8
Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries

Sandra Gaudenzi

With the rise of social networks[1] in the past 10 years, and the general acceptance of Web 2.0's collaborative logic,[2] online documentary producers have been tempted to invite their audiences into what was previously considered their very own walled garden: the production of the documentary itself. One way to transform what was previously called an audience to what has been called *prosumers* in the world of collaborative media is to allow User Generated Content (UGC)[3] to populate the content of the documentary. Prosumers 'treat the world as a place for creation, not for consumption' (Tapscott and Williams 2008, p. 127); They don't just browse, they want to collaborate.

When prosumers send, or upload, their content they change the nature of the contract that has implicitly shaped the filmmaker–audience relationship in linear documentaries. Those who used to be called viewers become users with levels of agency. What is unclear is the exact position gained by the former audience through the use of its newly acquired agency. For Tapscott and Williams (2008, p. 149) 'in the new prosumer-centric paradigm, customers want a genuine role in designing the products', so the extent to which they act on the design and who decides the limits of their agency, become the crucial questions of this new paradigm. The new contract between interactive authors and documentary prosumers pivots around distribution of power and ownership of the final product. When a prosumer of a participatory documentary sends content to an online production, is the prosumer becoming a co-producer, a co-creator or a co-author?

In order to answer such questions this chapter will look at the nuanced levels of collaboration that can be achieved in interactive documentaries. By providing an overview of experiments to date, it will argue that uploading content is the most common way to collaborate in

the case of online documentary, but it is definitely not the only one. It will be suggested that contributions of content lead to co-creation but not to co-authorship, since the latter require a degree of intervention in the overall concept (i.e., form) of the product.

The ability to upload content to an online documentary gives it a fluid form that is not achievable in a linear documentary. Since new content can potentially be uploaded *ad infinitum*, the collaborative documentary becomes a constantly mutating entity. What could now be seen as a *living documentary* – with its life span, its own ways of adjusting to users' additions, and its own rules of behaviour – is a new breed of documentary that needs its own taxonomy. This chapter will argue that the term 'collaborative documentaries' is too broad, because it does not differentiate between *strategies of collaboration*. Strategies of collaboration constitute a new contract between prosumers and authors: they frame the level of intervention that the prosumer can have on the final product, that is, what can and cannot be done.

A quick look through the online participatory documentaries that have emerged in the past ten years shows that there are a great many ways to collaborate through an online documentary. Each type of participation shapes the final form of the documentary: the outcome can be a linear documentary/performance – created through user collaboration but orchestrated by an author (*Overheated Symphony*, *RiP: a Remix Manifesto*, *Life in a Day*, *The Johnny Cash Project*), an interactive web documentary that leads to comments and debate (*Prison Valley*, *Miami/Havana*), an interactive artefact that is closed to audience input but that actively involves the subjects that it portrays (*Out my Window*, *The Waiting Room*, *GDP: Measuring the Human Side of the Canadian Economic Crisis*), a locative documentary that gathers UGC while moving in physical space (*Rider Spoke*, *Greenwich Emotion Map*) or an open database fed by user content (*6 Billion Others*, *Participate*, *One Day on Earth Interactive Gallery*, *Mapping Main Street*, *Question Bridge*). It would be wrong to speak about just one type of participatory documentary. Different levels of participation seem to lead to different degrees of openness of the final artefact, going from a finished, and therefore closed, linear documentary to an open web documentary that keeps changing and expanding through time and user participation.

In order to map the strategies of collaboration that have been used in interactive documentaries, we will have to go back to the roots of the notion of participation in digital culture. It is by mapping the concept of participatory culture[4] onto the praxis of video and documentary making, that the strategies of collaboration will become clearer.

Participatory culture and user generated content

Collaborative sites such as YouTube, Flickr and Wikipedia, are flourishing today. They channel a cultural need that was ready to be expressed: the need to be more inclusive in cultural production. In 'What Happened before YouTube', media theorist Jenkins (2009, p. 109), reminds us that it is 'the emergence of participatory cultures of all kinds over the past several decades' that have 'paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption, and diverse use of such platforms [as YouTube]' and not vice versa; The platforms are just catalysts. The communication logics afforded by social media have increased our ability to share and cooperate with one other and, by making it so simple for the individual to contribute to group effort, they have created the condition for a 'participatory culture'. Participatory culture, states Jenkins, 'contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand' (Jenkins 2006, p. 3).

Currently, terms such as crowdsourcing, peer sourcing, open sourcing and UGC are not clearly differentiated when applied to interactive documentaries. Perhaps the confusion comes from the fact that they are often used as generic synonymous for participation. While these terms share a bottom-up approach to cultural creation, they differ on how such creation is reached because they have different origins. As we will see in the next section, peer sourcing and open sourcing come from the world of software hackers, while UGC comes from the world of social networks, bloggers and Wikipedia feeders. None of these comes from the realm of video production. In order to understand how these terms can be applied to interactive documentary, we need to understand what they meant in their original context and how they have been applied to the affordances and constraints of video production and documentary language.

From open source code to open source documentary

The term open source was coined in 1998 when technology publisher Tim O'Reilly organised the Freeware Summit to find a new name for what had been called free software.[5] Open source is therefore the result of a strategic rebranding that promotes an approach to software development that dates back to the late 1960s. As elegantly summarised by

Tapscott and Williams in *Wikinomics*, open source code basically follows this motto: 'nobody owns it, everybody uses it, and anybody can improve it' (Tapscott and Williams 2008, p. 86).

The culture of free hacker collaboration that has emerged through the creation of open source and free software is the result of a methodology of work that programmers such as Torvalds, Stallman or Murdock have created. Using the Internet to post messages to the hacker community, one programmer would describe a project and people would volunteer to help and participate. More than crowdsourcing, this is peer sourcing within a highly specialised community: that of hackers. This collaborative effort has been proved to work very well in a relatively small and highly skilled community such as the hackers (where there is a common passion, a sense of belonging and where respect and reputation are important). But, could this model of peer production work in areas other than software and in communities other than programmers?

When filmmakers started drawing the parallel between source code for software and video rushes for documentaries, they started adjusting modes of production coming from different realms. *Dancing to Architecture*, by Leroy Black and Kristefan Minski, is the first documentary directly inspired by the open source ideology. Shot in 2002, *Dancing to Architecture* is a film about the Australian *This Is Not Art* festival. The recordings of the festival were edited into an artfilm[6] and they were also uploaded into an Internet archive[7] where anybody could use the footage freely for their own productions or create a re-edit of the film. With a budget of AU$1000, and before the establishment of Web 2.0, the first open source documentary had been made.

But what makes it is open source? The movie was made and edited in a traditional way. What was perceived as new, in 2002, was that the rushes were not considered the property of the people who shot them. In *Dancing to Architecture* people could, in theory, remix the movie, add their own shots, and create a 'better' version, but in reality why would they do so? *Dancing to Architecture* illustrates well the passage from open source code to open source narrative content. Unlike software production – where hackers want to contribute to a shared piece of code – filmmakers seemed more interested in using the rushes for their personal artwork, and collaborative editing did not appeal to them.

A few years later, Web 2.0 made it possible to use participation as a way to influence the *processes* of documentary production (Dovey and Rose 2012) rather than just sharing rushes. Around 2004, filmmaker

Brett Gaylor began working on a participatory project where people could not only share resources but also collaborate on the film production itself. Coming from a new media background, Gaylor was one of Canada's first video bloggers. To go beyond the idea of the free sharing of rushes, he created the Open Source Cinema website, which encouraged people to participate in making his feature documentary: *RiP: A Remix Manifesto*. On his website, Gaylor describes *RiP* as 'an open source documentary about copyright and remix culture'[8] – with particular interest in the charismatic remix DJ Girl Talk.

It took six years to complete the film and Gaylor claims that it is the result of hundreds of people who have contributed to his website. How did this collaboration really work? Gaylor is the first to admit that the collaborative logic changed throughout the years;[9] it evolved through trial and error. At the very beginning of the project, Gaylor was uploading the rushes of the interviews he was doing, and was just asking people to remix them. This did not work because no one knew about his project, and no one seemed to be interested in spending time remixing it. Crowdsourcing the masses did not seem to work. Gaylor then tried to tap directly into the re-mixer community, searching for the most talented ones via YouTube. Following Jeffe Howe's categorisation of crowdsourcing,[10] Gaylor was now crowdsourcing 'the professionals' (Howe 2006, p. 1) which is to say that he was peer sourcing within a selected crowd of enthusiastic re-mixers.

Gaylor says that what he learned is that one needs to create different levels of participation, because there are very few hard-core collaborators. What seemed to work particularly well was to edit a segment, post it to the community, and then ask people to 'fill the gaps' or to perform a specific task. Gaylor's attempt to introduce participative logic in his documentary is limited by the final form of the documentary itself: a linear film, which needs to respect the rules of narrative coherence. The viewers can help in the process, but they cannot own the form.

A documentary made using crowdsourcing's logic of participation, following Wikipedia's example that will be explored next, would have to accept crowd-reviewing, rather than single authorial editing. Such a documentary would probably lose its narrative coherence – normally linked to its author's voice – and would therefore assume a rather fragmented aesthetic. As we will see in the next section, when a documentary fully embraces a mass crowdsourcing logic, the role of the author has to move from 'narrator of a story' to 'facilitator of other people's stories', and this is not an easy step for documentary producers.

From crowdsourcing Wikipedia entries to crowdsourcing video

If the Internet facilitated peer collaboration in the hacker and academic community, Web 2.0 pushed participation one step further, opening all cultural content domains (music, encyclopaedia, design, news, video etc.) to mass collaboration, leading to the emergence of *crowdsourcing*. Although the term comes from open source principles, it evolved beyond software production to describe new models of collaboration and organisation.

One of the most influential examples of crowdsourcing is Wikipedia. From its launch in 2000 it has challenged both the view of the expert as a quality guarantor of knowledge and the logic of corporate hierarchies as a preferred model to guarantee management efficiency, cost reduction and product quality. Wikipedia's source code, its content and its logic of governance have been inspired by open source culture, and yet they had to adapt to a culturally specific environment: encyclopaedias.

When content is entered in Wikipedia it makes Wikipedia's content larger, or more accurate, but it does not change the user interface of the website.[11] Wikipedia's form and structure is unchanged; it is the single entry that might be different. One could say that participants are co-authors of the single entry, but not co-authors of Wikipedia's concept. Transported into the online video world, this means that crowdsourcing video could create a larger 'evolving documentary' (Davenport and Murtaugh 1995, p. 6) but not a co-authored one. In participatory documentaries authors are facilitators, they 'stage a conversation' (Dovey and Rose 2012), they do not have to produce any content by themselves. All the current participatory documentaries (some examples might be *The Johnny Cash Project*, *Mapping Main Street*, *6 Billion Others*, *Man with a Movie Camera: Global Remake*, *Life in a Day*, *One Day on Earth*, *Question Bridge*) ask users to add content, but they never involve them in the interactive architecture of the project. Of course, the creation of a digital platform from scratch requires programming skills that are not open to all. However, it also might be that the interactive architecture of a project is now the very place where the authorial voice is been expressed. In *Software Takes Command*, Lev Manovich reminds us that understanding contemporary techniques of control 'cannot be complete until we consider the software layer' (Manovich 2008, p. 7) – where the way software appears to users, and the functions it offers through its media interfaces, carries '*assumptions and models about a user, her needs, and society*' (2008, p. 16, emphasis in original). The control of the interface is therefore a new leverage of power. In this context authorship is less

about the expression of a particular intention (Foucault 2008, p. 53) or about giving power of interpretation to the reader (Barthes 1984, p. 37) and more about orchestrating levels of user agency through software.

The mosaic aesthetic of crowdsourced documentaries

In 2010, by uploading a call to action in the form of a YouTube video[12] Oscar winning filmmakers Ridley Scott and Kevin Macdonald launched a concept: crowdsourcing both a linear and an interactive documentary via YouTube. Joining forces with YouTube and the Sundance Institute, they launched a 'historic global experiment to create a user-generated feature shot in a single day' (Rose 2010, p. 1). Through a multiversioned promo available in 20 languages they engaged YouTubers around the world asking them to record a glimpse of their life on a specific date: the 24th of July 2010. Macdonald then cut selected contributions into a feature documentary, *Life in a Day*, which would premiere at the Sundance Festival, and on YouTube, in January 2011. The aim was to create a portrait of 24 hours on earth. The linear film would only be one of the forms[13] that the project would take: YouTube would also host *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery* – a website where one could access all the videos posted by participants.

The 80,000 people who responded to Kevin Macdonald effectively participated in the project, but in what way? And how has this collaboration influenced the production process? Their contribution was to post on YouTube, a *participant collaboration* in the form of a self-made movie that was to populate the preset interactive interface of *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery* and, maybe, be selected by film editor by Joe Walker to be edited into "his" movie *Life in a Day*. What has been called a crowdsourced documentary[14] is a film where director Kevin Macdonald has not directed shots but has selected those produced by others. This is quite far from Wikipedia's logic of crowd-reviewing of a single entry, since no participant has the power to modify other people's videos, nor to edit the final film. Editing video is certainly different to editing text, and a film is not an encyclopaedia, as film narrative needs to bridge all the different parts of the story. While not suggesting that *Life in a Day* would have benefitted from being co-produced, co-shot and co-edited, we can still say that behind the current UGC discourse of revolution in documentary praxis, the role of the author, responsible for the final linear narrative, has stayed intact.

When one looks at *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery* one sees a collection of mini clips produced by a multitude of co-producers who accepted

the authorial vision of Kevin Macdonald and Ridley Scott. What is 'distributed' here is the production of the single videos: not the production of the interactive wireframe, and not the authorship of the whole idea (distribution of agency). We must therefore distinguish between *distributed-production* and *distributed-authorship*.

Distributed-production has its own economic, aesthetic and ethical repercussions, but it does not touch upon the authorship of the interactive documentary. For example, by opening up the production process to prosumers a certain responsibility gets shared: without public contributions there is only an empty interface, and the project loses authority. Scale and variety are at the heart of the aesthetic of what Rose has called 'life on earth' projects (2010, p. 1), referring to their intent to represent life around the globe. It is because *6 Billion Others* started with 5,000 interviews[15] that Yann Arthus Bertrand can claim that it offers 'portraits of humanity',[16] it is because *One Day on Earth* collected 3,000 hours of video in one day[17] that project founder Kyle Ruddick can claim that it is a 'unique worldwide media event'.[18] A large number of contributions gives credibility to projects that aim to portray a world made of multiple
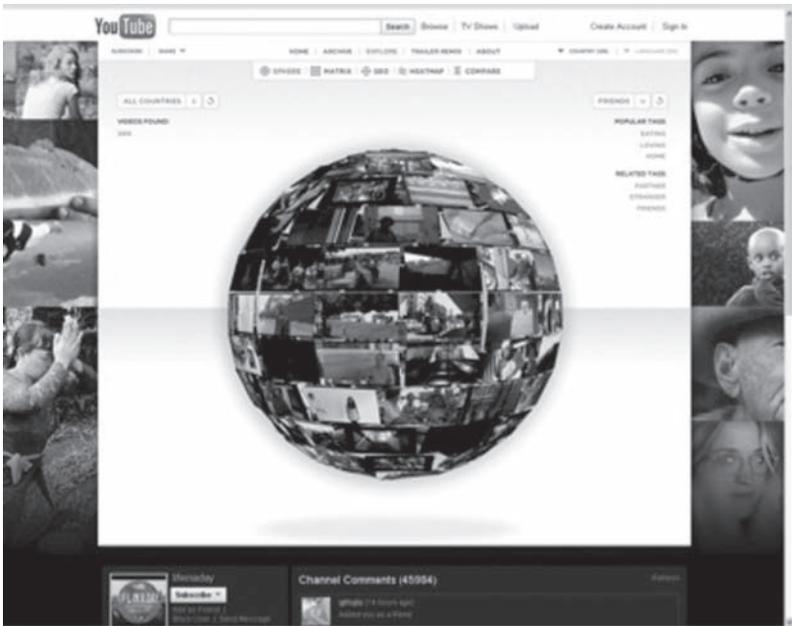

Figure 8.1   Sphere interface of *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery*
Source: http://www.youtube.com/lifeinaday (accessed 24 October 2013)

points-of-view. These projects are potentially opened *ad infinitum* as they accept contributions for however long they stay online, posing the problem of whether they ever reach an end, and a final form. The mosaic aesthetics of 'life on earth' projects needs a multitude of clips to populate an interface that is conceived to fill a globe (*Life in a Day Interactive Gallery*, Figure 8.1), a screen of portraits or a map (*One Day on Earth*, Figure 8.2). The number of participants is essential to the artefact itself. High numbers of crowd participation need to be seen through the interface in order to validate the concept behind the project: 'we want to have a voice'. Without that the project is meaningless and risks dying.

The mosaic interface of such projects, characterised by the visualisation of multiple entry points, seems to give the following message: our world is multiple, we are all of the same importance, your voice counts. And yet, this aesthetic has its problems. By visualising human kind within a stylistically framed wall of faces the granularity of our differences disappears while emphasising our similarities.[19] When filling a globe with
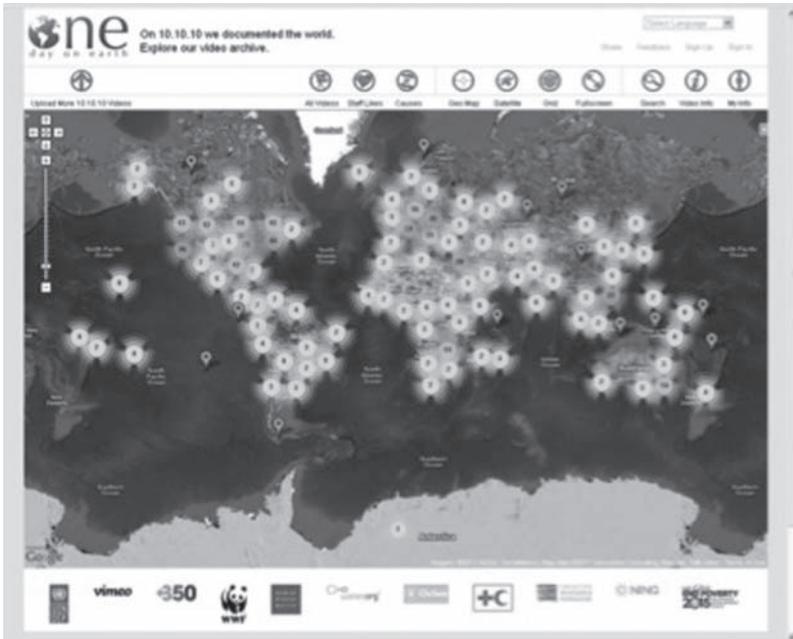
Figure 8.2   Geo-mapping interface of *One Day on Earth*
Source: One Day on Earth website : http://www.onedayonearth.org/ (accessed 24 October 2013)

an apparently massive number of videos, the voices of the excluded are unrepresented (*Life in a Day Interactive Gallery*, Figure 8.1). There seems to be a contradiction in such mosaic projects: by trying to visualise the multiple through a single uniform interface, they end up standardising it while somehow losing the details that make such heterogeneity interesting.

While in linear documentaries meaning was created by framing shots and editing them together, in participatory interactive documentary meaning is shared and layered: there is the meaning of the individual clips (not controlled by the interactive documentary author), the meaning of the interface (normally conceived by the author) and the meaning of the browsing (the narrative route and associations generated by the user, while jumps between videos). The challenge therefore lies in playing with those layers to create a richer meaning, while avoiding the trap of internal contradictions.

From *cinema vérité* to interactive documentaries for change

Beside *co-authoring* and *co-producing* there is another way to include the participant in the production of an interactive documentary: *co-initiating* content. This happens when the collaboration is placed in the preproduction phase of both the video material and the interactive artefact. In this case the participant is not a *user* of a launched interactive artefact but a potential *subject* of a project in its shaping. This type of collaboration does not come from the peer sourcing of open software, or from the crowdsourcing of Wikipedia and YouTube, but rather from the participative school of *cinema vérité* of the 1960s and it is often linked to a social activist cause. Interventionist media used the affordances of video to empower subjects in their own representation during the filming and sometimes during the editing of the documentary. In BBC2's *Video Nation* (1993–2001) subjects had a right of veto over their material, although it was professionally edited. Video was supposed to empower them, allowing the formulation of their own point of view. But, nowadays the affordances of the media have changed: digital cameras, the Internet, and social media empower people beyond the production of the film itself. Online movies have forums for discussion, viewers can get in touch with the subjects of the film by a simple click[20] … the video production has become just one part of a larger cross-media production. Interactive documentaries create a network of relations that opens the reality of the filmed subjects to the world, allowing them to be active during the filming process.

In *Highrise*, a 'multi-year, many-media collaborative documentary experiment at the National Film Board of Canada'[21] Katerina Cizek

explores life in suburbia and vertical buildings around the planet. *Highrise* is an umbrella name for what effectively is a series of stand-alone digital experiments that are accessible through a common website, but are totally separate experiences. The project launched in April 2010, with *The Thousandth Tower*, an interactive documentary that takes the web visitor into the apartments and lives of six residents in a highrise in Toronto's interurban neighbourhood, Rexdale. As of January 2013, *Highrise* has expanded into five interactive forms: *The Thousandth Tower*, *Out My Window* (a website and an interactive exhibition), *Participate* and *One Millionth Tower*.

Each of these interactive forms experiment with a different logic of participation: sometimes they involve the 'subjects' (*The Thousandth Tower*, *Out My Window*) sometimes they involve the 'user' (*Participate*) and sometimes they put the 'subjects' in contact with the 'experts' (*One Millionth Tower*). What is fascinating about *Highrise*, is the way it evolves with a ripple effect, each wave creating a different one, separated and yet related. *Highrise* is a truly relational object: a series of 'bridges within several worlds' (Gaudenzi 2011, p. 2). Each sub-project depicts one aspect of highrise living. Each project makes sense on its own, but it is only when linked to the others that a feeling of complexity emerges. Two of its sub-projects, *The Thousandth Tower* and *Out My Window* specifically concentrate on the involvement of their 'subjects' in a similar way to interventionist documentaries.

With *The Thousandth Tower* director Cizek began a participatory project involving six Toronto tower block residents, and asked them to show the world what the view looks like from inside. In *The Thousandth Tower* the web user can only browse through the content. User generated content has been swapped for *subject generated content*: here it is the subjects that are actively involved in the process of production. The six subjects portrayed in the *Thousandth Tower* were not just found and interviewed by a filmmaker; Cizek and her team certainly selected them but then started a long-term collaborative relationship between the interactive producer, the residents of the tower and Toronto's urban planning institutions. Those subjects were not just filmed and observed but rather placed in a dynamic for change, which started with some technical training, continued with the creation of a website, then the designing of a new playground and finally the establishment of a space for dialogue with the relevant regional institutions.

When in October 2010 – just six months after launching *The Thousandth Tower* – Cizek created *Out My Window* (*OMW*) she wanted to step out of Toronto and involve the rest of the world in her exploration of vertical

living. She also wanted to try a different way to collaborate with her subjects. This time she used social media to find 13 subjects scattered around the world. Being so distant from her subjects, Cizek had to delegate the production to local crews. She could no longer meet her subjects every week, as in *The Thousandth Tower*. In *OMW* she used digital media to create a network of collaboration, but also to let the project emerge (see Figure 8.3). The interface of *OMW* emerged from the contributions she received. The idea of creating a fictional digital tower block from which the web user would be able to enter 13 different flats (spread in reality across the globe, see Figure 8.4) had not been designed when starting the project, but the material received made the concept possible.

Of *OMW* content 70 per cent comes from people that Cizek has never met in the flesh.[22] She communicated with them via Skype, Facebook or e-mails, sometimes not knowing what they were producing until she received the footage. A Cuban girl independently decided to interview her own father and then sent the footage by courier to Canada. Other people requested a professional photographer but were happy to record their voices by themselves. Is this content crowdsourced – open to anyone that wants to participate, as in *Life in a Day* – or peer sourced – open to specialists, as in *RiP: A Remix Manifesto*? Neither of those two: there is no open call for video participation, and *OMW*'s subjects are

Figure 8.3 A Highrise project: Home screen of *Out My Window* (prior to any selection)
Source: http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow (accessed 24 October 2014)

Figure 8.4   Out My Window – inside a flat
Source: http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow (accessed 24 October 2014)

not Cisek's peers. The participants are neither a huge crowd (leading to crowd-production of a mosaic aesthetic) nor a specialist team that wants to share Cizek's authorship (leading to co-authoring). The material is not even user generated, it is subject generated. When I asked Katerina Cizek her views on UGC she replied 'I am not interested in UGC, I want to maintain an authorial role'.[23] She is the facilitator, and as such she maintains the authorship of navigation, which she considers as a type of content. What she opens to collaboration is the voice given to the subject. She accepts *subject-producers*. *OMW* plays on the distinction between the *active-subject* and the *active-user*. This makes all the difference. It makes a difference for the subjects: they are not to be one of the thousand points of view of a mosaic, but rather a character who can use digital media to empower her/himself. They are co-initiators in a process that will shape the documentary, shape its database and maybe change their lives. It makes a difference for the user: the web viewer of *OMW* is external to the project, navigating into a hypertext documentary, with the power of browsing through it but not of adding to the database. Finally, it makes a difference for the digital artefact: database entries are carefully selected and edited, hyperlinks are curated with attention to detail, and the whole project has a clear and distinctive style. This feels and looks like a highly authored interactive documentary.

Strategies of participation: The who, what and when

When we speak about participatory documentary, we should specify that there are different possible moments of participation. The production life of interactive documentaries is, in most cases, split into four parts: preproduction (research and ideas); production (technical realisation of the platform itself, which involves coding, and production of some content); launch of the digital platform (often populated by little content); and user's content production. This differs from the production cycle of a linear documentary, typically devised into three phases: preproduction (research); production (shooting and editing); and postproduction (launch and distribution). In an interactive documentary there is therefore a distinction between the production of the interactive framework (designing the wireframe, coding of the website and the user interface) and the production of the content that is going to populate such interactive form.

As a result, when deciding what sort of participation will be possible in a collaborative documentary, three points need to be considered: 'who' is participating, 'what' can be done, and 'when' is this intervention possible. Those three decisions are the ones that will 'stage a conversation' (Dovey and Rose 2012) around a chosen topic, and that will shape the contract between the author of the interactive documentary and its participant. Authorship, in a collaborative documentary, is in the hands of those who decide, and take responsibility, for the following decisions:

Who is invited to participate?

When a group of experts is invited to participate in a project, as in the case of the remixer community invited by Brett Gaylor in *RiP: a Remix Manifesto*, then those collaborators effectively become *peer-producers* of the final film, even if the author retains editorial and authorial control. They are *peers* because they are remixer experts (they share a certain level of knowledge and passion for a specific topic) and they are *producers* because they affect at least one stage of the production of the film (in the case of *RiP*: its research and its editing).

When the participant is a crowd of non-experts, like the mass invited to send video material to YouTube channel's *Life in a Day*, or the viewers who choose to add their voice to *6 Billion Others*, then those collaborators are *crowd-producers* of a potentially evolving database. Not every user can collaborate but, as long as collaborations are sent, the piece keeps growing in scale. Crowd-produced documentaries need to deal

with three major challenges: how to navigate through a vast amount of information (interface), how to create a coherent narrative for the final user (user experience) and if and when to stop the income of content (life cycle of the project).

When the participants are people portrayed in the documentary, like in the *Thousandth Tower* and *Out my Window*, then those effectively become *subject-producers*. Subject-producers are a limited number, often selected by the author, but they are given a freedom that a documentary subject normally does not have: to participate in the documentation of oneself. The limits of such collaboration are the contract that binds the project initiator and her subjects. Deciding *who* is to participate is one of the most important decisions of the author: it is about selecting who is included in a potential dialogue. The *how* is the next decision to be taken.

What can the participant do?

The degree of freedom given to the participant during such dialogue has ontological consequences. What can the participant do? How can they contribute? We are not speaking of agency of interaction here (click, select, choose within existing content) but of agency of collaboration (add to the existing content, change it, intervene in the project). Is the participant only able to speak about herself (*Out my Window*) or can she challenge the edits of the author (*RiP: A Remix Manifesto*)? Is the act of participation only reactive (commenting in *Prison Valley*) or can it be constitutive (*Mapping Main Street*, *The Johnny Cash Project*, *6 Billion Others*)? And, even when the participant adds to the documentary by adding content, changing the database size and form, to what extent does such collaboration also influence its interactive architecture and the interface?

Degrees of power, and the consequent positioning of the individual in society, are what can be read behind the agency given to the participant. If linear documentary 'stands for a particular view of the world' (Nichols 2001, p. 20), online participatory documentary stands for a particular *position* in the world. 'What can the participant do' is a proposition of action, a visualisation of change, within an online world that has its own rules and constraints – normally set by the author.

When is the collaboration happening?

Documentaries that open the preproduction and production of their content (rather than their interactive interface) to subjects, or peers, tend to accept external input during a temporary phase, but do normally

end up being as highly authored as a hypertext documentary (*Out My Window*, *The Thousandth Tower*) or a performance (*Overheated Symphony*). When the collaboration is not only about content, but also about sharing the governance of the project (*Global Lives*[24]), then the form of the documentary keeps changing following the views of a dynamic collective.

When the participation involves contributions of content after the launch of the interactive interface (to populate an existing interface that is already available to the user) then the documentary is normally opened to a multitude of contributions and often acquires a mosaic aesthetic (*6 Billion Others*, *Participate*, *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery*). A mosaic interface tries to place all the contributions in a single screen. Its challenge is to visualise a growing number of contributions (the project may have no limits to accepting new content) and to offer the user a satisfactory experience. The 'when' of the collaboration therefore adds to the 'who' and 'what' of a timeframe of possible inclusion: where is intervention allowed in a project, and for how long can it have an effect?

The strategies of participation seen so far give different levels of freedom to different actors at different times. In the projects that have emerged in the past five years, the freedom of action given to the participant has normally impacted the production of the content itself, or the finances of the project (crowd-funding), but not its form. It is still extremely rare for contributors to be allowed to act at a concept level – hence to influence the very proposition of the documentary. It is one thing to visualise the multiple within an interface, and quite another to allow the multiple to build such an interface. Problems of ownership and narrative coherence would probably arise but, more than anything else, authorship would have to be shared. If the 'who is the author of the content' has already been challenged, the conceptual authorship has not. What Dovey and Rose have called *distributed authorship* (Dovey and Rose 2012) would, for now, better be described as *distributed production.* The author is still very much present in collaborative documentaries. Ruling as a benevolent dictator, she orchestrates a mixture of peer-producers, crowd-producers or subject-producers through an infinite combination of strategies of participation. One question comes to mind: will this be enough in a new prosumer-centric paradigm where 'customers want a genuine role in designing the products' (Tapscott and Williams 2008, p. 149)?

Notes

1. Media theorists Boyd and Ellison define social network sites as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile

within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (2008, p. 11).

2. In his article *What is Web 2.0* Tim O'Reilly underlines that in Web 2.0 'there is 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' (2005, p. 6).

3. In *Here Comes Everybody* Shirkey defines UGC as 'a group phenomenon, and an amateur one'. When people talk about UGC, he says, 'they are describing the ways that users create and share media with one another, with no professionals anywhere in sight' (2008, p. 99).

4. In *Convergence*, media critic Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as 'a culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content' (Jenkins 2006, p. 331).

5. The critique that was made to the term *free software* was that 'free' means both 'freedom of information' and 'no cost'. The name *open source* was proposed to put the emphasis on the free ability to look at the source code of a software keeping the free cost of the resulting application a preferred option, but not a necessity. As a result both open source and free software still exist as separate movements. They share the same working praxis but not the same philosophical and political goals.

6. The film is available at http://www.minskimedia.com/projects/dta.html (accessed 22 October 2013).

7. The log of the tapes can be found at http://www.minskimedia.com/projects/dta-archive.html and the videos themselves are stored into the DTA open source archive at http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=TINA%202002 both (accessed 22 October 2013).

8. Accessed at: http://www.opensourcecinema.org/project/rip2.0 but no longer available.

9. Private interview held on 10 November 2009.

10. The term *crowdsourcing* was first coined by journalist Jeff Howe in 'The Rise of Crowdsourcing', *Wired*, June 2006. In this article Howe notices that companies are starting to use the web to tap into a 'new pool of cheap labour: everyday people using their spare cycles to create content, solve problems and even do corporate R&D' (Howe 2006, p. 1). Howe also highlights four groups of people that are being crowdsourced: the professionals, the packagers, the tinkerers and the masses. Obviously the target group is chosen depending on the needs and enquiries of the crowdsourcer. In Gaylor's case a group of professionals, in the sense of experts, remixers was chosen. Although remixing is not recognised as a paid profession, its most active members are recognised as experts in the field. Gaylor did not offer a financial retribution to the people who answered his calls to collaboration, but their name was credited in the final movie. Recognition, more than profit, was used as a motivator of participation.

11. Only a few active members of the Wikipedia collective can actually participate in some decisions taken by the governance body, the Wikimedia Foundation. This represents a minimal fraction of the people that use and edit Wikipedia every day, and the decision they can take part in are more of internal editorial organisation than of strategic nature.

12. See http://www.youtube.com/user/lifeinaday?gl=GB (accessed 22 October 2013).

13. Out of the 80,000 contribution that were sent, worth 4,500 hours of video foot- age, only around 1,000 became part of the final linear movie but all the material was presented at a touchscreen gallery exhibition and most of it is accessible through the interactive interface available at http://www.youtube.com/user/ lifeinaday?gl=GB (accessed 22 October 2013). For the gallery exhibition see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4y6cppFxgo (accessed 22 October 2013).

14. Wikipedia refers to *Life in a Day* as a 'crowdsourced documentary film'. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_in_a_Day_(2011_film) (accessed 22 October 2013).

15. *6 Billion Others* also invites web and exhibition visitors to add their contribu- tions to the online database via the use of a webcam, or through a special recording boot that is present in all the exhibition spaces of *6 Billion Others*. The project was launched with 5,000 interviews but it is now an evolving database of interviews.

16. Source: http://www.7billionothers.org/node/64 (accessed 22 October 2013).

17. *One Day on Earth*'s first media creation event occurred on the 10 October 2010. 'The collaboration was the first ever simultaneous filming event occur- ring in every country of the world. It created a unique geo-tagged video archive as well as an upcoming feature film'. Source: http://www.oneday- onearth.org/ (accessed 22 October 2013).

18. Source: http://www.onedayonearth.org/page/history-1 (accessed 22 October 2013).

19. This myth of the universality of human condition had already been criti- cised by Roland Barthes in 1957 as too simplistic. Describing a touring pho- tographic exhibition, *The Family of Man*, where photos of birth, death, work, knowledge and play coming from all around the world seemed to propose the idea that 'there is a family of Man' (Barthes 2009, p. 121), Barthes notices how, out of a such apparent diversity of morphologies, races and customs the exhibition tries to hint at the message that 'there is underlying each one an identical "nature", that their [our] diversity is only formal and does not belie the existence of a common mold' (2009, p. 121). For Barthes the myth of universality of human condition lies on the belief of nature and religion as global unifiers. One could question if in projects such as *6 Billion Others* it is still nature and religion that are seen as unifiers, or if it is the web, and its networking action that is being mystified.

20. This was for example made possible in *Prison Valley* (2010), where web users could get in touch with the subjects of the interactive documentary in the forum hosted by production company Upian.

21. From the 'about' section of *Highrise*'s website. Source: http://highrise.nfb.ca/ index.php/about (accessed 22 October 2013).

22. Information given during Katerina Cizek's presentation of Highrise at the British Library on the 16 September 2011.

23. Recorded conversation with author, 16 September 2011.

24. *Global Lives*, a project started by David Evan Harris in 2004, and still in production, might be one of the very few examples where collaborators are given the power to influence strategic decisions. Here representatives of the collective can participate to the Board of Directors' meetings and can

potentially change the whole nature of the project. To date *Global Lives* still looks unfinished, so it is difficult to judge its success. The challenge it faces is to maintain coherence within the project itself while allowing for a high level of co-authorship.

References

Barthes, R. (1984) 'La Mort de l'Auteur', in *Le Bruisement de la Langue: Essais Critique IV* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

Barthes, R. (2009) *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Classic). First published: Barthes, R. (1957) *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

Boyd, D. M. and Ellison, N.B. (2008) 'Social Network Sites: Definitions, History and Scholarship', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 11.

Davenport, G. and Murtaugh, M. (1995) *ConText: Towards the Evolving Documentary*, ACM Multimedia 95 Electronic Proceedings, November 5–9, San Francisco, CA, accessed 22 October 2013 at: http://ic.media.mit.edu/Publications/Conferences/ConTextEvolving/HTML/#ref2

Dovey, J. and Rose, M. (2012) 'This great mapping of ourselves – New Documentary Forms Online', in B. Winston (ed.) *The BFI Companion to Documentary* (London: BFI).

Foucault, M. (2008/1969) *L'Archeologie du Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard).

Gaudenzi, S. (2011) *The i-doc as a Relational Object*, accessed 22 October 2013 at: http://i-docs.org/2011/09/08/the-i-doc-as-a-relational-object/

Howe, J. (2006) 'The Rise of Crowdsourcing', *Wired*, 14 (June), accessed 22 October 2013 at: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press).

Jenkins, H. (2009) 'What Happened before YouTube', in J. Burgess et al. (eds.) *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press), pp. 109–126.

Manovich, L. (2008) *Software Takes Command*, accessed 1 April 2013 at: http://tinyurl.com/cbgubrc

Nichols, B. (2001) *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

O'Reilly, T. (2005) 'What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software' in *O'Really Networks*, accessed 22 October 2013 at: http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html

Rose, M. (2010) 'Life in a Day' in *Collabsdocs*, July 7, accessed 22 October 2013 at: http://collabdocs.wordpress.com/2010/07/07/life-in-a-day/

Shirkey, C. (2008) *Here Comes Everybody; How Change Happens when People Come Together* (New York: Penguin Press).

Tapscott, D. and Williams, A. (2008) *Wikinomics, How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (New York: Portfolio).

Digital Interactive Works

Arthus-Bertrand, Y. (2003–) *6 Billion Others*, accessed 22 October at: http://www.6billionothers.org

Bard, P. (2009–) *Man with a Movie Camera: Global Remake*, , accessed 22 October at: http://dziga.perrybard.net/

Blast Theory (2007) *Rider Spoke* (Blast Theory).

Brachet, A. (2010) *Miami/Havana*, (Arte and Upian), accessed 22 October at: http://havana-miami.arte.tv

Brault, P. and Dufresne, D. (2010) *Prison Valley*, (Arte and Upian), accessed 22 October at: http://prisonvalley.arte.tv/?lang=en

Burns, Heppermann, Oehler and Shapins (2009–) *Mapping Main Street*, accessed 22 October at: http://www.mappingmainstreet.org

Choquette, H. (2009–2010) *GDP: Measuring the Human Side of the Canadian Economic Crisis*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at: http://gdp.nfb.ca/home

Cizek, K. (2009–) *Highrise*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at:http://highrise.nfb.ca/

Cizek, K. (2010) *Out my Window*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at: http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow

Cizek, K. (2010) *The Thousandth Tower*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at: http://highrise.nfb.ca/thousandthtower/

Cizek, K. (2011) *One Millionth Tower*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at: http://highrise.nfb.ca/onemillionthtower/

Cizek, K. (2011–) *Participate*, (National Film Board of Canada), accessed 22 October at: http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindowparticipate/

Davis, L. and Nicks, P. (2010–) *The Waiting Room*, accessed 22 October at: http://www.whatruwaitingfor.com/

Gaylor, B. (2004–2009) *RiP: A Remix*, accessed 22 October at: http://ripremix.com/home/

Johnson, C. (2011–) *Question Bridge*, (Songha and Company), accessed 22 October at: http://questionbridge.com

Koblin, A. and Milk, C. (2010–) *The Johnny Cash Project*, accessed 22 October at: http://www.thejohnnycashproject.com/

Macdonald, K. (2010) *Life in a Day Interactive Gallery*, (YouTube), accessed 22 October at: http://www.youtube.com/lifeinaday?x=explore

Nold, C. (October 2005–March 2006) *Greenwich Emotion Map*.

Ruddick, K. (2010) *One Day on Earth*, accessed 22 October at: http://www.oneday onearth.org

Turner, S. (9 March 2008) *Overheated Symphony*.