



# The MyStreet Movement and Participatory Video

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**Abstract.** What is the future vision of children in a Pupil Referral Unit in North London? How does Budapest’s skateboarding subculture create its own representation? What do Prague residents do on the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution? These are a few of the wide-ranging topics explored by the filmmakers of MyStreet. Launched in the early 2010s, the MyStreet project, modelled on the UK’s Mass Observation movement, expanded traditional academic forms of knowledge production to include broad social groups, researching everyday experiences and publishing the videos on a map-based website. This article presents the history and connections between MyStreet and its historical predecessor, the British Mass Observation movement of the 1930s, and then analyses some videos from the collection to examine how MyStreet enables marginalized groups to represent themselves.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** participatory video, self-representation, digital archive, digital literacy, minority literature.

## Introduction. The History of MyStreet

MyStreet is a collaborative anthropological research project that was launched in 2010 by Michael Stewart, a cultural anthropologist and film producer, who

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1 The point of departure for this research on the MyStreet movement was the 2018 program of the Roma Visual Lab, and it included a visit to the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, which was supported by the Talent Development Council of ELTE University, Budapest. I held a grant from the New National Excellence Programme of Hungary, while conducting this research, and presented the first results at the Communication and Media Studies section of the 34<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Scientific Students’ Association (OTDK) in Spring 2019. I extended and developed these into my MA thesis, which I defended in the same year. The present article, which is an excerpt of my thesis, was originally published in Hungarian in the social science journal *Replika* (Cseke 2022) and has been revised for the English version. Both the Hungarian and the English version were produced within the framework of the four year long research project titled, *The History and Current Practices of Hungarian Participatory Film Culture, with an Emphasis on the Self-representation of Vulnerable Minority Groups* (2019–2023), no. 131868, supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office.

has taught at University College London (UCL) and Central European University (CEU) and is a founder of Open City Documentary Festival. “Every street has a story, but not all of them are made into a film. Shoot yours!” This was the opening of the MyStreet movement’s call for action in Hungary in 2015.<sup>2</sup> The idea – which Stewart later presented in a paper – was inspired by Marcel Mauss, among others, who described popular culture as one big ocean. The metaphor is based on the idea that wherever the ethnographers cast their net, they are “bringing up riches” (Stewart 2013, 306–307). The community archive of everyday life is composed of the community-created moving images. As an alternative to institutional, mainstream media, anyone can create their own image – without social, economic or cultural constraints – and share it on the global video map, if they have access to technology and the internet.

The first time Stewart conducted research among Roma minority groups in Hungary was more than 30 years ago. He moved to an Olah Roma community in north-east Hungary for 15 months in 1984 and published his anthropological observations in the book *Brothers in Song*. In her review, Ottilia Solt writes that Stewart “did what Hungarian ethnographers have not been prepared to do in this century: he moved into a Roma community, in accordance with the established methods of cultural anthropology, in order to learn and understand its workings from inside” (1998, 412).

So Stewart clearly had the desire to describe the everyday world of the group studied from their own perspective, using the method of participant observation, as early as 1980s. In the 1990s, he worked as a producer for the BBC, where he gained practical knowledge and experience of documentary filmmaking. He had been teaching the history of the Mass Observation movement at the University of London for years. This dovetailed well with other research in the department, which focused on how the potential of visuality could be exploited in research practice (Szijártó 2017, 198).

Stewart describes this moment as one of genuine belief in the democratic potential of web 2.0, shared by numerous researchers, including himself. It was also a time when camera-equipped smartphones became widely used and the affordable, easy-to-use handheld cameras appeared on the market (Stewart, personal communication, 2018<sup>3</sup>). Studies have amply demonstrated by now that web 2.0 has not brought

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2 See: *My Street Films Budapest*. <http://www.daazo.com/contests/my-street-films-budapest/info>. Last accessed: 28. 12. 2022.

3 Personal communication by Michael Stewart, 2018. 11. 30. Budapest: Central European University. References to this conversation will be marked as Stewart, 2018 in the following sections.

the democratic revolution expected and that social inequalities persist in online spaces as much as in real life. Yet, from a media anthropological perspective, the technique of participatory video has a lot of potential, allowing groups who were previously subordinated to and subject to representational practices to create their own image. Szijártó also suggests that it is also an opportunity for anthropological research to “redefine the relationship between academic and non-academic fields in the production of knowledge” (Szijártó 2017, 201).

MyStreet is a project in which participants make short, documentary-style videos about their immediate surroundings – or, more broadly, about the issues that concern them – and then publish them in a free, online, map-based video collection [Fig. 1]. The call states that anyone anywhere in the world can upload a video of up to 10 minutes to the community archive, as long as the film is thematically related to the name of the collection, *MyStreet* (Stewart 2013, 307).

The founders deliberately avoided making the call more specific, because they wanted to capture the fragmentation and heterogeneity of everyday life. The researchers of MyStreet were exploring how the diverse representations of everyday life could be shown. How do people use the opportunity to take a camera and tell their own story? What tools and forms do they use to “research themselves” and create their own image? In retrospect, Stewart thinks a more specific topic would have worked better, as the call turned out to be too broad and elusive, and the anthropological approach (observing our own environment) was often lost in the videos, with many people looking at the past of their surroundings rather than the present. “We found that attachment to place significantly correlated with nostalgia. This is what we got when we didn’t ask for anything specific.” (Stewart 2018.) The founders of Mass Observation may have had a similar experience nearly seventy years earlier; the quantity of empirical material accumulated soon after the launch was impossible to process and organise in book form, so the leaders later asked participants for observations and questionnaires based on more specific questions (Császi 2016, 29).

The internet seems like an infinite archive compared to printed books: an incomprehensible amount of video material is uploaded to YouTube, the largest global video-sharing portal, every second. Instead of publishing the videos on YouTube, MyStreet chose to develop its own map-based collection to organise the content.<sup>4</sup> Tibor Mester, explaining Flinn’s concept, calls participatory community archives a bottom-up archival model, which he positions between traditional institutional archives (e.g. museums) and global digital archives (e.g.

4 MyStreet Films <http://mystreetfilms.org/>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

YouTube). Like global digital archives, community archives allow anyone to share content, but while the former rarely categorise content by subject matter or other characteristics, community archives have their own specific archiving system (Mester 2016, 192–193).

Content was spatially organised on the MyStreet website, as videos could be added to the map by postcode. When uploading a video, one had to provide the title, the creator's name, a short synopsis, and the postcode. The postcode allows you to know exactly where the video was made, so locality, local knowledge and the local community or neighbourhood played a much greater role in the original concept (Stewart 2018). Before a MyStreet video was uploaded, the operators only checked the formalities (correct format, legal compliance) without any strict content or aesthetic filter (Stewart 2018).

Open City Docs, an educational NGO also founded by Michael Stewart at the University of London in 2010, is closely linked to the MyStreet story. The main program of the organisation is the Open City Documentary Film Festival, which focuses on creative documentaries. In the early years, the best MyStreet films were awarded prizes and screened at the documentary festival (Stewart 2018).

In 2014, the operation and organization rights of MyStreet were taken over by Doc Alliance Films, a Prague-based Czech documentary film organisation, a collaboration between seven European documentary film festivals.<sup>5</sup> The original website (*mystreetfilms.com*) is now defunct, with videos made in the UK being transferred to the video-sharing portal Vimeo (*MyStreet Films*).<sup>6</sup> The new website was very similar in design and visual appearance to the original platform. However, the changeable and transient nature of online archives is shown by the inaccessibility of the Czech map on the internet at the time of writing and the complete abandonment of the original concept and transformation of its visual appearance by the organizers.

The first year was reportedly a huge success in Prague, with over 120 films submitted by amateur and professional filmmakers (Daazo Shortfilms). While some elements of the UK initiative were kept, such as the MyStreet Awards and the education program, new elements were also added. In addition to the possibility of uploading finished films to the video map, a new option was added in 2014: submitting a topic and, if selected, having it mentored and supported by film professionals. This has broadened the range of participants, allowing people

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5 DAFilms Alliance <https://dafilms.com/section/about-alliance>. MyStreet Films on DAFilms: [https://dafilms.com/program/180-My\\_Street\\_Films](https://dafilms.com/program/180-My_Street_Films); Jina Perspektiva. DAFilms <https://dafilms.cz/film/10278-jina-perspektiva>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

6 See: MyStreet Films on Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/mystreetfilms>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

without practical filmmaking skills to get involved. The social embeddedness of the programme is supported by MyStreet open workshops held several times a year: hands on classes are taught by documentary filmmakers, producers and editors in various cities across the Czech Republic.<sup>7</sup>

The best films selected by the jury are screened each year in the non-competition section of the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival. On a research trip to the 2018 festival, I found that the educational profile of MyStreet plays a fairly active role in the Czech documentary scene. As I observed, the main difference from Stewart's original concept is that emphasis has shifted from an anthropological approach (exploring the self) toward the aesthetic characteristics of film and thinking in terms of the creative documentary genre.

The Czech organisers also aimed to spread the movement internationally: Poland, Slovakia and Hungary joined the programme with the support of the Visegrad Fund in 2015 and 2017, all three countries organising their own MyStreet competitions.

## **A Mass Observation**

After a brief overview of the founding and history of MyStreet, let's go back to its roots. MyStreet's antecedents and direct inspiration, according to Michael Stewart's study, can be traced back to the British Mass Observation movement of the 1930s, which explored contemporary British society in the spirit of surrealism (Stewart 2013, 307).

In 1937, barely 15 years after Malinowski had laid the methodological foundations for participant observation with his research in the Western Pacific (Malinowski 2014), a call for volunteers for a new research project was published in several English daily papers. The founders of Mass Observation wanted to reach the widest possible audience, with the aim of encouraging members of social groups that are traditionally the subject of research to become researchers of themselves. In the spirit of the emancipation of working-class culture, they thought the true nature of society could be learned through uncovering everyday practices and experiences invisible to the dominant culture (where the means of representation were concentrated) that (Stewart 2013, 307).

In addition to the two founders of Mass Observation – poet and journalist Charles Madge and self-taught anthropologist Tom Harrison – painter and documentary

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7 Source of the information: personal communication by Dominika Andrasko, 2018. 10. 29. Jihlava, Czech Republic.

filmmaker Humphrey Jennings initially played a major role in the movement (Stewart 2013, 308). His film *Spare Time* (Humphrey Jennings, 1939), explores the leisure time of the English working class and illustrates the affinities of his cinematic vision with the movement quite well. It is a montage of spontaneous everyday moments, the main concept being that it is not during work that the habits of the working class can be learned, but in the short window of time between work and sleep, when they are freed from the strict rules imposed by work. The working-class people in the film go to drama and self-education classes, attend football matches and horse races, walk the dog and tinkering, to name but a few examples of the diversity of the montage the film provides (Stewart 2013, 312).

Nearly a thousand factory workers, office workers and housewives volunteered in the Mass Observation movement. The research drew on their subjective observations, diary entries, and the surveys and interviews with their input. After selecting and organising the accumulated material, the founders compiled volumes that provide an alternative way of representing the broad masses of English society (Highmore 2002, 76). The structure of knowledge is different from the knowledge set generated in academia: this alternative knowledge system emphasises singularity, the uniqueness of data (Szijártó 2017, 193).

The *science of ourselves* was a radical innovation in the 1930s, and it is no surprise that the emergence of Mass Observation was initially greeted with scepticism in contemporary social science due to the novelty of the methodology and the chaos or even absence of analyses. Malinowski questioned the relationship between subjective observation and objective analysis. In his view, the objective analysis of subjectively collected empirical data is rather rudimentary and unscientific (Marcus 2001, 13) He claimed that the subjectively collected valuable empirical material was not sufficiently interpreted, even though that is one of the key tasks of the social sciences (Szijártó 2017, 198). Other contemporary social scientists questioned the extent to which “researching oneself” could be achieved when the founders merely asked participants to describe observations without interpretation (Stewart 2013, 311). In other words, are middle-class researchers actually empowering working-class people with the right to research, or are they still just using them as a means of strengthening their own position through the research? Jennings responded to these criticisms in the volume *May the Twelfth*, arguing that a single subject can lend itself to several interpretations, depending on the interpreting subject. Jennings conceived of society as a montage of fragments, which was radically at odds with the concept of structuralist social research (Stewart 2013, 311–312).

Michael Stewart writes that three elements of Mass Observation inspired the launch of MyStreet: the desire to understand the true nature of society through empirical investigation from below; the surrealistic interpretation of the secrets and mysteries present in everyday reality; and the movement's revolutionary method of breaking down the centuries-old barrier between academia and the world outside, between observer and observed, and between the subject and object of research (Stewart 2013, 307).

Let me highlight some similarities between Mass Observation and MyStreet. *Britain by Mass Observation* was published in 1939, in the midst of a socio-political crisis and the looming outbreak of World War II. The mass media were reporting on Hitler's expansion and Chamberlain's negotiations in Munich, while the editors of the book argued that the masses were not really concerned with this news. Public opinion, as shown in the chapters in *Britain by Mass Observation*, was preoccupied with completely different subjects (e.g. astrology, football, and the Lambeth Walk dance) even in this period (Harrison and Madge 1939).

In the *Two-Minute Story* chapter, the editors analyse the Armistice Day commemoration,<sup>8</sup> in which a thousand volunteers described what they did between 10:30 and 11:30 on November 11, 1937. Most of the observers were at work – in factories and offices – and report that work was suspended for the duration of the commemoration, with workers gathering in a common area at 11 am. Twenty percent of respondents, however, did not observe the two-minute silence and continued with their daily activities. One observation, for example, describes a maid who vacuumed and sang loudly during the commemoration, saying that she did not deal with such things because it would only tear up old wounds. An office worker recorded a short interview in which her colleague says that the commemoration should be stopped because it is a hassle and is bad for business (Harrison and Madge 1939, 208). While the next day the newspapers reported on the loud disruption of the public commemoration at the Cenotaph in London by a man who had escaped from a mental asylum as an unprecedented catastrophe, Mass Observation researchers found that lots of people were bored or uncomfortable with the two-minute ritual nearly twenty years after the war. Submitted observations show that the attitudes of the crowd are much more heterogeneous than is represented in the media in a schematised way. The aim of Mass Observation was precisely to give voice to marginalised groups whose

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8 The armistice agreement ending World War I was signed on November 11, 1918 by representatives of Germany and the Allied Powers. In the United Kingdom, a 2-minute silence is observed every year 11 AM on November 11.

real experiences are not represented in the mass media. The political potential of this research was recognised by the Home Office, and the movement was quickly absorbed into the Propaganda Department at the beginning of World War II to monitor public opinion, investigate mass reactions to war news and gauge people's fears about war (Marcus 2001, 14).

The theme of the Czech MyStreet film *Another Perspective* (Bára Hlaváčová, Kateřina Kaclíková, and Tadeáš Polák, 2017) is very similar to that of *Two-Minute Story*. The film was shot on the 17th of November, the day of the struggle for freedom and democracy in the Czech Republic, commemorating the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It is a national holiday and state celebrations are held in a number of cities. The narrative begins in the narrator's home, where we only hear her in voiceover without seeing her, and she tells us that her day starts like any other weekday, except that the house is emptier than usual because of the holiday. Pictures of posters start appearing at the same time: announcements that shops are closed for the holiday and a placard denouncing nationalism. After a few frames, this is framed by a television newsreel, which reports that the streets are full of public celebrations and demonstrations against nationalism. The first two sequences of the film establish the basic theme, we see the narrator's relation to it as well as the representation of the commemorations and demonstrations in the mass media. The film's narrator then leaves the house and walks the streets as a participant observer, being told by ordinary people about how they spend their day off. A waitress works the same as on any other workday, another character uses the day off to clean and do the laundry at home, while the students who speak spend the school holiday skateboarding and playing computer games. Ordinary activities all around with no reference to national events, and the interviewees do not even mention what democracy means to them or share their attitude to the demonstrations and public commemorations. If the filmmakers had not shown the posters and the television news at the beginning, the film would have appeared to show an ordinary day in the life of a Prague neighbourhood for quite a long time. This impression is counterpointed by the images of demonstrations and marches, which are always shown indirectly, through some medium: first the television newsreel, then the helicopter footage (although this is not indicated specifically, this may also be part of the news), contrasting the images of the mass media with the experience of the lay observer. [Figs. 2–3.]

As it appears from the analysis above, the two research projects conducted in different forms at different times do have a shared theme: a commemoration significant for national identity presented from an alternative perspective. By



alternative, I mean that the authors depart from the mass media narrative and present the perspective of people who do not participate in the commemorations. While the mass media largely homogenizes the citizens' commemoration (suggesting that everyone is engaged with the mass events), both the observers of Mass Observation and the creator of *Another Perspective* present a far more heterogeneous society. In both cases, the form of representation is the montage style familiar from Jennings's films: the editors' narrative is assembled from juxtaposed observations, cutaway shots, and utterances. It seems, the founders of both Mass Observation and MyStreet aimed to represent everyday life in all its diversity and fragmentation.

## **MyStreet in Education**

From the very start, MyStreet has complemented anthropological social research with educational activities aimed at developing students' media literacy: "learning to make videos is just as important as learning to write in school" (Stewart 2018). Tibor Koltay, who defines media literacy as "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and produce different forms of communication," adds that it is now also closely linked to visual literacy, which is "the ability to analyse, create and use still images and video using different technologies and media. Visual literacy enables critical thinking, communication, decision-making and understanding" (2009). Appadurai argues that one of the results of globalisation is the free flow of information capital and knowledge. Research is now part of everyday life, and citizens need to make decisions every day that require the skills of finding, organizing, analysing and documenting relevant information. Knowing how to conduct research is a prerequisite for participating in society, and therefore Appadurai proposes the broad extension of the right to research: "research, in this sense, is an essential capacity for democratic citizenship" (Appadurai 2006, 176). Under the daily deluge of information, it is not easy to find and process the data we need to make a decision. With ubiquitous media and its dominant role, there is a great demand for developing visual and media literacy in schools, in addition to traditional literacy and other skills (Hartai 2018).

Recognizing this, the filmmakers of MyStreet have been teaching basic video skills to primary and secondary school students. The *Docinaday* program had students film short videos of their environment in a school setting during a school day. Following a preliminary briefing session, they could plan the shoot for a few weeks, then had a short technical training session, and subsequently

they worked on the video concept and shot the raw footage in a few hours with simple handheld cameras in groups of two or three. In the afternoon, they were editing on paper, that is they decided on the sequence of images and built the narrative of the video, but the computer editing was done by the filmmakers in the evening. The next day, the films were then shown in school, with an average of 8 to 10 videos per class per day. Stewart claims that the students learned skills in a day that they could not acquire in schools based on a formal curriculum except for some rare cases (Stewart 2018).

Browsing through the *Docinaday* videos uploaded to Vimeo, one easily finds a number of videos shot in school buildings, where the filmmakers address a current social issue that affects schoolchildren, through the voices of classmates and teachers – for example, *Respect, Bullying*. Videos following the pattern of television news reports are also common, with students asking passers-by near the school about their relationship with the place and their memories (e.g. *Brent Community: My Community, Happiness in Wembley, Waste of Space*, see: MyStreet Films on Vimeo).

Stewart shares the observation that the really exciting films were usually not made in reputable, socially recognised grammar schools, but in institutions called Pupil Referral Units, for students who had dropped out of the formal education system and were often economically and socially disadvantaged. These students were less concerned with conforming to the expectations of teachers and adults and did not follow conventional filmmaking patterns, so their videos were more sincere in tone and more unique in content and form. Stewart suggests that they had a stronger desire to give voice to themselves and to create their own representation, which they had not had the opportunity to do before (2018).

The video *Agincourt House*<sup>9</sup> was made by students at a Pupil Referral Unit in North London. The topic is future vision, a recurring theme in arts-based participatory action research. To cite a Hungarian example, Kata Horváth and Judith Teszárý used sociodrama to explore young people’s future vision at a “second chance” school in Borsod County, attended by young Roma students who study for a high school diploma after having dropped out of public education. The sociodrama revealed that for the participating girls and boys the goal of life was the image of a happy family life as opposed to the pattern seen at home, would be the, which means “an honest marriage, healthy children, a small house, a car, financial security, a supportive family environment” (Horváth and Teszárý 2015, 139).

9 *Agincourt House*. MyStreet Films. <https://vimeo.com/62344329>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

Not knowing the circumstances in which the video *Agincourt House* was made, we can merely assume that the theme of future vision came from the young participants, unlike in the case of the sociodrama. They used filmmaking devices to respond to a question on their minds every day or perhaps to the expectations of their environment (“What will you do when you’re big?”). Contrary to the results of sociodrama, participatory video did not prove to be a completely suitable technique for enabling participants to articulate their future vision. More specifically, they discuss their future vision in the video without any concrete ideas. The authors did not aim to create complete stories, and the narrative consists of a montage of small details and scraps of information. In the first half-minute, the camera shows nothing except black and a brief description of the institution. Meanwhile there are harsh, aggressive shouts off screen, such as “I’ll punch you in the face!” “You think I don’t dare to punch you in the face?” As it turns out after a drastic shift, it was the filmmakers’ voices that we heard, so the viewer’s first impression is not based on their appearance. In the rest of the video, the students of the school talk and rap about how they have no idea about their future. The institution comes across through these fragments of speech like a prison from which students cannot escape while they are of mandatory school age.

Instead of repeating patterns of television reportage, the vibrant visuals and elliptical narrative of the video formally borrow from the visual codes of North American rap clips (e.g. in the shots and angles, hanging out in the streets, clothes, non-verbal cues). The narrative of the video is composed of three layers: the speech and the rap lyrics present the creators’ subjective feelings about their hopeless future and confinement at school. Meanwhile, on the visual plane, we see cutaway images of the characters and everyday life at the school. The moving images do not reveal why the school is a prison for the narrators, nor do they provide much information about their socio-economic status. The third level of the narrative, the music, gives a completely new meaning to the narrative and the visual content: in the beginning, the slowness and deeper tones of the music create a mood of hopelessness, which gives way to the creators’ anger embodied in the more dynamic pace of the music in the second half of the video.

In the video *Agincourt House*, the creators are more powerfully present as subjects than in the *Docinaday* videos, which are based on the patterns of television reports. The film is used here as a complex, multi-layered tool through which the filmmakers attempt to articulate and represent their own story about failure. Filmmaking can also be understood as self-therapy, and it is no coincidence that such art-based research emerged from the field of art therapy (Oblath 2015, 15).

## Minor Literature

The MyStreet workshop organized by members of the Green Spider Media Workshop (Zöld Pók Médiaműhely) in Hungary in 2017 and attended by students from the Green Rooster Lyceum (Zöld Kakas Líceum) in the 9th district of Budapest was very similar to the *Docinaday* program.<sup>10</sup> The Green Rooster Lyceum, like the Pupil Referral Units in England, takes in students who have not found their place in other secondary schools, but have the potential to graduate or even go on to higher education. According to their website,<sup>11</sup> they take a personality-centred approach to education, using individualised benchmarks, individual mentors, and alternative teaching methods.

The participants of the two-day MyStreet workshop in Budapest first learned how to put together a film concept and what steps are needed when creating a video. Then they formed two crews and spent one day shooting and a second in post-production. István Nagy says<sup>12</sup> the filmmaking process was far more important than the product. In this method, participants need to find out for themselves how the chosen topic can be presented through moving images, so they learn how video is different from other forms of narration. One might call this a partially self-taught method of developing visual literacy. During the two-day training, the organizers wanted the teams to go through the whole process from coming up with the topic to presenting the video and to conclude with a joint reflection session.

The video *Rios* (Áron Halász, Bendegúz Szűcs and Dániel Varga-Sipos, 2017),<sup>13</sup> which was produced at the workshop, presents a DIY skatepark built on the site of the eponymous former nightclub, and the skateboarding community that uses it. The makers of the video are members of both the skateboarding subculture and of the local community that uses the skatepark (Barta 2018). [Figs. 4–5.] The group is essentially bound together by belonging to a subculture with its own norms and rules, but an attachment to the place and the skatepark itself also plays a significant role in community identity. The community has a shared narrative and origin story, and the boy in the video tells how the three or four

10 Source of the information: personal communication by Edit Barta at the round table discussion organized on 25. 04. 2018 in Budapest at the DocuArt Cinema. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjiR45av9gl&t=1427s>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

11 Zöld Kakas Líceum [Green Rooster Lyceum]. <https://zoldkakas.hu/>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

12 Round table discussion organized on 25. 04. 2018 in Budapest at the DocuArt Cinema. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjiR45av9gl&t=1427s>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

13 *Rios*. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1593339820710362>. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

founders built the park with their own two hands, without permission. Creating self-representation is an important means of the self-organizing group's existence and survival.

Adopting Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature in his study, Stewart writes that at the time of launching MyStreet, they were wondering if one could "use documentary film as a 'minor' art, exploring the modern 'minor' practices of the everyday world of the street" (Stewart 2013, 314). "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language," write Deleuze and Guattari in their analysis of Kafka's work (1986, 16). Kafka was born into a German-speaking Czech Jewish family in Prague and wrote his works in German. However, this German is not the literary German used by the majority, but a "deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses" (Deleuze and Guattari 2009, 17). According to the study, minority literature has three main characteristics: 1. its language is highly deterritorialized, 2. all expressions are political because, due to spatial constrictions, the personal is inescapably linked to the political, and 3. because the conditions for individual expression are not given, everything in it takes on a collective value, i.e. "there isn't a subject; there are only collective assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 18). What Stewart means by minor literature is a form of narrating everyday life that departs from the canonical formal language of television and develops its own language (Stewart 2013, 314).

Skateboarding is a subculture whose members voluntarily choose to belong to a minority group (Kacsuk 2005, 20). In order to affirm minority identity and emphasize the distance from the majority, it is essential for the group to develop its own cultural codes that question, reject or critique majority customs and norms. "I believe skateboarding is a way of life," says the narrator of *Rios* in the video. Exploring the meanings of skateboarding, Zoltán Kacsuk points out that the members of the group generally understand their subculture as a way of life, as in *Rios*, yet television presented it as a sport in the 1990s, which is fundamentally different from the skaters' identification and self-representation. While sports entail a high degree of "regulation and institutionalization" and are governed by competition and performance, skateboarding is interpreted by skateboarders as being about creative "self-expression and self-actualisation." "Skateboarding is basically about the opposition of rebellion and hedonistic self-determination to the hierarchical, performance and profit-driven world of competition" (Kacsuk 2005, 26).

*Rios* can be classified as minor art in the sense that members of the skateboarding subculture reject the skateboarding language created by the majority ("not a

sport”), appropriating representation and creating their own deterritorialized language through film (“way of life,” “community cohesion”).

## **Summary**

The essence of participatory video is that members of the given group are given the means and opportunity for self-representation in the spirit of “nothing about us without us.” The people who can create their own image as an alternative to, or even in opposition to, representations by the dominant culture, are often marginalised (e.g. factory workers in the 1930s, students of a Pupil Referral Unit in the 2000s) and were previously condemned to silence.

It does raise important questions, however, that the right to self-representation was not gained by the people concerned through a fight in the well-known examples of participatory video. Rather, they were given the incentive and the opportunity “from above,” by social researchers, documentary filmmakers, and artists. Taking this into account, can one identify the MyStreet project as the “science of ourselves” or as self-representation, while the hierarchical relations actually remain intact (who provides the technical and material means for self-representation, who teaches filmmaking)? Is the objective of participatory research a change in the participants’ situation, or is it only to enrich the researcher’s knowledge and methods? In other words, does the creation of self-representational tools from above aim to reorganise social relations or, on the contrary, does it once again set firm boundaries between one’s own group and another in order to reinforce hierarchical relations? Is it possible to create a situation in which the creator/researcher who initiated the project and the members of the group involved are genuinely working as equal partners and the socio-economic and cultural hierarchy is eliminated?

The full development of self-representation needs to include a self-reflexive element, suggests András Müllner: “that is when the speaker can realize that they and their group are created / come into being in a discursive-performative way, primarily in their emphatically non-hierarchical relations with others, in the play of difference and identity” (2015, 50). Visibility and the reclaiming/reappropriation of one’s own image does not automatically entail a heterogeneous representation of the marginalised social group. It is still a good idea to teach students video skills at school age, so that they can use this visual literacy and go on to construct their self-representation autonomously without external influence later on. For the politics of representation, as understood by Stuart Hall, can

only come later in the process that needs to start with creating the conditions for producing one's own image.

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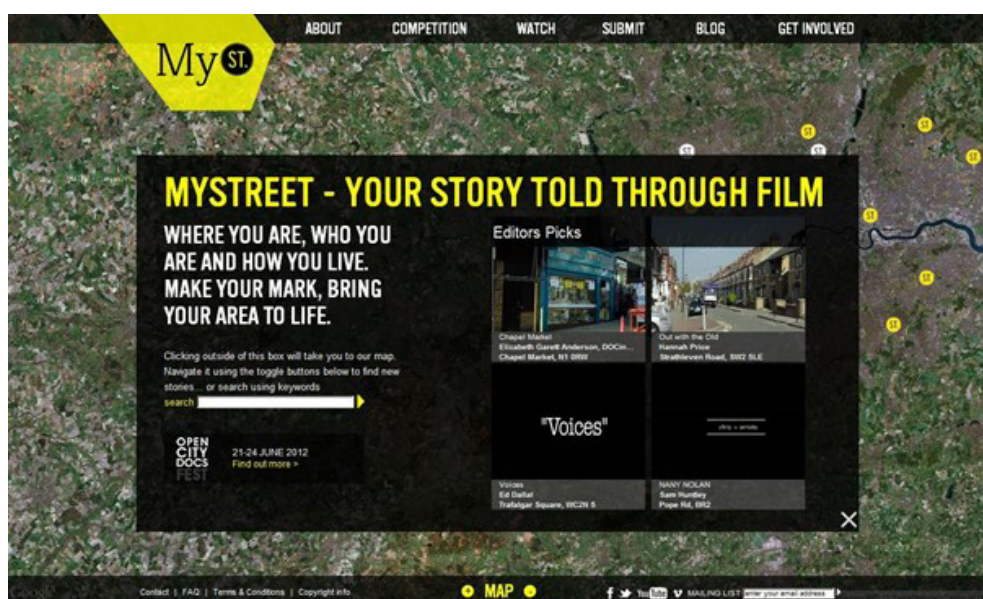


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## List of Figures

**Figure 1.** The home page of the original *Mystreetfilms.com* in 2012.



Figures 2–3. Scenes from *Another Perspective* (2017).



Figure 4-5. The landing page of *Rios* (2017) on the Hungarian MyStreet website and a photo of the people involved in the filmmaking.

