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The Moving Image: Expanded Documentary Practice in Contemporary Art

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The shifting styles and approaches to documentary make the definition of documentary practice increasingly problematic. The term 'expanded' refers to the flexible role and evolving definition of documentary in the artistic context and digital age, in which the merging of documentary with other art forms such as video or art intervention results in an entirely new form of documentary practice. The expanding nature of documentary art, as emphasised by several scholars and practitioners, lies in the very ambiguity of the term "documentary". The boundaries between reality and fiction are often ambiguous. The abundance of ambiguities that surround the domain of documentary creates vast scope for theoretical debate and practical experimentation, and the complexities and problems that arise as a result of documentary's uncertainty serve as one of the most appealing aspects for artists. It is the interplay of these opposing elements in the genre of documentary that create innovative contributions to the field of contemporary art, and demand closer analysis.

Documentary practice has begun to be positioned entirely differently within the art context. This article makes reference to several documentary artists (namely Peter Watkins, Patrick Keiller and Phil Collins), as well as documentary discourse, referencing in particular the analysis of Hito Steyerl, who has explored extensively the role of documentary in the context of contemporary art.