CONVERGENCE MEDIA, PARTICIPATION CULTURE AND THE DIGITAL VERNACULAR: TOWARDS THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF DOCUMENTARY.

Richard Vickers
Lincoln School of Media
University of Lincoln
United Kingdom.

An art made by the people, and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user. That is the only real art there is, the only art which will be an instrument to the progress of the world, and not a hindrance.

William Morris, The Art of the People, 1879.

Abstract
This paper discusses the convergence of media technologies, participation culture and the new vernacular of smart device photography. The author and Lincoln School of Media colleague, James Field, are developing a participatory interactive documentary project entitled 24-hours.in (www.24-hours.in), exploring new opportunities for participation, collaboration and the potential democratization of documentary production. Utilizing user-generated video captured on mobile phones and smart devices, the project is participatory whereby the audience contribute documentary videos, around the theme of 24 hours in a city or location. With reference to Dziga Vertov's seminal 1929 documentary film 'Man with a Movie Camera', the aim is for the videos to document the cities, the people that live there and their daily lives. Moving beyond the user-generated content model, the project will build up a database of location specific documentary material and aim to create a new system for collaborative documentary production and user-curated content.

Convergence media and the digital vernacular
The media landscape has changed exponentially over the last decade, and it was the development of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s that established the foundations for the current convergent media environment. The Internet, the network of networks via which the Web operates began in the 1960s and modern cyberculture can trace its root back to the cultural practices of that era (Turner, 2006). The exploration of electronic arts in the 1980s evolved into computer-mediated multimedia in the early 1990s as the web and CD-Rom platforms gained momentum, morphing seamlessly into interactive multimedia, and then new media towards the end of the 20th century. The readily available tools and relative freedom of the web enabled a vibrant and playful new media environment to develop, in 1997 it was much easier to imagine large numbers of amateurs producing media than it was to imagine large numbers consuming amateur content (Jenkins, 2006). However the term new media was always problematic, as all media were new at some point, Richard Grusin asks whether "new media" within the current media regime of premediation has become too limiting a concept.

The product of certain 1990s global post-capitalism economic and sociotechnical formations, new media may turn out to be a problematic analytical concept to make sense of our media everyday, particularly insofar as it continues to emphasize the "newness" of digital media rather than their "mediality". (Grusin, 2009)

With the beginning of the 21st century the term new media seemed outdated and was replaced with the catchall 'digital media', but all media are digital and this term is not definitive or even meaningful. Meikle and Young suggest that 'the significant characteristic of contemporary media is not just that they are digital but that they are also networked, enabling complex relationships of two-way communication.' (2012) For them convergent media are networked digital media and this offers us a pertinent term for media today that has both currency and meaning.

The most ubiquitous networked digital media device is the mobile phone and the proliferation of these devices Worldwide over the last decade has been phenomenal. In February 2012 the BBC News website carried a story stating 'that according to network firm Cisco, mobile devices will outnumber humans this year' (BBC, 2012). The mobile phone has been assimilated into the very social fabric of life in the 21st century. Increasingly these devices are smartphones, powerful mobile computing platforms running a dedicated OS (Operating System) expandable by the addition of software applications or apps. With the smartphone we have a device that can record images in both still and video format, we can edit on the device, it is connected to the internet so we can disseminate or publish via the device, and we can view rich media content on the device. The continuous improvement in imaging sensors has resulted in a new breed of camera phone that can record Full HD (High Definition) video at 1920 x1080, including the latest version of Apples iPhone, the 4S. Finnish telecommunications company Nokia announced their latest 41-megapixel smartphone at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in February 2012 (BBC, 2012). Video captured on these latest generation smart devices is impressive, especially considering the small size of the lens. The always on, always connected and always with us smart device facilitates a new vernacular photography of the now. In 2003 Daisuke and Ito had noted that, In comparison to the traditional camera, which gets trotted out for special excursions and events – noteworthy moments bracketed off from the mundane – camera phones capture the more fleeting and unexpected moments of surprise, beauty and adoration in the everyday.

The pervasive and ubiquitous nature of the camera phone and smart device signify the final stage in the process of the democratization of photography that began over 100 years ago. Eastman Kodak released the first truly consumer oriented camera, the box Brownie in 1900, and so began to democratize the practice of photography that up to then had been the realm of the professional, privileged or relatively wealthy. The low cost of the Brownie combined with it ease of use [the process was simple, the user just had to press the shutter, wind the film on until all exposures were used and then send the camera back to have the film developed] made photography a viable practice for the general public at large. Since the invention of photography the camera had been used to capture or document reality, actual events that happened at that moment in time. The Brownie gave birth to the snapshot and vernacular photography, those captured moments in time were now of everyone and the everyday. The beginning of the 20th century was a significant moment in history, never before had such a large number of people had access to a camera or the opportunity to document their lives and surroundings. The early 21st century signals another paradigmatic moment, not only do the majority of the population in the modern world have access to a camera via their mobile device, but importantly they have it with them at all times, wherever they are. The trope of the camera phone as an exemplary everyday form of image capture carries important cultural implications, especially when it is joined up with a narrative and rhetoric of technologies fit for use for all, a certain demotic turn in photography. (Goggin, 2006).

The photo and video sharing site Flickr lists the Apple iPhone 4 as the most popular camera device currently being used by its community of over 50 million registered users. Flickr was created in 2004 and soon became the most popular image hosting service for professional and amateur photographers alike, with on average over a million photos uploaded everyday the site now hosts in excess of 6 billion images. This offers the contemporary photographer another unique 21st century opportunity, the ability to disseminate their work as never before possible, 'the networking of the snapshot provides something which vernacular photographers have always lacked: a broad audience' (Rubenstein and Sluis, 2008). In the past it was not only the camera that was brought out only for special occasions, but the

collection of snapshots commemorating those events, the birthdays, holidays etc., would be resigned to the family album or a box in the cupboard and rarely viewed. With 80 million unique visitors a month, the potential audience of Flickr is extensive, however the number of images the site hosts is relatively small compared to social network giant Facebook. Current estimates suggest that Facebook has over 850 million active users; with over 250 million photos uploaded to the site everyday the site now hosts over 100 billion photos. Photography has evolved from being an analogue print-oriented practice to a pixel based, screen oriented, networked experience. With the latest generation devices capable of capturing broadcast quality HD video, and Facebook, YouTube, Flickr & Vimeo offering accessible platforms for dissemination/consumption, we are experiencing a new vernacular of photography both still and video, that is unprecedented.

Participation culture in the networked era
The web is not only a distribution channel but a platform for interaction and participation, especially with the development of Web 2.0, a term first coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, that became synonymous with the move from a receptive web to a participative one. Although in his original usage of the term O'Reilly was discussing the systems architecture and server side technologies he later concluded 'There's an implicit "architecture of participation", a built-in ethic of cooperation, in which the service acts primarily as an intelligent broker, connecting the edges to each other and harnessing the power of the users themselves.' (O'Reilly, 2005) In 2006 British broadcaster Channel 4 launched FourDocs a revolutionary user-generated online documentary channel. FourDocs showed four-minute documentaries, made by ordinary people, as well as providing a platform for anyone with a camera to upload a documentary they had created, on any subject they want. Crucially, because of Channel 4's Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) remit, it was essential that FourDocs engaged a mainstream audience beyond film-makers and students and made them feel like it was easy to do, and relevant to them. Channel 4 were one of the founders of BRITDOC, a social entrepreneurship organization initially developed to support British documentaries declined by broadcast commissioners. The BRITDOC mission statement (2012) states, "We believe that documentaries are a vital part of culture and democracy with a unique role to play in reflecting on the way we live and challenging our ideas, assumptions and fears about the past, present and future of the world". The Foundation now supports international documentary from production to distribution, both online and offline.

Previously marginalised by traditional broadcast media channels and outlets, the web was a liberating environment for documentary filmmakers. They embraced the democratizing potential of the web to not only disseminate work but also explore new forms of interaction and opportunities for collaboration that the online platform offered. The participatory Web 2.0 environment enabled the development of the web documentary, in his pre-face to '*Webdocs. An online guide for online filmmakers',* Peter Wintonick declares:

The adventurous and curious within the traditional docommunity are re-branding themselves: docmakers, as docitizens are becoming produsers, i.e. producer users. They take control of their own media, their own voices, their own vision, their own stories. By doing so, they extend Vertov's dream by declaring that: I am a camera, I am a webdoc. I am my own platform. I am my own truth. (2011)

Moving beyond Vertovian concepts of 'cinema-truth', the contemporary documentarist can develop the framework, creating a platform for democratization. The Webdoc movement has gained considerable momentum over the last decade, with organizations such as ARTE (Association Relative à la Télévision Européenne) in France and the National Film Board of Canada supporting the development of innovative work and emerging platforms.

In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols proposed six modes of documentary representation, defining the Participatory Mode as one that 'emphasizes the interaction between filmmaker and subject' (2001). Films that fall into this mode are Vertov's 1929 film 'Man with a Movie Camera' and Jean Rouch's 1960 'Chronique d'un été', a film that explored the lives of ordinary Parisians and contributed to the beginning of the cinéma vérité movement. The filmmakers built on the anthropology practice of participant-observation and are part of the film, with the filmmaking process transparent and evident to the viewer. If we consider that documentary is subjective, whilst appearing/aspiring to be objective, the new opportunities for participation can challenge and address issues of mediation, bias and neutrality. As we have experienced (and continue to experience) the convergence of media forms and technologies, and the emergence of new technologies and platforms, we can move beyond modes of representation to begin to define modes of interaction with documentary. Sandra Gaudenzi has begun the process by proposing four modes of interaction in digital interactive documentary: the Conversational mode, the Hitchhiking/hypertext mode, the Participative mode and the Experiential mode (2011).

Interactive documentary is a rapidly evolving field, with participatory projects embracing the opportunities that the internet and social media platforms offer, Gaudenzi suggests that, "The participative options of digital media enhance our acting role and therefore allow us to mediate reality in a shape that is more attuned with our way of being in the world." (Gaudenzi, 2011) YouTube's 'Life in a Day' project was developed to document a single day on Earth, the 24th July 2010. Contributors from around the world were encouraged to capture a glimpse of their life on that day and then upload their video to YouTube for consideration to be included in the final film. YouTube received over 80,000 video clips and some 4,500 hours of footage. Sifting though all the footage and dealing with the multitude of formats, resolutions etc. was a formidable undertaking. The final 95–minute film went on general cinema release in 2011. Inspired by Life in a Day, the BBC has recently collaborated with YouTube to develop 'Britain in a Day' (www.youtube.com/britaininaday) 'an extraordinary project to create the definitive self-portrait of Britain today, filmed by the British public.'   On Saturday 12th November 2011, Ridley Scott and director Morgan Matthews invited everyone in UK to pick up a camera to capture part of their day, their thoughts, hopes and aspirations and upload them to YouTube.   The resulting film and online archive will be a powerful and moving snapshot of twenty-fours in the life of the UK, the historic documentary will be broadcast on BBC Two in 2012, ahead of the London Olympics.

Although embracing the participatory potential of social media via the YouTube platform, both Life in A Day and Britain in a Day are largely intended for traditional media delivery i.e. via the cinema screen or TV. The contribution of user generated content by what Jay Rosen calls 'the people formally known as the audience. The viewers who picked up a camera,' (Rosen, 2012) remains relatively passive. The contributors had no control or influence over the piece, or even whether their contribution would be included, conventional hierarchical power structures remained with the director the author and perhaps to some lesser degree the producer and production team. The multi-platform participatory project One Day on Earth (www.onedayonearth.org) started in September 2008 with the goal of creating a unique worldwide media event where thousands of participants would simultaneously film over a 24-hour period. The project has developed with annual global film collaborations undertaken in 2010 and 2011, aiming to achieve participation from every country in the world and create an accessible archive of diverse video. Whilst still focused on producing more traditional outputs in terms of films, the project utilizes the One Day on Earth website and social network platform to develop a community around the world, with inclusivity as one of the founding principles.

The democratization of cultural production is not without its critics, perhaps the most notable being Andrew Keen, who commented on the rise of user-generated content and its cultural impact in his 2007 polemic 'The Cult of the Amateur'. In 'PressPausePlay - a film about hope, fear and digital culture', Keen is interviewed and says:

"There's no evidence that we're on the verge of a great new glittering cultural age. If there's any evidence, as I've argued in my book, and everything else, I say we may well be on the verge of a new dark age in cultural terms. Where all we have is cacophony and self-opinion. We have a crisis of democratized culture." (2012)

For Keen the rise of user generated content and the democratization of cultural production undermines the quality processes of established traditional media/cultural outlets. However these are early days for participation culture, we have recently seen the development of socio-political movements and the wider societal and cultural impact will continue to develop. This is the era of the digital natives, who were 'born digital', history's first "always connected" generation. Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multi-tasking hand-held gadgets almost like a body part (Pew Research Center, 2010). Children born today will possibly experience the smart device or tablet as the first screen, rather than the fourth screen (after the TV, Cinema and PC screens), and the cultural capital of the convergent media device is yet to be determined. Online and social media platforms offer a means for participation, collaboration and distribution or dissemination that was unimaginable even a decade ago. The ubiquitous smart device offers the means of production.

24-hours.in an interactive documentary project
The initial prototype of the 24-hours.in project was developed in April 2011, the author attended the Tampere Art Factory International Week hosted by TAMK School of Arts & Media, Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Tampere, Finland. During the international week he ran an interactive documentary workshop, working with students from TAMK to produce a 'proof of concept', a collaborative, participatory, experimental documentary project centered on 24–hours in Tampere. The aim was to document the city of Tampere, with reference to (but not recreating) Vertov's 'Man with a Movie Camera'. Dziga Vertov produced 'Man With a Movie Camera' in 1929, and the film is an outstanding example of avant-garde documentary filmmaking that still resonates today. The British Film Institute description of the film says, "Man With a Movie Camera is an extraordinary piece of film-making, a montage of urban Russian life showing the people of the city at work and at play, and the machines that keep the city going. […] a work that is exhilarating and intellectually brilliant" (BFI, 2000). The film represents 'a day in the life' of the recently established Soviet Union, capturing 'life caught unawares', with the filmmaking process transparent and evident throughout.

Prior to making Man With a Movie camera, Vertov had worked on the 'kino–pravda' newsreel series, a film version of the Pravda newspaper. He believed that the 'kino–eye' or camera 'eye' could not only capture life 'as is', but reveal a deeper level of truth than was normally perceived by the imperfect human eye (Cousins & Macdonald, 2006). With the kino-eye movement Vertov explored a participatory model aiming to move away from the authorship of a single person to mass authorship and a montage vision. Vertov's aspirations for the movement encompassed the democratization not just of technology but also of creativity (Hicks, 2007). Man With a Movie Camera is often cited as the first example of database cinema, long before the database as we understand it today existed. Lev Manovich states that; "Man With a Movie Camera is perhaps the most important example of a database imagination in modern media art" (Manovich, 2001).

The workshop in Finland began with a briefing on the technologies that would be utilized, good practice and principles of using mobile devices for filming, screenings of interactive documentaries and Vertov's Man With a Movie Camera. Interestingly the students were aware of the film but hadn't actually seen it, they found the film striking and it is testament to the outstanding qualities of the film that it still resonates today. An important consideration was file size and bandwidth, video = data, 1 second of iPhone HD (1280x720) video = 1.3MB, so there was a requirement to keep the video clips relatively short. The participants were therefore encouraged to keep individual shots or scenes short, with the proviso that they could add lots to the database, one shot per minute over 24 hours would equate to 1440 shots. Adobe Media Encoder was used to compress and encode the videos for online delivery in the FLV/F4V format.

For the prototype developed in Tampere the process of encoding and adding to the online database was laborious and time consuming. Using Adobe Media Encoder, each individual video clip was encoded and optimized for delivery over the internet, also for each clip a JPG image file was created for display in the main interface. All clips were uploaded via FTP to the project directory and a database entry made detailing the author of the video and importantly the time using the 24–hour clock. The project is available online at http://www.24–hours.in, using Adobe Flash as the delivery platform. The main interface is a grid of 24 images, each one representing an individual video clip for that time within the 24–hour clock. Visible above the grid of still images is a line of 24 blocks each giving the user a non-linear navigation to the 24 individual hours in the 24–hour period. Clicking on one of the images plays the linked video clip, there is a simple transition between the grid display and the video playing, the author of the video and the time are displayed in the lower left hand corner below the video clip. Clicking on the video as it plays will close that clip and return to the main interface, the still image from the video that was playing forms the first image of the 24 displayed in the interface grid. If the user does not close the video, the next clip chronologically plays and will continue playing through all the clips.

The workshop participants were encouraged to embrace Vertov's pioneering avant-garde approach to filmmaking, using camera phones to capture 'life caught unawares' and in doing so recontextualized Baudelaire's notion of the flâneur, "a person who walks the city in order to experience it". In her 1977 text 'On Photography', Susan Sontag (p. 55) says:

In fact, photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle class flâneur, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes.

The contributors to 24–hours.in Tampere wandered the city, capturing scenes of everyday life there as the city awoke from the long Finnish winter; the cleaning of the streets, the simple pleasure of going for lunch, the political elections; 24-hours in Tampere offers a fascinating insight into everyday life in the city.

The project is in continued development and with the latest iteration the conversion and compression of video files is accomplished server-side via an automated process provided by FFMPEG software running on the server. There is a moderation control panel in place ready for phase two of development for when content directly submitted to the project via the web. HTML 5 video will be utilized to offer a full cross-platform experience without the need for plugins, with the aim for 24-hours.in to be a multi-platform web application that uses the most appropriate delivery technology in response to how the project is being viewed. With either the Flash or HTML5 platform, the user is guaranteed an engaging experience on any device from the interface and with highly optimized video, rarely is there a situation where streaming hinders the users progression while exploring the project's contents. A minimal web interface houses the application/video content with a MySQL database storing video clip details. For the next phase of development a separation of the website and automated video conversion is planned freeing up server resources and allowing a more asynchronous video upload and conversion experience. We are continuing to enhance the user-experience, for a participatory project of this nature putting the user-participant at the center of everything is a critical factor for success. The initial framework for uploading video clips has been refined into a step-by-step process and should the contributor have more than one video to add to the project, data is retained to remove the need to re-input information.

Conclusion
The 24-hours.in project will roll out on an international basis over 2012, continuously adding new locations to offer a fascinating insight into 21st century life around the world. Istanbul is one the locations currently being added to the project and this work in progress can now be viewed online. The aim of the project is to have an open and collaborative platform that anyone can contribute to, for the audience as 'user-producers' to document their city or location, the people that live there and their daily lives. Building on Vertovian concepts, the project

explores the potential that the ubiquitous camera phone 'eye' may offer for a unique and cumulative version of 'cinema-truth' to emerge. By exploring a model of participation we have moved away from the authorship of a single person towards mass authorship and a collaborative montage vision, and in doing so revisit Vertov's aspirations for the democratization not just of technology but also of creativity.

Moving beyond the participation model, the project is building a database of location specific documentary material, developing a new system for collaborative documentary production and user-curated content. The project aims to be a democratic platform for sharing human life experiences around the world, telling local stories on a global scale. In the 21st century we all have the potential to document reality and life as we wander the city with our smart devices and camera phones. We can capture the nuances of the vernacular of everyday life, regardless of how banal or seemingly unimportant they may seem at the time, for posterity and digital eternity. The convergence of media technologies, new participatory platforms and ubiquitous smart devices offer an unprecedented the opportunity for the democratization of documentary.

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