chapter will reclaim the hermeneutic significance of temporality, and discuss how temporality relates to spatiality in the interactive documentary.

This is accomplished by arguing that the navigation of an interactive documentary should be seen as a type of calendar time⁴⁸— this allows us to view the constituent elements of the interactive documentary as potential ‘axial moments’, allowing for each to reference the other. By examining Ricoeur’s three features of calendar time— founding event, bidirectional traversal, and measurement units— I establish that calendar time is able to account for a temporality which does not require “the distinction between

⁴⁷ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 322.

⁴⁸ Victoria Browne describes Ricoeur’s calendar time as “[organising] histories into chronologies and timelines through temporal markers such as days, months, years, decades, and centuries... [what the] narrative signifies often depends to a considerable extent upon the markers inscribed in calendar time. (Browne, Victoria. “Calendar Time.” In *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History*, edited by Victoria Browne, 99–118. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014. 99.)

extreme end points and the intervals between them”.⁴⁹ This approach, of situating moments measured from other moments, helps to describe how all the elements of the interactive documentary relate to each-other and the user.

The reason why the chapter on time forms the last main chapter of my thesis is due to how temporality adds richness to the concepts already explored. Ricoeur emphasises the relationship between time and narrative, where narrative is “the privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, unformed and at the limit mute temporal experience”.⁵⁰ This process interweaves a number of temporalities. Narrative is capable of accounting for a composite temporal framework— and rather than being viewed as an instant or a structure, narrative is a process of integration. By viewing this through the lens of temporality, we can begin to approach the question of how this process can account for the endpoint of interactive documentaries— the cessation of interaction with a particular text.

Within this discourse of time and narrative, we also address the illusion of

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, Paul. “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative.” *Research in Phenomenology* 9 (1979): 18.

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, xi.

sequence, rejecting a “reduction of the chronological to the logical”, and instead put forth a hermeneutic which sees temporality as a necessary part of examining and interacting with the interactive documentary.⁵¹

What ultimately results from the discussion in this chapter is the idea that temporality is a condition of interaction as much as narrative understanding. We are even able to provide more detail here— using Ricoeur’s calendar time to describe the temporality of interactive documentary pushes past a simplistic view of sequence, and instead offers a temporality which allows for multiple, and even simultaneous starting points. The founding event⁵² is realised temporally, and thus indicates the start of an interactive documentary — when it begins to be interacted with. This logic was followed to thus indicate that the interactive documentary stands in a type of modulated discourse with the user. Because interactive documentary relies on a logical model (choose this or that), it is easy to lose sight of the unique temporality of interactive documentary. Interaction was therefore presented as the point at

⁵¹ Ricoeur, Paul. “Narrative Time.” *Critical Inquiry* 7, No. 1 (1980): 184.

⁵² This means the event upon which the axis of time is organised— for our Gregorian calendar, this would be the birth of Christ (eg. This thesis is being written in 2020— 2020 years after the birth of Christ). For interactive documentary, the founding event would be whatever extra-active action the user takes to commence the interactive documentary. This will be further explained within the time chapter.

which phenomenological experience of the interactive documentary is able to be inscribed upon cosmic time.

X. Research significance

This thesis adds an as yet neglected perspective to the developing field of interactive documentary. It complements, extends, and sometimes even challenges existing approaches. The potential of Ricoeur's hermeneutic method as a theoretical framework to discuss interactivity in interactive documentary has been validated through highlighting the human element of the interactive documentary's syntagmatic structure.

What is at stake? I believe that documentary can do great good for the world— and until we understand how interactivity and documentary intersect, we cannot use either to their full potential. This thesis' approach, adapting and redeploying Ricoeur, is developed to account for the broad spectrum of both modes and intensities of interactivity. Interactivity, through being a core part of the delivery mechanism of interactive documentary, thus becomes a vehicle for documentary. This thesis' approach asks important and relevant questions such as how to account for re-reading a constantly

changing text, or how to approach the construction of a narrative within a text with no determinate end. These are not just thought experiments— this affects how we make sense of interactive documentaries, and the world that they attempt to depict. To know how the expression of interactive documentaries will impact interpretation is to adapt to the future of representation, and Ricoeur’s method offers a rich avenue in which to do so— producing a theory that is able to adapt and grow to meet future demands.

This thesis is a response to a problem. This problem is that we do not understand the human experience of interactivity in interactive documentary. There is literature around the technical aspects of interactivity in interactive documentary— the “programmatic and computational conditions of an individual [system], and the way these conditions address and propose a particular way to consider the relations between the [elements]”.⁵³ What the field of interactive documentary theory is lacking is a theoretical accounting of how we understand interactivity, and how interactivity affects the capacity of the interactive documentary to “[bear] witness to the way the world is...

⁵³ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 205.

[forming] the basis for our orientation to or action within the world”.⁵⁴ By understanding the interactivity of interactive documentary in phenomenological and hermeneutic terms, we are able to better understand interactive documentary as a vehicle of expression. As Bill Nichols puts it, “documentaries lend us the ability to see timely issues in need of attention, literally. We see (cinematic) views of the world. These views put before us social issues and current events, recurring problems and possible solutions... Documentary adds a new dimension to popular memory and social history”.⁵⁵ Interactivity has the potential to fundamentally alter this representation for better or for worse, and it is through understanding interactivity in human terms that we can better engage with interactive documentary.

⁵⁴ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. xiii.

⁵⁵ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2.

1. Defining Interactive

Documentary

1.1 Introduction

The advent of computers has allowed us to revisit concepts and debates that, while not fundamentally or theoretically new, were marginalised by the dominance of print culture and fixed media forms of the 20th century. Digital technologies have made it easier than ever for this organisation of events to be literally acted upon by the user, which is why discussion around interactive documentary has predominantly geared towards the digital. This chapter aims to demonstrate that although digital technology has allowed for the re-emergence of such interactive technologies by grace of the fact that it is relatively easy (compared to analogue formats) to implement and haptically understood via the user's prior computer experience, this in itself does not make digitality a specific requirement for interactive documentaries. In this chapter, when I write that the interactive documentary is not inherently digital, it is important to note that I am not denying the materiality of the interactive documentary (as text and user must be separate in order for

hermeneutics to function, ergo the text must exist materially in some sense). I also advocate that the interactive documentary can be digital. Indeed, due to the ease of production and reception, the vast majority of interactive documentaries are indeed digital. This chapter is about making space for non-digital interactive documentaries, which may not be created according to the dominant medium.

This chapter will reconcile some key definitions in a manner that allows for a productive evaluation of interactive documentary that is not limited to the digital medium, but that instead sees the medium as one aspect within the broader umbrella of interactive documentary. By establishing interactive documentary as existing in non-digital contexts, this chapter pushes against the position put forth by Miles, that an approach which has a hermeneutic interest, “conceptualising audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects”, “[is] overly reliant on a disavowal of the materiality of our machines and their entanglements”.⁵⁶ This chapter does not aim to discredit a material approach. In fact, establishing a definition of interactive documentary contingent on a hermeneutic analysis of interactivity greatly broadens the material scope of interactive documentary. By removing specific material

⁵⁶ Miles, “Matters of concern”, 104-105; Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 207.

characteristics as a defining factor of interactive documentary, the following question is raised: how do we define interactivity in interactive documentary?

This chapter explores this question in three stages. First, it argues that interactivity in interactive documentary does not have to be digital. Therefore, the interactive documentary does not need to be digital. Secondly, it argues that a user is required in order to interact with an interactive documentary. This may seem self-evident, but by stepping through why this is the case, it demonstrates a compatibility between hermeneutics and object-oriented ontology. In order for hermeneutics to function, there must be a separation of user and text. Therefore, the materiality of the interactive documentary is undeniable and must be taken into account by any hermeneutic approach. Thirdly, existing theory and definitions are examined and built upon. By collating and augmenting these definitions, the interactive documentary can be shown to require a human input,⁵⁷ must work to documentary aims, and does not need to be digital.

⁵⁷ 'Human input' here refers to any action by the user beyond interpreting the text. This input is broad in nature— from a mechanical operation, to interactive sensors, to clicking a mouse, to walking through an installation. 'Human input' here must necessarily be broad in order to account for diverse forms of interactive documentary.

Indeed, there is a historical precedent to this. Although this thesis does not seek to relabel interactive documentaries of the pre-digital era ex post facto, there are certain areas which may be able to be reappraised with this new understanding of the relationship between interactive documentary and the digital. Judith Aston points to Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*, and her interest in "forms of audience engagement and participation that went beyond the 'point-and-click' interactivity of much screen-based work".⁵⁸ Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* was first published in 1970, and although Youngblood was writing on cinema in general, rather than documentary specifically, a phenomenological approach is already outlined. Youngblood writes on what he terms 'Kinaesthetics'— "the manner of experiencing a thing through the forces and energies associated with its motion... it's not what we're seeing so much as the process and effect seeing: that is, the phenomenon of experience itself, which exists only in the viewer".⁵⁹ Aston develops a concept of 'emplaced interaction', which she defines as "the creation, manipulation and sharing of meaning through engaged interaction, bringing

⁵⁸ Aston, Judith. "Interactive documentary and live performance: from embodied to emplaced interaction." In *I-Docs: The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary*, edited by Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi and Mandy Rose, 222-236. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. 224.

⁵⁹ Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1970. 97.

our bodies and minds into direct interplay with the wider environment”.⁶⁰

This essentially stands as a counterpoint to the increasing relation to the world as mediated by “the internet and now virtual reality”, and other such digital technologies.⁶¹ ‘Emplaced interaction’, beyond “[engaging] our full complement of senses by bringing us together through physical co-presence”, also helps to explain digital interactive documentary as a subset of a wider category of interactive documentary.⁶²

Aston points to “movements such as Fluxus and the ‘Happenings’ of the 1950s and 1960s” as being pre-digital forms of interactive art.⁶³ The aim here isn’t to attempt to recategorise these non-digital interactive technologies, but use non-digital examples to demonstrate that characteristics of interactive documentary, such as polyphony, or multiple pathways and perspectives, is not as such a unique characteristic to digital interactive documentaries, and thus not a unique characteristic to digital technology in general.

⁶⁰ Aston, “Interactive documentary and live performance”, 233.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid 234.

⁶³ Ibid.

To provide a brief example here: *Kinoautomat* is an interactive 1967 film—the “first functional interactive film-delivery system shown to a wide public audience”.⁶⁴ It functions similarly to *Choose Your Own Documentary*—there is a live moderator, and the audience has two buttons in their seats. At 9 points, the film stops, and the audience must vote on a pathway. Although *Kinoautomat*’s form of interactivity is crude, and it is not a documentary—it has a (limited) ability to demonstrate multiple pathways and polyphony. This chapter argues that this is what defines interactivity, and this is merely made easier by, but is not contingent on, digital technologies.

1.2 Consequences of a non-specific material definition

This chapter argues that the interactive documentary requires a degree of human interaction in order to configure and produce meaning. By better understanding the relationship between user and interactivity, interactivity will be shown not to require a digital support, as has been assumed by previous approaches. Let me be clear: this does not then advocate for the total removal of all material supports of the interactive documentary. This also does not mean that an interactive documentary cannot be digital. Instead, the

⁶⁴ Hales, Chris. “Cinematic Interaction: From Kinoautomat to Cause and Effect.” *Digital Creativity* 1, No. 16 (2005): 55.

argument here is that the interactive documentary through the relationship between the interactive documentary and the user. This itself requires a material support for the relationship to the user to be instituted. Beyond allowing Ricoeur to interrogate what interactivity does to documentary, this allows us to account for a more diverse range of interactive documentaries through removing the prerequisite of a digital substrate.

Given the discussion of material considerations, it is important to demonstrate the relation of orality to the current discussion. Walter Ong points out Ricoeur's proposal that the "human sciences (such as history, sociology, and so forth) develop by interpreting human action by analogy with textual interpretation".⁶⁵ This immediately inoculates a Ricoeurian hermeneutics against accusations of being strictly focussed on written texts. However, Ong writes that "Hermeneutics begins with texts, and it appears to stay in some primary sense with texts or, if in some vaguer sense not always with texts, at least with words, implying that the problem of explanation or hermeneutics is paradigmatically a problem of making clear something that is

⁶⁵ Ong, Walter J. "Before Textuality: Orality and Interpretation." *Oral Tradition* 3, No. 3 (1988): 259-260.

verbalized”.⁶⁶ Speaking to intertextuality (such as *Choose Your Own Documentary’s* combination of projection and performance), Ong writes of a destabilisation, wherein it becomes “impossible to regard [the text] as simply an isolated, visual unit, quiescent, passive, fixed, recuperable, manipulable—in other words, manageable as an object is”.⁶⁷ In other words, orality allows for an interactive relationship, and indeed, “The oral word is a unique kind of event... but if there is no hint of another person, real or imaginary, to whom the word is addressed, called out, cried out, the sound is simply not functioning as a word. Because it is a call, a cry, addressed to another person or, the equivalent, an imagined person or persons, the oral word is essentially explanation or interpretation or hermeneutics”.⁶⁸ In this sense, the relationship between storyteller and user is validated, whether it be mediated by the screen (as in *The Boy in the Book*), or by performance (as in *Choose Your Own Documentary*). How, then, do we ensure that interactive documentary remains broad in terms of material considerations?

Step one of this chapter is to ask what separates interactive documentary

⁶⁶ Ong, “Before Textuality”, 260.

⁶⁷ Ibid 264.

⁶⁸ Ibid 267.

from documentary simpliciter. Documentary will be shown to exist in both digital and non-digital formats, thus placing the onus of digital materiality on the function of interactivity. Moreover, interactive documentary will be distinguished from non-interactive documentary purely through the relationship between user and interactive documentary. Step two turns to Wittgenstein as a tool to collate existing definitions.

Broadening the material scope of interactive documentary to include non-digital formats, while an important step towards reconciling Ricoeur with existing approaches, is not the chief aim of this chapter. It is important to propose a cohesive definition of interactive documentary in order to begin to unpick the nature of the relationship between user and interactive documentary. This is the main aim— if interactivity is not defined by the medium, then what makes interactive documentary interactive?

To combine existing definitions, Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance is deployed,⁶⁹ and by showing that current definitions do not

⁶⁹ Briefly put, Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance finds common properties of games (that I then apply to interactive documentary) as "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. Gertrude Anscombe, New York: Macmillan, 1953. 66.).

need to be predicated on medium, this chapter argues that a Ricoeurian approach to interactive documentary not only allows for a definition which existing theory is able to complement and enhance, but also open to the potential material manifestations an interactive documentary may take. This approach avoids the assumption that interactive documentary can only exist in a digital medium, which can gear scholarship to a specific kind of interactive documentary, and not be representative of more diverse formats, some of which may yet to be developed.

Despite having this digital focus, current (and still evolving) interactive documentary literature generally links the definition of interactive documentary to the user's capacity to alter, negotiate, explore or otherwise change the documentary artefact. Aston and Gaudenzi explain this relationship as a demand to "play an active role in the negotiation of the 'reality' being conveyed through the i-doc⁷⁰".⁷¹ This action between the user and the artefact goes "beyond the act of interpretation".⁷² In other words, Aston and Gaudenzi's definition of interactive documentary hinges on the

⁷⁰ Lingo that refers to the interactive documentary.

⁷¹ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 126.

⁷² Ibid.

user's ability to negotiate the interactive documentary beyond simply interpreting it.⁷³ It is the work of this chapter to suggest that this negotiation between the user and artefact does not need to be digital— but the hermeneutic process does require a user and an artefact. A hermeneutic analysis here will help to better understand the act of interpretation, as well as interactive action beyond interpretation.

Despite Aston and Gaudenzi's definition emphasising the relationship between user and artefact, there is still a tendency to argue that the interactive documentary must also be exclusive to the digital artefact, and must rely on digital systems in order to allow for the type of feedback that defines an interactive documentary.⁷⁴ This chapter will disentangle Aston and Gaudenzi's argument that an interactive documentary is "a form of nonfiction narrative that uses action and choice, immersion and enacted perception",

⁷³ I use the term non-hermeneutic here to refer to what we would today call physical action. This action could manifest in through a click, stepping elsewhere within a virtual reality experience, clapping to advance the interactive documentary, and so on. I do not use the term physical here, as this would act to disqualify interactive documentaries of the future— one can imagine being able to negotiate an artefact through brainwaves alone, for example. It is important to keep in mind here that for these actions to be enacted, and reacted to by the interactive documentary, there must be the materiality of a medium.

⁷⁴ Aston and Gaudenzi write that "any project that starts with an intention to document the 'real' and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this intention" is an interactive documentary. (Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 125-126.)

from their claim that an interactive documentary must be digital.⁷⁵ The aim here is to adapt Aston and Gaudenzi's definition of an interactive documentary to encompass all interactive documentaries— whether digital or non-digital.

While Aston and Gaudenzi consider the relations between user and interactive documentary (through ideas such as action and choice), there is also a movement by theorists like Miles to examine the ontology of interactive documentary, advocating an “[engagement] with media as technical, engineered, mathematical, ecological and cultural objects without first translating everything into the form or model of language as an intellectual Esperanto”.⁷⁶ This chapter must therefore undertake a conciliatory approach which covers the different but complementary approaches of materialism and hermeneutics to interactive documentary.

As a brief addendum to this introduction on defining interactive documentary, a point must be made concerning the word ‘user’. ‘User’ has emerged as a term to refer to the audience-cum-reader-cum-interactor-cum-

⁷⁵ Aston and Gaudenzi, “Setting the Field”, 125.

⁷⁶ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.

viewer— the human element of the interactive documentary. There are three points of contention to note here. The relationship between an interactive documentary and its ‘user’ is more complex than the interactive documentary being a simple artefact to possess and use to expand knowledge— the relationship is more bilateral, as will be discussed in this thesis. Secondly, the word ‘user’ has become the defacto noun for someone interacting with a computer. As I intend to separate interactive documentary from the digital realm, this is an unhelpful connotation. Finally, ‘user’ is utilitarian— framing the interactive documentary as a tool. This does not account for an affective experience. Nonetheless, the word ‘user’ promotes the heuristic power wielded in interactive documentary, and highlights the nature of the interactor’s role, so I will use it here— with the above caveats noted. I am not the first person to acknowledge the problems inherent to the word ‘user’. The terms ‘participant’, ‘actant’ and ‘interactant’ are suggested and used by theorists such as Gaudenzi (see *The Living Documentary*, 26) and Anna Wiehl, interviewing Gaudenzi, who argues that “in an interactive documentary, the user becomes an active part of the documentary itself, through the act of

interacting. Consequently, we're not speaking about 'user' but 'interactant'".⁷⁷

However, this thesis aims to retain a hermeneutic as well as material approach, which sees the user as affecting, and being affected by, the interactive documentary. This is the other side of the argument as to why the interactive documentary must have a material element (in order for the user to interact with it). Similarly, I argue that to generate a hermeneutics, this interaction must have separate components of user and interactive documentary on a hermeneutic level, even if the user's actions are incorporated into the interactive documentary. This is a minor point, and beyond these caveats, this thesis' use of the term 'user' can be substituted for 'interactant' / 'actant' / 'participant' if desired.

1.3 What is a documentary?

What separates the interactive documentary from the documentary per

⁷⁷ Wiehl, Anna and Sandra Gaudenzi, "Shifts of focus. A revised perspective on evidence in interactive documentary as living documentary. A conversation with Sandra Gaudenzi on autopoiesis, VR, data-mining and personalization". *AugenBlick. Konstanzer Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft*. Heft 65/66: *Die Herstellung von Evidenz* (2016): 98.

se?⁷⁸ To address the terminology directly — the word ‘documentary’ is not seen to require a digital support. Nash, writing on the social functions of documentary, suggests that “recording and preserving, fostering civic involvement and persuasion... can be seen as documentary drives influencing the use and development of interactive platforms”.⁷⁹ The category of documentary, defined by its aims, is pre-digital. Nash recognises that although interactive documentary can expand the capabilities of documentary, the essential drives of documentary influence the development of interactive modes, but are not reliant on them. Following this, I aim to show that the role interactivity plays has no fundamentally specific material quality

⁷⁸ While I provide a Griersonian definition of documentary later in this thesis, defining documentary (or even documentary aims) is a contested area. Writing on the reception of documentary, Karin Becker Ohrn argues that “the photographer’s goal was to bring the attention of an audience to the subject of his or her work, and in many cases, to pave the way for social change”. (Ohrn, Karin Becker. *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980. 36.)

Gaudenzi points out that “The aim of documentary has... evolved over time from representing reality, to order reality, to finally becoming a negotiation with reality” (Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 34).

Dirk Eitzen suggests that “a neat definition of documentary on the basis of something like textual features or authorial intentions has proved very tricky. I suggest that, in fact, it is impossible”, although Eitzen paraphrases Nichols’ definition as “the use of conventional means to refer to, represent, or make claims about historical reality”. (Eitzen, Dirk. “When Is a Documentary?: Documentary as a Mode of Reception.” *Cinema Journal* 35, No. 1 (1995): 82.)

While these definitions point to a complex issue, I have found Nash’s brief summary useful to categorise four aims of documentary — “recording and preserving, fostering civic involvement and persuasion”. (Nash, “What is Interactivity for?”, 391.)

⁷⁹ Nash, “What is Interactivity for?”, 391.

such as digitality, and can instead be conceptualised as a relationship between user and interactive documentary— which can exist in many different material formats.

My argument that documentary can be defined pre-digitally is self-evident given that the term was first coined by John Grierson in a film review in 1926. In his essay titled “First Principles of Documentary”, Grierson set forth the functions that he believed a documentary must fulfil. A documentary must “photograph the living scene and the living story... [the original scene and actor] give [cinema] power of interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanician recreate”.⁸⁰ According to Grierson, documentary privileges “stories... [taken] from the raw”, “spontaneous gesture” and an “intimacy of knowledge”.⁸¹ Grierson’s belief in the documentary film-maker’s power to find rather than create stories is symptomatic of the complicated relationship between the indexical nature of film and its subject matter. I argue that this split remains relevant to the problem of defining interactive

⁸⁰ Grierson, John. “First principles of documentary.” In *Grierson on Documentary*, edited by Forsythe Hardy, 145-156. London: Faber and Faber, 1966. 145.

⁸¹ Grierson, “First Principles”, 145.

documentary today— there remains a complicated relationship between the denotative capacity of the medium (and its power to suggest authenticity) and the connotative functions of perspective and narrative. Documentary has had to bear many burdens linked to technology. The photographic image was a technological breakthrough that theory had to catch up with. The nature of the photograph (or film) leads to a unique position of authority which was further cemented through the apparatus of the camera— the quasi-mechanical process providing a distance between the producer and the image.

The burgeoning field of interactive documentary is an innovation that has emerged through the proliferation of platforms like the worldwide web. Gaudenzi states that the fundamental difference between documentary and interactive documentary “is not the passage from analogue to digital technology but the passage from linear to interactive narrative”.⁸² There is therefore not a shift in denotative capacity, but connotative capacity.

What is an interactive narrative? Gaudenzi suggests that interactive documentary should be seen as full of “relational entities”, where “dynamic

⁸² Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 32.

systems formed by heterogeneous entities (humans, machines, protocols, technology, society, culture)” have interdependent components.⁸³ It then falls to the user to order or alter these entities to compose an interactive documentary. Gaudenzi goes on to state that “the interactive documentary should [not] be defined by its aims, or authorial voice, but by the relations it forms”.⁸⁴ Two points emerge here— in not defining documentary (at least partially) by its aims, a certain apolitical stance emerges. Gaudenzi states that “Since in this research the objective existence of facts and truth will be challenged, it would make no sense to retain them as indispensable”, however by divorcing documentary from its aims in favour of an entirely relational approach, the documentary aims are diminished in favour of abstract stylings and interactive innovations.⁸⁵ Secondly, Gaudenzi sees the fundamental characteristic that separates the interactive documentary from previous documentaries as being the inter-relational aspect, which we will build on. In essence, we must preserve the relational approach to describe interactivity, while also ensuring that the ‘documentary’ of interactive documentary is upheld.

⁸³ Ibid 15.

⁸⁴ Ibid 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The relationship between interactivity and documentary creates something that is more than just a simple sum of its parts. This idea is best examined through the Ricoeurian (although Aristotelean inspired) concepts of mimesis and muthos, which in turn will help us to tease out the individual concepts of ‘interactive’ and ‘documentary’.⁸⁶ While the later chapters of this thesis address mimesis and muthos in much greater detail, these two principles are important to touch upon in a preliminary way here in order to develop an understanding of the nature of interactivity in interactive documentary.

Mimesis, as explained by Ricoeur, represents a hermeneutic arc of interpretation that extends from prior experience, to interpreting the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference back to the sphere of human action. Ricoeur schematises this as mimesis₁ (prefiguration), mimesis₂ (configuration) and mimesis₃ (refiguration). Ricoeur’s mimesis is built on Aristotle’s poetics, and is an “active process of imitating or representing something... understood in the dynamic sense of making a representation, of a transposition into

⁸⁶ Muthos is a term which borrows from the ancient Greek rather than Latin. Although muthos and mythos are essentially different translations of the same term, Ricoeur uses the term muthos, and this thesis will follow in this Ricoeurian approach.

representative works”.⁸⁷ This will be discussed in depth later, but the salient point here is that Ricoeur places the reader (or user) as the site for the operations of meaning and reference, which therefore do not exist in the text in isolation from any event of reading. The other role of the reader (for Ricoeur) is to configure the events presented to them into some sort of order which makes sense for them. For Aristotle, this represents the “organisation of events”, which he terms *muthos*. Ricoeur takes from *muthos* the “active sense of organizing the events into a system”, and uses this as a base for his concept of *emplotment*.⁸⁸ For Ricoeur, *emplotment* is an action performed by the reader, and we will examine this attribute later when defining interactivity. Rather than a rigid structure, plot is configured through the user— this approach can account for a multiplicity of potential, latent narratives.

The *muthos* of interactive documentary emerges from the interaction of user and interactive documentary. The structure of narrative in an interactive documentary differs fundamentally from previous forms of documentary because it allows for a mode of *emplotment* that can impact the artefact itself. The organisation of events that constitutes *muthos* (or *emplotment*) can

⁸⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

now be literally acted upon by the user. Mimesis and muthos are important to remark on due to their useful division of the words interactive (linked to muthos and the structure of the narrative) and documentary (linked to mimesis and documentary representation).

1.4 Family resemblance

Wittgenstein provides a useful tool to collate existing definitions to help classify interactive documentary in a manner that makes interactive documentary capable of being studied hermeneutically, while retaining broad and diverse material characteristics. Because interactive documentary varies so wildly (to the point of occasional contradiction) under current definitions, examining shared characteristics has the dual function of delineating the boundaries of study, as well as building a networked definition that accounts for current theory yet is capable of sustaining an application of Ricoeurian thought. I propose that Wittgenstein's concept of Familienähnlichkeit (family resemblance) will help to trace the territory.

Hjalmar Wennerberg paraphrases Wittgenstein, stating that "family resemblances between a set of objects is not a sufficient but only a necessary

condition for the existence of a general term which denotes these objects”, which has more to do with how we classify rather than the inherent properties of the object.⁸⁹ Wittgenstein believed that our “craving for generality” was the result of a tendency to think “that there must be something common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term ‘game’ to the various games”.⁹⁰ This is a problem of semiotics, and refutes “the essentialist view that all the entities subsumed under a general word have something common in virtue of which they are so subsumed”.⁹¹ Further fleshing out this semiotic aporia, Wittgenstein states that a general term (he gives the example of the word ‘leaf’) possesses a “kind of general picture... as opposed to pictures of particular leaves”.⁹² To bring this question to bear on the definition of interactive documentary, there are huge variations in what is called an interactive documentary— while documentary aims could be taken as being a common factor, that would only distinguish documentary from conceptual art, not accounting for modes of interactivity or

⁸⁹ Wennerberg, Hjalmar. “The concept of family resemblance in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.” *Theoria* 33, No. 2 (1967): 117.

⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Blue and Brown Books*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965, 17.

⁹¹ Griffin, Nicholas. “Wittgenstein, Universals and Family Resemblances.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 3, No. 4 (1974): 635.

⁹² Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 17.

the diversity of documentary subjects. The tendency in the field has been to point to digital and programmatic relations between user and artefact, but this necessitates a specific materiality, a position it is the purpose of the present thesis to expand upon. Wittgenstein, in attempting to find properties common to all games, sees “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail”.⁹³ Wittgenstein characterises these similarities as family resemblances, “for the various resemblances between the members of a family... overlap and criss-cross in the same way”.⁹⁴ This definition is a complex and networked approach to the complex and networked field of interactive documentary.

My use of Wittgenstein is motivated by two ideas. First, Wittgenstein examines family resemblance in games, and interactive documentary shares similarities with games. Kerrick Harvey writes that “the core argument here is that, being a game, the success of an ARG⁹⁵ depends on the continued and active participation of ‘players’ rather than on the passive viewing of an

⁹³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. Gertrude Anscombe, New York: Macmillan, 1953. 66.

⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 67.

⁹⁵ ‘Alternative Reality Game’.

‘audience’”.⁹⁶ The participative aspect as well as the rules governing effective engagement have occasionally led interactive documentary to be considered under video game theory, particularly with suggestions of ludic narrative.⁹⁷ Secondly, although Ricoeur criticises Wittgenstein’s account of language for “situat[ing] himself immediately in this world of everyday experience, in which language is a form of activity like eating, drinking, and sleeping”, there is plenty of evidence that Ricoeur’s account of language is compatible with Wittgenstein’s, as they cover largely different areas.⁹⁸ Indeed, Ricoeur uses Wittgenstein to relate the concepts of narrativity and temporality as “a language game and a form of life”.⁹⁹

Is there a feature common to all interactive documentaries? Is there a feature that is both common and peculiar? Gaudenzi writes that “if linear documentary demands a cognitive participation from its viewers (the act of interpretation), the interactive documentary adds the demand of physical

⁹⁶ Harvey, Kerrick. “‘Walk-In Documentary’: New Paradigms for Game-Based Interactive Storytelling and Experiential Conflict Mediation.” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, No. 2 (2014): 190.

⁹⁷ See Raessens.

⁹⁸ Ricoeur, Paul. “Husserl and Wittgenstein on Language.” In *Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, edited by Harold Durfee, pp. 87–95. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. 1976. 94.

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time”, 169.

participation (decisions that translate into a physical act such as clicking, moving, speaking, commenting etc...)”.¹⁰⁰ This is a feature which is common to all interactive documentaries (if a documentary exists without this feature, then it is simply a documentary). However, interaction is not *peculiar* to interactive documentary. We have countless interactions every day — between people, mediated via digital technologies, with physical objects. Interacting with contemporary artwork is an example of an environment close to the interactive documentary, yet not all contemporary artwork that is able to be interacted with is an interactive documentary. Thus a documentary drive¹⁰¹ is required — and must be a common characteristic.

Within this relationship between of interactivity and documentary (recall here the discussion of interactivity as *muthos*, documentary as *mimesis*), we find that there are two common characteristics which must exist in order to qualify something as being an interactive documentary — an engagement by the viewer which is not solely cognitive, and a documentary drive. Neither of these two characteristics are peculiar to interactive documentary separately,

¹⁰⁰ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 32.

¹⁰¹ As discussed earlier with regards to Nash and Eitzen — Nash outlines these drives as consisting of “recording and preserving, fostering civic involvement and persuasion”. (Nash, “What is Interactivity for?”, 391.)

but both are necessary. Taken together, the combination becomes peculiar.¹⁰² A presentation of current definitions will help to expand the common characteristics, and in providing an overview, also prove that at no point in the interactive documentary process (from production, to ordering, to interacting) is there a digital prerequisite. I discuss Gaudenzi's attempts at defining different participatory levels, then embed these in Nash's writing around the impact of interactivity on representation. Finally, I approach Craig Hight to address the idea of a database— which will lead into a refutation of the digital requirement (via a brief detour through a materialist argument presented by Miles).

1.5 Current definitions

The definitions I present immediately below are by no means exhaustive—these are just examples of extant work in the field of interactive documentary. Nor are the individual definitions specific to that individual author. Moreover, the broad difference between materialist approaches and hermeneutic approaches does not mean that they do not share some similarities, and the intention here is not to get each to invalidate the other. The difference in these

¹⁰² As an example, documentary simpliciter has a documentary drive, and expanded cinema has an engagement by the viewer which is not solely cognitive.

approaches is more a matter of focus, not that each of these perspectives is mutually exclusive. What this thesis is doing is bringing a rigorous study of Ricoeur and hermeneutics to ongoing debates in the field.

Gaudenzi presents four modes of interactivity. This schema helps to characterise the hermeneutic differences that different levels of participation can bring. Interactivity is more than an action of solely muthos — or emplotment. It impacts hermeneutic interpretation and the process of mimesis. How do we incorporate this dual nature into a definition of interactive documentary? Gaudenzi is one of many theorists who approach interactive documentary with the assumption that it is the interactive element that requires definition, and takes documentary as a known term — building on the work first begun by Grierson. Gaudenzi's approach is to discuss an interactive documentary based on how the interrelated components form a dynamic system via the mediation of the user. Gaudenzi builds her relational approach by adopting John Corner's position that "specific production practices, forms and functions all work to 'hold together' (or not) the documentary identity at different times and places".¹⁰³ While this does not

¹⁰³ Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary", 25.

require digital technology, Gaudenzi believes that “what is implicit in its terminology is that an interactive documentary needs to use a digital support, and be interactive”.¹⁰⁴ Assuming an implicit digital nature leads Gaudenzi to “include in the notion of interactive documentaries all the factual narratives that can be done with the existing, and possibly future, digital interactive platforms”.¹⁰⁵ There is no mention of why an interactive documentary must be digital, and this appears to conflict with Gaudenzi’s statement that “a platform-agnostic definition [of interactive documentary] is therefore needed”.¹⁰⁶

Gaudenzi posits that “a linear documentary that has been shot with digital technology, and that is distributed on the Web, is a digital documentary but not an interactive one”.¹⁰⁷ Thus the concept of interactivity, is predicated on the belief that the “user needs to have an agency”, rather than on the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid 26.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 31.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 26.

technologies themselves.¹⁰⁸ In the interests of providing a broad notion of interactive documentary, Gaudenzi suggests that any definition must be applicable to multiple digital platforms. By not constraining her definition to a single platform, she has already done half the work to allow for a non-digital interactive documentary. Gaudenzi's recourse to platform-agnosticism does not mean platform-indifference— I recognise that presenting an interactive documentary via different media can have fundamentally different impacts. An effective hermeneutic approach will not erase any differences between platforms, but see them as affecting the interpretation— much like how mimesis and muthos do not exist in separate vacuums.

There are, of course, many different types of interactive documentary. Gaudenzi organises them into four distinct modes: the conversational mode, the hitchhiking mode, the participatory mode and the experiential mode. These modes differ based on the various participatory levels— from “semi-closed (when the user can browse but not change the content)”, “semi-open

¹⁰⁸ Gaudenzi provides a discussion of agency— adopting Janet Murray's definition of agency as “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices”. (Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 126.)

Gaudenzi chooses this definition as it “puts the emphasis on the notion of ‘power’”, and continues to use agency in her thesis to explore the power dynamic of interactive documentaries. (Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 126.); Ibid.

(when the user can participate but not change the structure of the interactive documentary)” or even “completely open (when the user and the interactive documentary constantly change and adapt to each other)”.¹⁰⁹ The four modes have been defined to ask questions like “What can [the user] do? How far can they take control? What are they responsible for?” — Gaudenzi’s questions essentially concern how the user constructs meaning from this participation.¹¹⁰ This concretises the concept of a platform-agnostic approach, as different levels of participation can render different experiences of the interactive documentary. Organising interactive documentary into several modes distinguishes different levels of interactivity. There is no binary¹¹¹ of interactivity / non-interactivity, but instead a more diverse spectrum of interactivities. Different interactive modes help to explain how interaction is more complex than ordering elements. It is problematic to simplify the idea of documentary to make it a simple recording of events. Gaudenzi provides the example of an “accidental 22 seconds [of] 8-mm footage shot by amateur Abraham Zapruder of the assassination of President Kennedy” — while

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 69.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ By this I mean a simplistic view where if a documentary is considered interactive, the interactive element has the same impact on the user no matter the level of participation. This highlights the importance of Wittgenstein in ensuring that the definition of interactive documentary does not simplify different levels of interaction.

factually accurate, the lack of structure or context truncates the possible documentary applications.¹¹² Interactive modes can help structure and contextualise this footage— and the interactive mode can change our understanding of the event.¹¹³

If one is not aware that the person being assassinated is President Kennedy, then the latent meaning cannot be constructed by the viewer— simple documentation does not allow us to understand that the person being assassinated is the President, or the cultural impact of that moment. The roles of mimesis and muthos are critical: both to make sense of what is being depicted, and to structure interpretation in a way that creates a meaningful narrative. Gaudenzi has discussed two relationships thus far—That of materiality to interpretation, and that of documentation to context. Interactivity has been shown to be a contextualising force as well as an organisational (or disorganisational) one— thus complicating the relationship between mimesis and muthos, and ensuring that interactivity and

¹¹² Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 34.

¹¹³ Edward Barrett and Marie Redmond expand upon this contextualisation, writing on how navigational structures in interactive multimedia systems can impact the social construction of knowledge (Barrett, Edward, and Marie Redmond, eds. *Contextual Media: Multimedia and Interpretation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.)

documentary cannot be taken as two separate concepts simply stitched together.

Gaudenzi's definition of an interactive documentary includes "any project that starts with an intention to document the 'real', and that does so by using digital interactive technology", and while appearing unapologetically based on the digital, Gaudenzi then clarifies that "it is not the fact of being digital that gives it a specific form, nor the fact of documenting, but the fact of documenting through interactivity".¹¹⁴ This is to say that the delivery mechanism is a core part of the definition, and makes up the bulk of Gaudenzi's discussion. Moreover, Gaudenzi sees the interaction between the user and the interactive documentary as having a bilateral relationship— how we change our environment and how our environment changes us is a relationship that escalates with the increased autonomy an interactive documentary provides.

Nash runs a somewhat parallel course to Gaudenzi in considering interactive documentary. It is important to note that Nash writes about web-

¹¹⁴ Ibid 69.

documentary, which falls under a broader interactive documentary umbrella. Web-documentary is inherently digital, as its delivery format must be via the world wide web. First, let us keep in mind that Nash is presenting web-documentary as a subcategory of interactive documentary— and that web-documentary must be inherently digital. Secondly, Nash argues that “technology, while an important factor in discussions of interactivity, cannot in isolation help us to grasp the contribution that interactivity makes to documentary discourse”.¹¹⁵ With this noted, Nash has several ideas which can be applied to interactive documentary. Nash “considers interactivity as a representational strategy”, ultimately presenting a schema of three “interactive structures”— the “narrative, the categorical and the collaborative”.¹¹⁶ These structures are based on “control over content, the ability to contribute and the framing of user contributions and, finally, the ability to form relationships and present one’s case”.¹¹⁷ What Nash does by introducing three structures is to suggest that “webdocs exhibit patterns of textual organisation”, which then allows her to make a case for “textual analysis of the webdoc”.¹¹⁸ This is an

¹¹⁵ Nash, Kate. “Modes of Interactivity: Analysing the Webdoc.” *Media, Culture & Society* 34, No. 2 (2012): 200.

¹¹⁶ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 195.

¹¹⁷ Ibid 200.

¹¹⁸ Ibid 197.

important base on which to build a Ricoeurian theory, and Nash has much in common with a hermeneutic approach. In other words, Gaudenzi's approach tends towards material considerations, while Nash's is more hermeneutic in nature— each complementing the other.

Nash proposes three “dimensions of interactivity”, which are “the form of interactivity, the purpose or motivation for interactivity and the context of interactivity”.¹¹⁹ Nash suggests that these three dimensions can then lead to “at least three interactive structures... narrative, categorical and collaborative”.¹²⁰ Nash's fondness for tripartite schema aside, she also shares Ricoeur's belief for the “need to consider meaning”, and she mentions that her framework “does not currently take into account the ways in which the meaning of webdoc interactivity may trade on the familiarity of audiences with the internet as a source of information and a site of different media practices”.¹²¹ This is reminiscent of the prefiguration stage of mimesis as proposed by Ricoeur, where “to imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this

¹¹⁹ Ibid 196.

¹²⁰ Ibid 197.

¹²¹ Ibid 208.

preunderstanding, common to both poets and readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics”.¹²² Nash proposes further study into this mimetic relationship, and she specifically questions “to what extent... might the meaning of collaborative production refer back to users’ experience of new media practices like photo sharing and blogging”.¹²³ Nash’s approach focusses on the hermeneutic relationship between the user and the interactive documentary, instead of the more material relationships through a materialist perspective. By asking what prefigures the audience, she positions her dimensions of interactivity as a primarily hermeneutic device rather than a material one. An intervention by Ricoeur here will strengthen Nash’s approach through helping to account for the relationship between the context of prior user knowledge and the framework of interactive documentary.

Nash’s interactive structures shed light on how interactivity furthers documentary aims— as an embedded tool rather than a separate delivery mechanism. Nash states that “Critical reflection on participation *in* documentary would focus on the nature of participant contributions, the

¹²² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 64.

¹²³ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 208.

‘framing’ of the invitation to participate and the relationships surrounding production. In contrast, participation *through* media draws attention to documentary’s social dimension”.¹²⁴ In a sense, participation *in* is similar to the act of writing, which focusses on production. Participation *through* is a connection and engagement, but without the decision-making around representation— much like how when one reads a text, they do not rewrite the words. Nash’s focus is on how “interactivity [contributes] to representation”, and how “interactive activities contribute to the documentary project”.¹²⁵ This is a Ricoeurian question— asking how emplotment (or interaction) affects the configuration stage (representation) or the refiguration stage (the documentary project— or actions outside of the text). Let me also be clear— this is a key focus of the field in general. And this is where an intervention by Ricoeur can help to better understand how interactive activities contribute to the documentary approach.

Nash helps to contextualise Gaudenzi’s modes of interactivity, where these interactive modes can be traced back to questions around not just how we interact with the interactive documentary, but what that does to the

¹²⁴ Nash, “What Is Interactivity for?”, 387.

¹²⁵ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 196.

documentary itself. As a brief postscript, Nash too recognises Wittgenstein's family resemblance as an apt tool to discuss what interactive documentary has in common with "traditional documentary", which includes "the institutions and contexts of production, textual conventions and continuities of purpose".¹²⁶ This cements Nash's concern around the 'why' regarding interactivity in documentary, not just the 'how'. While Nash's approach is more hermeneutic in nature, Hight's definition of interactive documentary helps to consider how the user navigates around a documentary database— a technological format that is new to the field of documentary in general, and an important consideration in interactive documentary.

Hight's essay "The field of digital documentary: a challenge to documentary theorists" comes a few years before Nash or Gaudenzi. Hight's immediate interest is in "the relationship between documentary and digital technologies", and extols the virtues of digital platforms as allowing for "far more direct, if not yet fully democratic, forms of participation".¹²⁷ He recognises the difficulty in formulating a definition, admitting that he has

¹²⁶ Ibid 197.

¹²⁷ Hight, Craig. "The Field of Digital Documentary: A Challenge to Documentary Theorists." *Studies in Documentary Film* 2, No. 1 (2008): 3.

“clumsily” grouped together digital platforms for documentary under the label of “digital documentary”.¹²⁸ Like Nash, Hight focusses his definition on digital documentary (even including the word digital in his title), and does not use the nomenclature of interactive documentary. Similarly to Nash, I suggest that the digital interactive documentary can be contained within interactive documentary. We can imagine a digital interactive documentary, but this does not make all interactive documentary digital. Hight is useful not for his writing on the digital medium, but instead for his argument about rejecting a collective term— this approach is Wittgensteinian in principle.

Hight recognises “the manner in which digital technologies are increasingly incorporated into ‘conventional’ documentary practice“, which ranges from “the increasing use of digital camcorders and other mobile devices as the main means of gaining footage, to the reliance on desktop-based (or mobile, laptop-based) digital non-linear editing systems”.¹²⁹ It is not contentious to say that one can utilise either digital or analogue technologies to create a documentary that is not interactive— there is no material restriction placed on the documentary simpliciter here. Despite the fact that

¹²⁸ Hight, “The Field of Digital Documentary”, 3.

¹²⁹ Ibid 4.

documentary simpliciter is clearly not “‘native’ to [a] digital platform”,¹³⁰ we can claim that documentary simpliciter can exist digitally.¹³¹ Hight suggests that the modes of production for a documentary simpliciter and an interactive documentary can be similar in nature and medium. What Hight sees as the crucial distinction is the narrative complexity that arises with an interactive documentary.

Hight argues that we must “reconceptualize and clarify those things that make ‘documentary’ distinctive from other kinds of symbolic forms”, suggesting the abandonment of a collective term to describe the documentary, instead “identifying a number of distinct practices that overlap the digital and analogue... and distinct practices of engagement centred on a clearly-defined continuum of interactivity and participation”.¹³² Hight’s proposed definition is not based on medium but on what he terms practices of engagement, which is able to be discussed and explored outside of material terms. Hight’s divorce of documentary from medium is a decisive step in a definition of interactive documentary with no digital requirement.

¹³⁰ To borrow again from Gaudenzi.

¹³¹ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 30.

¹³² Hight, “The Field of Digital Documentary”, 6.

The concept of a database is discussed by Hight, and bridges the gap between the hermeneutic possibilities of interactive documentary with the medium-specific actualities. Hight asks “how does the creation of pathways through database-centred content relate to the creation of narrative and argument that are of such central concern to documentary practice”?¹³³ Hight’s question relates to how narrative and meaning are constructed and mediated given a wide base of potential content and relations to choose from. A database is required to navigate through an interactive documentary — in order to actually interact, the user requires their actions to make a difference to how the interactive documentary is delivered. The creation of a database is simplified in a digital state, but this is not a precondition — and the size and complexity of databases can change depending on the participatory mode. Some databases may be closed to alteration, while others may welcome amendments. A database is capable of being studied both in terms of the relations it may have outside of human interaction (for example, how different video clips may hyperlink together), and it also allows us to track how the user navigates the interactive documentary. The database is the link between

¹³³ Ibid.

the interpreted qualities of the interactive documentary, the documentary content being referred to and interacted with, and the structuration or emplotment of the interactive documentary.

Around Gaudenzi, Nash and Hight, common features have emerged. Gaudenzi suggests that interactive documentary, while platform agnostic, is affected by changes in platforms. She sets forth a relational and dynamic system that is mediated by the user. Nash further questions the user's role, specifically raising the issue of how interactivity furthers the documentary project. Nash's dimensions of interactivity link the delivery mechanism (what Gaudenzi would call a mode) to the documentary project— which all these theorists see as similar to that of the non-interactive documentary. Finally, Hight discusses the database, which is ultimately what links the user, the content, the structure and the participatory mode. Throughout my analysis of all three theorists, I have slowly constructed a definition that is largely compatible with existing theory. First, we take from Gaudenzi her notion of a platform agnostic approach, where an interactive documentary is capable of existing across platforms, but these platforms and ways of participation can shape how the user constructs meaning. Gaudenzi's argument that the

interactive documentary requires a digital support is refuted by her definition privileging the diverse relations that a documentary has with itself and its user. Nash's idea of interactive structures reinforces the importance of hermeneutics, as they question the relationship that interactivity has with interpretation, and thus, the documentary project. Nash's approach is limited as she specifies the web documentary rather than interactive documentary in general. By using Hight's definition of a database, Nash's more mimetic perspective can be applied to interactive documentaries at large. A definition of interactive documentary can thus be seen to require three clarifications. First— what interactivity means, and what levels a documentary can have. Secondly, what the documentary means, and how interactivity can affect this. Finally, the materiality of the interactive documentary cannot be excluded. While Hight's discussion on databases helps to orient the interactive documentary, it does not directly address a recent movement that refutes attempts to define an interactive documentary in discursive terms.

1.6 Meaning and definition

In collating definitions of interactive documentary, I have made several judgements— that an interactive documentary requires a human input, that

an interactive documentary must work to documentary aims, and that it is important to examine how we interpret interactive documentary. This is a hermeneutic perspective.

A materialist approach must be brought into the conversation here. In Miles' essay "Matters of concern and interactive documentary: notes for a computational nonfiction", he explains that contemporary humanities scholars "spend a lot of effort worrying about the problem of how to classify and sort things that do not need, or necessarily like, to be classified and sorted".¹³⁴ He argues that this approach to interactive documentary has "largely mirrored the broad approach of cinema... where discussions about genre, style, narrative, interpretation and audiences" results in corresponding epistemological categories— Ricoeur falls into this approach.¹³⁵ Miles calls on Jussi Parikka to discuss interactive documentary in an 'ontological' way,¹³⁶ rather than "[conceptualising] audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects for what they mean socially, culturally, politically and

¹³⁴ Miles, "Matters of Concern", 104.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ This is to say, examining what there is— what specific relations the pieces of media within an interactive documentary have with each other.

hermeneutically”.¹³⁷ Miles concludes his essay by stating that interactive documentary requires research methods that are able to account for “messy sets of interrelations”— and that his own approach of examining “individual interactive documentaries as relational and inevitably deeply material actor—networks” is just one of many possible approaches.¹³⁸ Ultimately, this material does not devalue or preclude a hermeneutic approach (or vice versa).¹³⁹ The questions Miles raises concerning the material networks present in interactive documentary is an important side to the same coin, and aids discussion on how modes of representation alter interpretation. Just as documentary scholars in the 1930s had to account for the material realities of documentary, we must construct an approach that does justice to the materiality of the interactive documentary. To do this, Miles’ concerns must be incorporated into our working definition, based around Gaudenzi’s modes of representation, Nash’s interactive structures and Hight’s database.

My approach differs from Miles, as like Nash, I see the refiguration stage as

¹³⁷ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.

¹³⁸ Ibid 115.

¹³⁹ Miles is of the same mind here— he notes that “I am not interested in negating existing work in interactive documentary theory (such labour strikes me as a petty, null game of largely Oedipal resentment)”. (Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.)

a critical component of interactive documentary. In other words, what a documentary *means* is important, and how it urges a change in perspective in a broader, more practical sense is important. To take the interactive documentary from a machine of myriad relations and programmatic impulses to a meaningful narrative for the user requires a translation of sorts. Let us consider again Gaudenzi's example of the Kennedy assassination. I argue that just as the lack of context limits the heuristic power of the video, without a focus on the user the interactive documentary remains a passive object, unable to perform Nash's four roles of "recording and preserving, fostering civic involvement and persuasion".¹⁴⁰ While Miles is able to consider the material network of relationships within interactive documentary, hermeneutics allows for a completely different but just as valuable approach— the user is after all a crucial part of the interactive documentary, helping to give it a level of sociopolitical power that is impossible to gain through an object-oriented ontology.

Defining interactive documentary through a model of hermeneutics also enriches the material perspective— even the Latourian actor-network theory

¹⁴⁰ Nash, "What Is Interactivity for?", 391.

that Miles espouses, which “accords no particular privilege to the human, social, semiotic or cultural”.¹⁴¹ Miles points to Hight, Nash and Gaudenzi as having developed widely adopted “classificatory schemas” for interactive documentary.¹⁴² Miles argues that “taxonomies and classificatory schemas are inimical” to the task of finding research methods that “no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable”.¹⁴³ I must mention here that this does not mean the two research methods are incompatible. Miles writes that the “specificity and individuality of relations matter”— I completely agree with this, but I argue that it is by refining the scope of an interactive documentary that one can then progress to addressing the specificity of its relations with the exterior world.¹⁴⁴ To define an area of study to allow for a hermeneutic approach does not diminish the potential of these relations, nor does the process act as a substitute for investigation.

1.7 Conclusion

Having discussed what defines an interactive documentary, as well as the

¹⁴¹ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 106.

¹⁴² Ibid 110.

¹⁴³ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 111; Law, John. *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 111.

importance of coming up with such a definition, the interactive documentary can be said to have no explicitly digital requirement. For Gaudenzi, “any project that starts with an intention to document the ‘real’, and that does so by using digital interactive technology, will be considered an interactive documentary”.¹⁴⁵ Here, Gaudenzi hints as to why she uses the word ‘digital’ as a qualifier, stating that “this definition puts the emphasis on the interactive-native nature of the artefact, and on the documentation intentionality of the author”.¹⁴⁶ Gaudenzi’s insistence on the interactive documentary as digital entity is based on Martin Percy. Gaudenzi aims to “retain from his definition [of internet native movies] the idea that an interactive documentary needs to be ‘native’ to its digital platform”.¹⁴⁷ This runs the risk of conflating ease of production with definitional boundaries. In other words, I agree with Gaudenzi to the extent that digital platforms have made it easier than ever to create interactive documentaries— billions of possible pathways can be rendered in an instant, and the user can engage with these interactive documentaries in a way that can be accessible from almost anywhere with almost any device. But this does not mean that the interactive documentary

¹⁴⁵ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 30.

must be digital.

Of course, digital technologies open up many more possibilities. As the database is a defining feature of interactive documentary, the digital inherently lends itself to this capacity. This chapter does not dispute this. Instead, the aim of the chapter was to ensure that current definitions of interactive documentary did not have an inherently digital bias, which risks erasing diverse approaches. Judith Aston quotes Douglas Adams, who addresses the neologism ‘interactivity’, writing that “during [the 20th] century we have for the first time been dominated by non-interactive forms of entertainment: cinema, radio, recorded music and television. Before they came along, all entertainment was interactive”.¹⁴⁸ Just how this makes thinking about interactivity important, I have argued that because interactive documentary has been dominated by digital formats, means that we must be careful not to completely exclude other formats. I have supplied some examples in this chapter— imagining *Choose Your Own Documentary* as

¹⁴⁸ Aston, Judith. “Interactive documentary - what does it mean and why does it matter?” *I-Docs.org*. <<http://i-docs.org/interactive-documentary-what-does-it-mean-and-why-does-it-matter/>>; Adams, Douglas. “How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet”. *The Sunday Times*. August 29, 1999. Accessed 20 Apr. 2021. <https://internet.psych.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/532-Master/532-UnitPages/Unit-14/DouglasAdams_1999_Edited.pdf>. 2.

existing in an analogue format, similar to *Kinoautomat*.

Gaudenzi argues that “by placing the viewer in a position of doer [interactive documentaries] afford specific roles that are both symptomatic and formative of social and political power relations”, and the roles determining what the user becomes “[depend] on the interactivity afforded by the artefact”.¹⁴⁹ This extends Ricoeur’s concept of the task of the reader—Ricoeur describes the status of reading as “at once a stasis and impetus”.¹⁵⁰ The database (and navigation of it) can exist in analogue contexts. Gaudenzi presents several examples: “performances or exhibitions or docu-games”, which are hybrid in nature, as the navigation element is performed physically by the user.¹⁵¹ Gaudenzi acknowledges this, stating that “the interactive documentary should not be confined to the simple human-machine interaction process - where the user acts and the computer reacts, creating a series of on/off loops that leads to the fulfilment of the user’s goal”.¹⁵² To simultaneously navigate and be affected by the database of an interactive

¹⁴⁹ Ibid 37.

¹⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 179.

¹⁵¹ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 29.

¹⁵² Ibid 74.

documentary, the user is less “in control of” the artefact, but more “[a] part of it”.¹⁵³ To put this into Ricoeurian terms, the interactive element informs structure, and the documentary element informs content. Interactivity can be seen as *muthos*, and documentary can be seen as *mimesis*.

I have proposed that an interactive documentary must have a user, an artefact and an interaction. The artefact, as argued, can be either analogue or digital with the caveat that the platform does indeed impact on the final interpretation. The artefact has some limitations— it must adhere to the tenets of documentary photography, which Nash briefly summarises as to “record, reveal or preserve”, promote “civic engagement” or to “[persuade]”.¹⁵⁴ This avoids casting too wide a net and is in keeping with documentary’s sociopolitical aims. In addition, the artefact must physically exist, and be distinct from the user. Conjecturing, postulating or considering a documentary topic cannot count as an interactive documentary. An interactive documentary must be irreducibly material in order to have the separation of world of the text and world of the reader.

¹⁵³ Ibid 75.

¹⁵⁴ Nash, “What is Interactivity for?”, 388-390.

The user also must have limits. Can the user be a machine or an animal? Gaudenzi approaches Galloway's proposition that "any documentary that uses interactivity as a core part of its delivery mechanism can be called an interactive documentary", as Gaudenzi argues that "interactivity changes all the stages of the creation/production/life of the interactive documentary".¹⁵⁵ A definition based solely on the mode of delivery is insufficient to fully explain interactivity. To fully engage with the idea of documentary, a user (with a social conscience, a prefigured world and an ability to act)¹⁵⁶ must interact— with their task being not to "[enumerate] events in a serial order", but instead to "organise them into an intelligible whole".¹⁵⁷

Ultimately, while I agree that digital technologies make the production and dissemination of interactive documentary *easier* due to their programmatic nature, I reject the notion that digital technologies form a fundamental characteristic of interactive documentary. If one is encouraged to judge an interactive documentary based on its relationships (with the world, the user

¹⁵⁵ Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary", 12; Ibid 29.

¹⁵⁶ Although this will be fully explained in the mimesis chapter— being a human is not the only prerequisite to being an interactive documentary user. The interactive documentary user must meet further requirements such as knowing how to interact and having the impression that they are interacting.

¹⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

and its own constituent parts), then I would argue that these relationships are not predicated on being digital. This perspective also helps clarify the relationship between how we interact with digital media in general. To unnecessarily restrict the definition of interactive documentary is unproductive. It can gear discussion to a specific type of interactive documentary which may not fully represent the broad spectrum out there. We should not prescribe the materiality of the interactive documentary, but rather adopt the more productive approach of judging it based on its narrative complexity, and the heuristic power it provides the user. I have shown that the interactive documentary, following the definitions provided in this essay, has no digital requirement. I have consolidated Hight's database, Gaudenzi's modes of participation, Nash's dimensions of interactivity and Miles' materialist approach in order to establish that the interactive documentary is best defined through its relations. It is this relational element which makes interactive documentary ripe for a hermeneutic analysis.

2. Mimesis

2.1 Introduction

While interactivity has been seen to “[give] an agency to the user— the power to physically ‘do’ something”, there has yet to be a rigorous application of Ricoeur’s ideas to interactive documentary in order to further tease out the nature of this agency and how this impacts on interpretation.¹⁵⁸ While work has been done around interactive ‘modes’ (see Nash, Hight and Summerhayes), these modes are generally discussed from the perspective of how the user physically interacts with an interactive documentary. This chapter aims to show that a hermeneutic approach is critical to consider when discussing interactive documentary. This hermeneutic approach does not have to rely on linguistics, and can be compatible instead with the wide range of interactive documentaries and interactive documentary theory. The result of this approach will begin to develop a hermeneutics of interactivity— of understanding how the hermeneutic facet of interaction intersects with physical capabilities and phenomenological understanding.

¹⁵⁸ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 3.

Nash, Hight and Summerhayes write that “while documentary scholarship has frequently considered the contexts in which documentary is produced (and, to a much lesser text, consumed), an ecological framework calls for an extension of this to foreground the interdependent relationships between media”.¹⁵⁹ Miles writes that “this ontology of media is a way to let us recognise the implicit materialism of media... this media materialism is then a way to engage with media as technical, engineered, mathematical, ecological and cultural objects without first translating everything into the form or model of language as an intellectual Esperanto”.¹⁶⁰ These approaches, while useful, should not be seen as exhaustive. Miles continues, writing that an “interest in meaning reflects a theoretical epistemology that conceptualises audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects that can be examined for what they mean socially, culturally, politically and hermeneutically”.¹⁶¹ Miles argues that the “habit of placing a desire for meaning first risks missing what is novel and different, and therefore possible, in interactive documentary because in seeking meaning I first reduce all to the form or model of

¹⁵⁹ Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes, “Introduction”, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Miles, “Matters of concern”, 105.

¹⁶¹ Ibid 104-105.

language”.¹⁶² This chapter argues that a hermeneutic approach is not reductive, and does not function through simplistic epistemological categorisation, but instead offers a broad and multifaceted approach to meaning in interactive documentary. To do this, Ricoeur’s mimesis is introduced and adapted to discuss interactive documentary.

Each of mimesis’ three steps will first be defined and articulated in terms of relevance to interactive documentary. From this, each stage will be used to develop a hermeneutics of interactivity, spanning from user competencies and abilities, to a conceptualising of interaction as action and reaction, and finally to the relationship between interaction and understanding. By exploring a hermeneutic approach to interactivity in interactive documentary through Ricoeur’s mimesis, this chapter argues that interactivity is more than an act by the user, but is an action and reaction understood in hermeneutic terms. This is an important point— as it positions interactivity as being of the same hermeneutic order as reading. However, this is not an instance of reducing everything to language. The trans-linguistic merit of this approach will be discussed further in the chapter. Briefly put, by comparing (but not equating)

¹⁶² Ibid 105.

reading and interactivity, interactivity can be discussed as both a navigation of the text and as an interpretation of the content. This opens up interactivity to being discussed in terms of both narratological structuring as well as as a historicising and fictionalising force— both approaches will be addressed further in the thesis.

Importantly, Ricoeur situates many of his concepts along the hermeneutic arc of mimesis. By laying out the groundwork early in the thesis, we can then easily locate and build concepts upon the conceptual map that mimesis provides. Mimesis accounts for the phenomenological impact of the text and the consideration of the text as a discursive whole— not as a collection of small units clumped together. It is this holistic approach that can consider the diverse formats of interactive documentary, as the final format of an interactive documentary is ultimately dependent on the user.

2.2 Overview of mimesis

Based on Aristotle's mimesis praxeos,¹⁶³ Ricoeurian mimesis represents a

¹⁶³ Ricoeur explains in *Time and Narrative* 1 that Aristotle develops in the *Poetics* an understanding of representation. Ricoeur essentially bifurcates Aristotle's tragedy into "imitation or representation of action" and "the organisation of events" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 34). Mimesis praxeos refers to the imitation or representation of action.

hermeneutic arc of interpretation that extends from prior experience, to engagement with the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference (of the text) back to the sphere of human action. Ricoeur places the reader as the ontological site for the operations of meaning and reference, which means that what is described through the hermeneutic arc belongs to the “world of the reader”, though this world is in turn transformed by its hermeneutic encounter.¹⁶⁴ Through reimagining Ricoeur’s mimesis via the lens of interactive documentary, this chapter will show that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic arc of interpretation is procedural rather than instantaneous, thus highlighting the potency of hermeneutics to describe interactive documentary. The point of Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis is to avoid the assumption of an immediate and unchangeable understanding. It provides a way to highlight both the problems surrounding subjectivity and objectivity, and a relation of the text to human action— which is a more complex relationship than interactive documentary theorists have suggested.

Mimesis is an awareness of connotation and denotation, of phenomenology and epistemology. This chapter argues that a discussion

¹⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 99.

around meaning does not mean reducing everything to either a model of language or a fixed epistemology. Mimesis constitutes the interpretation of an image that is not a reconstruction or a dull simulacrum, but “by which practical experience provides itself with works, authors and readers”.¹⁶⁵ A hermeneutic approach has been mischaracterised by interactive documentary theorists as concerned only with syntactic and semantic structures of a work. Hermeneutics will be shown to instead offer new avenues for examining the interactive documentary — allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations and approaches that, in turn, helps us to extend Ricoeur’s own account of the hermeneutic encounter. Ultimately, this chapter will show that the user of an interactive documentary plays an important role, and moreover, that that the user and the interactive documentary have a relationship which results in interaction changing them both.

2.3 Ricoeur's tripartite schema

This chapter will use Ricoeur’s tripartite mimesis as a guide for discussion. Developed in *Time and Narrative* volume 1, Ricoeur’s mimesis draws on

¹⁶⁵ Ibid 53.

Aristotle's poetics,¹⁶⁶ and contains the stages of prefiguration (mimesis₁), configuration (mimesis₂) and refiguration (mimesis₃). We will establish that each stage of Ricoeur's mimesis is compatible with (and relevant to) interactive documentary. This must be done for each of the three stages in order to prepare the way for future discussions (later in this chapter as well as further in the thesis). After this, each stage will be revisited in order to construct a hermeneutics of interactivity.

Ricoeur calls prefiguration (mimesis₁) a “pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character”.¹⁶⁷ In other words, if there is to be a representation (and interpretation), the reader (and user, as it will be later shown) requires the capacity to identify several articulations. To understand a text is to understand the “language of... cultural tradition”.¹⁶⁸ At first examination this may seem obvious— that the user must understand, at some level, what the interactive documentary depicts. However, this stage of mimesis will be expanded upon

¹⁶⁶ This reference is perhaps most explicit in Ricoeur's stage of configuration (mimesis₂), where Ricoeur follows Aristotle in asserting that “plot is not a static structure but an operation, an integrating process... completed only in the reader or in the spectator”. (Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, 21.)

¹⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 54.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid 57.

through including the actual haptics and heuristics of interactivity. While Ricoeur used prefiguration to assume a reader who had past experience to draw on, and could understand the abstraction of the text, this chapter will show that prefiguration must also be seen as describing the interactive capacity of the user.

Prefiguration is where this chapter will locate the discussion of interactive modes— of the capacities of the user to interact with the interactive documentary. This will necessitate a different approach to Ricoeur's concept of prefiguration, which until now has just represented understanding, rather than action. It is important to place action within prefiguration rather than configuration as interaction is a prerequisite to configuring the interactive documentary, rather than a consequence of prefiguration.

The audience's prefiguration and the text itself are consolidated through configuration (mimesis₂). Configuration is a function that "[produces] a quasi world of action through the activity of emplotment".¹⁶⁹ Configuration

¹⁶⁹ Ricoeur, Paul. "Mimesis and Representation" In *A Ricoeur Reader: reflection and imagination*, edited by Mario J. Valdés, 137-155. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 143.

provides the bridge between the world of the reader¹⁷⁰ and the world of the text. Configuration accounts for the “semantic autonomy that cuts [the text] off in three ways: first, from the presumed intention of its author; second, from the capacity of its first audience to receive it; third, from the socio-cultural conditions of its genesis”.¹⁷¹ This is a critical condition of the hermeneutic arc. Not only does this autonomy allow Ricoeur to view configuration as productive— opening the “kingdom of the as if” — but it also points to the trans-linguistic potential of this hermeneutic approach.¹⁷² Configuration of a text does not produce an “effigy or replica of an action”— some verisimilitudinous approximation, but instead an “intelligible schema”.¹⁷³ This is not an attempt to understand the action itself, but instead generates a phenomenological understanding unique to the reader (or user). We can then say that due to the semantic autonomy of configuration, the text is presented not in referential terms, but in poetic ones. This “engenders a profound

¹⁷⁰ From here on, please note that the word ‘reader’ is Ricoeur’s. The position of the chapter is that Ricoeur’s reader may be exchanged for the user of the interactive documentary. As this will not be completed until later in the chapter, I will retain Ricoeur’s use of the ‘reader’ until the point where Ricoeur’s mimesis is expanded to consider user.

¹⁷¹ Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation”, 143.

¹⁷² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 64; Ricoeur’s definition of fiction “is deliberately confined to the study of [configuration]”, which will be discussed in detail within the history and fiction chapter. (Simms, Karl. *Paul Ricoeur*. Abingdon: Psychology Press, 2003. 90.)

¹⁷³ Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation”, 143.

alteration in the process of communication”: where language “[depends] on the trans-linguistic reality that [it describes], the poetic function suspends this concern for an external reference”.¹⁷⁴

Configuration speaks of the autonomy of the text from author and user. We will adapt this to an interactive documentary model. Nash, Hight and Summerhayes suggest a need for “re-examination of documentary theory itself... [and] to engage critically with the claim made on behalf of emerging media technologies”.¹⁷⁵ Configuration offers the possibility of engaging in this re-examination without risking “missing what is novel and different, and therefore possible, in interactive documentary... [by reducing] all to the form or model of language”.¹⁷⁶ Configuration offers a trans-linguistic approach to hermeneutics, allowing Ricoeur’s approach to enter conversation with the diverse formats of interactive documentary.

Refiguration (*mimesis*₃) is the final step in Ricoeur’s *mimesis*, where the configured world of the text is brought to bear on the transfigured world of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes, “Introduction”, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Miles, “Matters of concern”, 105.

the reader. Refiguration is the “intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader”.¹⁷⁷ Ricoeur admits that “the intersection between the configured world of the plot and the transfigured world of the reader constitutes in itself a very complex problematic”.¹⁷⁸ This is due to the diversity of its modalities. For Ricoeur, this problematic dissolves only when we stop “seeing the text as its own interior and life as exterior to it”.¹⁷⁹ This is a great help to our project— of developing a mimetic approach to interactive documentary which can account for the trans-linguistic components of interactive documentary. This is because Ricoeur here implies that mimesis is an action— not specifically tied to reading or language, but instead “an act of judgement and [...] an act of the productive imagination”.¹⁸⁰ By removing mimesis from being inherently linked to the text, Ricoeur also shows that refiguration— the third stage of mimesis— is not a finality. Ricoeur speaks of “an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes”.¹⁸¹ The key idea here is that

¹⁷⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 71.

¹⁷⁸ Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation”, 148.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid 150.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid 151.

¹⁸¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 72.

refiguration focuses on the application of the text to the real world— allowing for engagement with meaning past the text itself.

Rather than seeing the user and the interactive documentary as being two distinct and separate entities, refiguration links both together, establishing a quasi-symbiotic relationship between user and interactive documentary.

Through viewing the interactive documentary through this process of refiguration, Ricoeur's mimetic approach will be shown as highly compatible with interactive documentary. As interactive documentaries can have many permutations, a hermeneutic approach must rely not on the 'beginning, middle and end' of the text, but able to account for connections and re-description, which our discussion of refiguration will cement.

Mimesis shows interpretation as a process. Ricoeur examines how meaning is created and changed, and how an audience interacts with a text and consolidates it with their own experience. This forms an endless dialectic of explanation and understanding, rather than limiting interpretation to either a non-event or as a single moment. By establishing a conversation between mimesis and interactive documentary, we can understand how the user's "power to physically 'do' something", forms part of an ecosystem in which "all

parts are interdependent and dynamically linked”.¹⁸² Mimesis will help to uncover the user’s role in this complex system.

2.3.1 Prefiguration: interactive capacity

Prefiguration (*mimesis*₁) expresses existing competencies— of knowing *how* to interact with an interactive documentary. For example, an interactive documentary may be predicated towards clicking on certain areas to play a video. The user must have a prefigured understanding of this specific kind of interactivity. The user must know that the interactive documentary is interacted with by clicking on those certain areas. Also contained within prefiguration is the assumption that we understand the structures governing the syntagmatic order of narration. In other words— our ability to ‘follow’ a narrative and bridge any gaps that may appear. Prefiguration also applies to the user’s understanding of the semantics of action (questioning the who, what, when, where, why, how), symbols, and narrative. Prefiguration would, under Ricoeur’s conditions, also include the ability to read. I raise this not to be reductive, but point to the basic conditions for engaging with an interactive documentary— an ability to interact. Being unable to interact with an

¹⁸² Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 3.

interactive documentary must necessarily render the documentary non-interactive (at least for the individual concerned).

Gaudenzi presents four interactive modes; “the conversational, the hypertext, the experiential and the participative”.¹⁸³ While this does not represent an exhaustive list of potential interactive modes, Gaudenzi does manage to highlight the different roles that the user may have. An example here will illustrate the variety of user inputs that an interactive documentary relies on. In a hypertext interactive documentary, assets can be “organised as a closed database of video clips that the user could browse via a video hyperlink interface”, which can be characterised as a “logic of ‘click here and go there’”.¹⁸⁴ Of course, the hypertext mode is not predicated on the sole input of the mouse. One could also use a trackpad, or laser pointer, or imagine an analogue alternative which relies on turning to specific pages in a book. The hypertext mode’s logic of ‘click here, go there’ is not tied to any specific material requirement. In order for the hypertextual interactive documentary to achieve some sort of cohesion, the user must understand this logic. If, for example, the user clicked but did not understand that they remained within

¹⁸³ Aston and Gaudenzi, “Setting the Field”, 126.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid 127.

the same interactive documentary, then their prefiguration would have fundamentally altered how they understood the interactive documentary. Similarly, if a user clicked and exited an interactive documentary, then their interpretation, too, will be unquestionably impacted. An interactive documentary, rather than being based on a particular input, requires that the user understands the logic of the interaction— and that it *is* an interaction. This is quite separate from the content of the interactive documentary, which will be discussed in the section on configuration (mimesis₂).

There are terms of engagement regarding interactive documentary. Any action not accounted¹⁸⁵ for by an interactive documentary meets one of two criteria. The first is that the action causes the interactive documentary to end. An example of this would be shutting down your computer while engaging in a computer-based interactive documentary.¹⁸⁶ Let us call these extra-actions.

¹⁸⁵ By this, I mean any action that would not consist as part of interacting with the interactive documentary. As an example, if an interactive documentary was able to be interacted with only by clicking certain areas of the screen, then an action outside of this could be the user coughing. While it is possible to imagine an interactive documentary which is able to be interacted with through coughing, with the click-only interactive documentary, then coughing would be an action by the user not accounted for by the interactive documentary.

¹⁸⁶ Of course, one could make the argument that all interactive documentary makers consider the fact that the user will eventually stop interacting with their documentary. The extra-action will thus be developed in more detail further in the chapter, as it represents an important part of the hermeneutic arc.

At the other pole are actions that fail to register. An example of this could be blinking. While there may be a future interactive documentary which is able to take blinking as an input, the lion's share of current interactive documentaries do not register how often you blink, length of blinks, or any other actions which could be taken as an input. Let us call these actions endo-actions— these are the potential inputs. The user must understand that the hypertextual interactive documentary really requires a narrow band of possible inputs. In the example given by Gaudenzi, it is the click of the mouse. The interactive documentary cannot account for any extra-actions, nor can it account for any endo-actions¹⁸⁷ This is also part of the user's prefiguration— they must understand what (if anything) they can do to halt the interactive documentary, how they can interact with the interactive documentary in a way that involves some sort of progression, and what makes no difference— or is assumed to make no difference— to the interactive documentary.

By separating extra-action, interaction and endo-action, we effectively establish three principles. The first is that non-interactive documentaries contain endo-actions. The second is that interaction must be understood by

¹⁸⁷ Recall that these two terms are neologisms which are intended to split interactivity into different areas of study.

the user in order to fully extend the hermeneutic power of interactive documentary. The third is that extra-actions represent an important step in the interpretative process— they provide an ‘end’ of sorts that allows the world of the text to retain a degree of autonomy from the world of the user. These principles will each be expanded upon immediately below.

The first principle is that endo-actions are common to both interactive and non-interactive documentaries. Almost all actions one can perform on a non-interactive documentary can be considered endo-actions. Clicking around a video yields no reaction from the video itself— or yelling instructions in a cinema does not alter the course of the film. These actions are unable to be accounted for by the documentary, just as how the interactive documentary requires specific inputs. Yelling instructions in a cinema may work with some interactive documentaries but not others.

A brief note must be made here regarding the functions of play/pause/fast-forward/rewind/mute and so on. These functions do not change the delivery of the content. Just like bookmarking a book, one can pause a non-interactive documentary to resume later. Similarly, if one covers their eyes and

ears, they can alter how they experience the non-interactive documentary. However, this is an engagement possible by the user, not necessarily encouraged by the text. By encouraged, I mean that this process, while having some hermeneutic significance, does not stand as an invitation for “the audience to interact and participate in various ways”.¹⁸⁸ Instead, these controls function as a vehicle for extra-actions. There if you need them, they do not quite slot into the neat category of extra-actions, as they do not necessarily mark the end of an engagement with the text.

It is like considering the pages of the book— the words are printed in a legible font, and a book’s layout is such that the bulk is concealed behind the current page, but you have the capacity to bookmark, resume reading, to flick forward or to flick back. The controls occasionally offered, of play / pause / fast-forward / rewind, require a certain acquiescence from what is being controlled. A member of the audience cannot fast-forward a film watched in cinemas. Some interactive documentaries may allow themselves to be paused, while others may force the user to continue, or end the engagement. Nash briefly addresses this— asking how a documentary with a menu of scene selections

¹⁸⁸ Nash, “What Is Interactivity for?”, 385.

differs from an interactive documentary which presents material based on user interests. Nash suggests that “what separates the webdoc [a type of interactive documentary] from the documentary DVD is the way in which the spectator / user is positioned. The webdoc invites the user to play a role in the presentational order of the documentary. The documentary maker expects that the user will do this and attempts to structure the process of navigation”.¹⁸⁹ While this is a useful differentiator, Nash’s suggestion of intentional navigation process versus extra-textual organising force does not fully address the fact that these controls, then, carry a hermeneutic weight beyond interaction, and we are unable to address their presence within the guidelines of prefiguration. This discussion will continue in the final section of the chapter, where interaction will be contrasted with the controls of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward.

The second principle is the requirement of the user to understand the terms of engagement. Nichols writes that two assumptions are made by viewers of documentaries— that “the images [they] see (and many of the sounds [they] hear) had their origin in the historical world” and that

¹⁸⁹ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 199.

documentaries make some sort of argument about this historical world.¹⁹⁰ The interactive documentary also requires an understanding by the user that their actions can alter the path of the documentary. Just like how a documentary, perceived as total fiction, loses its documentary status, the interactive documentary, perceived as non-interactive, loses its capacity for phenomenological impact further than interpretation of content. While Galloway et al. write that “any documentary that uses interactivity as a core part of its delivery mechanism” is an interactive documentary, this focus on the mechanism of the documentary risks underestimating the importance of the user’s understanding of the terms of engagement.¹⁹¹ In other words— what use is interactivity if the user does not know about it? Without understanding that an interactive documentary is interactive, the hermeneutic approach and phenomenological impact will be like that of a non-interactive documentary— erasing the possibilities that interactivity can offer. As an example, imagine an interactive documentary linked to the user’s swallowing. If the user does not understand that their swallowing changes a clip— and that the time spent swallowing determines which clip then plays, then the

¹⁹⁰ Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. 14; Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 25.

¹⁹¹ Galloway, Dayna, et al. “From Michael Moore to JFK Reloaded: Towards a Working Model of Interactive Documentary.” *Journal of Media Practice* 8, No. 3 (2007): 330.

user is unaware that they are interacting with an interactive documentary. Therefore, there would be no hermeneutic understanding of interactivity, as the user would have experienced this interactive documentary in the same way they would a documentary simpliciter.

Nash suggests that for interactive documentary, “communicative potential and the user’s ability to control and contribute to content are significant”.¹⁹² By highlighting that interactive documentary requires both the capacity of the documentary to interact as well as user engagement, Nash strikes at the heart of the requirements placed on the user. Nash presents this as three aspects of interactivity— “control over content, the ability to contribute... [and] the ability to form relationships and present one’s case”.¹⁹³ Each of these three aspects requires the user to be cognisant, at some level, to the interactive nature of the documentary.

The third principle is the importance of extra-actions. The ability to stop an interactive documentary represents a hermeneutic ‘end’. This is important for two reasons. The first is that an end allows for repetition. One cannot re-

¹⁹² Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 196-197.

¹⁹³ Ibid 200.

interact with an interactive documentary without ending an engagement first. The idea of repetition will be developed later in the discussion of prefiguration. The second is that an end establishes a boundary of sorts between the interactive documentary and the world of the user. The semantic autonomy of the text is critical for Ricoeur's mimesis. Ricoeur uses semantic autonomy to suggest that "what the text means now matters more than what the author meant when [they] wrote it".¹⁹⁴ But this semantic autonomy must also extend to the reader (or user, in our case). Ricoeur's very definition of a text requires "detachment of meaning from the event".¹⁹⁵ Ricoeur states that the text must be interpreted separately to the original situation and without the option of clarification from the author. Interactive documentary can push up against this notion. In order to be an interactive documentary text, the user's actions must be a proxy for another action. In Aston and Gaudenzi's words, "click here and go there".¹⁹⁶ If the user's actions were not abstracted in some sense, then what they would be experiencing would already belong to their world — there would not be a world of the text to interpret and

¹⁹⁴ Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1976. 30.

¹⁹⁵ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 127.

incorporate into their own world.

Why is it so important to separate the world of the reader (or user) from “a world that constitutes the reference of the text”?¹⁹⁷ This question leads us to configuration (mimesis₂). Before we continue to discuss why the separation of reader and text is a prerequisite for developing a Ricoeurian hermeneutic, let us first consider what prefiguration has helped to explain. While the area of existing competencies may seem to be tangential to our primary aim of elucidating the user’s role in the interactive documentary, this section has shown that the user must understand three inputs, and where each of them falls in a continuum of extra-action, interaction and endo-action. Using these classifiers, we have been able to separate and individually discuss the idea of endo-action— which ties interactive and non-interactive documentaries together, pointing out that the idea of interaction is in fact a narrow band of possible interactions. We have discussed interaction in terms of why the user must understand that they are interacting— this is necessary in order to fully develop the interactive documentary. Finally, we have discussed extra-actions — where the user is both capable of ending, and understands that they have

¹⁹⁷ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 92.

ended, the interactive documentary. This articulates Ricoeur's idea of the world of the text and the world of the reader entering into a relationship. This cannot be contained solely within the stage of prefiguration, and so we shall commence our discussion of these two worlds in the next stage— configuration.

2.3.2 Configuration: sense and representation

We have discussed how extra-action refers to the ability to stop an interactive documentary, thus representing a hermeneutic 'end'. This was unable to be fully explained by the prefiguration stage— as ending an interactive documentary must occur by way of the rest of the hermeneutic arc. In other words: the interactive documentary can offer virtually endless paths. As an example, there may be a random number generator within the text, making it difficult to discern both where the 'end' of an individual engagement should occur, as well as where the 'end' of possible permutations may be.

Configuration (*mimesis*₂) for Ricoeur refers to the configuration of textual elements within a field of action made possible by *mimesis*₁— configuration is

the stage where Ricoeur sets his discussion of both plot and fiction.

Configuration is more than the step between prefiguration and refiguration. It is characterised by “its mediating function”, which refers to three main aspects, according to Ricoeur.¹⁹⁸ The first mediation is between “the individual events and a story taken as a whole”, the second brings together heterogeneous factors such as “agents, goals, means [or] interactions”, and the final mediation is that of “[the plot’s] temporal characteristics”.¹⁹⁹ It is tempting at this point to suggest that mediation “puts consonance where there was only dissonance... [giving] form to what is unformed”.²⁰⁰ Indeed, Miles is concerned that by “seeking meaning [one] first [reduces] all to the form or model of language”.²⁰¹ This section’s task is thus set— to establish that one can speak of a mediation between user and interactive documentary without simplifying the plethora of connections that an interactive documentary may have. In doing so, I will have begun to show that the hermeneutic stance given here is trans-linguistic — in that it does not rely on “translating everything into the form or model of

¹⁹⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 53.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid 65-66.

²⁰⁰ Ibid 72.

²⁰¹ Miles, “Matters of concern”, 105.

language”, but instead can discuss interactive documentary ‘as it is’.²⁰²

A separation of text and user is important because without this, we cannot speak of the relation enacted between both. For Ricoeur, the text represents “the paradigm of distancing in communication... as such it displays a fundamental characteristic of the very historicity of human experience”.²⁰³ The alteration of the event through inscription allows the text to be removed from its original author, world and audience, thus extending the potential audience “in principle to anyone who can read”.²⁰⁴ While narrative (and the act of plot by the user) will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, I will discuss here the difference between the schematics of the interactive documentary and the experience of the interactive documentary.

Ricoeur’s “world of the text” consists of “the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic”.²⁰⁵ The text and the references within it proceed to open up new ways for the reader to understand their own

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ricoeur, Paul. “The Hermeneutical Function of Distancing.” *Philosophy Today* 17, No. 2 (1973): 131.

²⁰⁴ Ricoeur, “Function of Distancing”, 139.

²⁰⁵ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37.

world. A distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader liberates this relationship from a narrow, dialogical situation, instead allowing the autonomous text to become the site for new expression and meaning— Ricoeur terms this “semantic innovation”.²⁰⁶ Miles summarises the hermeneutic approach as being a theoretical epistemology that “conceptualises audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects that can be examined for what they mean socially, culturally, politically and hermeneutically”.²⁰⁷ What is lost in the hermeneutic approach, according to Miles, is “a way to engage with media as technical, engineered, mathematical, ecological and cultural objects”.²⁰⁸

By imagining the process of a user interpreting interactive documentary as being an action, we thus have actions in two ways— the interactive elements as well as the act of ‘reading’— of interpreting the content. Thus the user navigates both the structure and the content. This resonates with Ricoeur’s description of ‘sense and representation’— where “‘sense’ is a logical

²⁰⁶ Ricoeur, Paul. “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality.” *Man and World* 12, no. 2 (1979): 129.

²⁰⁷ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

dimension, ‘image’ a psychological one”.²⁰⁹ This is where sense gives a “body, a contour, a shape to meaning”.²¹⁰ This is not to subordinate sense to representation: Ricoeur argues that “[sense] is not confined to a role of accompaniment, of illustration, but participates in the invention of meaning”.²¹¹ Therefore the interactivity contributes to the meaning we draw from the interactive documentary. Despite the fact that what I read and view in an interactive documentary could very well be quite different to what someone else views in terms of content, it is the sense— interaction— that informs and contributes to my configuration of the work.

We have now established that configuration of textual elements can take place under the categories of both sense and representation. By keeping this within the lexicon of acts and action, we have also successfully shown that this approach remains open to engaging with media outside of representation. Ricoeur’s use of ‘sense’ as a productive contributor to meaning has underlined the relevance of mimesis to interactive documentary. What remains now is the refiguration stage, which solidifies this step towards a trans-linguistic

²⁰⁹ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 129.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

hermeneutics, as well as setting up the engagement as a continuous, rather than a single moment of interpretation.

2.3.3 Refiguration: trans-linguistics

Refiguration (mimesis₃) is the last stage in Ricoeur's threefold mimesis. Despite this, Ricoeur urges that mimesis should not be viewed as a singular moment of interpretation, unable to change or adapt. Equally, Ricoeur argues against the idea of a hermeneutic circle, where "the end point seems to lead back to the starting point or, worse, the end point seems anticipated in the starting point".²¹² Instead, Ricoeur suggests an "endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes".²¹³ Ricoeur's endless spiral is challenged through the interactive documentary. Given that "repetition [has become] an expected norm as some viewers will return to the same [interactive documentary] several times", mimesis must allow for a hermeneutic accounting for the experience of re-interacting with a documentary.²¹⁴ By refusing to establish a hermeneutic circle, Ricoeur inoculates his theory of mimesis from interactive

²¹² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 71-72.

²¹³ Ibid 72.

²¹⁴ Keen, "A List of Propositions", 61.

documentary's capacity to vary in content between readings. This is only accomplished by viewing the refiguration stage as the intersection "between the configured world of the plot and the transfigured world of the reader".²¹⁵ For Ricoeur, texts change us and our outlooks in real and tangible ways— our transfigured world could not be so without our prefigured understanding, the separation of text and user in configuration, and in our capacity to relate the text back to our own world and experience— allowing for engagement with meaning past the text itself. This engagement is a keystone in the hermeneutic arc, and ultimately shows that mimesis does not use language as a crux. Instead, Ricoeur takes a phenomenological approach to describing this hermeneutic process.

This chapter so far has described this hermeneutic process in terms of how the user acts upon the interactive documentary. Now, we must address how the interactive documentary acts upon the user. Ricoeur uses the term "interweaving reference" to describe how texts relate to our own experience, and vice versa.²¹⁶ This intersection of the world of the text and world of the reader occurs within the act of reading. Sense stems from here— "the act of

²¹⁵ Ricoeur, "Mimesis and Representation", 148.

²¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 32.

reading... becomes the critical moment of the entire analysis. On it rests the narrative's capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader".²¹⁷ Every text has a horizon of possible experience, and the act of reading "makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative".²¹⁸ For Ricoeur, the text is not a closed and encoded set of static meanings based on language. It is instead the "projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live".²¹⁹ While this approach helps to establish that meaning is generated through an act, the Ricoeurian act of reading is not identical to the act of interaction. So then, the difference interactivity makes in the fusion of the horizon of the text and the horizon of the user must be examined in order to discuss interactivity beyond the Ricoeurian act of reading. It is clear that the refiguration stage (and indeed all of Ricoeur's mimesis) retains a cyclical nature— due to refiguration we will look at the world in a different way, in response to this we may act and interpret in a different way, and so on. However, this cyclical nature is complicated by the interactive documentary— the possibility of repetition is stifled through the potentially massive number of permutations possible within the interactive documentary. Mimesis is able to account for this, as we

²¹⁷ Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", 26.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

have seen in the chapter on defining interactive documentary, and by doing so, demonstrates the separation of hermeneutic understanding from the model of language.

A hermeneutics based solely on language would be unable to cope with the demands of interactive documentary when it comes to repetition. After all, the interactive documentary is tempered by its independence from content between readings— it offers the radical possibility of opposing plots without the common ground of content. To try and understand the interpretative process through the content of the interactive documentary would mean that repetition (and thus alteration of content) could not be accounted for in a way that does not require every permutation. By arguing that refiguration is an intersection of the text and reader *by way of reading*— that is to say, the action of configuring the projected world of the text, then Ricoeurian mimesis is able to “[subordinate] the epistemological dimension of reference to the hermeneutical dimension of refiguration”.²²⁰ What remains now for the analysis of refiguration is to determine how interactivity compares to the Ricoeurian act of reading, which, for Ricoeur, remains the “critical moment of

²²⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 5.

the entire analysis”.²²¹

Reading represents both a navigation of the text, and an interpretation of the content. There is a divide present within interactive documentaries— as the modes of delivery allow for choice, which should thus be incorporated into a theory of interpretation. After all, making the decision to follow a certain pathway in the interactive documentary can fundamentally affect how the entire text is received, in the same way that interpreting a sentence in a non-interactive text can alter the reception of the entire text. Semantic autonomy means that ambiguity forms a critical part of this experience— with texts both interactive and non-interactive. However, I argue that interactivity is of the same order as reading when it comes to refigurative capacity. Recall the discussion of prefiguration, where we established endo-action, interaction and extra-action. Interaction was presented as requiring the user’s understanding of the terms of engagement, lest the interactive documentary not be seen as interactive. In other words, being unable to interact (or equally importantly, unable to understand that there is interaction) makes it impossible to “unfold the world horizon implicit in [the text]... which includes

²²¹ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, 26.

the actions, the characters and the events of the story told”.²²² One can perceive a book without reading— understand that there are pages, or that there is a front and back cover. But without the act of reading, the hermeneutic possibilities of the text remain latent. Interactive documentary can be imagined in much the same way— and much like how the latent possibilities of the book are actualised into “the projection of a new universe” through the act of reading, the interactive documentary requires interaction in order to reach this hermeneutic potential. This requirement of understanding interactivity at the prefiguration stage establishes that interactivity is of the same order as reading at the refiguration stage— as an act that intersects the world of the text with the world of the reader.

2.4 Interaction and controls

We have established that each stage of Ricoeur’s mimesis is able to be adapted and extended to discuss interactive documentary. The prefiguration stage has shown that the categories of endo-activity, interactivity and extra-activity are apt descriptors for the levels of engagement that the user can have with interactive documentary. Prefiguration interrogates what interactivity

²²² Ibid.

means, and questions the user's role in this.

Ricoeur's configuration stage is important for its mediating function between the world of the text and the world of the reader. By imagining interaction with an interactive documentary as being an extension of “[grasping] together’ the details of action into the unity of the plot”, we have argued that introducing a hermeneutic component to the interactive documentary throws up many possibilities of connection and understanding, and as such, encourages further study of the user in interactive documentary — and that this does not necessitate a reduction of interactive documentary to a model of language.²²³

Refiguration has shown that just as the act of reading intersects the world of the text and reader, so does interactivity. By arguing that interactivity is of the same order as reading at the refiguration stage, we are able to account for the many latent, potential pathways through an interactive documentary.

Recall that in the prefiguration section, we had trouble placing the controls

²²³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 76.

of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward into this hermeneutic — is it interactivity, or extra-activity? Now that we have encompassed the whole hermeneutic arc, we will be able to answer this. Nash, writes that “when interactivity is considered in relation to documentary it is most often understood in terms of the user’s ability to exert control over content”.²²⁴ In this case, however, control over content requires further explanation — does the ability to pause and play content constitute control? This question must be answered hermeneutically. Nash points out that “while technological affordances are an important consideration in discussions of interactivity, the contexts in which technologies are deployed are just as critical”, and gives the specific example of “scene selection [as] a technical possibility”, despite the text retaining its ‘non-interactive’ nature.²²⁵

This problematic can be further exercised through extra and endo-actions. If I tear up a novel, I am interacting with it to a certain extent. If I change the source code of a documentary I am watching online, I am interacting with it to a certain extent. Conversely, recall Moskowitz on algorithmic and programmatic adaptations of internet video — where unbeknownst to the

²²⁴ Nash, “Modes of interactivity”, 199.

²²⁵ Ibid.

user, techniques such as “tracking, behavioural profiling and personalisation” are deployed.²²⁶ How is this able to be accounted for? These levels of interactivity must not be addressed from the side of the interactive documentary, because attempting to discern some “logic of the medium itself” will only restrict the variety of ways in which we currently interact, and may interact in the future.²²⁷ Instead, the difference between these functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward / mute (and other such interactions) is located at the level of configuration as it pertains to refiguration. In other words, the question one must ask the interaction is this— does it “[organise] together components...gathering all [the] actors... [to make] the plot a totality”?²²⁸ This is a question of configuration, yet the terms of interaction are made clear in the refiguration stage— can it be compared to the act of reading? Any interactions which do not engage in configuration cannot form part of the hermeneutics of interactive documentary. Similarly, any change of the interactive documentary, like the examples provided by Moskowitz, must be understood as interactive by the user in order to form part of the hermeneutics of interactive documentary.

²²⁶ Moskowitz, “Look Who’s Watching”, 170.

²²⁷ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 228.

²²⁸ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, 21.

A direct comparison with reading may be useful here. Ricoeur speaks of an act of reading— if the reader stops reading, then the hermeneutic process of configuration ends. There is no longer a world of the text to configure, instead, the integration of the text into lived experience as per the refiguration stage commences. Similarly, these functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward are devices not of configuration, but of refiguration. By acting to separate the world of the text and the world of the reader (or user, viewer), these functions halt configuration in favour of refiguration. In this sense they cannot be equated to reading in the same way that some interactivity can.

By stepping through a Ricoeurian process of mimesis, we have been able to subordinate what I will call controls (that is, functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward) to the stage of refiguration, allowing the stage of configuration to describe interactivities which are compatible with the Ricoeurian act of reading. Thus, we end up with the following terms to describe how the user might interact; extra-action, interaction, endo-action and controls. This has clarified the role of the user in a way that is not specific to any one interactive approach. Although this chapter referred specifically to

Gaudenzi's "hypertext model", this was only to discuss the separation of the user's action and the user's action as mediated through the interactive documentary ('click here to go there').²²⁹

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the role that the user of an interactive documentary plays— both in the generation of meaning through Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc, and also by using the category of prefiguration (*mimesis*₁) to separate interactivity into extra-activity, interactivity and endo-activity. This extends Ricoeur's prefiguration stage to go beyond pre-existing competencies, views and experiences— this renewed approach to prefiguration stresses the importance of understanding the conditions of engagement. This prerequisite of interaction also helps to clarify which user inputs can be considered as interactivity. More than this, it shows that endo-active inputs can tie the interactive documentary to the written text as more generally utilised by Ricoeur— that a condition of interactivity does not permit every type of interaction. Finally, prefiguration's category of extra-activity describes the hermeneutic 'end' of an interactive documentary in a way that cannot be covered by a material approach. This end fundamentally requires a user to

²²⁹ Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary", 50.

function, and thus separate the world of the text from the world of the user.

The configuration stage describes why this separation is so important, particularly concerning the trans-linguistic hermeneutics that Miles demands. The separation of text from user makes it possible to view the user's pathway / s through the text— in other words, to understand that the text is able to be mediated despite the user's inability to fulfil every possible pathway. This was the first step to a trans-linguistic hermeneutics, as by placing the act of configuration as the hermeneutic stage, then Ricoeur avoids reducing the complex interactive documentary text to language with a fixed meaning. Ricoeur's use of a schema helps to imagine this act by the user of grasping together the elements of the interactive documentary.

The stage of refiguration was a base for our discussion around interactivity's link to reading. This was not without its own issues: it left us asking which forms of interactivity could be equated to reading. So, in the final section, we examined the difference between interactivity (of the sort discussed by interactive documentary theorists, such as Gaudenzi's 'click here to go there') and other controls, such as scene selection (raised by Nash), or

the functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward. This problematic was ultimately dissolved through categorising interactivity as being of the same order as an act of reading, which occurs in the configuration stage. Any such interaction which does not configure the text under Ricoeur's conditions must necessarily not count as an act of reading, and thus we managed to separate interaction from what I have termed controls (that of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward).

This chapter has shown that the user of an interactive documentary plays an important role, and should therefore be considered as part of a relationship in which the user and the interactive documentary are constantly changed through interaction. The hermeneutic process developed here was also careful to consider claims from theorists like Miles, who showed concerns around “translating everything into the form... of language as an intellectual Esperanto”.²³⁰ An approach was thus developed which provided a trans-linguistic hermeneutics— allowing for both “theoretical frameworks to address... theoretical problems” without excluding the approach of “[engaging] with media as technical, engineered, mathematical, ecological and

²³⁰ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.

cultural objects”.²³¹

Finally, mimesis’ place within the broader conceptual framework of Ricoeur must be situated. This thesis has already made strides to define interactive documentary, thus opening up the possibilities of engaging with Ricoeurian thought. Mimesis is the first of Ricoeur’s tools to have a whole chapter devoted to it, and the reason for this has been twofold. First, mimesis has been shown to effectively determine the role the user plays in the interactive documentary. Secondly, many of Ricoeur’s other concepts are situated with respect to mimesis. Mimesis can be understood as the entire hermeneutic arc, and thus Ricoeur’s other concepts naturally fall within each of the stages. Ricoeur’s approach to narrative, hinted at in this chapter, will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. Ricoeur stresses the act of emplotment, and as such, places this firmly within the stage of configuration. The dialectic of history and fiction will follow — fiction unfolding as a consequence of emplotment, thus also situated within configuration. Fiction enters into a dialectic with history via prefiguration and the through trace of the text. A later chapter will address this, drawing on the conceptual

²³¹ Ibid.

framework developed in this mimesis chapter. Time will be discussed in regards to the refigured world— how a “hermeneutics of narrated time” can create a relationship between “aporetics and a poetics”, thus developing, through discussion of temporality, a figure of “discordant concordance”.²³²

The user of an interactive documentary is not merely a catalytic surface which remains unchanged by the interaction. The user plays an important role in the interactive documentary, and a hermeneutic approach shows the importance of the relationship between user and interactive documentary. Even Ricoeur, discussing only written texts, suggests that “in the act of reading, the recipient plays with the narrative constraints, brings about deviations, takes part in the fight between novel and anti-novel... [and] it is the reader who completes the work”.²³³ After all, the written text may also have “many holes, lacunae and indeterminate zones” for the reader to fill (Ricoeur gives the example of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*), and Ricoeur’s mimesis provides a considered and extensive base for further discussions of the hermeneutics of interactive documentary. Interactivity in interactive documentary has been shown through Ricoeur’s mimesis to have both

²³² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 71; Ibid 73.

²³³ Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation”, 151.

hermeneutic and phenomenological elements. The hermeneutics of interactivity in interactive documentary will be extended in the next chapter, which aims to see interactivity as a force of trans-linguistic narrativisation.

3. Narrative

3.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that narrativising interactive documentary is significant to understanding what interactive documentary is and does. It also contends that interactive documentary theory has oversimplified concepts of narrative in order to accentuate the contrast between documentary simpliciter and interactive documentary. Specifically, by the previous deployment of the terms linear and non-linear, it is argued that there is a risk of imagining the interactive documentary as an impermeable and incomprehensible artefact, resistant to hermeneutic examination. Mitchell Whitelaw writes that “new media forms pose a fundamental challenge to the principle of narrative coherence, which is at the core of traditional documentary”, and poses the question: “if we explode and open the structure, how can we be sure that the story is being conveyed”.²³⁴ This concisely states the problem — that narrative

²³⁴ Whitelaw, Mitchell. "Playing games with reality." Catalogue essay. *Halfeti: Only Fish Shall Visit* (2002). 1.

coherence is at the core of ‘traditional documentary’,²³⁵ yet the complex and networked nature of interactive documentaries creates anxiety around how “user contributions [are] framed by the documentary text”, and how the user is able to make sense of a complex and potentially massive text.²³⁶

Ricoeur states that texts produce an “imperfect, open-ended, and incomplete mediation between the future, the past, and the present”.²³⁷ This encourages a phenomenological approach to narrative which can help to describe the multiple experiences present in interactive documentary. By seeing narrative as a function of how the user makes sense of the text, rather than as a material characteristic of the text itself, Ricoeur provides an open-ended narratological framework. This stands in opposition to the position that “when an interactive documentary has no beginning, middle, or end” in terms

²³⁵ Documentary itself presents a point of contention— I adopt Nichols’ criteria emerging from his six documentary modes discussed in *Introduction to Documentary*. This includes (but is not limited to) the idea that documentaries: “offer aural and visual likenesses or representations of some part of the historical world. They stand for or represent the views of individuals, groups, and institutions. They also make representations, mount arguments, or formulate persuasive strategies of their own, setting out to persuade us to accept their views as appropriate”. (Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 4.)

To paraphrase, the idea of representation is critical to documentary, despite documentary having many modes and various degrees.

²³⁶ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 200.

²³⁷ Nankov, Nikita. “The Narrative of Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative.” *The Comparatist* 38 (2014): 240.

of structure, then narrative is unable to exist.²³⁸ When defined this way, narrative is a limited tool to describe the user's encounter with the interactive documentary.

By exploring the nature of narrative, we are able to better understand how people make sense of interactive documentaries. This chapter will show that by approaching the question of narrative coherence phenomenologically, a theory of narrative can be developed which is able to account for interactive documentary traits which are not shared with documentary simpliciter. Namely, exploring the nature of narrative reveals the importance of a facet of interactivity: interactivity is a narratological structuring action.

By showing that the interactive documentary can be narrativised under Ricoeurian conditions, then interactive documentary can be seen as having hermeneutic similarities to traditional texts. This will allow narrative to better describe the nature of the user's interaction with the interactive documentary text, and ultimately establish that narrative is an important part of the interactive documentary — and that interactive documentaries do not

²³⁸ Keen, "A List of Propositions", 61.

preclude or reject narrative. This approach argues that a fundamental difference between the interactive documentary and documentary simpliciter is not in the sense of a linear narrative, but instead due to the interactive documentary's potential restriction on re-reading the text. This sacrifice of hermeneutic capability for physical autonomy will be further discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Procedure

This chapter puts forth three arguments concerning the narratological characteristics of interactive documentary. First, that narrative should be seen in terms of an action by the user rather than inherent to (or, alternatively, not present in) interactive documentary.²³⁹ The chapter also demonstrates that re-reading (or re-interaction), while physically expanded, is hermeneutically restricted. The argument here is that an important part of the hermeneutic process is the capacity to re-read (or re-interact with) a text. Interactive documentaries, which can vary between the first and subsequent interactions,

²³⁹ It must be mentioned here that this does not preclude the notion that different texts can have different narratological structures, and that some narratological structures are easier to decode than others. This argument is simply for the phenomenology of narrative within a hermeneutics. Hermeneutics relies on a communication of sorts— and thus on the interplay of what is within the text, and what the user (or viewer, reader, listener, etcetera) brings to it from their own phenomenological understanding.

are not beholden to any requirement to stay structurally identical between interactions. This means that potentially, an interactive documentary could never have its content 're-read' in the same way a book is able to be re-read cover to cover. Finally, by rejecting the idea that a text must have specific boundaries in order to be narrativised, this chapter proposes that the user's experience of an interactive documentary must be approached using terms other than 'linear' and 'non-linear'. To accomplish this, the chapter will begin by highlighting some deficiencies in the current approaches to narrative, and then demonstrate the benefits of a Ricoeurian engagement with narrative in interactive documentary.

Secondly, the Ricoeurian concept of *muthos* will be discussed, which presents plot as an action performed by the user, rather than a static structure. I must stress here that this does not deny the capacity of media to manipulate. Instead, this Ricoeurian approach points to the ultimate grounding of plot in the user. Simply put—the user is still capable of being affected by or misled by their understanding of the text. A Ricoeurian approach will simultaneously reject the notion that a text must be structurally teleological in order to be understood by narrative, and present a view of narrative which does not

impose conditions of finality, and instead retains the “irreducibly diachronic character of every narrated story”.²⁴⁰ It should be noted here that this chapter distinguishes between teleology in the sense of everything being read with the end in sight, and the telos of the plot as “simply [an] ordering principle with a power to suspend or neutralise what might otherwise seem to be troublesome questions about a vast heterogeneity of motives, goals, actions and material circumstances”.²⁴¹ In other words, teleology as a formal consequence of narrative structure is seen as distinct from teleology as requiring a specific ending.

Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis, as explored in the previous chapter, will then be used to describe a way of narrativising the interactive documentary that accounts for the interactive documentary’s interactive characteristics. Briefly restated, Ricoeur examines how a text creates meaning, and how an audience interacts with a text and consolidates it with their own experience. This forms an endless interplay between explanation and understanding, rather than limiting interpretation to either a non-event or a single moment. Given that

²⁴⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 56.

²⁴¹ Dowling, William C. *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et Récit*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. 6.

“repetition [has become] an expected norm as some viewers will return to the same [interactive documentary] several times”, mimesis will allow for a hermeneutic accounting for the experience of re-interacting with a documentary.²⁴² This will then allow for a brief discussion concerning linearity in interactive documentary— which is itself a problematic term compounded by the varying uses of the term ‘non-linear’. This chapter will argue that non-linearity, as it pertains to narrative structure, is not a characteristic of the interactive documentary, and its deployment conceptually and artificially constricts current debates surrounding interactive documentary.

This chapter ultimately articulates the function of narrative as a mediation between the hermeneutics of interactive documentary and phenomenological experience. Narrative can be conceptualised as a broad term to describe this relationship, rather than a constricting structure that largely excludes the fragmentary and networked characteristics of interactive documentary. This gives narrative the power to describe the relationship between user and interactive documentary, rather than as a characteristic to be ignored at best, or vanquished at worst. This approach allows one to consider interactivity as

²⁴² Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 61.

a bridge between hermeneutics and phenomenology, positioning the interaction of the user as having both phenomenological and hermeneutic power.

3.3 On examples

In this chapter, I will briefly touch on Florian Thalhofer's interactive documentary *Planet Galata* to contextualise and ground the theory presented. It is important to note that this example does not represent a limit case by any means. I must emphasise that if existing interactive documentaries cannot show the limits of the framework under discussion in any meaningful way, their only function is to illustrate the argument. This is the approach to *Planet Galata* that this chapter will take.

Planet Galata is a Korsakow film. Korsakow films are a programmatic style of creating interactive documentary. The Korsakow program was created by Florian Thalhofer, an interactive documentary maker, and is based on the principle that “[video] clips, as well as additional sound files, images, and custom interface designs, become a library of assets to be used within a project, and relations between all of these assets [are] authored with the

Korsakow software”.²⁴³ This creates a dense network of relations, and as a consequence, requires “a mechanism ... to find your way amongst these relations”.²⁴⁴ This mechanism often manifests itself as a ‘point and click’ method through a mouse attached to a computer.

The Korsakow system which underwrites *Planet Galata* maintains a basic linking mechanism using a system of keywords. While this network of possibilities offers a pathway through the story, there are still limits. For example, the content may be algorithmically generated, rather than randomly generated. Moreover, the sole interactive heuristic in *Planet Galata* is the mouse click. The user’s location, or time of access, or weather outside does not impact this interactive documentary. Of course, there is nothing to stop the Korsakow software from programming a degree of randomness into the interaction (perhaps the links change according to the time, or a random number generator swaps the clip options around). This being said, *Planet Galata* does not contain any such mechanism. As an example— if I were to restart *Planet Galata*, and click on the same elements, I would experience the same number of clips in the same order.

²⁴³ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 209.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

The choice of *Planet Galata* as an example is due to Thalhøfer's description of the interactive documentary in Aston and Gaudenzi's paper, "Interactive Documentary: Setting the Field". Here, Thalhøfer describes his experience of concurrently creating the documentary simpliciter of *Planet Galata* and the interactive documentary of *Planet Galata*. Aston and Gaudenzi write on Thalhøfer's frustration that "the Aristotelian narrative form – with its need of a beginning, a complication, a middle and a resolution at the end – 'forced' him to construct a story that was not fitting with his real life experience".²⁴⁵ This frustration presents an ideal case for a Ricoeurian approach to narrative, as detailed in this chapter.

3.4 Current theories of narrative in interactive documentary

Current methodologies in conceptualising narrative in interactive documentary are predicated on the understanding that narrative is inherent to the text, rather than a user-mediated heuristic. This manifests itself in several different ways, which will be listed and briefly commented upon. The aim of this section is not to discredit existing approaches, but to show how a slight

²⁴⁵ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 133.

alteration by a Ricoeurian approach demands a radical reimagining of narrative's place in interactive documentary. By imagining narrative as a user-mediated heuristic, the narratological importance of interactivity in interactive documentary is emphasised.

An analysis of the nature of narrative in interactive documentary demands first a working concept of narrative, upon which the Ricoeur-inspired approach will sit. This section contextualises the Ricoeurian approach in relation to current interactive documentary theory, and acts to orient the discussion. This will be done by generating three propositions from existing theory. Briefly stepping through these approaches to narrative in interactive documentary allows us to highlight the utility of Ricoeur in furthering the study of the nature of narrative in interactive documentary.

The first use of narrative is exemplified by Dayna Galloway, who begins his discussion of narrative in interactive documentary by adopting Mark Meadows' definition of an interactive narrative: "a form that allows someone other than the author to affect, choose, or change the plot".²⁴⁶ Galloway also

²⁴⁶ Meadows, Mark Stephen. *Pause & Effect: The Art of Interactive Narrative*. Indianapolis: New Riders Press, 2002. 2-3.

assumes that “the more traditional view of narrative” is one of a “linear, authored experience”, using as a crutch Aristotle’s characterisation of plot as a simple beginning, middle and end.²⁴⁷ This produces a simplification which suggests that ‘traditional’ notions of narrative cannot deal with interactive documentary. Moreover, this view assumes that a reliance on Aristotle does not allow for a continuing interpretation. This gives us proposition one: in documentary simpliciter, nobody other than the author is able to affect, choose or change the plot.

Gaudenzi highlights the importance (and existence) of narrative within interactive documentary, writing that “the fundamental difference between a linear and an interactive documentary... [is] the passage from linear to interactive narrative”.²⁴⁸ While this approach highlights the importance (and existence) of narrative within interactive documentary, this chapter questions the meaning of ‘linear narrative’ and ‘interactive narrative’. This approach yields proposition two: Narrative is fundamentally different between

²⁴⁷ Galloway, Dayna. “Establishing Methodologies for the Analysis and Development of Interactive Documentary.” PhD diss., The University of Abertay, 2013. 33.

²⁴⁸ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 32.

interactive documentary and documentary simpliciter.²⁴⁹

Finally, Seth Keen uses “Bordwell and Thompson’s (2010) definition of ‘nonnarrative’ to describe the particular form of interactive documentary”.²⁵⁰ This definition focusses on how “relations are organised between shots in a “narrative” and “nonnarrative” manner”.²⁵¹ Keen is working under the assumption that narrative is tied to a structure, writing that “in a narrative a linear structure is utilised to convey one situation leading to another as part of an ongoing “cause and effect” framework”.²⁵² This view is shared by Miles, who writes that “narrative involves deliberate cause and effect chains of actions and is inherently teleological. Events happen in stories for reasons, and as any good narratologist can tell us, these reasons are, at the end of the day, to progress the narrative towards its inevitable and seemingly natural conclusion”.²⁵³ Here, Keen and Miles suggest that narrative is an unhelpful

²⁴⁹ ‘Linear documentary’ is an unsatisfactory term as it suggests that linearity is what separates the interactive documentary from documentary simpliciter— this chapter aims to disprove this hypothesis. Henceforth when theorists such as Gaudenzi refer to ‘linear documentaries’, I shall paraphrase as ‘documentary simpliciter’.

²⁵⁰ Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 53.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Miles, Adrian, Carles Sora, Daniel Fretzner and Judith Aston. *The Material turn and interactive documentary: a panel*. Edited by Adrian Miles. Melbourne: RMIT, 2017. 10.

tool to help make sense of interactive documentary. This gives us our third proposition: narrative requires an inevitable and inescapable conclusion. This view of narrative allows theorists to dismiss the importance of narrative within the interactive documentary format with its potentially myriad open endings.

Although this is by no means an exhaustive overview of approaches to narrative in interactive documentary scholarship, the examples provided demonstrate the need for a theory of narrative which can account for three concerns, as indicated by our three propositions. So then, how does a Ricoeurian approach address the narratological concerns communicated by these theorists? The broad procedure in the present analysis will be to show that narrative can be viewed as more than a limiting, organisational principle, and can instead be approached as a critical link between user and interactive documentary. Key to this approach is conceptualising narrative as “not a static structure but an operation, an integrating process”, which is completed only in the “living receiver of the narrated story”.²⁵⁴ A Ricoeurian approach combines phenomenology and hermeneutics to establish a nuanced view of narrative

²⁵⁴ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, 21.

which leans heavily on the user. Typifying this, Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity argues that "knowledge of the self is an interpretation ... [and] the interpretation of the self, in turn, finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privileged mediation".²⁵⁵ This is not limited to the documentary content presented to the user, nor does it exclude fragmentary approaches with no immediately discernible subject. Even the most complex interactive documentaries, or those with minimal content, are both subject to this process of narrativisation through the user.

3.5 Ricoeurian benefits

A Ricoeurian approach to narrative in interactive documentary yields many benefits beyond existing approaches. These benefits can be distilled down into three distinct areas. The first is on the level of the text. Ricoeur's *muthos* simultaneously rejects the notion that a text must be structurally teleological in order to be understood by narrative, and presents a view of narrative which does not impose conditions of finality, and instead retains the "irreducibly diachronic character of every narrated story".²⁵⁶ This diachroneity

²⁵⁵ Ricoeur, "Mimesis and Representation", 73.

²⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 56.

is key to productively discussing the user's experience in terms other than linear and non-linear.

The second area concerns the user. Ricoeur's mimesis accents the exploration of plot as action (via *muthos*) through describing the phenomenological structure of the interactive documentary as experienced by the user. Mimesis frames interpretation as an endless interplay of explanation and understanding, rather than limiting interpretation to either a non-event or as a single moment. Given that "repetition [has become] an expected norm as some viewers will return to the same [interactive documentary] several times", mimesis will allow for a hermeneutic accounting for the experience of re-interacting with a documentary.²⁵⁷

Taken together, *muthos* and mimesis advance a view of narrative not as an artificially constricting structure, but as an opportunity to understand the role of the user in interactive documentary. This enhanced view of narrative benefits a third area— that of hermeneutics in general. Specifically, on the hermeneutic ability to re-read (or re-view, re-use). The test that interactive

²⁵⁷ Keen, "A List of Propositions", 61.

documentary supplies to Ricoeurian hermeneutics is through the hermeneutics of a second (or subsequent) impression of the text, if an interactive documentary dynamically differs in its content with each reading. This stretches Ricoeurian thought beyond Ricoeur's own written work, and demands an accounting of hermeneutics in terms of interactivity.

The claim put forth by interactive documentary theorists such as Miles, is essentially that narrative is incompatible with interactive documentary, as it is a limiting, organisational principle. For interactive documentary, there is "nothing in the logic of the medium itself that would foster... [the generation of narrative]".²⁵⁸ Ricoeur conceptualises narrative as "not a static structure but an operation, an integrating process", which is completed only in the "living receiver of the narrated story".²⁵⁹ This is a phenomenological approach to narrative which has been overlooked by interactive documentary theorists. Ricoeur states that texts produce an "imperfect, open-ended, and incomplete mediation between the future, the past, and the present".²⁶⁰ Ricoeur's open-

²⁵⁸ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 228; Although Manovich is not an interactive documentary theorist per se, Gaudenzi builds her description of interactive documentary based on some of Manovich's work.

²⁵⁹ Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", 21.

²⁶⁰ Nankov, "Ricoeur's Time and Narrative", 240.

ended approach to narrative is important as it allows for multiple experiences and interpretations of the same text. This stands in opposition to the position that “when an interactive documentary has no beginning, middle, or end” in terms of structure, then narrative is unable to exist.²⁶¹ When defined this way, narrative is a limited tool to describe the user’s encounter with the interactive documentary. By incorporating the ability to sustain multiple viewings into a theory of narrative, and to argue that the beginning, middle and end of an interactive documentary are anchored by the user, narrative becomes a powerful force to describe how the spheres of the user, text and the world intersect.

Secondly, Ricoeur’s narratological approach sees narrative as a function of how the user makes sense of the text, rather than as a material characteristic of the text itself. Hight asks how “the creation of pathways through database-centred content relate to the creation of narrative and argument that are of such central concern to documentary practice?”.²⁶² By establishing that narrative is constructed by “an intuitive grasping together (*prendre ensemble*) of otherwise heterogeneous elements”, the relationship between the database

²⁶¹ Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 61.

²⁶² Hight, “Digital Documentary”, 6.

and hermeneutic function can be explored.²⁶³ Moreover, Ricoeur uses muthos to describe the “sense of narrative isolated from reference”.²⁶⁴ By neatly separating the structure of interactive documentary from its referent, this approach allows for a Ricoeurian hermeneutic approach to co-exist with the new materialist approach that has emerged in recent literature.²⁶⁵ A Ricoeurian approach to narrative is compatible with the idea of platform agnosticism. This then allows for an “acknowledging [of] the materiality of video and digital media, and the actor–networks that interactivity entails”, without precluding or excluding a hermeneutic approach.²⁶⁶

Finally, it is through applying Ricoeur to interactive documentary that

²⁶³ Dowling, *An Introduction to Temps et Récit*, 5.

²⁶⁴ Ricoeur, “Human Experience”, 25.

²⁶⁵ New materialism advocates an “[engagement] with media as technical, engineered, mathematical, ecological and cultural objects without first translating everything into the form or model of language as an intellectual Esperanto”. (Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.)

²⁶⁶ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105; The separate treatment of sense and reference is a theme in Ricoeur’s work. On fiction, Ricoeur writes that “the constant tendency of classical philosophy to reduce fiction to illusion... [closes] the way to any ontology of fiction”, as Ricoeur instead adopts the dual ideas of “poetic image” and “iconographic function”. (Ricoeur “Function of Fiction”, 135.)

However it is critical to note that Ricoeur does not follow Frege and Husserl, for whom “the break between Sinn (sense) and Vorstellung (representation) is total”. (Ibid 129.)

Ricoeur’s ultimate aim is “the denial of the dichotomy between poetic imagination and epistemologic imagination”, and Ricoeur’s writing on narrative should also be approached in this vein. (Ibid 140.)

another tangential benefit emerges — that the limits of Ricoeur’s narrative thought are reached. This is helpful both in expanding and modernising Ricoeur, but in also pinpointing where exactly the interactive documentary hermeneutically differs from the documentary *simpliciter*. While this chapter will show that interactive documentary and documentary *simpliciter* have many traits in common (and that their differences have been heavily emphasised), some fundamental differences remain. The key difference that this chapter will focus on aims to dispel the confusion around the hermeneutic effect of when “some viewers [return] to the same content several times”, given that the ordering of this content in the interactive documentary is dynamic.²⁶⁷ By examining where Ricoeur’s narrative thought is unable to account for interactive documentary, these hermeneutic differences are accentuated and thus opened up to further study. Interactivity is thus explored in hermeneutic terms.

3.6 Muthos

Ricoeur writes that “most of our words are polysemic... it is the contextual function of discourse to screen, so to speak, the polysemy of our words and to

²⁶⁷ Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 61.

reduce the plurality of possible interpretations”.²⁶⁸ It is in this sense that the user of an interactive documentary makes sense of poly-vocal and unstable meaning through the process of contextualisation. But this alone does not distinguish interactive documentary — traditional texts also act to reduce the polysemy of words (or clips), forming instead intelligible narratives. Muthos offers an avenue to describe the heuristics of the interactive documentary. Muthos brings together the previously disparate interactive documentary and documentary simpliciter, and suggests that their differences are not located at the level of narrative.

Ricoeur’s concept of muthos is critical to understanding narrative as a process, rather than a fixed element of the text. To provide a brief definition, Nankov introduces the concepts of muthos and mimesis as “two basic notions ... equivalent in terms of action in Aristotle – mimesis or ‘representation of action’ and muthos or ‘organization of the events’”.²⁶⁹ For Ricoeur, “muthos and mimesis are operations, not structures, and bear the mark of production and dynamism”.²⁷⁰ Muthos’ action of organisation is also called “emplotment”

²⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 17.

²⁶⁹ Nankov, “Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative”, 227.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

by Ricoeur— emplotment is an action, rather than a structure.²⁷¹ Ricoeur immediately distinguishes his concept of *muthos* from Aristotle's by attempting to imagine a universal application. In other words, Ricoeur questions "whether the paradigm of order, characteristic of tragedy, is capable of extension and transformation to the point where it can be applied to the whole narrative field".²⁷² To do this, Ricoeur's *muthos* relies on being seen as a concordant organisation of events, based on "completeness, wholeness and an appropriate magnitude".²⁷³ This organisation of events is called plot. Already, we begin to see Ricoeur's attempt at universalising narrative, and it is in this spirit that Ricoeur's thought is transformed to approach interactive documentary.

Aston and Gaudenzi argue that interactive documentary should be seen as "a form of [narrative] that uses action and choice, immersion and enacted perception as ways to construct the real".²⁷⁴ This statement of purpose parallels Ricoeur's belief that the task of the audience is an active one— and

²⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 31.

²⁷² Ibid 38.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 125.

that the act of interpretation requires the audience to interactively construct the meaning of the text. For Ricoeur, *muthos* is “mediating in at least three ways”: between individual events and the story as a whole, between factors in the story, and between temporalities.²⁷⁵ This mediation is performed by the user, and transforms plot into story – “extracting a configuration from a succession”.²⁷⁶ Rather than conceptualising plot as a simple beginning, middle and end, it is productive to see plot as Ricoeur does – as “[engendering] a mixed intelligibility between what has been called the point, theme, or thought of a story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes and changes of fortune that make up the denouement”.²⁷⁷ Ricoeur writes against Aristotle’s view that “now a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle and an end”.²⁷⁸ This is a very narrow view of narrative, and Ricoeur refutes this perspective, writing that “it is only in virtue of poetic composition that something counts as a beginning, middle or end”.²⁷⁹ What Ricoeur means by this is that there is not some inherent beginning, middle

²⁷⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

²⁷⁶ Ibid 66.

²⁷⁷ Ibid 68.

²⁷⁸ Ibid 38.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

and end to the text, but instead that the beginning, middle and end emerge as “effects of the ordering”.²⁸⁰ This is how we will approach the narrative of interactive documentary. Not as preordained points to pass through, but instead emerging as a consequence of the interaction.

3.6.1 Muthos as ordering principle

This begs the question – how can an interactive documentary be seen as phenomenologically or hermeneutically yielding narrative without having the entirety of its possible pathways exhausted? To reiterate, the application of muthos developed in this chapter proposes a narrative without a medium or medium-specific teleological structure. Traditional texts such as books tend to have a set beginning page, a middle, and an end page. Interactive documentaries, on the other hand, may “change between individual readings.... not because the media components used are different (though they could be), but because the order and sequences in which they appear are dynamic”.²⁸¹ The answer to this problematic is found by closely examining the beginning, middle and end as an effect of ordering, rather than preordained

²⁸⁰ Ibid 39.

²⁸¹ Miles, *Antipodean Approaches*, 8.

points specific to the text.

The key here is that, for example, clicking through various clips or choosing certain pathways is not hermeneutically specific to interactive documentary. While these actions may be physically specific to an interactive documentary, texts such as books or documentary simpliciter also act to reduce the polysemy of words (or clips), forming instead intelligible narratives. The difference here is that for the latter, this ordering is accomplished solely through reading/viewing/listening and thus understanding, rather than as a physical ordering. As an example, if we see a video clip of a man at a funeral, then a close-up of his face crying, the first scene acts to filter out interpretations – leading most people to conclude that the man is crying because he is at a funeral, rather than over an unrelated event. Muthos is concerned with the linking of these events – the classifier of wholeness is not provided by the events themselves, but how we make sense of these events as part of the narrative.

For Ricoeur, the beginning, middle and end are not “features of some real action”, but rather a subordination of succession to “some logical

connection”.²⁸² The events that happen in stories are not themselves teleological. It is the “inventing of order” which draws together a beginning, middle and end.²⁸³ Miles argues that a “hermeneutics of reading that has been grounded on the linear and temporal fixity of media as a consequence of its technical substrate [has been] dissolved”.²⁸⁴ However, a Ricoeurian approach to narrative²⁸⁵ shows that the “plot functions as the narrative matrix”.²⁸⁶ This allows for a “structure which could be common to both historical and fictional narratives”, or to address Miles more directly, a mechanism which means that narrative can be wrought from texts both traditional and interactive.²⁸⁷ A narrative order does not require the beginning, middle and end to be explicit within the text, as they are constructed through the process (or action) or ordering. Moreover, this does not require the entire interactive documentary text to be interpreted or absorbed. The latent possibilities remain exactly that; they are not all required at once to interpret the interactive documentary. The

²⁸² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 41.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 216.

²⁸⁵ Recalling that Gaudenzi sees narrative as “the fundamental difference between a linear and an interactive documentary”. (Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 32.)

²⁸⁶ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 23.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

narrative is unfolded in the configuring act, not just in the latent structure of the text.

What is, then, the whole structure of the text? The completeness or wholeness of the narrative does not lie within the unexplored boundaries of the text. Instead, this lies in the user's phenomenological satisfaction with the narratological trajectory. That is to say, that the user believes that they have started and finished a certain narrative. Let me be clear – this chapter argues that narrative should be established as an ordering action by the user. This is quite separate from the suggestion that there are interactive documentaries which don't attempt to tell us something. Regardless of the interactive documentary's potentially fragmentary approach, the user's mediation (between temporalities, factors in the story, and between individual events and the story as a whole) develops narrative.

There is a further point to make here. Phenomenological satisfaction does not correlate with any feelings the user might have towards the narrative (for example, 'that end made me angry', 'I am unsure at the conclusion drawn', 'I predicted that ending at the start'). Instead, this phenomenological satisfaction

is caused by recognising the series of scenes, or clips, or words that are presented to the user as a narrative in itself. We do not need to consider every single latent clip within the interactive documentary when assessing phenomenological and hermeneutic impact. An example here will clarify why this is the case.

When I read a book, I cannot possibly grasp every last bit of detail of the world that book describes. Take the following sentence: ‘the man went to the store, and then came home with bread’. I am not told what colour the man’s socks are, where the man lives, where the store is, what type of bread the man bought. But this does not impact on my ability to construct a narrative.

Unexplored possibilities of the interactive documentary can offer detail and other (even contradictory) perspectives, but they are not a pre-requisite to narrative. I can still understand that the man went to the store to buy bread.

The interactive documentary offers additional context – if I am interested, I can find out that the man was wearing red socks. Some of this information can fundamentally change how I interpret the narrative— if I found out the man travelled a thousand kilometres to the store, this would radically change how I imagine the story. But this does not preclude the validity of my first

narratological impression.

3.6.2 Muthos as action

Muthos must thus be emphasised as an action. By understanding narrative as an action, a fundamentally phenomenological perspective is provided which escapes the restriction of any single medium. No matter what path through the media or temporal refiguration of the media occurs, the engagement takes place with a user who begins the engagement, and necessarily ends the engagement, given that human life is finite. Plot should not be conceptualised as residing solely within a massively complicated textual structure, but should be characterised and actualised through the lived experience of the user's journey through the medium. Ricoeur explains the importance of action, as "without the reader who accompanies it, there is no configuring act at work in the text; and without a reader to appropriate it, there is no world unfolded before the text".²⁸⁸ Without a reader, the text's

²⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 164.

“ontological status remains in suspension”.²⁸⁹ To consider the unseen as having a suspended ontological status— a “transcendence in immanence” — suggests that it is through the user that the interactive documentary is unfolded, and meaning is generated.²⁹⁰

In *Time and Narrative* 1, Ricoeur describes the role of the reader (or user) as “grasping together” a series of disparate events to form a plot.²⁹¹ This organisation is not chronological, and aims to create a configuration that “has form, contour, coherence and structure”.²⁹² Miles writes that “narratives, as causal sets of logical processes, are always understood teleologically, so that for any narrative ... it is the end that largely determines how we come to understand the logical connection of its parts”.²⁹³ Miles assumes that this lack

²⁸⁹ Ibid 158; A quick note to make here is that suspended ontological status may not be equivalent to suspended hermeneutic status. While the parts of the interactive documentary themselves may be rendered irrelevant to the user’s experience, it may be hermeneutically important for the user to know that their experience could have been otherwise. This is just one example of the possibility of Ricoeurian hermeneutics to more deeply explore the philosophy of interactive documentary, and to itself be expanded by the characteristics of interactive documentary.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

²⁹² Christopher, Gregory Theodore. “Linguistics and Literary Theory: Redefining the Disciplinary Boundaries.” PhD diss., University of Texas, 2000. 89.

²⁹³ Miles, Adrian. “Hypertext Structure as the Event of Connection.” *Journal of Digital Information* 2, no. 3 (2006): 1-7.

of clarity regarding the logical connection of narrative elements must imply teleology. Ricoeur, on the other hand, asks “[if] the internal connection of the plot is logical rather than chronological, what logic is it?”.²⁹⁴ Ricoeur suggests that “what is at issue is an intelligibility appropriate to the field of praxis [practice], not that of theoria [theory], and therefore one neighbouring on phronēsis, which is the intelligent use of action”.²⁹⁵ The logic of organisation is a circular argument, and Ricoeur suggests that “to conceive of a causal connection, even among singular events, is already a kind of universalisation”.²⁹⁶ The narrative logic upon which muthos is based is to “make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or probable from the episodic”.²⁹⁷ This logic does not require a text to be fixed, and imposes no conditions of finality on its structure. This can be extended to see physical interaction by the user as a narrative act, and Ricoeur’s narrative logic is thus able to account for the many possible pathways of an interactive documentary.

²⁹⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 40.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid 41.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Key to both of these points is that for Ricoeur, the beginning, middle and end are not “features of some real action”, but rather a subordination of succession to “some logical connection”.²⁹⁸ The events that occur in stories are not themselves necessarily teleological. It is the “inventing of order” which draws together a beginning, middle and end.²⁹⁹ This is user-facing rather than text facing, and this can be demonstrated through an examination of Thalhøfer’s *Planet Galata*.

3.6.3 Muthos and *Planet Galata*

Anna Wehl, writing on *Planet Galata*, states that there is an experiential depth due to the subtly rising awareness of the universal kaleidoscopic nature of this micro-universe – whether it is the visual simultaneous presence of selected SNUs³⁰⁰ on the surface of the graphic interface; whether it is the knowledge about the set of further micro-narratives hidden in the database but potentially available; or whether it is the knowledge of the un-assessable expansion of combinations of SNUs generated by the underlying algorithms

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ ‘SNU’ is an acronym for ‘smallest narrative unit’. This term refers to what are usually small video clips, that make up an interactive documentary. SNUs are the pieces of the interactive documentary that interaction navigates between. This will be explained (and interrogated) in greater detail further in the thesis.

which resemble the uncertainties of existence itself.³⁰¹

Muthos, as an act of “grasping together”, demonstrates how we make sense of this.³⁰² In interacting with *Planet Galata*, it is unclear in what order the selected stories were filmed, or if there was any causation from one story to the other. The beginning of *Planet Galata*, for me, is when I choose to click on the link emailed to me by Thalsofer’s website. It is not when Thalsofer videoed the opening shot, and it is not when Thalsofer first uploaded the video. Before my interaction with *Planet Galata* commenced, it presented no phenomenological narrative.

Planet Galata opens with a shot of a boat crossing under a bridge, followed by an introduction as ‘a bridge in Istanbul’. There are a number of clips presented where various people introduce themselves. They all speak Turkish, and the user is able to click through at any point to view more material about a given person. At one stage a number of clips are presented at once, where the user is then able to make a choice as to where their next ‘stop’ will be. I

³⁰¹ Wiehl, Anna. “Database Aesthetics, Modular Storytelling, and the Intimate Small Worlds of Korsakow Documentaries.” *NECSUS* 5, no. 2 (2016): 190.

³⁰² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

discover that there are various cooks, traders, taxi drivers who use the bridge. In this sense— I build a narrative. I click ‘start’ on *Planet Galata*. I learn that there is a bridge. I learn that it is in Istanbul. I learn that cooks rely on this bridge. I learn that traders work along the bridge. I learn that taxi drivers use the bridge. I close my browser window. My narrativisation in this case is one of contextualisation. Although the information is delivered to me as ‘cooks and then traders and then taxi drivers’, my narrativisation in fact removes the primacy of chronological order from this information. I understand that the bridge is used by these three groups of people simultaneously. The completeness of my understanding of this does not require me to chronologically sequence the groups themselves (that is to say, working out a chronological order that these groups were filmed), despite them not appearing simultaneously in the interactive documentary itself. It also does not rely on my exhaustive viewing of every clip. I am able to construct a narrative without all of the information. After all, this is what documentary *simpliciter* does to great effect. I can watch a documentary *simpliciter* and draw together a narrative without necessarily seeing outside of the frame presented to me.

The peculiar act of muthos can help us to view the interactive documentary database as a text in which we hermeneutically (as a function of grasping together the disparate strands) and physically (through material interaction) forge our own path. This reigns in all that ‘could have been’, and grounds the text in a phenomenology of the actual experience. The interactive documentary is, after all, interpreted by its user. In *Planet Galata*, I physically chose the clips to view. I isolated this interactive documentary to between when I opened the link, and when I closed my browser. All this being said, *Planet Galata* does not present a strong challenge to the problem of re-using³⁰³ an interactive documentary. I am able to get an identical (in terms of content) ordering of clips between my multiple interactions. Refreshing *Planet Galata* does not mix up the order in which I can select clips. In order to discuss re-use of an interactive documentary, we must turn to mimesis.

3.7 The task of mimesis

The discussion of muthos accounted for how plot could be seen as an action performed by the user, thus shifting the locus of narrative from text to user. In doing so, this section showed that the boundaries of beginning,

³⁰³ This phrase is used in a similar way to how one would say re-reading, re-viewing and so on.

middle and end were ultimately phenomenological. Muthos was unable to account for re-using an interactive documentary. To solve this problematic, mimesis will be redeployed in order to argue that in the interactive documentary, the hermeneutic act of re-reading is either restricted, able to be quantified, or recognised by the text. This is important to consider in the broader context of interactivity in interactive documentary, because this shows that interactivity as a narratological structuring action is tempered through its restriction of the hermeneutic capacity to re-use.

Mimesis must account for re-using the interactive documentary – as repetition may render different pathways (through procedural generation or through different user choice). Re-using the interactive documentary is different to re-watching a documentary *simpliciter*, as the interactive documentary is predicated on the user's inability to fully view³⁰⁴ the whole database (or exhaust potential combinations) on the first approach – thus offering the radical possibility of opposing plots without the common ground of content, as is present in documentary *simpliciter*.³⁰⁵ In other words, we can

³⁰⁴ Or read, listen to and so on.

³⁰⁵ That is to say that the interactive documentary can present several plots that are based on the subjects of different incidents – thus calling into question the relationship between plot and content.

rewatch a documentary *simpliciter*, and see the same clips in the same order. Despite this, we can draw different conclusions, and this hermeneutic is accounted for through Ricoeur's mimesis. What presents itself as a challenge to mimesis is the fact that we are able to re-use the interactive documentary in a way that allows us to draw different conclusions, but this is complicated by the fact that the content of the interactive documentary which is presented to the user may have completely changed between uses. Indeed, it may be impossible to re-use the interactive documentary with the same content that the first interpretation was based on.

Of course, the inputs of the user are able to extend beyond the construction of different plots – their interaction can influence and generate many other aspects depending on the content and mechanisms of the interactive documentary. This approach does not suggest that the user's interaction is exhaustively limited to the generation of plots. Instead, the role of mimesis can help us to describe the act of re-using the interactive documentary. A brief discussion of mimesis will articulate interactive documentary's distinctive referentiality within the context of a theory of narrative.

3.7.1 Mimesis and repetition

While mimesis was explored in more detail in the previous chapter, a brief overview will help to situate mimesis with regards to narrative. Ricoeur's mimesis posits that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence".³⁰⁶ Mimesis represents a hermeneutic arc of interpretation that extends from prior experience, to interpreting the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference (of the text) back to the sphere of human action. Ricoeur places the reader (or user) as the ontological site for the operations of meaning and reference, which means that the reality eventually described through the hermeneutic arc belongs to the "world of the reader" (thus intersecting hermeneutics with phenomenology).³⁰⁷

Briefly restated, mimesis is a threefold concept that begins with mimesis₁, or prefiguration. mimesis₁ is a "preunderstanding of the world of action, its

³⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 52.

³⁰⁷ Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Vol. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 99.

meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character”.³⁰⁸ mimesis₂, or configuration, “[transfigures] the one side [mimesis₁] into the other [mimesis₃] through its faculty of mediation”.³⁰⁹ Mimesis₂ opens “the kingdom of the as if”.³¹⁰ What Ricoeur means by this is that mimesis₂ allows for a configuration, through muthos, of the text. Finally, mimesis₃, or refiguration, represents the “intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader”.³¹¹ Despite being the last stage of mimesis, mimesis₃ does not represent a finality, but a focus on the application of the text to the real world – allowing for engagement with meaning past the text itself.

This section of the chapter will use mimesis to discuss the user’s agency beyond that of muthos. This will show that repetition in interactive documentary requires a radical re-examination of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic method. Particularly, mimesis will help to discuss the issue of finality and linearity in the interactive documentary. Ricoeur writes of “an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at

³⁰⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 54.

³⁰⁹ Ibid 53.

³¹⁰ Ibid 64.

³¹¹ Ibid 71.

different altitudes”.³¹² The idea of an endless spiral at multiple altitudes is particularly interesting when considering interactive documentary. This is because the interactive documentary must consolidate the endless hermeneutic spiral with the possibility that the text no longer retains the same point— where the reference of the text may have changed in structure and/or content. Recursive viewing of the interactive documentary retains the different altitudes of hermeneutic experience, but is complicated by that ‘same point’ instead shattering into myriad potential clips. This means that the interactive documentary can vary between uses in not just a hermeneutic sense, but also through the constituent parts of the narrative changing, re-ordering, disappearing, or increasing.

3.7.2 Mimesis and Korsakow

Miles argues that Korsakow films (or K-films, such as *Planet Galata*) are enriched from repeated viewing, writing that to return to an individual K-film offers not so much the reward of an increasing hermeneutic density (though this is certainly available) but the ongoing unveiling and discovery of a deep structure which is realised as nuanced pattern, of an immanent autopoetic

³¹² Ibid 72.

complexity.³¹³ On a superficial level, Miles' assessment shares a similar argument to Ricoeur's imagining of mimesis, which demonstrates that no text (interactive documentary or otherwise) can be received in exactly the same way on multiple occasions – this multiplicity of interpretations being a function of individual experiences. On describing his hermeneutic arc, Ricoeur evokes the notion of a “story that would be in ‘continuity’ with the passive entanglement of subjects in stories that disappear into a foggy horizon”.³¹⁴ It is this foggy horizon that Miles suggests can be changed and enriched through repeated viewing, and Ricoeur's mimesis reinforces this idea.

However, there remains a fundamental difference between mimesis' continuous re-interpretation, and re-interacting with an interactive documentary like *Planet Galata*. Ricoeur approached mimesis from the field of literature – in *Time and Narrative 2*, Ricoeur writes that he aims to apply mimesis to “everything the theory of literary genres puts under the rubrics of folktale, epic, tragedy, comedy and the novel”.³¹⁵ There is thus a temptation to

³¹³ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 216.

³¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 75.

³¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 2*, 3.

put forth the following argument: Ricoeur's mimesis assumes that the entire text has been read (or at least, to the point of having a complete and whole narrative as discussed in the section on muthos). A reading performed after the first is therefore a re-reading.

This approach does not strike at the heart of what differentiates the interactive documentary from the traditional text, and oversimplifies Ricoeur's imagining of mimesis. Before continuing to discuss why this argument does not fully cover what is at stake in the re-reading of an interactive documentary, I must provide an addendum concerning the parts (or clips) of the interactive documentary which have not been phenomenologically experienced, and thus remain latent to the user. Despite not being physically interacted with or observed, the latent clips carry hermeneutic weight. Wiehl indicates this when discussing *Planet Galata*, writing on "the knowledge about the set of further micro-narratives hidden in the database but potentially available".³¹⁶ This is important, as the interactive element of an interactive documentary gains its phenomenological power through the capacity of the user to recognise that their experience could have

³¹⁶ Wiehl, "Korsakow Documentaries", 190.

been otherwise.

Planet Galata presents many clips simultaneously. I recognise that by choosing one certain clip, I potentially lose the ability to view others. It is easy to provide thought experiments that further illustrate the hermeneutic importance of the phenomenological impression of interactivity. Consider a cinema, where every time the user blinks, the documentary cuts to a new, randomly generated clip. If the user has no awareness that their interaction causes change of some sort to the documentary, then they will not interpret it as an interactive documentary regardless of their ongoing interactivity, and thus the hermeneutic weight of all the latent clips goes unaddressed. By hermeneutic weight, I mean the impact on interpretation that is achieved by the fact that the viewer believes an interactive documentary to be interactive. This phenomenological aspect is critical to consider in order to separate interactive documentary from other procedural or algorithmic forms of media. Moskowitz highlights possible “personalisation techniques” which are programmatically tailored to each audience member without their knowledge.³¹⁷ This is linked to Nichols’ argument that “the sense that a film is

³¹⁷ Moskowitz, “Look Who’s Watching”, 180.

a documentary lies in the mind of the beholder as much as it lies in the film's context or structure".³¹⁸ Extended to interactive documentary: the sense that a documentary is interactive lies in the mind of the beholder as much as it lies in the documentary's context or structure.

To provide a converse example – consider a situation where one is told that at the end of each clip in a documentary, they may clap their hands once to view a happier scenario, and clap their hands twice to view a sadder scenario. Unbeknownst to the viewer, the clips play in the same order and pay no regard to their clapping. Here, there is the hermeneutic weight of interaction, despite the documentary having no such interactive mechanism. What this means is that the phenomenology of the user of an interactive documentary covers what is interacted with – but the hermeneutic weight of the latent parts of the interactive documentary is also important to the overall phenomenology. Given this qualification between phenomenology and the hermeneutic weight of latent parts, we can now explore the hermeneutic act of re-using the interactive documentary.

³¹⁸ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 35.

Ricoeur's mimesis, while predicated on the typical novel, is not a "closed [list] ... [the texts'] provisional titles do not bind me in advance to any required classification of literary genres".³¹⁹ Thus, mimesis does not require a specific 'ending', and retains its compatibility with interactive documentary. For Ricoeur, "just as it is possible to compose several different plots on the subject of the same incidents (which thus, should not really be called the same events) so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed plots about our lives".³²⁰ If Ricoeur's narrative theory can be extended to life, then interactive documentary is not the radical departure from narrative as it has been thought. I may discover in my second (or any subsequent) interaction with *Planet Galata* that the bridge was destroyed. This is important information, and fundamentally changes how I view the interactive documentary. But this does not alter the fact that I interpreted it in the first place. Ricoeur examines how meaning is created and changed, and how an audience interacts with a text and consolidates it with their own experience. Through the user's interaction with an interactive documentary and subsequent consolidation with their own experience, an endless interplay between explanation and understanding is formed, rather than limiting interpretation to either a non-

³¹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 2, 3.

³²⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 248.

event or as a single moment.

However, this way of understanding mimesis as continuous process, solidified by typifying mythos as an action with the user as its ontological base, is yet to consider the consequences of re-using the interactive documentary. In the example of the man going to the store to buy bread, we have not yet considered what it would be to re-read the sentence in the context of interactive documentary.

In the interactive documentary, the hermeneutic act of re-reading is either restricted, able to be quantified, or recognised by the text.³²¹ Miles writes on the “surrendering of [the author’s and the user’s] agency to the procedural demands of the unit or system”.³²² The user, in certain cases, is limited by design to their first interpretation of any one particular pathway. Miles describes the viewing of a K-film as an individual performance, but one that can be returned to, revised, and continually re-understood. This does not foreground a “computational rather than narrative logic”, as Miles claims, but instead demonstrates that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic spiral is present even in the

³²¹ Or any combination of the three.

³²² Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 219.

K-film.³²³ What distinguishes the interactive documentary is not the ability to interpret the subsequent readings differently. This is, after all, precisely what Ricoeur includes in mimesis. It is that there is a potential restriction (or quantification) of the user's ability to experience the same stimuli in the same order within the interactive documentary.³²⁴ The act of narrative choice previously resided within the reader. A conventional book is able to be re-read, and although there may be a different interpretation rendered through the second reading, or different areas of the text are noticed more than others, the text is still the same structurally as the first reading. Interactive documentary divides the act of narrative choice between the user (choosing their physical pathway through interaction, and narrative pathway through muthos) and the artefact (through procedurally or randomly generated content). The randomised interactive documentary is relegated to the first viewing of any one sequence.

The user's choice can in a sense be truncated by the interactive

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Of course, this is not a requirement of interactive documentary. Some interactive documentaries, such as *Planet Galata*, are able to be approached a second time and present the same clips in the same order. But this theory of narrative must account for the potential interactive documentaries in which this is impossible.

documentary. Instead of allowing the user to re-read a text, interactive documentaries may sell themselves on the user's inability to do so. The interactive documentary par-excellence is one which shoulders the traditional reader's burden of hermeneutic re-interpretation. The user is not just a simple interpreter – the user must enact a pathway through the text, as well as “[grasp] together” the narrative – and each affects the other.³²⁵ In other words, the user's muthos is expanded (through being able to direct the narrative on a certain interactive level), while the hermeneutic spiral is diminished through the potential inability to experience the same stimuli in the same order across multiple uses of an interactive documentary.

Furthermore, a Ricoeurian mimesis helps to illuminate the complexity at work in the collaborative storytelling of an interactive documentary (where, plausibly, a user may also be a co-author). Mimesis represents interpretation that extends from prior experience, to engagement with the text, to the transfer of the abstracted reference (of the text) back to the sphere of human action. Ricoeur situates the reader as the ontological site for the operations of meaning and reference, which means that what is described through the

³²⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

hermeneutic arc belongs to the “world of the reader”.³²⁶ By extending this interpretation to human life, the idea of narrative requiring an enclosed structure is dismissed in favour of imagining mimesis as a complex interweaving of what is experienced through the interactive documentary with the life of the user. This idea of narrative is not so much imposing a beginning, middle and end on a text in a strict teleological fashion, but instead describes how we make sense of the world. Irrespective of the interactive documentary’s potential paucity of conventional ‘story’ (for example, our hero goes there, slays the dragon, rescues the princess), there is a process of narrative through both muthos – bringing together the narratological elements in a way that is meaningful for the user, and through mimesis, mediating this with their own life and experience.

To account for this complex experience, this chapter will now argue that the user’s experience of an interactive documentary must be approached using terms other than ‘linear’ and ‘non-linear’. This is because the nature of narrative as developed in this chapter emphasises how interactive documentary is engaged with, understood and ultimately assimilated,

³²⁶ Ibid 99.

phenomenologically. The diversity of interpretations here must not be strictly bound through the limited qualifiers of linear and non-linear.

3.8 Linearity

The concepts of muthos and mimesis, taken together, serve to question the sufficiency of linearity to describe the generation of meaning in the interactive documentary. In fact, it is impossible to propose the concepts of muthos and mimesis as forming an adequate theory of narrative if the idea of the user's progression through the interactive documentary is left unaddressed. We have just explored how muthos can be used to show that narrative is an action by the user, and how mimesis approaches the hermeneutic implications for re-interacting with an interactive documentary. The user's experience is thus one of narratological action through interpretation and physical input, and one that can be physically expanded yet hermeneutically restricted through considering re-interaction. The question remains: can this action be considered as either 'linear' or 'non-linear'? This section will critically analyse what makes the interactive documentary non-linear, and how (or indeed, if) the interactive documentary is non-linear.

There is a lack of clarity around the term ‘non-linear’, and this is conceptually and artificially constricting current debates surrounding interactive documentary. Linearity itself is a problematic term, in that it can refer to either a spatial or a temporal structure. This problematises itself in interactive documentary as it is a database with a non-temporal network of relationships, that is experienced and interacted with in a temporal manner (I click here, *then* click there). This is an important problem within the context of narrative, which, following Ricoeurian thought, occurs through the user’s act of “grasping together” to form a plot.³²⁷ We must consider through linearity the relationship between the sequence of a complete and whole narrative, and when “hard connections usually formed between parts are now soft and multiple”.³²⁸

Gaudenzi uses Espen Aarseth to define a non-linear text as “a work that does not present its scriptons in one fixed sequence, whether temporal or spatial”— where a ‘scripton’ is “an unbroken sequence of one or more basic elements of textuality”.³²⁹ The fixed sequence that Gaudenzi refers to concerns

³²⁷ Ibid 65.

³²⁸ Brasier, “Moments of Noticing”, 23.

³²⁹ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 46.

the structure itself, rather than the content (the content of a non-interactive documentary can jump back and forth in narrative time just as well as the interactive documentary can). What makes a sequence fixed in a Ricoeurian sense is the interaction of the user, so there is not a difference in kind between interactive documentary and other texts. Muthos is, after all, grasping together several elements to create a sequence, and this has been shown to also be true of interactive documentary just as well as of conventional book reading. The connective tissue of these sequences is constantly changing and being re-understood. Aarseth presents several subclasses of non-linearity, including “forking, linking/jumping, permutation, computation and polygenesis”.³³⁰ While this helps to alleviate the inherent vagueness of the term ‘non-linear’, Aarseth himself states that “the use of the term nonlinearity in [his] essay is grounded in mathematics”, and that “the categories [he intends] to extract are pragmatic and tentative”.³³¹ As a result, Aarseth’s subclasses of non-linearity can just as easily be applied to the mind of a reader reading a book rather than the structural machinations of an interactive documentary – so to what extent should non-linearity be ascribed to the textual format, the textual content, and/or phenomenological experience?

³³⁰ Aarseth, “Nonlinearity”, 777.

³³¹ Ibid 767.

The organising force of narrative is a temporally-extended action by the user,³³² and one that weaves together the phenomenological time of the user, with the time of the narrative, with the cosmic (clock) time of the world. These temporalities, all present in the interactive documentary (as well as the traditional text), cannot simply be coalesced in terms of 'linear' or 'non-linear'. Ricoeur states that phenomenological time itself, if seen as a simple "[constitution of merely] relations of simultaneity and of succession between abstract 'nows'", cannot account for "the centrality of the present as an actual now, nor the primacy of the future as the main orientation of human desire, nor the fundamental capacity of recollecting the past in the present".³³³ Ricoeur writes that "if time-experience is mute, narrating is eloquent".³³⁴ It is through narration that temporal experience is organised and articulated in a text, and given that phenomenological time cannot be reduced to the crude classifiers of 'linear' and 'non-linear', linearity does not set out terms which evoke a difference between the interactive documentary and the traditional

³³² Ricoeur writes that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence". (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 52.)

³³³ Ricoeur, "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative", 18.

³³⁴ Ibid 21.

text, as all texts are experienced with a sense of both linearity and non-linearity. The vague evocation of ‘linear’ to mean sequential, and ‘non-linear’ to mean non-sequential is problematic, and does not do justice to the ways in which one can engage with an interactive documentary. We have shown that the task of the user is not to “[enumerate] events in a serial order”, but instead to “organise them into an intelligible whole”.³³⁵ An intelligible whole has no requirement of linearity or non-linearity. Thus, linearity should not constitute part of the discussion concerning narrative as defined under Ricoeurian criteria. This section has raised issues with its definition, and suggests that linearity does not help to explain what the interactive documentary is, or how the user makes sense of the interactive documentary.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has extended and reapplied the Ricoeurian concepts of muthos and mimesis to make a case for narrative’s place to describe the relationship between user and interactive documentary. To describe this relationship, current approaches to narrative in interactive documentary were interrogated, and muthos was presented as a simultaneous answer to the role

³³⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 65.

of the user in interactive documentary, and a rejection of the idea that narrative is materially bound, thus imposing a sense of finality. Muthos lets us imagine narrative as an action. The consequence of this is the emergence of a narrative which does not require a beginning, middle and end to be explicit within the text, as they are constructed through the process (or action) or ordering. Moreover, this does not require the entire interactive documentary text to be interpreted, absorbed and even seen or heard. The latent possibilities remain exactly that; they are not all required at once to interpret the interactive documentary, and the fact that the user takes action to emplot the narrative cements the fact that the narrative is unfolded in the configuring act, not in the whole structure of the text.

The aim of this chapter has been to present narrative as a tool for existing theorists to describe interactive documentary, rather than as a point of divergence between interactive and non-interactive documentary, or a characteristic to be fought against. Ricoeurian hermeneutics helps to establish a narratological position that is productive and compatible with existing theories. This could not have been possible without addressing how narrative relates to finality and repetition in the interactive documentary. The rejection

of narrative's condition of finality was bound within a discussion of mimesis, which describes the endless spiral of explanation and understanding within interpretation. It was here that the issue of repetition was broached. Repetition under Ricoeurian mimesis was accounted for, but the limits of Ricoeur were reached when interactive documentary was seen to have the capacity to restrict the hermeneutic act of re-reading. Re-reading (or re-interaction) is shown to be hermeneutically restricted in the interactive documentary. The user's role, while physically expanded, can be hermeneutically restricted in particular ways. The randomised interactive documentary is relegated to the first viewing of any one sequence. Ricoeur describes the status of reading as "at once a stasis and impetus".³³⁶ This impetus can be instantly fulfilled by interactive documentaries in a way that is a physical refiguration. This physical refiguration comes at the cost of the hermeneutic refiguration. The user's choice is in a sense truncated by the interactive documentary. The user's choice is limited precisely because the hermeneutic task of re-reading is partially outsourced to the interactive documentary, which as a consequence of viewers approaching the second and subsequent readings in a different manner, will present a different structure. This is an area ripe for further

³³⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 179.

study, and represents a hermeneutic difference between interactive documentary and traditional texts. Despite this, the concepts of muthos and mimesis act to generally coalesce interactive documentary and traditional texts on a hermeneutic level and as a consequence, challenge the position of linearity in interactive documentary.

In *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Ricoeur states that “language relies on the possibility of two kinds of operations, integration into larger wholes, and dissociation into constitutive parts. The sense proceeds from the first operation, the form from the second”.³³⁷ It has been shown that interactive documentary can be approached in the same terms. The path the user takes is essentially one of integration. Nash writes that interactive documentary “exists simultaneously as a product and as a process, inviting the audience to interact and participate in various ways”.³³⁸ Applying narrative theory to interactive documentary has allowed for further research to be done on the role of the user, and by understanding physical agency in terms of a sacrifice of hermeneutic freedom, it has questioned in more detail the function of interactive documentaries.

³³⁷ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 7.

³³⁸ Nash, “What Is Interactivity For?”, 385.

Ricoeur questions “the identity of what is far away and what lies deep, through which the instants that have become other are included in the thickness of the present instant”.³³⁹ A thick instant with myriad possibilities and infinite narratological opportunities presents itself as perfectly equipped to describe the interactive documentary. Narrative under Ricoeurian conditions has demonstrated the sustainability of a broader, mutually beneficial conversation between Ricoeurian hermeneutics and interactive documentary.

Gaudenzi argues that “by placing the viewer in a position of doer [interactive documentaries] afford specific roles that are both symptomatic and formative of social and political power relations”, and the roles determining what the user becomes “[depend] on the interactivity afforded by the artefact”.³⁴⁰ But these roles of the user come at the cost of an independent hermeneutic approach. The user’s choices and narrative process, while cloistered within the mind in traditional texts, are able to be demonstrated and counted with the interactive documentary. While there still remains an

³³⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 29.

³⁴⁰ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 37.

intangible, phenomenological aspect (after all, the interactive documentary is unable to fully control how the user interprets it), it is important to note that part of the hermeneutic process has been outsourced to the text— lending itself to data collection, indexing and counting. There is a trade-off between hermeneutic independence and physical agency.

The theory of narrative as developed here is not only able to account for some of the characteristics unique to interactive documentary due to the interactive element (for example, the potential difference in content between the first and subsequent interactions). Narrative is also able to describe how the user uses interactivity as part of a suite of tools to understand the interactive documentary. Interactivity is shown to not only have phenomenological impact, but to carry with it significant hermeneutic weight, through a limited capacity for re-using.

4. History and fiction

4.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that the mechanism of interactivity in interactive documentary is a fictionalising force, and that this is in fact beneficial to the interactive documentary's documentary import. By emphasising fiction's capacity for creative reconstruction, Ricoeur's hermeneutics will be deployed to reimagine fiction's place in documentary in general, and interactive documentary in particular. For this discussion, fiction is seen as within "the region of cognitive symbols with an emphasis on aesthetics... [belonging to] a general theory of imagination".³⁴¹ Simply put— Ricoeur sees fiction as depicting something with "no given model, in the sense of an original already there, to which it could be referred".³⁴²

This chapter will elaborate an account of fiction which sees fictionalisation as a productive force, and aim to apply this to interactive documentary. This will establish that interactivity is fictionalising— and this interactivity requires

³⁴¹ Ricoeur, "The Function of Fiction", 123.

³⁴² Ibid 126.

both an action by the user, and a reaction from the interactive documentary. This approach will ultimately allow us to better understand how interactivity works to deliver documentary content, and allows us to critically examine the how interactivity can be seen as a fictionalising force in the interactive documentary. Ricoeur writes that “no articulate theory of imagination is available which does justice to the basic distinction between image as fiction and image as copy. Stubborn prejudices tend to identify the notion of image with that of a replica of a given reality”.³⁴³ These stubborn prejudices are present in documentary theory, and have helped to establish documentary as a “[piece] of reality more authentic than extended literary narratives”.³⁴⁴ While this gives the documentary institutional power, it also limits how fiction is viewed. The title of ‘non-fiction’ is used almost interchangeably with ‘documentary’, which presents fiction as a condition which documentary must struggle against. This must be resolved if we are to avoid presenting fiction (through interaction) as a step away from the documentary perspective.

By demonstrating that interactivity can be seen as both an action performed and an action inscribed, this chapter highlights how a physical

³⁴³ Ibid 23.

³⁴⁴ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977. 74.

praxis of interaction leads to creative poiesis through fiction. Interaction, rather than getting us closer to the events which the interactive documentary depicts, instead can be viewed as a fictionalising force. However, this chapter positions fiction not as a failure of documentary, but instead as an important phenomenological tool. The hermeneutics of interactivity in interactive documentary, as built on in the previous chapters, is thus brought into conversation with the phenomenological impact of interactivity: namely, this increased capacity for fiction. This is important to consider, as this fictive capacity of interactivity can lead to not only contextualising the documentary element, but also highlighting the importance of a phenomenological perspective when considering interactive documentary. The interactive documentary is again linked to the user through the mechanism of interactivity. Therefore, an account of interactivity has been provided in this thesis that sees interactivity as constituted of hermeneutic, phenomenological and physical elements. This is a new, comprehensive and inclusive approach.

This chapter steps through several relationships in order to bring Ricoeur's understanding of fiction to bear on interactive documentary. This process will first briefly touch on the relationship between image and photograph. In the

second section, a loose comparison is drawn between Ricoeur's linguistic units and the relationship between photograph and video. This will also point to material differences between the photograph/video and writing, which is important when discussing history. In the third section, the characteristics of documentary are discussed, in terms first of the trace. Then, by unpacking content, artefact and impression, the question of history within documentary is addressed. A hermeneutic of interactivity is then developed, which culminates in the idea of interactivity consisting of action and reaction.

Emerging from these steps will be the relationship of fiction and history to documentary in general. This will be done through dividing documentary into three separate areas of study — content (what the documentary depicts), artefact (the documentary text) and impression (the phenomenological interpretation of the documentary). Ricoeur writes of an interweaving of history and fiction, and so in order to discuss fiction, we must first approach history. If an aim of documentary has been to reveal historical actuality through the document, where does fiction fit in? This chapter argues that the power of fiction is rooted in what we do with the information provided by the document, and how we interpret the documentary. Fiction in this context

hinges on the phenomenological understanding developed by the user.

Ricoeur's development of an approach that pairs history and fiction allows him to "[subordinate] the epistemological dimension of reference to the hermeneutical dimension of refiguration".³⁴⁵ This method, where "history as a form of inquiry stops with the document as a given", invites an open-minded approach to examining the role of fiction in documentary.³⁴⁶

Interactivity's inability to easily fit into the categories of reading or writing will be demonstrated. Instead, Ricoeur's speech acts will be used to discuss how interaction requires the inscription of an action, which culminates in positioning interactivity as comprising of action and reaction. This is the crux of this chapter, and helps us to better understand the nature of interactivity and thus its power to fictionalise. Aston and Gaudenzi suggest that "each form of [interactive documentary] seems to negotiate reality far beyond" typical approaches, as "the 'moment of truth' is now also placed into the actions and decisions of the user / participant".³⁴⁷ A Ricoeurian approach to fiction offers a counterbalance to this argument, and suggests that the actions of the user can

³⁴⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 5.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Aston and Gaudenzi, "Setting the Field", 128.

also be seen as fictional forces. This does not diminish the documentary power of interactive documentaries, as creative reconstruction experienced through fiction will ultimately be shown as a powerful documentary tool. Rather than viewing fiction as an impoverished facsimile of reality, Ricoeur proposes seeing fiction as adding to reality — providing humans new ways to understand the world that we live in.

4.2 The application of Ricoeur's fiction

The word fiction derives from the latin 'facere' — to do (as in to make, create or act). Fiction according to Ricoeur is not some quality inherent to texts, and this chapter will elaborate an account of fiction which sees fictionalising as a productive force. In other words, fiction allows for the generation of new knowledge and new understanding. In order to discuss the productive power of fiction, several steps are required. These steps must be taken in order to adapt Ricoeur's dialectic between history and fiction to interactive documentary. This is because Ricoeur's approach has been limited to primarily discussion of the image and written language. This chapter must therefore work carefully to expand Ricoeur's approach to encompass the interactive documentary. This link is important to establish. Not only will it

allow us to view interactivity as productive, it also highlights how interactivity fictionalises the interactive documentary, and in doing so, opens up a world of opportunity hitherto under-explored. Interactivity should not be seen as a move towards a more ‘realistic’ interactive documentary, but instead as a powerful fictionalising tool.

Separating the link between Ricoeur’s existing work and the idea of interactivity as fictionalising force into four stages allows each section to perform the dual work of applying Ricoeur’s writing on fiction to a different mode or medium, as well as discussing the capacities of that particular mode or medium to affect how we see interactive documentary. The four stages of this chapter step between ‘image and photograph’, ‘photograph and video’,³⁴⁸ ‘video and documentary’ and finally ‘documentary and interactive documentary’. This pathway must be taken in order to bring Ricoeur’s concept of ‘productive reference’ to bear on interactive documentary, thus allowing us to critically examine the productive capacity of interactivity in the interactive documentary.

³⁴⁸ I use the word ‘video’ deliberately in this section, as the word ‘film’ can refer to an analogue photograph. Given the nature of my discussion which straddles both analogue and digital mediums, to minimise confusion I have selected the word video to describe a motion picture— and I make no distinction here between video and film.

The first section, 'Image to photograph', is a brief examination of the photograph itself— very little work must be done to transpose Ricoeur's analysis from image to photograph, as Ricoeur uses photography as an exemplar. In this section, I will also highlight the nature of the photograph as distinct from the image.

In 'Photograph to video', I compare the relationship between linguistic units (such as words and sentences), and use this as an analogy for the relationship between photograph and video, as a photograph forms a part of a video, yet a video represents more than the sum of its parts. This is an important relationship to clarify: as an example— the Korsakow authoring program for interactive documentary is built on a number of "what the software describes as the SNU – 'smallest narrative unit'".³⁴⁹

The relationship between the 'smallest narrative units' must inform the analysis of Ricoeur's fiction. This is because the still photograph can also be seen as part of a video, and similarly, that a video can be seen as part of an

³⁴⁹ Miles, "Sketch Notes", 210.

interactive documentary. Thus— if the Korsakowian SNU refers to a video clip, then this implies that the still photograph, itself a part of the video, has no narrative value. While this clarification— that the still photograph carries a narratological element— may be seen as a given, it is important to discuss both the photograph and video as material vestiges— documents with historical import. This discussion of the qualities inherent to both the photograph and the video must not be seen as a restriction of the myriad technical possibilities that may deliver documentary content in the future. The aim of this section is to establish a logic that photographs, videos (and whatever may supersede them) can all follow. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to documentary and interactive documentary, whose relationship to video can be understood in terms of a change of historical status, rather than substantive material changes. To allow for this medium-agnostic approach, analogue and digital photographs and videos will be briefly discussed.

While the previous sections dealt with changes of a tangible and material nature, ‘Video to documentary’ points to documentary (which in itself is not exclusive to video). The aim of this section is to present more clearly the

historical power of the documentary in general. This will be done through expanding our discussion of the trace, and then by dividing documentary into three separate areas of study — content (what the documentary depicts), the artefact (what the documentary is) and impression (the phenomenological interpretation of the documentary). This addresses Ricoeur's interweaving of history and fiction through properly addressing the 'document' of documentary.

Fiction will be discussed alongside the mechanism of interactivity in the final section, 'Documentary to interactive documentary'. Aston and Gaudenzi suggest that "each form of [interactive documentary] seems to negotiate reality far beyond" typical approaches, as "the 'moment of truth' is now also placed into the actions and decisions of the user / participant".³⁵⁰ However, Ricoeur's concept of fiction requires a radical shift, demanding that the actions of the user be seen not as moments of truth, but instead as fictional forces, thus allowing for creative reconstruction.

The focus of 'Documentary to interactive documentary' is to explain the

³⁵⁰ Aston and Gaudenzi. "Setting the Field", 128.

nature of interactivity. This is the largest and most decisive step to take, and so will be broken down further into three steps. The first is to situate Ricoeur's fiction— Ricoeur lays out four steps that must be taken in order to discuss how fiction refers to reality. Secondly, a hermeneutics of interactivity will be developed— interactivity cannot easily fit into the categories of reading, writing or speech acts. Ricoeur's speech acts will be used to discuss how interaction requires the inscription of an action.

The final step is the most decisive— describing how interactivity can be seen as a form of action and reaction. This concept of action and reaction articulates how an interactive documentary inscribes an action, which renders a hermeneutics of interactivity which transcends writing, speech acts or reading. This is a defining characteristic of interactive documentary, and cements an approach which accounts for the fictionalising and ultimately productive force of interactivity. Describing the roles of history and fiction in the interactive documentary allows us to consider interaction as both an action of the user, and a reaction of the text.

4.3 Image to photograph

In order to discuss the fictionalising force of interactivity in interactive documentary, we must first establish if the interactive documentary is able to be considered as fictional in any respects. This prerequisite starts with Ricoeur distinguishing between “image as fiction and image as copy”.³⁵¹ This distinction is, for Ricoeur, a question of reference. Image as copy has no question of reference— it is simply a copy to “be perceived in praesentia or imagined in absentia”.³⁵² This approach raises the question— to what does the copy refer? This will be articulated in this section. First, if we are to discuss the interactive documentary as fiction, we must determine if it can be seen in terms of image as fiction or image as copy. In doing so, this section will clarify the difference between fiction and copy, as Ricoeur saw it. Although most of Ricoeur’s work focussed on the written text, it is in discussing fiction where Ricoeur briefly refers to photography. While photography does not encompass all of interactive documentary— and several further steps are required, photography is a useful tool to tease out the difference between fiction and copy. The photograph is a text which may reference (if not exactly replicate)

³⁵¹ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 123.

³⁵² Ibid 125.

the world, yet has a fictive capacity.³⁵³

Ricoeur defines the image in simple terms— to have “an image of something is to ‘see’ it in our mind's eye, without the presence of the actual thing”.³⁵⁴ This does not help us to imagine a productive element to the image. It is only by “[denying]... the primacy of the original” that we can open “new ways of referring to reality for the image”.³⁵⁵ To deny the accusation that the image is a mere copy of some original world shifts the referential status of the image. In the case of fiction, “there is no given model... to which [the original] could be referred”.³⁵⁶ Image as fiction is not *reproducing* some original model— and so it can be seen to refer “in a ‘productive’ way to reality as intimated by the fiction”.³⁵⁷ Ricoeur writes that photography “is never a simple replica of reality, even in its less imaginative forms”.³⁵⁸ This is a promising start.

However, can the photograph be compared directly to an image? Ricoeur uses

³⁵³ To refresh: in the first chapter on defining interactive documentary, I adopted Dirk Eitzen’s paraphrasing of Nichols’s definition, as “the use of conventional means to refer to, represent, or make claims about historical reality”. (Eitzen, “When is a Documentary?”, 82.)

³⁵⁴ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 124.

³⁵⁵ Ibid 126.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid 138.

the photograph as an exemplar for describing the potential “non-existence of the object of the fiction”.³⁵⁹ Ricoeur writes that “the original of a photograph is absent but may be real or may have been real”.³⁶⁰

Ricoeur’s distinction between absence and unreality will help to draw a parallel between the photograph and the image. Ricoeur writes that “the nothingness of absence concerns the mode of givenness of a real thing in absentia, the nothingness of unreality characterizes the referent itself of the fiction”.³⁶¹ Here, Ricoeur delineates absence as being a mode of givenness—the opposite of presence. Each has the same referent. Ricoeur acknowledges that “absence and unreality are very often confused”, so this must be set out very carefully.³⁶² Unreality has no referent. To consider the photograph in these terms, we must separate its mode of absence from its mode of unreality. Ricoeur states that “the original of a photograph is absent but may be real or may have been real”.³⁶³ But this does not tell the whole story of the

³⁵⁹ Ibid 126.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

photograph. A photograph, beyond what it may be referencing, introduces a “neutralised atmosphere of fiction... [suspending] our attention to the real”.³⁶⁴ The photograph— itself a frozen artefact of time in a specific frame, by the nature of its suspension, generates and “[diffuses] meaning across diverse sensorial fields [and hallucinates] thought in some way”.³⁶⁵ Absence is the difference between fiction and reality. The fact that the original scene of a photograph is absent while we are viewing the photograph opens up the fictional power of the photograph. Rather than an attempt to be a direct reference to reality, the photograph becomes a fictional heuristic.

The photograph can be seen as having two functions. It does have a reproductive function, in that it references the world in a way that written texts do not. Ricoeur provides Sartre’s example, where “my friend Peter, over there in Berlin, is the same that I could see if I were there and whose photograph I contemplate here in my room”.³⁶⁶ This is the mode of absence. But the photograph can provide more than an analogon. This is due to two factors. The first is to do with how the photograph isolates through its

³⁶⁴ Ibid 134.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid 125-126.

freezing and framing of a moment. This is most easily explained as the photograph can be taken out of context because “their originals enjoy innumerable relations with the rest of the world”.³⁶⁷ This allows the photograph to present its contents in a way that extends past reproduction.

In another sense, the photograph performs just like Ricoeur’s written texts, in that it “captures and fascinates. It scatters and isolates”.³⁶⁸ The photograph, through its inscription, has different and new qualities to the original event. It is in this sense that the photograph retains its capability to construct new meanings. It is a new combination (through the freezing of time and selection of a frame) which “has no reference in a previous original to which the image would be the copy”.³⁶⁹ Ricoeur borrows the term ‘iconic augmentation’ from François Dagognet to describe this, writing that iconic augmentation “[characterises] the power of the image to condense, spell out, and develop reality”.³⁷⁰ Photography is a condensation and an examination of its subject. Through this iconic function the photograph can wield its power to produce

³⁶⁷ Ibid 128.

³⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 40.

³⁶⁹ Ricour, “The Function of Fiction”, 126.

³⁷⁰ Ibid 136.

rather than reproduce. This new combination allows us to deny the primacy of the original referent, and thus introduce Ricoeur's function of fiction to photography.

The photograph has also been shown to be distinct from the image— the photograph has a reproductive nature, and the photograph is a text— this means that its creation of meaning is through condensation, isolation and combination. Let me be clear: this definition of the photograph does not position fiction as a “merely complex [idea] whose components are derived from previous experience”.³⁷¹ The photograph has conditions of both absence and unreality, and it is through this condition of unreality that the photograph creates a fiction— and the non-existence of the object of this fiction is what gives photography its fictional power.

Exploring the link between image and photograph has shown that the photograph fictionalises. This will be useful to our discussion of interactivity, as it must be addressed that the photograph itself fictionalises, as well as interactivity acting as a fictionalising force. The cumulative force of the four

³⁷¹ Ibid 125.

steps following image to interactive documentary will allow me to properly address this double-fictionalisation later in the chapter. For now — the unreal photograph can be correlated to Ricoeur's concept of the image. In the following section, video will be shown to have the same capacity for fiction as photography, thus allowing aspects of video to occupy the same space as Ricoeur's image.

4.4 Photograph to video

In a sense, the photograph can be partly subsumed by the video — the video can consist of a series of still photographs played back rapidly.³⁷² It is important to establish this relationship for two reasons. The first is to acknowledge that Ricoeur's writing on the photograph is equally applicable to video, thus allowing us to continue on our journey to discuss interactive documentary through Ricoeur's writing on fiction. The second is, crucially, to prove that Ricoeur's idea of fiction is able to be extended to a number of

³⁷² Video is a term used to refer to moving images which may or may not include sound. Video is not a pre-requisite for interactive documentary (as has been shown in the defining interactive documentary chapter), but it does present a challenge distinct from the still photograph. Although I use the term video, this term encompasses analogue or digital, or other sensory experiences in addition to sight.

It is best to view this section not as solely focussed on a digital moving image attached to the interactive documentary, but as a move away from a medium-specific approach in favour of establishing that fiction is able to function wherever there is hermeneutic meaning.

different formats. While Ricoeur wrote about the formats prevalent in his lifetime (such as sculpture, painting, photography and poetry), this does not form an exhaustive list. I do not intend to make such a list as I cannot anticipate future formats or mediums. The aim here is to instead suggest through comparing photography and video that many similar parallels can be drawn in the future. It is important to emphasise that this is not a medium-specific approach, but instead a demonstration that the format does not require syntactic linguistic units such as those present in writing. This approach will begin using Ricoeur's semiotics and semantics as an analogy to describe how photography forms part of video.³⁷³ The second half of this section will prove that this approach is not predicated on specific analogue or digital requirements.

4.4.1 Linguistic units

Language contains units: "phonemes, lexemes, words", sentences, paragraphs and so on.³⁷⁴ These units can combine to create new elements. For example, in English writing, one can combine letters to make a word, or

³⁷³ To be clear here— this does not argue that one experiences a frame of video in the same way that one experiences a photograph, and this difference will be discussed in this section.

³⁷⁴ Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", 26.

combine words to make a sentence. However, there is a difference not only of quantity but of quality when we move from letters to words to sentences. I am not rejecting Ricoeur's assertion that "reality is contained neither in the dictionary nor in grammar".³⁷⁵ Instead, I point to the difference between semiotics and semantics: Ricoeur posits that "a sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign".³⁷⁶ By this, Ricoeur means that "the sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts".³⁷⁷ Ricoeur means this in a hermeneutic sense— one, after all, can still count the letters of the sentence, even if the meaning is not derived from those letters individually. The video is a collection of photographs,³⁷⁸ played back at a rate of around 25 photographs per second. This gives the impression of continuous movement. The video's meaning is, of course, more than the sum of its parts.³⁷⁹

There is no complete equivalence— I do not suggest that shots can be envisaged directly as words, and sequences directly as sentences. What I am

³⁷⁵ Ibid 26.

³⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 7.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ And sound, the illusion of movement, and the like. The documentary is greater than the sum of its parts, just like the written text that Ricoeur describes.

³⁷⁹ As much as a sentence is more than the sum of its letters, to take Ricoeur's example.

doing is making a local strategic analogy. This analogy highlights that the video is *more* than a combination of photographs, much as the novel is *more* than a combination of letters. Essentially, the semantics of video does not constitute the semiotics of the video. It is true that the relationship between photograph and video is different to that of the word and sentence— the sentence consists of nothing but words, while the video may contain sound and artefacts caused by the movement of images. But this does not detract from the point that the video “is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts”, just as the sentence is for Ricoeur.³⁸⁰

The constituent parts of the video are (among other things) photographs, and thus the video retains a similar relationship to the photograph regarding the question of fiction: both are “a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.”³⁸¹ Both are unreal in the same sense.

This is not to say that the photograph is reducible to a meaningless ingredient of video. Indeed, the photograph itself does not constitute the smallest possible element of a video. The photograph does not have a definite

³⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 7.

³⁸¹ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. 65.

end point. The analogue photograph, most often a plastic base coated on one side with a gelatin containing silver halide crystals, does not have an identical structure between frames to analyse— each frame of an analogue roll of film will have a slightly different structure and characteristics, and the granular nature of silver halide crystals means that it is functionally impossible to determine which crystal is the smallest. This lack of a minimum linguistic unit extends to digital photographs too. William Mitchell writes that “there is an indefinite amount of information in a continuous-tone photograph...”³⁸² A digital image, on the other hand, has precisely limited spatial and tonal resolution and contains a fixed amount of information”.³⁸³ This is a tempting proposition— the digital camera produces an image which consists of a finite number of pixels, each with a distinct colour mapped to a certain hue, saturation and luminance value. However, this does not tell the whole story. Lev Manovich points out that “even the pixel-based representation, which appears to be the very essence of digital imaging, can no longer be taken for granted”.³⁸⁴ This is because images can exist as vectors— represented by

³⁸² That is to say, analogue photograph. [My footnote]

³⁸³ Mitchell, William. *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. 9.

³⁸⁴ Manovich, Lev. “The Paradoxes of Digital Photography.” In *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, 240–249. London: Routledge, 2003. 245.

equations rather than pixels, which allows for “an image of virtually unlimited size”.³⁸⁵

Of course, the simple fact can be argued that words can be interpreted in a number of different ways, and so the argument can be made that they too exist as vectors. Taking this argument further, one can propose that each stroke of ink on the page can be further divided. Even typed text on a screen is not tied to individual pixels, but rather exists as a collection of mathematical formulae, bezier curves and rasterised output. Even though the written language and photography retain major differences, Ricoeur’s narrative logic applies to them both— hermeneutic meaning (and thus fiction) cannot be traced to the artefact itself, but stands as an image outside of the semantic elements. Ricoeur’s fiction does not require specific semantic elements to function, and so can be expanded to account for the various mechanisms which make up contemporary storytelling, such as video.

4.4.2 Iconic function

Ricoeur writes that “what occurs in painting is entirely comparable to the

³⁸⁵ Manovich, “The Paradoxes”, 245.

invention of the phonetic alphabet through a succession of stages, from pictograms and hieroglyphics to ideograms and the phonetization of the alphabet”.³⁸⁶ Ricoeur writes that “painting also appears to be an attempt to capture the universe in a web of abridged signs”.³⁸⁷ This clearly sets out Ricoeur’s position on the model of thought he develops regarding fiction, that it is able to be deployed in a similar fashion to mediums beyond written language. This chapter does not argue that the photograph is equivalent to the word, or the video equivalent to the sentence, but instead develops Ricoeur’s generic framework, expanding his analysis from words and sentences to other formats. Ricoeur’s position here is that when considering painting and writing, “their manifest difference can be subsumed under a general function of iconicity, and it is the structure of this general function which is in question here”.³⁸⁸ For Ricoeur, this iconicity is a deeply phenomenological concept— it is through iconicity that Ricoeur discusses how fiction relates back to the “world of manipulable objects [and] the world into which we have been thrown by birth”.³⁸⁹ There is no doubt that photography shares this complex

³⁸⁶ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 137.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid 138.

³⁸⁹ Ibid 139.

relationship to the world alongside writing and painting. But to only consider photography as an abridged sign is to erase its unique characteristics— of indexicality, or of being a subtractive process (where the act of photographing is primarily the act of excluding everything outside of frame).

The photograph's iconic function cannot be denied, but it is more than a simple abbreviation through signs. The photograph's semiotic similarities to writing and painting do not need to completely erode the photograph's semantic complexity. Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* 3 describes an "interweaving of history and fiction" to "concretize their respective intentionalities... by borrowing from the intentionality of the other".³⁹⁰ For Ricoeur, this interweaving acts to unite "the standing-for the past... with the imaginative variations of fiction".³⁹¹ If the photograph and video have different ties to history (what has been photographed) than those held by writing, then this begs the question— how does this relationship affect Ricoeur's writing on history and fiction?

Ricoeur directly references photography when discussing fiction, and

³⁹⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 180-181.

³⁹¹ Ibid 192.

writes that “photography is never a simple replica of reality, even in its less imaginative forms— the problem was to capture something other than the alleged objective dimensions of proportion, form and color”.³⁹² The photograph’s aim is “not simply reduplication but creative reconstruction by the means of the mediation of fiction”.³⁹³ This clearly states that the photograph retains its fictive capacity. However, the photograph’s historical function is more difficult to delineate. For Ricoeur, “pictures³⁹⁴ may be taken out of context because their originals enjoy innumerable relations with the rest of the world”.³⁹⁵ The nature of photography means that these innumerable relations are already present (or suggested by their absence) in the still images in some capacity. So then, video, despite offering a new mode of narrative through its cinematic qualities (such as movement), ultimately contains many frames, each with innumerable relations between themselves and to the originals they point to. Recall our discussion in the first section— of the absent photograph and the unreal photograph. These relations within and emanating from the image do not refute the photograph’s unreal nature.

³⁹² Ibid 138.

³⁹³ Ibid 140.

³⁹⁴ Ricoeur refers explicitly to the photograph.

³⁹⁵ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 128.

In this sense, Ricoeur's framework for discussing fiction is capable of considering video, with the following two caveats. First, while Ricoeur's use of linguistic units makes a useful metaphor for the relationship between photograph and video, it should not be used to suggest direct equivalences. Secondly, it must be remembered that Ricoeur's own analysis did not encompass much of what will be discussed. This chapter builds on and expands Ricoeurian ideas, but from video to documentary to interactive documentary, Ricoeur does not provide concrete examples.

The point of this section is that Ricoeur's writing on the image and photograph is able to be adapted, through analogising his use of linguistic units, to consider video.³⁹⁶ What this means for video is that it itself is greater than the sum of its 25 photographs per second, and that these photographs are also not as simple as semantic units—elements from which to draw out meaning through the extended narrative of the video. Instead, these photographs (which form part of the video), retain a historical function

³⁹⁶ While one can suggest that there can be animated videos or animation within a documentary, this does not alter the fundamental point I am making here. The still photograph contains innumerable relations— and a video is a number of these photographs played per second, with the caveat that a video is *not only* this.

different to the written language. Within the semantics of the video is the semiotics of photography.³⁹⁷ Moreover, Ricoeur's linguistic units can be roughly compared with separate mediums, thus encouraging the application of fiction in both a phenomenological and a hermeneutic approach. This section has thus demonstrated that the capacity for fiction lies more in the capacity for hermeneutic generation of meaning rather than within a specific material construct. This allows for the discussion to continue beyond applying fiction to the interactive documentary, and will now focus on the relationship between history and documentary. Once this is completed, then we will be able to finally consider fully how fiction operates in interactive documentary.

4.5 Video to documentary

By discussing the differences between the photograph/video and written language, we have considered the historical import of the former. If a photograph or video have conditions of both absence and unreality, as highlighted in the 'image to photograph' section, then we must consider: absence of what? It is through the condition of unreality that the photograph/video creates a fiction, but it is through the condition of absence that the

³⁹⁷ And this is without even considering the other aspects separating video from photography, such as the possible inclusion of sound.

photograph/ video develops its historical power so critical to documentary practice. This position will be explained through Ricoeur's interweaving of history and fiction.

We have already addressed how the condition of unreality allows the photograph/ video to be considered as a fictional heuristic under Ricoeurian conditions. The goal of this section is to address how the condition of absence acts to coalesce the photograph/ video and history. This is clear and present in documentary. By doing this, we will have established a dialectic between history and fiction present in the documentary photograph/ film. This will then ground our discussion of interactivity — and how it intersects within this dialectic of history and fiction already found in the non-interactive documentary. By doing this, we will be able to develop a nuanced view of how interactivity fictionalises outside of the boundaries we will establish.

In this section, Ricoeur's concept of the trace will be introduced, and then through the categories of content, artefact and impression, I will discuss how the trace impacts each of these aspects of the documentary. André Bazin and Roland Barthes will be briefly discussed in relation to the notion of

impression. This does not supplant my use of Ricoeur, but rather provides a grounding in the phenomenology of video, which Ricoeur did not write on. This is a vital step, as it delineates between the documentary as artefact and the documentary that the audience or user sees. The documentary artefact can be seen as the actual celluloid film, or computer files held on a hard drive. It represents the image data— the 1s and 0s or the silver nitrate of film. The documentary that the audience (or user) sees is the representation of that. It is the organisation of the 1s and 0s into a projected image— that the user then can interpret. It is the debayered image— or the image produced from the negative. Artefact is easy to imagine. The difference between content and impression requires more subtlety. The impression is entirely phenomenological— differing from user to user. The content sits between the artefact and impression, and represents the interface of the documentary. The user does not see the 1s and 0s of a digital documentary. They see an image created through algorithms from this raw information. The viewer of a film at the cinema does not see the original negative, they see a projected image of the negative. This is the difference between artefact, content and impression.

Examining these three categories clarifies how a documentary refers to

history, and suggests where interactivity has the potential to alter this relationship. It is pivotal to point to where interactivity and documentary intersect before undertaking a study of interactivity — this section will lay the foundation for the rest of this chapter's discussion on fiction and interactivity.

When discussing historical time in *Time and Narrative* 3, Ricoeur touches on the etymology of document (the root of 'documentary'). He writes that "the accent today is no longer placed on the function of teaching... rather the accent is placed on the support, the warrant a document provides for a history, a narrative, or an argument".³⁹⁸ The role of the warrant is to provide evidence — "material proof... for the relationship drawn from a course of events".³⁹⁹ This uneasy relationship with history informs robust and ongoing debates between documentary scholars — the question of 'truth' is subject to a maelstrom of opposing viewpoints.

As a consequence of privileging the documentary warrant, there is an inadequacy in the treatment of fiction within documentary literature. Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* illustrates the problems inherent to describing the

³⁹⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 117.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

role of fiction in documentary. Nichols writes that “because documentaries address the world in which we live rather than a world imagined by the filmmaker, they differ from the various types of fiction (science fiction, horror, adventure, melodrama, and so on) in significant ways”.⁴⁰⁰ Nichols refers to assumptions of purpose, audience expectations and the type of relationship between filmmaker and subject. But to consider documentary as diametrically opposed to fiction deprives documentary of the productive opportunities fiction can provide. Even though Nichols realises that there is no guarantee of “absolute separation between fiction and documentary”, there is still an assumption that fiction is a simple collection of “practices or conventions”, and that fiction and documentary can merely borrow from the other’s practices and conventions.⁴⁰¹ I argue that the role of fiction is much more complex than a stylistic choice, and is instead inherent to the documentary by virtue of the documentary’s hermeneutic character. To discuss this role of fiction, we must first examine where the warrant of documentary stems from, and this will be undertaken using Ricoeur’s concept of the trace.

⁴⁰⁰ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xi.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

4.5.1 Ricoeur's trace

The concept of the trace is a heavily theoretical term (used by Lévinas and oft-referenced by Derrida).⁴⁰² For our purposes here, we will be careful to define it in Ricoeurian terms. For Ricoeur, the notion of a trace “constitutes a new connector between the temporal perspectives that speculation arising out of phenomenology... dissociates”.⁴⁰³ In other words, the Ricoeurian trace rests at the end of a process which examines “the notion of archives... that of a document... and then reaches its final epistemological presupposition: the trace”.⁴⁰⁴ Ricoeur's trace may “[become] a document for historians as soon as they know how to interrogate its remains”.⁴⁰⁵ So then, for our purposes, the Ricoeurian trace expresses the relation between the experience of history, and the capacity to place this experience at a critical distance, allowing it to be studied and experienced reflectively.

⁴⁰² Lévinas develops the trace in *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, while Derrida's main works concerning the trace are *Writing and Difference (L'écriture et la différence)* and *Of Grammatology (De la grammatologie)*.

⁴⁰³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 116.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid 117.

Ricoeur writes that the “document... functions as a trace left by the past”.⁴⁰⁶ It is the trace which allows us to make explicit the similarities between the Ricoeurian document and documentary. For Ricoeur, the trace “orients the hunt, the quest, the search, the inquiry”.⁴⁰⁷ The trace is seen not as a simple, solely epistemological furnishing of evidence, but instead as an “enigmatic [instrument] by means of which historical narrative ‘refigures’ time”.⁴⁰⁸ It does this by acting as a junction through which “the overlapping of the existential and the empirical in the significance of the trace” takes place.⁴⁰⁹ The trace therefore sees a convergence of phenomenology and historiographical procedures. For Ricoeur, the trace “is what history is. To say that it is a knowledge by traces is to appeal, in the final analysis, to the significance of a passed past that nevertheless remains preserved in its vestiges”.⁴¹⁰

It is this epistemological presupposition furnished by the trace that has given documentary its power — the documentary is “propositional”, stating

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid 118.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid 120.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid 125.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid 125-126.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid 120.

“this is so, isn’t it?”.⁴¹¹ The trace lends historical authority to documentary, as through the quasi-mechanical process of production, a sort of authenticity is assumed — That the photograph being viewed was true at one time and from one perspective. But the documentary has a trace further than what it depicts — the documentary itself is a trace. Ricoeur writes that “people from the past left these vestiges. However they are also the products of their activities and work”.⁴¹² In this sense the trace has a dual potential — to describe the people from the past, and to demonstrate in itself the product of their activities and work. Essentially, the documentary is a trace as it stands as an historical artefact. It is a vestige of the past — the documentary is ultimately a culturally, socially, politically informed object that is of its time: a documentary does not stand outside of history, nor is the documentary itself erased by whatever it might be referring to. This characteristic is also extended to interactive documentaries — while they can be more difficult to quantify or delineate, they still exist as vestiges — produced and created.

It is clear that the Ricoeurian trace has relevance to several aspects of documentary — by separating documentary into three categories of content,

⁴¹¹ Nash, “What Is Interactivity for?”, 383; Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 114.

⁴¹² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 119.

artefact and impression, we can examine in more detail documentary's relationship to history. As an aside, it should also be mentioned here that Ricoeur's thought around the trace is narrower in scope than current approaches demand. While the computer is still a human trace, Ricoeur does not contemplate the possibility of a second-order trace— a trace left by a computer, which is itself a trace.⁴¹³ Take a random number generator for example. The computer would be a human trace, as would the algorithm generating these numbers. But the numbers themselves? To what degree do humans exert themselves over this consequence— and how many degrees of separation are required in order to suggest a non-human (or perhaps a peri- or trans-human) trace? This is not a problem exclusive to the digital world. To what degree are domesticated animals a human trace? How many generations without human interference would be required to escape the yoke of human traces? It is clear that Ricoeur's thought must at least allow for this uncertainty, and thus within the context of this thesis, the trace must not be seen as exclusively human. Given this, Ricoeur's approach still retains its usefulness— the salient point is that the trace describes the conditions under which it has been created through both the content (the world the trace

⁴¹³ This question, though critical to Ricoeur's trace, has not been developed in the secondary literature.

references) as well as the artefact itself. This is a characteristic independent of whether the trace was an exclusively human creation or not.

4.5.2 Content, artefact, impression

To understand how viewing the documentary as a trace impacts the historical import of documentary, we must first separate documentary into the three sections of content, artefact and impression. This demonstrates where the trace is present— and where interactivity fits in. First, the *content* of the documentary. Content refers to what Barthes describes as “a sort of umbilical cord [linking] the body of the photographed thing to my gaze”.⁴¹⁴ Malin Wahlberg writes that “in documentary theory the phenomenology of the image as imprint and record fuses with the classical index argument, which has commonly been associated with the ascribed veracity of documentary representation”.⁴¹⁵ The content of the documentary has a complex relationship with the referred scene, and the documentary itself. The mechanical apparatus of the camera propelled the early perception that “photography’s indexicality [constituted] the basis for proposing ontological distinctions between painting

⁴¹⁴ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. 80-81.

⁴¹⁵ Wahlberg, Malin. *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 3.

and photography”, and that the camera was an authoritative view of an objective scene.⁴¹⁶ This content represents the absent photograph.

To discuss the artefact, I must first define what I mean. Essentially, the documentary artefact is *not* the documentary experienced. To describe how this differs from documentary content, it is helpful to analogise using the genotype-phenotype distinction. While this is in the field of biology, the genotype-phenotype distinction helps to imagine what a documentary artefact may be, especially in interactive and digital documentaries, where there is no longer a necessarily unique object, such as a reel of film. The genotype is the genetic constitution of an organism. Pace epigenetics, the genotype can roughly be thought of as a set of plans containing that organism’s full hereditary information— the potentials and limitations. The phenotype is essentially the manifestation of the genotype— the phenotype

⁴¹⁶ Van Gelder, Hilde, and Helen Westgeest. *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2011; Indeed, much has occurred in photography since Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* in 1981. There has been a general inundation of critical theory around photography — paired with technological changes in how photography is disseminated (like through the internet) and manipulated (through photoshop and similar editing programs). The conjunction of theory and technology has led to a more critical and skeptical perspective of photography.

Yet this does not impact Barthes’ underlying argument. The fact that photography has not been subsumed by mediums like painting or 3d modelling suggests that photography has retained the capacity to point to the world in which they were created. In this sense, photographs can be seen as a sort of trace, even though their authority has eroded in the years since Barthes wrote.

represents all observable characteristics and traits of the organism. While the genotype is one major factor in influencing the development of the phenotype, it is not the sole factor. Epigenetic and environmental factors also influence these observable characteristics. Not all organisms with the same genotype appear identical due to these other conditions (and vice versa— not all apparently identical organisms necessarily have the same genotype). We can say that the documentary artefact represents a sort of genotype, and the documentary content represents a sort of phenotype.

The content, or phenotype, represents the user interface— what they see, hear, smell, touch, taste. This phenotype emerges out of a genotype or artefact — a plan or set of data. The artefact is similar to a genotype in that it contains all the possibilities through which an interactive documentary can express itself. In a digital interactive documentary, it can be the 1s and 0s that make up the strings of code that determine the images to be displayed. Just because the genotype contains extra code (for extra images, as an example), this does not require the content (or phenotype) to display all this potentiality. The genotype also exists outside of the digital realm— the reel of film being projected is separate to the projection that the audience sees, as an example.

Even if examining the negative, the genotype of each crystal— the specific detail— is unable to be physically resolved with human vision, and thus relies on display technologies such as enlargers. This is in addition to potentially having a colour-negative film. This is a second-order experiencing of the analogue documentary.

All genotypes of the documentary become phenotypes when observed. So what role does interaction play here? When examining a biological specimen like a human, one cannot access their genetic code— one observes the phenotype. Similarly, the user of the interactive documentary does not derive their meaning directly from the 1s and 0s, or silver halide crystals that compose the interactive documentary, nor indeed from a global view of the documentary's overall architecture. The impression given by the journey through documentary is all-important. The language of genotype and phenotype is not Ricoeur's terminology. It is presented as a heuristic device, to allow us to conceptualise the difference between the documentary artefact and the documentary impression. This is extremely important as it allows us to integrate a phenomenological approach with the materiality of the interactive documentary. They are two sides of the same coin, not two exclusive

approaches.

In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” Bazin states that there is a “transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction”.⁴¹⁷ In other words, the photographic image conveys a sense of perception. This is the absent photograph, from our first section. The photographic image, through its trace, depicts an absence of some projected world. Daniel Morgan explains this, writing that the photographic image “has a closer tie to its objects than simply being a sign of them”.⁴¹⁸ This implies that the links a photograph assumes independently can affect our engagement, the new relations formed by the photograph are thus able to be transferred back to reality, deriving meaning from more than just its antecedent. In other words, the lessons that we learn from the photograph can extend beyond the photograph to affect our lives. The photograph itself exists as a trace— this is the documentary artefact. But the documentary itself (which exists in our reality) stands separate to its impression, or the unreal image. This impression has productive and fictive power. The impression of the documentary is deeply phenomenological, and

⁴¹⁷ Bazin, André and Hugh Gray. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 8.

⁴¹⁸ Morgan, Daniel. “Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics.” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (2006): 449.

information can be generated through this impression in an epistemologically significant way. For Bazin, realism was not based upon fidelity or arbitrary criteria, but instead on the impression of a “continuous and homogeneous reality”.⁴¹⁹ Nichols writes that the documentary tradition “relies heavily on being able to convey to us the impression of authenticity”.⁴²⁰ Impression encompasses everything from the resolution of the subject matter, to the use of cuts, to the appearance of movement through playing back footage at many frames per second.

There is a concern in documentary that an “accentuation of the message” may lead to “obliteration of the reference”, where “a beautiful photograph drains attention from the sobering subject and turns it toward the medium itself, thereby compromising the picture’s status as a document”.⁴²¹ To view the impression of a documentary as a trace in-itself destabilises the primacy of document as evidence. And it is through the phenomenological impression of the documentary that we can discuss the productive capacity of fiction.

⁴¹⁹ Bazin, André. *Orson Welles: A Critical View*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978. 77.

⁴²⁰ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xiii.

⁴²¹ Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1975. 264; Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 68.

Fiction's capacity for "provoking an illusion of presence, but one controlled by critical distance" offers possibilities for documentary which do not strictly align to attempts to conjure a verisimilitudinous reflection of what has been filmed or photographed. The idea of 'authenticity' can cover a multitude of sins— the impression of documentary furnishing evidence has historically led to the privileging of "straight photography", where an aesthetic was developed which "[celebrated] the camera's transcriptive capabilities".⁴²² However, documentary also retains fictive capabilities— as evidenced by the line we have drawn from image to photograph to video to documentary. But this does not tell the whole story. Interactivity introduces an entirely new way of fictionalising, which will be explored by first examining Ricoeur's four steps of fiction, and then seeing interaction as a speech act— requiring action and reaction.

4.6 Documentary to interactive documentary

It is interactivity that separates the interactive documentary from the documentary, but interactivity itself is an umbrella term, as the interactive documentary can offer many diverse formats. This has manifested itself in the

⁴²² Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. xxviii.

current interactive documentary literature: Aston and Gaudenzi present four ‘modes’,⁴²³ Galloway et al. similarly suggest four categories (separate to those discussed by Gaudenzi),⁴²⁴ and Nash proposes three structures, each of which can be further divided.⁴²⁵ Rather than attempt to duplicate the work already conducted by many scholars in the field, this discussion of interactivity will look at the common features of these different modes of interactivity, namely that they are fictionalising forces. This principle does not require specific types of interactivity to be discussed, and as a result, will render an understanding of interactivity as fiction which will be able to be applied in broad and varied ways.

This final section contains three distinct stages. The first is to draw on the rest of this chapter, and discuss how Ricoeur’s four steps of fiction can be applied to interactive documentary, rather than just the image. This allows us to introduce two modes of interactivity. The second is to develop a

⁴²³ “The conversational, the hypertext, the experiential and the participative”. These modes are modelled on different understandings of interactivity— which, paraphrased, are conversation with a computer, linking within a text, interactive computation or participation in an evolving database. (Aston and Gaudenzi “Setting the Field”, 126.)

⁴²⁴ These categories being “Passive Adaptive, Active Adaptive, Immersive, and Expansive”. (Galloway et al., “Towards a Working Model of Interactive Documentary”, 336.)

⁴²⁵ These structures are “the narrative, the categorical and the collaborative”— their capability to be divided highlights the “diverse uses of interactive features”. (Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 195.)

hermeneutic of interactivity — interactivity is not able to be reduced to a speech act, writing or reading. Finally, the relationship of action and reaction will be introduced. This demonstrates that interactivity is a productive, fictionalising force.

The cumulative force of what is being expressed here is an understanding that interactivity is an important fictional device, and that this fictional device does not erode the documentary aims of interactive documentary. Moreover, interactivity as a fictional device is shown to be more than an adaptation of reading. Instead, we come to understand that in order for interactivity to function, there must be an action and reaction. By being able to affect the text through action in a way that leaves a trace, then the user is undertaking a creative construction. This is not just a hermeneutic construction as Ricoeur writes, but a physical step of fictionalisation. Ricoeur categorises a text as the “detachment of meaning from the event”.⁴²⁶ By continuing to augment this text, meaning further detaches from event. Far from this standing as a critique of interactive documentary holding untrue to documentary aims, the relationship between interactivity and documentary in interactive

⁴²⁶ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25.

documentary is fundamentally challenged. We discover here the ‘point’ of interactivity in documentary terms. The movement away from historical trace does not reduce the possibility of phenomenological meaning. The fictionalisation through the interactive documentary’s reaction to the user’s action enhances the possibility for a personalised and phenomenologically-focused documentary — this is the point of interactivity in interactive documentary. This chapter ultimately aims to answer the question of how interactivity works in concert with documentary goals.

4.6.1 Four steps of fiction

The title of ‘non-fiction’ is used almost interchangeably with ‘documentary’,⁴²⁷ presenting fiction as a condition which documentary must struggle against. By re-imagining fiction in documentary, we will be able to harness fiction’s capacity for creative reconstruction. Before discussing interactivity as a fictionalising force, we must understand what exactly Ricoeur means when he discusses the productive power of fiction. In “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality”, Ricoeur outlines four steps that must be taken in order to discuss the “distinctive ways in which portraits and

⁴²⁷ This is present even in prominent texts such as Erik Barnouw’s *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*.

fictions refer to reality”.⁴²⁸ These four steps are: shifting fiction from perception to language, linking fiction to work, bridging the divide between connotation and denotation, and overcoming the dichotomy between theory and praxis. These steps will be followed here— not only do they clarify Ricoeur’s approach to fiction, but they also demonstrate how interactivity is uniquely positioned as a fictionalising force.

By establishing how fiction refers to (and expands) reality,⁴²⁹ we can address two questions. First, how interactivity functions as a device for fictionalisation, and secondly, if this fictionalisation through interaction reduces or enhances documentary’s direct reference to an extra-textual reality. Given that documentary “[relies] heavily on being able to convey to us the impression of authenticity”, interactivity will be interrogated through the lens of Ricoeur’s account of fiction, where the mechanism of interactivity can be seen not just as a way to get closer to the historical truth of the documentary subject, but instead as an avenue to “refer in a ‘productive’ way to reality as intimated by the fiction”.⁴³⁰ In this vein, it will be argued that interactivity is a

⁴²⁸ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 123.

⁴²⁹ ‘Reality’ here refers to the world of the reader.

⁴³⁰ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xiii; Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 126.

useful mechanism not because it *reduces* fiction, but that it *expands* the capacity of fiction to create a model for creative reconstruction.

Ricoeur aims to “liberate the theory of fiction from the yoke of imagination as picture”.⁴³¹ First, Ricoeur argues that “the problem of the image⁴³²” should be moved “from the sphere of perception to that of language”.⁴³³ What this means is that through language, the concept of image as “a weak impression, of a representative, of a sign substituted for an empirical presence” can instead stand as a combination of sense and representation.⁴³⁴ This is where the image can provide “a body, a contour, a shape to meaning”, whilst simultaneously “[participating] in the invention of meaning”.⁴³⁵ In other words, the image can refer to more than its original. This has already been covered in some detail in section one of this chapter. However, this thought gains potency when considering documentary, which for so long has used its indexical relationship to the world as a crutch. Let me be clear: here I criticise both the supposition

⁴³¹ Ibid 140.

⁴³² ‘Image’ here is not exclusive to the photograph.

⁴³³ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 129.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

that “cameras furnish an impersonal, objective image”, as well as the view that “photographs are evidence not only of what’s there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world”.⁴³⁶ These positions each have some degree of validity,⁴³⁷ but ultimately only displace the challenge of history and fiction. Ricoeur writes that “in the case of fiction, on the contrary, there is no given model, in the sense of an original already there, to which it could be referred”.⁴³⁸ The documentary contains both an historical trace, as well as a “nothingness proper to the representation of an absent thing, [which] belongs to the mode of givenness of the image, not to its referent”.⁴³⁹ The ‘nothingness’ that Ricoeur refers to is the “non-existence of the object of the fiction”— the referent of the documentary image may be a real thing, but it is aimed at in absentia.⁴⁴⁰ In other words, the fact that the documentary image can have some historical import does not mean that the whole documentary is a mere facsimile of reality. Ricoeur writes that “of course, if you treat fiction as a complex image you may refer your elementary images one by one to

⁴³⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, 88.

⁴³⁷ For example, the camera can indeed be controlled by an individual, and thus be a process of exclusion.

⁴³⁸ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 126.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

corresponding entities in the world... [but] it's the new combination which has no reference in a previous original to which the image would be the copy".⁴⁴¹

To divorce the documentary image from its referent in this way allows for what Ricoeur calls "iconic augmentation" — because a text is not equivalent to reality, it has the capacity to offer new models for perceiving the world.⁴⁴² Iconic augmentation can present a subject under different conditions than it is ordinarily experienced, Ricoeur concluding that "iconicity, then, means a revelation of a real more real than ordinary reality".⁴⁴³ As an example — Eadweard Muybridge's photographic studies on animal locomotion were commissioned by Leland Stanford, with the purpose of determining whether a galloping horse ever lifts all four feet off the ground at once. The horse, in fact, does lift all four feet off the ground. But it was the photographs (made into a rough approximation of a video through a zoopraxiscope) that revealed this. The horse was presented under different conditions than is ordinarily experienced, and through this, something was revealed. Viewing image as a

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid 136.

⁴⁴³ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 42.

question of language rather than perception is to properly acknowledge the epistemological import of the documentary image. In other words, not only was the horse perceived differently through the photographs, but the photographs themselves acted to re-describe the subject. Ricoeur writes that “modern semantics since Frege and Husserl has tended to exclude image from the sphere of meaning”, where there is a total break between sense (provided by the image) and epistemological reference.⁴⁴⁴ Image as language allows image to escape its minor “role of accompaniment, of illustration, [instead participating] in the invention of meaning”.⁴⁴⁵

The second stage in Ricoeur’s project of a productive fiction is an “attempt to link fiction tightly to work”.⁴⁴⁶ Work, for Ricoeur, means activity such as writing— wherein there is more labor required “than to ‘see’ and to ‘imagine’”.⁴⁴⁷ For Ricoeur, “fiction only reveals its ability to transform or transfigure reality when it is inserted into something as a labor”. Ricoeur

⁴⁴⁴ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 129.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 127.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid 128.

posits that without work, the image may “[remain] within the poverty [sic]⁴⁴⁸ of its own appearance”, where due to the fascination with the original subject of the image, the “magic of quasi-possession”— of almost being there— acts as the opposite of work, instead showing “to what extent reproductive imagination may become parasitic on the picture’s original”.⁴⁴⁹ This is similar to our discussion of the genotype and the phenotype in the ‘video to documentary’ section. A phenotype only exists once the documentary has caused some sort of phenomenological impression. Only by looking at (or interacting with) the documentary is the phenotype of the documentary revealed. The act of interpretation and thus active imagination can be classified as work. Interaction takes a more literal definition of work— the user must physically generate this phenotype out of the genotype. Ricoeur states that “when the image is made it is also able to re-make a world”, and it is in this sense that fiction must be linked to work in order to avoid the tendency of classical philosophy to “reduce fiction to illusion... [closing] the

⁴⁴⁸ Ricoeur’s paper “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality” bears similarities with his “Leçons sur l’Imagination: De L’Image-portrait à L’Image-fiction”. While this is not a direct match, Ricoeur writes in “Leçons” that “la fiction ne partage pas la pauvreté de l’image d’un objet absent”. (Ricoeur, Paul. “Leçons sur l’Imagination: De L’Image-portrait à L’Image-fiction” *Cours* 1973-1974. 65.)

‘Pauvreté’ translates to poverty in English— given the similar tone of “Leçons” to “The Function of Fiction”, it is reasonable to assume that “poverty” is a simple misspelling.

⁴⁴⁹ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 128.

way to any ontology of fiction”.⁴⁵⁰

Ricoeur writes that “Writing a poem, telling a story, construing an hypothesis, a plan, or a strategy: these are the kinds of contexts of work which provide a perspective to imagination and allow it to be ‘productive’”.⁴⁵¹ Rather than imagined capabilities and massive numbers of potential pathways, interactivity, through physical work, provides a phenotype to the genotype of the interactive documentary. This also separates the interactive documentary from the documentary *simpliciter* as Ricoeur explicitly sets out that “further labor is required than to ‘see’ and to ‘imagine’”.⁴⁵² While Ricoeur does not write explicitly on the interactive documentary, this idea of further labor than interpretation is germane to the interactive aspect of interactive documentary.

Ricoeur sees this idea of work (interaction past simple interpretation) as key to making imagination productive— it is the “contexts of work which

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid 135.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid; Although one can argue that the documentary *simpliciter* can also be heard, the point here is that the type of interaction is fundamentally different from physically constructing what ends up being a ‘wrought’ understanding.

provide a perspective to imagination”.⁴⁵³ The non-interactive documentary demands the audience to see and to imagine. The interactive documentary requires more than this — in order to progress, the user must work to hew the interactive documentary, regardless of how this interactivity may present itself (as physical movement, clicking and so on).

The third stage is to overthrow the prejudice which renounces all “truth-claims for the arts”, as Ricoeur argues against the assignment of “denotation to science and... connotation for the arts, meaning by this last expression that the arts merely evoke feelings, emotions and passions devoid of any ontological weight”.⁴⁵⁴ Ricoeur uses this as an exhortation to “extend the concept of fiction beyond language and the plastic arts” towards “the conceptual field of scientific knowledge”.⁴⁵⁵ But this can be taken another way — to properly recognise how the interactive element of interactive documentary is a heuristic fiction: a model ‘for’ re-describing reality rather than a model ‘of’ a previously given reality.⁴⁵⁶ This separation is also present

⁴⁵³ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 128.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid 140.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ To paraphrase Ricoeur.

in the distinction between the absent photograph (the model 'of') and the unreal photograph (the model 'for').

Interactivity here presents an opportunity to explore this model through the physical work of drawing a phenotype out of a genotype. The sole photograph cannot offer this heuristic approach, no matter if it is approached as a model 'of' or as a model 'for'. The ontological weight of the documentary is combined with the productive power of interactivity— where the connotative and phenomenological elements spur a “creative mimesis of reality”.⁴⁵⁷ The documentary import of interactive documentary is not just in the denotative, indexical elements of the image. It also relies on how the documentary is received. To this phenomenological end, the capability of the interactive documentary to construct a model 'for' allows for the denotative to be construed in a meaningful way.⁴⁵⁸ As more than a reduplication of reality, the capacity of fiction can also *add to* our understanding of reality, rather than

⁴⁵⁷ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 141.

⁴⁵⁸ This echoes Barthes' writing in *Camera Lucida*. Barthes proposes a relationship between the photograph itself and its phenomenological impact, stating that he “would have to consent to combine two voices: the voice of banality (to say what everyone sees and knows) and the voice of singularity (to replenish such banality with all the elan of an emotion which belonged only to myself)”. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.)

reproduce it. Ricoeur terms this “productive reference”.⁴⁵⁹

Ricoeur’s final stage in liberating fiction from picture is more of a footnote in his work, and will be treated similarly here. It does bear mentioning, however, as it encourages a heuristic approach to fiction, which is being discussed in this chapter. For Ricoeur, the fourth step is to overcome “another dichotomy, that of theory and praxis... and would attempt to overcome it within a general theory of fiction”.⁴⁶⁰ Ricoeur couches this recommendation within a context of “ideology and utopia”, but the bridging of theory and praxis is tightly linked to his concept of work— and it will be argued later that interactivity provides a sense of praxis.

To recap, Ricoeur’s four stages are: shifting fiction from perception to language, linking fiction to work, bridging the divide between connotation and denotation, and overcoming the dichotomy between theory and praxis. It is important to liberate fiction from picture as this then allows for productive reference— ultimately why fiction is an important component of documentary

⁴⁵⁹ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 141; Productive reference will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

⁴⁶⁰ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 141.

in general. Interactive documentary in particular has unique fictional characteristics which must be discussed. Although fiction, at first supposition, seems anathema to the documentary project, it will be shown that fiction is deeply compatible with the documentary aspect of interactive documentary.

The four stages that Ricoeur presents in order to discuss fiction as a productive power have been shown to be relevant to interactivity. The four stages, besides situating interactivity as a fictionalising power, can also help to show that the goal of interactivity should not be to approximate verisimilitude, but to enhance its inherent standing as a fictional device, and thus provide a much-needed shape to documentary meaning. Interactivity can be broken up into the two facets of user participation and tailored pathways. User participation describes the textual effect of interactivity, while tailored pathways discusses the phenomenological import of interactivity. When both are taken together, interactivity will be shown to be fictionalising at both the level of the text, and the user.

Interactivity allows for a unique fiction. Interactive documentaries have a potentially massive number of pathways— this allows for an individual

experience, not just in phenomenological interpretation, but potentially also in the structure and content of the interactive documentary. While Ricoeur speaks of overcoming the “dichotomy [between] theory and praxis”, the trace of action in interactive documentary does beg the question: is interactivity a question of application (praxis) or making (poiesis)?⁴⁶¹ In other words, does the reaction of the interactive documentary to the user’s action constitute part of the latent text, or does it suggest that the user has made something new through their trace? To answer this, the mechanism of interactivity will be examined through the lens of Ricoeur’s account of speech acts.

4.6.2 Speech acts

Interactivity does not fit neatly into the classification of speech act, reading or writing. But by approaching interactivity using Ricoeur’s writing on speech acts, we can use the stages of locution, illocution and perlocution help to consider interactivity hermeneutically — as a mixture between speech act, reading and writing. The aim of this is to show that interaction within interactive documentary can be seen as requiring both an action from the user, and a reaction from the interactive documentary. This is a decisive step by

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

which we will conclude this chapter.

To sketch out a hermeneutics of interactivity, we turn to Ricoeur's paper "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text". Ricoeur's proposition here is that "inasmuch as [the] object displays some of the features constitutive of a text" and the "methodology develops the same kind of procedures as those of... text-interpretation", then hermeneutics may be extended as a paradigm to describe interpretation in general.⁴⁶² While Ricoeur extends this to the social sciences, we may approach interactivity in much the same way. By adapting Ricoeur's speech acts to interactivity, we find three levels to user participation. These are the level of the locutionary ("the act of saying"), the illocutionary ("that which we do *in* saying") and the perlocutionary ("That which we do *by* saying").⁴⁶³ Ricoeur provides an example here— the locutionary act is saying "close the door!", the illocutionary act may be that it is said "with the force of an order and not of a request", and the perlocutionary act is that "I can stir up certain effects, like

⁴⁶² Ricoeur, Paul. "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text." *New Literary History* 5, no. 1 (1973): 91.

⁴⁶³ Ricoeur, "Action Considered as Text", 93-94.

fear, by the fact that I give you an order”.⁴⁶⁴ Can interactivity be categorised in this way?

Of course, interaction is not completely equivalent to a speech act. However, an equivalence may be established by considering that an action, like a speech act, may be identified “not only according to its propositional content, but also according to its illocutionary force”.⁴⁶⁵ Both constitute the “sense-content”, and in this manner, the action thus lodges itself in a similar dynamic between temporal status as appearing (then disappearing) event, and its “logical status as having... ‘sense content’”.⁴⁶⁶ It is also important to note that “in the same way that a text is detached from its author, an action is detached from its agent and develops consequences of its own”.⁴⁶⁷ Action, then, can be looked at through the lens of locutionary acts.

With this in mind, let us consider again the three locutionary acts in the context of user participation. The user’s locutionary action can be

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid 94.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid 100.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

conceptualised as the action itself (for example, clicking a clip). The illocutionary effect of this is centred on both the exclusion of all other options in that stage, as well as laying the narratological pathway to follow. Finally, the perlocutionary act is how the user's action impacts their phenomenological interpretation of the interactive documentary — perlocution is an act of speech or writing which aims to effect an action, but in itself does not constitute the action. For example, the perlocutionary force of a documentary may be to encourage action in preserving the climate. But in itself this documentary does not have a perlocutionary force without a viewer or user. This accords with Ricoeur's statement that "the perlocutionary act is the least inscribable aspect of discourse" — the impact is on the user, rather than the text.⁴⁶⁸

So then, is interactivity a latent characteristic of the text, or a user contribution? The answer is more complex than either of these simple alternatives — it is a relationship between the interactive documentary and the user, which will be pointed to through Ricoeur's account of speech acts. This is a particularly important step when considering that modes of interactivity can

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid 94.

vary greatly in interactive documentaries— Nash writes that “interactivity can serve a number of functions within the documentary text: finding information (either within or beyond the documentary), learning, furthering the narrative, personalizing the documentary, adding to the documentary content, play or searching ‘playfully’ for hotspots within an image-interface”.⁴⁶⁹ The execution of these actions can vary from selecting one of several options through to engaging in production. These examples may sound like a clear distinction between the former as praxis and the latter as poiesis. However, the feature of interaction is common to all interactive documentaries, even if these forms of interaction can differ greatly. Let me be clear: Ricoeur acknowledged that the “variable polydicity of the predicative structure of action” allows for “a plurality of arguments capable of complementing” the act itself.⁴⁷⁰ In other words, interaction can vary wildly in its locutionary capabilities. The distinction between locution and illocution is based on the “dialectic of event and meaning similar to that of the speech act”.⁴⁷¹ Interactivity is a dynamic relationship between event and meaning which has some essential characteristics no matter the mode.

⁴⁶⁹ Nash, “Modes of Interactivity”, 201.

⁴⁷⁰ Ricoeur, “Action Considered as Text”, 99.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

Consider our examples— selecting an option versus engaging in production. The locution of each can be substantively different— selecting an option may be through a human-computer-interface which only requires the movement of a finger, while engaging in production could be as involved as physical travel and documentation. But locution alone does not determine interactivity. Equally importantly, the degree of involvement in an interactive documentary does not guarantee one experience being more of an “interactive documentary” than the other. For example, imagine an interactive documentary where, in order to access it, the user was required to film and submit an 8 hour clip of their day. When this was completed, the documentary would show this user an 8 hour clip of another user’s day. This documentary would require substantial involvement and interaction, and the user would indeed contribute to the documentary. But the illocutionary force may be no different to the user selecting an option to watch an 8 hour clip of somebody’s day. The poiesis of the first user does not necessarily correspond with the praxis of interacting with the documentary.

Ricoeur writes that “in the same way that a text is detached from its author,

an action is detached from its agent and develops consequences of its own”.⁴⁷²

He continues, that “in the same way fixation by writing is made possible by intentional exteriorization inherent in the speech-act itself, a similar dialectic within the process of transaction prepares the detachment of the meaning of the action from the event of the action”.⁴⁷³ The distancing present in action is inscribed by the interactive documentary (hence making interaction).

Action, as mediated by the interactive documentary, is thus a conversation *with* a text. The nature of interaction means that the text must respond to the action provided by the user, but in doing so, abstracts this action. This is what leads to a separation of meaning and event, and through doing so, makes it impossible to neatly categorise interactivity into poiesis or praxis.

4.6.3 Action and reaction

We have considered action, and have determined that it can be seen as both a poiesis and a praxis. The fact that we have not yet been able to determine if interactivity is a characteristic of the text or a user contribution takes us to the next step. Action is a user contribution. The inscription of that action forms a

⁴⁷² Ibid 100.

⁴⁷³ Ibid 99.

reaction from the text.⁴⁷⁴ Interactivity thus has two stages— the action of the user, and the reaction of the text. To be clear: before an action of the user, the interactive documentary does not have a perlocutionary force— it is without interaction. As soon as it is engaged by a user, this relationship between user and interactive documentary is formed. This is why I use the terminology of action and reaction, even though the user's action is not the originating action. This is a major step. By discussing interactivity in terms of action and reaction, we can not only recognise the importance of the fictionalising force of interaction, but also the epistemological realities of the interactive documentary. By framing reaction as an inscription of an action, we achieve two things. First, we situate a hermeneutics of interactivity— it has elements of speech act (on account of the user's action), writing (affecting the interactive documentary) and reading (the impression of the interactive documentary then being altered by this action). This also helps to distinguish the truly interactive documentary from documentary— the relationship between reaction and inscription is unique to the characteristic of interactivity.

⁴⁷⁴ A note must be made on the use of the word 'action'. This should not be read as that the user has the originating action— as the user is, after all, reacting to the interactive documentary.

Instead, view this word within the context of the interactive documentary responding to the user's input. The user's input, while not the originating action, is what the interactive documentary is responding to.

It is this idea of inscription which allows us to establish a relationship between action and interaction. This is also a vital part of the relationship between user and interactive documentary. Ricoeur claims that action itself may undergo “a kind of objectification similar to the fixation which occurs in writing... [constituting] a delineated pattern which has to be interpreted”.⁴⁷⁵ This fixation of action acts to describe two phenomena: how the interactive documentary responds to user participation (thus cementing its interactive status), and how interactivity fictionalises documentary further than simple interpretation. In the interactive documentary, an action leaves a “trace”, contributing to “the emergence of such patterns which become the documents of human action”.⁴⁷⁶ Ricoeur asks “what corresponds to writing in the field of action?”.⁴⁷⁷ In interactive documentary, it is the *reaction* of the documentary. The changed state of the interactive documentary as a consequence of the user’s action in a sense inscribes the action of the user. This logic can also be applied inversely — where the user’s reaction is a writing of the action of the interactive documentary. However, for our purposes, the former approach of

⁴⁷⁵ Ricoeur, “Action Considered as Text”, 98.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid 101.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid 100.

this bidirectional relationship is what we shall discuss. This is because Ricoeur's imagining of fiction occurs in the configuration stage of mimesis—which is ultimately a configuration that occurs in the reader (or in the case of interactive documentary, the user). Given this, let us consider the proposed gap between action and interaction. A user can perform an action on anything, such as pausing a film or flipping through the pages of a book. But it is through the reaction (and thus the ability to leave a 'trace') that a documentary becomes interactive. The interaction is between the user and the text, and requires a bidirectional relationship.

This is such an important point because it fully incorporates Ricoeur's dialectic of history and fiction into a study of interactive documentary. Ricoeur writes that the "quasi-historical moment of fiction [changes] places with the quasi-fictive moment of history", and through this relationship, "the standing-for the past in history is united with the imaginative variations of fiction".⁴⁷⁸ Interaction can be seen as user action and interactive documentary reaction— each supporting the other. Fiction does not supplant the documentary, it augments and contextualises it. Interaction is a process of

⁴⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 192.

fictionalisation, but due to the reaction of the text it has epistemological roots.

By being able to affect the text through action in a way that leaves a trace, the user is undertaking a creative construction. Each action the user performs does not just change their phenomenological perception, but also adds to or augments the interactive documentary. Ricoeur categorises a text as the “detachment of meaning from the event”.⁴⁷⁹ By continuing to add to (or at least augment) the text, then the meaning further detaches from the event. This movement away from historical trace or document does not reduce the phenomenological possibility for meaning: the fictionalisation through the interactive documentary’s reaction to the user’s action enhances the possibility for a personalised and phenomenologically-focused documentary.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that interactivity introduces a new capacity for fiction. Through the relationship of user action and interactive documentary reaction, a hermeneutics of interactivity has been sketched out, and the productive power of interactive documentary has been demonstrated.

⁴⁷⁹ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25.

We have successfully applied Ricoeur's writing on the image along the chain; from photo to video to documentary to interactive documentary. This has shown fiction to be a productive force that can be applied to interactive documentary, thus conceptualising interaction as a fictionalising (and ultimately productive) force.

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, the 'warrant' of the documentary is such that documentary has typically been seen as antithetical to aesthetic or figurative refiguration— relying instead on being “a substitute for looking at the thing itself”— where the documentary “cannot (in itself) be an expressive object, and therefore has no legitimate claim to aesthetic status”.⁴⁸⁰ The role of fiction, as established by this chapter, thoroughly refutes this realist perspective and concept of “a clear-eyed and dispassionate view”.⁴⁸¹ Instead, fiction has been shown to not only contextualise the document of documentary, but to open up this historical trace not just to

⁴⁸⁰ Scruton, Roger. *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture*. London: Methuen, 1983. 111; Smith, Peter, and Carolyn Lefley. *Rethinking Photography: Histories, Theories and Education*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015. 98; Although of course this definition remains contested, and is a thorny issue in the field. One only needs to consult Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* to see that the idea of documentary as a “discourse of sobriety” has been hotly contested for some time (Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 3). This thesis aims to instead further expand on the role that history and fiction play in interactive documentary, as a supplement to existing discourse rather than supplanting it.

⁴⁸¹ Dexter, Emma and Thomas Weski. *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the 20th Century Photograph*. London: Tate Modern Gallery, 2003. 15.

enhancement or embellishment, but “invention of meaning” — even “[increasing] reality”.⁴⁸²

The interactive element of interactive documentary has revealed a rich philosophical avenue, sparking discussion around interaction as both an action performed and an action inscribed — this is a capacity of interactive documentary which Ricoeur has not accounted for in his philosophy. The interplay between user and interactive documentary expands Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of human action ever closer to the speech act, and towards the act of writing. This is a decisive step in Ricoeurian thought — and establishes a hermeneutic difference between interacting with an interactive documentary and interacting with a non-interactive documentary. This has also modified Ricoeur’s concept of “productive reference”.⁴⁸³ While it is true that interactivity allows for the “reality shaping” as demanded by Ricoeur’s definition of productive reference, interaction has been shown to be more than a simple fictional tool.⁴⁸⁴ Instead, interactivity bridges the gap between fictionalisation and praxis — the physical praxis of interaction leading to the creative poesis

⁴⁸² Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 129; Ibid 127.

⁴⁸³ Ibid 123.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

through fiction.

This chapter has ultimately shown that interactive documentary introduces a new capacity for fiction, and argues that this is in fact beneficial to its documentary import. The ideas of action and inscription have shown a new way to imagine interactivity without prejudicing one type of interactivity over the other. This is crucial, as the diverse formats of interactive documentary have been shown to be joined through the idea of a personal praxis— one which fosters the invention of new meaning through fiction. In other words, the physical praxis supports the phenomenological poiesis in a way that was not anticipated by Ricoeur. Interactivity is a complex process that combines many elements, including fictionalisation. Ricoeurian thought has been successfully expanded to consider this, while establishing a relationship between interactivity and documentary that extends further than action, presenting a relationship between action and reaction.

5. Time

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, on history and fiction, saw interactivity established as a fictionalising force. Fiction has a fundamentally phenomenological temporality — as it is a force originating from the user of the interactive documentary. This final chapter, on time, argues that interactivity can not, and should not be seen as simply phenomenological, fictionalising force. Instead, the temporality of interactivity will be explicitly discussed, and this chapter argues that this interactive time interweaves several different temporalities. Without the clarification of this chapter, interactive documentary would be seen to retain a fundamentally identical temporal character to non-interactive documentary. This chapter will show that the paradigm of interaction in interactive documentaries demands an alternative approach to discussing temporality.

This chapter has two aims. The first is to show how adapting Ricoeurian temporality can let us account for (the impression of) the beginning and end of an interactive documentary. This in turn concretises interactive

documentary as a text in a hermeneutic sense. The main aim of this chapter is to develop a discussion of temporality which can adequately describe interactivity. Even if the negotiation through an interactive documentary is conducted through “[a] logic of choices”, there are still temporalities present.⁴⁸⁵ And these temporalities are part of “the multiple ways in which we participate, shape and are shaped by interactive documentaries”.⁴⁸⁶ Existing approaches to temporality do not account for the unique capacities which interactivity affords, and in an attempt to better account for interactivity, interactive documentary theorists have adopted the use of spatiality to refer to the navigability of an interactive documentary. As such, temporality is often put forth in opposition to spatiality when discussing the structure of interactive documentary.⁴⁸⁷

This thesis has so far shown interactivity to require distance between user and interactive documentary, as well as an action and reaction which must occur physically. This is to say that interactivity is spatial — and that current

⁴⁸⁵ Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 121.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid 3.

⁴⁸⁷ Gaudenzi notes that the “focus on... temporal montage” is not “representative of the non-linear, multi-window nature of interactive artefacts”. (Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 16.)

theory has recognised this.⁴⁸⁸ But interactivity is not only spatial. By disentangling the ostensible dichotomy between temporal and spatial, the hermeneutic significance of temporality in interactive documentary will be articulated. In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich writes of a “spatial montage”, which “represents an alternative to traditional cinematic temporal montage, replacing its traditional sequential mode with a spatial one”.⁴⁸⁹ Interactive documentary theorists such as Aston, Gaudenzi, Keen, Wiehl and Miles each point to Manovich’s spatial montage as representative of interactive documentary.⁴⁹⁰ For Keen, “in the design of the interface for an interactive documentary working with video both temporally and spatially is involved”.⁴⁹¹ Gaudenzi similarly writes, paraphrasing Manovich, that “interactivity makes [the interactive documentary] a connected and dynamic

⁴⁸⁸ Sharon Daniel is one such practitioner (and theorist). Daniel writes about thinking of issues as “a landscape or ‘site’... rather than narrative”— moving to collect direct testimony, and then designing a database for this, “that maps out an extensive territory... rather than building a single road across this territory to get from point A to point B, the interface sets the viewer down within its boundaries”. (Daniel, Sharon, Judith Aston, and Stefano Odorico. “Polyphony in Practice: An Interview with Sharon Daniel.” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 15, (2018): 99-100).

⁴⁸⁹ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 322.

⁴⁹⁰ Aston, Judith. “Database Narrative, Spatial Montage, and the Cultural Transmission of Memory: An Anthropological Perspective.” In *Digital Media and Technologies for Virtual Artistic Spaces*. Hershey: IGI Global, 2013. 150-158; Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 60; Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 60; Wiehl, “Korsakow Documentaries”, 179; Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 113.

⁴⁹¹ Keen, “A List of Propositions”, 52.

object where ‘spatial montage’... may replace ‘temporal montage’”.⁴⁹² The risk of seeing spatial montage replace temporal montage is that the two are assumed to be incompatible, or to have spatiality solely represent interactivity. The dichotomy cast between the “temporal” nature of film and the “multi-window nature of interactive artefacts” does not allow for the diverse forms of temporality present in Ricoeur’s thought.⁴⁹³

This is the challenge: to conceptualise a view of temporality which can account for the diverse formats of interactive documentary. Do these formats have different temporalities? Is this a unique consequence of interaction? Time is central to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, and underpins his defence of narrative in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*. Temporality thus is critical to examine in order to concretise the hermeneutic developed over the course of this thesis. The relationship between temporality and what interactive documentary scholars call spatiality must be interrogated.

Ricoeur’s approach to temporality is complex and multifaceted, and thus he presents a large number of temporalities; some intersect with each other,

⁴⁹² Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary”, 73.

⁴⁹³ Ibid 16.

others have more than one name, and even more constitute part of another temporality. This is at best confusing, and at worst obfuscates Ricoeur's main argument: that narrative activity "provides a [privileged] access to the way we articulate our experience of time".⁴⁹⁴ This chapter will not enumerate the specific differences between physical, psychological, chronological, chronicle, mortal, historical, cosmic, mythic, psychic, calendar, lived and universal time.⁴⁹⁵ Instead, the spirit of this chapter is to distinguish between what we will broadly call calendar time, lived time and narrated time. These three temporalities are chosen as they are all impacted in some way by interactivity. By examining the nature of this impact, we can learn something about the temporality of interactive documentary. If temporality is not discussed here, we lose an opportunity to understand how interactivity mediates between the interactive documentary and the user, rendering any critical investigation into the hermeneutics of interactivity incomplete.

It must also be noted here that this chapter should be considered as a radical extension of Ricoeur's calendar time. Such a step is required in order to emphasise the importance of temporality when discussing interactivity in

⁴⁹⁴ Ricoeur, "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative", 17.

⁴⁹⁵ All of these temporalities appear across just three pages of *Time and Narrative* 3.

interactive documentary. This chapter will often refer back to Ricoeur, but this is more to do with the thought underpinning his application of calendar time, rather than with calendar time itself. This is because, for Ricoeur, calendar time was not used as a direct tool to analyse the temporal experience of human-text interaction. This chapter will show that although this is the case, the extension of calendar time to accomplish this fits with a general Ricoeurian hermeneutics. To address this extension of calendar time, the term ‘interactive time’ will be established further in this chapter, to demonstrate that although based on calendar time, this thesis extends far beyond the limits of Ricoeur’s approach to time.

5.2 Steps to a Ricoeurian temporality

Ricoeur’s concept of calendar time will be used as a stepping stone to discuss the temporality of interactive documentary. In order to adapt calendar time to this new role, this chapter will first need to address Ricoeur’s pre-requisites for calendar time— namely, the idea of ‘equal measurement units’ and a link to ‘astronomical passages’. Once these two areas are engaged with, then this chapter uses Ricoeur’s three features of calendar time to discuss interactive documentary.

The first of these features is a ‘founding event’. The founding event of a calendar will be transposed on to the interactive documentary to articulate the temporal ‘beginning’ of an interactive documentary. In doing so, ‘founding event’ reconciles the possibility of multiple starting points of an interactive documentary with the hermeneutic requirement of a text separate from a user. Ricoeur’s second feature of calendar time, which I bring to bear on interactive documentary, is his concept of ‘bidirectional traversal’— which will be used to discuss how time and narrative intersect in an interactive context.⁴⁹⁶ Finally, the third characteristic of calendar time is ‘measurement units’.⁴⁹⁷ This section is necessarily specific, as if we do not show that measurement units in a calendar should not be seen as equal and astronomically linked, we cannot adequately use calendar time to discuss the temporality of interactive documentary. A discussion will then be conducted here on the question of narrative units of interactive documentary. Just as a documentary simpliciter may consist of several film clips, the question is raised whether an equivalent unit exists in the interactive documentary— what the Korsakow software

⁴⁹⁶ Bidirectional traversal, within a calendar, is the ability to look at dates in the past and in the future.

⁴⁹⁷ For the calendar, this is of the order of years, months, days, hours, minutes, seconds and so on.

describes “as the SNU – ‘smallest narrative unit’”.⁴⁹⁸ Just as the book has pages, interactive documentaries have mechanisms for the reader to complete the mimetic arc. Calendar time is a way of providing these mechanisms with a temporal character, while allowing for a broad range of interactive documentary formats.

The cumulative power of exploring Ricoeur’s three features of calendar time to discuss the temporality of interactive documentary comes from the fact that Ricoeur positions “calendar time” as a bridge between “lived time and universal time”.⁴⁹⁹ Ricoeur emphasises that calendar time is a “third form of time between psychic [that is to say phenomenological] time and cosmic time”.⁵⁰⁰ In other words, calendar time offers a way to explore how phenomenological time intersects with cosmic (clock) time. Transposed to the context of interactivity, this will allow us to understand the temporality of interactivity not only in terms of the physical action taken, but the phenomenological temporality of interactivity in equal measure.

⁴⁹⁸ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 210; The SNU typically mentioned is not the smallest narrative unit, the case for this has been made in the previous chapter. SNU is mentioned here in order to present a challenge to temporal cohesion in interactive documentary, rather than specifying the smallest possible narrative unit.

⁴⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 105.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid 106.

The following two sections of this chapter stem from this renewed understanding of calendar time. As narrated time is a mediation between calendar time and lived time, it performs an important function. Nankov points out that “the conjunction ‘and’ in *Time and Narrative* (in the original, *Temps et récit*) does not entwine together two equal notions such as “time” (temps) and “narrative” (récit) but rather... ‘and’ (et) stands for a logical connector that means ‘therefore’: ‘time, therefore narrative.’”.⁵⁰¹ The resulting narrative capacity of the text must be considered as a consequence of its temporal configuration.

Finally, in the lived time section, I address the illusion of sequence—rejecting a “reduction of the chronological to the logical”, and instead putting forth a hermeneutic which sees temporality as a necessary part of examining the interactive documentary.⁵⁰² This section further develops the connection between user and interactive documentary, and queries whether interactivity leads to a phenomenologically revised view of temporality as a consequence.

⁵⁰¹ Nankov, “Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative”, 227.

⁵⁰² Ricoeur, “Narrative Time”, 184.

5.3 Calendar time

Ricoeur's category of calendar time allows us to consider the temporality of interactivity in interactive documentary. We will do this through examining three features that Ricoeur ascribes to calendar time— a founding event, bidirectional traversal, and measurement units. In these three features, Ricoeur recognises both “an explicit relationship to physical time”... and “implicit borrowings from lived time”.⁵⁰³ This section aims to show that the impression of an interactive documentary lends itself to being considered in terms of calendar time. What spurs this approach is the “axial moment” of calendar time, in which the “cosmic and phenomenological aspects of time [gain] new significance”.⁵⁰⁴ These axial moments acquire a “position in time”, which is a “distance measured in years, months, days” from some other moment— Ricoeur provides the sample of “thirty years after the storming of the Bastille”.⁵⁰⁵ This situates where “we are in the vast reaches of history”— and thus “physically simultaneous events become contemporary with one

⁵⁰³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 107.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid 108.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

another”.⁵⁰⁶ Calendar time thus “cosmologizes lived time and humanizes cosmic time”.⁵⁰⁷

The epic scope provided by Ricoeur must be tailored to suit the experience of an interactive documentary. This approach, of situating moments measured from other moments, helps to describe how all the elements of the interactive documentary relate to each other and the user. In other words, the time of the interactive documentary must be considered as a construction of interrelated points.

Ricoeur aims to bring together two normally disparate problematics: “the epistemology of the narrative function and the phenomenology of time”.⁵⁰⁸ This is a useful model for interactive documentary. We understand that the interactive documentary, like other texts, is an interweaving of history and fiction. Both of these components have temporalities. Our task now is to consider fiction as a counterpoint to the historical world in a temporal sense. Fiction provides no requirement to “conform to the specific connectors acting

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid 110.

⁵⁰⁸ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 17.

to reinscribe lived time upon cosmic time”, in other words, “the time of fictional narrative [is free] from the constraints requiring it to be referred back to the time of the universe”.⁵⁰⁹ As has been discussed in the previous chapter, interactivity is a fictionalising force. According to Ricoeur, every “fictive temporal experience” unfolds its own singular and unique world, which is “unable to be totalized”.⁵¹⁰ However, this does not mean that the fictional experience supplants the approach of calendar time. This is because the imaginative variations on time which fiction allows for are just so *because* they do not require a connection between historical time and cosmological time.

The fiction of interaction can thus exist concurrently with the connectors reinscribing lived time on cosmic time. An interactive documentary, before interaction by the user, has the potential to vary massively— but no capacity to vary at all, without the user. Instead of a fixed running time, or a fixed narratological chronology, the interactive documentary has no such requirement. Before discussing the problematic of understanding interactivity as both a fictionalising force *and* a potential to organise temporalities, we must first delve deeper into Ricoeur’s concept of calendar time. The first feature of

⁵⁰⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 128.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

calendar time, a founding event, will be presented as an alternative to a traditional beginning.

5.3.1 Founding Event

Victoria Browne, writing on Ricoeur's calendar time, states that "calendar time is a socially and culturally specific creation: a mechanism for organizing and coordinating time, which is mediated through the temporalities of lived experience and the regulatory practices of social and cultural life".⁵¹¹ In other words, it is a sort of reference framework which generates an artificial segmentation of time— whether "measured by a sundial, a mechanical timepiece such as a watch, or marked by a number in a calendrical grid".⁵¹² A founding event will be shown as a constructed measure according to each calendar, and thus interactive documentary can be seen to have its own founding event.

It is important to analogise the interactive documentary as having its own founding event, as this allows for a beginning that is open to change and

⁵¹¹ Browne, "Calendar Time", 100.

⁵¹² Ibid.

revision— and provides a phenomenological support to an otherwise alien cosmic moment. In other words, the founding event describes what happens when the user begins to interact with an interactive documentary— when the interactive documentary ceases to be full of potential pathways, and instead actualises itself through the user. Ricoeur writes that calendar time “cosmologizes lived time [and] humanizes cosmic time. And it does this by making a noteworthy present coincide with an anonymous instant in the axial moment of the calendar”.⁵¹³ This is an apt analogy to describe how the phenomenological moment is brought to bear on the anonymous and unfeeling interactive documentary.

The founding event is not a natural or universal event. This point will be illustrated through discussing calendar time amongst several calendars. The current Gregorian calendar has been in use for over 400 years, which itself is only a small alteration to the Julian calendar as instituted over 2000 years ago.⁵¹⁴ In the time of Julius Caesar, years were marked by the two consuls who held high office that year. When Caesar held the office of consul in 59BCE, the

⁵¹³ Ricoeur, Paul. *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991. 214.

⁵¹⁴ Moyer, Gordon. “The Gregorian Calendar.” *Scientific American* 246, no. 5 (1982): 144.

year was known as “the consulship of Caesar and Bibilus”.⁵¹⁵ Consuls would take office any time from January 1 to March 15— the years themselves thus varying in length. We now date the consulship of Caesar and Bibilus to 59BCE — which itself uses the common era notation, devised by Dionysius Exiguus in the year 525 and popularised by Johannes Kepler in the early 17th century.⁵¹⁶ This system emerges after first measuring the calendar *ab urbe condita*— from the mythic founding of Rome. Despite all of these calendars being almost identical, the axial moment upon which they are founded differs. For some, this axial moment is the year of office, for others the founding of the city — even our relatively secular society places this axial moment as the birth of Jesus Christ. This thesis will be published some 2000 years after the birth of Jesus Christ, and some 2770 years *ab urbe condita*.

This small detour illustrates how the founding event impacts the calendar. 59BCE is the same point in cosmic time as the consulship of Caesar and Bibilus, and the same point as 695 *ab urbe conditia*. The user may choose to

⁵¹⁵ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, edited by Robert Graves and Michael Grant. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978. Chapter XX.

⁵¹⁶ Pederson, Olaf. “The Ecclesiastical Calendar and the Life of the Church.” In *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar*, edited by George Coyne, Michael Hoskin and Olaf Pederson, 17-70. Vatican City: Specola Vaticana, 1983. 50.

interact with an interactive documentary at any point— and this may also cease at any time. There may not be a preordained pathway, and thus no preordained beginning and end. Just as the calendar is not anchored to a single arbitrary event, the founding event can change between interactive documentaries. The founding event— the beginning of the interactive documentary, is thus open to change and revision. This humanises cosmic time, and to take it another step, it humanises narrated time as it situates the user. In the absence of some standardised, universal beginning to the interactive documentary, seeing the navigation commence with a foundational event provides a beginning for each user. The founding moment is the first temporal step in the user engaging with the interactive documentary, with the second moment proceeding from the first, the third from the second, and so on. This approach, of situating moments measured from other moments, helps to describe how all the elements of the interactive documentary relate to each other and the user.

Let me be clear: the founding event, understood in the interactive documentary, is the instant where a user believes that they are hermeneutically interacting with an interactive documentary. Using a novel as

an analogy — it is when one opens to the first page and begins to read. By commencing the hermeneutic process of understanding an interactive documentary, the user creates a temporality specific to the interactive documentary of sorts. Rather than each potential pathway sitting latent, by interacting with the interactive documentary, the user constructs a mechanism for organising and coordinating the elements within the interactive documentary, which will be experienced temporally. It is when the anonymous temporality of an interactive documentary encounters the phenomenological ‘present moment’ of the user, who then structures the interactive documentary according to its own temporality. The founding event of interactive documentary can thus be socially and culturally mediated. The founding event, for the interactive documentary, is spurred by an interaction by the user.

While this movement towards seeing calendar time as a personal tool for the user to structure their temporal experience of the interactive documentary may at first appear to be quite a departure from Ricoeur’s calendar time, Ricoeur himself wrote that calendars are readable (and useable) only because we look beyond the present, and can distinguish “today”, “*this* year”, “*that*

decade” or “*this* century”.⁵¹⁷ It is important to remember that for Ricoeur, calendar time extends much further than a quantitative effect, but stands as a qualitative process. He explains that “when we speak of time as a system of dates...we quite simply forget the work of interpretation by which we moved from making-present, including all that it awaits and it retains, to the idea of an indifferent ‘now’”.⁵¹⁸ By using calendar time as a lens to examine the temporality of interactive documentary, we can engage with what it means to measure time a specific way — and thus the phenomenological intelligibility of interactivity.

When we examine the term ‘founding event’ we find that the word ‘event’ carries several meanings: ‘event’ is a temporal moment. More than this, ‘event’ closely mirrors Ricoeur’s language around speech acts, and the event of discourse. In the history and fiction chapter, we discussed how viewing interaction as a form of speech act helped to describe the hermeneutic difference between interacting with an interactive documentary versus a non-interactive documentary. The founding event occupies a similar role, in that an event is “always realized temporally and in a present, whereas the

⁵¹⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 107.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid 82.

language system is virtual and outside of time”.⁵¹⁹ While Ricoeur was referring to discourse here, this is equally applicable to the hermeneutic of the event. He explains that “whereas language is only the condition for communication, for which it provides the codes, it is in discourse that all messages are exchanged. In this sense, discourse alone has not only a world, but an *other*— another person, an interlocutor to whom it is addressed”.⁵²⁰ Following this logic, the event thus has its own world— and because interaction has been established as being of the same order as speech act, then the event of the first interaction thus indicates that the ‘other’— the interactive documentary— has a capacity to react to the user in a way that non-interactive documentary cannot.

Understanding the temporality of interactive documentary in terms of a founding event has led us to two conclusions. The first points to the social and cultural constructions of the calendar. The founding event is absolutely malleable— each founding (the consulship of Caesar, birth of Christ, foundation of Rome) has a corresponding calendar. This provides for a founding event of the interactive documentary that is open to change and

⁵¹⁹ Ricoeur, “Meaningful Action Considered as a Text”, 92.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

revision— furnishing a phenomenological support for an otherwise alien cosmic moment. The calendar is not some natural phenomenon, and nor is the inaugural moment of interaction.

We must now continue to Ricoeur's criterion of bidirectional traversal, which offers an opportunity to provide a temporal perspective to interactive documentary's spatial elements. In order for us to discuss the founding event and bidirectional traversal in terms of interactive documentary, the problematic measurement units must be addressed. First, we will use bidirectional traversal to develop an approach towards reconciling the spatial and temporal aspects of interactive documentary.

5.3.2 Bidirectional Traversal

Bidirectional traversal, within a calendar, is the ability to consider dates in the past and in the future. Within interactive documentary, it is clear that the clips, documentaries, or other parts are themselves unable to be bidirectionally traversed in a phenomenological sense. Even if we were to consider stepping back through the documentary, this would constitute a hermeneutic re-reading under mimesis. This is the reason why measurement

units must be discussed in some depth— without reviewing the idea of a measurement unit, calendar time cannot be used to discuss interactive documentary. While the phenomenological impact of interactive documentary is significant, we cannot discuss the entirety of an interactive documentary's temporality without accounting for what occurs in cosmic time.

In this brief section on 'bidirectional traversal', we will trace out the relevance of calendar time to the 'spatiality versus temporality' problematic within current interactive documentary theory. Bidirectional traversal lends itself to interactive documentary theory with very little alteration and as such, this section acts as more of an introduction to the section on measurement units. The term 'bidirectional traversal' refers to the "an explicit relationship to physical time" that the calendar has.⁵²¹ Ricoeur refers to bidirectional traversal in a strictly temporal sense, but if the task is to transplant calendar time on to interactive documentary, then the question arises: if Ricoeur sees narrative as "a structure that is at once spatial and temporal", then must bidirectionality account for both spatial and temporal traversal?⁵²²

⁵²¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 107.

⁵²² Dowling, *An Introduction to Temps et Récit*, 8.

Miles writes that the relations between pieces of media in interactive documentary have the “capacity to always vary... because the order and sequences in which they appear are dynamic”.⁵²³ Within this order or sequence are the pieces of media themselves, each with their own temporality in terms of cosmically-grounded running time (for example, a three minute clip versus a six minute clip, each captured at the same frame rate), as well as phenomenologically different time (for example, a time lapse covering 200 days in a 1 minute clip, versus 200 milliseconds slowed down to a one minute clip). To discuss bidirectional traversal in terms of phenomenological time (that is, looking at the *content* of the media) is an impossibility, and fundamentally overlooks “the temporal complexity of the narrative matrix”.⁵²⁴ This is because “the time of fictional narrative [is free] from the constraints requiring it to be referred back to the time of the universe”.⁵²⁵

It is also problematic to suggest that the order or sequence is able to be bidirectionally traversed in a phenomenological sense. The user can sit down and replay the interactive documentary, in some cases. However by simply

⁵²³ Miles, *Antipodean Approaches*, 8.

⁵²⁴ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 22.

⁵²⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 128.

viewing the time of the narrative as an episodic and linear sequence ('then', followed by 'and then'), we reject the configurational act which "makes the succession of events into significant wholes which are the correlate of the act of grouping together".⁵²⁶ To resolve this, we must examine what constitutes an analogy for the calendrical measurement unit in interactive documentary.

5.3.3 Measurement Units

This section aims to demonstrate that measurement units are not natural laws, but are shaped and decided according to various socio-cultural forces. The work of this section is to develop an understanding of calendar time which does not rely on uniform units tied to cosmic phenomena. This will then demonstrate the applicability of calendar time to interactive documentary, thus allowing us to bridge lived time and narrative time in a way that emphasises the importance of temporality in interactive documentary.

When speaking of measurement units, Ricoeur describes "a set of units of measurement that serve to designate the constant intervals between the

⁵²⁶ Ricoeur, "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative", 27.

recurrence of cosmic phenomena”. This is a restrictive definition of measurement units— requiring both a cosmic phenomenon (Ricoeur gives the example of a year marking one revolution of the sun), and constant intervals based upon the “recurrence of natural phenomena”.⁵²⁷ This approach must be closely scrutinised, as without alteration it does not allow for interactive documentary to be considered as having a type of calendar time— interactive time. The problem of measurement units here is twofold. The first is a push against an idea of a calendar requiring equal temporal units. The second is what constitutes a measurement unit in the interactive documentary.

These “equal intervals of time” are closely related to “an increasingly exact observation of the periodicity and regularity of astral movement, in particular of the sun and the moon”.⁵²⁸ What must be examined is Ricoeur’s assertion that calendar time consists of equal intervals of time. For Ricoeur, this is linked to astronomical movement— the interactive documentary itself does not guarantee this type of interval. Temporally speaking, although the interactive documentary may be split into many clips, each of these clips can vary in duration. This duration varies in two essential ways. The first duration

⁵²⁷ Ibid 107.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

is of the clip itself— some may run for one minute, others may run for three minutes. The other is of the time depicted. The one-minute clip may be a time-lapse over several years, and the three-minute clip may consist of slow-motion footage capturing a single second of a high-speed event. While one can imagine an interactive documentary approaching temporally-equal clips, this does not reflect the varied approaches of interactive documentary. While each of these clips occur on the earth— within the ambit of cosmic time, there are a few distinctions to make here.

This section will thus argue that a temporality of interactivity in interactive documentary, based on calendar time, does not require equal intervals of time to be effective. In order to prevent confusion, I will label this time ‘interactive time’. This will refute the regularity of astral movement, as well as discuss the imprecision of measuring time. By dismantling Ricoeur’s assumption that calendars are based on equal intervals as provided by astronomical time, then we open up his definition of calendar time to allow us to discuss interactive time as a mediation between the temporalities of the text and the temporalities of the user, without the predication of a consistent and exact cosmological clock.

While this appears to be tangential to interactive documentary, the arbitrary nature of human-measured time is critical to explain. By showing how the very nature of a human-constructed calendar is open to change, we liberate interactive time from the strict idea of equal intervals. This in turn allows interactive time to mediate not only between cosmological time and lived time, but also between the time of the text, and phenomenological time. This lends itself to an explanation of the temporal characteristics of interactive documentary in the absence of a fixed beginning and end of a given interaction. As this imagining of interactive time greatly extends Ricoeur's writing, special care must be taken to retain the idea of an axial moment and a position in time, without tying these moments to the rigidity of constant intervals. To determine the nature of Ricoeur's "measurement units", the "periodicity and regularity of astral movement" will be discussed.⁵²⁹ There are three points to make here; the number of different astronomical years, orbital fluctuations, and the current definition of the second as being unrelated to astral movement.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

The astronomical year may be measured according to several different criteria. Ricoeur arbitrarily points to the primacy of the “the sun and the moon” for determining this astral time.⁵³⁰ This is not the only way to use astronomy to construct a year — in use today are the sidereal year (the time taken for earth to complete one revolution of orbit), the tropical year (the time taken for the “mean ecliptic longitude of the sun to increase by 360 degrees”), and the anomalistic year (the time between “perihelion passages” — when the earth is closest to and then furthest from the sun).⁵³¹ These astronomical years are only the differences in measurement using earth’s orbit. Even so, the mean sidereal year is around 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes, 9.76 seconds, compared to mean tropical year’s 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45.00 seconds, or the anomalistic year’s 365 days, 6 hours 13 minutes 52.60 seconds. While this section will proceed with this data, it should be noted that astronomical years as measured using either solar or lunar methods vary just as much — this includes (but is not limited to): the Draconic year, full moon cycle, lunar year, vague year, helical year, Sothic year, Gaussian year or Besselian year.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Richards, Edward. “Calendars.” In *Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac*, edited by Sean Urban and Kenneth Seidelmann, 585-624. Mill Valley: University Science Books, 2013. 586.

The idea of an increasingly exact observation of the periodicity and regularity of astral movement begs the question— which astral movement? Even given Ricoeur’s arbitrary qualifiers of sun and moon, how shall this be measured? Further complicating this approach is the fact that these drift over time. The universe (or even our solar system) is far from clockwork, and these astral movements are not exact or repeatable. The bodies such as the sun and the moon, as referred to by Ricoeur, are not perfectly dense objects rotating around other perfectly dense objects— and do not retain perfect density over time.⁵³² Compounding this issue is the fact that each astral body’s movement is altered by the gravitational pull of other bodies.⁵³³ This causes short-term fluctuations in speed, and long-term changes in orbit. This pull can be from other planets, to other stars and galaxies. Given the sheer number of astral bodies in the universe, each impacting many others, it becomes functionally impossible to precisely and predictably state the periodicity of astral movement. The point here— and the reason for going into detail— is to address what constitutes a narrative unit in interactive documentary. By

⁵³² Rubie, Dave et al. “Accretion and Differentiation of the Terrestrial Planets with Implications for the Compositions of Early-Formed Solar System Bodies and Accretion of Water.” *Icarus* 248 (2015): 89.

⁵³³ Genova, Antonio et al. “Solar System Expansion and Strong Equivalence Principle as Seen by the NASA MESSENGER Mission.” *Nature Communications* 9, no. 289 (2018).

demonstrating that these units in a calendrical sense are not at equal intervals, we can begin to use calendar time as a base to develop an accounting for interactive time. This section lays the groundwork to demonstrate how interaction represents an intersection between phenomenological importance and an act grounded in cosmic time. Given that the concept of calendar time is stretched far beyond what Ricoeur wrote, it is important to elaborate with utmost accuracy, which is why this section must go into necessary detail.

We have discussed the complications of different astronomical years, as well as the imperfect timing of astral bodies. To complete this analysis, this astronomical data will be discussed with regards to our anthropocentric models of measuring time: particularly, the second. The difficulty of compressing astronomical movement into our rigid calendar has been a recognised problem since antiquity. Ptolemy's *Almagest*, written around 150AD, discusses how the orbital period of the earth is not an exact multiple of 24.⁵³⁴ He offers an approximation towards a correction from the meridian crossing of the sun to mean solar time— this is required for any planet that does not have zero axial tilt or orbital eccentricity.

⁵³⁴ Ptolemaeus, Claudius, and Gerald J. Toomer. *Ptolemy's Almagest*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 171.

The modern equivalent to Ptolemy is the International Earth Rotation Service (IERS). As a consequence of irregular orbits, the rotational speed of the earth is variable, and thus the IERS evaluates and alters time as required—often through inserting leap seconds.⁵³⁵ There is a fundamental disconnect between astral movement and our calendars. This is exemplified perfectly through the current definition of a second: "the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom", at a temperature of 0 Kelvin.⁵³⁶ Prior to this definition, the second was seen as $1/86400^{\text{th}}$ of a day, using mean solar time as measured by a sundial.⁵³⁷ As this was not sufficiently accurate, the day is now derived from the second, which itself is derived from this atomic observation. This is also not without flaws—currently atomic clocks function on this principle, but even the most accurate

⁵³⁵ Arias, Elisa, and Martine Feissel. "The Celestial System of the International Earth Rotation Service." In *Inertial Coordinate System on the Sky*, edited by Jay Lieske and Victor Abalakin, 119–128. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1990. 119.

⁵³⁶ McCarthy, Dennis and Kenneth Seidelmann. *Time: From Earth Rotation to Atomic Physics*. Weinheim: Wiley, 2009. 231–232.

⁵³⁷ Page, Chester and Paul Vigoureux, *The International Bureau of Weights and Measures 1875–1975: NBS Special Publication 420*. Washington: National Bureau of Standards, 1975. 238.

atomic clock drifts around 0.00018 nanoseconds per day.⁵³⁸ This method also requires extrapolation, as 0 Kelvin represents a theoretical temperature.⁵³⁹ The point here is that our current definition of the second; multiplied by 60 for the minute, 60 for the hour, 24 for the day, is entirely unrelated to astral movement. Therefore a definition of what constitutes a measurement unit in interactive documentary is not contingent on astral movement— and consequently, not contingent on a constant interval.

Returning to Ricoeur's description of measurement units, it has been shown that these units have never been constant. Fundamentally, these units of measurement have very little to do with cosmic phenomena, and even if they did, the intervals of these cosmic phenomena have been shown to be far from constant. It is easy to think of the calendar as a strict regimentation of time, unchanging and consistent. The point I am making here is that irregular durations do not present a new challenge to the calendar. Although we perceive the calendar as largely consisting of equal divisions, this is not the case. It is important to develop an understanding that measurement units are

⁵³⁸ Gibney, Elizabeth. "Hyper-Precise Atomic Clocks Face off to Redefine Time." *Nature* 522, no. 7554 (2015): 16.

⁵³⁹ McCarthy, Dennis and Alice Babcock. "The Length of the Day Since 1658.", *Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors* 44 (1986): 281.

ultimately not latent facts within the universe, but are shaped and decided according to various socio-cultural forces. There is no inherent reason that the second must be 9,192,631,770 periods of the caesium frequency. The social construction of calendar time allows for a fluidity that is not immediately apparent in Ricoeur's writing. Ricoeur uses calendar time to develop a temporality with "an explicit relationship to physical time"... and "implicit borrowings from lived time".⁵⁴⁰ His three features develop this— founding event, bidirectional traversal and measurement units. These features are helpful tools to discuss interactive documentary temporality, however we needed to take a detour via Ricoeur's rigid definition in order to dismantle some of his assumptions. In doing so, this section has radically extended Ricoeur's calendar time to address the temporality of interactivity in interactive documentary. The results of this will be explored in the remainder of this chapter. Recognising the scale of this extension, the temporality of interactive documentary has been termed 'interactive time'.

5.4 Narrative Time

Narrative is capable of accounting for a composite temporal framework—

⁵⁴⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 107.

and rather than being viewed as an instant or a structure, narrative is a systolic and diastolic process of integration and dispersal. The question to be addressed in this section is how this process can account for (the user's impression of) the end of interactive documentaries— the cessation of interaction with a particular text. For Ricoeur, "narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality, or temporal being, is brought to language".⁵⁴¹ Ricoeur writes that narrative is "the privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, unformed and at the limit mute temporal experience".⁵⁴² This process interweaves a number of temporalities. Miles writes that "closure is radicalised as it is now largely defined by readerly discretion, rather than privileging the text".⁵⁴³ Ricoeur states that a conclusion must be acceptable, which means that "we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions".⁵⁴⁴ While Ricoeur did not write on interactive documentaries, he and Miles share the view that an ending is a phenomenological state. For Ricoeur, "a narrative conclusion can be neither deduced nor predicted... rather than

⁵⁴¹ Ricoeur, "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative", 18.

⁵⁴² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, xi.

⁵⁴³ Miles, "Hypertext Structure", 3.

⁵⁴⁴ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time", 174.

being predictable, a conclusion must be acceptable”.⁵⁴⁵

We have already discussed how the user starting their engagement with an interactive documentary generates a founding event. Where the interactive documentary diverges from the calendar is in the conclusion. The closest parallel to draw here is with predictions of apocalyptic events, such as Pope Sylvester II claiming that 1000AD would signal the apocalypse, or Nostradamus predicting that the world would end in 1999.⁵⁴⁶ These cannot be used as reasons for using calendar time to discuss the context of a conclusion of interactive documentary, because the teleological movement required for an apocalyptic prediction is very different to the various endings that an interactive documentary may have. The key difference here is to do with “the paradox of contingency, judged ‘acceptable after all’”.⁵⁴⁷ While progression through the narrative has teleological movement, this is only found through a “backward look”.⁵⁴⁸ In other words, the ending must be in accordance with the

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Boyett, Jason. *Pocket Guide to the Apocalypse: The Official Field Manual for the End of the World*. Orlando: Relevant Books, 2005; Lorie, Peter. *Nostradamus: 2003-2025: A History of the Future*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002.

⁵⁴⁷ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time”, 174.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

events or chain of actions, but these events or chain of actions do not predict a specific ending.

This problematic highlights the relationship between time and narrative, or as Nankov writes, “time, therefore narrative”.⁵⁴⁹ The narrative of the text is a consequence of temporal configuration. As a result, we must end this chapter by considering how this Ricoeurian approach develops the unique temporal characteristics of interactive documentary. At the start of this chapter, as well as in the chapter on history and fiction, we discussed how “the time of fictional narrative [is free] from the constraints requiring it to be referred back to the time of the universe”.⁵⁵⁰ An apparent aporia erupts here: if interactivity is a fictionalising force, and if fiction has no constraints regarding its temporal character, then interactivity is a fundamentally phenomenological temporal alteration, no different to watching a non-interactive documentary with slow-motion and time-lapse elements. This temporal shift is only phenomenological. As each “fictive temporal experience” unfolds its own world, then we run the risk of interactivity becoming relegated to another of

⁵⁴⁹ Nankov, “Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative”, 227.

⁵⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 128.

these fictive worlds.⁵⁵¹ There are two steps to establish the temporal importance of interactivity. The first is to discuss the capacity of narrative time to allow for an ending to the interactive documentary. Once we have imagined the beginning and end of an interactive documentary, we can then examine lived time— and how the inscription of phenomenological time on cosmic time occurs through the mechanism of interaction under interactive time.

We must begin at the end of the interactive documentary. Miles, quoting Susana Tosca, posits that “narrative... organizes [spatial and temporal] data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience”, and that “narrative is a way of experiencing... a beginning, middle, and end... [which] are not contained in the discrete elements, say, the individual sentences of a novel but signified in the overall relationships established among the totality of the elements, or sentences”.⁵⁵² Miles recognises that this allows for “closure [to be] radicalised as it is now largely defined by readerly discretion, rather

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Tosca, Susana. “A Pragmatics of Links.” *Journal of Digital Information* 1, no. 6 (2000): 80-81.

than privileging the text as most other theoretical approaches do.⁵⁵³ Seeing the end of the narrative to be determined by readerly discretion recalls the user's configurational act (*mimesis*₂)— where the user “[grasps] together” the elements of a text.⁵⁵⁴ This hints at an answer to how the end of the text can allow us to discuss interactivity as more than pure fictionalising force, having more than a phenomenological effect on time. We are able to do this by bringing together “the epistemology of the narrative function” and “the phenomenology of time experience”.⁵⁵⁵ Because fictive time is not constrained by the need to refer to cosmic time, “the connectors between phenomenological time and cosmic time... lose their importance”.⁵⁵⁶ These connectors include the calendar, documents and traces. By leaving this behind, fiction is free to “explore the resources of phenomenological time which historical time restrains or leaves unexplored”.⁵⁵⁷ This is where we can begin to understand interactivity as both fictional device (as discussed in the history and fiction chapter), as well as a calendar-type event. Interactivity

⁵⁵³ Miles, “Hypertext Structure”, 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 28.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid 17.

⁵⁵⁶ Nankov, “Ricoeur’s Time and Narrative”, 236.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid 233.

physically situates these fictive and phenomenological experiences. So what does interactivity situate? In other words— what are the qualities of the measurable units of interactive documentary?

As discussed in the section on calendar time, measurement units do not have to be equal in interval nor tied to an astronomical event. Measurement units exist to tie an event of lived time to cosmological time— existing outside of a purely phenomenological measurement. Therefore we cannot look to fiction to provide one of these units, as the unconstrained temporality of fiction means that “the connectors between phenomenological time and cosmic time... lose their importance”.⁵⁵⁸ For Ricoeur, these measurable units included the “distance measured in years, months, days” from some other moment.⁵⁵⁹ By freeing our definition of measurement units from specific intervals, it becomes possible to consider the act of interaction as an “axial moment” of interactive documentary.⁵⁶⁰ Calendars are founded on an axial moment, just as the interactive documentary commences through the axial moment of first interaction. It is possible to consider that the axial moment

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid 236.

⁵⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 108.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

requires only a “position in time”.⁵⁶¹ At the moment of interaction, the “cosmic and phenomenological aspects of time [gain] new significance”.⁵⁶² The mechanism of interaction must be considered as an axial moment over the individual components of interactive documentary. The focus on specific elements in interactive documentary theory such as “code, bandwidth, codec, network, browser, protocol, gamma, luminescence, video, interface, screen, and electricity” risks overlooking the importance of interaction.⁵⁶³ Interactivity has been shown to be critical to anchoring the phenomenological import of the interactive documentary to cosmic time, and as a result of this, shows that interactive documentaries have a unique temporal characteristic as opposed to non-interactive documentaries, due to the mediating function of interaction carving out measurable units for calendar time.

It is easy to imagine this if we use an example. Rather than seeing an interactive documentary as a single discursive unit from the beginning to the end of the user’s interaction with the interactive documentary, we can imagine that a measurable unit from the perspective of interaction would therefore be

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 208.

between interactions. Just as many traditional films are punctuated by cuts to different scenes, so the interactive documentary can be seen as punctuated by the user's interactions. There is thus an axial moment established through interaction— being action and reaction. This is an intersection of act grounded in cosmic time (that is to say, the physical action) with phenomenological importance (that is to say, ability to progress in the documentary and hence increase phenomenological understanding).

5.5 Lived Time

This section on lived time aims to discuss the various temporalities of interactive time and put it in terms of a connection between phenomenological time and cosmological time. Each of these temporalities informs interactivity in interactive documentary. By establishing this connection, both the user-facing facet and the world-facing facet of interactive time are able to be explored. Lived time is explained by Ricoeur as being informed by two different experiences. The first is the experience of linear succession— we experience the days passing, and we move from birth to death. Ricoeur calls this 'cosmological time'. The other partner of lived time is what Ricoeur terms 'phenomenological time'— we experience time as a past,

present and future. Cosmological time is able to account for “relations of simultaneity and of succession between abstract ‘nows’”, which is sufficient to define “the time when something happens, for deciding what came earlier and later and how long a certain state of affairs might last”.⁵⁶⁴ It is the work of phenomenological time that establishes both “the centrality of the present as an actual now”, and “the primacy of the future as the main orientation of the human desire”.⁵⁶⁵ Phenomenological time also accounts for the capacity of “recollecting the past in the present”.⁵⁶⁶ Phenomenological time and cosmological time can both be invoked — by stating that “today is my birthday”, a cosmological date becomes anchored to a phenomenological concept, this is described by Ricoeur as an “inscription” of phenomenological time on cosmological time.⁵⁶⁷

Lived time is crucial to understanding how Ricoeur sees the temporalities present within a text — that we will extend to interactive time. Ricoeur argues that the ‘past’ and ‘present’ of the plot do not necessarily correspond to either

⁵⁶⁴ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 18.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 109.

the ‘past’ and ‘present’ of the reader (or user), nor the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the structure of the text. Similarly, a book may spend many passages — or a film many hours — devoted to depicting events which occur within extremely short periods of time. The temporality of the narrative is not beholden to the cosmological time of the world in which the text is interacted with, nor the time of the story which it tells. This distinction in temporalities is made clear by a brief sketch of the Russian formalist notions of *fabula* and *syuzhet*.

Defined by David Bordwell, the *fabula* refers to a progressive, retroactive, imaginary construct which “embodies the action as a chronological... chain of events occurring within a given duration”.⁵⁶⁸ In other words, *fabula* represents the chronological order of the story. *Syuzhet*, on the other hand, is the organisation of this story. Bordwell points out that “the *syuzhet* can cue us to construct *fabula* events in any sequence... in virtually any time span... [and] taking place any number of times”.⁵⁶⁹ Taking this back to interactive documentary and Ricoeur, we see that there are already two temporalities within the interactive documentary text. There is the *fabula* — the interactive documentary that is not interacted with, not organised into a coherent story

⁵⁶⁸ Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. 49.

⁵⁶⁹ Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 51.

for a user. Then there is the user's interaction as syuzhet— recall Ricoeur's muthos, where the user grasps together and orders events.

Cosmological time as a “succession between abstract ‘nows’... between extreme end points and the intervals between them” is sufficient when determining when something happens, what came earlier or later, or how long something might last.⁵⁷⁰ This approach cannot, however, account for “the centrality of the present as an *actual* now... nor the fundamental capacity of recollecting the past in the present”.⁵⁷¹ This is the domain of phenomenological time, which forms a bond with fiction outside of the “chronology of the universe”, instead encouraging the “exploration of the nonlinear features of phenomenological time that historical time conceals”.⁵⁷² This tension between cosmological time and phenomenological time allows us to examine interactive time. Phenomenological time will be used to show that regardless of the interactive qualities, one can have a complex and deep temporal relationship with any text. Cosmological time will be used to discuss the temporally-extended interaction by the user.

⁵⁷⁰ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 18.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 132.

We have seen in the narrative chapter that the interactive documentary is able to be narrativised. For Ricoeur, “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence”.⁵⁷³ In the narrative chapter, the discussion around the weaving together of temporalities (of the user, text, cosmic time and so on) challenged simple conceptions of ‘linear’ and ‘non-linear’ narratives. By showing the “reciprocity between narrativity and temporality” we can reject a “reduction of the chronological to the logical”, and instead put forth a hermeneutic which sees temporality as a necessary part of the interactive documentary.⁵⁷⁴ Cosmological time allows us to examine the question of sequence in interactive documentary.

Most non-interactive documentaries use audio and visual elements to convey a story— they do this through editing, which can skip time, or jump back and forth. The documentary film often emerges by cutting and organising the different video and sound clips into a specific order, that the viewer often has no say over. Of course, there can be exceptions to this— one

⁵⁷³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 52.

⁵⁷⁴ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time”, 169; Ibid 184.

can imagine several fringe cases where the documentary may be in real time, without cutting back and forward. This does not change the underlying argument here: the cosmological elements are separate to the phenomenological understanding of them. Viewing a documentary is now often just a procession of different pixels, played in a sequence over an hour or so. Within this cosmological fact— the “end points and interval between them”— is the “centrality” of a phenomenological interpretation.⁵⁷⁵ I perceive these pixels to be a documentary about four years in Europe between 1914-1918, or one hundred years in China in the 9th century. This is the dialectic of history and fiction playing out temporally. By “making explicit the movement by which the text unfolds... a world in front of itself” through the condition of temporal existence, we present the reciprocal nature of time and narrative, as put forth by Ricoeur in the eponymous text.⁵⁷⁶ Phenomenological time is such that regardless of the interactive qualities, one can have a complex and deep temporal relationship with any text. The fact that the user has helped to put together an interactive documentary does not change the phenomenological temporality. Just like non-interactive documentaries, a user can jump forward and backwards in time, diluting and extruding time. But

⁵⁷⁵ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 18.

⁵⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 81.

this too is also grounded in a cosmological time. This is where we can discuss the temporally-extended interaction by the user.

To clarify this approach to phenomenological time: although interaction is a fictionalising force, there is no specific temporality inherent to the phenomenological impact of interacting with the text. Because fiction is outside of the “chronology of the universe”, then the act of interaction can only change this temporality to the same degree as phenomenological understanding can.⁵⁷⁷ In other words, interactive time is temporally limited in a phenomenological sense because of how broad the temporality of fiction can be.

We must observe instead the act of interaction as grounded in cosmological time in order to discuss interactive time. We are able to do this by using the calendar, as explained earlier in this chapter. The device of the calendar (and thus calendar time) shows an intersection between moments of phenomenological time and cosmological time. It does this by “making a noteworthy present coincide with an anonymous instant in the axial moment

⁵⁷⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 132.

of the calendar”.⁵⁷⁸ The phenomenological impetus to interaction is thus temporalised through the interaction itself, which inscribes this action in cosmological time. Thus the fictional temporality, unlinked to cosmic time, is brought into harmony with historical time through the interaction. This harmony is more than an instant of recognition and connection, as Ricoeur explains that “by reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences”.⁵⁷⁹ Ricoeur refers to the action within the text— that is to say, in phenomenological time. But we can also bring this into cosmic time. By interacting with the interactive documentary, we thus “equate the present with the past, the actual with the potential”.⁵⁸⁰ Interaction actualises and brings into cosmic time the pathway through the interactive documentary, rather than having a field of potentials. This is the dialectic between history and fiction, between phenomenological time and cosmic time. “The sense of an ending” which can be superimposed on “the open-endedness of mere succession” is achieved through reviewing

⁵⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 214.

⁵⁷⁹ Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative”, 28.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid 32.

the effect of interaction on cosmic time.⁵⁸¹ Interaction, taken in the present, intertwines several temporalities— the narratological, phenomenological and cosmological.

This is so important because cosmological time is thus able to account for a sequence of interactions— this sequence charting the course of the impression of the interactive documentary. This is no longer a string of purely logical decisions, but reintroduces the chronological import of interaction. Calendar time shows us how interaction acts to mediate between the phenomenological temporal experience and the temporally-grounded act of interpretation. The fictional heuristic of interactivity as developed in the history and fiction chapter is now modified to show how this interaction, as an act, exists in a point in time. This act therefore anchors the phenomenological to the cosmological, fulfilling the function of calendar time, but in a way that is suitably new and expanded from Ricoeur's calendar time, and is thus termed 'interactive time'.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to clarify how interactivity could be seen as both a

⁵⁸¹ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time", 174.

fictional force and existing outside of a solely phenomenological temporal construction. This was accomplished in several steps, each generating new knowledge. To see interactivity as a fictional force as well as a physically mediated force, Ricoeur's concept of calendar time was radically re-imagined. By stepping through Ricoeur's calendar time, we discovered that interactivity was very temporally complex. Not only must one contend with the mediation between cosmic time, phenomenological time, and narrative time, but now each of these temporalities is further complicated through interactive time. Interactivity impacts each of these elements in separate ways. For cosmic time, it is interactivity as requiring physical action— be it a mouse click, physical step, clap, blink or similar. The phenomenological impact of interactivity was minimal— given that interactivity was already established as a fictionalising force in the previous chapter. Finally, we were able to address what constitutes a narrative unit in interactive documentary through the exploration of narrative time. The interactive documentary was shown to be temporally punctuated by interactions, and these interactions represented an intersection between phenomenological importance and an act grounded in cosmic time. It was under those terms that Ricoeur's calendar time was developed into interactive time.

Another problematic which spurred this chapter's investigation into the temporality of interactivity in interactive documentary was how to imagine the multiple possible pathways of interactive documentary in a temporal way. By thus establishing that interactivity has both a cosmic temporality and a phenomenological temporality, this chapter was able to address the relationship of spatiality to temporality. The physical act of interaction, grounded in cosmic time, was spatial, and the phenomenological impact of interaction could be seen as temporal in a sense. However, this view would thus only allow for temporality of the same order as a non-interactive documentary. The intersection of cosmic time and phenomenological time through interactivity thus required emphasising. In order to do this, the "reduction of the chronological to the logical" was rejected.⁵⁸² The section of lived time acted to concretise what set interactive time apart from phenomenological time, and this solution was found in how interaction actualises and brings into cosmic time the pathway through the interactive documentary, rather than having a field of potentials. "The sense of an ending" which can be superimposed on "the open-endedness of mere succession" is

⁵⁸² Ricoeur, "Narrative Time", 184.

achieved through reviewing the effect of interaction on cosmic time.⁵⁸³

By thinking about a temporal dimension to interaction, this chapter challenged the split between temporality and spatiality. Because interactive documentary relies on a logical model (choose this or that), it is easy to lose sight of the unique temporality of interactive documentary. This unique temporality has been shown to not be located at the level of phenomenology. Because fiction provides such a broad scope for texts in general, there is nothing here which separates the interactive from non-interactive. Instead, we used the model of calendar time to discuss the relationship between phenomenological and cosmic time through the event of interaction— this was our ‘axial moment’. Interaction was therefore presented as where the phenomenological experience of the interactive documentary is able to be inscribed upon cosmic time. The chronological was thus brought to bear on the logical— without oversimplifying interactive time as purely phenomenological in nature, but construing it instead as an intersection between cosmic time and phenomenological time.

⁵⁸³ Ibid 174.

Conclusion

XI. Restatement of aims

This thesis has emerged as an attempt to provide an alternative perspective to the post-narrative, post-human approach of current interactive documentary theory. Through the philosophy of Ricoeur, this thesis has established a framework to think about what the vehicle of interactivity (in interactive documentary) is in narratological, human terms. This user-facing approach looks to the level of social function. The function of interactivity in interactive documentary requires such an approach in order to discuss, as Nash explains, the “relative importance of [interactive] participation in documentary”.⁵⁸⁴ This conclusion aims to sketch out what ‘relative importance’ means in terms of having this new, hermeneutic framework to discuss interactivity in interactive documentary.

Interactivity affects the capacity of the interactive documentary to “[bear] witness” to the world — and how we form the “basis for our orientation to or

⁵⁸⁴ Nash, “What is interactivity for?”, 384.

action within” it.⁵⁸⁵ It was thus critical to understand interactivity in human terms, using the resources of the phenomenological and hermeneutic approach as developed by Ricoeur. Just as documentary “adds a new dimension to popular memory and social history”, interactivity adds a new dimension to how we understand and interpret documentary.⁵⁸⁶ This thesis has argued that by understanding interactivity in human terms, we can better engage with both existing and future interactive documentaries — understanding how these documentaries carry out documentary function through interactive elements. By stepping through this process in this chapter, I will discuss my findings, their purpose, and their significance.

Part of the power of this thesis’ application of Ricoeurian hermeneutics to interactive documentary is its cumulative approach. Although this hermeneutic was established in four distinct chapters: ‘Mimesis’, ‘Narrative’, ‘History and Fiction’, and ‘Time’, each chapter builds on the others to knit together a robust theoretical framework. Each chapter also individually renders new knowledge, which will be briefly detailed in a chapter-by-chapter summary. Rather than repeating the details of each chapter, this chapter

⁵⁸⁵ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xiii.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid* 2.

summary is positioned to bring the individual chapter findings to bear on the greater macro-contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides.

From this chapter summary, several key conclusions will be established, and expanded on in three areas. Firstly, the position of this thesis will be discussed in relation to the findings— demonstrating where this thesis presents theory of value. Secondly, and contingent on the first point, will be to establish a relationship between the findings and the current literature. Finally, this conclusion chapter will touch on the actionable areas— not only in terms of applying the framework developed in the thesis to existing theory, but also through recommendations for further research.

XII. Chapter summary

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis is a response to a problem— that we do not understand the human experience of interactivity in interactive documentary. The work done in this thesis has shed more light on what we can imagine this human experience of interactivity to be. Critically, this problem was framed in hermeneutic terms. Although Miles et al suggest that it is on the level of the text that interactivity functions, an undercurrent of my

entire argument was to reject seeing the user as a passive black box. This is instead a theoretical accounting for how we understand interactivity by putting it in phenomenological and hermeneutic terms. Why? We engage with and understand interactive texts in those terms. The question of meaning is critical to interactive documentary.

What makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts? As I indicated at the start of this thesis, this Ricoeurian approach has a cumulative effect which is greater than the sum of its parts. To know how the expression of interactive documentaries will impact interpretation is to adapt to the future of representation. This section discusses the findings of the thesis, their significance, and purpose.

Defining Interactive Documentary

This chapter saw interactivity conceptualised as a relationship between user and interactive documentary, rather than some material characteristic of the text. It was important to the project of this thesis to generate a definition of interactive documentary that did not hinge on a particular material characteristic. So then, what was the relationship between materiality and a

hermeneutic approach?

Miles articulated that a hermeneutic approach that “[conceptualises] audiences, institutions and texts as primarily discursive objects”, is “overly reliant on a disavowal of the materiality of our machines and their entanglements”.⁵⁸⁷ However, removing the material requirement on interactivity, the material scope of interactive documentary is actually substantially expanded. Rather than being a digitally-mediated ontology, a materialist approach can also look to the non-digital. As a thought experiment — imagine that several celluloid films are playing on several projection screens across a city. The interactive element is the ability to navigate to different screens depending on the user’s interest. While this would not have been accepted as an interactive documentary due to its paucity of digital content (or digital mechanisms of interactivity), the heuristics this affords the user are thus now able to be discussed both materially and hermeneutically.

In other words, hermeneutics has been established as the other side of the coin to an object-oriented ontology as Miles suggests. A hermeneutic approach

⁵⁸⁷ Miles, “Matters of concern” 104-105; Miles, “Sketch Notes”, 207.

does not disavow the “materiality of machines and their entanglements”.⁵⁸⁸

Instead, the definition of interactive documentary proposes that a user, an artefact, and an interaction are pre-requisites of an interactive documentary.

This does not change the argument that the platform can impact on the final interpretation, but it moves the materiality of interactive documentary from the sphere of pre-requisite to potential format. In other words, if there is an interactive documentary artefact at all (in order to establish distance between text and user — a pre-requisite for Ricoeurian hermeneutics), then any material characteristic beyond this is an addition to this pre-requisite.

What is the importance of this? This view, of arguing that although digital technology makes dissemination and production of interactive documentary perhaps *easier* than other avenues, while denying digital technology as a fundamental characteristic of interactive documentary, I am inoculating this definition of interactive documentary from solely catering to a specific type of interactive documentary — not fully representative of the formats the interactive documentary can take today and into the future. These material formats are then, therefore, open to discussion and examination using a

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

materialist approach. Thus it can be said that Ricoeurian hermeneutics, in a sense, extends the materialist perspective, as it argues for a materiality beyond digitality in interactive documentary.

Mimesis

The mimesis chapter functioned to clarify the role of the user in interactivity— both through the generation of meaning (which is a stance shared by non-interactive texts), but also, and crucially, through separating interactivity into extra-activity, interactivity, and endo-activity. This was done under the prefiguration stage of mimesis (mimesis₁), and points to how we can begin to conceptualise the conditions of engagement with an interactive documentary at an interactive level.

If prefiguration tells us how interactivity must be understood for interactive conditions to be established, then configuration (mimesis₂) explains why this is important. Configuration, for Ricoeur, emphasises the separation of text and user— so we can therefore learn something from the text. Taken to interactive documentary, configuration was used as the first step to describe how the user can be seen to have experienced and understood an interactive

documentary, without exhausting all potential pathways. Configuration as a hermeneutic stage avoids reducing the interactive documentary to language with a fixed meaning.

Finally, Ricoeur's third stage of his tripartite mimesis was refiguration, which was then used to discuss interactivity as separate to reading. This was an essential step, as much of the Ricoeurian hermeneutic is based on written texts where the hermeneutic process is based on reading. This analysis revealed that interactivity could be separated from other controls (such as scene selection, or the functions of play / pause / rewind / fast-forward / mute), which was accomplished by understanding interactivity as being of the same order as an act of reading. Reading is an act which configures the text— any interaction which does not configure the text under Ricoeurian conditions must necessarily not count as of the same order as an act of reading.

Mimesis presents several conditions of interactivity — the significance of this is threefold. The first, in a general sense, is a contribution to the definition of interactive documentary as outlined in the first chapter of the thesis. In order for an interactive documentary to be considered as such, the

interactivity must, under prefiguration, be understood as interactive and have the mechanisms of interactivity available to the user. Secondly, under configuration, the interactive documentary cannot occur internally to the user — there must be a separation of text and user in some sense. Thirdly, under refiguration, interactivity must produce some sort of hermeneutic effect of the same order as reading to be considered as interactivity. These are concrete and specific definitional guidelines.

Through these conditions of interactivity, we can also understand how the hermeneutic approach developed within this chapter suggests that interactivity does not need to be tied to linguistics. Rather than “translating everything into the form or model of language”, we can instead discuss interactive documentary as it is.⁵⁸⁹ What I mean by this is that for Ricoeur, the text is not a closed and encoded set of static meanings based on language. It is instead the “projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live”.⁵⁹⁰ The conditions of interactivity, as articulated earlier, demand an examination of interaction beyond a linguistic or content-driven approach. These approaches cannot account for repetition or multiple pathways. By

⁵⁸⁹ Miles, “Matters of Concern”, 105.

⁵⁹⁰ Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, 26.

arguing instead that interactivity is an action of configuring the projected world of the text, then we are able to “[subordinate] the epistemological dimension of reference to the hermeneutical dimension of [understanding]”.⁵⁹¹ The value of mimesis truly emerges here. A hermeneutic process based on phenomenology lends itself to trans-linguistic capability.

This process upon which Ricoeurian reading is predicated offers a base to discuss interactivity as a simultaneous navigation of the text and interpretation of the content. A projection of a new universe does not require an exhaustive cataloguing of what is present and absent within— the impression of a new universe is enough. In this sense the interactive documentary can be interpreted hermeneutically, with a phenomenologically-grounded beginning, middle and end.

Narrative

This chapter on narrative built on the work of the previous two chapters. The takeaway message here was that narrative should not be seen as located solely within the text, nor as an imposition of finality. The rift between

⁵⁹¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 5.

narrative and interactive documentary was quite extreme— many theorists use the word ‘non-narrative’ to describe the interactive documentary.

Instead, we bound narrative within mimesis, which describes an endless interpretation. Subsequently, this also helped us to explore the function of hermeneutic repetition in interactive documentary. What this chapter found was that repetition was hermeneutically limited in some senses, if the interactive documentary could change its content or structure between viewings. This tempers the view that interactivity is unilaterally and unconditionally an expansion of the user’s horizons. Instead, what we see is a potential balance between hermeneutic possibility and physical agency.

Narrative is ultimately positioned not as a function of the text or of some primordial plot, but instead as a process of the user understanding what they are interacting with. Non-narrative under these conditions points necessarily to the interactive documentary which is yet to be interacted with.

The theory of narrative developed within this chapter sees a facet of interactivity as a narratological structuring action. This does not position

narrative as a limiting, organisational principle, but instead as a critical link between user and interactive documentary. A process whereby the user makes sense of what is presented to them. Interactivity complicates this somehow when compared to narrativising non-interactive texts. Of course, non-interactive texts undergo a narrativising action by the user— Ricoeur writes that “it is the contextual function of discourse to screen, so to speak, the polysemy of our words and to reduce the plurality of possible interpretations”.⁵⁹² Interactivity expands this paradigm of order from a hermeneutic and phenomenological sense, to include physical action. In other words— we have always ordered and narrativised stories. But now we can physically order and narrativise.

This raised two concerns— how can an interactive documentary’s narrative be yielded without having the entirety of its possible pathways exhausted? And how is the physical act of interaction any different from turning the page of the book?

These two points sketch out the poles of this approach. On one end, the

⁵⁹² Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 17.

possibility of narrative without exhausting all potential pathways cements the phenomenological approach. On the other—the interplay between user action and textual reaction. Narrative separates what constitutes interaction from physical action in general.

Narrative in interactivity thus oscillates between phenomenological power and physical action in new ways compared to traditional texts. Although this chapter shows that the act of ‘grasping together’ to build a narrative is present in traditional texts, the interactive documentary enhances this through demanding a physical ‘grasping together’ as well as phenomenological. Even on a purely phenomenological level, interactive documentary shows many differences to non-interactive texts. This was explained chiefly through interactive documentary’s common characteristic— that the various pathways available to the user are often not intended to be viewed in totality or in every possible combination. The narrativisation thus undertaken by the user in interactive documentary does not need a beginning, middle and end inherent to the text, but instead these are conditions imposed as an effect of ordering. The latent pathways of the interactive documentary, however, were shown to have hermeneutic weight. It is important (and in fact necessary) for the user to

know that their pathway through the interactive documentary *could have been otherwise*. This condition was clarified in the third chapter, on mimesis, where prefiguration (mimesis₁) demands that the user understands *how* to interact with an interactive documentary, and that their interactions make a difference to how the content is presented to them.

Taking this to narrative, we find that the hermeneutic weight of the latent pathways of the interactive documentary is in fact in this mimetic process. If a documentary is perceived as total fiction, it loses its documentary status. Similarly, if the interactive documentary is perceived as non-interactive, then the interactive element has no phenomenological effect on the user.

Showing how interactivity changes narrative thus hinges on these two poles of a physical ‘grasping together’ augmenting the phenomenological ‘grasping together’, as well as this physical act being phenomenologically mediated— seen as a choice which will be reacted to by the interactive documentary.

What the chapter on narrative ultimately tells us about interactive

documentary is that hermeneutic possibility stands in tension with physical agency. What I mean by this is that the nature of the relationship between the physical and phenomenological grasping together means that in order to establish one, the other may be sacrificed to some extent. The hermeneutic ability to re-read may be impinged upon through the interactive documentary changing between subsequent readings— either randomly or as a consequence of reaction to physical action by the user.

Another consequence of this relationship between hermeneutic possibility and physical agency centres around interaction as action by the user and reaction by the text. We can see the action as both physical and carrying phenomenological weight (such as choosing a specific pathway or clicking on something you're interested in). This physical action, with hermeneutic consequences, can inscribe in a sense the physical action that the phenomenological user performs. Part of the hermeneutic process is thus outsourced to the text through this process. In a traditional text, the user's solely phenomenological 'grasping together' had no physical residue. In the interactive documentary, the physical action of the user, reacted to by the interactive documentary, can outline some of this phenomenological,

hermeneutic process. In a traditional text, we could not understand how the user was constructing a narrative. An interactive documentary provides physical ‘clues’ to this process— inherently lending itself to an ability to collect data and index these actions. It is important to emphasise that the narrative process in interactive documentary is thus a balance between physical agency and hermeneutic ability.

This chapter showed how the physical interaction intersects with hermeneutics. From this, we can begin to build on this relationship of phenomenological and physical user action and interactive documentary reaction to establish a theory of fiction which can account for interactivity.

History and Fiction

Interactivity introduces a new capacity for fiction. Beyond a simple fictionalising tool, interactivity bridges the gap between fictionalisation and praxis— the physical praxis of interaction leading to the creative poieses through fiction.

Breaking this down a little, this chapter builds on the schema of the

previous chapter on narrative, between physical agency and hermeneutic ability. The dialectic of history and fiction was transposed on to the praxis of interaction and the poiesis of fiction.

There are two major steps this chapter takes. The first concerns documentary in general. Fiction has been shown to not only contextualise the document of documentary, but to open up this historical trace to not just enhancement or embellishment, but “invention of meaning” — even “[increasing] reality”.⁵⁹³ This puts forward that fiction can be beneficial to documentary import, rather than antithetical to the general documentary project. The second step of this chapter built on this positive view of fiction, but asked how interactivity impacted fiction.

This question demanded an examination of interactivity’s hermeneutic, phenomenological and physical elements. The tripartite schema to order this discussion was essentially established as content (what the documentary depicts), the artefact (the documentary text) and impression (the phenomenological interpretation of the documentary).

⁵⁹³ Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction”, 129; Ibid 127.

A major consideration for this chapter was interactivity's inability to easily fit into the categories of reading or writing. Indeed, much of the chapter was devoted to proving the applicability of Ricoeur's approach to fiction on interactive documentary. Part of this approach was to use the concept of the genotype and the phenotype as an extended metaphor to articulate the difference between the content and the artefact. The phenotype represented the observable characteristics— the interactive documentary *as it has been interacted with*, where the genotype was positioned as a set of plans— the unrealised potentials and limitations of the interactive documentary. By understanding the documentary artefact as a sort of genotype, and documentary content as a sort of phenotype, we can understand how the phenomenological understanding of the user has two layers. The first layer, the phenotype / documentary content, represents the user interface— what they can see / hear / smell / touch and so on. Where this discussion of fiction really gets interesting is when you consider the genotype. The genotype becomes a phenotype when interacted with. But here we find a separation of physical action and the phenomenology of interaction. We can still understand that there is a genotype governing the creation of phenotype. In

other words, the user can— must— understand the functioning of the interactive documentary in order to concretise their personal pathway.

By instituting a relationship between phenomenology and the genotype of the interactive documentary, we see a second-order fiction emerge from the interactive documentary. Let me be very clear— Ricoeur's approach to fiction works on non-interactive documentary. Fiction is productive, and this idea of productive reference supplies an epistemology which has real impact— where the user brings what they have learnt from fiction to bear on their world. This is the first-order fiction, but this is not the topic of discussion here. Instead, I am much more interested in applying this same framework to interactivity specifically. This is the second-order fiction.

A formulation of the first-order fiction argues that the trace of the documentary (and thus the historical warrant) is already mediated in at least three ways— through the mechanism of capture (such as the framing of the shot or transmission of light to electrical impulses), through the content (such as the projection) and through the phenomenological impression of the user. The documentary, through its trace, depicts an absence of some projected

world. This implies that the new relations documentary can assume independently of what it depicts are thus able to be transferred back to reality, deriving meaning from more than just its antecedent.

Let us try to formulate the second-order fiction. The interaction (this is to say, the historical trace of action by the user as reacted to by the interactive documentary) is mediated in at least three ways: The first is through content— what the user is viewing, hearing or so on is changed in some sense by the interaction. Secondly, artefact— the *reaction* of the interactive documentary is part of the necessary conditions for interaction. Thirdly, impression— what the user interprets is changed by their action. Interactivity, through the physical trace of action and reaction, shows the phenotype of interactive documentary— what it actually is. But by virtue of the phenotype, the concept of genotype is alluded to— just as the phenotype relies on a genotype, the physical interaction relies on a phenomenological and hermeneutic understanding. In other words, understanding is like a genotype in that it shows the limits of where interaction can be physically drawn. If understanding does not encompass the area of interaction, then interaction (that the user is aware of) becomes impossible. This extends the interactive

relationship between user and interactive documentary from physical act to phenomenological relations which can thus be hermeneutically interpreted by the user, deriving meaning from more than just the physical act or the phenomenological impression.

It is by virtue of the fact that interactivity is *both* physically and phenomenologically significant that it occupies a unique position of fictionalising power. It is not as simple as saying that the impact of interactivity is a phenomenological fictionalising force, and that the physical act of interactivity as a historicising trace— and thus the fictional character of interactive documentary is simply the sum of these two elements. Instead, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Ricoeur claims that action itself may undergo “a kind of objectification similar to the fixation which occurs in writing... [constituting] a delineated pattern which has to be interpreted”.⁵⁹⁴ In the interactive documentary, an action leaves a “trace”, contributing to “the emergence of such patterns which become the documents of human action”.⁵⁹⁵ This trace, as shown above, can be

⁵⁹⁴ Ricoeur, “Action Considered as Text”, 99.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid 101.

considered both physically and phenomenologically. Physically: the changed state of the interactive documentary as a consequence of the user's action in a sense inscribes the action of the user. Phenomenologically: the user's interpretation is an inscription of the reaction of the interactive documentary to the user's action.

Ricoeur's imagining of fiction is ultimately a configuration that occurs in the reader (or in the case of interactive documentary, user). The relationship between the physical and phenomenological aspects of interactivity fully incorporates Ricoeur's dialectic of history and fiction. Ricoeur writes that the "quasi-historical moment of fiction [changes] places with the quasi-fictive moment of history", and through this relationship, "the standing-for the past in history is united with the imaginative variations of fiction".⁵⁹⁶ Fiction does not supplant the physical interaction, it augments and contextualises it. By being able to affect the text through action in a way that leaves a physical trace, the user is undertaking a creative construction. Each action the user performs does not just change their phenomenological perception through interpreting the reaction of the interactive documentary, but also adds to or

⁵⁹⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 3, 192.

augments the interactive documentary.

Ricoeur categorises a text as the “detachment of meaning from the event”.⁵⁹⁷ By continuing to add to (or at least augment) the text, then the meaning further detaches from the event. This movement away from historical trace or document does not reduce the phenomenological possibility for meaning: the fictionalisation through the interactive documentary’s reaction to the user’s action enhances the possibility for a personalised and phenomenologically-focused documentary.

In this summary, we have found that interactivity is a useful mechanism not because it *reduces* fiction, but that it *expands* the capacity of fiction to create a model for creative reconstruction. More than this, we have understood the two orders of fiction, as well as the relationship between the phenomenological impact of interactivity and the physical trace of interactivity.

Time

⁵⁹⁷ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25.

The final body chapter, on time, draws its inspiration from the discussion of interactivity as a fictionalising force, as articulated in the history and fiction chapter. The question of temporality in interactivity is asked because interactivity has several facets. There is indeed a phenomenological, fictionalising force. This is cached in a phenomenological approach to temporality, and thus retains an identical temporal character to non-interactive documentary. This is easy to imagine with an example.

Say we watch an hour-long, non interactive documentary of a woman who went to the shops, spent a week locked in the store, and then escaped. Next, imagine an interactive documentary on the same subject. The user spends an hour of their time interacting throughout the woman's week at the store in order to find an escape route. We can already point to the temporality as experienced by the viewer and the user— one hour. And then is the temporality of the narrative— being a week at the store. But where does the interactive documentary distinguish itself temporally from the non-interactive documentary, if it does at all? This chapter attempts to answer this question through several steps.

Critical to this discussion was to see interactivity as a fictional force as well as a physically mediated action. Although interactivity, through its fictionalising characteristics has a phenomenological time, there is also the action of interactivity. If one ‘clicks here to go there’, this click is grounded in a certain temporality as well, which is not fictional. To discuss the temporality of interactivity between these two valences, Ricoeur’s calendar time was radically redeployed. The interactive documentary’s temporality was therefore shown to be punctuated by interactions, and these interactions intersected phenomenological importance with an act grounded in cosmic time.

Although this may sound at first like an arcane distinction, this helps us to schematise the temporality of interactive documentary’s multiple potential pathways. The previous approach to the multiple pathways of interactive documentary was to schematise these pathways spatially— a logic of choice, where the user essentially chooses to ‘go this way’ or ‘go that way’. This resulted in neglecting the temporality of interactivity, as temporality was positioned as being at odds with spatiality, and thus at odds with the interactive element of interactive documentary. This is where seeing

interactive time as an intersection of phenomenological importance and an act grounded in cosmic time becomes so important.

This intersection demonstrated the role temporality plays in actualising and bringing into cosmic time the pathway taken through the interactive documentary. In other words, rather than seeing a field of potentials, the temporally-extended action of the user, as well as providing phenomenological importance, grounds in cosmic time their pathway through the interactive documentary. In this sense, the chronological is brought into conversation with the logical. The ‘interactive time’ that this chapter established does not point to interactivity belonging to one specific temporality, but instead sketches out a necessarily temporally complex view of interaction— due to the intersection between phenomenological temporal construction and physically mediated force, as discussed in the chapter on history and fiction.

Breaking down the steps: the interactive documentary is absent of phenomenological time before it has been interacted with. This is because there is no user to have a phenomenological interpretation. Of course, this

does not point to the complete absence of temporality in the yet-to-be-interacted-with (I use the word 'latent' throughout this thesis) interactive documentary. For the following, the brackets contain brief examples to illustrate my point. There is the cosmic time in which the documentary artefact sits (the interactive documentary went on to this server on January 18th 2017, and has remained there until the current time). There is the temporality in terms of clip length (3 minute clips that are linked together). There is the temporality of what has been recorded (there was a time lapse of 7 weeks, condensed to one three minute clip). But none of this is different to, say, a non-interactive documentary. The non-interactive documentary also sits in cosmic time. It also has various lengths. It also has a temporality of what has been recorded.

The user is required in order to temporally distinguish interactive documentary from non-interactive documentary, and thus ascertain the temporal character of interactivity. However, we cannot do this by examining the user alone. To gauge interactivity solely using a phenomenological understanding of time, the physical potency of interactivity is lost. This is because phenomenological temporality is ultimately a user-based temporality.

To adequately explain interactive time, we must combine the temporalities of the interactive documentary and the temporalities of the user. Taken separately, neither can address the temporality of interactivity. It is through a correlation between these temporalities that we can point to interactive time. This is why, in the chapter, Ricoeur's calendar time was transformed to describe this interactive time, providing a potent counterpoint to the suggestion that interactivity only has spatial value. Here, interactivity is not seen in terms of affecting phenomenological time, nor the cosmic time of the interactive documentary. Instead, interactive time shows the introduction of chronology to the logical model of interactive documentary.

XIII. Recommendations for further research

Ricoeur states that "for a theory constructed within the sphere of language, the best test of its claim to universality lies in determining its capacity for extension to the sphere of practice".⁵⁹⁸ Just as this thesis' application of Ricoeur to interactive documentary has generated new knowledge, taking this new

⁵⁹⁸ Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual Autobiography" In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Hahn, Trans. Kathleen Blamey, Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XXII, 3-73. Chicago: Open Court, 1996. 44.

theory back to specific interactive documentaries will act to reinforce and bring extra nuance. This thesis builds on the work done by Aston and Gaudenzi, where the “discussion around the act of developing and making interactive documentaries is seen as being a necessary prerequisite to subsequent theorizing in relation to their impact on the continuing evolution of the documentary genre”.⁵⁹⁹ The next step here is to bring the theory developed in this thesis back to bear on interactive documentary practice. In this thesis’ introduction, I outlined the position taken towards examples—that the examples which have appeared on occasion throughout the thesis do not represent limit cases, and instead acted to illustrate the argument. This was because existing interactive documentaries, at the time of writing this thesis, do not push the limits of the theory. Now that this thesis has concluded, I hope that the theory within can be helpful to both interactive documentary theorists and practitioners alike.

This thesis presents ripe ground for an application to practice. As a consequence of this thesis extending beyond current practice, I have used thought experiments. Now, specific interactive documentaries can be

⁵⁹⁹ Aston & Gaudenzi, “Setting the Field”, 125.

constructed to extend, reinforce, and bring nuance to the ideas developed in this thesis. In a Ricoeurian sense, this is the theory's test "for extension to the sphere of practice".⁶⁰⁰ In terms of a dialogue established with other interactive documentary theories, this thesis provides a structure to further theorise, rather than act as a strict replacement for current theory. The Ricoeurian framework as developed in this thesis was shown to be compatible with a broad range of interactive documentary theory, even extending to the new-materialist approach of Miles. Indeed, the work done in this thesis around the balance between physical capability and hermeneutic agency lends itself immediately to questions of data collection and quantification. If the hermeneutic process is forced into conversation with algorithmic decision making and data collection, then there are new forms of power and control which pose challenges to traditional hermeneutics — questioning individual autonomy in an interactive environment. There is, therefore, a way to use the hermeneutic phenomenology of Ricoeur in order to discuss these materially-based concerns. The theory developed in this thesis is not purely to benefit how we understand interactive documentaries, but offers a pathway to discuss how interactive documentaries can impact our society through their

⁶⁰⁰ Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography", 44.

interactive, as well as their documentary, nature.

Establishing a conversation between Ricoeur and interactive documentary requires a fundamental shift in the way we think about narrative. Indeed, the narrative discussed in this thesis remains far from mainstream, and the field of interactive documentary in general has yet to form a broad base of users and mass appeal. It is thus critical to consider how to adapt the approach taken through this thesis to ensure it filters through to a wider audience—hence encouraging wider engagement with documentary content.

To broaden the appeal of this thesis, a step may be to conduct more research on analogue antecedents to the digital interactive documentaries, and similarly, to specify focus on digital interactive documentary, to create space for subsequent work which may be fundamentally non-digital in nature. With this being said—the proliferation of interactive documentaries in recent years is helped along by digital mediums, which inherently lends itself to database driven work. Further to this point, the interactive documentary field is constantly continuing to evolve, and the general public's media literacy and openness to interactive texts is continuing to develop. As interactivity

becomes more mainstream, it is critical to consider that this Ricoeurian approach must exist in concert with alternative approaches— the approach outlined in this thesis is not intended to supplant pre-existing approaches, but rather to lend a new dimension to extant thought. As an example— Ricoeur’s focus on narrative as constructed by the user does not account for any internal logic of narrative within the text. Thus, Ricoeur must be situated within a wider set of debates in the field.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that there are other, non-western systems that can be brought to bear on the debates addressed by this thesis. Although Ricoeur’s approach to narrative remains quite open-ended (which may encourage compatibility with cross-cultural approaches), this thesis is essentially leveraging western epistemology to discuss interactive documentary. Let us not forget the wider possibilities for both interactive documentaries and the scholarly work around them.

XIV. Final message

This thesis responded to a problem— that we do not understand the human experience of interactivity in interactive documentary. To answer this problem, this thesis approached interactivity in interactive documentary in

phenomenological and hermeneutic terms. This revealed several key findings.

- The interactive documentary does not need to be digital.
- We must know that an interactive documentary is interactive, in order to properly interact with it.
- What matters is not only the path one takes through the interactive documentary, but understanding that there were paths not taken.
- Hermeneutic agency can be sacrificed for physical capability.
- Interactivity is a fictionalising force, but this does not impinge on the documentary capacity of interactive documentary.
- Interactivity is chronological and logical.

Ultimately, interactivity can be viewed in physical, hermeneutic, phenomenological and material terms. There are several facets to interactivity that this thesis has unearthed. Each of these facets affects the others.

Interactivity has been positioned in this thesis not as a capability of the text, but instead as a testimony to the importance of the user in drawing meaning from the interactive documentary. Nichols writes that “[documentary puts] before us social issues and current events, recurring problems and possible

solutions”.⁶⁰¹ Interactivity is a vehicle to help us tell these stories. It can fundamentally alter documentary representation for better or for worse.

This thesis has worked to understand interactivity in human terms. Not only so that we can better engage with existing interactive documentaries, but so we can adapt to the future of representation. Interactivity is fast becoming a popular way in which we “[bear] witness to the way the world is”.⁶⁰² What is at stake here is that this forms the basis of our “orientation to or action within the world”.⁶⁰³ We can further develop our understanding of the human side of interactivity, and the potential of interactive documentary to help reframe how we think about narrative and storytelling. It is my firm belief that this reframing is necessary as a means of contributing to meaningful change both politically and socially, and that the field of interactive documentary has an important role to play in this process.

⁶⁰¹ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2.

⁶⁰² Ibid xiii.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

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