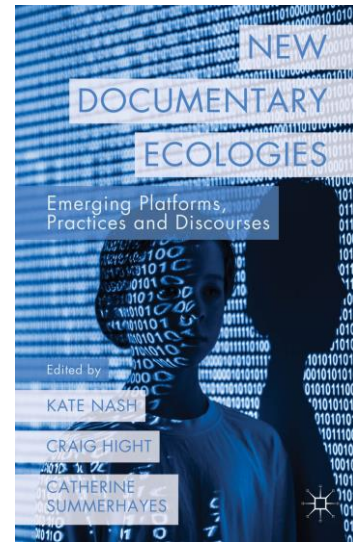


Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Eds.), **New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses**, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 254 pp., \$100.00 (hardcover), \$95.00 (paperback).

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The intersections of the documentary form and new technologies have drawn much scholarly curiosity and attention. In 2012, the journal *Studies in Documentary Film* dedicated an entire issue to the subject, and multiple articles appear in media studies, communication, and other academic journals. ***New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses***, edited by Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes, is the first anthology devoted to the subject. The editors assembled scholarly chapters and interviews with professionals to provide a robust volume for those seeking an overview of this nascent field.



In “Introduction: New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses,” Nash, Hight, and Summerhayes set the stage for the changing documentary field, outline the primary theoretical frameworks, delineate their goals, and preview chapters. Using media ecologies—which focus on complex media systems as interrelated and interdependent parts—as a conceptual frame, they avoid drawing a firm boundary with this collection, but instead remain open to diverse inquiries. To bring some order to them, they divide the book into three parts: “Expanding Documentary,” “Production Practices,” and “Inter/Action: Rethinking Documentary Engagement.”

Part I, “Expanding Documentary,” explores critical developments through five theory-driven chapters. In chapter 1, titled “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” Jon Dovey examines a new documentary form called the “living documentary” through its tensions between collaboration and exploitation. He draws on the culturalist perspective, political economy, and media ecology to demonstrate how the two ideas are inseparable. In chapter 2, titled “Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary,” Alexandra Juhasz emphasizes the corporate underpinnings of the online spaces that encourage content creation and interactivity while noting the limits of online interaction, such as sharing, as forms of activism.

In chapter 3, titled “Clicking on the World: Documentary Representation and Interactivity,” Kate Nash outlines four dimensions of interactivity—technological, relational, experiential, and discourse—and their connections with the idea of a documentary voice. Nash applies this framework to the National Film Board of Canada’s interactive documentary *Bear 71* to conclude that the interrelationship between participant and interactivity “becomes a representational strategy available to documentary makers” (p. 63).

In chapter 4, titled "Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies," Adrian Miles examines the uncertainty of interactivity through Deleuze's theory of affect image toward understanding affective ecologies. Interactive documentaries can be fragmented and incoherent by reasons of design, choice, or something more, in turn manifesting this uncertainty within them. These fragments warrant further investigation because, according to Miles, "Documentary, when reconsidered as affect image, and therefore as an affective knowing, offers wonderment and knowledge as its account for what is, or might be" (p. 79).

In chapter 5, titled "Web-Weaving: The Affective Movement of Documentary Imaging," Catherine Summerhayes analyzes still and moving images through the tropes of ecos, gest, and social gest to situate Web documentaries in their online environments. With the horrors of Darfur, Sudan, serving as a thematic link across the visuals, Summerhayes delves into the complexities of the relationships. She observes, "Any interaction with a website is not innocent or transparent, and currently we can only answer this question in a speculative fashion" (p. 99).

Part II, "Production Practices," investigates the changes behind the scenes within these new documentary ecologies. Actor-network theory (ANT) frames Elizabeth Coffman's chapter 6, titled "Spinning a Collaborative Web: Documentary Projects in the Digital Arena." Coffman uses two case studies: Kartemquin Films's *The Interrupters* (2011) and *Inspiring Stories*, a Mary Kay Cosmetics-funded project created by amateur filmmakers. ANT expands the ideas of authorship in ways useful for examining contemporary production practices, encompassing participants who "are increasingly aware of their abilities to drive the narrative and opportunities to tell their own stories" (p. 111, emphasis in original), not only within the documentary itself but also in the social networks and spaces beyond them.

In chapter 8, Sandra Gaudenzi explores "Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries." Gaudenzi stresses the relationships between design and agency, noting how design determines the potential of agency. She proceeds to delineate strategies for collaboration between audiences and makers, starting with sharing content and moving to more involved processes.

In chapter 10, titled "Making (with) the Korsakow System: Database Documentaries as Articulation and Assemblage," Matt Soar provides an insider's examination of Korsakow, which he both codeveloped and uses for his own projects. Korsakow is a software program that features a drag-and-drop interface, allowing filmmakers with no programming experience to create interactive online productions. Soar situates the program within the new media ecology and theorizes the database documentary creation process while providing more detail about developing and creating with the system. Soar's chapter addresses Korsakow 5, although release 6 appeared in late 2016.

In chapter 11, titled "The Evolution of Animated Documentary," Annabelle Honess Roe delineates the important role of animation within these new media landscapes. She covers much ground, starting with a definition of animated documentary, and then shifting to production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption of animated documentary. Overall, animation plays an important role in a media environment that blurs the lines between amateurs and professionals, between professional and consumer equipment, and between centralization and democratization of media.

Along with more academic chapters, the second section features three interviews: Ingrid Kopp, director of digital initiatives at the Tribeca Film Institute; Jigar Mehta, director of operations at Matter and part of the *18 Days in Egypt* project; and Florian Thalhoffer, media artist and documentary maker integral to Korsakow.

Part III, titled "Inter/Action: Rethinking Documentary Engagement," addresses the audience's roles in this new documentary environment. In chapter 13, titled "Digital Diffusion of Delusions: A World Wide Web of Conspiracy Documentaries," Bjørn Sørenssen explores the proliferation of the conspiracy documentary within the new documentary ecologies. Although the genre struggled to gain distribution and find audiences prior to videotapes, the Web and YouTube in particular propelled the dissemination of conspiracy theory documentaries and facilitated building online communities around these theories. Sørenssen uses Peter Joseph's *Zeitgeist*, which also found audiences through Netflix, as a case study.

In chapter 14, titled "Shoot, Edit, Share: Cultural Software and User-Generated Documentary Practice," Craig Hight addresses the role of software by first examining the critical place of user tools and then examining the software available with the Flip camera, a user-friendly camera accessible to almost anyone. Hight finds that the software moves away from enabling complex editing or collaboration, and thus reinforcing the diversion focus and quick consumption of online video. He also asserts that software is not neutral, but a performance.

In chapter 15, titled "Ethical Challenges for Documentarians in a User-Centric Environment," Patricia Aufderheide surveys ethics and their encounters within the new documentary ecologies. Part of the challenge lies in the documentary profession possessing no consensus on a code of ethics, whereas another part of the challenge lies in the myriad online texts and user-participation options. The end result is more questions than answers, but Aufderheide still explores the issues through users as subjects, users as receivers, sponsors, and technologies, with an eye toward transparency.

*New Documentary Ecologies* possesses many strengths. The editors' selections cover a cross-section of documentary forms, such as animation and interactive documentary, as well as a cross-section of technologies incorporated at all levels of creation, dissemination, and consumption. The book's three-part structure provides a coherent frame and flow for the chapters, and each chapter covers enough of its own ground to prevent overlap. The variety among the chapters and their topics encourages discovery of new titles and projects.

The anthology also calls attention to the problems of digital media, accessibility, and archives. Currently, little concentrated effort is directed toward preserving interactive texts constructed for online distribution, exhibition, and participation. Interactive documentary projects with institutional support, such as those from the National Film Board of Canada, remain available longer than others supported independently. App-based projects "break" when they go without updates as new operating system updates appear. Some projects described in the chapters have disappeared altogether. The volume puts into relief the problems of writing about and accessing digital documentaries and other online projects. Without an independent system to preserve them, these problems will continue.

This anthology is suitable for scholars and students interested in learning more about the changes in documentary studies. It is accessible for advanced undergraduate or graduate classes. Some of the chapters, particularly those in the first part, might prove challenging for those unacquainted with the scholarly underpinnings.

*New Documentary Ecologies* provides the first book-length foray into the emerging field of online documentary. This volume offers a series of broad perspectives without losing sight of its goals. It is that rare volume with something for theorists, enthusiasts, producers, and the otherwise curious.