

<b>Institution: Leeds Trinity University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 33</b>		
<b>Title of case study:</b>  Contemporary documentary practices: historical perspective and interdisciplinary approaches – the International Research Centre for Interactive Storytelling (IRIS)		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2017 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Stefano Odorico	Reader in Contemporary Screen Media	2013 – present
Prof Graham Roberts	Emeritus Professor in Film	2010 – 2020
Dr Amir Husak	Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)	2015 – 2020
Dr Ilaria Vecchi	PhD/Visiting Lecturer/Lecturer in Media	2016 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/<u>N</u></b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  Researchers within the International Research Centre for Interactive Storytelling (IRIS) have developed a mixed methodological approach for practice-based research with a theoretical underpinning in the field of documentary studies. This innovative approach has opened up new opportunities for Leeds Trinity staff and external participants to develop their work in a contemporary and impactful way. The work of IRIS has also led to an increase in public engagement and awareness among staff, students and the general public of contemporary and alternative documentary forms through participation in live events on campus, in the city of Leeds and through online output. This impact case study will demonstrate this through the work of four different but complimentary researchers.		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  The underpinning research for this impact case study, focussing on the concept of theory into practice and vice-versa in contemporary documentary, has been led, within the International Research Centre for Interactive Storytelling (IRIS), by two Leeds Trinity staff members: Dr Stefano Odorico and Prof Graham Roberts (current and former Directors of IRIS) alongside Dr Ilaria Vecchi and Dr Amir Husak. IRIS, established in 2016, has been formed to explore emerging methods of storytelling through new media and technology, promoting and facilitating dialogue between creative practice and theoretical knowledge.  Odorico's research in developing theoretical models for interactive documentaries (i-docs) started with his doctoral work on communicative structures and pragmatic strategies in contemporary documentary forms. Odorico concentrates on the aesthetics and form of i-docs and on i-docs as		

a research method for transdisciplinarity. He is currently working with Dr Judith Aston (UWE, Bristol) on a project that attempts to define a theoretical model for polyphonic documentary and to analyse the impact of multi-perspectival thinking within a practice context. Expanding these ideas further, in particular in the publication 'The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary' (**R2, R3**), they also propose that there is value in interrogating Bakhtin's ideas to examine their relevance to contemporary documentary practice.

In his research, Roberts applies established socio-cultural theories to documentary studies and practices. Focusing mainly on research by practice, Roberts combines wider theories of 'punk' to DIY aesthetics and practices in order to capture reality. An example of this is his transmedia project: *Joe Strummer Slept Here* (2015), a multi-platform documentary on the leader of the music band: The Clash. Roberts also successfully combines DIY with concepts of Russian formalism through research in public performances - *Music with the Music Camera* is a series of public events where a live band performs and improvises over the silent images of Vertov's film within a DIY context. The project explores how live collaborative (DIY) performance can facilitate engagement with a 'classic', historically 'important' documentary for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, he developed a project: *SOME SEVENS CLASH* (2017) which was based on Guy Debord's concept of experimental behaviour (1956). This is an unplanned journey through an urban landscape in which participants let themselves be drawn by the encounters they make (**R6**).

Husak's practice-based PhD interrogates the capacity of interactive documentary as a tool for civic action. More specifically, it looks at interactive documentary as a social practice and method for creating and mobilizing community archives. The central piece of practice associated with his PhD is a web-based i-doc titled *From Proletariat to Precariat* (2020). His project is a proof of concept and an enactment of the methodological excursions explored in his thesis. Synthesizing viewpoints from several different disciplines, Husak argues that interactive documentary can be employed and studied as a collective archiving practice, serving the needs of different communities and ensuring that history is captured in an inclusive way (**R1, R4**). Some elements of Odorico and Aston's current research in polyphony were also successfully used in Husak's work.

Vecchi's PhD project also focusses on practice, but from a more traditional angle: linear documentary, with a strong theoretical underpinning. Her research analyses the adaptation process of the last members of one of the many traditions popular in the northeast of Japan, the blind female medium called *Itako*. As this research is practice-based, the critical religion method is transposed to visual ethnography (**R5**). Therefore, the critical religion approach is combined with visual ethnographic methods to recalibrate the traditional portrait associated with these women. Her output is a documentary called: *The Itako – a vanishing tradition* (2020).

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

**R1:** R6: Husak, Amir. *From Proletariat to Precariat* (2020). [www.pro2pre.com](http://www.pro2pre.com)

**R2:** Odorico, S and Fernando (eds.). Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies 12.2 (Fall 2020)

**R3:** Odorico, S. and Judith Aston. 'The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary'. Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media (Issue 15, 2018). ISSN: 2009-4078.

**R4:** Husak, Amir. "Exercising Radical Democracy: The Crisis of Representation and Interactive Documentary as an Agent of Change." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 15, Summer 2018, pp. 16–32.

**R5:** Vecchi, Ilaria. *Itako on the Screen: The Use of Visual Ethnography for Understanding How These Japanese Shamans Adapting to Modern Japan*, Journal of British Association for the Study of Religions, September 2019.

**R6:** Roberts, Graham. *Joe Strummer Slept Here* (2015)

20-minute documentary film – Roberts as Producer/writer and presenter.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txZmfG2t3Eo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txZmfG2t3Eo&feature=emb_logo)

<https://www.facebook.com/Joe-Strummer-Slept-Here-Documentary-910531802333904>

<https://joestrummerslepthere.wordpress.com/>

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

The impact and importance of enhancing transdisciplinarity through a practice-based approach is evidenced in the number of academic staff that have become members of IRIS from all Leeds Trinity University Schools, demonstrating a recognition of the impact this approach can have on the direction of their research work, in terms of dissemination, presentation and engagement. By having such a broad representation of the University's research environment working together within IRIS, it greatly increases mutual awareness of different approaches to research and provides the opportunity to collaborate on projects and funding opportunities that would have not been possible previously. Furthermore, IRIS has influenced the design of the new 30 credit modules within MFC, adding interactive practices and concepts to a number of them. The modules impacted by this are: Transmedia Storytelling, Documentary Theory and Practice, Advanced Documentary Production, Core Production Skills and Researching Media, Film and Culture. As well as the modules at Leeds Trinity, the research conducted within the centre has influenced the design of modules in other institutions too, including the University of the West of England and the Swinburne University of Technology (Australia) **(S1)**.

IRIS' approach on storytelling enables connections and communication with diverse audiences across international boundaries and social contexts. This allowed Dr Ilaria Vecchi to document and mainly preserve the traditions and rituals of a now small group of female mediums operating in this Northeast area of Japan. These traditions are in danger due to a fast-changing Japanese society and Vecchi's documentation of these customs, serves as a digital archive of their practices, safeguarding the traditions for the future and increasing their visibility internationally.

A result of collaboration with local artists, activists and worker associations, the research project *From Proletariat to Precariat* (2020) by Dr Amir Husak sought to keep the critical momentum of a social uprising alive and construct collective memory by assembling and preserving a complex record of political dissent. Husak believes the most concrete and visible impact of the project is that it helped assemble a community of action and reclaim some of the commons. For example, project participants and early collaborators became key players in a decisive action of saving the last remaining public gallery from being shut down and sold off to a large foreign credit institution. The action involved a massive petition drive and coordinated pressures from renowned figures in arts and culture to keep the gallery in public hands. The project also helped initiate conversations with the city government about the fate of one of the research sites, the abandoned workers' club on the former grounds of the textile factory *Kombiteks*. City officials eventually agreed to allow *Fondacija Revizor*, a local art organization to manage the club and organize public programs. The club has since been renovated and now serves as a public center for contemporary art and culture **(S4)**.

In relation to impact, Dr Stefano Odorico was recently invited to give a public talk, together with Dr. Judith Aston (UWE, Bristol) as part as the i-Docs 2020 conversations. Over 100 people engaged with the event and showed interest in creating a collaborative working group in the field. The group created by Odorico and Aston meets regularly and is composed of scholars, practitioners and members of the general public interested in the topic - currently 70 people (20% academics – 70% practitioners – 10% general public) signed up to be part of the workgroup that will generate a practice based research project on current socio-political issues **(S5)**.

Odorico was also invited to deliver a Keynote talk at the 2016 MINA Conference and Film Festival in Melbourne, Australia (MINA is widely recognised as one of the main mobile film festival and network across the world) **(S7)**.

In 2017 Odorico ran a workshop on interactive documentaries and VR held in a traditional spacer (Theatre) as part of the 22<sup>nd</sup> international film conference Bremen and in collaboration with a local cinema: City 46. The event provoked an intense debate on the future of cinema among experts, practitioners, and cinema goers. The event had over 100 attendees and it was live streamed with more than 400 people watching (**S2**).

Prof Graham Robert's events: *MUSIC WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA (2017-19)* - replicated 6 times in public venues in the centre of Leeds were widely attended (between 40 and 80 people each time - sample of feedback forms attached). A key component of the project was the audience's participation in the performances (audiences were asked to play along) and the general aim was to bring classic silent documentaries into a contemporary urban context stimulating awareness and engagement with the documentary form by general audiences. The project website includes documentation of the events and feedback from performers/audiences (as well as recordings) of six performances of improvised collaborative soundtracks for screenings of the film. Furthermore, the multi-platform project SOME SEVENS CLASH (2017) has currently almost 3000 views on Youtube and over 600 people are following its Facebook page (**S3**).

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

**S1:** Testimonial from Dr Max Schleser, Swinburne University of Technology.

**S2:** Selection of feedback from VR workshop's participants.

**S3:** Selection of feedback from event participants.

**S4:** Photos of the event.

**S5:** Event website: <http://i-docs.org/community-conversations-3-i-docs-and-multi-perspectival-thinking/>

**S7:** MINA website: <https://mina.pro/minamobile2016/>