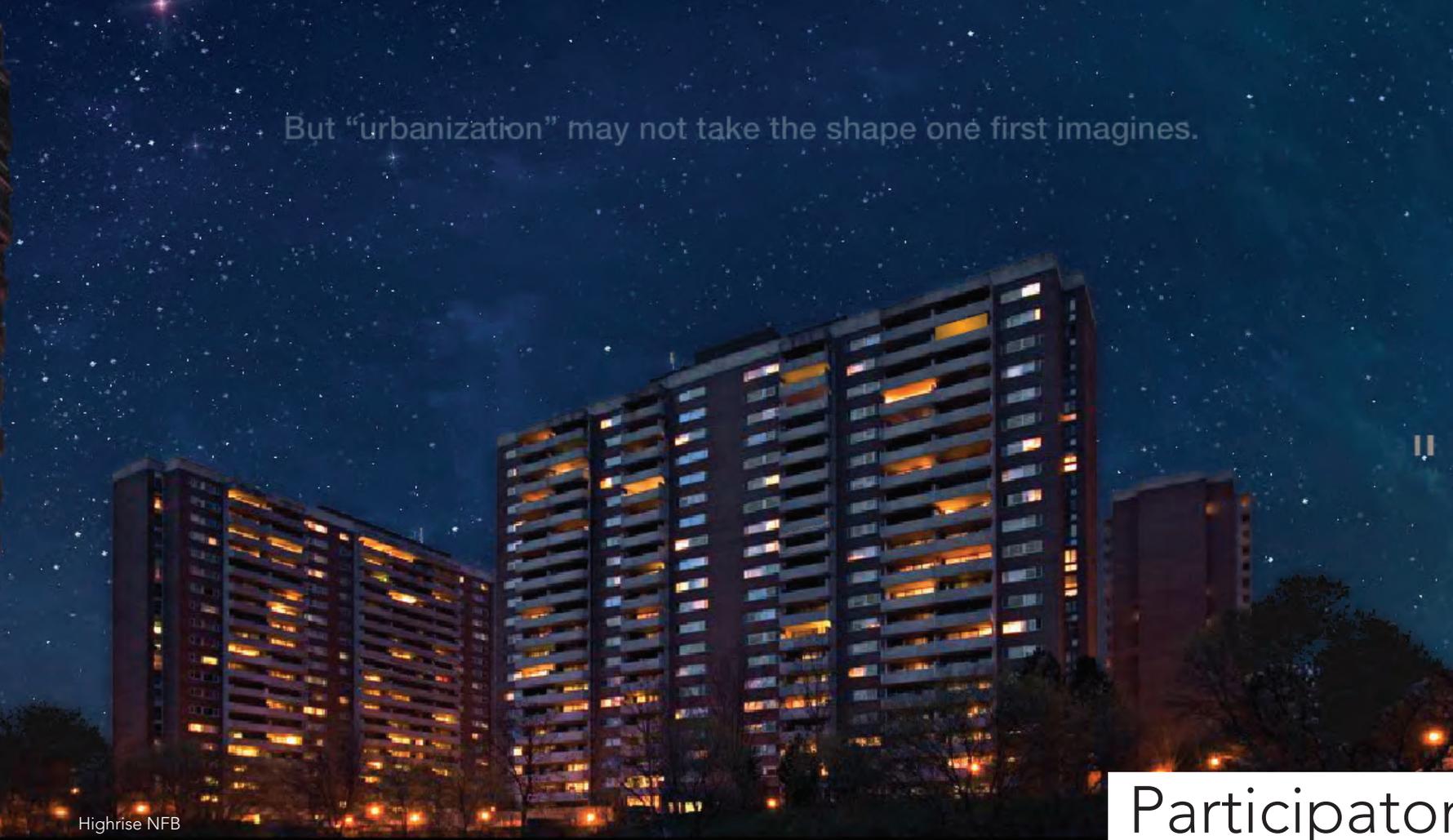


But “urbanization” may not take the shape one first imagines.

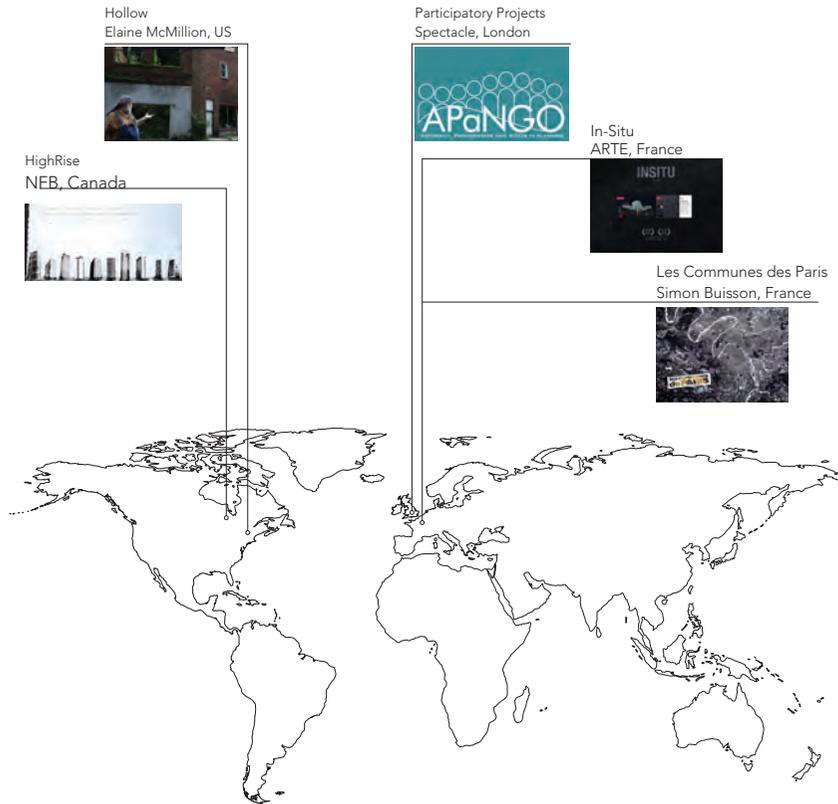


Highrise NFB

Participatory  
Documentary  
[and the city]



The productions chosen for the research.



The recent emergence and accessibility of new media technologies brings with it new opportunities for professions not traditionally associated with media production. The potentials for the use of documentary practice in urban research and design projects goes much further than the traditionally formatted video production.

This research project examines this potential, from both an aesthetic and working process viewpoints. The work looks at five participatory and interactive films that focus on urban issues. From this analysis it establishes working methods for how documentary practice could be integrated into urban research and design projects.

We will see how interactive and participatory documentaries are not only about the final finished product. They are as much about designing a storytelling process that engages with the voices of people, their communities and the places they live in. This process can often become a catalyst that empowers and engages the communities involved. While online interactive documentaries can encourage this participation by combining a range of media; photography, maps, soundscapes and data visualisations into one compelling experience for the viewer.



# How this research is structured

The research is a compilation of interviews with directors of the selected films, case studies looking at two key productions and an essay looking at the historical relationship between documentary film and urban design.

Working methods are established from a number of key themes, central to this is the non-traditional role of the filmmaker within each process. How this can work is outlined in a number of demonstration projects with different project partners. This will hopefully become the second phase of the project in due course.

This research is the result of a starter grant from the Dutch Creative Industry Funds.

# Contents

Working Methods	Key Themes The role of the filmmaker
Developing a demonstration project	Neighbourhood level City Narrative Urban Research
Case Studies	The Thousandth Tower - Highrise Les Communes des Paris
Interviews	Katerina Cizek - Director of Highrise Elaine Mc Millon - Director of Hollow Mark Saunders - Spectacle
Essay	Documenting the Myths of Modernism
Archive	Challenge for Change The Social life of Small Urban Spaces

# Key Themes

From the analysis six key themes have emerged that have a particular relevance to urban research and design projects. The table below highlights how the different themes appear in each of the documentaries. Some of the productions such as High-Rise engage with all of themes to a certain extent. While Les Communes de Paris excels in map based story telling.

All of the productions successfully engage with a wider audience achieve this is something often missing from urban research work. It is in the basic nature of documentary to be able to bring complex topics to a wide audience. This trait can be the biggest asset in integrating documentary practice with urban research.

	RESEARCH			THEMES		
	Community Media as Public Space	Empowering Communities	Global Issues Personal Views	Map based Storytelling	Crowdsourced Research	Engaging Audiences
Hi-Rise	+	+	+++	+	+	++
Hollow	++	+++	+	++		++
Spectacle	++	+++				+
Les Communes des Paris				+++		++
Insitu				+	++	+++

## Empowering Communities

In the three projects involving community participation the filmmakers worked closely with residents in participatory mapping, storytelling and media workshops providing training and support so they could access the media tools to tell their own story. Bringing their story to a wider audience empowers the community and amplifies their voice, while involving people in the documentary process is a great method to engage people in the debate about the future of the place where they live.

- Highrise
- Hollow
- Spectacle

## Community Media as Public Space

The development of community media projects often provides local residents with a new type of social meeting space. In three of the documentaries the communities in question were provided with training and workshops in documentary production. Working with media became a catalyst for people to get involved. The workshops became an open platform for discussion reflection and debate about wider issues affecting their neighbourhoods. This in turn gave people the means to reach a wider audience with their concerns and ideas.

- Highrise
- Hollow
- Spectacle

## Global issues - Personal views

Both Highrise and Hollow have developed their documentary research alongside similar academic projects. In the majority of urban research the personal views and stories are secondary to the main body of research while the opposite is true for documentary. Telling a global story through a personal and intimate perspective is one of the main skills of a documentary filmmaker. A personal viewpoint can bring a level of meaning and depth to an issue with a responding level of understanding in the viewer.

- Highrise
- Hollow

## Map based Storytelling

Maps are a fundamental element in every urban research project there is the potential with transmedia to integrate stories into maps, through video, soundscapes and animation. This can bring a new dimension to both documentary storytelling and the presentation of urban research.

Interactive maps are integrated into a number of the projects. In the Les Communes des Paris case study we see how they are used effectively.

- Highrise
- Hollow
- LCd Paris
- Insitu

## Crowdsourced Research

Two of the documentaries allow the audience to participate and contribute to the overall project. This brings benefits for both the documentary production (more content) and the audience (sense of being part of the project). Harnessing the power of the audience can make a relatively large research task a lot easier. The engagement with contributors can expand the scope of the research and lead to new possibilities and connections. However it can also lead to incoherence with an over production/supply of content.

- Highrise
- Insitu

## Engaging Audiences

Engaging audiences works on two levels, it is about generating viewers for the final content and motivating an audience to become part of the process from early in the production.

Hollow generated a core audience through social media networks and crowdfunding campaigns to build awareness. With the result that the audience helps to finance the documentary's production and development. This process has in recent years become an essential part of independent documentary production.

- Highrise
- Hollow
- Spectacle
- LCd Paris
- Insitu

# Cross-referencing Themes

	Empowering Communities	Community Media as Public Space	Global Issues Personal Views		Map based Storytelling	Crowdsourced Research	Engaging Audiences
HighRise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community led storytelling in <i>The Thousandth Tower</i> amplifies their voices in the city renewal proces.</li> <li>Stories told and presented at Toronto city Hall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Platform created for tower residents to voice concerns and discuss renewal plans</li> <li>One Millionth Tower brought residents together with designers to re-imagine their neighbourhoods.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Out My Window</i> links personal stories from people living in similar towers around the world</li> <li>Whole production links number of global academic research projects with personal intimate stories</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive Google map in <i>The world of HighRise</i> allowing users to contribute</li> <li>Map based navigation in <i>Out My Window</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive Google map in <i>The World of HighRise</i> allows users to contribute locations of similar typologies around the world</li> <li><i>Out My Window</i> participate collates contributed photos taken from viewers windows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-platform and multi year HighRise has both an online presence and appeared off line in different formats at festivals and in galleries</li> <li>Participatory elements allow user to engage and</li> </ul>
Hollow		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participatory mapping and storytelling workshops with residents.</li> <li>Residents producing their own films showing their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A story told on the local level but with universal themes for areas suffering from post industrial decline</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linked with the geography of the region a map will allow viewers to navigate through the documentary</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive strategy from the beginning to the end of project.</li> <li>Successful Crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter</li> <li>Social media charts the story with updates posted throughout the process</li> </ul>
Apango	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different community media groups were able to influence the regeneration debate in their neighbourhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The filmmaking workshops with the community provided a forum for residents to discuss the wider changes occurring in their neighbourhood.</li> </ul>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different community media groups</li> </ul>
Les Communes des Paris					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map serves as the primary mode of navigation for the audience, allowing a non-linear interactive route through the city.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily web based a live version was presented at IDFA's DocLab in 2010</li> </ul>
Insitu					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map provides a secondary layer of navigation where viewers can browse through the films locations and contribute locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The interactive map allows the audience to contribute and add to the database of street art locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singular film</li> <li>Online version contains extra interactive elements</li> </ul>

## What is the role of the filmmaker when they are challenged with working outside of their traditional boundaries?

To guide the process the following points have emerged during the research, they are primarily borrowed and adapted from Katerina Cizek's filmmaker in residence manifesto. Which aims to challenge the conventional notions of documentary practice and forms of story telling:

01. Ideas should be developed in an open collaborative context with the community and other parties involved.
02. The process is often as important as the final product.
03. Break stereotypes. Push the boundaries of what documentary means.
04. The filmmaker's role is to experiment and adapt documentary forms to the original idea.
05. Use documentary and media to "participate" rather than just to observe and to record. Filmmaking is not an AV or a PR department.
06. Work closely with the community partner, but respect each other's expertise and independence.
07. The social and political goals – and the process itself — are paramount. Ask yourself every day: why are you doing this project?
08. The documentarian should be free to use any forms of media, photography, sound recording, video depending on the context even just pen and paper. It can all be documentary.
09. Cross collaboration between different disciplines should be encouraged and can enrich the process.
10. Track the process, the results and spend time disseminating what you've learned with multiple communities: professionals, academics, filmmakers, media, general public, advocates, critics and students.

Always tell a good story...



# Developing a demonstration project



## How could participatory documentary be used as a catalyst for change within an existing neighbourhood?

Potential project partner

DRIFT Carnissebuurt, Rotterdam



DRIFT are the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions, based at the Erasmus university in Rotterdam. They are currently one of the project partners for the Veerkracht project in the Carnissebuurt in Rotterdam South. The Veerkracht project sets out to explore the latent potentials in the neighbourhood and give them a direction and space to establish themselves. In this way residents, institutions and other stakeholders can bring the different social, environmental and economic potentials of the district together in an effective manner. This is done by developing the necessary conditions, a self-organizing network within the district, a collective involvement in public space and developing education and skills learning.

The role of documentary here is as a catalyst that can begin a process of wider change within the neighbourhood. Participatory documentary can play an empowering role that can help the community to explore the potential within their neighbourhood. Participatory media workshops, interviews and screenings can provide a basis for discussion where everyone is given an equal voice and platform on the screen.

The approach outlined takes influence from the participatory work carried out by the NFB in Canada. Involving the community in the production of their story.

## A working method for integrating with a community process on a neighbourhood level.

The documentary process is used as a catalyst to begin a discussion within the neighbourhood. This can bring a new dynamic to the situation and provide the community with a new way of looking at their familiar surroundings.

A number of workshops can be developed that address different themes affecting the neighbourhood. Discussion on these themes could be initiated with a short film about the neighbourhood.

Media training workshops can promote community participation in the documentary process. Community members can be interviewed and submit their own media to the project.

Everyone is given an equal voice on the screen

Concerns are heard and topics that need to be addressed come to the fore.

These issues are addressed and further documented, this could lead to the creation of physical interventions as solutions or organising actions within the group to address the issues.

The results of the process are presented to a wider audience, empowering the community, amplifying their voice acting as a catalyst for further change.





How could participatory and interactive documentary be used to develop a city scale narrative?

Potential project partner  
In development

A working method for how documentary could integrate with a city scale narrative

Another format that is suited to the non-linear nature of interactive documentary

Across a wider city region a singular themed narrative or a multiple different narratives are documented

A number of short stories or personal portraits are made on the chosen theme

The narrative could be widened with an open call for people to participate and include archive footage

A map of the city region is created as an interactive interface where the different elements are brought together

Presented to a wider audience via a web platform  
Here documentary maker must act as both a creator and curator of content. Bringing together different individual stories that add up to create a bigger narrative.

How could participatory and interactive documentary link with a larger urban research project?



Potential project partner

Failed Architecture

Plein St Flats, Glasgow. Chris Leslie

Failed Architecture is a growing network of people that provides observations on architecture and the city. This network is constantly growing, with contributions from all over the world and from different perspectives, and many visitors to our website. A large part of the content comes from knowledgeable and passionate contributors that help us explore the notions of failure in architecture, urbanism, politics, economics, and other domains related to the urban environment.

A documentary approach could develop a number of singular narratives in more detail that already feature on failed architecture website. In a similar manner to Highrise a production would feature an open call to contributors and develop some of the content already submitted to the site into a more coherent narrative.

A working method for integrating with a larger urban research project.

Here documentary maker must act as both a creator and curator of content. Bringing different stories together to highlight the human element often lacking in urban research. However these personal stories are often the most effective way of communicating bigger issues to a wider audience.

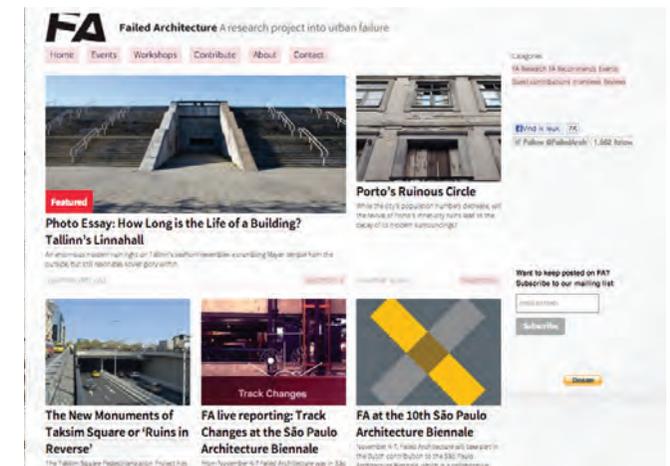
The non-linear nature of interactive documentaries is suited to larger research projects that address a particular theme.

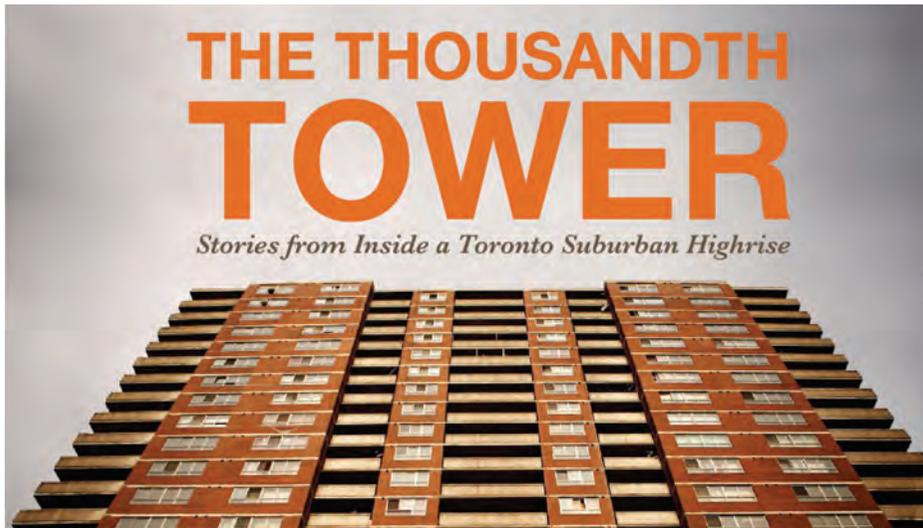
From that theme a common narrative should be derived that can tell the bigger story from a personal standpoint.

Connecting the larger narrative with a number of short stories or personal portraits can bring greater significance to the wider narrative.

An open call for people to participate can broaden the scope of the project.

An interactive documentary format can bring form to and help shape the different elements together.



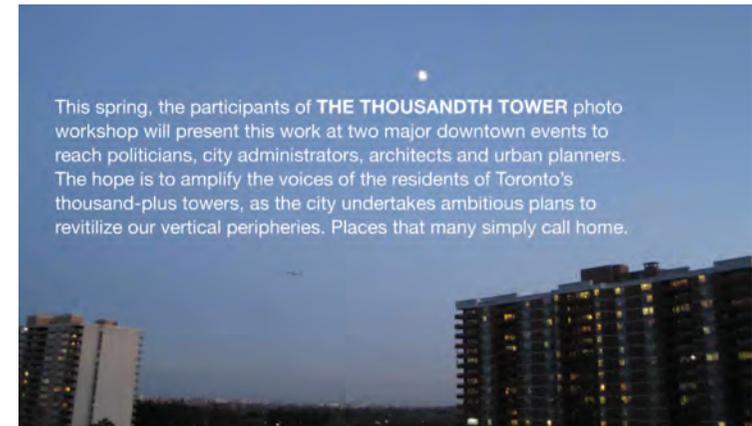


## Case Study

### Community Empowerment in The Thousandth Tower

The Thousandth Tower is one of the smaller projects that was created under the High Rise umbrella. It was created with six residents of one of Toronto's suburban highrise towers, asking them to show the world, what their view looks like from inside. Its presentation format is simple but effective, consisting of interviews with the residents presented together with their photographs. We hear the stories about their experience of living in a high rise tower block and can navigate with ease through the web documentary from one story to the next. The Thousandth Tower is the perfect example of how a documentary can bring marginalised voices into the larger urban renewal debate. As the director Katerina Cizek says

“What is unique about us is that we could engage in the city renewal debate in a way that actually nobody has done before, we could uniquely contribute from a social and community standpoint.... we wanted to amplify the voices of the residents in the discussion about what our city could and should be”

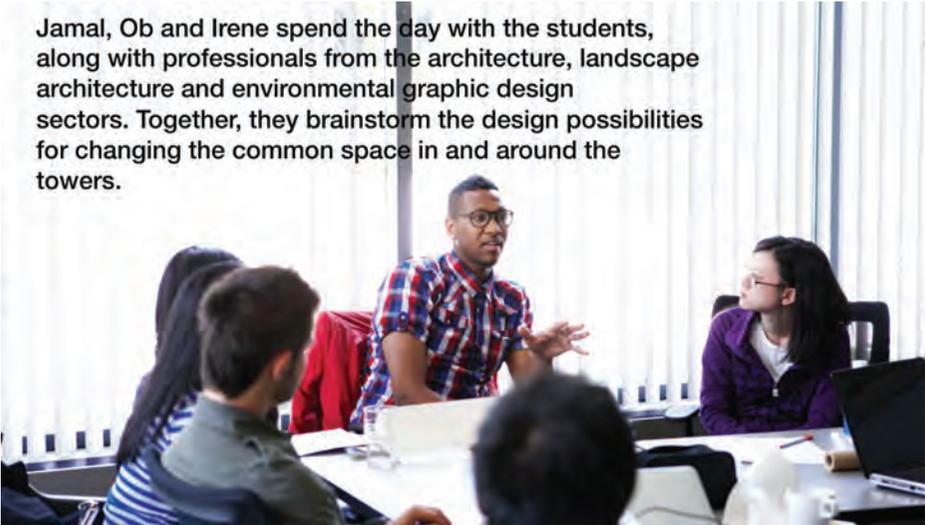


They amplified the residents voices by presenting their stories at Toronto's city hall, at an event that placed their voices in the wider context of work that was being carried out around Toronto's Tower Renewal Program.

The presentation was not an end point for the project but became a starting point with the residents receiving invitations to a number of follow up presentations around the city (shown in the images). The residents also worked with design students to imagine how the public spaces around the towers could be transformed. We can see the results of this work in another more experimental High Rise documentary called One Millionth Tower.

The simplicity of the documentary approach is most appealing. The documentary is created in a participatory format by and with the residents. Developed over the course of a year we can see a clear editorial hand guiding and shaping the work but this does not compromise the individual identity of each contribution. The work avoids using film – the traditional documentary format - opting instead for photos taken by the residents underlaid with audio of their personal stories. The public presentation then became more powerful by the residents themselves telling their stories.

The documentary can be viewed at the Highrise site <http://highrise.nfb.ca/thousandthtower/>



**Jamal, Ob and Irene spend the day with the students, along with professionals from the architecture, landscape architecture and environmental graphic design sectors. Together, they brainstorm the design possibilities for changing the common space in and around the towers.**



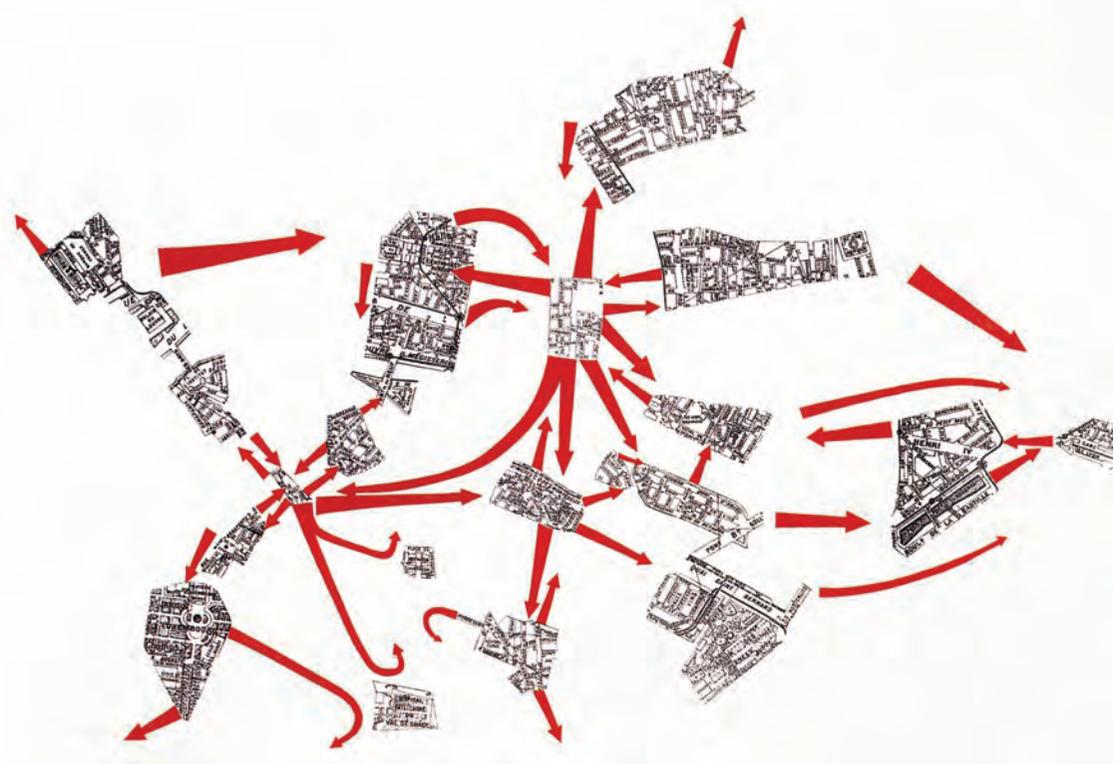
**The instructor, Arlene Gould, explains that "Residents are experts who need to sit with designers in charettes. We need to create user-centred human spaces. We know there are many so-called \*green\* buildings that are actually not good for people!"**



**The Thousandth Tower group is also invited to a charette (brainstorming session) with students at York University. They're using the Tower Renewal Site as a case study for a course in "Design for Sustainability for the Built Environment."**



**Elise Hug, from the City Tower Renewal office is also here, and she's been listening. She promises to bring some of these ideas back to the property manager. Together, residents and design students have become an active part of the design process for Tower Renewal.**



## Case Study

### Map based storytelling in Les Communes des Paris

'Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simple observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all.'

Kevin Lynch, Image of the City

Our urban stories are intimately linked to our everyday geographies and landscapes. Our daily movements through the urban fabric define and shape the narrative of the city. Personal stories and city narratives are often presented differently either via static - maps drawings and text - or dynamic means – video and animation. The advent of transmedia allows the integration of these static and dynamic elements into one coherent digital media production. This can bring a new dimension to both documentary storytelling and the presentation of urban research.

In one of the research documentaries Les Communes des Paris a static map is the interface for this interactive documentary. In the film we join twenty four different characters each of which brings us on a different personal journey through Paris. When their story ends the viewer then has a choice to connect with another two characters for the next step of the trip. The diversity of people, their journeys and locations are weaved together via the map to tell the bigger story about the workings and daily rhythms of the greater Paris region.

This non-linear method of navigation through Paris immediately brings to mind the Situationists - Naked City plan. Where a series of disparate Parisian fragments are stitched together by bold red arrows creating an alternative geography of the city making it clear that "the city is only experienced in time by a concrete, situated subject, as a passage from one "unity of atmosphere" to another, not as the object of a totalised perception".

In order to get a picture of the whole we would need to stitch the narratives of these situated subjects together, which is what occurs in Les Communes des Paris. Albeit a momentary fleeting snapshot of the millions of lives being lived in greater Paris.

Here the map is the ideal interface due to the urban nature of the production. The viewer can trace their path through the city, return a second time and experience it in a completely different way. This non-linear navigation and experience of the narrative breaks from the traditional linear documentary format. This presentation and non linear way of reading the urban fabric are similar to the actual way that we experience the city. In the opening passage of Kevin Lynch's "Image of the City" he describes the city as:

'the city is a construction in space... a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time....On different occasions and for different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across....Nothing is experienced by itself but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequence of events leading up to it, the memory of past experience'. The static image of the city - the map - cannot ever capture these dynamics but we can begin to see in Les Communes des Paris how it can become infused with documentary content. From my analysis of the different productions I have distilled a number of key points for the use of maps as a primary interface.

- In this context maps don't have to be accurate, they are narrative devices
- In order for the map to work it must be closely tied to the original narrative.
- The map needs a limit that the viewer can recognise.
- Beyond a certain scale it becomes harder to link the different story elements with each other.
- The viewers must see their movement through the map and content.

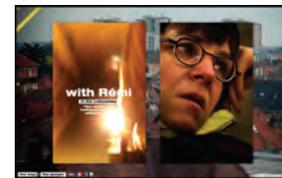
Maps can also be used as a secondary element within a production as in the other documentaries selected for this research; Insitu and Highrise use maps to allow the viewer to interact with the production. Here viewers can submit information via a map, in Insitu it documented street art and interventions in public space across European cities. While Highrise wanted to know more about the diversity of Highrises around the world.



01. Opening Scene  
The viewer chooses the starting point from the map



02. The film begins with a video introduction of that area.



03. Here the viewer has to choose between which character to follow.



04. We follow the character on a journey through Paris.

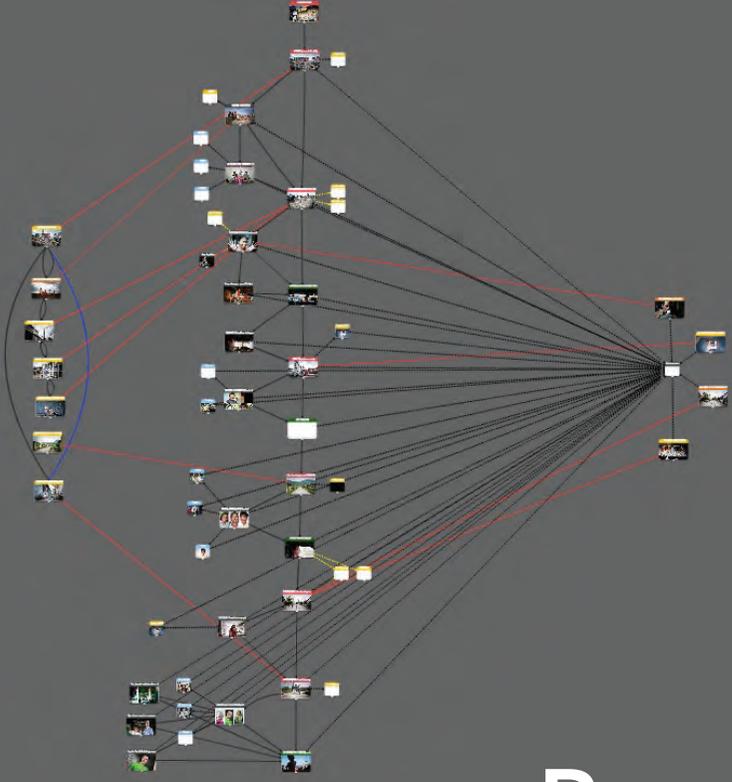


05. Where their story ends begins that of another two characters and so on...



The viewer can return to the main map at any point to view their route. Or chose from the characters themselves.





# Research





Screenshot from Out my Window NFB

## Highrise

National Film Board Canada

High Rise is a multi-year documentary research project into the human experience in suburban high rise neighbourhoods. It's not a traditional documentary production rather an online platform composed of many smaller documentary projects. Over the years the work has taken many forms, web-documentaries, live presentations, installations, workshops, films and online participatory projects. The project was developed at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) an organisation that has been at the forefront of documentary innovation for decades and this work by director Katerina Cizek continues this rich tradition, with High Rise having won numerous awards in recent years. The work integrates personal stories from residents around the globe with academic and architectural research into high rise neighbourhoods. High Rise is one of the key projects in this research and I spoke with the director Katerina Cizek about the history of the project, here is the transcript of the interview.





### How does Highrise fit into the history of participatory documentary at the NFB?

Highrise emerged out of the previous project I had at the film board called Filmmaker in Residence, that's a project I did at an inner city hospital for about 4 to 5 years, which was created directly out of an initiative by the NFB to re-invigorate the Challenge for Change program in the digital context. So in 2004 they contacted me because of a project I did called Seeing is Believing about the genesis of the handycam revolution. They thought I might be the person to start thinking about the Challenge for Change in a new way and they gave me this brief where they did not want a classical documentary approach.

### Interview Katerina Cizek

### Could you describe this new documentary approach?

The traditional approach would mean first finding a subject and then the research material to fit the thesis of your film, so the approach I came up with was inspired by Challenge for Change. The foundation is that instead of starting with a thesis or a story subject is to start with building a relationship with the subject and this forms the basis of the work. Both Filmmaker in Residence and High Rise are more about building relationships and collaborations with people, rather than deciding a story focus and a medium which is a common practice in documentary making. The difference with this approach is it starts out as:

*lets explore a collaboration with x/y/z because they are doing interesting and important work and lets see how documentary might align and find a really interesting place in that process*

This process was developed in the changing context of the digital era, film is not a top priority for me, I have always been what I call media and platform agnostic in the sense that I have cared more about the relationship with the community and the story. The medium is chosen afterwards to fit what the story the relationship and the needs are for the larger overall strategy. So I have worked across a multitude of platforms for most of my life and film and video is just one of them.

### How did this approach inspire the beginnings of High Rise?

After Filmmaker in Residence was complete we asked how can we take these ideas and this approach and this methodology to another level. I was interested in Toronto, how the city works and how the city is segregated. You find the cities most vulnerable people cluster close to the social services downtown, but once these people settle and get more secure they end up in the very far away peripheries, often in Highrises. I was intrigued by that phenomenon and I wanted to learn more about the city. The city I saw in the streetcar everyday was this postcard



perfect, diverse metropolitan city – but when I would get off the streetcar to go to work or go home its pretty shocking to see how segregated the city is.

So I started connecting with three groups of academics and practitioners that helped inform the project that became High Rise they are David Hulchanski – University of Toronto, Rogier Keil and the Global Suburbanisms Group at York University and finally the work of Graham Stuart and ERA architects which are a firm looking at the postwar tower block as something that deserves renovation and attention rather than just being torn down. So those were the three main underpinnings of High Rise. It started as a interest to look at Toronto and to understand what was happening around me in the city because it didn't match the everyday mythology and stereotypes, and once we started it didn't take long for that story to become global.

### **How did you begin the process with the community? and did the documentary work act as a catalyst for the community?**

To begin the project there were two things that I wanted to know right away, one was I wanted to understand the viewpoint of residents in a building and I wanted to understand that at a local level. So there was a selection process in Toronto to find a place where that could work. And the second ran parallel to that, I started working with a team of researchers to look at global stories and to get a view of High Rise neighbourhoods around the world and what was going on at that scale.

In Toronto we started these participatory workshops, we wanted to choose a site that would benefit from our intervention, to come in at the right time with the right partners, that was the goal. There was limited resources

and a very specific kind of work that we could do to make a difference. If we could be a tipping point for something, you need to be really aware of what you can and can't contribute and try and make sure that the work that you can do, can really help to push something into another realm.

We worked for about two years on a weekly basis, we had a team who led the community media workshops in Toronto and three of us would go to the two Highrises on Kipling Avenue and every week we would meet with five or six residents and we started off The Thousandth Tower (see the case study also) with this photo-blogging project.

*What is unique about us is that we could engage in the city renewal debate in a way that actually nobody has done before, we could uniquely contribute from a social and community standpoint.*

Everyone was doing interesting work, and we were the catalyst for the residents voices to be heard at a broader scale and to bring those voices downtown to city hall to tell their stories.

### **In One Millionth Tower you worked with a number of designers to re-imagine the neighbourhood, have any of the proposals that were made at the time been implemented?**

One of the obvious really small things that came out of the process was a playground. Partially because of the work for One Millionth Tower we learned that 50% of the residents in the tower blocks are under the age of 20. This statistic becomes so powerful in the right hands. The community got a phone call from the tower renewal office and there was an opportunity to build a playground. Due to the community work from the documentary all the other things were already in place. So the process itself is the most important design that came out of any of this. The community work and the ability of the residents to work with the agencies and bring the various players together and identify community needs and to be able to respond collectively to whatever opportunities may come along. So I think it is the process and the collaborations that are the most interesting design to come out of the

project, the ability to make collective decisions and work as a whole is the most important.

### **How did the other design professionals, the architects, urban planners, city officials respond to the documentary process?**

What is so wonderful about the approach that we have taken is that everybody at the table has an expertise. Often we just do this within our own circles we don't collaborate across disciplines.

So there is something incredibly exciting about collaboration and working with architects, landscape architects and residents on my end. They have the expertise and the lived experience of being in the buildings. Something exciting started to happen during this process and we all felt the energy that comes out of breaking out of the mould of your own discipline and figuring out new solutions to old problems.

### **Could you tell us some more about the global focus of Highrise?**

The idea for Out my Window came from the research and incredible stories we were hearing of High Rise communities around the world. I thought it would be interesting to have them all in one High Rise online, matching their stories with these windows. The intention was to do something early that gave the sense of how global this is and simultaneously how incredibly local this is. Out My Window also peels away at the High Rise stereotype and finds the humanity inside, I really wanted that as one of the first things that we introduced on a global scale with High Rise. Out My Window was the first attempt to express what High Rise is about and that it is less about the architecture and more about the people inside and learning from them. I directed the project via the internet using facebook, email, skype and the phone mostly working with local people, photographers, journalists and housing activists.

One of the aims of High Rise is to be iterative and to try and bring in partners and solicit interest from people that we may never have thought about or of working with. So every project that we do is both an expression of an idea but also a call to action.



### **The project keeps growing what are the next steps for Highrise?**

The New York Times recently approached us wondering if we would be interested in doing something on New York and also specifically for their new op-docs section which is short distinctive point of view documentaries. One thing I have always been interested in doing is the short history of the High Rise. So I got access to "the morgue" the undigitised photo collection in the New York Times archive this contains 5/6million photographs to look for a story. After spending a week there and with the help of an amazing archivist I selected 500 photographs to try and weave the story of NYC. New York of course being a focus and having a major a role to play in the history of the high rise. So we have three short films based on the archives the first one is called Mud which covers the pre-history of the High rise the Tower of Babel to the modern highrise. Part two is known as Concrete and this traces the 20C of the High Rise and the rise of public housing. Glass which traces the end of the modernist high rise and the rise of the condo. The 4th piece is a peoples history in which we have done a call out to the new york times readers we have over 1000 submissions with some really exciting stories coming through.





## An overview of the projects within Highrise

### Out My Window

One of the worlds first interactive 360 documentaries - about exploring the state of our urban planet told by people who look out on the world from highrise windows. It's a journey around the globe through the most commonly built form of the last century: the concrete slab residential tower. Meet remarkable highrise residents who harness the human spirit -- and the power of community -- to resurrect meaning amid the ruins of modernism. With more than 90 minutes of material to explore, Out My Window features 49 stories from 13 cities told in 13 languages.



### One Millionth Tower

A follow up project to the Thousandth Tower the work brought residents together with architects, urban designers and illustrators to re-imagine the public spaces outside and around their tower blocks. The work is presented in an innovative and engaging 3d web format that brings the illustrations and ideas to life.



### World of Highrise

Outside of these productions there are two "participate" projects that have asked viewers to contribute both with a global focus. The first collects stories and images for the "out my window" project, while the other aims to document the "World of High-rise" locating high-rise complexes around the world using google maps.





The story of McDowell County, West Virginia, is the story of America.

## Hollow

Hollow is both a participatory project and interactive documentary. It is made with and by the community of McDowell County, West Virginia, a mining area suffering from industrial decline and the associated population loss. The work engages with the community who have taken part in the film-making process by creating 20 of the 50 short documentaries. The final interactive project will combine their content with other video portraits and interactive data. Hollow was selected for the research because of its approach towards the community and its setting in a rural area suffering from population shrinkage. A topic that is becoming more and more relevant in the European urban debate. The following is an interview with the director Elaine Mc Million about the project.





## Interview Elaine Mc Millon

McDowell itself has a really bad reputation, even within the state, it's where a lot of the stereotypes come from that are about Appalachia. The mainstream media go to McDowell to show poverty, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, for some reason it is always the place to go. So I went, because obviously there are a lot of issues there and I was surprised by the amount of interesting people I met in one day. The first guy I met was an artist who was painting a mural on an abandoned building, there is not a bigger sign of pride and hope than that. So there is so much more to this story than what we think.

My original thinking about this project was to create a linear film, a straight forward documentary. A lot of the documentary work I am inspired by is direct cinema- verite work that is observational, but there is still a journalism side of me that wants to investigate things a bit more and not just settle with what is on the screen. So I left that day rethinking this as a linear film, because I had five interesting conversations with people that came from very different perspectives and had different roles within that community. I thought this needs to be something that allows for many voices to be heard on the same playing field this couldn't be contrived and edited and it should not be linear. It should have different entry points the community should be able to

### **Can you tell me about the background to the project both your personal motivations and inspirations from documentary history?**

I grew up next door in Logan County which is in a very similar situation to McDowell County. I grew up in a family where I was the only one that doesn't have a job associated with the coal industry, so my dad is a coal miner, my brother is a coal miner, my female cousins are nurses working in clinics that treat coal miners, so the industry is very tightly woven there. So I am very familiar with the situation and can sympathise a lot with the issues in McDowell. In 2009 I graduated from West Virginia University and then read a book called "Hollowing out the Middle - What Rural Brain Drain Means for America" the book is all about young people leaving small towns across America specifically this town in Iowa, but it almost felt like the entire book was about West Virginia, you could just replace Iowa with West Virginia. So I have a personal connection to the story it because I am definitely part of that problem.



submit stuff and be part of it and the interactive side.

Once we decided it was going to be interactive we really took a survey of what's out there, and what we think works and doesn't. I love High Rise I think its a beautiful project, Out my Window and One Millionth Tower are great because of their community participatory part. Also Welcome to Pine Point because it really creates that cultural attachment that is often lost on the web it's sort of like reading a visual storybook, but it really accomplishes creating that emotional tie to a people and their place.

### **Has the documentary been a catalyst for any wider changes in the area?**

We definitely created that moment for the community to establish the goals that they wanted to achieve. We had storytelling workshops where we got together and one resident Shawn talked about his initiatives to help promote tourism in the area to clean up the town, and we helped them to map and navigate all the things that were bothering them and to talk about the very early planning stages of how we can get these things changed.

### **Was there a wider process already happening within the community or did the documentary lead the discussion?**

It's kind of hard to say because, the community garden has always been an idea, people have always wanted to do it, but I think we had a big part in encouraging it. It was just a matter of saying you know you can do this, here are some resources and grants you can get to do this, here are some people you should know. It was through the process of the documentary they realised there was a lot more that they could be doing. Before we held the workshops I think they felt a bit stuck, they had these ideas but did not really know where to start. In one of the last interviews I did the guy said:

"I just hope we are able to keep up the momentum that you have established here, because before you came here we didn't have a group of people and now we do because you have brought us together through this project, and have really given us the opportunity for change at this point."



I think it's a difficult place and it's just difficult to live there daily, they just have so many issues that sometimes the bigger things get lost and it has been our goal and mission to keep them on track.

### **How were the storytelling and mapping workshops organised?**

We had three storytelling workshops, the first one was really an introduction to the project, explaining the work and material, doing some video training and having discussions around representation. The community talked about the words the media used to describe them in the past and how they feel when they talk about home. We created a list for each and they couldn't be more different.

The second workshop was where people hand wrote stories and submitted photos and talked about a lot different types of things. The final workshop was all

about really finding those initiatives that people were going to work on from August 2012 until we launch. We established a calendar and a private facebook group where we could keep contact.

The mapping work was kind of a wild card, some people don't want to shoot videos but they wanted to take part in the project. So we used a weather balloon with a Go-Pro to take high-res imagery of the town. The goal was to take images and map them out to allow people to do resource mapping. There is a lot of unused land and we thought this would be an interesting way to let them see that. In the actual interactive doc the maps are a behind the scenes element they are not so much part of the stories that we see but they will be featured in the community tool where the community can actually log in and start mapping things so its more a resource for the community.

**Hollow is one of the new forms of documentaries that has used crowdfunding and Kickstarter quiet successfully how have you benefited from having an engaged audience throughout the process?**

I have used kickstarter in the past, it's great for money for linear films but with the interactive format its so valuable because we will have 500 instant visitors to the site. Having that audience has been an amazing plus, because we were able to send out a survey to our kickstarter backers saying Why did you give us money for this? are you interested in the story or the form? what were the reasons? so we have been able to get a better picture and understanding of what their expectations are. You never have to do this with a linear film. With the interactive approach you have to consider all the user pathways, if it falls flat it's because you haven't considered the different approaches from the different users. We found out that 90% gave to the project because of the storytelling, only 2 out of the 500 had seen an interactive documentary before, so for us its really powerful that they can experience this new form of technology and be really introduced to this new world. We have always said that the story leads and the technology complements and evolves so we never wanted to do something because it's trendy and to get a lot of attention from the tech, if it doesn't serve the purpose of the story. So we are trying to get that balance that allows you to lean forward and interact but also that which allows you to lean back and enjoy cinema.



Interview

Mark

Saunders

The central aim of Spectacles video projects is to train residents to film and edit video footage and through this capture the changing physical and human face of their neighbourhood. By recording their neighbourhood participants not only contribute to the history of their neighbourhood and community but also positively intervene in the regeneration discourse. Video workshops provide an activity based environment which have proven to help people to engage and work together. The core of the work focuses on the concept of community media as a public space. The workshops, training and screening provide a place for discourse, reflection and recording of the events going on in and around the neighbourhood. The presence of video cameras empowered the community in question and provides them with a platform to amplify their (often overlooked) concerns in the regeneration debate. The following is an interview with Mark Saunders director of Spectacle.

### **Could you provide a background to the work?**

Spectacle has been developing this kind of work from way back in the 80s with our media group Despite TV, Where urban renewal topics were quiet high up on our agenda, such as deregulation of the city and encroachment of the city into Tower Hamlets and the Docklands. I have been working with the Luton people for more than fifteen years it began with the documentary Exodus following the work of those at Marsh Farm the community media work evolved out of this. I started working in Brussels in 2000 because I got invited over there to screen some work at the NOVA cinema and started working together with Alex Claes.

### **The are all long term projects how were they funded?**

Part of the process of Spectacle working on these projects long term was attracting sources of funding to allow us to continue to do our work, this included a European Social Fund project and then APaNGO funding. The demonstration projects for APaNGO were Silwood Estate, Marsh Farm and St Joost in Brussels. In Brussels we were initially getting funding from a small community based grant then we attracted larger cultural funds from

Brussels then APaNGO became involved and we then made St. Joost part of our demonstration project. By attracting different types of funding we have managed to cross-subsidise our long term work and commitment to these communities.

### **How did you structure the community work?**

The workshop model creates a space for discussion and debate, its difficult to bring people together to talk about planning, but you might get them together to talk about documenting how their neighbourhood has changed. Or a similar group activity such as media training, people can become part of that and this will maybe bring people in that are interested in learning skills. So you start to create a different kind of knowledge base which can be really important in regeneration situations.

### **Was regeneration the primary motive for the work?**

Originally we got involved in the Silwood Estate because they wanted us to film outreach for them about urban landscaping. So initially it was about how this estate is going to change and asking how do you want it to change? Our agenda was always to try and develop a community media group, that the community centre with media facilities could become an amenity for the community. In terms of participation you have a local synergy but the video productions also reached some an experts in certain areas that then got involved and offered their expertise to the community. So it's also a type of outreach that does produce different kind of benefits for that local community. It brings a spotlight onto the local issues.

### **How did the production work in a group context?**

Shooting might involve up to 30-40 people, then we would hold a number of group screenings so we would edit and have a collage of separate bits getting feedback during the screening. This opened up editorial input to large amounts of people, but in the end its the 3-4 dedicated people that would get the editing work done.

I think there is a way that you can do post production that is also participatory an open and relatively flat, but because of the intensity of the work it tends to only really involve those that are enthusiastic about editing. So where it really mattered about editorial decisions it was quite open. In essence the films that are made up of a lot of little chapters with lots of different little individual contributions and ideas that have a certain kind of aesthetic. There are some films from the Brussels work that are more cohesive and are pulled together.

### **Was there a difference in cultural contexts?**

The major difference between the different places was that the starting position in Europe was that democracy necessarily means that there should be a range of opinions. To have a good healthy system you need all kinds of voices and opinions to be expressed. I think in the UK it has much more to do with it as a means of exerting power and it is about funding people that are going to say the things you want them to say and cutting funding from places where there are people saying things that you don't want them to say. I was very struck by that difference it is a bit ingrained here that that's how it is that is the reality, if you place your head above the parapet here you will not get funding, in Brussels we continued to get funding.

For the videos produced by local communities, screenings become significant in terms of bringing the community together as people are interested in watching a video while they are reluctant to participate in a meeting about the same subject.



# Spectacle

The work of Spectacle, does not fall into the traditional documentary category, it was primarily concerned with developing participatory community media as a public amenity, the work was primarily focused in neighbourhoods of urban change and renewal. During the early 2000s Spectacle had developed a number of these groups in the UK and Europe; Marsh Farm in Luton, Silwood Estate in London, St Joost in Brussels.





Screenshot from Who Cares (1972) Nick Broomfield

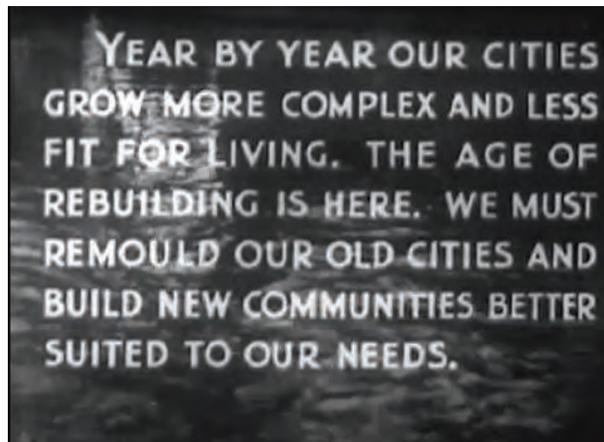
# Documenting the Myths of Modernism

Since the beginning of the medium, documentary filmmakers have been fascinated by cases of architectural and urban failure. The personal stories of those affected, reflected in the backdrop of ruins and urban decay, provides fertile ground for documentary filmmaking. The films produced now provide us with a rich source of material for the analysis of architectural failure during the 20C. Not only the individual cases of failure but also the wider narratives that have shaped architectural and urban thinking throughout the century.



At its core this narrative was; that the overcrowded dilapidated 19C city was no longer fit for modern man and needed to be replaced with a well designed alternative. Not only the quality of the housing was called into question but the whole city form needed to be altered to meet the demands of modern society "death to the street" being the prevailing quote from the time. The alternative to this city was found in the design of high-rise estates and suburban new towns connected by new road networks. With such a strong narrative of the liberating power of design what could possibly go wrong?

The slums were real, poverty, dilapidated buildings and inner-city overcrowding were genuine urban problems that had to be dealt with. There was no simple solution and in the spirit of the times those solutions favoured held firm to the belief that design would solve all problems. Many of the early documentaries did not question this logic, and were produced almost as propaganda pieces advocating the ideologies of the architects planners and developers of the day.



These two key documentaries from the 1930s, Housing Problems (1935) and The City (1939), are the best examples of how this style of documentary worked. They follow a simple narrative arc that presents the problem, followed by the solution and finishes with an optimistic ending. They set out to convince the viewer about the solutions without any real social or urban analysis taking place within the frame.

In Housing Problems (1935) directed by Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey, we hear from the residents of tenement housing in Leeds describing their living conditions. Looking rather dated today this documentary was groundbreaking at the time being the first to use recorded interviews on location. As you can see from the living conditions an improvement was clearly needed. This was provided by the documentary's sponsors the Gas Council. Who advocated tearing down the failed buildings and replacing them with the Quarry Hill Estate, a large-scale modern complex, with housing blocks built using the latest construction techniques and fully fitted with all the latest gas fittings, of course.

The sponsors of *The City* (1939) the American Institute of Planners advocated a different approach. The screenplay was developed by the urbanist [Lewis Mumford](#) and the film directed by [Willard Van Dyke](#). It portrays the American city as a dirty, polluted and overcrowded place full of problems, the solution was to start anew with carefully planned, comfortable and clean garden city style suburbs connected by the car. Greenbelt, Maryland is the exemplar presented in the final act of the film. How the new network of these well designed towns will solve the problems of the inner-city is conveniently left unanswered.

How did these proposals fare? Housing Problem's, [Quarry Hill](#) was demolished in the 1970s. The development was welcomed when the first residents moved in but it soon became plagued with construction and maintenance problems, and became one of the first recognisable failures of the modern movement in the UK. While *The City's* approval of suburban sprawl, exacerbated rather than solved the problems of the American inner-city, which suffered for decades. resulting from the flight to the suburbs and the associated motorway building programmes.

This is the real narrative to be derived from 20C urbanism, which was repeated in numerous locations around the world, and has become all too familiar. Problem slums are cleared and replaced with a poorly executed version of a modernist utopia, or an exurban development. This is an improvement at first, and welcomed by residents

but it then in turn becomes a problem, the real social ills remaining the same.

Nowhere is this story more perfectly illustrated than in the fateful tale of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis. The icon of urban failure it has appeared in [different posts](#) on this site and in numerous documentaries over the years, most notably its demolition in *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and *Robert Hughes Shock of the New* (1980). In *Shock of the New* the complex features at the culmination of an episode looking at the developments within modern architecture and urbanism in the 20C. Entitled - *Trouble in Utopia* – the narrator Robert Hughes quotes Charles Jencks declaration that “Modern architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972, at 3.32pm....” the detonation time of the towers. This quote sums up a lot of the sentiment around the history of Pruitt-Igoe. It's faults and failure blamed on the design.

While Pruitt-Igoe's design was clearly deficient in many aspects, there is a danger in blaming it's failure solely on design. This ignores all the other factors that were at play in St. Louis at that time and taking this position perpetuates the modernist myth that design can solve all social problems. This is the same myth that was presented to us in the first two documentaries *Housing Problems* and *The City*. This myth allows for simple reading of the conditions and allows for the real social ills to be covered up without any true and meaningful social analysis taking place.



This has been explored in a recent documentary directed by Chad Freidrichs *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011). This documentary - partly based on [this research](#) by Katherine Bristol - takes another look at the complex web of social policy, maintenance and management, city politics, population decline, racial segregation, economics that occurred in St. Louis at the time alongside the design issues. It provides a more complete picture of the causes that led to the developments failure, interweaved with the personal stories of residents.

---

While it is easy to analyse cases of failure with the benefit of hindsight, it is far more difficult to create a realist social document in an area that is undergoing urban change. In one documentary about slum clearance in 1970s Liverpool entitled *Who Cares* (1974) director [Nick Broomfield](#) does just this. Liverpool had at the time listed 70% of its inner city terraced housing for demolition. *Broomfield* documents the anger of residents who were being moved from their terraced streets to new high-rise suburban estates. We witness the disintegration of the close knit community and the documentary makes the plea that future planning should take into consideration the lifestyle and wishes of the community. *Broomfield* revisits Liverpool again in [Behind the Rent Strike](#) (1979) documenting the inevitable failure of the new estates, and the residents fight for better conditions. These works don't attempt to find a simple narrative based around myths, but document the reality on the ground allowing the complexity of the social issues to come to the fore. Which is the place to begin if real solutions to social problems are to be found.

---

This essay first appeared of *Failed Architecture* a research project into the cases of urban failure.

---





**Archive  
Films**

# The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

## The documentary work of William H. Whyte

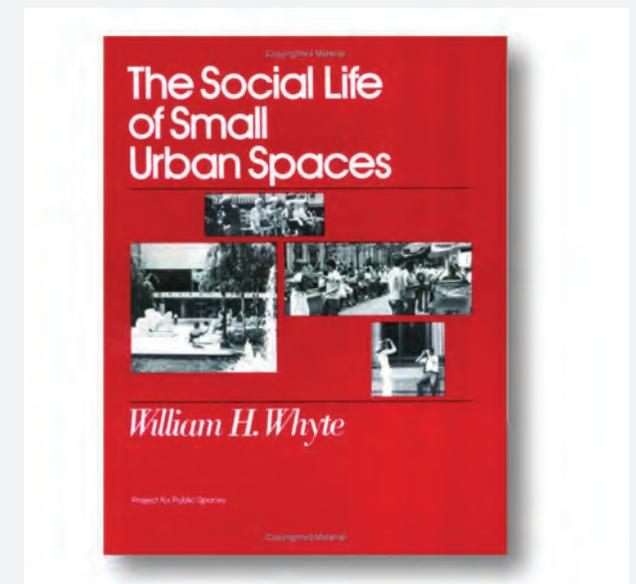
The social life of small urban spaces, (1988), preceded by a book of the same title in 1980. This documentary was the culmination of years of observational research in and around the plazas, streets and squares of New York City. Conducted by Whyte's and a number of students. The project was entitled "The street life project" and its primary aim was to find out why "people flocked to some plazas and left others empty".(Whyte 1980)

The project set about observing pedestrians going about their daily business via a series of 8mm cameras, recording in traditional and timelapse modes. The cameras were set up overlooking the public spaces in question. The resulting footage reveals the hidden patterns of urban life, from "schmoozing patterns" to "the rituals of street encounters". Trying to distill evidence from the resulting hours of footage, was an extensive task. Through careful analysis Whyte and his team began to find recurring patterns in how people use and behave in public spaces. The best of this footage, and their observations on how some spaces work and others don't, makes up the resulting documentary film. What we gain is a remarkable insight into the hidden social rules that govern our everyday experience of the urban. Whyte took his research further, and drew up a number of guidelines for the design and zoning of public spaces. Guidelines that were that were eventually adapted by New York City planning department.

Making a film was not the original goal; it only emerges from this extensive archive of research footage. In terms of documentary history it is unique in that context. We gain a true piece of ethnographic research that "sought to capture

the minute detail of ordinary life through extensive field-work"(Moran 2005, p.9). In this context, film as a medium provides a perfect tool for documenting the everyday. As Lefebvre pointed out 'the everyday cannot simply be read like a literary text, because it is lived out in spaces and practices as much as in language and discourse' (Moran 2005, p.22). The social life of small urban spaces manages like few films do, to capture these spaces and practices, the everyday moments as lived. As such the film does not follow a traditional narrative format. The pleasure the viewer gains in watching, arises from the identification with the minute details of everyday life, that the cameras managed to capture.

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces is a friendly, witty, welcoming and engaging film to the viewer. Much like the successful urban plazas documented by Whyte and his team. The details of the hundreds of encounters recorded contain a full range of human emotions that the viewer can easily relate to. In the film we are given a glimpse of how cities work best, when they are open and accommodating to all ages. And alongside this Whyte provides instructions and examples of how to improve places that don't work.



# Challenge for Change

Forming the backdrop to all participatory documentary projects is the work produced under the Challenge for Change program by the National Film Board of Canada. This work sets the foundations for a lot of the projects in this research and was ground breaking in handing over the means of media production from the filmmaker to the community, allowing them to tell their own story. This story evolved from a participatory process, involving media workshops interviews and screenings. And this process was the essence of the program. The documentary production providing a platform for the community discussion and debate.

Challenge for Change was a participatory film and video project created by the National Film Board of Canada in 1967. Active until 1980, Challenge for Change used film and video production to illuminate the social concerns of various communities within Canada. The impetus for the program was the belief that film and video were useful tools for initiating social change and eliminating poverty.

In total, the program would lead to the creation of over 140 films and videos across the country, including 27 films by Colin Low about life on Fogo Island, Newfoundland. Known collectively as The Fogo Island Project, these films had an enormous impact on the future direction of the program.

The Challenge for Change program was designed to give voice to the "voiceless." A key aspect was the transfer of control over the filmmaking process from professional filmmakers to community members, so that ordinary Canadians in under represented communities could tell their own stories on screen. Community dialogue and government responses to the issues were

crucial to the program and took precedence over the "quality" of the films produced. As the program developed, responsibility for the film production was put increasingly into the hands of community members, who both filmed events and had a say in the editing of the films, through advance screenings open only those who were the subjects of the films.

Fogo Island was a watershed moment for Challenge for Change with the "Fogo Process," as it came to be known, becoming a model for using media as a tool for participatory community development.

The idea for the Fogo Process originated in 1965, prior to the start of Challenge for Change, when Donald Snowden, then at the University of Newfoundland was dismayed by the urban focus of the Economic Council of Canada's "Report on Poverty in Canada." Snowden wanted to produce a series of films to present how the people of Newfoundland felt about poverty and other issues. In 1967, with Challenge for Change already underway, Snowden discussed his ideas with Low and introduced him to Fred Earle. Low credited

## The Fogo Process

Earle with sparking his interest in the project: "I went to Fogo Island mainly because I was impressed by Fred Earle. I had an idea if nothing more happened I could make a film about a fine community development worker who would help justify our involvement." The opening voiceover narration to Introduction to Fogo Island also testifies to his key role, stating that Earle "was born and raised in Fogo Island. He knows, and is known, by all its people.... we, as outsiders, felt that we could never go into such a community without the help of such a person."

In the films, Fogo Islanders identified a number of key issues: the inability to organize, the need for communication, the resentment felt towards resettlement and the anger that the government seemed to be making decisions about their future with no consultation. Low decided to show the films to the people of Fogo and thirty-five separate screenings were held with the total number of viewers reaching 3,000. It became clear that while people were not always comfortable discussing issues with each other face-to-face, they were comfortable explaining their views on film. By watching themselves and their neighbours on screen, islanders began to realize that they were all experiencing the same problems.

There were concerns at Memorial University over the political consequences of criticisms of the government expressed in the films. It was decided that the Premier of Newfoundland and his cabinet should view the films. This had the effect of allowing fishermen to talk to their cabinet ministers. The Minister of Fisheries, Aiden Maloney, also asked to respond to criticisms on film. This facilitated a twoway communication between community members and decision makers. The films contributed to an island-wide sense of community and assisted people in looking for alternatives to resettlement.

Snowden went on to apply the Fogo process all over the world until his death in India in 1984. In 2007, the NFB launched Filmmaker-in-Residence a cross-media project based on the Challenge for Change model, with frontline health care workers, in partnership with St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto. Challenge for Change was also cited as an inspiration for the NFB's 2011 web documentary, One Millionth Tower.





Films

Highrise

[highrise.nfb.ca](http://highrise.nfb.ca)

Hollow

[hollowdocumentary.com](http://hollowdocumentary.com)

Les Communes des Paris

[lescommunesdeparis.com](http://lescommunesdeparis.com)

Insitu

[insitu.arte.tv](http://insitu.arte.tv)

Spectacle

[spectacle.co.uk](http://spectacle.co.uk)

All of the research presented in this booklet is available on  
[dmau.com/participatory-documentary](http://dmau.com/participatory-documentary)

Author Daryl Mulvihill

**DMAU**

[www.dmau.com](http://www.dmau.com)  
[daryl@dmau.com](mailto:daryl@dmau.com)  
+31652036681

Open Co-op  
Tolhuisweg 2  
1031 CL Amsterdam

**creative industries  
fund NL**