

<p>Institution: University College London</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 24 – Anthropology and Development Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Visual Mass Observation: Facilitating public engagement with a new collaborative ethnography</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The MyStreet project explores a new collaborative anthropology by training and facilitating filmmakers in using techniques some of which were inspired by study of Mass Observation. This is achieved through a competition and online film archive with a global audience, and the annual Open City Docs film festival which has led to new partnerships with private and community organisations, and inspired a similar project in Prague. Through DocinaDay, about 350 students and community groups from high-exclusion areas received training in filmmaking and a screening platform, with positive impacts on social cohesion and individual welfare.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The MyStreet project at UCL, led by Michael Stewart (UCL Anthropology since 1997), is an innovative example of participatory research in which filmmakers are encouraged to turn their cameras on their own environments and reflect ethnographically on their everyday experience. MyStreet was developed at UCL Anthropology, a department with a longstanding focus on the use of the visual as a research process. In recent years, for instance, Victor Buchli collaborated with the UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, using film to investigate Adaptable Suburbs, and Christopher Pinney has researched the use of video as an agent in political self-representation. MyStreet, which uses film to inform ethnography and ethnography to inform film grew out of this research culture.</p> <p>The specific direction of MyStreet was born from three of Stewart’s ongoing research interests. The first is his ethnographic research among east European Roma (1984–present). An enduring concern in this was the ability of ethnography to capture the distinctive life-worlds of hyper-marginalised communities and individuals (not to be seen as failed versions of mainstream culture) [d]. Equally salient was the Roma use of visual social clues, i.e. an intuitive practice of grasping fluid visual forms which can be seen as a ‘minor’ venatic practice of the hyper-marginalised [c].</p> <p>The second is Stewart’s own ‘venatic’ tracing of clues in the historical archive within his research on Roma under the Nazis inspired by Carlo Ginzburg’s approach, focusing on the use of individual case-histories to explore macro-social trends. This led him to recognise the power of the case study approach that is also fundamental to ethnographic film [e]. The convergence of his written, historical ethnography with established film practice suggested the anthropological potential of a new form of ethnographic film [a]. The final strand was his own work in film since 1988 which led him to develop the MyStreet model of collaborative filmmaking [d, a].</p> <p>In line with its Mass Observation inspiration, MyStreet laid the foundations for a distributed, collaborative, shared ‘science of ourselves’, aiming to dissolve the researcher/ researched distinction. Whereas conventional ethnography involves a filtering and selection of voices by the anthropologist, MyStreet facilitates a multi-authored polyphony of multiple and diverse perspectives [a]. In this 2013 publication, Stewart describes how vernacular filmmaking helps dissolve the producer/ consumer boundary through an explicit rejection of the traditional power relations of broadcast documentary. He draws on the Mass Observation movement – a methodology that itself tried to harness the new media of its time in an attempt to democratise ethnography and to re-enchant the study of the ‘everyday’ [a].</p> <p>Stewart’s research into marginality has thus led him to expand the traditional approach of ethnographic film not only by including people who were not traditionally part of the ethnographic film conversation, but by putting the theoretical and practical tools of ethnography into the hands of the participants themselves [d, a]. MyStreet conceptualises how practices of ‘indigenous media’ might enable a revival of the democratic anthropology of Mass Observation. The research team has formed relationships with over 300 filmmakers, inspiring them to use ethnographic investigations of everyday British life. Through the annual competition, a website, and screenings these film-research projects create ethnographically informed conversations. A total of 315</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

independent films now exist on the MyStreet living archive [b]. The project also facilitates the use of film as an ethnographic tool for people who are normally the objects of social scientific study, through DocinaDay workshops in schools and communities. Participants generate their own research-film outputs, of which 89 are viewable on the MyStreet website.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] Stewart, M. S. (2013) 'Mysteries reside in the humblest, everyday things: Collaborative anthropology in the digital age', *Social Anthropology* 21(3), pp. 305–321. Submitted to REF2.

[b] MyStreet (2013) <http://www.mystreetfilms.com> [website].

[c] Stewart, M. S. (2004). 'Remembering without commemoration: the mnemonics and the politics of Holocaust memories among European Roma' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10(4), pp. 561–582. Available on request.

[d] Day, S., Papataxiarchis, E., & Stewart, M. S. (eds.) (1999). *Lilies of the field: Marginal people who live for the moment*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview. Available on request.

[e] Stewart, M. S. (2010) *Un catastrophe invisible: La Shoah des Tziganes*. Paris: Terrain Mars 54 pp. 100–121. Submitted to REF2.

Quality of research is demonstrated by publication in rigorously peer reviewed journals (e.g. [a]) and an AHRC Research Leave award 2006 to Michael Stewart (113181/1 for £15,301, 10/04/06–09/08/06), which led to [e].

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The MyStreet project has provided a ground-breaking platform to promote ethnographic film of everyday life for filmmakers. The *reach* of this impact is demonstrated by the visitors to the MyStreet website and the Open Cities festival. The website was designed and supervised by Stewart to provide a permanent forum where such work can be advertised and seen. It went live in 2011, and by 31 July 2013, the MyStreet website had been visited 21,708 times by 11,635 visitors; with an average dwell time of over 4 minutes [1]. The *reach* was further enhanced by making films available on YouTube and Vimeo [2] and for embedding on third-party websites, with both local and national audiences, such as *We Are Camden* and the *Independent*.

A second, live, platform for exposure was through Open City Docs Fest, a festival held annually at UCL in London in June 2011–June 2013, with audiences growing from 2,000 to nearly 4,000 over the years [3]. The ten best MyStreet films were screened each year, at a total of 21 screenings annually. In 2011 alone, over 3,000 people saw a MyStreet film: in dedicated MyStreet screenings; in shorts screened before main features and in special pop-up boxes ([3] p. 3 in the 2011 report). The best MyStreet films were judged and a prize presented by an international jury of acclaimed practitioners who also awarded the Open City Grand Jury Prize – a conscious move to promote these films to the top of the festival's agenda and facilitating the development of a self-sustaining social film community [4, p. 4]. Over the years, the festival received substantial notices as well as appreciative critical reviews that engaged directly with the research. Indicative examples are [5]:

- Global: *CNN*: 'Why we are all digital anthropologists now' (29 May 2013) (62m monthly visitors from around the world in 2012): 'Anthropology as the 'science of humanity' has broadened, and the idea of the anthropologist has evolved. Like with many professions, the baton has passed from trained individuals to you, to me, to a big wide world.'
- National: *The Independent*. 'My Street Films: The Lea Valley kids' (26/5/11).
- Local: *The Evening Standard*: 'We're going to shoot film about your homeless for Afghan TV' (17/6/11).

In Spring 2013 the Community Channel screened 8 of the MyStreet films on 14 occasions between March and July with a total of 14,000 viewers on the occasions audiences were monitored [6]. These follow-up projects fostered sustained impacts upon filmmakers: "it was the confidence thing and the feeling worthy of Community Channel [...]. Taking you on a little bit further than just that day before" [4 p.2].

The *significance* of these linked channels are demonstrated by the sustainable partnerships

Impact case study (REF3b)

formed with private organisations seeking to promote film as a tool of research and the importance of voices of marginalised individuals. For example, in 2012 Arup Phase 2 (a gallery space in the world-leading engineering company in Fitzrovia, London) presented a rotating selection of MyStreet films for 22 weeks across the summer in a bespoke exhibition box. As the head of exhibitions later said, “the screenings led Arup staff and visitors who are involved in planning the built environment to engage with different perspectives on modern urban life that they rarely get to hear or experience at first hand. The MyStreet initiative triggered discussions about several projects that Arup is involved in, ranging from the Olympics to Kings Cross as well as feeding into the research about the environmental and social impact of High Speed 2”. Arup estimated that about twenty thousand visitors viewed films at this exhibition [7].

The process of research – which includes training and providing platforms for filmmakers – is a participatory one, and has had significant impacts on the young people who took part, equipping them to question their environment [4, p. 4]. As a focus group exercise for filmmakers and teachers conducted in 2013 showed, at its most fundamental level, the MyStreet research project has engaged both aspiring and experienced filmmakers with ethnographic ideas, encouraging them to reflect on their own work in this light [4, see p. 1, 4, 8].

Through MyStreet’s ancillary training programme, DocinaDay (DiaD), the understanding of film as a research tool has been widened amongst filmmakers, as has their technical ability. In its first year, *MyStreet* worked with Open Cinema to make films with London’s homeless and then screened the resulting films at Open City 2011 alongside Penny Woolcock’s award winning film, *On the Streets*. Homeless filmmakers, young professionals, students and professional documentarists mingled at UCL in an embodiment of DiaD’s democratising agenda. Here the online and offline components of the MyStreet platform created a space to bring together different communities of people, dissolving the producer/ consumer distinction. As noted by one filmmaker, MyStreet “connects you to a community that is also offline, that you can actually have access to through the festival” [4, p.4].

Between 2011 and 2013, 89 DiaD workshops were held around London, with 350 participants [8]. All of the schools and community groups were chosen for their low university application rate (and high indices of social deprivation), and five films were made in Pupil Referral Units for excluded children [8]. This work – which mostly took place in schools and youth centres – has led both to increased confidence [4, p. 9] and impacted upon the students by providing them with their first opportunity to create a permanent record of their vision of their place in the school . It also led to increased applications to creative courses following the production of four DiaD films [4, p. 6]. DiaD brought new ideas into the school, “things that they hadn’t necessarily discussed before but led on from being exposed to different sorts of creative arts [...]. It made them think about what was out there for them and different opportunities were available” [4, p. 6]. The films produced have since been integrated into the curriculum of the schools concerned [9, p. 8–9]. Underprivileged secondary school children, youth and local community groups in London have learnt to tackle the issues and stories that are important to them and to explore the ‘mysteries that reside in the humblest things’ [4, p. 8].

To increase impact upon empowerment of the citizen filmmakers many of their films were selected for screening at Camden Council funded screenings at Open City Docs Fest in 2011 and 2012, with over 80 in attendance on each occasion [3]. As a teacher at the Ark Academy in Wembley explained, making the films had positive effects for social inclusion through the impact on their understanding of cultural diversity [4, p. 8].

Participating in DiaD increased the ability of students to work with professionals from beyond their school: “it was about not just communicating with their peers but with people who they hadn’t even met before and a lot of the students would find that difficult usually but because I think it was something creative and something they were interested in and wanted to be involved in it allowed them to communicate much more effectively” [4, p. 7, 9]. In line with its democratising agenda the programme strengthened students’ abilities to “express their views” on their everyday lives and, uneditorialised, “share their stories and their emotions” [4, p. 6]. Some students ‘were empowered to ask questions that they would not normally dare to put. One group, for whom the police are not a reassuring presence, were able to spend the morning filming in a police car, talking with the officers’ [4, p. 8]. In Somerstown, London, new film projects were launched on the back of the DiaD

Impact case study (REF3b)

experience [4, pp. 8–9, 11] [8]. Inspired by MyStreet, a filmmaker based at Central St Martins launched a visual ethnography of the Kings Cross area, using Mass Observation techniques to commission three films on the theme of gentrification, and playing them at installations onsite [9]. One teacher explained that staff, too, were influenced to be “more open and seek out types of projects that we knew the [students] would really enjoy” after seeing the “passion” of the students for filmmaking [4, p. 7].

MyStreet’s promotion of a collaborative, visual research agenda through a Web 2.0 environment has inspired others to launch similar projects, inspiring new forms of cultural expression internationally. In June 2013, work on a clone site in Czech was begun by One World Prague, a human rights documentary film festival who signed a contract with Open City Docs to launch MyStreet Prague in 2014 [10]. As the director of One World Prague film festival said: “The focus on the immediate surroundings that encompasses urban, historical and social science aspects along with educational elements in the field of film is inspiring. It offers an ideal connection of the real and the Internet world that is not reduced to the creation of an artificial reality but builds a specific community of people who actively relate to their immediate surroundings’ [10].

Similarly, the Afghanistan-based media training and development organisation, Afghan Voices, was inspired to engage their students with ethnographic ideas, creating 8 films by young Afghan students researching aspects of daily life in cities around their country. As covered in the *Evening Standard* [5], four of these filmmakers came to London in 2011 to present their films at Open City.

Through these interrelated activities – MyStreet, DocinaDay and Open City – Stewart’s research facilitated a new form of digital, collaborative anthropology and laid the foundations for a changed relationship between ‘researchers’ inside and outside the walls of the conventional university.

The contribution this research makes is demonstrated by the words of two major filmmakers who served on the first MyStreet jury panel in 2011. Stephen Daldry (*The Hours*, *Billy Elliot*) said, “As street by street in the country a MyStreet film is made, we are learning who we are”, while Roger Mitchell (*Notting Hill*, *Enduring Love*) added: “... the opposite of Google Earth, MyStreet sees ourselves from the ground up, making a modern, urban Domesday Book which we can all help create and dip into.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Website visits from Google Analytics report, available on request. Films are also embedded in other sites where views do not count to this total, such as [2] with nearly 7,000 plays.

[2] Extended reach: <https://vimeo.com/mystreetfilms/videos>; play numbers are listed for individual films.

[3] Compiled from the Annual Reports of Open City Docs Fest 2011, 2012, 2013 prepared for external and internal funders, with viewing figures for screenings – available on request.

[4] MyStreet and DocinaDay Focus Group Report (2013), Kevin Guyan. Available on request.

[5] Examples of news coverage: CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/29/opinion/mystreet-digital-anthropology>. Visitors: <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2013/01/18/cnn-digital-maintains-top-spot-for-2012/>; *Evening Standard*: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/were-going-to-shoot-film-about-your-homeless-for-afghan-tv-6412364.html>; *Independent*: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/my-street-films-the-lea-valley-kids-2288774.html>.

[6] Statements from General Manager, Community Channel, available on request.

[7] Statement from Head of Exhibitions, Arup on viewings at Arup Phase 2, available on request.

[8] DiaD Annual Reports 2011 and 2012, prepared for internal and external funders, available on request. The number given includes 5 workshops in 2013; no report was prepared this year.

[9] Statement provided by filmmaker responsible for the Kings Cross film project, available on request.

[10] Statement from Head of Acquisitions and Director of MyStreet Prague, on the influence of My Street on their model, available on request.