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At the edge of documentary: participatory online nonfiction

Abstract:

Calls for participatory nonfiction are not new, particularly from the ethnographic film movement. However, the Internet has given them new momentum. User-generated content (UGC) and its online distribution through social media have created a largely untapped resource for producers of co-created nonfiction. Resultant opportunities and challenges exist on three interpenetrating continua: firstly, sourcing content; secondly, structure and form; and thirdly, distribution. I will propose a typology with examples of recent projects. Some co-created projects claim to be documentaries. Their relationship to that form depends on whether a coherent ‘voice’ rises above the database of multi-vocal elements such projects contain. Online co-created nonfiction projects may be more participatory, but participation may come at the cost of received ideas of documentary practice (for example, those of Grierson 1946; Renov 2004 and Nichols 1983). The opportunities of UGC and co-creation suggest that a new space is being excavated in nonfiction – one concerned with community and niche cultures rather than addressing an external audience looking for recognisable encounters with documentary practice. The creators of these hybrid projects must develop a more sophisticated understanding of documentary practice if they wish to appeal to a wider audience. Meanwhile, scholars should be wary of including all co-created nonfiction within the scope of documentary practice, as this move threatens to render that term meaningless.

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Far too many contemporary filmmakers appear to have lost their voice. Politically, they forfeit their own voice for that of others (usually characters recruited to the film and interviewed). Formally, they disavow the complexity of voice, and discourse, for the apparent simplicities of faithful observation or respectful representation, the treacherous simplicities of an unquestioned empiricism (the world and its truths exist; they need only be dusted off and reported) (Nichols 1983: 18).

This paper explores the extent to which Nichols' critique (quoted above), written more than thirty years ago, remains relevant to a new breed of participatory nonfiction, which re-appropriates user-generated content (UGC). What happens to the media maker's voice when he or she is dependent on other people's media? Can arguments be mounted and sustained in sophisticated ways if you are reliant on UGC? What is to be gained from UGC, and what lost? To assist an exploration of these questions, I will propose a typology of co-created nonfiction, and suggest a range of issues that are relevant to their analysis.

Not all UGC is published online, but the Internet has emerged as the easiest way to source it. Applications such as *Storify* (2012) and even *Pinterest* (2009) illustrate how UGC may be collected and remediated. Is such a collection comparable to a documentary? Let us compare these practices to the Kahn archive, an assortment of footage captured by professional cameramen in the early 20th century. The founders were, according to Amad (2010: 77), 'united in their desire to learn how to see the ordinary and the banal with new eyes'. At the time, the documentary concept was at best emergent. One of its early exponents later proclaimed 'the little daily doings, however finely symphonised, are not enough. One must pile up beyond doing or process to creation itself, before one hits the higher reaches of art' (Grierson 1946: 150).

We can imagine that Grierson would hold a similar opinion of the Internet as UGC archive, no matter how 'finely synthesised' into thematised *Pinterest* collections. From the 1930s, documentary is seen to entail creative re-working of source material (film, video, audio recording or textual documents)¹. Documentaries wrap argumentation in aesthetic and affective cloth.

The stipulation that source material be creatively re-worked has been re-articulated many times (although often with some reservations). Renov's poetics of documentary outlines four documentary tendencies or 'aesthetic functions' (1993: 21):

1. To record, reveal, or preserve
2. To persuade or promote
3. To analyse or interrogate
4. To express

The three latter tendencies all entail creative re-working.

Documentaries – at least, until recently – result from finite and structured processes involving a specific individual or individuals. Without these processes and practices, decisions about exposition, reflexivity, visual style and so forth would be random or haphazard. In other words, documentaries are authored. Documentary is an authored

practice, according to Corner, ‘in that it is about creativity and transformation based on vision’ (1996: 14).

Production teams make decisions about how projects engage with the tendencies that Renov indicates in coherent and even unique ways. The implementation of these decisions can be summarised as a project’s ‘voice’. A sophisticated documentary voice will smelt Renov’s four tendencies so that they can be only superficially separated, as Renov acknowledges (1993: 28).

Can reliance on UGC be compatible with the development of a sophisticated documentary voice? After all, the very point of UGC is that other people – other voices – emerge. Surely their voice will drown out the production team’s own vision? And if they have no vision, are they making a documentary at all?

In the face of this challenge, it is to be wondered why media makers wish to reappropriate UGC. Nevertheless, at a recent conference on community media, one speaker wondered how to ‘contextualise and amplify’ all the bits of video that exist online (Gregory 2012). Journalists, too, are trying to work out how to leverage UGC.² Documentary makers are exploring how it can be included in larger projects, perhaps because they share Lars von Trier’s (2010) prescription for capturing reality.³ Von Trier himself is working on a UGC project (Itzkoff 2012). A range of groundbreaking projects have resulted, some of which have been called documentaries (described by Nash 2012 as ‘collaborative web docs’).

The aspiration to harness UGC stems from an ethnographic desire to capture and represent real people, communities and cultures (Ginsberg 1999: 173). The complexities of such a project, in particular issues surrounding representation and power, have long exercised the minds of ethnographic film-makers, for ‘on the one hand, truth is produced, induced, and extended according to the regime in power. On the other, truth lies in between all regimes of truth’ (Minh-ha 1993: 90; see also, Clifford and Marcus 1986: 1–26). One response is greater multivocality (Corner 1996: 23); another is to encourage subject groups to produce their own films (Ginsberg 1999; Lutkehaus and Cool 1999).

Mid-20th century ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch argues that filmmakers and participants should have negotiated equal and extended relationships throughout the production process. He argued that ‘true ethnographic films’ would ‘join scientific rigor and cinematographic language’ (2003: 45). Filmmakers would step out of the role of observer, and:

The work [would be] judged ... by the very people the anthropologist went out to observe. This extra-ordinary technique of ‘feedback’ ... has certainly not yet revealed all of its possibilities. But already, thanks to it, the anthropologist has ceased to be a sort of entomologist observing others as if they were insects (thus putting them down) and has become a stimulator of mutual awareness (hence dignity).

This type of totally participatory research, as idealistic as it may seem, appears to me to be the only morally and scientifically feasible anthropological attitude today (Rouch 2003: 44).

Power relationships and representational concerns are considerably different when they involve Internet-based UGC. Even prior to the UGC phenomenon, Ginsberg was admonishing practitioners:

The genre now exists amid a bewildering array of imagery from around the planet and within an equally complex range of technologies for its production and circulation. These new media forms present a kind of moral imperative to rethink the genre's project at the present moment (1999: 157).

UGC and the Internet may meet some of the ethnographic movement's concerns surrounding representation and filmmaker accountability. However, it may come at the cost of a project's voice. Indeed, some of the projects I will explore would be hard-pressed to identify a 'filmmaker' at all.

A typology of co-created nonfiction

Categories of media products, such as documentary, are nurtured by a number of intersecting factors – technical, cultural, social and economic.⁴ During the Web 1.0 era, web documentaries used hyperlinks to form non-linear paths through richly designed environments combining moving image, audio and static HTML pages. According to Odorico (2011: 236), such documentaries 'raise key questions about conventional documentary practice and analysis, about its effect on realism, its value of truth and about its viewer's position', but what they *don't* do is allow the user to enter the database. 'In other words, they cannot permanently modify information or even have access to it – for example, to the video footage added by the director' (Odorico 2011: 241).

What happens to a nonfiction project's voice when individuals have read and write access? The answer to that question might hang on whether the database – the unstructured media elements, which underpin hypertext and algorithmic projects (Manovich 2001: 212–37) – is the predominant organisational principle. More traditional, highly edited media, such as the long-form book or video, suppress this atomism by presenting the project in a preferred linear order.

The first type of project, 'radical participation', has a database structure and its native environment is the Internet.

1. Radical participation

Radical participation means that most or all the content (including editing, commentary, aesthetic decisions and so forth) is supplied by UGC. The production team supplies the programmed interface and (possibly) the server space. Individuals upload or link their own content to display within the interface. The rhetoric of social media – that we all have the opportunity for undiluted self-expression with no editorial intervention – has been whole-heartedly embraced by these projects.

The UGC sought by such projects tends to be citizen journalism or 'confessional', personal or autobiographical UGC. Idiosyncratic and often very amateurish, the preferred format is video, and includes video diaries and mobile phone capture of

current events. The most famous video UGC repository is Youtube, from which the video diary phenomenon became mainstream.⁵

A UGC video diary is the antithesis of the ‘fly-on-the-wall’ style. As director, technician and performer are identical, there is no sense in which the creator is not performing. Questions of a pro-filmic ‘reality’ collapse. The video diary has rapidly become a genre in itself. A range of widely-recognised signifiers suggest the authenticity of a video diary, such as the amateur quality of the footage; the head-and-shoulders front-on shot of the speaker; the domestic setting, parodied, for example, in *The Lizzie Bennet diaries* (Green and Su 2012–13). Even the editing (or lack thereof) can be seen as an expression of the subject’s personality. The spectator often views the author in a domestic setting using technology similar to theirs. This identification encourages empathy and believability.

The emotional power of UGC lies in its publishing transparency. Any uneven quality and coherence may be ameliorated by the ‘deep sense of truthfulness’ (Odorico 2011: 236) UGC promotes – a power inversely revealed by outcries over various examples of ‘false document’ UGC, for example *lonelygirl15* (Zeller 2006). Remediation of such content must therefore avoid destroying what Odorico (2011: 237) has labelled this ‘pact of confidence’.

Most UGC is either conventional or bound by the least technological path of resistance (cheapest and quickest). ‘Every page’, Shields (2010: 94) diagnoses, ‘is a bent version of reality – too unsophisticated to be art but too self-conscious to be mere reportage’. Nevertheless, UGC is revolutionary precisely because media unsophisticates have become publishers. Bruns and Schmidt’s (2011: 3) response to criticisms of the UGC phenomenon is that it is barely possible to apply the standards of industrial media production to such work:

the processes which we are observing here are what results if the barriers between the mere usage of existing content and the productive alteration and extension of such content are lowered to such a degree that it becomes possible for participants to switch easily and effortlessly between these two roles allowing, ultimately, for the emergence of a hybrid role in between: that of the *produser*. And what these ‘produsers’ engage in is no longer simply usage or production, but something else altogether: produsage, or ‘the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement’ (Bruns 2008; Bruns and Schmidt 2011: 3–4; see also Bruns 2008: 21).

It is likely that none of the radical participatory projects under review yet achieves Bruns’ and Schmidt’s level of ‘media democracy’, however they also escape or exceed most conceptions of modernist documentary practice.

One recent example of radical participation using video diary UGC is *The dream is now* (Emerson Collective 2013), an agitprop project made by child victims of US immigration laws. The project also has an active Twitter feed. Capturing a historical moment and a contemporary socio-political drama, it trades on the strength of social media to take the contemporary pulse.

A strong sense of consensual reality emerges as speaker after speaker more or less presents the same message. Not only does the message become convincing, a community is formed and named. The impact of participation is personally transformative and even political, as participants voice concerns about governmental retribution as a result of ‘outing’ themselves via the project. However, the community focus limits the scope of this project. *The dream is now* is a snapshot of a moment in history. Opportunity for dialogue is limited to the Twitter feed, and individual participants rarely raise their analysis beyond their personal experience. This project fails to make the leap from the particular to the universal, for the ‘voice’, which might have synthesised the material and made those sorts of connections, does not exist. While our sympathies may have been roused, our interaction remains superficial.

The producers of *The dream is now* continue to seek contributions. It is often not clear how much moderation of submissions is undertaken, or, indeed, whether content has been actively recruited. Creating a groundswell to attract UGC is often necessary, but recruited content may then determine the tenor of future submissions and stifle a more considered exploration of the subject.

One project which reveals – and perhaps revels in – these complexities is *18 days in Egypt* (Mehta et al 2011–ongoing), which is, according to the blurb, a ‘collaborative documentary project’ thus staking claim to a place in a tradition which includes modernist film and television documentary (explored by Nash 2012: 197–8):

For the first time in history, citizens are recording an actual revolution in real time. Throughout the 18 days of the 2011 uprising – in the year since, and now – Egyptians are filming pivotal events on their cell phones, taking pictures, texting, and facebooking their extraordinary bid for freedom (Mehta et al. 2011–ongoing).

The material is more wide-ranging, and the concept more expansive than *The dream is now*. The viewer encounters video, text and stills ranging from jokes to a fatal soccer game to an interview with a campaigner who wants to clean up Tahrir Square. Much of the UGC is interview footage, remediated citizen journalism and even TV segments; the project seems to have attracted budding journalists. When eyewitness accounts emerge, they too have generally been remediated. The result is a production-heavy environment with media of diverse type and quality. While the database does not dominate exposition as much as it does in *The dream is now*, the project’s wide-ranging scope and ambition makes for a huge diversity in contribution quality, style and content. At the same time, aesthetic and structural experimentation is difficult because of the content management system’s design parameters.

Radical participation documentaries often tie dissemination to content recruitment. In *18 days*, for example, when you create a story, you connect it to your own social media accounts. The people who shared the moment with you – people with a vested interest in the story – are likely to share it further through their own social media networks (Mehta et al. 2011–ongoing), and even perhaps add their own UGC. In these community-centric projects, dissemination collapses into content recruitment.

Unlike *18 days*, the *The dream is now* website makes no claim to be a documentary, and indeed it would be hard to view it as one. While it may have a rudimentary argument, it falls prey to Nichols’ (1983) criticism about interview-centric or

observational projects in which the filmmaker disowns her or his own voice. Projects that don't interrogate witness testimony under-acknowledge their production team's own subject position. The lack of editing extends the problem. Its absence leaves discreet media objects without hierarchy or order. Following FitzSimons' revision (2009) of Nichols' typology of voice (1983), *The dream is now* is all chorus, with no protagonist, counterpoint, argument or reflection – unless that protagonist be the system itself, which encloses, organises and curtails the scope of work submitted.

Nash (2012: 206; see also Almedia and Alvelos 2010: 124) wisely expresses reservations about whether radical participation projects can be considered documentary. These are not projects with an over-arching narrative, argument, perspective or aesthetic; they are not pulled together by a single director or editor. They are destined to appeal mainly to their co-creators because they are celebratory or supportive rather than critically engaged. To the extent that they are outward-looking at all, it is as a marketing exercise. A limited aesthetic integrity is bootstrapped by a content management system, which at most provides an outer wrapping over diverse content. In other words, a voice does not emerge.

The websites for *18 days* and *The dream is now* hosts both submission and display of contributions. Adequately dealing with both ambitions simultaneously requires a level of design and programmatic sophistication to date often lacking. As a result, these projects suffer 'split address'. Modern documentaries, and even most ethnographic films (with some significant exceptions), are aimed at a non-participant audience, and are structured to guide viewers through the material, by means of an argument, characters, events or voice-over narration among other techniques. The flat, non-hierarchicalised (hierarchical), database structure of co-created projects, often visually represented by a grid-like table of thumbnail images representing each contribution, refuses linear organisation, and while it acts as a symbol of inclusivity for the participant community, it may well exclude casual viewers.

On many levels, radical participation exists at some remove from the traditional documentary.

2. Edited Participation

Edited participation is a slightly more established subgenre of participatory nonfiction, because the UGC acquired is sourced offline and 'face-to-face' rather than via the network. These projects then go through a more or less traditional editing process and are published as linear videos. While they are more easily recognised as documentaries, the issue of a coherent and sophisticated voice remains.

One of the most transparent works of edited participation is Nathaniel Hornblower's *Beastie Boys awesome* (Hornblower 2004). As shown at the start of the documentary, Hornblower handed 50 cameras to audience members at a Beastie Boys' performance, then edited the footage. The work is held together because it documents the concert; no exposition occurs beyond the editing itself.

The subject matter of *Rise like lions: OWS and the seeds of revolution* (Noble 2011) by Scott Noble is the Occupy Wall Street movement. In the tradition of the *Showdown*

in *Seattle* (Guerillavision 1999–2009) and *Crowd bites wolf* (Guerillavision 2000), Noble remediated the UGC from various activists, captured various ways, into a traditional linear video documentary. Textual interstices act as segues and provide extra information. In radical participation, such creative re-working that exists resides in the software and the interface; in edited participation, it resides in the editing.

Perhaps the most significant examples of edited participation are the works of Brian Hill and his collaborators, including *Feltham sings* (Hill 2002). By working with participants, Hill encourages participants, in this instance young incarcerated men, to become sophisticated media-makers in their own right, performing poetry and musical compositions written on their behalf by poet Simon Armitage (Baker 2006); thus, argues Baker, the participants become collaborators (2006: 155). Winner of numerous awards, *Feltham sings* is one of the few edited participation documentaries to leap out of the ghetto of its partisan audience and find a broader one. Clever editing, an exposition that is allowed to emerge from the participants' own creative performance, and the integrity of the project scope allow a sophisticated, 'mosaic-like' (Nichols 1981: 210) voice to emerge.

The conventional linear video format of edited participation, however, limits the duration and scope of participation to the production period of the documentary. This is a more modest type of co-creation than radical participation.

Because of the underdeveloped voice and exposition in most of the projects in my first two categories (with the notable exception of Hill's oeuvre), co-created nonfiction seems predisposed to superficial and even propagandistic exposition. Given the rhetorical complexity of modernist documentary, this is a significant limitation. However, there have been more sophisticated documentaries using UGC.

3. Peripheral Participation

In peripheral participation, UGC is added to projects during a post-publication UGC period and is conceived as enabling a dialogue with the main media. Members of the production team may engage in the UGC dialogue. Since the early interactive video docudrama *Us mob* (Vadiveloo 2004), in which school children could create an account and add their own UGC stories, this form has matured as Web 2.0 technologies have become easier to implement.

The projects mentioned here have as sophisticated a voice as any contemporary video documentary. One recent project is the networked version of *Insitu* (Viviani 2011). The main part of *Insitu* is a poetic, essayistic interactive video. Situationist in philosophy, it meanders poetically through a range of perspectives on people and urban space, from artists to town planners to activists. The *Insitu* UGC is conceived by the filmmaker as '[a]round the film, an exclusive participatory poetic map of the urban space in Europe and a blog allow the debate to go beyond the film, new practices of the city to exist online and in the city' (Viviani 2011).

Post-publication UGC is added to a summary map interface, mainly consisting of location-based photographs, created and uploaded via an iPhone app. The UGC provides a sense of real people inhabiting real locations; however it is structurally

ghettoised, and unlike in *18 days*, seems relatively insignificant. In *Insitu*, the delicate balance between archive and linearity has been tipped in favour of linearity.

A number of other recent web documents reveal a similar limitation. In *Gaza-Sderot, life in spite of everything* (Brachet and Szalat 2010), viewers can add comments onto individual videos. However, the viewer must ‘step out’ of the video documentary to engage with the comments, so flow is destroyed. Similarly, the *Driftless: stories from Iowa* (Wilcox Frasier 2009) comment facility provides a feedback mechanism, but you need to step out of the video to participate. *Highrise: out my window* (Cizek 2010), about high rise apartment living, uses a range of continuously updated data, including photos from Flickr, streetviews from Google Maps and weather data from Yahoo (Watercutter 2011); once again, however, the user must ‘de-immerses’ to add their own content. The slightly gamified *Prison valley* (Brachet 2010) hosts forums at some remove from the video. Participant feedback is possible through the post-publication interactivity, and has resulted in ongoing dialogue with the filmmakers. At the time of writing, the Facebook account was more or less inactive; the Twitter hashtag had some activity. More modestly successful is *A convenient education* (Elliot-Jones et al 2012), addressing the exploitation of Indian international students in Australia, which successfully integrates user comments into the linear timeline accessible from the video itself. The UGC possibilities are limited, and synchronous exchange between users is beyond its scope, but user comments are seamless, timely, and intuitive. *Holy mountain* (de Billy 2009) grabs tweets using particular hashtags and embeds them live into the video; once again, although modest, at least participation remains part of the main media.

18 days and *Insitu* represent the poles of a conundrum: how can we embrace UGC and participation, while maintaining a desire to develop a sophisticated voice? Is coherence the price of inclusivity? On the other hand, can professional documentary makers – with their aesthetic sophistication, their desire to present a narrative arc or argument, and their agendas – incorporate participation in a really meaningful way? Does embracing UGC place structural limitations on a media-maker’s ability to present a sophisticated argument? As Vaughan warns us, ‘...the antithesis of the structured is not the truthful, or even the objective, but quite simply the random’ (Vaughan 1999: 57).

New platforms are emerging to harness UGC in nonfiction projects. *Popcorn* (Mozilla 2012-ongoing), an exercise in genre technological determinism, has been characterised by Gaylor as an overt attempt at changing documentary practice (2012). Producers can access and display live feeds from social media platforms such as Twitter. It is yet to be seen whether such systems present a significant step forward.

Addressing the Rouchian challenge

I have already outlined how some of these types of participatory nonfiction lend themselves to a stronger voice than others. The Rouchian ideals of participant feedback and filmmaker involvement are also addressed with varying levels of success in the different types of project. In radical participation, while technically and structurally feasible, participant feedback and filmmaker involvement seem beyond

the conceptual scope of the projects I discussed. Meanwhile, in edited participation, the filmmaker positions him or herself observationally, and fails to take up the Rouchian challenge, perhaps partly because of the conventional video format that this sub-genre is allied to. (Participant feedback may have occurred prior to final publication.)

Peripheral participation projects acknowledge the Rouchian demand that filmmakers remain in dialogue with their communities. However, the weaker side of the Rouchian covenant is their tendency to sideline participant feedback. Of the projects under review, *Prison valley* is the most successful at participant feedback and filmmaker involvement. Overall, the desire to address concerns about representation and power in documentary are met more by the promotional rhetoric of peripheral participation projects than their practice. Peripheral participation projects demonstrate a well-developed voice, whereas the radical and edited participation projects often expressly disown it. To the extent that these projects address their communities, this may not be a problem. However, projects seeking to be recognised as documentaries and garner a wider audience would do well to develop a unique and coherent voice. This will require a change in attitude to UGC.

Respecting gifted UGC must not mean it cannot be questioned, contextualised or re-aestheticised. Such an attitude not only encourages irresponsibility and immaturity from prosumers, it also atrophies robust public debate. UGC curation would be complex, but not without precedent (for example, on talkback radio). An ethics concerning recutting, copyright, acknowledgement, permissions and other issues would be required. Mature curatorial processes would also include archival strategies, for few if any of these projects have an infinite life. It would be combined with a more sophisticated approach to database programming to facilitate different types of experience for different types of users.

Conclusion

Media genres evolve and thrive if they present a viable ‘solution’ to the possibilities that contemporary technology, economics and social and cultural factors throw up. Over the past two decades, many hybrid online media forms have emerged, some of which have claimed relationships with genres associated with prior media technologies. Some participatory nonfiction projects incorporating UGC claim to continue the documentary tradition, despite significant differences in structure, interactivity, production conditions and relationship to their ‘audience’. These claims must be carefully considered if we are to maintain a clear concept of what a documentary is.

This is not to suggest that participatory projects lack value. Indeed, media producers wishing to leverage the UGC revolution perform a valuable exercise by gathering such content and presenting it more systematically, or by boot-strapping prosumer communities in which knowledge, passion, and political ambitions are shared and developed. However, while UGC offers a new approach to the ethical and representational concerns raised by ethnographic film, the cost of freedom of speech and transparency often seems to be coherence and sophistication. Projects situating

themselves at the co-creative end of the nonfiction spectrum may be casting themselves adrift of the wider audience that traditional documentary has attained.

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Endnotes

1. Some documentary theories under-acknowledge the extent to which film or video capture also entails creative decisions (framing, timing, re-enactment, etcetera). Post-production 're-working' is super-imposed on this initial creativity.
2. For example, producer Steve Rosenbaum calls for 'focused, topic oriented editorial specialists. Individuals who can gather information, provide context, separate information and ideas from data and noise. A new brand of journalist that can bring a distinct editorial voice to a curated content environment' (2012).
3. 'Shooting must be done on location, and props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is found); the sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa (music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot); the camera must be handheld; the film must be in colour, and special lighting is not acceptable; optical work and filters are forbidden; the film must not contain superficial action (murders, etc., must not occur); temporal and geographical alienation is forbidden (that is to say, the film takes place here and now); genre movies are not acceptable; the director must not be credited' (Lars von Trier 'Dogme 95 manifesto', reproduced in Shields 2010: 49–50).
4. To illustrate this point, let us consider an earlier phase in the history of documentary. Despite the Lumiere brothers' 'actualities' (Demers 2007: 153), in the silent era documentary as we now know it did not exist (Nichols no date). It was not until the late 1920's and the technical, financial, cultural and social factors that could support the American movie industry including the introduction of sound (Dominick 1994: 207; Demers 2007: 157) that recognisable documentary developed. In particular, the introduction of an audio track transformed the 'longings, enchantment, and idylls' of the nascent form, into 'exhortation, warnings, and proposals' of Nichols' expository mode - not the ideals of Rouch, but of Lene Riefenstahl (Nichols no date; also see Kovarik 2011: 151).
5. Renov argues that it is a function of the personal video camera to elicit personal content, in comparison to the industrial film cameras of heritage media Renov (2004: 196–8). He excavates what could be described as the technical pre-history of the Youtube confession, starting with Rouch's *Chronique d'un été* (1961), for whom the camera '... was not a brake but let's say, to use an automobile term, an accelerator. You push these people to confess themselves and it seemed to us without any limit. Some of the public who saw the film [Chronicle] said the film was a film of exhibitionists. I don't think so. It's not exactly exhibitionism: it's a very strange kind of confession in front of the camera, where the camera is, let's say, a mirror, and also a window open to the outside' (Eaton 1971: 51). The presence of the camera spurs self-revelation. Video also gives confession 'exchange value'; it becomes public and consumable (Renov 2004: 204). The Internet, as publisher and distributor, of confessional video amplifies the effects that Rouch and Renov have identified. The Internet is the authority, the public(s) to whom the confessor addresses. The confessor must possess an internalised sense of who this public is, its likely values and interests, so that s/he knows how to confess – what the scope of the confession should be, where the guilt, or shame, or despair lies. The culture of confession on social media platforms imparts a sense of general confessional reciprocity.

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