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| Section A | | |
| Institution: University of St Andrews | |  |
| Unit of Assessment: UoA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies | | |
| Title of case study: Beyond Fact or Fiction: Enhancing Documentary Discussions | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 - 2019 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed at HEI: |
| Leshu Torchin | Senior lecturer | 01 January 2007 – present |
| Philippa Lovatt | Lecturer | 01 September 2017 – present |
| Dina Iordanova | Professor | 01 October 2004 – 31 July 2020 |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 – 31 December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| Section B | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) | | |
| <p>Between 2017 and 2020, Leshu Torchin and Philippa Lovatt built on research that combines analysis of aesthetics and contexts to identify documentary's contribution to political perspectives by collaborating with creative practitioners to enhance cultural understanding of the genre. Their efforts resulted in changes in professional practice in relation to documentary programming and production. Torchin introduced the DocSalon, a public conversation between practitioners, since adopted by the Edinburgh International Film Festival as a recurring annual feature (2017 to 2019). Based on the research, Lovatt developed a documentary sound workshop at the Hanoi DocLab (Vietnam) resulting in the production of experimental documentaries that have been exhibited locally (in Scotland), globally (e.g. Hong Kong, the US, Switzerland, the Netherlands), and on the international streaming platform, MUBI.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) | | |
| <p>In their research, Leshu Torchin and Philippa Lovatt have expanded the limits of how documentary can be understood and studied.</p> <p>Since the 1990s, documentary researchers have sought to disrupt the popularly held belief that non-fiction films are neutral delivery systems for information by highlighting aesthetic tactics that shape perception and by studying the uses of film, particularly propaganda and public affairs. Yet the question of <i>how</i> documentaries bring about change and mobilise audiences remained. What was the relationship between seeing, believing, and taking action?</p> <p>To answer this question, Torchin turned her attention beyond the film as end product to study the journey from idea to audience. In <i>Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide in Film, Video, and the Internet</i> [R1 (2012)] she explores the ways documentary contributed to the public understanding of genocide and cultivated urgency and avenues to action by studying not only the film form and content, but also the contexts of production, distribution, and exhibition. The people and institutions involved were determining the aesthetic tactics, guiding interpretation and</p> | | |

response. As such, the aesthetics of what looked 'true', or urgent were contingent on provenance, technologies, and social, historical, or political conditions.

Further, developing the role of different players in documentary meaning-making, truth-telling, and response, Torchin, with Dina Iordanova, edited and contributed to the *Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism*, [R2 (2012)]. The collection combines perspectives of scholars, filmmakers, festival programmers, and activists to identify the myriad ways meaning is constructed and audiences are rallied—not just through the content of the films, but in the circumstances of the viewing encounter.

This research did not disregard the work of documentary form and content. Rather, Torchin worked to broaden the parameters of what constitutes documentary, expanding the limits of the genre. In her essay on *Borat* [R3 (2008)], she argues that Sacha Baron Cohen's hoaxes in the guise of a fictional character could be read as documentary. Each encounter between Borat and his victim yields insights (hidden racism, most notably). Moreover, each encounter encouraged the audience to ask the critical questions they should ask of all documentaries, not just *Borat*: What were the circumstances? Are we seeing everything?

Similarly, Torchin's analysis of *The Missing Picture* [R4 (2014)], Rithy Panh's account of his experiences during the Cambodian Genocide, calls attention to how creativity - in this case clay figurines and dioramas - can claim a stronger relationship to truth than the newsreel footage of the Khmer Rouge, the perpetrators seeking to simultaneously justify and obscure their horrors.

Building on Torchin's work, Philippa Lovatt extends the study of documentary into artists' film, sound, gallery spaces, and Asia. Through the AHRC Networking Grant, 'Promoting Dialogue Across Critical and Creative Practice', Lovatt explores how Southeast Asian artists work around and challenge authoritarian governments, using creativity to dodge the censorship risked by more overt documentary style. Her article on Vietnamese experimental eco-documentaries continues this focus on censorship and witnessing in relationship to artists' representations of environmental crisis in Vietnam [R5 (2020)].

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

The publications listed are a combination of peer-reviewed journal articles, chapters in edited collections and monographs. R1 and R3 were submitted to REF2014.

R1. L. Torchin. *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/creating-the-witness>

R2. D. Iordanova and L. Torchin eds. *Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism*. St Andrews, UK: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012. ISBN: [978-0-9563730-5-2](https://doi.org/10.1017/9780956373052).

R3. L. Torchin. Cultural Learnings of *Borat* Make for Benefit Glorious Study of Documentary. *Film & History*, 8.1 (Spring 2008): 53-63. DOI: [10.1353/flm.0.0003](https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.0.0003) [Reprinted emended version in *Documenting the Documentary 2nd Edition*, ed. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski. Wayne State University Press.]

R4. L. Torchin. Mediation and Remediation: *La Parole Filmée* In Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture (L'image Manquante)*. *Film Quarterly* 68.1 (Fall 2014): 32-41.

DOI: [10.1525/fq.2014.68.1.32](https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2014.68.1.32)

R5. P. Lovatt '(Im)material histories and aesthetics of extractivism in Vietnamese artists' moving

image', *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*. Volume 4, Number 1, March 2020) DOI: [10.1353/sen.2020.0004](https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2020.0004)

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

Since 2017, Torchin and Lovatt have drawn on their research to enrich the cultural conversation about documentary film and media by collaborating with film programmers and filmmakers, resulting in enhancements to festival programmes and creative practice. With initial activities and effects concentrated in Scotland and Vietnam, there has been secondary reach in the US, Europe, and Asia.

Programming: DocSalon at the Edinburgh International Film Festival

In 2017, Torchin collaborated with the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF), founded in 1947 with an average 150,000 people (general public) in annual attendance. Drawing on her research into documentary **[R1-R4]**, she proposed a public discussion (a 'DocSalon') on the subject of documentary in the age of fake news, to expose the EIFF audience to the various people who assess, support, and produce documentary, as well as to the ways they understood the value of documentary.

Held at the Traverse Theatre (1 July 2017), the lively public exchange between a panel of documentary professionals (festival programmers, commissioning editors, filmmakers) and audience "*exceeded our expectations*" according to the Head of Education and Learning, both in size (73 people in attendance) with the "*conversation [going] over the 90-minutes slotted and continued in the Traverse Bar for at least an hour more. The audience was stimulated, engaged, and clearly hungry for more*" **[S1]**.

In order to incorporate a format that augments their core mission of "*transforming lives through the watching, making and understanding of film*", the EIFF adopted the 'DocSalon' as a "*continued feature for the festival*", changing their public programme on documentary **[S1]**. Their



Double Exposure Film Festival uses Torchin's The Conversation article to start a public conversation.

documentary programmer praised it and Torchin's work as "*invaluable to light shared concerns about what documentary could and should do in educating, entertaining, enlightening; increas[ing] appreciation for the work of documentary film, filmmakers, and programmers in an age of fake news and confusion*" **[S2]**. There have been 3 DocSalons as of 31 December 2020, the second "*sold out immediately.*" **[S1]**. Further programming has been postponed due to Covid-19 until the festival returns.

DocSalon's Sustained Momentum: Scotland, US, and Japan

Motivated by reports of an excellent panel, The Documentary International Human Rights Film Festival (Glasgow) invited Torchin to chair and speak on a similarly structured Critical Forum on 21st October 2017 at the Centre for Contemporary Arts. **[S3: Production Coordinator, DOCUMENT]**

In 2019, following his attendance at DocSalon 3, the Director of Media Education, an Edinburgh-based organisation that provides film training for marginalised communities, invited Torchin to bring the DocSalon there, noting the format's ability to “*educate general audiences and professionals on the possibilities and responsibilities of documentary film practice*” **[S4: Media Education Director]**. The event has been postponed due to Covid-19.

Torchin wrote an article on the first DocSalon, which the Double Exposure Investigative Documentary Film Festival (Washington, D.C.) used as a conversation-starter in their social media promotion, describing it as “*a much-needed conversation for journalists, filmmakers, and the general public*” **[S5: Festival Social Media]**. This piece was translated into Japanese and republished in the magazine, *NewSphere* (31 July 2017) **[S5]**.

Supporting Creative Documentary: Hanoi DocLab (Vietnam)

Lovatt’s research illuminating the intersections of artists’ film practice in documentary production **[R5]** has resulted in the creation of new documentary art installations, produced in Vietnam, and exhibited in Scotland, Hong Kong, Switzerland, and The Netherlands.

In conjunction, with her AHRC-funded Southeast Asian Cinemas Research Network and the Hanoi DocLab (Vietnam), a venue dedicated to supporting documentary and experimental film, Lovatt organised a two-day symposium on experimental nonfiction with a sound-recording workshop on reality-based audio hosted by a sound artist. Held in November 2017, the workshop pushed past the documentary expectations of ‘Seeing is Believing’ to delve into the work of aural evidence. It “*was useful for developing [their] own creative practice*”; whilst the symposium (with 60 in attendance), “*helped make this festival the largest event ever since we started to organise it*” **[S6: Email Programmer, Hanoi DocLab]**.

Creative non-fiction work followed from the workshop and in the collaborations enabled by the workshop and symposium.

Weekday (Hanoi) (2017): A sound installation produced by the workshop participants was exhibited at the Glasgow Short Film Festival (GSFF) in March 2018. **[S7: GSFF Website/Programme]**

Everyday’s the Seventies (2018): Initially screened at the symposium as a film, it was subsequently developed into a multi-channel audio-visual installation piece by the filmmaker in collaboration with the sound artist. This was exhibited at GSFF (March 2018) **[S6, S7]** and at the Osage Art Foundation, Hong Kong (March-May 2018). **[S8: Osage Website]**



Torchin translated and published in the Japanese magazine, NewSphere



Everyday's The Seventies (Nguyen Trinh Thi and Ernst Karel, 2018)

The Tree House (2019): This follow-up collaboration between a symposium participant and the sound artist has been programmed at the New York Film Festival (2019); the International Film Festival Rotterdam, a leading festival of art cinema with 300,000 people (general public visitors) each year; and the prestigious Locarno Film Festival, in Switzerland (2019). Praised as one of Locarno's "best premieres" [S9: MUBI Festival Notebook], it also received attention for its "terrific sound design" from an international industry journal, *Cineuropa*, which is published in 4 languages with monthly average readership of 450,000 people [S10: *Cineuropa* webpages]. In August 2020, it was released on streaming platform MUBI with an estimated 100,000 people (subscribers) and 8,000,000 people (registered users) [S11: New York Times].

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

S1: Letter from the Head of Education & Learning, Centre for the Moving Image (partner organisation for Edinburgh International Film Festival)

S2: Email from the Documentary Programmer, Edinburgh International Film Festival (2014-2018).

S3: Email from the Programme Coordinator for DOCUMENT International Human Rights Film Festival (Glasgow).

S4: Letter from the Director of Media Education

S5: Festival Social Media – Double Exposure and NewSphere

S6: Email from the Filmmaker, DocLab Hanoi Programmer and Workshop Participant

S7: Glasgow Short Film Festival Programme – Installation Information:

<https://glasgowfilm.org/glasgow-short-film-festival/shows/inst>

S8: Osage Art Foundation Exhibition Information for 'The Sun Teaches Us that History is not Everything': <http://myartguides.com/exhibitions/the-sun-teaches-us-that-history-is-not-everything/>

S9: Review: 'Locarno 2019. Vital Transmissions: Three of the festival's best premieres—*Endless Night*, *The Tree House* and Pedro Costa's *Vitalina Varela*— boldly revive the past' *MUBI Notebook Festival*, 15 August 2019: <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/locarno-2019-vital-transmissions>

S10: Review and readership: 'The Tree House', *Cineuropa* 20 August 2019: <https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/376818/>

S11: New York Times article about Mubi, 19 January 2017