

Chapter 5 - The Hypertext interactive documentary through the lenses of the Live documentary

In this chapter I will concentrate on the Hypertext, or Hitchhiking, mode: a logic of interactivity where the relation between the user and the documentary is based on the exploration of a finite database of audiovisual content. As seen in Chapter 1, the components of the hypertext interactive documentary are divided in video segments which have been pre-determined by the author and stored onto a digital support (CD-Rom, DVD, Web etc...). The user can explore those segments by following a hitchhiking logic (jumping from one segment to the other) that can have levels of pre-determination (depending of the coding the linking mechanism can be strictly authored or just rule based¹). From the several examples given in Chapter 1 I want to choose one main case study for this section. The choice is not simple, as this mode is probably the most developed in interactive documentaries because it follows the logic used in the literary hypertexts that boomed in the late 1980's². Linking audiovisual material, rather than only text, seemed a natural progression to artists and documentary makers. The famous filmmaker Chris Marker experimented with the form in 1997 with his CD-Rom *Immemory*. Even today the linking properties of the internet make this form a well established interactive documentary mode. Examples such as *Journey to the End of the Coal*³ (2008) and *The Big Issue: A Web Documentary on the Obesity Epidemic*⁴ (2009) by Honkytonk Films, *Becoming Human*⁵ (2008) by The Institute of Human Origins and *Diamond Road Online*⁶ (2008) by Kensington Communications prove that hypertext documentaries are a still an established form of interactive documentary.

I have chosen the [*LoveStoryProject*] (2007) by Florian Thalhofer as my case study for hypertext interactive documentaries because I believe that its rule based organisation and linking structure is more elaborate than most other hypertexts, which are just reactive structures. The difference between a *reactive* and *interactive* structure is important because only interactive structures are opened to change, meaning that the relations they forge with other assemblages impact their own form and internal logic. To clarify this point I will have to make a diversion from the Live documentary and briefly explain how the evolution of digital support (from CD-Rom to internet) and

¹ Marie-Laure Ryan offers a comprehensive description of the possible structures of database narratives in *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Chapter 8.

² *Afternoon* (1987) by Michael Joyce is an early example of hypertext fiction. Conceived with the Storyspace software, the user could read a text on the computer screen and jump to another screen by clicking into a hyperlink.

³ *Journey to the end of the coal* is available online at <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/webdoc/>. Accessed 22.03.10.

⁴ *The Big Issue* is a web-documentary by Samuel Bollendorff and Olivia Colo available at <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/thebigissue/>.

⁵ *Becoming Human* is a web-documentary done by The Institute of Human Origins. It is available online at <http://www.becominghuman.org/node/interactive-documentary> . Accessed 10.06.2010.

⁶ *Diamond Road Online* Is a web-documentary done by Kensington Communications. Available online at <http://www.diamondroad.tv/>. Accessed 3.04.10.

the proliferation of software available to author interactive projects has created sub-genres of hypertext documentaries. If the hyperlink, ‘the jump, the sudden displacement of the user’s position in the text’ (Aarseth, 1994:60) unfolds the content of the documentary to the user, the coding that rules such jump can follow different logics. I think that those different logics can substantially change the nature of the resulting interactive documentary.

Reactive and interactive Hypertext documentaries

In mixing an autopoietic approach with an assemblage/systemic approach when analysing interactive documentaries as Live documentaries, I make an assumption: that an interactive documentary can be seen as a dynamic system. I mean by that that it a system that has an impact on its environment. In *What is interaction? Are there different types?* Hugh Dubberly, Paul Pangaro and Usman Haque also explicitly take a Systems Theory approach to interaction, rather than a HCI’s point of view⁷. They distinguish between static and dynamic systems⁸ and then, within dynamic systems that are acting upon their environment, they distinguish ‘between those that only react and those that interact—linear (open-loop) and closed-loop systems’ (2009:71). Usman Haque argues that the process of clicking a fixed link (for example in a web page) is not *interaction* but *reaction*⁹. In *reaction* ‘the transfer function (which couples input to output) is fixed; in *interaction* the transfer function is dynamic’ (2009:70).

Most Hypertext documentaries have a *reactive* form. In order to illustrate this I will have to deconstruct the interface of some specific examples and map the interactive options given by the artefact to the user. The two examples that I have chosen are *Immemory* (1997) by Chris Marker and *The Big Issue: A Web Documentary on the Obesity Epidemic*¹⁰ (2009) by Honkytonk Films. I have chosen those two examples because they are well known in their field, they are often quoted as interactive documentary “success stories” but also because they are ten years apart (proving the point that *reactive* Hypertext documentaries were not just the first attempt to apply digital logics to

⁷ For the authors, the HCI approach to human-computer interaction is coming from a first order cybernetic feedback loop logic. The person has a goal and acts to achieve it in an environment by providing an input to the computer system. The person measures the output from the system (feedback) and directs her next input by comparing the result to pursued aim (feedback loop). In a System Theory approach the person is not seen as external to human-computer interaction loop but as part of such loop (second order cybernetic approach).

⁸ Where *static systems* ‘cannot act and therefore has little or no meaningful effect on their environment’ (2009:71), for example a chair, and *dynamic systems* ‘can and do act, thus changing their relationship to their environment’ (ibidem).

⁹ A similar distinction is hinted at by media theorist Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* when he makes the difference between ‘menu-based interactive multimedia applications’ (2001:67) where all data already exists before the user accesses it, and ‘dynamic new media artworks’ (ibidem) where data is created on the fly. I prefer to use Usman Haque’s terminology here because he concentrates on the hyperlink, and not on the final content that is shown as the result of such link. While Manovich is interested in generative content, Haque concentrates on the functioning of the link, whether it follows an in/out logic or whether the link itself has a wider range of options.

¹⁰ *The Big Issue* is a web-documentary by Samuel Bollendorff and Olivia Colo available at <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/thebigissue/>.

documentary making, but that they are an established form that is actually predominant nowadays).

Immemory (1997) by Chris Marker is an early example of *reactive* Hypertext documentary created for on a CD-Rom support. Chris Marker chooses an interactive media format to do something that is specifically conceived to be non-linear: mapping memories as a geographical investigation, rather than an historic one. Chris Marker wants the user to browse through what he calls ‘zones’ of his memory, hoping that this exploration will serve as a trampoline to the user’s personal memories.

My working thesis was that every somewhat extensive memory is more structured than it seems -- that photos taken apparently at random, postcards chosen following momentary whims, begin given a certain accumulation to sketch an itinerary, to map the imaginary land that stretches out inside of us.

Chris Marker, 1998, *Immemory* CD booklet

The map that Chris Marker has developed is divided in six zones (see Fig. 1) : Le Voyage, Le Musée, La Photo, La Guerre, La Poesie et La Mémoire. Each zone contains a mix of data (photos, texts, audio files and some videos) revealed by a mouse roll-over¹¹. The user can navigate through any possible path by clicking on roll-overs, and each roll-over brings the user to a fixed location. For example, if the user clicks on “La Mémoire” the CD-Rom will jump to a screen that contains a main photo, or graphic, which itself contains links to other pre-authored links. *Immemory* is therefore a *reactive* Hypertext documentary. *Reactive* because to each input of the user there is only one pre-established output, and Hypertext because the main logic of it is to navigate through a closed archive. Interactive narrative writer Marie-Laure Ryan would probably see *Immemory*’s structure as a ‘network’ (Fig.2), ‘a hypertext-style decision map allowing circuits’ (2001:248), a model better suited ‘for a system of analogical connections or for Dadaist/surrealist carnivalizations of meaning than for the generation of multiple stories’ (2001:248). *Immemory* has a clear starting point but no clear ending. It is trying to document Chris Marker’s memory by providing paths of explorations within a loose narrative.

¹¹ When the mouse rolls over a picture it reveals a text that can be clicked. If clicked the narrative moves to a new screen that reveals new possible links.



Fig.1 - Immemory, main menu screen

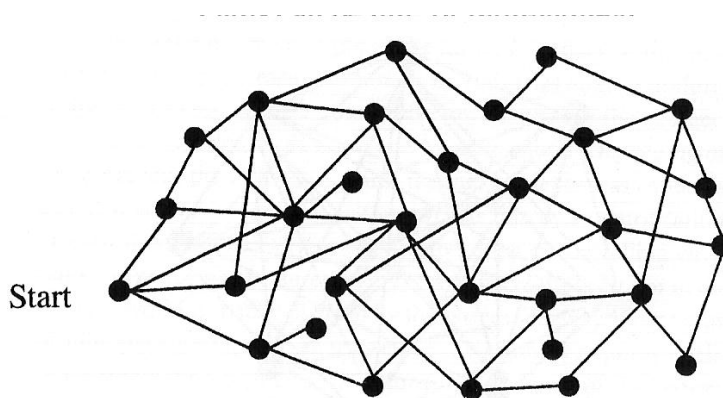


Fig. 2 - Marie-Laure Ryan's Network structure of interactive narrativity

More recently, French company, Honkytonk Films, has produced two web-documentaries with similar structures: *Journey to the End of the Coal*¹² (2008) and *The Big Issue: A Web Documentary on the Obesity Epidemic*¹³ (2009). In *The Big Issue* (2009), a web-documentary about obesity in Europe and America, the user is given the role of an investigator that has to browse through a tree of possible paths. Here again the type of relation between the user and the piece is of a reactive type. After having seen the title sequence

¹² *Journey to the end of the coal* is available online at <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/webdoc/>. Accessed 22.03.10.

¹³ *The Big Issue* is a web-documentary by Samuel Bollendorff and Olivia Colo available at <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/thebigissue/>.

the user finds herself in a surgical operation room. A part from reading some extra information about bariatric¹⁴ surgery the choices of the user are quite clear: 1. “wait for the end of the surgery to talk to the surgeon” 2. “try to meet some other partners” (Fig.3). Each of those choices, if clicked, will lead to a specific new part of the investigation and will eventually cover most of the journey that the authors had planned for the user.

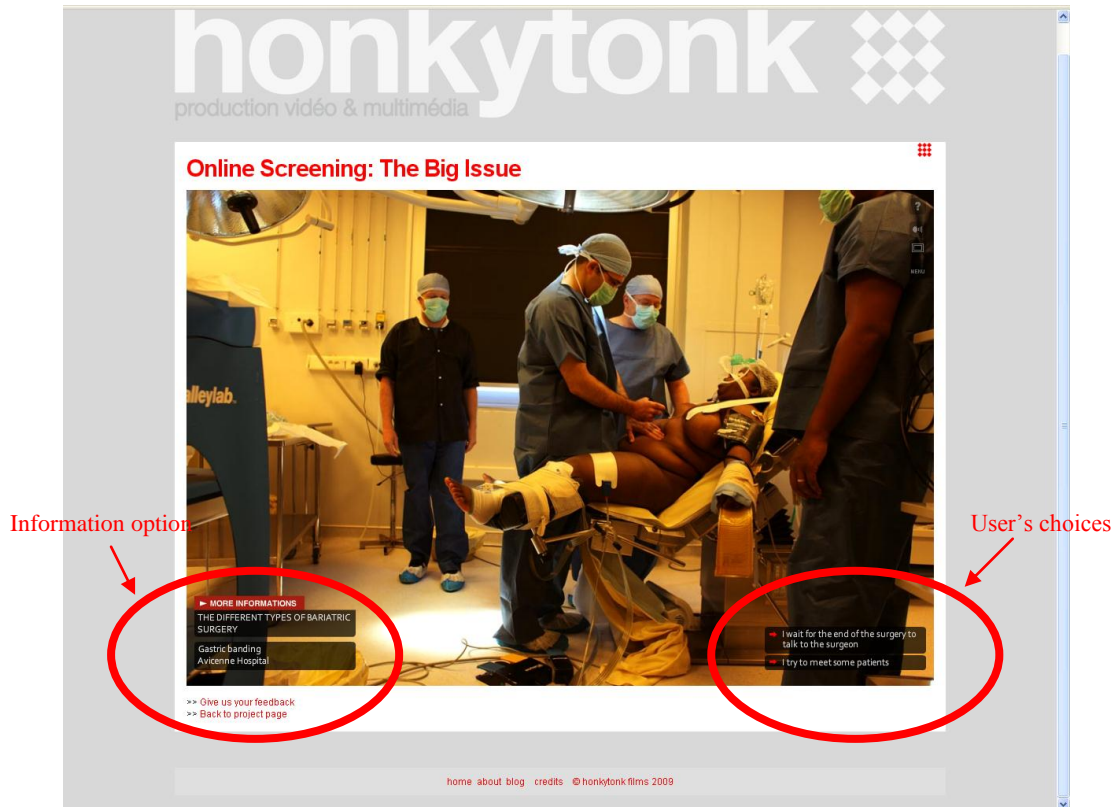


Fig. 3 - First choice screen of the Big Issue <http://www.honkytonk.fr/index.php/thebigissue/>. Note that the red circles, arrows and texts are my own annotations. They indicate choice options for the user.

The structure of *Big Issue* (which is very similar to *Journey to the End of the Coal*) is what Marie-Laure Ryan would describe as a ‘directional network’ or ‘flowchart’ (2001:252) where the user’s journey starts at a fix point and then is lead by few choices meant to lead to a resolution of the story. As Gareth Rees observes ‘the merging narratives keep[s] the story on a single track while offering [the user] an illusion of choice’ (as quoted by Ryan, 2001:252). In the terminology that I am proposing in this research both *Big Issue* and *Journey to the End of the Coal* are Hypertext documentaries with *reactive* interactivity, since to the input of the user the system re-acts delivering pre-established paths.

¹⁴ Bariatric surgeries are performed on the stomach and/or intestines to help people with extreme obesity to lose weight.

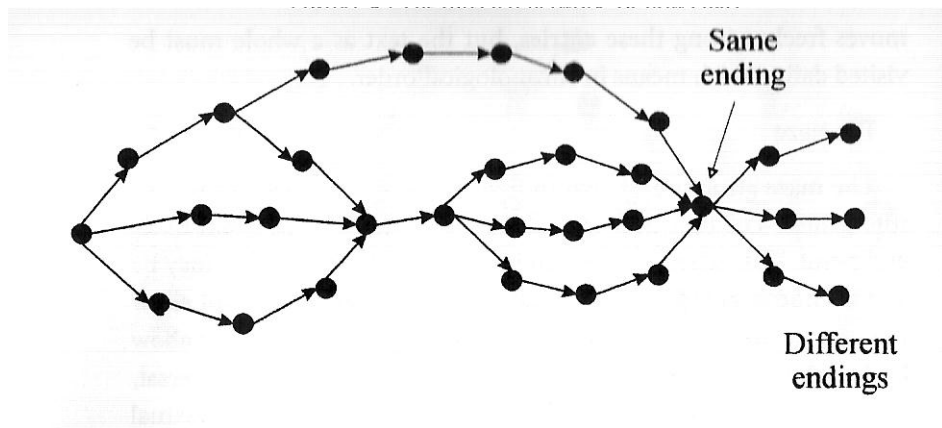


Fig. 4 - Marie-Laure Ryan's diagram of the structure of a directed network, or flowchart (2001:252)

The *reactive* nature of a Hypertext documentary is only linked to the way its hyperlinks are coded. The fact that one input generates only one output allows the author to control the interactive narrativity of its artefact. In *Narrative as Virtual Reality* Marie-Laure Ryan has distinguished between ten possible structure of interactive narrativity. But if the linking logic is not *reactive* but *interactive* (in the sense of not pre-determined and generated in real-time) then the structure of the artefact might vary every time it is accessed by the user.

Effectively the branching options given by the narrative structure can be more or less complex, they can lead to multiple ends or to a single ending, but essentially they are possible routes between a pre-established fix structure. The level of 'reactivity' for the user will go from the simple choice of going ahead or stopping the exploration (to click or not to click) to more elaborated choices that will demand rational thinking (in the case of an investigation) or just mere curiosity (in the case of the *Immemory*). A pre-established linking structure (*Big Issue, Immemory, Journey to the end of the Coal* etc...) assumes that the author accepts to have the control of the possible branching narratives, while a generative linking structure assumes that the author does not want to build a tree of possible narratives but just to build associative logics between families of topics or data. A world, as new media documentary maker Florian Thalsofer says, where 'nothing too unexpected will happen but where I still do not exactly know what will happen'¹⁵.

The case study that I will choose for this research is a case of *interactive* Hypertext documentary, if one wants to follow Hugh Dubberly, Paul Pangaro and Usman Haque's terminology. This means that to the clicking input of the user the system will generate an output that it not totally pre-defined, but that is generated on the fly following rule-based coding. The reason for which I am interested in *interactive*, rather than *reactive*, Hypertext projects is because I believe their level of autopoiesis is higher than in *reactive* projects- since their links are created in real time they self-generate themselves (within a set of finished possibilities) each time they are accessed. As seen in Chapter 4, higher levels of autopoietic behaviour create Live documentaries that are more prone to visualize our being in the world. Since I follow in this research the assumption that we are ourselves autopoietic entities co-emerging with our

¹⁵ From a private interview held in London in 15.01.10.

environment, I prefer to choose a case study that is likely to have related patterns. The interest of the in depth analysis though, will be to see if, and how, an interactive hypertext Live documentary can help us visualize our being in the world.

I will choose as a main case study of Hypertext documentary Florian Thalhofer's *[LoveStoryProject]* (2007), although I am aware that it is not the most representative example of this mode (most Hypertext documentaries are reactive systems).

The [LoveStoryProject] – a case study of Hypertext mode

‘The world is a cloud that is constantly changing. One cannot fully grasp it, because as long as one is part of this world one cannot view its exterior to understand its shape. Theoretically you could examine all of the cloud’s molecules. However, this would require a lot of time. Time during which the world would change again. One would have to freeze the world to watch the molecules in peace in order to understand the world this way. But that is not possible either. The whole world is much, much too large. One could try to freeze and understand smaller sections. And I think this is what we are doing here. We are trying to freeze small sections of the world in order to understand it’.

Florian Thalhofer¹⁶

The [LoveStoryProject] as a dynamic interactive Hypertext LIVE DOCUMENTARY

‘The Korsakow System (pronounced ‘KOR-SA-KOV’) is an easy-to-use computer program for the creation of database films. It was invented by [Florian Thalhofer](#), a Berlin-based media artist. Korsakow Films are films with a twist: They are interactive – the viewer has influence on the K-Film. They are rule-based –K-Films are generative – the order of the scenes is calculated while viewing’¹⁷.

The *[LoveStoryProject]* is a database narrative that is accessible through the internet¹⁸. During five years (2003-2007) Florian Thalhofer has interviewed people from around the world on their views about love. The project started in Cairo in 2003 and slowly moved through Singapore, Dublin, New York and Berlin. People were asked to expand on their definition of love, on their first kiss, on their hopes and fears and more generally on their experience of love. Those interviews were then edited down as single topic grabs, devised into

¹⁶ From Florian Thalhofer’s website. Available at <http://www.cloudx.eu/>, accessed 10.03.10.

¹⁷ From Korsakov’s website. Available at <http://korsakow.org/about>, accessed 10.03.10.

¹⁸ The *[LoveStoryProject]* has also been shown in a art gallery installation context. In this research though I will concentrate on the internet version of the project because there is no archive material of its installation form, and the internet version is by far more accessible to its users.

SNUs (Smallest Narrative Unit)¹⁹ and then linked through a set of rules using the open-source software Korsakow 5. As an author Florian does not want to pre-determine the choices of his audience, he wants to imagine a world of possibilities.

The links are rule based. If you decide on fixed links they create a map that is a fix tree structure, which ultimately is linear. If you link by rules you create a multi-dimensional movie. You walk from one cloud to another and as an author you do not know where exactly in this cloud you are going to be. I do not decide on the order of things but on how groups of videos are linked to each other... and this is a different way to see the world.

From a recorded conversation with Florian Thalhofer (London, 15.01.10)

The Korsakow software²⁰, with which the documentary has been authored, links families of videos by rules (for example: 'link to any video containing the word kiss' or 'link to an interview of a woman') which means that its author organizes the logic of linking but does not know which precise video segment will be proposed by the software to the user. This element of unpredictability adds a level of openness but the fundamental logic of the relation between the user and the content is still, as seen in Chapter 1²¹, that the database is limited and not expandable by the user, the logic of interactivity is inspired by Turner's algorithmic computation, the role of the user is mainly to explore the database and the role of the author is to create possible paths within a closed database. While the user browses videos the assemblage user-interface-machine-server-database-video keeps re-forming itself depending on the paths that are being opened. The logic of construction of such paths can change, and depend from the type of coding used, but since the database is closed and the user is mainly browsing it I will consider it a Hypertext, or Hitchhiking, interactive documentary. If the user had been able to change the linking rules, or directly add to the database it would have come under the Participative Mode.

For the user the [*LoveStoryProject*] opens in a webpage without the need of a particular plugin (Fig. 5). Once clicked on the title a first video appears on a main window and soon after five little image hyperlink appear at the bottom of the window. Each image is the still photo of a character. Quite intuitively if the user clicks on such image she will jump to the grab of that character. When the mouse rolls over the hyperlinks a text appears. Those are key words such as "kiss", "fist love", "love again" etc... which are indicative of the topic that the character will discuss in her grab.

¹⁹ Korsakow turns media assets (video files) into Smallest Narrative Units (SNUs). This involves making rule-based associations between all the media assets in the project, using two kinds of keywords: IN ("I am..." keywords) and OUT ("Looking for...") keywords. A K-Film (Korsakow-film) will only 'work' if there are multiple SNUs with keywords in common. The keywords are derived by the author, based on the content or meaning of each SNU. Where keywords coincide, links are made (edited text taken from Korsakow's tutorial at <http://korsakow.org/learn/quick-start>).

²⁰ Korsakow is an open source software conceived and originally coded by Florian Thalhofer himself that is downloadable from the internet from <http://korsakow.org/>.

²¹ See the chart of 'Modes of interaction in digital interactive documentary' in Chapter 1.

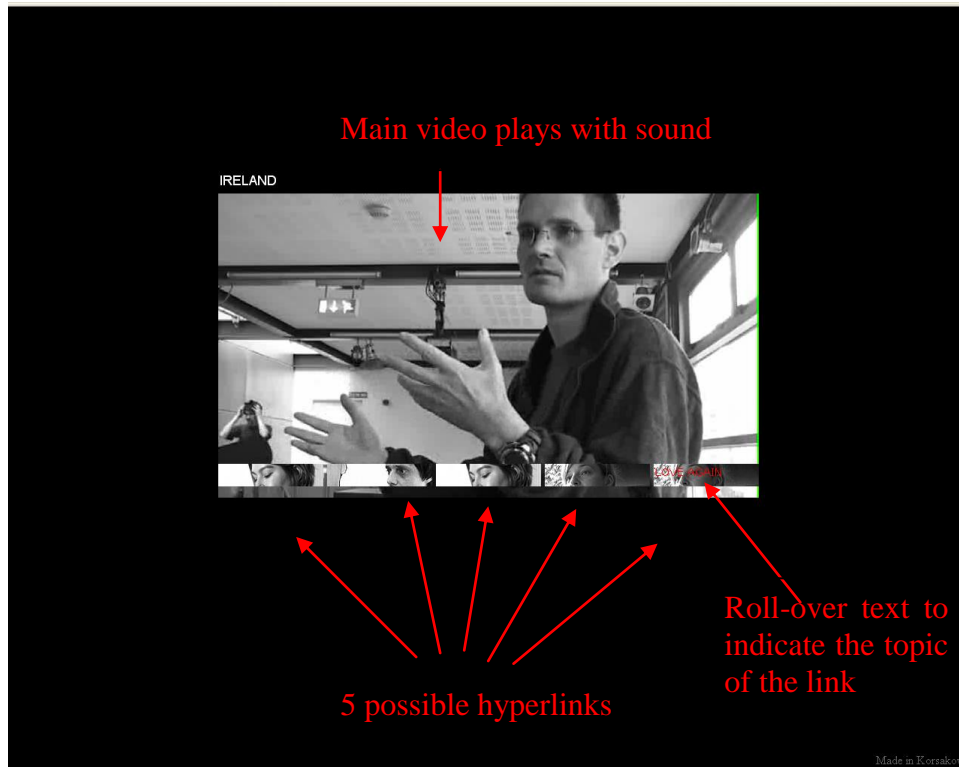


Fig. 5 - The *[LoveStoryProject]*, screen of one interview highlighting the possible links
 Note that the red arrows and texts are my own annotations. They indicate choice options for the user.

The structure of *[LoveStoryProject]* starts as a tree structure, very similar in fact to any other Hypertext documentary, but with the particularity that the links are generated on the fly. So although the number of options are predictable (five or less) the actual interview grabs that will appear are not, and since those options will themselves generate other 5 options it is impossible to fit *[LoveStoryProject]* into one of Marie-Laure Ryan's structures, as it could change every time. You can see here my attempt to graphically represent the *[LoveStoryProject]*'s structure (Fig.6).

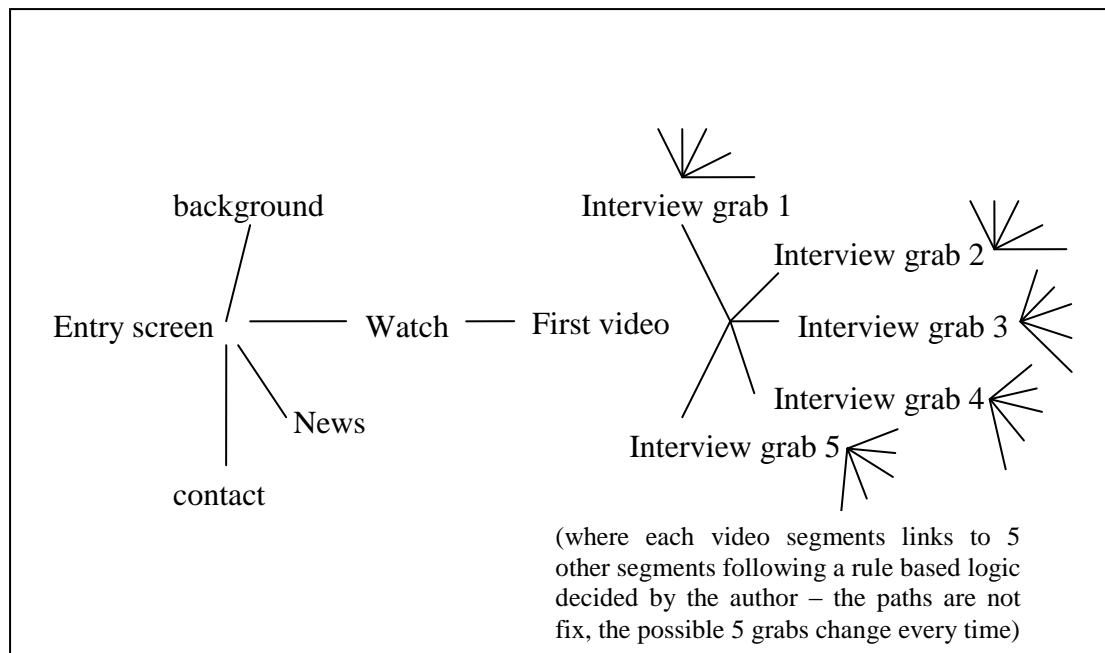


Fig.6 - Narrative path and linking logic of the *[LoveStoryProject]*

Thalhofer describes his project as ‘an evolving and dynamic documentary-film. A film that never is the same twice’ (Thalhofer, <http://www.lovestoryproject.com/>). But what is “dynamic” about it? What does it mean that it is “evolving”? For Thalhofer the film is dynamic because it is never the same twice (the rendering of the linking mechanism will produce a different path for every user) and it is dynamic because he, the author, can always decide to add more interviews if he wants the database to grow.

For me his project is an interactive (not reactive) dynamic (that influences its environment) Live documentary, but not an “evolving” one – in the sense that it only evolves if its author adds content, but cannot evolve via the interaction with its users and network. From an ontological point of view this means that the reality it portrays is a predetermined one where there is no space for novelty to emerge. In order to verify such hypothesis I will use the questions flagged in Chapter 4 and use the Live documentary to zoom into the particularities that make the *[LoveStoryProject]* what it is. My investigation here takes the shape of a question: if I wanted to see the *[LoveStoryProject]* as a relational object, what would I see about it that I do not see now, and which political, aesthetic and ontological consequences would it have? The Live documentary acts here as a magnifying lens that allows me to divide such a big question into four lines of enquiry:

1. what are the main dimensions that compose the *[LoveStoryProject]*?
2. what is its organization and can it change or evolve?
3. how those changes affect its identity, and the identity of the systems that are related to it?
4. what stabilises it or destabilises it, and when does such system stop functioning/existing?

1. What are the main components and dimensions that compose the [LoveStoryProject]?

As seen in Chapter 4, I have defined *dimensions* as ‘a network of relations (which can be of any sort) that links the components that make the Live documentary possible’, and *components* the elements that form the Live documentary and that ‘acquire sense and function depending on the dimension that contains them’. A component can be contained in different dimensions and a dimension can be big or small, depending on how many relations it is composed by. Since dimensions are also potentially infinite I will try to see here which ones seem to emerge from each case study as ‘determinant dimensions’ – in the sense of relations that are crucial to the existence of such Live documentary. It is by isolating distinct dimensions of analysis that one can start zooming into the otherwise endless networked form that a Live documentary is. Different components link to each other into a unique way and create the specificities of the *[LoveStoryProject]*.

The video segments are not enough to create this piece, nor is its interface. Their sum is not the *[LoveStoryProject]*. But the way the videos are linked to the Korsakow interface in this project create a unique artefact. The dimension of analysis video-interface can therefore be useful to understand how the *[LoveStoryProject]* create, or does not create, an immersive experience.

The digital artefact is the result of a concomitance of heterogeneous components: user choices (emotions, interests, background, computer literacy etc...), technical feasibilities (Korsakow coding, internet protocol, server functionality, delivery bandwidth, socio-geographical positioning of the user etc...), author intentionality (what were the “in” and “out” coded for each segment, the aesthetics of the piece, the choice of interviewees... etc). A different balance of any of those components, and of any of the components that constitute them, could have produced different projects.

The shift that the Live documentary allows me to do is to re-unify the entities that are normally seen as independent (the author, the user, the database etc...) and to unify them through lines of determination – meaning assemblages that create the Live documentary. Through the Live documentary I can see the author as part of the project, and not as causal antecedent to it. In the same way I can see the user is part of the project, and not coming “after” its creation. While the *[LoveStoryProject]* is played, all its sub-assemblages are being re-defined through the playing. Like a set of marbles launched on the floor, they form new collisions and new shapes. The author and the user are both being re-defined by their action/reaction interplay and, while this is happening, new sub-assemblages are being created. The difficulty in this approach is in finding a methodology to identify the main dimensions of the Live documentary. If the *[LoveStoryProject]* is an heterogeneous assemblage where human (the author, the users) and non-human (the machine, the code, the network etc...) co-exist and co-create each-other, how can we distinguish between “marginal” and “main” dimensions?

In the following section I will pick a few components and dimensions that I see as determinant in forming the assemblage that is the *[LoveStoryProject]*. As I am part of the *[LoveStoryProject]* Live documentary myself (as a participant and a writer) I am not claiming an outsider “neutral” point of view.

Actually: I am willingly embracing my partiality and select the dimensions that have emerged to me. Maybe, in the process of analysing them, their salience will define aspects of my own self too. Maybe this inevitable partiality will inspire others to find other dimensions more suitable to them. Nevertheless, the logic that I will embrace is the following one: if a dimension is a series of relations I will extract the ones that turn around a dominant component (such as the code, the interface, the platform, the author, the user etc...) and I will then see how such components can behave in a particular dimension²². In the following section I will try to isolate dominant components and see how they relate and form dimensions of analysis of the *[LoveStoryProject]*.

1. the code

The *[LoveStoryProject]* is authored and created with the Korsakow software. It is stored on a server, findable through a search engine, linked by the internet network, it opens through a browser and it runs with a Flash player. Without code there is no *[LoveStoryProject]* therefore it is a determinant component that is itself part of a software: the Korsakow software.

1.1. the Korsakow software

This dimension effectively structures the organisation of the project: what can the user do and how the internal elements of the piece are going to be linked together. But Korsakow itself has a structure and a way of linking its elements: the author will be able to push its structure (especially now that it is an open source software) but effectively she will also be constrained by its affordances. As any software Korsakow depends on other software -its Java scripting, the open source coders that will change it, its interface, its platform and browsers compatibility etc... so it is itself a dynamic complex system. The code is therefore related to the Korsakow software that is itself related to other supporting softwares.

1.2. supporting softwares

Korsakow runs on the internet, and therefore is subject to the internet protocols²³. It also needs a Flash Player (the previous version was running on Shockwave) which means that the viewing of a Korsakow project is subject to a long list of technical compatibilities and that any problem or glitch into such code chain can change, or interrupt, the viewing of the documentary itself. As an Live documentary the *[LoveStoryProject]* is depending on the temporal

²² Obviously depending on the case study the dominant components and dimensions will change because they rotate around different logics of interactivity (as seen in Chapter 1) and of different materialities (platforms, media, code etc...).

²³ 'The Internet protocols are the world's most popular open-system (nonproprietary) protocol suite because they can be used to communicate across any set of interconnected networks and are equally well suited for LAN and WAN communications. The Internet protocols consist of a suite of communication protocols, of which the two best known are the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and the Internet Protocol (IP). The Internet protocol suite not only includes lower-layer protocols (such as TCP and IP), but it also specifies common applications such as electronic mail, terminal emulation, and file transfer' (<http://www.cisco.com/en/US/docs/internetworking/technology/handbook/Internet-Protocols.html>, accessed 20.03.10)

configuration and fitting of all its elements. The software dimension has levels of complexities that will determine *[LoveStoryProject]*'s functioning but also its interface.

[To see how the code is linked, and participates, to the interface dimension keep reading the next paragraph. To see how code can create a legal dimension jump to the “copyright” section, and to see the links between code and a possible social-economical dimensions jump to “the platform” section²⁴.]

2. the interface

Korsakow has its own interface, this interface will influence the authors that will use it by presenting forward certain possibilities more than others. Korsakow influences the interface of the final documentary project itself – as it assumes that the main video is always played into a central frame and that text or image links will be on the side of the main frame²⁵. The interface is not a frame; it is part of the artefact itself. It dictates “a particular configuration of space, time, and surface articulated in the work; a particular sequence of the user’s activities over time in interacting with the work; a particular formal, material and phenomenological user experience” (Manovich, 2001:66). A different interface means a different project.

The interface of the *[LoveStoryProject]* can also be seen as a cultural interface ‘largely made up from elements of other, already familiar forms’ (Manovich, 2001:71). The idea of the main screen comes from the cinema screen, while the hyperlinks come from a well established multi-media language. This cultural interface is easy to understand –allowing a certain fluidity of browsing – but also locked into a well established language and closing Korsakow projects into a relatively fixed aesthetic. The interface dimension offers fluidity of browsing, but also cultural constraints, to the *[LoveStoryProject]*'s user. It creates a visual language where only one video can be played at a time. This video is dominant in size, and is the only one that plays sound. The possible future video clips are represented by photographic icons, and by roll-over texts. It is the simplicity of this interface that creates the easiness of browsing for the user, but it maybe also creates frustration, when the user realises that its choices are limited by a set number of hyperlinks.

[How is this interface structuring, influencing and forging the relations *[LoveStoryProject]*-user? (jump here to “the user” section). How is such interface connected to the control that the author has on the flow if its video database? (jump here to both “the author” and “the code” section)²⁶].

²⁵ Korsakow allows a certain flexibility in the final interface and projects such as *The Way I Saw it* (2007, by Paul Juricic), *Fragments* (2009, Adrian Miles), *Forgotten Flags* (2006, by Florian Thalhofer), *The [LoveStoryProject]* (2003-7, by Florian Thalhofer) or *Rehearsing Reality* (2007, by Nina Simoes) do all look slightly different, but they all work around the same idea: one central window allows the user to watch the main video, and around this window several hypertexts, or hypervideos, link to the next video segment.

²⁶ Potentially, as said before, each component could be linked to multiple dimensions following a rhizomatic logic. In this text I only underline a limited amount of connections, hoping that it will push the reader to create her own ones.

3. the copyright

The legal dimension of Korsakow is determining the future uses of the software, but also the nature of the possible users. Korsakow version 5.0 is a free open source software, and is made available under the GNU General Public License. This means that the software is open to change and that it will transform itself. Future Korsakow projects might look very different from today's projects. This might also create problems of compatibility and re-formatting. Creators that will not update their projects might be at risk of seeing their K-films becoming "second rate" projects, or just "too simple". On the other hand first generation Korsakow projects might be seen as "classics" in a near future. The potential development of open source Korsakow means that the watching conditions, and stylistic references, of actual K-projects will change over time. This will directly impact in the popularity, and potential life-span, of each K-film.

The fact that Korsakow is open source, and free to use, does also partially determine the type of creators that will use it. It is legitimate to imagine that students, artists, media activists etc... might be attracted by Korsakow's zero cost policy. Clearly the type of authors that will use Korsakow will also have an impact on the type of projects that will be created through it... a certain circularity, or reflexivity, is clear here.

[For the relation code-copyright-author jump to the "code", "copyright" and "author" sections].

4. the platform

Korakow is viewable on the internet; it implies internet access and high bandwidth, but also computer literacy, server stability and protocol regulation. The platform dimension of the *[LoveStoryProject]* rules its physical accessibility but also the type of people that will be exposed to it. Here social-economical dimensions of computer accessibility, technical dimensions of signal compatibility and legal dimensions of protocol respect are interlinked. If the *[LoveStoryProject]* keeps freezing, or stumbling, because of poor internet bandwidth, its viewing will be interrupted. For other people, that do not have access to the internet network, the *[LoveStoryProject]* is simply not materializing itself.

[For the relation platform-life length of *[LoveStoryProject]* go to sub-chapter 4: *What stabilises, destabilises, or ends the [LoveStoryProject]*). For the relation author-code-software-platform-media-user-participant go to each individual sections].

5. the media

A Korsakow film can be photo based, text based or video based – or all of those mixed together- and each of those media comes with a background of syntaxes and media praxis knowledge. *2012 (and all that)* (Mél Hogan, 2010), a K-film made exclusively with words with only two letters as hyperlinks, is radically different from *Fragments* (Adrian Miles, 2009), a K-film based on video segments with as many as ten photo hyperlinks to choose from per

screen. Here is not the place to discuss such a vast topic as multi-media aesthetics, but it will be enough to cite what media theorist Lev Manovich says about new media artefacts. In new media artefacts ‘the two sources connected through an hyperlink have equal weight; neither one dominates the other’ (2001:76) thus hyperlinked artefacts ‘can be correlated with contemporary culture’s suspicion of all hierarchies, and preference for the aesthetics of collage in which radically different sources are brought together within a singular object’ (ibidem).

The media here is not only the media modalities contained by the project but also the media that supports the project itself. The *[LoveStoryProject]* is accessible via a computer. The language, the location, the single-viewer/group-viewer, the active/passive etc... dimensions of the *[LoveStoryProject]* experience are themselves related to such media. Florian Thalsofer has also presented the *[LoveStoryProject]* in art galleries²⁷, where the computer presence was more dissimulated and group viewing, rather than single user, was the norm... this other materialization of the *[LoveStoryProject]* possibly makes it “a different project”, although its video content is the same. To link the media with its digital particularities jump to “the code”, “the software”, “the platform” and “the interface” sections.

[To see how *[LoveStoryProject]* might create its own digital aesthetic go to sub-chapter 2: *The [LoveStoryProject]’s ‘organization’: an interactive dynamic Hypertext documentary that affects itself and its environment*). Finally to relate to the larger dimension of digital aesthetics one would have to jump to the vast literature that covers such subject].

6. the authoring

I do not want to see the author’s component as the dominant one, but simply as one element that shapes the digital artefact, especially when considered in relation with other components such as “code” and “software”. The author decides the content of the database and the software that will manage such database, he also cuts the video segments and decides the length of the SNUs and their IN and OUT keywords – that will generate the linking. Florian Thalsofer is the only one that can add new video segments to the *[LoveStoryProject]*. From his point of view this guarantees some narrative and quality continuity. As he told me in a recorded conversation “I am interested in a system where an author can build something. I am a real believer in the author because an author has an interesting view points on things”²⁸. So Florian does not really want to convey a message to his audience, but more a point of view, a way to see things. He does so by fixing the rules by which the scenes relate to each other, so he purposely does not create fixed paths. In dynamic new media artworks “the initial data supplied by the programmer acts as a genotype that is expanded into a full phenotype by the computer.[...] the content of the artwork is the result of [...] a collaboration between the artist/programmer, the computer program, and the user” (Manovich, 2001:67). The author sets up the initial conditions, and the logic that the programme will have to follow, he shapes the logic but not the

²⁷ See <http://www.lovestoryproject.com/> for more details. Accessed 28.03.10.

²⁸ Personal interview with Florian Thalsofer, 10’32”. London 15.01.10.

final form of the *[LoveStoryProject]*. This means that even in a mode of interactive documentary such as the Hypertext one – where the authorial figure is quite dominant- the software takes on board a big part of the authorial decisions, sometimes actualizing the author’s principles or rules, and sometimes calculating new routes for the user/participant.

[What might be the consequences of such relation of semi-control? If an interactive dynamic does co-determine the two, or multiple, agents that it puts in relations... what are the consequences for the author? Jump to sub-chapter 2: *The [LoveStoryProject]’s ‘organization’: an interactive dynamic Hypertext documentary that affects itself and its environment* and to sub-chapter 3: *How do changes affect the identity of the [LoveStoryProject] and the identity of the systems that are related to it?*. Also, who are the participants of such dimension? Jump to “the user”, “the author”, “the code” or “the participant”].

7. the enactor

Who is the enactor in the *[LoveStoryProject]* and what does she “do”? The enactor is the person/entity that by interacting with the digital artefact allows it to move into a new form. In this case the user has to click on a picture to start the process of link generation and move to the next video - this decision is the result of a specific mood, a curiosity for an image, or a reflected choice. If the user makes a choice though, the software transforms it into a direction, and participates to the change. Only when the click happens Korsakow can generate a specific link – out of all the possible ones derived by the set of rules coded by the author – which will flag a new main video with a new selection of possible links to take the story further. If the user does not click on anything the video on the main window will reach its end and normally fade to black. If the user does not make any choice the documentary stays still and stops. Seen from an author centric point of view the user only activates a pre-conceived masterplan. Seen from a software centric point of view the user is the on/off switch that puts it into motion. Seen from a user centric point of view the user is the *raison d’être* of the project, the one for which the project was made and the one that needs to be compelled by the project. But seen from the documentary point of view the user is the co-player, the collaborator that allows the documentary to emerge and to flourish. Until the user acts on it the *[LoveStoryProject]* stays as a potential Live documentary that sits on a server. When the user watches, listens and clicks the *[LoveStoryProject]* takes shape. The interaction between the two is more on the league of game play than of communication, as it is rule based rather than linguistically based. The user is well aware that the number or “answers” from the computer are limited (as opposed to the feeling of a conversation where the answers seem limitless). In the *[LoveStoryProject]* the interface clearly establishes that at each stage there will be a maximum of five possible “answers” from the computer/software/content/author (jump to “the interface” section). Once this rule is understood, and accepted by the user, the collaborator/players can start their encounter. But the *[LoveStoryProject]* is not a game narrative –it has no aim and no winners- it only retains the rhythm of a game, the sending back and forward the ball and the feeling that one needs the other to continue, and yet both players have the power of stopping the game. In the Live

documentary that is the *[LoveStoryProject]* the user is the dimension that links all the others by starting the action and creating a dynamic motion.

[What are the ontological consequences of such user's role? Jump to sub-chapter 3: *How do changes affect the identity of the [LoveStoryProject] and the identity of the systems that are related to it?*). What are the aesthetic consequences of the relation user-interface? Jump to sub-chapter 4: *What stabilises, destabilises, or ends the [LoveStoryProject]*. Finally, is the user always an outsider of the reality that the *[LoveStoryProject]* portrays? Continue and read "the participant"].

8. the participant

The participant dimension is the one that is often referred to as "content". The people that have been interviewed for the *[LoveStoryProject]* have no control on how their grabs have been placed into a new media interface and disseminated onto the web. When interviewed they were "the observed" ones. And yet, any word that has been considered interesting by Florian Thalhofer has been retained to form what the *[LoveStoryProject]* really is: a container of points of views about love. So far, like in any linear documentary, the interviewee is the content that makes the film interesting within a framework given by the author. But since the *[LoveStoryProject]* is an interactive documentary the participant can now also be a user. From her point of view she passes from a first level observer to a third level observer (she observes what her observer has observed). Also, as seen in Chapter 2, she now becomes an en-actor, as she is part of the system that she is observing. Potentially, as a user, she can re-shape the form that contains her. This recursive loop uses the participant's outputs (the interview grabs) as an input for her viewing of the *[LoveStoryProject]*. This process is typical of autopoietic entities, but it normally happens in consecutive time²⁹. In the *[LoveStoryProject]* the participant/user mixes an input and an output that happened in different times and locations. The participant dimension is not anymore a fixed object called content, but a space of recursivity that mixes input and output to create the *[LoveStoryProject]* in real time.

[How can this blurring of boundaries between the user and participant allow us to see our being in the world differently? Jump to sub-chapter 2: *The [LoveStoryProject]'s 'organization': an interactive dynamic Hypertext documentary that affects itself and its environment* and to sub-chapter 3: *How do changes affect the identity of the [LoveStoryProject] and the identity of the systems that are related to it?*].

The eight components that have been described so far are interlinked and create different dimensions, depending on what we want to look at. Components are themselves dimensions when one zooms inside them (as they are themselves composed of other components). Each dimension can become part of another one, and one could zoom out from the Live documentary itself to see how it links to its immediate, or remote, environment. The same chain of connections could be followed on the opposite direction: zooming inside

²⁹ While trying to reach a glass of water my hand is continually informed by my eyes of the distance from the glass (negative feed-back) and this input guides my output in such a way that I eventually smoothly grasp the glass.

the Live documentary to see its internal organization. The next section will concentrate exactly on this: on the organization of the *[LoveStoryProject]* Live documentary.

2. The *[LoveStoryProject]*'s 'organization'

What types of 'organization' is holding the *[LoveStoryProject]*? I return here to Maturana and Varela's definition of organization as '[t]hose relations that must exist among the components of a system for it to be a member of a specific class' (1987:47). I have already made clear in this chapter that I see the *[LoveStoryProject]* as part of a specific class of interactive documentaries: the Hypertext one. Its organization is such that each sequence is linked to another by an algorithm and that its database is closed. This is what makes it part of "a specific class". But, within the class of Hypertext documentaries each artefact is different. The relations that make the *[LoveStoryProject]* what it is are linked to the dimensions that compose it and that link it to other assemblages. Here the dimension code-Korsakow-platform-media is based on a system of relation between video segments that is dictated by the "in" and "out" rules that link the SNUs. Those rules, which are specific to the *[LoveStoryProject]*, because they have been coded by Florian Thalsofer for this project only, are like a behavioural code of conduct of this Live documentary: if this, then go there, if that then do not do anything. Those rules are themselves limited by what Korsakow can and cannot do. We have here a double loop of constraints: the *[LoveStoryProject]* can be what its author has allowed it to become, within the constraint of what its digital materiality allows it to do. The political forces that are made visible by the *[LoveStoryProject]* are the effects of structure, materiality and power on our lives. Participation and agency are possible in the *[LoveStoryProject]* but they are kept at a low level, a level that makes the structure and interface so overwhelmingly visible that the user feels like an observer rather than an actor-participant.

If I wanted now to zoom out of the *[LoveStoryProject]*'s Live documentary and consider those relations that are external to the system I would have to pose my attention to the relationship that the Live documentary forges with its environment. For this I have to clarify what I mean by environment. First of all: it is common understanding that environment is synonymous of externality and surroundings³⁰. My approach is radically different from a dualist vision of organism/environment. I take here Varela's 'middle way' approach where the world is enacted by our history of structural coupling and 'organism and environment enfold into each other and unfold into one other in the fundamental circularity that is life itself' (1993:217). This absence of clear boundaries between in/out also fits with Deleuze, Guattari and DeLanda's assemblage theory, inasmuch that each assemblage is constantly linked with other ones.

³⁰ The Free Dictionary definition of environment is "the circumstances or conditions that surround one". Available at <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/environment>, accessed 18.03.10.

When the user (which is part of the environment- if one takes the documentary's point of view) clicks on a link (which is part of the documentary entity) the effect is both on the user (who discovers a new part of the story) but also on the documentary itself (that becomes one of its possible forms). The circularity of this motion is very clear in the *[LoveStoryProject]*: when clicking on a hyperlink I jump to a new interview and I see new links unfolding on the screen. For me, the user, the story has moved on, my curiosity is new, my emotions are following my interest for the interview that I am discovering, but for the documentary the impact of the click has been a jump, the resolution of a coding algorithm, the firing of a new audio-visual file and the re-organization of the next possibilities available from this point. At each click the *[LoveStoryProject]* re-forms itself as a result of a mutual co-emergence of new forms for both the user and the documentary. This co-emergence is typical of the Live documentary as it happens in real time (hence "live") and shows elements of "aliveness" (in the sense of being alive and of being in movement/action).

Although Florian Thalhoffer sees his system as 'evolving' and 'dynamic', from my point of view it is dynamic³¹ but closed to evolution, in the sense that the changes to its organization and content are not done autonomously but need the intervention of the author. A video can be added, but it will not disrupt the goals and way of functioning of the project. Its organization does not permit it to be independent from its author. Since the user cannot add content to the database of videos that form the artefact, nor can she change the rules that generate links, the organisation of the *[LoveStoryProject]* appears to be closed. At each click the *[LoveStoryProject]* re-forms itself but no click can bring it outside the set of possibilities that characterize its organisation.

What are the implications of having a Live documentary that cannot change its own organisation? The *[LoveStoryProject]* portrays a vision of life as multiple and in movement –there are several possibilities and each leads to something else - the role of the individual is of choice, interpretation and exploration, and not changing the rules of her functioning. There seems to be freedom of exploration but no freedom of action.

This conclusion would probably be shocking to Florian Thalhoffer, as his whole concept is to put the user in front of a non directive piece, where it is the individual that understand what she wants and where the author offers choices rather than certainties. Could it be then, that although the 'machinic'³² aspect of the *[LoveStoryProject]* is organizationally closed the dimension user-interface-code allows for mechanisms of change of a different nature? Could one sustain that interpretation is a mode of change and that it has consequences on both the user and the Live documentary? Could there be other consequences to the "click" of the user than just jumping within videos stored in a database? The next section will see how different levels of what is meant by "actions" can change the ontological role of the *[LoveStoryProject]*.

³¹ As pointed out earlier my use of the word 'dynamic' is different from Florian Thalhoffer's one. For Florian 'dynamic' means that his project does not have fixed links, while for me the *[LoveStoryProject]* is 'dynamic' because it does influence its environment - see Hugh Dubberly, Paul Pangaro and Usman Haque (2009:71).

³² I use here Michael and Irwin's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's term where *machinic* 'refers to the causal relations between objects that make up an assemblage' (2003:120).

3. Do changes affect the identity of the [LoveStoryProject] and/or the identity of the systems that are related to it?

I am aware that any documentary starts from the intentionality of one, or a community, of authors. Since in this chapter I am only considering interactive documentaries, I take the standpoint that, whichever is the topic of the documentary, my starting point will be the logic of interactivity that holds the documentary itself, not the intentionality of the author or the meaning of the piece. These are important elements but they tend to have too much relevance in media analysis so I consciously place them as one of the possible angles of the piece, and not the only relevant ones. I am not interested in video or audio content per se, but in how the production and consumption of such content creates ‘complexes of subjectivation’ (Guattari, 1995:7) and co-emergent identities. For Guattari ‘complexes of subjectivation’ are the result of ‘multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine’ (1995:7). Subjectivity ‘does not only produce itself through the psychogenetic stages of psychoanalysis or the “mathemes” of the Unconscious, but also in the large-scale social machines of language and the mass media –which cannot be described as human’ (1995:9). The interdependence between human subjectivity and mass media machines, such as the computer and the Live documentary, is what interests me.

In a similar line, although in a more human-centric way, when Jonathan Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy analyse digital games they remind us that ‘understanding subjectivity becomes a matter of understanding people’s individual relation to technics as much as understanding geographies, class, race, gender, age or sexuality’ (2007:1) and they opt for ‘a view of subjectivity that challenges the notions of a fixed or stable identity by starting from the idea of an always relational and always situated self’ (2007:6). What I claim in this research is that if identity is always relational and interaction is co-constitutive (a notion that I take from structural coupling and enactment) than the identities that are co-created in interactive documentaries are multiple and they include the interactive documentary itself and all the subjects that are in contact with it.

The interactive documentary might not have a subjectivity (because it does not have a conscious self) but it has an identity and a point of view (even if it is a non conscious one). For psychiatrist David Galin any dynamic system (even a non conscious one) has a point of view, which is to be understood as ‘the total set of possible discriminations an entity can make in its present state and context’ (1999:225). The point of view depends on the properties of the entity³³, its materiality (what it is made of, its technical support, its structuring code, the media that it supports), its organization³⁴, and the time, place and context of the entity. Basically it depends on its possible behaviours. The code that links the [LoveStoryProject]’s SNUs dictates the possible set of options

³³ Where “entity” is a unit, a wholeness, a kind of form. Galin defines an entity as ‘a group of bits or elements distinguished from those in its environment by ‘belonging to each other’ in some sense’ (1999:224).

³⁴ Here again I take Varela’s understanding of the word “organization” (see note 8).

that the entity [*LoveStoryProject*] has at any present state and context. Those links being not pre-defined give the artefact an identity that keeps changing at every click of the user, and yet maintains its organisation. This is the base of their circular autopoietic relationship: the user affects the artefact, the artefact adjusts to those changes and reshapes itself demanding an new adjustment of the user's point of view etc... they are both acting as self-regulating and self-making systems and yet they are in constant relationship with each others.

So, what is the effect of the relation between subjectivity and the linking action of the user?

When the [*LoveStoryProject*] begins a title sequence starts in the main video window and five portrait-hyperlinks appear on the bottom of the screen. How do I choose between the five options that are on the screen? My first *instinct* is to go for a face that interests me. Am I going for the Muslim looking woman, the gay-looking girl, the blond woman, the guy with glasses or for the handsome looking guy? Am I choosing the person, the religion or the sexual orientation? Those choices are not conscious; all I notice is that my hand tends to bring the mouse over the type of person that I would want to talk to socially. But when my mouse rolls over the picture of the selected person a text appears. My rational side takes over. I now read that under the Muslim woman a text says "falling in love", while the gay-looking girl has "love again" and the handsome guy has "freedom". My mind does a series of quick associations. My instinctive tendency to go for the handsome guy is now diminished by the fact that I *assume* he will speak about the fact that he does not want any serious love story because he wants to be free (hence the text "freedom"). Suddenly the Muslim woman, that had not interested me at first, gains my attention. If she is going to speak about "falling in love", and she might do so from a Muslim point of view, it might be interesting. I click on her. Her video clip starts playing on the main video window. She is talking about her first love but she does so in a totally non-religious way. I am somehow disappointed; I was hoping to have an insight into some other culture than mine. While still listening to her I quickly *decide* to get out of this video by clicking into one of the five hyperlinks that have now appeared on bottom of the screen.

How have those two minutes of exploration of the [*LoveStoryProject*] affected me and the project itself? The project, as said before, has just reformed itself twice, following my two clicks. Not only it has generated two if its possible facets but those facets have generated its next possible forms.

But what about me? How has the [*LoveStoryProject*] affected me?

While watching the [*LoveStoryProject*] I was very conscious that the piece was depending on me making choices. This position has 'resingularised' me, as Guattari would say (1995:7). Each click is a choice that defines me: what attracted me to the handsome guy? Why did I assume that he would speak about not wanting a stable relationship with a woman? After all, the "freedom" rollover could as well have lead him to explain how much he feels free in his serious and long term relationship. Why did I decide that a religious take on love would be interesting? What does all this say about me? At each of those decision points I have positioned myself as "a woman that is attracted by a handsome guy", as "a woman that does not trust handsome men's love commitments" and as a "woman that is interested in cultural diversities". I am

obviously all of these women. I have quickly passed through each of those “me” and eventually, by clicking on the Muslim lady, I have positioned myself as “a woman that, in this precise moment, prefers cultural differences to handsome men”. Probably, next time I will encounter the handsome man, I will click on him without even reading his roll-over, since the *[LoveStoryProject]*’s simple interface allows me to click on a face without reading the text (if I click quickly the text does not have the time to appear). There is here a constant play between a cognitive choice (the click on a text that depends on the meaning of such text) and the affective choice (that just follows an instantaneous curiosity) and I believe this is one of the elements that makes the *[LoveStoryProject]* such an interesting project. The fluidity of its experience depends on the fact that as a user I can constantly follow both my affective and rational side. I have the power to cut people in the middle of their sentence and to jump to someone else that, in that moment, seems more interesting to me. I have the power to stop, to choose, to cut. What are the implications of such power? I am not listening to people’s ideas about love anymore; I am searching for what might interest me in their experience of love. I search for satisfaction, not for explanations. The interactive media has put me on the side of the seekers, not of the listeners. This is one of the most difficult problems for interactive authors: their product needs to be interesting enough for the user so that she will want to actively explore it. But this is also a new way of consuming documentary content: the user is not the third level observer that she used to be in linear documentaries (the observer of the filmmaker’ observations) but she is stepping into an enactor chair³⁵: she is actively searching through a world of possibilities offered by the interactive documentary. While most users would describe themselves as browsing through the *[LoveStoryProject]*’s content I would argue that they actually constantly take position upon this content and that they relate to the interviews with a position of power that would not have been possible in linear documentary. If it is true, as seen in the last section, that the user cannot change the options, nor the content, that form the *[LoveStoryProject]* this does not necessarily mean that this Live documentary portrays the image of a fixed world where the individual has no power. The political position of the individual here is in making the cut possible, in taking a position in the world, in making sense of it, and therefore in defining herself.

The originary moment for the creation of a system, according to Niklas Luhmann, comes when an observer makes a cut. Before the cut- before any cut- is made, only an undifferentiated complexity exists, impossible to comprehend in its noisy multifariousness... the cut helps to tame the noise of the world by introducing distinction, which can be understood in its elemental sense as a form, a boundary between the inside and the outside. What is inside is further divided and organized as other distinctions flow from this first distinction, until a fully-fledged system is in place.

³⁵ As seen in Chapter 2 in an enacted vision of perception we do not passively perceive a reality out there, but we actively form it through our sensori-motor abilities. Through each click we actively and take a direction that gives meaning to what is to follow.

On the other side what are the limitations of my “cutting” power? My freedom is contained between clear boundaries: I only have five possible choices at a time and I ignore the rules that link my choices. I act in a world that was pre-given to me, how am I supposed to interpret my position in the world? If I had not done some research about the *[LoveStoryProject]* I would probably have not spotted that the links are rule-based. To the one off player a link is just a link. It is only because I purposely restarted the *[LoveStoryProject]* five consecutive times that I realized that each time a different sequence of possible links had emerged. What has this added to my experience? The idea that each *[LoveStoryProject]* is a different movie has pushed me to be more playful with it. I can start it again and again and always see something different. But at the same time it has given me a sense of responsibility: I cannot come back next time and try “the other link”, because the chances are that this set of link will never re-propose itself. A bit like in the “real world” my actions have consequences that I have to accept and feel responsible for. Here again, would this feeling of responsibility be possible in a linear documentary? Will it influence the way I view the world outside of the *[LoveStoryProject]*?

Finally once I know that the *[LoveStoryProject]* is a ruled-based narrative I cannot help but wondering which are the rules behind the clicks. Like in any relationship between human beings and the world one cannot stop questioning “what is behind it”. While a reactive branching Hypertext documentary can be fully explored (it is just a matter of going through every single possibility) an interactive Hypertext documentary is a world that we cannot fully understand. While I define my position in this world through every single cut, while I singularise myself through my choices, I modify the world that I am in, but I do not grasp it. The encounter between the two dynamic systems that we are temporary defines us, but since I am part of this new Live documentary that is the *[LoveStoryProject]* I can only have a first-person’s view. Am I re-enacting, through the *[LoveStoryProject]*, my fundamental position as a human being in the world? Is the *[LoveStoryProject]* pushing forward a constructivist view of perception, where I make sense of the finite input that my body receives from the world by making embodied actions that define me as an autonomous responsible being? One of the fundamental hypothesis of this research is that interactive media are more apt than linear media to re-create the enacted relationship that we have with our world.

4. What stabilises, destabilises, or ends the *[LoveStoryProject]* ?

The *[LoveStoryProject]* does not need a specific plug-in. It runs on flash, but most computers have flash pre-installed on them. This means that although the database is stored on a server it materializes on the computer screens of its users by a simple click on a website menu. By clicking “watch” the introduction video starts playing and generates on the fly the first five possible interview grabs. Since the architecture and organization of *[LoveStoryProject]* is closed, the user has no way to modify it. A part from an external computer crash, or a server default, which could interrupt the flow of the project, the

documentary will keep running depending entirely from the rhythmic relationship between the choices of the user and the dynamic algorithmic calculations of the Korsakow software. If the user stops clicking the current video segment will run till its end, go silent, and leave a black screen with five active possible links. Those links will stay as potential paths if the user does not select them. The silent computer screen (there is no audio looping on the background) will wait, and eventually disappear when the user will close the browser window, or just exit the website. So what would it mean to speak of stabilization or destabilization of the system in such case?

In Deleuze and Guattari's work the notion of stabilization or destabilization is linked to the one of 'territorialisation'. When DeLanda has used such notion in the context of social studies he has described 'territorialisation' as a process that 'increases the internal homogeneity of the assemblage' (2006:12). In the social entities that DeLanda is considering in *A New Philosophy of Society* territorialisation stabilizes an assemblage via a spatial process (for example face-to-face conversation) or by excluding certain people from an organization. Is exclusion of unwanted people a mechanism of territorialisation for the *[LoveStoryProject]*? I believe not. People that do not have access to a computer, or no access to digital media culture, are effectively excluded, but the *[LoveStoryProject]* does not seek its authority in computer literacy. On the contrary its authority is given by the fact that it presents itself as a free to view art project that is accessible to anybody with a computer and broadband. A hacker that wanted to take down the *[LoveStoryProject]*'s website would be considered a threat, but a non-user is not. The more the users, the more the artwork gains authority. On its website³⁶ Florian writes 'In 2005 the *[LoveStoryProject]* was invited to the Fringe-Festival in Dublin. In September 2006 more interviews were made for the Berlin Blind Date Party, organized by Jim Avignon at Galapagos Art Space in Brooklyn, New York'³⁷. The project is therefore presented as an experimental video art piece sponsored by the Goethe Institute. It is presented as a work of art done by an artist and backed up by a cultural organization. There is a big difference between what gives authority to the *[LoveStoryProject]* and what stabilizes it. Authority has to do with external recognitions, while stability guarantees a longer life to the project. I believe that if the concepts of territorialisation/deterritorialisation are crucial in Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory (later applied to social entities by DeLanda) they might be less relevant in the Live documentary. As I will explain in the next paragraphs, I believe that stabilization in a Live documentary is not about homogeneity but about fluidity and immersion.

When considering what stabilises and destabilises an autopoietic assemblage such as the *[LoveStoryProject]* one needs to consider different levels of relations: relations within its technical dimension, within its cultural dimension and within its author-interface-user dimension. Those three dimensions, and probably more, are the ones that assure that the *[LoveStoryProject]* is played/viewed for a certain amount of time and that it can be played/viewed. Any disruption to the Live documentary's external relations, the connections between the piece and a technological infrastructure

³⁶ From <http://www.xxlove.thalhofers.net/>, accessed 22.03.10.

³⁷ From <http://www.lovestoryproject.com/>, accessed 22.03.10.

such as the internet, Korsakow and the computer, could be lethal to the project. These disruptions could be of technical order but also of political, viral or economical order. If a government was to censor the website, if a virus was to attach the server or if electrical power cuts were to happen, the access to the [LoveStoryProject] would immediately stop or be seriously altered. If any of those disruptions were to happen, the [LoveStoryProject] would effectively stop functioning, or simply disappear from the Web. This can be seen as a form of death, a possible ending point to the Live documentary's existence.

Disruptions to its internal relations, relations that happen while the project is running, can also disrupt the life of the artefact. If the user is captured by the multiplicity and diversity of points of views portrayed by the [LoveStoryProject] a certain stability is established and the interactive documentary will have the time to evolve and show its multiple facets. If the user is not grabbed by the pleasures of choosing one face and hearing her point of view, or if technical problems modify the speed of such interaction (for example if the speed of the streaming is slow and keeps disrupting the video viewing), then the *flow*³⁸ of the experience will be disrupted and the documentary could be stopped or closed. The [LoveStoryProject] only exists if its experience is fluid and of interest to its user. The moment the flow is interrupted the user is bored and stops choosing between options. At that moment the [LoveStoryProject] stops calculating its possible new directions and stops generating new forms of itself. As any Live documentary, the [LoveStoryProject] has certain autopoietic behaviours. As we will see in the next case studies certain Live documentaries are more autopoietic than others, but all of them can stop existing at any moment if their organization is not able to function anymore. Since the [LoveStoryProject]'s organization, as we have seen earlier, depends on both internal and external relations its existence will have different life-spans. Its eradication is possible if the website disappears for one reason or another from the internet, but its subjective life-span is also influenced by the length and quality of connections that are established with the different users that give it a temporal life by the simple fact of viewing it.

Finally, what can determine the length of the user- Live documentary life span of the [LoveStoryProject]? In other terms: what creates the immersion, interest and flow that will keep the user "in relation" with the [LoveStoryProject] for a certain duration?

Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi considers that flow requires 'a balance between the challenges perceived in a given situation and the skills a person brings to it' (1990:30). The skills required to the user in the [LoveStoryProject] are very low: one just needs to click on a face (or on the roll-over text that appears on the face if the mouse rolls over it). This means

³⁸ By *flow* I mean the successful feeling of fluidity that can happen when the interplay user/content/machine works well enough to be immersive for the user/participant. Studying the feeling of immersion that artists can experience while painting, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called flow the 'optimal experience' (1990:24) achieved when the goal-seeking tendency that shapes the choices we make among alternatives feels in harmony with the contents of our consciousness. Flow theory can be applied to any activity that creates a fluid experience between man and tools/machines (paint brushes, music instrument... and also computers).

that the flow is not determined by the difficulty of the task (which might be a motor of immersion for some game narratives) but by the perceived interest of the videos. More exactly, the content of the interview grabs, their relevance to the user's perception of love, or the challenge that they represent to the user's point of view is what holds the piece together. The *[LoveStoryProject]* is a carefully crafted piece of multi-cultural and multi-personal points of views on a common topic. It is its efforts to portray love in its multiple dimensionalities that is touching. For some users though the absence of a unique narrative path might be difficult. As all branching non-linear narratives the *[LoveStoryProject]* is based on the logic of choices, it has multiple narrative paths and no fixed ending. What holds it together is what the user might find in between the content of its interviews and in the associations of its links. The *[LoveStoryProject]*'s interviews are not meant to prove a precise point, on the contrary, as Florian says 'without claiming universal validity, the answers provide a new perspective on your own and the other culture'³⁹. The piece is meant to open one's mind, to add perspectives and to create self-reflection. The aesthetic of the hypertext Live documentary assumes a willing participation of the user in the act of choosing within a set of options... can such logic sustain flow for a long time? At which point does the user stop her linking function between the database and the software, and why? The power to stop this machinic encounter ultimately belongs to the user: she is the one that can say "no", or "enough", to the *[LoveStoryProject]*. While the power to choose options during the viewing of the hypertext documentary is somehow limited and pre-orchestrated by the author, the power to stop viewing is totally in the hands of the viewer. This could happen at any moment, and this is the act that determines the temporary life span of the Live documentary. Politically the *[LoveStoryProject]* asks participants to find their desires and beliefs, more than their voice. If they cannot add to the database, they can say no to it. If they cannot communicate their thoughts to others via the Live documentary, they can still formulate their own answers for themselves. But more importantly: when choosing between options users are not supposed to find "the best grab", "the narrative highlight", but to position themselves while constantly asking "do I care", "do I want more of this"? Even if often flagged as an exploratory and observational journey for the user (Ryan, 2005; Platt, 1995) the hypertext Live documentary is actually more a journey of self discovery, where desire and interpretation are more important than action.

Conclusion

In this research I propose to use the concept of the Live documentary (elaborated in Chapter 4) to look at interactive documentaries from a relational point of view, rather than from a film theory one. In this Chapter I apply such relational approach to the Hypertext interactive documentary (one of the four interactive documentaries modes coined in Chapter 1: Hypertext, Conversational, Participative and Experiential) using the frame of the Live documentary. I am questioning if a Hypertext interactive documentary can be

³⁹ From <http://www.lovestoryproject.com/>, accessed 22.03.10.

seen as a dynamic system (in the sense that it can act on its environment) that has an organization (a logic of interaction and self-organisation that determines what it is), that has a structure (the materiality of its components but also their relations to technical protocols and design decisions), that can be more or less open to change (operationally closed/open) and that can have levels of self-making (levels of autopoiesis).

I start by recalling the main characteristics of the Hypertext mode, which is characterized by the exploration of a database narrative, with a database that is closed and links that can be pre-determined or rule-based. I make the distinction between *reactive* (one input- one output) and *interactive* documentary (one input-many possible outputs) and I choose as a main case study the [*LoveStoryProject*], a dynamic *interactive* documentary. I then use the concept of the Live documentary to identify and explore the heterogeneous *components* and *dimension* that form the [*LoveStoryProject*]. I define *components* as elements that constitute the Live documentary that do not exist as a single unity, since they acquire their sense and function depending on the dimensions that contain them. I define *dimensions* are networks of relations (which can be of any sort) and that link the elements that make the Live documentary possible. My assumption is that by zooming in and out of such dimensions I will be able to see the [*LoveStoryProject*] as a richer digital object, as an artefact that is much more than a documentary that has been digitized and distributed on the Web.

I start by selecting some components that I see as determinant in the [*LoveStoryProject*]. I then link those components to the possible dimensions that they can form, noticing that such dimensions are interconnected and co-existent. After unwrapping some of those dimensions I link them to see how the [*LoveStoryProject*] is organized as a system. I notice that its organization has a database logic where the author/software/user sub-assemblages sees the author as the only one that can add content to the archive, and the user as the only one that allows the project to materialize in its different forms - code and technical glitches permitting. Through this mechanism, the user is placed in an enacted position within a limited world of which the rules are not known to the user. Via the linking process both the user and the documentary co-emerge and co-constitute the Live documentary that is the [*LoveStoryProject*]. During this rhythmic encounter they both shift identities resingularising themselves through each click. I argue that the [*LoveStoryProject*] has an identity, even if it is an unconscious one, represented by the set of possibilities that are present at each moment in time. Its identity is therefore linked to the user's one, since she is the one that triggers the different forms of the artefact. This makes me question the ontological role of the [*LoveStoryProject*].

On a first glance the relation user- Live documentary seems to limit the power of the user to her clicks, to her choices within pre-established options, and to her interpretation of the videos. This would suggest that we, as human beings, have freedom of exploration and interpretation but no freedom of action. And yet, using the concept of the Live documentary to zoom into the user-video dimension I can see that while the documentary materializes in different forms the user shifts from "user" to "someone that is interested in religion" or "someone that is interested in handsome guys" (etc...) gaining responsibility and subjectivity through each choice. To me this indicates that the user is not only browsing the artefact but, through this act, she is constantly creating new

possible subjectivities. The political position of the individual here is in making the cut possible, in taking a position in the world and in making sense of it. The user also has a final power: the one of stopping interacting with the *[LoveStoryProject]* and, de facto, terminating the Live documentary's temporary life. This final act requests a search for desire, as one has to ponder how much one cares about the *[LoveStoryProject]* and how much time and effort one wants to dedicate in this relationship. Politically the *[LoveStoryProject]* asks participants to find their desires and beliefs, more than their active voices. This is a world where desire and interpretation are more important than action.

Finally I question what stabilises and destabilises the *[LoveStoryProject]*. I realise that any disruption to its external relations, the connections between the *[LoveStoryProject]* and its technological infrastructure (the internet, Korsakow and the computer) could be lethal to the Live documentary. These disruptions could be of technical order but also of political, viral or economical order. I also note that dimensions such as the user-computer one can act on the temporary life of the Live documentary. If life is considered as the materialization of the digital artefact through the interaction with the user – rather than the mere existence of digital data on a server – then the user can stabilise and destabilise the *[LoveStoryProject]*. By not choosing, or browsing out of its website, the user stops the fluid functioning of the digital artefact. As any autopoietic entity the *[LoveStoryProject]* can stop existing at any moment when its organization is not able to function anymore.

(Next Chapter: the *Experiential* interactive documentary through the lenses of the Live documentary)