



From Voice to Listening: Becoming Implicated Through Multi-linear Documentary

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The contemporary mediated landscape with its multitude of voices gives the impression that there are ever more opportunities to speak, stake claims, and have a voice. This illusion capitalizes on discontent, giving a forum for an outpouring of personal grievances and despair about the increasing inequality between rich and poor, environmental degradation, and the alienating loneliness of individualizing technology and late capitalism. This enablement of voicing highlights the imperative that we do not just need more opportunities to speak; rather, we also need new ways of listening.

This chapter addresses what it might mean to enact a methodology of listening as a documentary practice that enables multiple constructions of knowledge as well as reveals what might be difficult, complex, and urgent. This creates a loop of listening and speaking that works together as an integrated dialogue. Through a process of listening, documentary can be re-positioned as a tool of critical and pedagogical engagement.

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A documentary practice that foregrounds listening as both a methodological process *and* as an audience experience can destabilize traditional binaries and implicate the practitioner and audience in the documentary project within an ecology of relationships, multiple perspectives, and complexity. Attentiveness towards what it means to listen places an ethical focus on the receivers of these voices and implicates them in a relationship of responsibility and social critique.

This chapter looks at a number of documentary projects that foreground listening as both a methodological practice and an audience experience. These works include Natalie Bookchin's *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012 and 2017) and *Long Story Short* (2016), Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill's *Empire: The Unintended Consequences of Dutch Colonialism* (2012–2014) and before Rosemarie Lerner and Maria Court's *Quipu Project* (2015). These works operate across a number of platforms. In discussing these works, I chart a progression in terms of documentary strategies from voice to listening: from speaking outwards through the material, to the demand to be listened to, towards involving the audience in the listening project. The deconstruction of the traditional linear form, inherited from documentary film and its concomitant de-focus on speaking outwards towards one of listening, creates a critical distance that effectively positions the audience within a space of active inquiry and implication, forcing them to distance themselves from reductive views and take a position of responsibility. I propose that implicating the filmmaker, participants, and audience through listening can subvert and displace the privilege and dominance afforded to voice and speaking to reveal more complex relationships and destabilize, fixed knowledge. To make a work that uses listening as a methodology, as well as translating this into how the work is experienced, can address critical issues in the world and make incursions into the structural inequality of representation.

BECOMING MINORITARIAN: FROM VOICE TO LISTENING

Conventional documentary practice has been largely concerned with matters of voice, although not necessarily with listening. A focus on speaking and voice creates privileged positions of power in terms of representation and who gets to speak. Power is still afforded primarily to the filmmakers (or producers) who shape the final artefact—traditionally a linear film intended for broadcast and/or cinema release.

Power is also encoded in well-established documentary conventions and binary relationships such as filmmaker-subject or filmmaker-audience, as well as modes of transmission and models of distribution. While the documentarian's drive has been towards worthy pursuits of giving voice to people and bearing witness to issues, stories, and situations less visible, the main focus is generally on the act of speaking, informing, and conveying.

Often cited in discussions of documentary voice is Bill Nichols's influential essay from 1983, "The Voice of Documentary". Updated through several iterations, most recently in 2017, this essay has continued to be a seminal source of reference for debates around the notion of documentary voice. For Nichols "voice" is the "intangible, moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes" (1983, 18). According to Nichols, documentary voice encompasses elements of film style such as framing, shot length, editing decisions, and music as well as the participants and the interaction between themselves and the filmmakers. This definition can largely be termed authorship. Irina Leimbacher claims a broad and over-theorized conceptualization of "voice" has led to confusing and divergent interpretations and meanings (2017). Even when the concept of voice considers whom the film is speaking to, what it says and how it says it, it is still primarily making a proposition or argument about the world. The authorial voice that speaks, whether literally or through other filmic techniques, shapes the material into a single channel of knowledge. More recently, the diversification of documentary forms, modes of participation, and tools has resulted in a proliferation of voices, resulting in works that are more polyvocal. These forms often have a less overarching authorial framing, indicative of a more variable ontology. However, the inclusion of more voices has exposed a growing lack of ability to listen to them, for if everyone is talking, then who is listening?

The proliferation of voices means that often smaller, quieter, and more divergent ones become engulfed by the most dominant ones, reflective of a persisting majoritarian discourse. This does not mean the most dominant voices are the more numerous, but rather are afforded the most power through their privileged position within a major culture or discourse (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). Rethinking how we can both produce and engage with documentary works through foregrounding the act of listening can enable the speaking subject to move towards a listening subject in a process of becoming minoritarian (Braidotti 2014). The act of listening is, therefore, one of a critical opening up

that can encompass a distancing from a position of self-concern and knowledge towards an ethical consideration of one another and a multitude of perspectives.

LISTENING AS DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE

Listening has always been central to the practice of documentary making. The documentary interview continues to be a mainstay of the form, either as part of the initial research or as the main audio-visual material of the film. Predicated on the concept of the speaking subject, vocalization is often considered to be the most direct way to transfer experience and testimony. Nichols speaks about a paradigmatic shift in the use of interviews in the “participatory mode” of documentary as from “I speak about them to you” to “I speak with them for us (me and you)” (2010, 180). However, theorists such as Trinh T. Minh-ha are more critical of the reliance on the interview for claims of authenticity (1993, 90–109). Additionally, the use of participants’ voices is often tempered in post-production and constrained by the requirements of the form that is shaped according to pre-determined authorial intentions. Shifting landscapes of documentary production, largely brought about by decreased sources of funding as well as increasingly conservative mandates and dictates on form driven by television programming, have pushed documentary makers to use alternative modes of production while critiquing and challenging conventional approaches. These strategies are often a combination of using more accessible technologies and the desire to subvert traditional top-down models through more collaborative and participatory approaches. While these practices are important, they also create a false sense of progress towards a more democratic ideal of empowerment through voicing. While there is a tendency to think that having a voice is equal to having power, according to Deborah Bird Rose, this is still a privileged position, always projecting outwards, as it is one that does not have to consider the other:

Power lies in the ability not to hear what is being said, not to experience the consequences of one’s actions, but rather to go on in one’s self-centric and insulated way. The communication is all one way and the pole of power sustains its privilege by refusing any feedback that would cause to open itself to dialogue. (2015, 128)

The axis of power accorded to those who capitalize on the spoken word exists on a continuum. While Rose's claim might pertain to those who occupy positions of evident power, any act of uni-directional speaking claims a space that is incontestable.

RE-PRESENTING A MULTITUDE OF VOICES AND HOW TO BE HEARD

Filmmaker and video artist Natalie Bookchin's work makes use of personal vernacular video material to re-present and make visible broader concerns in a polyvocal way. There is something voyeuristically unsettling about watching Bookchin's work. Often compiled from the profusion of individual testimonies or vlogs on YouTube, Bookchin's multi-screen video installations and films focus on issues such as self-medication, unemployment, sexuality, and racism. The original source material of the vlogs conveys a mass of opinions made public. This amateur material has a clear affinity with home video recordings, yet it is less of a documentation of the everyday in the private sphere and more a social commentary, critique, and confession. Michael Renov suggests that the introduction of consumer-level technology and video equipment enabled this kind of "techno-therapy", although he also differentiates what is often "acting-out" through the video recording as quite different from actual psychoanalysis (2004, 200). The self-recorded subjects speak with no sense of an interlocutor. While the very act of recording these pieces implies the desire to be heard, the act of speaking still dominates. Lone voices, framed by their own personal *mise-en-scène*, speak to their webcams intimately and unimpeded, afforded by ubiquitous recording devices. In echoing social media's great paradox, they speak to no one and everyone at the same time, public and intimate. The contemporary impulse to share through broadcasting has reduced the audience to a depersonalized presence that lacks the specificity of an embodied listener, as can be seen in Fig. 1. Bookchin's skilful editing and re-presenting of these moments emphasizes how much of this talking is occurring in cyberspace. The act of making this work is evidence that someone is listening, and the subsequent re-presentation through Bookchin's multiple-screen installations or split-screen videos creates a re-contextualized space where the audience is forced to listen to that which would otherwise probably go unheard. Re-positioning the act of listening troubles the intimate and

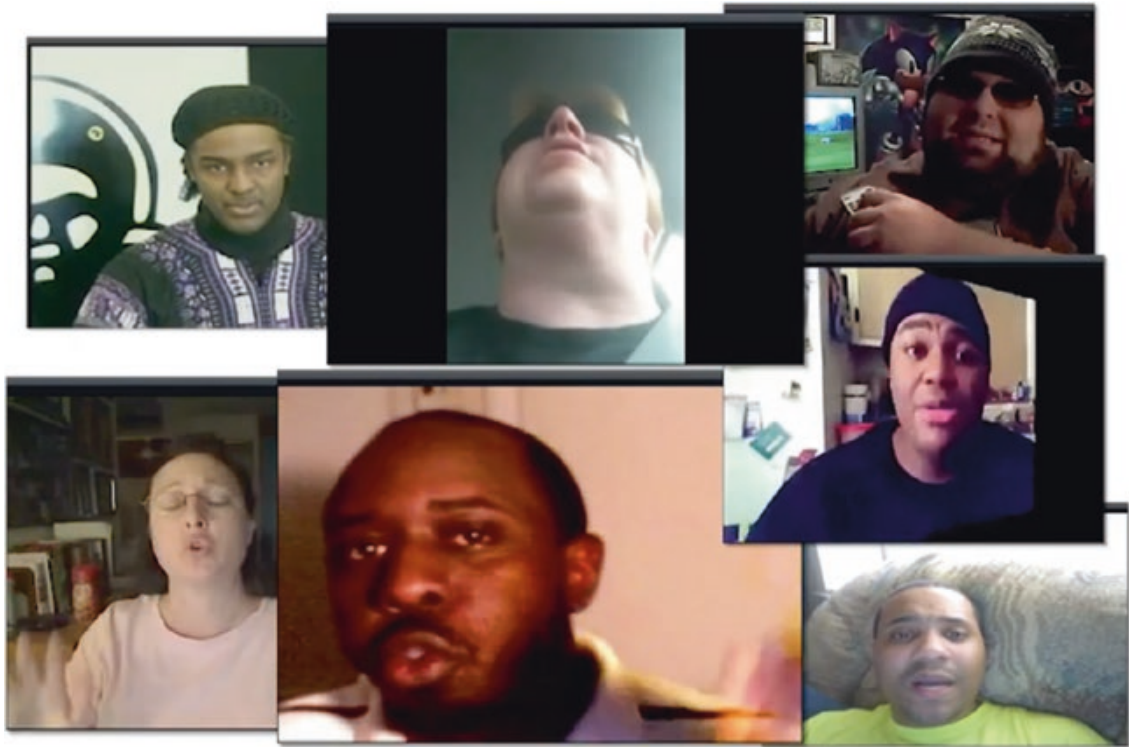


Fig. 1 Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see*, 2017. Image courtesy of the artist

public spheres. Listening is transformed from a private activity to a public one. Kate Lacey claims that the political implications of shifting listening from the private to the public space are necessary to shift the dialog around urgent issues away from the responsibility of the individual to a broader concern (2013, 9). The presentation of all these voices through Bookchin's re-framing forms an assemblage around the social issue particular to each work, and demands that they be considered en masse.

Bookchin's multiple-screen video project *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* exists in two forms. The original format (2012) was an installation of 18 video screens that surround the viewer in the gallery space. In the second iteration (2017), Bookchin reworked the multiple-channel work into a linear film composed of the different video clips. At times only one video appears full frame, at other times, multiple videos play on screen in different configurations. In sourcing the material for this work, Bookchin sifted through YouTube vlogs of Americans of different ethnicities, who speculate and comment on incidents involving famous African American men. Although these men are not named, we

can guess who they are by the context. For example, we hear various versions of the speculations on Barack Obama's place of birth and racial identity, and the calls for him to produce his birth certificate. For some, he is not black enough; for others he is too black. According to Bookchin, the selection and composition of these clips "pay[s] close attention to the language ordinary people use as they describe, judge, prescribe behaviors for, and variously attack black men; all the while defining the places and positions they think black men in America can and should occupy".¹ Many of these addresses are preceded by, "I'm not racist but..." Bookchin combines these voices to create polyphonic or contrapuntal effects: to concur or contradict. These techniques create a tension between voice as social participation or as a signifier of individual agency with a clear authorial intent. The videos represent the inherent quality of social media as the seemingly one-way unimpeded transmission of voices with an absent interlocutor. Lacey critiques the ability to share these opinions through these platforms that allow extensive participation in the public media space as evidence of a "culture that celebrates and privileges the freedom of *expression*" (2013, 7). Lacey claims that the listener is subsequently "rendered mute and helpless" through the plethora of voices and opinions, the listener's agency being silenced (2013, 7). Given the sheer quantity of these opinions readily expressed through these vlogs, these are all voices that would largely go unheard, for who is the audience, if there is one? The act of speaking and giving voice is distanced from the responsibility and the affective response of hearing them. Through the highlighting of language and foregrounding of repetition, in Bookchin's piece, these opinions become decontextualized and can be heard. The use of multiple screens lends itself less to making a singular argument, offering an opportunity to interrogate attitudes to race and privilege in all their complexity.

THE POWER DYNAMICS OF SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Intrinsic power dynamics of the speaking and listening binary are not limited to documentary media, but are indicative of a broader social and philosophical concern whose vein runs deep. This goes beyond speaking and voice as a human and linguistic construct towards the broader concept of sounding the world. If we pause to listen to the dominant sounds in our immediate environment, what can be heard? Perhaps, it is the traffic outside our window or the neighbor's television.

Along with human voices, these form the soundscape of a particular moment. Accustomed as we are to the dominant sounds, given the space and time, a shift towards listening can happen, and more minor and subtle sounds and voices can be heard. Murray Schafer wrote about the urgency and impact of the changing soundscape of the world, claiming that sound is reaching beyond the aural into other senses in an “indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of human life” (1977, 3). Voice can be considered a metonym of power. While speaking implies dominance in an auditory space, listening destabilizes comfortable positions of power and privilege through a shift towards the other and that which is beyond the self. Gemma Fiumara claims: “We have little familiarity of what it means to listen” as “we are imbued with a logocentric culture in which the bearers of the word are predominantly involved in speaking, holding, informing” (1995, 9). An attunement towards one another or an other repositions the speaking subject as an intersubjective interlocutor. It not only takes you outside of yourself but also asks you to be present to what arises. To engage with what is present is an ethics of concern for what is beyond our self-contained existence. The problem with much documentary is that it does not create a space or the conditions that engender such an active listening; rather, it replicates an environment where the other is kept at a safe distance: object of our pity, empathy, curiosity or self-affirming political position.

The act of listening is a central tenet that is methodological, ontological, and literal in the Peruvian interactive documentary the *Quipu Project*. This project grew out of community development work undertaken by the directors Maria Court and Rosemarie Lerner around the forced sterilization of nearly 300,000 women as well as thousands of men, which was part of a family planning program instigated by Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s. Many of the victims claim that this procedure took place without their informed consent. Additionally, the majority of victims were rural indigenous Peruvians, who were often illiterate and spoke the non-dominant local dialect of Quechua. As linguistic minorities, these people were disenfranchised and lacked access to systems of support and power.² Having already built relationships with the participants through outreach programs, Court and Lerner were able to train them to help engage their communities in collecting stories. This replicates traditional community structures based around sharing cultural knowledge. Moreover, a process of facilitating the collection of material through web-like strategies decentralized the filmmakers as authors, creating a collaborative network which facilitated the inclusion of as many

voices as possible. This strategy follows in the tradition of projects beginning with the National Film Board of Canada's *Challenge for Change* and the *Fogo* projects from the 1960s (Waugh et al. 2010). This community-driven process to documentary making and decentralizing the author, thereby positioning the local residents as co-filmmakers with agency to tell their own stories, is a common approach now.

The understanding of the participant community and the methods used to facilitate the production of material is crucial to the design of the *Quipu Project*. Mobile phones were distributed and a hotline was set up so that the participants could record their stories anonymously. As such, this project amassed first-person experiences which, as Patricia Zimmermann suggests, “aggregates testimonies rather than identities” (2017). This subverts the prevalence of a documentary form that focuses on characters and story and the need for the audience to identify with them. Instead, the result is an audio archive which re-presents the voices (see Fig. 2). Integral to the *Quipu Project* is the implicit demand that was previously denied to the victims that they be listened to. The producers of the project claim that by using a telephone answering service and the internet, there is a combination of low and high technology which allows for a wider reach for these participatory practices as a method of collecting and preserving the oral histories of the participants.

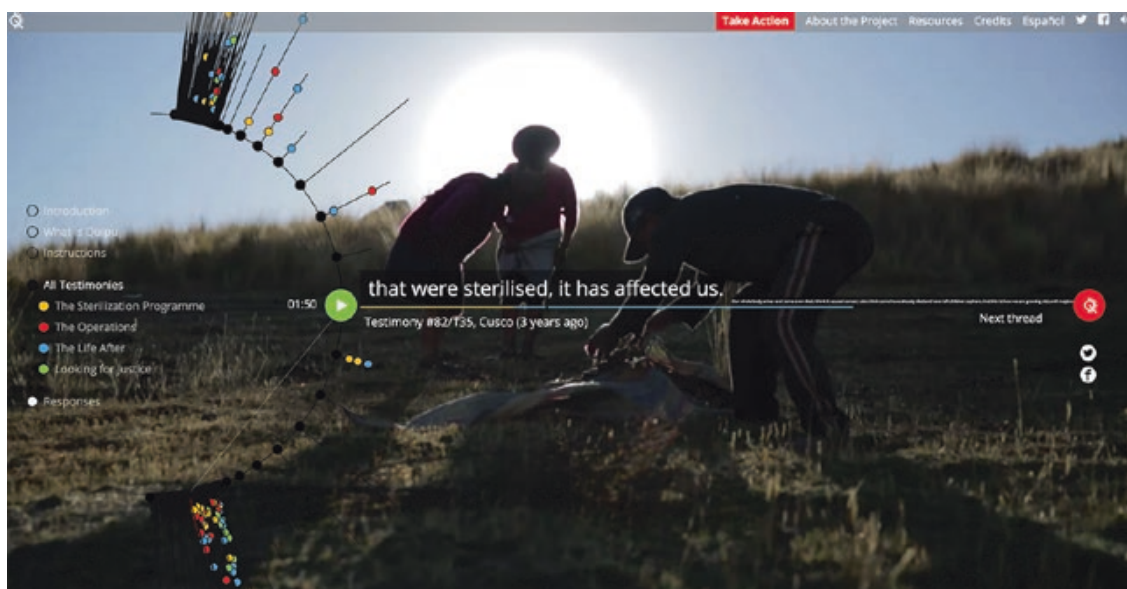


Fig. 2 Maria Court and Rosemarie Lerner, *Quipu Project*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artists

This methodology also reflects and reinvigorates the oral cultural history that predated the internet, and that has endured despite the shift towards various more text-based forms of knowledge distribution over the past centuries. Using technology that is appropriate for the cultural context and that helps to preserve the integrity of the subject matter is at the core of *The Quipu Project*. Here, listening is used as a method of material collection as well as a lens through which the user or audience are asked to engage with the participants' experiences. The largely audio archive further decentralizes the concept of documentary voice, away from the usual primary dependence on visual evidence for making truth claims.

LISTENING AS A MOVE TOWARDS THE OTHER

The *Quipu Project* takes its name from the ancient Andean and Incan instrument used to communicate complex messages and to tell stories. It consists of a series of knots on strings. Quipu expert Gary Urton claims that the way to understand this mysterious form of communication is through studying the knots and by looking at it in depth, "following every cord's twist, turn and colour change" (2016, 115). Urton claims this is a necessary shift from reading the quipu only through the observations and reports of the Spanish colonizers. This approach implies getting close and becoming implicated in the meaning through direct contact with the object, which is another form of listening. This interpretation is apt when discussing the conceptual intent of the *Quipu Project* as an acknowledgement and legitimation of the participants within the historical context of colonization by the Spanish. Listening to the voices of the participants in the *Quipu Project*, it is important to consider how this material is treated, mediated, and re-presented within the context of colonial and post-colonial discourses. Documentary production, at its most self-serving and unethical, can itself be considered an act of colonizing stories and experiences. It implies a selective listening that filters what is presented, and appropriating this for pre-conceived ideas and outcomes. Fiumura draws comparisons with a tendency to negate the voices of others through a lack of listening with a history of human dominance as a species, as is the case with colonization. According to Fiumura, the difficulty of listening is a philosophical problem of considering another. She asks, "Why should it be so difficult to listen to something without transforming it into nothing or transferring it into our own language" (1995, 39). Again this returns the focus of documentary

practices to issues of power: who is allowed to speak, and who listens. A focus on listening presents implications for documentary making that challenge the authorial voice as the dominant determiner of meaning.

The *Quipu Project* is composed of a series of documentary artefacts, including an interactive online project, a short linear film embedded in *The Guardian* website, and a campaign for action. The interactive online version uses the motif of the quipu as a structuring device. The introduction sets the context and gives background about the government's sterilization program. The individual testimonies of the victims are broken into different segments including: *The Sterilisation Program*, *The Operations*, *The Life After* and *Looking for Justice*. Playing behind the interactive graphic rendering of the quipu structure are videos of landscapes, rural scenes, people tending the fields or handling a mobile phone. These videos are very quotidian and unobtrusive, resisting drawing attention away from the spoken voices while providing context and highlighting the specificity of location. In her discussions of listening within public spaces, Lacey claims that while the visual is individual and subjective, focusing the attention on the subject and object, a focus on the auditory world is a shift to the "intersubjectivity of the public, plural world" (2013, 13). This is evident in the *Quipu Project* where the act of "listening in" is foregrounded in contrast to any emphasis on "looking at" individual participants or environments. Beyond the act of listening, the website of the Quipu Project also enables the recording of messages of support for the participants as an acknowledgement that someone *is* listening to them. This feedback loop circumvents some of the inherent issues in interactive documentary that echo traditional transmission models predicated on a one-way exchange. In the film on *The Guardian* website, the final sequence shows the Peruvian women with the phones to their ears—not talking but listening to these messages. In this way, the audience as listener becomes an active agent in the construction of the documentary voice.

LISTENING, MULTI-LINEARITY, AND INCOMPLETE KNOWLEDGE

As a linear artefact, documentary film is often necessarily configured as a singular perspective or argument. While the process of making the film may be relational and contingent, what is presented is a structure which often renders the voice or the text of the film as fixed, stable, and unified. With the linear form comes a certain ontological position

regarding causality and unified conceptions of knowledge. According to Rosi Braidotti, linearity represents a teleological thinking which encourages adherence to the canon of established texts and arguments (2011, 23). Trinh similarly equates linearity with closed systems that occlude multiplicity (2009, 70). Linear films, therefore, always limit the exploration of multiple forms of auditory engagement. Multiple voices, sounds, and perspectives necessarily have to be edited to allow for meaning to be translated clearly, with the human voice primarily used for its linguistic signification. In shaping the documentary to tell a singular story or present an argument, the complexity of other positions or perspectives needs to be simplified, or simply omitted. Elizabeth Cowie claims that, therefore, documentary film creates false causal relationships to make the world knowable (2011, 39). This fixity renders the world as constructed of discrete elements hermetically sealed from the dynamic and complex nature of relationality. As Cowie claims, “In presenting a narrative of cause and effect, the documentary creates the certainty of a knowable world, centring the spectator as subject of (but also subject to) this certainty” (2011, 96). While the subject matter may question or counter our understandings of certain ideologies and hierarchies, the structural approach continually replicates power discourses endemic to the form. Although documentary may not necessarily replicate the dictates of a classic narrative or a three-act structure, conformity to a sealed linear composition allows this unified voice to dominate in its particular framing and presentation of knowledge. A linear way of telling stories through a singular logical construction has implications for rendering complex experiences that might be served better by alternate forms which allow more multivalent readings of the material through activating the auditory space as a site where impartial and contested knowledge can exist.

Opening up the documentary space to allow the material to expand across multiple platforms and iterations allows for a broader conceptualization of documentary knowledge. Within a multi-platform approach, each form has its own unique ontological positioning of knowledge and material which creates critical distance through a disruption of traditional linearity. Presenting documentary in forms that break free of the constraints of linearity allows engagement and readings that foreground multiple forms of knowledge through implicating the audience as a listening subject. Rather than presenting knowledge as totalizing, incompleteness and fragmentation are highlighted through an attunement

to listening. The listening subject constructs meaning through piecing together the fragments, aware that there are gaps and not all the auditory information presented can be grasped.

Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill's *Empire: The Unintended Consequences of Dutch Colonialism* is a large scale project spanning four years and ten countries. The project traces the ongoing impacts of Dutch Colonisation as it has mutated and manifested through progressive generations. Consisting of four parts; *Cradle*, *Legacy*, *Migrants*, and *Periphery*, this work was initially exhibited at the New York Film Festival over a number of sites and installations in 2013. Through a collaboration with interactive designers, it was subsequently reworked into a web-based project with the four components reinterpreted using the affordances of interactivity. According to Jongsma and O'Neill, the online interactive iteration of *Empire* was intended to reflect the complexity of the project in terms of concept, geography, and the longitudinal nature of both their own engagement in the production process and the after-effects of Dutch Colonisation. To subvert the linear form, they composed the project combining a range of media and installation and online video works, still photographs, a book, essays, a blog, and the interactive online version:

Limiting our work to one platform and voice didn't seem like the right way to examine (post) post-colonialism. We needed to allow for a multiplicity of perspective, and to reflect the far-reaching impact — in both geographical and spiritual terms — of the Dutch colonial endeavour. We decided that it was okay if casual observers never realised the full breadth of the project. (Jongsma and O'Neill 2014, 8)

The breaking open of the closed linear form of the documentary enables a shift from a singular documentary voice to a multiplicity of voices, revealing that knowledge is never complete. The design of the *Empire* project plays with the idea that multiple perspectives can only be experienced incompletely and need to be navigated by selective and attuned listening. This occurs through the enabling of the audience to co-construct meaning and engage with the multiple possible avenues to navigate the work (see Fig. 3). In documentary film, much knowledge and truth claims, whether valid or erroneous, are predicated on what is visible and indexical to the real. Often sound bears the extra burden of providing evidence through testimony. Trinh uses the example of sync-sound



Fig. 3 Eline Jongsma and Kel O’Neill, *Empire: The Unintended Consequences of Dutch Colonialism*, 2012–2014. Image courtesy of the artists

in documentary interviews where the image of people speaking the words is “[Illustrative], giving it the realism it lacks, and amplifying it when it fails to convince” (2013, 155). In documentary, the voice of the participant is often recruited for testimony of lived experience. The visual indexical representation enables the audience to engage and identify with the participant, by seeing who is saying the words and seeing them say them. It is then assumed that through seeing, the audience can form an affective and intersubjective relationship with the subject. The statements become facts. According to Trinh, the “real” has “one basic referent—pure, concrete, fixed, visible, all-too-visible” (2013, 94). While the sync-sound interview conflates the visual and the auditory, the distance is substantiated through its predication on existing binaries between the viewer and documentary participant endemic to the transmission model in communication (Cowie 2011, 97). Moving away from conflating truth and visual evidence opens up the less dominant field of sound, allowing an exploration of less concrete propositions about the world as manifested through documentary. Aurality is the lesser trustworthy sense due to its inherent intangibility. Tanja Dreher suggests that “A focus on listening and privilege thus highlights incompleteness and

connection rather than knowing and mastery [...] through decentring and denaturalising” (2009, 452). Through the creative use of sound and listening techniques, the audience is asked to question claims on knowledge as totalizing.

In the installation version of *Periphery* (the fourth part of *Empire*), listening is foregrounded as it contains two video works that cannot be viewed or heard at the same time. In one video, Norman, a Californian descendent of Dutch-Indonesian immigrants, talks about the acting career he has carved out as a Mexican bandido; the only roles that seem to be available to him due to his Mexican appearance. The other video shows an indigenous Australian, Yeti, who claims he is a descendent of shipwrecked Dutch sailors from the seventeenth century. Yeti explains his attempts to try to prove his Dutch lineage in order to reclaim his ancestral land. The two character portraits of Norman and Yeti tell parallel stories of heritages denied and claimed in the aftermath of Dutch colonisation. In the installation, the two videos were located separately in the male and female toilets. The spatial configuration meant that only one story could be heard directly. The other story could be relayed through the mediation of another’s experience, replicating incomplete knowledge of both the participants’ ancestry and how they present to the world. The videos are already a mediation, relying on story-telling, oral histories, and implied listening. The conceptualization of this work also calls to mind the childhood game of “telephone” where a message is whispered from one person to another with the final utterance often differing vastly from the original as a result of mishearing, malapropism, and interpretation. Our reception of knowledge and information is always mediated and to varying extents distorted. This is achieved in the online version of *Periphery*, which allows the audience to notice similarities between the two stories through the presentation of a split-screen with the two videos visible simultaneously. The video at the top of the screen is the right-way up with the sound more dominant, while the one under is upside-down with a lower volume. At times, the visuals mirror each other in close-ups, landscapes or details. Both stories can be heard simultaneously and overhearing occurs when there is silence in one of the videos. The simultaneity of the combined voices create a co-existent portrait of these two men: one who is seeking his Dutch heritage, and the other who through necessity has reinvented it. Using the cursor, we can mix the audio to privilege one of the voices. In this way the audience is implicated in the meaning-making of the work.

LISTENING TO BE PRESENT

To listen is to transgress space. The use of sound and its corollary sense listening can also enable the experience of simultaneous and differing ontological or phenomenological positions. In Jongsma and O'Neill's first video work, *Cradle*, two perspectives of the singular location of Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport are integrated through the use of sound. One of the videos shows a worker at the airport's mortuary preparing and receiving bodies for international transport. Many of these bodies are being returned back to previously colonized territories. The other video shows plane spotters on the fringe of the airport. The soundtrack is a merging of the sound of both videos. Navigating the video online, you can flip between the two images but only one is visible at a time. For example, a young boy from South Korea talks about his favourite part of the plane while the mortician speaks of the difficulty in having to transport children's bodies. The visual treatment gives you an incomplete experience, but the sound unites these two perspectives, offering a more complex experience. The overhearing of the non-diegetic audio of the image you cannot see is like eavesdropping or "earwitnessing", a term Justine Lloyd borrows from Elias Canetti. Lloyd claims that the act of "earwitnessing" requires us to be more attentive as we endeavor to grasp moments of overheard speech and information. This calls into question the long-held assumption of the passivity of listening (2009, 478). In *Cradle*, while we can be quite sure of what we see, we remain attuned to what is on the other side of the image in view.

In his original essay on voice in documentary (1983), Nichols cautioned against the tendency for filmmakers to hide their authorial position behind the voices of the participants. Nichols claimed the filmmaker was in danger of losing their voice, thereby diluting the argument that the film should be making. Trinh presents a related contention, critiquing the use of the filmmaker's claim that they were "giving voice" to an oppressed other: "The socially-oriented filmmaker is thus the almighty voice-giver [...] whose position of authority in the production of meaning continues to go unchallenged, skilfully masked as it is by its righteous mission" (1993, 96). Multiple voices can be recruited and coalesced to create a unified perspective in documentary, de facto neutralizing heterogeneity. In discussing the use of interviews in some documentary films, Stella Bruzzi proposes the term "choric voice" to describe the use of multiple participants to support a singular argument

(2000, 48). In her video installations, Bookchin uses a similar choral technique to illuminate social issues through the accumulation of voices. Zoë Druick calls this an “aesthetic of the multitude” whereby through being presented with a sheer quantity of material and data, the audience is asked to consider the scale of a particular situation or issue (2016, 6). Rather than letting the subject matter of these interviews draw attention to the stories, it is Bookchin’s editing style that creates a chorus around experience and signifies the mass.

In *Long Story Short* (2016), rather than drawing on pre-recorded videos sourced online, Bookchin travelled around San Francisco and the Bay Area to interview the long-term unemployed and people living below the poverty-line. The interviews are all shot in a similar format, not dissimilar to the YouTube vlogs Bookchin used in previous works. The central framing and direct address to the camera barely hide the presence of an interlocutor or an embodied listener, and the presence of the filmmaker as listener indicates an ontological shift towards the presence of another. Her use of the interview as strategy marks a re-engagement of the traditional documentary method of bearing witness. These participants were recruited in specific social spaces—usually welfare or job centres, soup kitchens or other facilities which offer help around an increasingly visible and urgent social epidemic in the United States. Shifting from the methodology employed in much of her previous work, Bookchin says she decided to interview as many people as she could find as there was little pre-existing video material on this topic online. Bookchin claims that after eliciting a few vlogs from participants, where they just spoke alone to camera, the participants frequently expressed the desire to have someone ask the questions and listen to their responses (Van Diepten 2016). Given the nature of the context and subject matter that Bookchin is engaging in, listening is both an ethical and an essential role she took on as documentarian in an attempt to share the power to be heard. The documentary maker here enacts what Lloyd refers to as a “labour of care” (2009, 485). To really listen to another is an acknowledgement of the complexity of difference, as it requires one to be in the presence of the person and to navigate a range of complex and often conflicting positions. It allows one to hear what one does not necessarily want to hear. This recalls Rose’s claim that power is sustained through the refusal to listen (2015, 128). Bookchin, as documentary maker, sifts through and makes sense of what is said through her listening. This calls to mind the practice of psychoanalysis where speaking is central to the process

but only bears fruit with careful listening to what is said, purposefully, accidentally, and with an attuned ear. For without the other to intercept what is said and create a feedback loop by acknowledging or deconstructing, the voice dissipates after leaving the person.

In *Long Story Short*, at times there might be six or more individuals speaking to us on a singular screen, resembling a multi-channel installation. In watching this film, our responses are activated by the embodied subjects. While we listen for the differences, we also notice the similarities, the moments where the voices coalesce into a polyphonic experience. This is when the piece becomes a collaborative testimonial, each utterance in support of the others. This not only reinforces the commonality of their experiences, but also highlights the linguistic features and expressions used to describe such experiences. The use of documentary as a social tool is evident in this work, and rather than a consecutive procession of testimonials on the effect of poverty on these people, the linear timeline is interrupted by the layered nature of the presentation of the voices. This a cappella effect uses a kind of collaborative overlap, common to conversations where the speakers speak at the same time to show support or rapport. Indeed, the participants here concur and corroborate each other's experiences. While this work is presented as a linear film, the presentation of the talking heads in their simultaneity creates a sense of multiplicity and coexistence. Unlike the succession of material as one sequence after another, loosening dependence on narrative strategies negates the causal relationships endemic to any conventional linear structure. As a result, the issue of poverty is effectively presented to us as systemic, ongoing, and far-reaching.

In her critique of how conventional documentary collaborates in the othering of differences, Jill Godmilow suggests that "the traditional documentary enables viewers to have the coherence, manageability, and often the moral order of their lives reaffirmed, while simultaneously allowing them to feel that they're interested in other classes, other peoples' tragedies, other countries' crises" (1997, 87). Godmilow goes on to claim that "the audience experiences itself as not implicated, exempt from the responsibility either to act or even to consider the structures of their own situation" (1997, 87). The strategies that engender an active listening in the audience in Bookchin's film projects, whether in their linear or installation forms, disrupt the traditional binary of viewer and subject through commanding a space that foregrounds the audience as a listening subjects and active meaning-makers.

CONCLUSION

The works discussed in this chapter present documentary practices and projects that move away from how we consider both documentary “voice” and the voices of participants in traditional modes of production and representation. Through these works, we can rethink documentary voice beyond its mode of framing and speaking outwards. Expanding the concept of documentary voice towards a focus on listening is integral in carving out spaces and making incursions into prescribed ways of doing documentary. A turn towards listening makes visible multiple forms of knowledge and relationships as well as an ethics of care. These include the repositioning and re-presenting of evidence of social epidemics manifested in first-person testimonies in Natalie Bookchin’s work, the deep ethical consideration of the importance of neglected listening in the *Quipu Project* and the complex multiple ongoing effects of post-colonialism in *The Empire Project*. Continuing to make works that listen and are subsequently listened to can reconfigure power dynamics of documentary production and spectatorship. These works also enable critical stories, experiences, and issues to be heard within a landscape of mass voicing.

With more heterogeneous voices being facilitated through the production of non-fiction and documentary works, which span linear, interactive, immersive, and installation forms, much theorizing has focused on issues of polyvocality and de-centralizing the author to allow space for those previously unheard. While an increasing number of projects manage to successfully rethink established traditions and power dynamics of conventional documentary production, a continual opening up of platforms and opportunities for participation also requires a paradigmatic shift in how we make sense of these voices. In this chapter, rather than a focus on documentary finding ways to speak and represent voices, I have argued that we need new ways to listen. This involves both methodologies of documentary practice and the creation of artefacts that inscribe and challenge us to experience forms of knowledge, experience, and stories through the sensorial phenomenon of aurality. Preferencing the act of listening over more established and privileged senses such as vision creates a critical distance that can enliven documentary works and empower them to be heard amidst the plethora of affective information that we encounter in the contemporary mediated world. However, it is not only through the sense of hearing: true listening is an ethical and

philosophical pursuit. A philosophy of documentary listening includes the recognition of multiple incomplete forms of knowledge, the destabilization of the prescribed power of speaking, and a movement towards an other through the active acknowledgement that this might often involve not understanding another position, but still being able to be in its presence and hear it. Moreover, a focus on listening is an awakening of an ethics of concern to what might otherwise be hidden, overlooked or previously misunderstood. Becoming attuned to listening is an ethical imperative to reconsider our individual positions as implicated within a broader ecology of existence and an awareness of positions that are incommensurate with our own.

NOTES

1. Natalie Bookchin, "Natalie Bookchin," accessed August 3, 2017. <http://bookchin.net/projects/now-hes-out-in-public-and-everyone-can-see-2/>.
2. "Quipu Project," accessed July 29, 2017. <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/intro>.

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