

Dokumentwerden

[*Becoming a document*]

Temporality | Work | Materialization



CALL FOR PAPERS

for the annual conference of the DFG Research Training Group *Documentary Practices: Excess and Privation* | Ruhr University Bochum | 05 - 07 May 2022 | Kunstmuseum Bochum

How does something become a document? Definitions of 'document' (and the adjective 'documentary') usually suggest defining it either in terms of its function (based on its etymological root, *docere*, meaning 'show' or 'teach'), or in terms of a delimitable subject area, which is in turn defined by its (problematic) reference to reality. In focusing on the process of 'Dokumentwerden' (*becoming a document*), we want to examine the processes – translations, mobilizations, applications – which underlie documentary practices and undermine such a dichotomy. Documents (as media artefacts of documentation) allow documentary practices, even call for them; they thus demand a specific approach to concrete materialities, which takes into account their referential character. Conversely, it is practices of showing, attesting, preserving or presenting that create documents in the first place, and allow us to read media artefacts as documentations.

The annual conference of the interdisciplinary graduate research group 2132, *Documentary Practices: Excess and Privation*, aims to test the potential of such a processual definition of documentary practices, both from a theoretical perspective and in relation to concrete objects. Here we suggest categorizing processes of *Dokumentwerden* in terms of three dimensions – though this is not intended as an exhaustive list of all possible perspectives.

1 | Temporality

How do the documentation of time, the temporality of documents, and documents from times past (and present) relate to one another? One area of enquiry here is the temporalities of documentary practice, the problematic reference of the document to past and future events. Another is the role of the temporal dimension in the production of a document.

How can we reflect on the process of *Dokumentwerden* against the background of contemporary debates on temporality, which critically examine the assertion of evidentness, presentness and heterochrony, countering it with e.g. queer-feminist, more-than-human, decolonial ways of *Dokumentwerden*? What role is played here by the institutional and theoretical conditions and temporalities of the archive, or by forensic practices of demonstration (e.g. in scientific-artistic works by Lawrence Abu Hamdan or Allan Sekula), in queer video art or film installations (e.g. by Boudry/Lorenz or Sharon Hayes), or in (fictionalizing) documentary approaches to theatre (e.g. in the work of Milo Rau, Rabih Mroué, Walid Raad). Another matter to consider, in light of this documentary engagement with temporal structures, is the claim that (algorithmic) data processing can make it possible to document the future.

2 | (Collaborative) Work

The second focus of the conference programme is on processes of work and collaboration that aim to produce documents. Under what circumstances and by what work processes can something become a document? What actors are involved in these processes? Which forms of (im)material work or care work go into the process of *Dokumentwerden*, and how can they be made visible? Questions such as these can be applied, for example, to the complex collaborative production processes in film and photography, or to the documentations of everyday life in social media. Can *Dokumentwerden* be described as a collaborative practice? And what political and ethical questions play a part here? How – to borrow a concept from Ariella Azoulay – might we conceive of a 'civil contract' of documentary practice?

A further question that arises is how work itself becomes a document. How do contemporary and historical documentary work and the documentation of work relate to each other, and how does this tension shape their media forms? Possible examples include the description of work as the starting point for a Marxist critique of society in the work of Friedrich Engels; undercover or socially oriented journalism;

the 'worker correspondent' movement in the Weimar Republic; or the process by which subjects and work processes literally *become* documents under the conditions of bureaucracy and administration.

3 | Materialization

Our final concern is to consider *Dokumentwerden* as a process of materialization. How are documentary practices and their material conditions connected, to what extent can documentary material be understood as a resource, and what role do documents have in an economy of global extraction? At this point it would be good to try out a shift in perspective, focusing attention not on the representational-symbolic qualities of documents, but on their material-indexical qualities – from artefact to relic. It is also worth thinking about chains of translation, reallocation and recontextualization of documentary infrastructures, which open up the technological status of a global 'architecture of security' for practices of counter\documentation (*Gegen\Dokumentation*), e.g. in the work of Trevor Paglen or Natascha Sadr Haghghian. Another element in the exploration of the material dimension of *Dokumentwerden* is discussion of the 'obstinacy of things' (*Eigensinn der Dinge*, Hans Peter Hahn), examination of the non-intentional excess that each document owes to its material constitution. For example, a writer's work is work *on the paper*, and the paper's materiality and agency find their own expression in reflection on literary creation (e.g. as a scene of writing).

For a joint interdisciplinary discussion of these ideas, we – the doctoral candidates and post-doctoral researchers of the Bochum graduate research group – would especially welcome contributions from media studies, literary studies, film studies, art history, visual studies, theatre studies, cultural studies, the social sciences and political science. We would also welcome praxeological studies and forms of artistic research, as well as artistic formats. The conference is open to alternative forms of presentation as well as scholarly lectures.

Contributions should be **15-20 minutes** in length and can be submitted in German or English. Please email an abstract of max. 3000 characters and a short biography to dokumentwerden-tagung@rub.de. Deadline **November 15th 2021**.

Organization: Cynthia Browne, Theodor Frisorger, Jana Hecktor, Philipp Hohmann, Vanessa Klomfaß, Tilman Richter, Julia Schade
Team: Marion Biet, Carina Dauven, Vera Mader, Susanne Nienhaus, Anna Polze, Julia Reich, Fynn-Adrian Richter, Jan Harms
Website: rub.de/dokumentwerden-tagung
Contact: dokumentwerden-tagung@rub.de