

Institution: University of the West of Scotland		
Unit of Assessment: 34: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Innovative Screen Practice and Social Change		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Prof Nick Higgins	Professor	2013 - 2020
Dr Kiki Tianqi Yu	Lecturer	2017 - 2019
Dr Peter Snowdon	Lecturer	2014 - 2016
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Our innovative screen practice research has massive international and global impact not only changing the way audiences think and feel about social issues, but also how they conceive and experience the very media artefacts that we create. The United Nations has embraced our research and our outputs have been lauded by the New York Times and garlanded at international festivals in the most populous countries in the world. Our work changes how the public understand the effects of mono-linguistic education in Africa, the importance of citizen media in the middle east and the limits of freedom of expression in China.</p>		
2. Underpinning Research		
<p>This case study is underpinned by the field of lens-based practice research that builds on traditions in ethnographic filmmaking whilst also utilising innovative new media forms such as virtual reality.</p> <p>Forming the bedrock of the submission are three international award-winning feature length documentaries: <i>Colours of the Alphabet</i>, Winner of Best Children's Rights Film UNICEF 2018, <i>China's Van Goghs</i>, Best Director Award/Skip City Festival 2017 & Best Documentary Award/Beijing International Film Festival 2018, and <i>The Uprising</i>, 2014 Best World Documentary Film Jilhava Film Festival. Each output is innovative in its approach to lens-based practice research and evidences a rigour and creativity that has been critically acclaimed.</p> <p>Higgins's collaborative research project, <i>Colours of the Alphabet</i>, (80mins, 2016) [3.1] employed an observational and longitudinal approach to capturing the reality of the first year of school for children in rural Zambia. Whilst Zambia is a country of 72 indigenous languages, all formal education is delivered in English. The project's principal innovation was to capture an acculturation process that reveals the costs and consequences of a mono-linguistic educational policy that is never, or rarely, witnessed outside of the classroom. The research, whilst located in a particular community, reveals what for many is a universal experience of being denied the right to an education in a language they can understand. Yu's project, <i>China's Van Goghs</i> (80mins, 2016) [3.2], also adopts an observational approach, taking cameras into the studios of Dafen, the so-called oil-painting village in the city of Shenzhen, China, where men and women dedicate themselves to the single-minded reproduction of famous paintings, most notably masterpieces by Vincent van Gogh. The project focuses in particular on one painter, Zhao Xiaoyong. Going beyond the surface phenomena of skilful duplication of international art works, the project seeks to understand the psychological and material obstacles that prevent creative practitioners and their Chinese publics from embracing their own artistic works. It is a complex situation wherein the demands to make a living sit uncomfortably alongside a system of global exploitation within which the west, whilst at once championing human rights, is also complicit in their exploitation. Snowdon's <i>The Uprising</i> (78 mins, 2014) [3.3] emerged from a research practice which combined cutting-edge film practice with innovative theory. This montage film is composed entirely of videos made during 2011 to 2012 by citizens of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The videos are edited together so as to produce a coherent narrative</p>		

creating an imaginary pan-Arab revolution, without commentary or contextualisation. The project thus constitutes a clear departure from the way in which most social-media-based documentary features rely on interviews or narration to mediate the extensive use of citizen video for their audiences and tests the hypothesis that such props are not necessary to produce a convincing and coherent narrative form.

Our innovation in screen practice has also led to us develop a **portfolio of virtual reality productions** that culminated in our Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with the ISO digital design partnership being recognised as ‘outstanding’ by Innovate UK.

3. References to the research

3.1 Colours of the Alphabet. 2016. [Documentary film] Produced by Nick Higgins and Directed by A. Cole. Lansdowne Productions/Tongue Tied Films.

<http://beta.uws.io/2020/03/01/ref-practice-based-research-portfolio-nick-higgins/>

Colours of the Alphabet successfully researches and captures a process of linguistic acculturation that gives meaning to the right to be educated in a language you understand.

3.2 China's Van Goghs. 2016. [Documentary film] Directed by Kiki Tianqi Yu. Trueworks.

<http://beta.uws.io/2020/03/01/ref-practice-based-research-portfolio-kiki-tianqi-yu/>

China's Van Goghs research provides an insight into the global artistic labour market, where workers rights in China are exploited both by the international market and undermined by Chinese cultural norms.

3.3 The Uprising. 2014. [Documentary film] Directed by Peter Snowdon. Rien à Voir / Third Films.

<http://beta.uws.io/2020/03/01/ref-practice-based-research-portfolio-peter-snowdon/>

The Uprising research project explores the mediatized form of citizen journalism creating a narrative structure that give innovative form to the right to freedom of expression denied to the citizens filmed during the Arab Spring of 2013.

3.4 The Circuit: A Jockey's Journey. 2017. [360 Degree VR Documentary Film] Directed by Nick Higgins. UWS Creative Media Academy / ISO.

<http://beta.uws.io/2020/03/01/ref-practice-based-research-portfolio-nick-higgins-2/>

The Circuit research project gives innovative form and meaning to the reality of professional jockeys and, as the first 360 virtual reality documentary produced in Scotland, expanded our understanding of the ability of the documentary form to create ‘3 dimensions of freedom’ immersive experiences.

3.5 Kristallpalast: Fractures in the Cinematic Void. 2019. (Interactive CGI VR Experience). Nick Higgins. ISO. <http://beta.uws.io/2020/03/01/ref-practice-based-research-portfolio-nick-higgins-2/>.

Kristallpalast: Fractures in the Cinematic Void advances the research undertaken in The Circuit and offer significant research innovation by producing an interactive documentary form that allows for ‘6 degrees of freedom’ of immersive experience

Grant:

3.A Higgins, N., Gilardi, M,. *To embed advanced visualisation knowledge and expertise (both augmented reality and virtual reality) in support of emerging global business opportunities.*

Innovate UK: KTP with The ISO Organisation Ltd, August 18 to October 20, GBP112,985

4. Details of the impact

Colours of the Alphabet has screened at **56 international festivals**, was simultaneously released across **Africa** attracting an audience of more than 200,000 people and, most recently, was presented to a global audience in 40 languages by the **director general of the United Nations in Geneva** as the keynote event to celebrate International Mother Language Day.

The film's impact both changed how audiences thought and felt about mono-linguistic education policies, and created new communities and infrastructures that value mother tongue education and indigenous languages.

This was achieved in three ways:

1. a **national cinema tour** supported with post-screening discussions with representatives of minority languages such as Gaelic, Scots and Doric.
2. an **international festival campaign** 56 screenings as far apart as Ethiopia and Norway, including academic events at conferences (MeCCSA, CAREED), and special events with The Smithsonian (USA), and the School of Oriental and African Studies.
3. an **African impact campaign**, (ESRC funded), partnering with the Amara subtitling platform, Screen Languages and the Institute of Translating and Interpreting, a certified 2 month long online subtitling workshop supported 54 indigenous language speakers to subtitle the film. Working with UNESCO in-country staff, a simultaneous digital release of the film in 30 languages (27 indigenous plus English, French and Portuguese) made freely available on International Mother Language Day 2018 on the Afridocs platform broadcasting to 54 countries in Africa. Supported with the Facebook campaign #mytonguemystory, the public shared stories of their experiences of mono-linguistic education. The African Film Translators Network we created supports African translation and subtitling projects and provides an ongoing source of income for the project's translators.

The story of the film's impact has been published in both the journal of media practice and education and in a 56 page impact report that is presented as an example of best practice by the international industry body, Doc Society.

The impact of **China's Van Goghs** has been to change the perceptions and understanding of Chinese artistic labour and the possibility and value of creative originality emanating from within a community and culture that sees such endeavours as politically troublesome. This impact has been achieved through screenings at over **30 international festivals**, where the film has **won 8 awards**. Wider international audience impact has also been achieved thanks to the theatrical release of the documentary in 4 countries (the **Netherlands, Japan, Finland & Italy**), and the availability of the film on KLM and Cathay Pacific airline flights from **Europe to China**. Evidence of this impact was captured at post screening discussions, in social media posts and in international press coverage and reviews including the **Hollywood Reporter, Artnet, de Volkskrant, VPRO**, amongst other publications.

The impact of Snowdon's innovative experimental documentary film was to create a re-evaluation of the artistic and political potential of 'user generated content' thus not only making the totality of the Arab spring digestible in one film but more specifically repositioning the understanding of such vernacular filmmakers both within society, the film industry, and the wider public. **The New York Times** described the film as a "masterpiece of iPhone cinema" and went on to claim that the film transformed the way such footage was understood "elevating it from everyday YouTube reportage to artistic and ethical significance". [5.6].

The film was greeted by Craig Baldwin, the doyen of American found footage filmmaking as "*a bold, epoch-defining leap forward in doc method*", and by French film director Léa Fazer as "*the film that Paul Greengrass wants to make, and cannot*". The film is the subject of chapters in at least five PhD theses on film and politics, and has been discussed in many academic books and articles, where it has been compared not only with other recent works generated by the Arab Spring, but also with classics of the archive film genre, such as Harun Faroki and Andrei Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992). A recent search on Google Scholar for "Snowdon Uprising" produces 1,110 results.

Our practice-based research in Virtual Reality led us to deliver **2 festival exhibitions** with over **1,000 attendees** and to establish a two year AHRC & SFC funded Knowledge Transfer Partnership with the ISO Digital design agency that Innovate UK awarded as 'outstanding' for transforming the business model of the company leading to new international contracts in Denmark and the Arab Emirates with an estimated value of GBP 1,000,000 over the next five years.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Colours of the Alphabet: Testimonial from the Director General of the United Nations - <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/IMLD2021>

5.2 Colours of the Alphabet: Testimonial from Afridocs

5.3 Colours of the Alphabet: Impact Report

5.4 Colours of the Alphabet: Afridocs Press Report

5.5 The Uprising: Impact Report

5.6 The Uprising: link to New York Times article
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/movies/the-uprising.html>

5.7 China's Van Goghs: Media Links
<https://www.uws.ac.uk/news/china-s-van-goghs/>
<https://chinasvangoghs.com/news/media-coverage/>

5.8 Virtual Reality/UWS Immersive Impact Links

5.9 Testimonial from Glasgow Short Film Festival

5.10 Virtual Reality/KTP – Certificate of Excellence, Innovate UK