The Netflix documentary house style: Streaming TV and slow media

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Abstract

Streaming services have significantly changed the way that films and TV series are produced and received. The full effects of these changes have yet to be seen, but this article offers an inquiry and critical analysis of some of these changes as they pertain to stand-alone and serial documentaries produced by Netflix. This article contends that there is an emergent "house style" for Netflix original content, particularly documentary, that is in part dictated by platform constraints, but also by an adherence to the principles of Slow Media. To demonstrate, I observe a couple of key moments episodes of *Chef's Table* (2015-) and *Shot in the Dark* (2017-), as well as the feature-length documentary *The Ivory Game* (2016). The findings of the article suggest that the consumption of on-demand content – and more specifically its being chosen by the viewer, rather than observed in the flow of network-era television – affords producers certain concessions around the choices they make. In the examples discussed, there is a clear focus on quality and high production values, bringing Netflix-produced content in line with the tenets of the Slow Media movement.

Keywords

Streaming services have significantly changed the way that films and TV series are produced and received. The full effects of these changes have yet to be seen, but this article offers an initial inquiry and critical analysis of some of these changes as they pertain to stand-alone and serial documentaries produced by Netflix. The contention of the article is that there is an emergent "house style" for Netflix Original content that is in part dictated by platform constraints, but also by an adherence to the principles of Slow Media. To demonstrate, I observe a couple of key moments in some recent Netflix documentaries. These include an episode from *Chef's Table* (2015-), created by David Gelb and an episode from *Shot in the Dark* (2017-), directed by Jeff Daniels, and the feature-length documentary *The Ivory Game* (2016), directed by Richard Ladkani and

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Kief Davidson. This textual analysis is prefaced by an introduction to Slow Media, a consideration of how far television and its status as an object of study have come, and where Netflix and its users might fit in the post-broadcast and on-demand media landscape.

Slow media

In 2010, Benedikt Köhler, Sabria David and Jörg Blumtritt published their "Slow Media Manifesto," outlining how media makers might resist the increasing speed of development in the mediascape. "Like 'Slow Food,'" they offer, "Slow Media are not about fast consumption but about choosing the ingredients mindfully and preparing them in a concentrated manner (Köhler et al). Among the 14 elements of the manifesto are the following three credos:

6.   Slow Media are discursive and dialogic

13.   Slow Media focus on quality

14.   Slow Media ask for confidence and to take their time to be credible (Köhler et al)

I acknowledge that many of these terms are at best slightly problematic and at worst hotly disputed, particularly regarding television, but the tenets of Slow Media have been picked up in a number of contexts elsewhere, from social media (Karppi 2011) and games studies (Ashton and Newman 2011) to reconceptualisations of cinematic temporality and expression (de Luca and Jorge 2016, Kelly 2015).

The present article is concerned with how Netflix has used these tenets of Slow Media in the production of three of their original documentary products. Further, I contend that resistance to the speed of the mediascape is evident in the texts themselves, and I demonstrate this through a close textual analysis of two episodes of television and one feature-length documentary. Netflix is a platform built on networks, on instantaneous international communication infrastructure, and incredibly sophisticated algorithms. There is an irony, then, that much of Netflix's documentary content would adhere to the principles of Slow Media, which move to resist the unrelenting speed of the internet age. However, this article contends that this is a conscious ploy on the part of the platform to create a distinct brand, via a documentary "house style."

Post-broadcast and on-demand media

The platform of television was defined for many years by two things: its singular position in the home, and the linearity of its broadcast. In 1974, Raymond Williams outlined how television inherited older media formats, such as news, talk shows, sport, advertising, and drama from radio; but also, how the platform created hybrid forms like drama-documentary and variety (39-76). But Williams' greatest contribution to the understanding of television was to consider and theorise how these various forms coalesced during the linear broadcast. "This phenomenon, of planned flow," offers Williams, "is ... perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a

technology and as a cultural form" (86). Williams suggests that by considering television as a continuous flow of programming, a new kind of experience results, one where the viewer does not consider discrete media objects: a television program or film, for instance, but rather "a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings" (92). In his final summation of flow – considering the ways that a mid-1970s American newscast cobbles together small news items, seamlessly inter-weaving commercials for cat food and headache pills – Williams writes that "in their essential combination, this is the flow of meanings and values of a specific culture" (120).

Of course, in the contemporary media landscape, broadcast television competes against other media platforms. As Jinna Tay and Graeme Turner note, "we cannot think of television networks in the same way we once did: as merely competing for a slice of the national audience" (8). Furthermore, that national and international audience is no longer conceived by institutions, networks, or by scholars as a homogenous and passive group. Audiences have a greater level of control over what they watch, and when and where they watch that content. Audiences also critique, comment on, mash-up and share content, and in some cases even contribute to its creation. As Henry Jenkins writes, "If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible," then "the new consumers are now noisy and public" (19).

In discussing post-network television, Amanda D. Lotz proffers three categories of television content that help somewhat in delineating medium-specific conversations as regard TV in the twenty-first century. The first category is "prized" content, which is actively sought out and watched as an event; the bleeding of commentary around this content into social circles and online discussion platforms also bolsters the content as a valued piece of culture – even if the spike in hype may not last long. Lotz suggests that the value placed in certain content may not be shared by all audiences: her examples range from *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011) to *Duck Dynasty* (2012-). No matter its perceived value, prized content is considered discretely as artefact – partly removed from the intricacies of its platform, and from the surrounding programs (per Williams above). Lotz's second category is live sports and contests, which "resist all of the ways the technologies and distribution opportunities of the post-network era enable audiences to disrupt prized content from residual viewing norms and economic strategies" (14). This is still sought-after content, but its "exceptional time sensitivity" and, to a degree, unpredictability, keep it at a remove from the prized content described above (14). The third of Lotz's classifications is linear content, where intentionality and focus may be slightly reduced than with prized or contest-based programming. "Linear content is what people watch when they watch 'what is on,'" Lotz offers (14). Very often, it is a sense of shared space – or of mutual boredom – that characterises the viewing of linear content. Lotz presents these three categories as catch-alls that "illustrate the need to speak of particular types of television content and make content-specific claims when postulating coming economic models" (15).

Documentaries are hard to place cleanly within Lotz's categories, particularly in the context of Netflix, where the idea of watching "whatever is on" does not really truck with its on-demand nature. There are contest-like elements to some of Netflix's original non-fiction content, for instance, such as *Ultimate Beastmaster* (2017-) or *Westside*

(2018-), but these remain on-demand products, rather than occurring in-flow. The marketing of Netflix's original content, both within the platform, in real-world settings like billboards or bus stops, and on social media, suggests that Netflix considers its own content much more "prized" than its acquired material: consider the promotion of *Stranger Things* (2016-), for example, or *13 Reasons Why* (2017-), which took precedence over the acquisition of popular properties like *Mad Men* (2007-2015) or *Homeland* (2011-). Netflix places their Original content in a separate category on the main browser interface, privileging this content with larger portrait-oriented thumbnails. Netflix has chosen the nomenclature of "series" and "films," which consciously connects its products with labels from the network era. Furthermore, Netflix largely restricts its content to the run-times and structural conventions of those formats. How, though, do new viewing practices, new modes of production and distribution, become inscribed in the product, the content, itself? What are the similarities and differences between network-era programs and post-broadcast content?

Netflix's documentary content is constitutive of the commercial reality of the platform in that while much of the content is commissioned or produced by Netflix itself, there is something of a balance between original and acquired content. From a user perspective, the platform is structured around the distribution of content according to the viewer's preferences, and the "preference machine" or algorithm is designed and used by a company whose revenue is assured by continued subscription and viewing. It thus behoves Netflix to work within existing documentary sub-genres, and to form hybrids with related styles like reality television, in order to attempt to attract a wide and varied audience. Across the range of content, though, what are the similarities and differences? Can a Netflix Originals "house style" be observed, and what comprises it? I attempt here to delineate just such a style through three case studies, and to contextualise this style within the broader discussions conducted above.

Michelin-starred television: *Chef's Table*

The use of Max Richter's re-working of *Winter* (Concerto No. 4 in F minor, Op. 8, RV 297), from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (1725), as the theme for *Chef's Table*, is somewhat symbolic of the series' status and function. *Chef's Table* premiered in 2015 as Netflix's first original documentary series and has since run for an additional five series – or "volumes" – plus a spin-off featuring France-based chefs. I mention the symbolism of the theme, *Winter*, for three reasons. *Winter* is a singular concerto that has its own discrete tone and characteristics; in the same way, each episode of *Chef's Table* is a standalone story that profiles an internationally-renowned chef. But *Winter* is also one of four concerti that comprise Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, functioning in conjunction with the other three pieces or seasons; *Chef's Table* is a series where stylistic patterns propagate and blend with each other across the episodes. Finally, the version of *Winter* used for the title sequence of *Chef's Table* is a minimalist arrangement and re-composition by the German-British composer Max Richter.

Chef's Table continues a long tradition of food documentaries and television programs, and is not ignorant of this history; but it also leverages the freedom afforded by its

combined producer-distributor in order to play and experiment with the form. In this way the series, too, is a remix or reorientation of a certain type of documentary. Most notable in terms of these more experimental techniques are smooth camera movements, super slow-motion shots, soft-focus or *bokeh* cinematography, the use of computer-controlled camera rigs, and a presentation of food that is comparable to the arrangement of props for still-life painting: the perfect alignment of *mise en place* with *mise en scene*. These techniques are not new, but their combination in an ultra-high definition program to be consumed via streaming tells us a lot about how platform might be inscribed in content within Netflix's oeuvre.

The second volume's third episode focuses on French-born Dominique Crenn, America's first two-Michelin star chef. This episode starts – as many of them do – with a brief prologue hinting at the chef's early life. In Crenn's case, we are told she was adopted by a loving family and spent an idyllic youth in Brittany with her brother and parents; it was her father that took her to restaurants, where she became enamoured with the beauty, the precision, the ritual, the movements of fine dining. The pre-titles prologue is based around a set-up interview: a medium shot of Crenn sitting at a bar, pristine glassware arrayed and gleaming in soft focus behind her. Alongside this interview, we hear from other chefs and critics about the subject's wider influence. Around these interviews, the editor cross-cuts between Crenn sitting meditatively on a train (that we later learn is zipping through the French countryside) and slow-motion shots of dishes being prepared and arranged on plates. Many episodes of the series begin this way, but the variety in dishes, environments, colours, and stories means each prologue unique. The prologue sets the tone for the episode, building to a mini-climax, where often a completed dish is centred before the camera, and we then cut to the opening strings of Richter's arrangement of *Winter*.

Beyond the prologue and titles, the chef's narrative continues to unfold, and we learn about how their personal story or influences manifest themselves in their menus. Like the food presented in the show, the cinematography is precise and constructed. In Crenn's episode, a pivotal emotional moment is the death of her father. Her father is presented visually through photographs and symbolically via his artwork: paintings that are hung in Crenn's home and in her restaurants. After a brief summary of a period of soul-searching that saw her work in Indonesia and Los Angeles, Crenn reaches the point in her narrative where she is about to open her own restaurant. From here, there is a swelling in visuals and sound that takes us through the opening of Atelier Crenn in San Francisco, and gives us tantalising glimpses of various dishes.

In each of the sequences discussed above, a few elements stand out: colour, sound and music, and the way that the sound and visuals are brought together. Colour is a big part of the series, and the footage is clearly graded in post-production to emphasise the variety in and richness of hues. The opening montage of Crenn's episode ends with the chef meticulously arranging multi-coloured flowers and sauces on a plate. The sound design is just as precise, with a balance of classical music, isolated voice, and silence, and environmental sounds. Crenn leaves the chaos of the kitchen at one point in the episode, to visit an orchard in Yountville, California, where she sources some of her ingredients. This sequence echoes similar sections in other episodes, and they tend to

function as a period of respite from the swelling crescendos of the chef at work; further, it is worth considering the parallels between this example of Slow Media, and the principles of the Slow Food movement, which call for the sourcing of local, sustainable ingredients (Honoré 59). Crenn is shown walking around the fields with the owner of the farm, trying the raw ingredients, and the soundtrack comprises their conversation and environmental sounds, primarily crickets, birds chirping and the wind rustling the leaves. The crickets in particular are quite high in the audio mix, and the absence of music is noteworthy. However, I would argue that the layering of natural sounds in this short sequence is its own kind of musical arrangement, a score in itself, or a soundscape to match the overgrown greenery on screen. The final ingredient Crenn tastes is a perfectly ripe fig. From the wider shots of the two wandering the farm, the camera moves in, to get a close-up detail of the fig's interior, and as Crenn lifts the fruit to her lips, a single note of music starts up, signalling a shift away from the outdoors, and back to the kitchen, where the fig will be the star of a dish. The set-up interview with Crenn is also gently re-introduced here, inter-cut with shots and sounds from the farm. We are being softly re-oriented back to the charged atmosphere of the kitchen. It's a fluid movement, rather than a hard cut, and the sound is crucial to that transition.

Each episode is difficult to analyse, not in terms of aesthetics, but more with regard to structure. There is rarely a moment when the flow of imagery and sounds stop, where there is a shift from one "section" or scene to another. The images and sounds rise and fall, they build in intensity, in motion, in fluidity. With the editing alone, there is more a sense of decoupage than montage. More than the individual shots or their alignment with each other or with the soundtrack, there is the sense of an overall gesture. More than sequences or scenes, each individual visual element is layered on top of another to give a rich sense of texture, depth and complexity. In discussing the editor's rhythmic movements, Karen Pearlman uses words like "orchestration" and "conducting" (24-25); the result of this approach is an experience that feels more felt than watched. There is a polish to *Chef's Table* that lends itself to high-definition displays; this is content that is pristine and precise. Time has been taken to achieve this sense of polish, as the producers assume that viewers will seek this content out over other options. The content is treated as prized, with the assumption that the viewer will see it that way: *Chef's Table* is *event* streaming, rather than something designed to stand out in a flow of information.

Soft-focus chaos: *Shot in the Dark*

From the nuanced, balanced, symphonic, high-brow *Chef's Table*, we move to the ostensibly gutter-based world of stringers, with Jeff Daniels' series *Shot in the Dark*. The series follows several stringers – independent cameramen – as they roam the streets of Los Angeles after dark, getting footage of the aftermath of accidents or crimes, or events of interest as they happen. They then bid to sell this footage to news networks for broadcast the following day. Where the ebbs and flows, the movements and arrangements of each episode of *Chef's Table* are distinct and changeable, *Shot In The Dark* is, by contrast, formulaic and connected (albeit tenuously) by an overarching narrative.

The thrust of the show is straightforward: each night, several stringers react to calls they hear on the various police scanners they have rigged up in their cars. They fly across the city to the location, film the incident or its aftermath, then hurriedly edit the footage together to pitch to networks. The overarching narrative is interwoven between each incident, and presents the camaraderie and competition between the media companies and their individual stringers. In terms of structure, the episode begins with an establishing sequence that either sets up the thrust of the episode or is something of a non-sequitur that nevertheless draws the viewer into the action. In the case of the fourth episode of the first series, "Nice Package," stringer Howard Raishbrook (also one of the show's executive producers) arrives at the site of a fatal head-on collision on one of LA's dangerous freeways. Quickly covering the scene, he uploads the footage, believing himself to have the exclusive on the story. Unbeknownst to Howard, though, competitor Scott Lane has snuck up behind a freeway sound barrier to get the high angle, and then packages this footage with other stories to secure more "hits" or purchases. Howard later realises the story was taken out from under him, and identifies Scott's packaging of content as somewhat undermining the nature of the stringing industry. This brief narrative sequence is shot in a variety of ways: some of the cinematography is handheld, some is static, some is shot from a bonnet-mounted camera.

Like much reality TV, *Shot in the Dark* treads an often-blurry line between constructed Kardashian-esque narratives and actions/reactions that are genuine and true to life. Leaving debates of verisimilitude aside, the visual treatment of the content is interesting in and of itself. As noted, the camera work is varied: a mixture of handheld immediacy, cinematic timelapse or static establishing shots, and views from bonnet-mounted cameras that capture the faces of the stringers as they drive to an incident. This is supplemented by aerial drone footage of Los Angeles, and graphic inserts that resemble a GPS navigation system tracking the stringers as they race time and each other to their destinations.

The accidents and events the stringers encounter and film are very real, but elements of the show are very well-produced. The set-up interviews with each of the stringers are shot with multiple cameras, to keep the editing dynamic and fluid; Howard Raishbrook, for example, is usually shown sitting in a booth at a moodily-lit diner. Each of the stringers' car interiors are lit with LED lights corresponding to the colour designated to their media company; this colour is also used to track each stringer in the GPS graphic inserts.

The sound design, too, in *Shot in the Dark* is complex and affecting, showing an attention to detail that would seem strange in other crime/reality shows such as *COPS* (1989-), where rawness and messiness are part of the chosen *cinéma vérité* style. There are no clear breaks in the soundtrack between clips, as would normally occur when cutting: background noise will usually be slightly different in each clip. With no clear breaks, it can be deduced that care has been taken to mask these cuts in the sound design, to give the impression of a continuous flow of images, and distracting the viewer from the jarring nature of any visual cut. Sound design of this kind can be expensive, so is indicative of high production value: a budget that allows for such

attention to detail. In fact, high production value is indicated by all these little touches: the varied shots, well-produced set-up interviews, and the complex sound design, all parts of a clear Netflix slow documentary house style that adheres to Lotz's "prized" content, in the way that the platform markets these in the online interface.

At the end of each "section," once an incident has been resolved, there is a slow-moving tracking shot filming a television showing the news coverage of that event. A text overlay then indicates how many "hits" each of the stringers got with their footage. What interests me most about these little epilogues is their duration: each one lasts around a minute or so and serves as little breaths between the chaos of each stringer's chase. To take a minute for these interludes is an editing and storytelling luxury; this not an unprecedented luxury in television structure, but it is one that the producers seem to return to a great deal more than their network-bound counterparts.

While watching *Shot in the Dark*, one is left with an overwhelming sense of polish: a glossy production true to the aesthetics and principles of Slow Media. The image is clean and moves smoothly, even when it is overlaid with a faux viewfinder graphic to denote footage taken by the stringers themselves. There is no attempt to replicate the immediacy of embedded reportage or other reality shows via the shaky cameras of *COPS*, or the crash zooms of *Jersey Shore* (2019-2012) or the *Real Housewives* franchise (2006-). The constructed narrative and compulsive attraction of the show betrays its "reality" status, but its adoption of more cinematic techniques, such as set-up interviews, advanced lighting and sound design, gives it a polish more akin to *Chef's Table* or, as I will now discuss, feature-length documentaries like *The Ivory Game*.

Duration and persuasion: *The Ivory Game*

The Ivory Game is a feature-length persuasive documentary film that takes as its subject the poaching of African elephants for the ivory from their tusks. This is hardly a new issue, but it is one that finds new currency with shifting political landscapes and the pressures of global scrutiny. The filmmakers' approach is to structure their film as an investigation – it begins on the ground in Tanzania, where a notorious poacher is detained, before we then meet the security chief of a wildlife reserve, Craig Millar. Millar's attempts to protect the elephants in his care forms one arm of a branching narrative; the other stories are that of the investigators tasked with finding the poachers, and those attempting to halt the international trafficking of ivory.

The visual style is a combination of sweeping cinematic drone cinematography, combined with more immediate, hand-held footage, particularly when the camera operators follow law enforcement as they raid poacher compounds, or when conservationists attempt to negotiate with land-owners at night. There are also sequences captured with hidden cameras, as undercover operatives attempt to expose the illegal trafficking of ivory. This binary of immediate action and the expansive environment is broken up by scenes that take place in London, where environmental groups lobby for support, and in China, where much of the poached ivory ends up. The grand aerial shots show great swathes of unspoilt desert and greenery and, when combined with a swelling orchestral score, make for compelling imagery.

Viewers who are predisposed to sympathise with the wildlife and its protectors will no doubt be caught up in the affective nature of *The Ivory Game*. Around 53 minutes into the film, for example, a plane is seen swooping low over the environment, as one of the conservationists discusses putting extra protection in place. From here, the film shifts location to Nairobi, Kenya, where a handheld camera descends into the lower floors of a government storage warehouse. The soundtrack features radio and television news reports about the illegal ivory trade as the camera peeks into rooms simply filled with tusks, piled floor to ceiling. A conversation between conservationists and workers reveals that they have catalogued over 55 tons of tusks at this facility alone. The conversation is filmed in close-up, with occasional moves away from the group as something or other is pointed out: a high pile of tusks, or the smart device on which the ivory is being catalogued. Over a score of a single string note, the voiceover notes that if the ivory is not destroyed, then it may be stolen and once again leaked onto the black market. A montage of soft-focus shots, shows the workers sorting through the ivory and marking each tusk with an identification number, desperately trying to find room for the sheer amount of contraband. The editing of this sequence is languorous. Once again, time is taken to ensure that the content of each shot is allowed sufficient screen time for the viewer to take it in: this is particularly true of wide-angle shots of the piles of tusks.

Even in the sequences featuring handheld footage or shots from hidden cameras, each shot is allowed to play through a long duration. As the undercover activists move through a building at around 85 minutes into the film, we see a number of long shots where a couple of enormous polished tusks suddenly appears; another few steps, and a huge bearskin fills the frame. With no cuts, there is certainly a sense of authenticity – this is a real place, these are real people – but as with the other examples discussed here, there is a sense of freedom, of patience, to wait and let the story unfold naturally: to let the audience take it all in.

This is an aesthetic that is enabled *by* technology but is also a sort of response to the ubiquity of technology. The producers clearly enjoy access to multiple different camera types, and have cut together the varied footage in ways that foreground the affordances of each. The measured editing, though, seems to ask audiences to "take their time" in a Slow Media kind of way, and to let it all sink in.

The final filmed image of *The Ivory Game* is a huge mound of ivory tusks being set alight and burning ferociously. A text overlay explains that Kenya destroyed its entire stockpile of ivory in 2016, but subsequent text reminds the viewer that the struggle to end the ivory trade is still very much ongoing: in the words of the film, "The fight continues." These images of flame are slow motion, moving from long, wide angles to close-ups of licking flame. As the orange frames fade, we are left with a single black and white still image of an elephant. Text beneath this image reads:

<div style="text-align:center">

Dedicated to the memory of Satao
JOIN THE FIGHT AT WWW.THEIVORYGAME.COM

</div>

This is a compelling call to action. Having just met the many people involved in stemming and trying to end the trade of ivory, the message is unrelenting, and there is

no happy ending. The fight continues, and we cannot forget those that have been lost along the way. The call to action is a staple documentary technique, and can be either explicit, as in the case of this final image and web address, or implied throughout the piece, leaving the viewer to determine how to engage with the issue. According to Bill Nichols, techniques such as the call to action "place documentary in much closer alliance with rhetoric than aesthetics" ("Blurred Boundaries" 47). Carl R. Plantinga says nonfiction films project "the actual world as portrayed" (17) and the filmmakers thus "cue the spectator to understand and evaluate what is shown as nonfiction" (19). With this in mind he offers a number of ways in which filmmakers wrap things up:

> *The end of the formal narrative documentary parallels the overall epistemological function of the text, providing full, clear, high-level knowledge of the ostensible truth. It accomplishes this by answering salient questions earlier raised, summing up, reinforcing main points, or providing a frame for interpretation. (Plantinga 131-2)*

One such frame for interpretation is the call to action, that makes the agenda of the piece plain, and clearly delineates the voice of the filmmakers. All documentaries have an agenda, and each puts forward its own perspective on a person, an issue, or an event. "Documentary voice," offers Nichols, "derives from the director's attempt to translate his or her perspective ... into audio-visual terms; it also stems from his or her direct involvement with the film's subject" ("Introduction to Documentary" 69). Documentaries are discursive and dialogical; they invite the audience to compare their own views with that of the film and its makers. The freedom to employ high production values is a luxury not available to all documentarians, but it is a freedom that the makers of *The Ivory Game* have embraced to tell a story that unfolds with care and duration. With *Chef's Table* and *Shot in the Dark* the attitude seems to be to let the story speak for itself. There is no real need to persuade the audience of anything, least of all to act. But with *The Ivory Game*, there is necessarily an inherent request for confidence, and a call for trust that the full story and perspective will be shown in time. After this has been done, the producers feel comfortable imploring the viewer to consider action. Purely aesthetically, too, as with the two previous examples, there is a clear and unrelenting focus on high production values. This is persuasive, dynamic documentary, but it is still slow, deliberate, and designed as *event* streaming.

Stranger things...

Netflix is a platform that emerged from the hyper-development of media technologies. Rather than a "network" or a "channel" it offers viewers what Sudeep Sharma calls a newsstand (144), and Ramon Lobato a "catalog," based on licensing agreements that "change over time and across space" ("Rethinking International TV flows research" 242). Finally, the platform is built upon and reliant on the infrastructure of the global Internet: "vast networks of fibre and coaxial cable, copper telephone wires, and satellite data links" (Lobato "Streaming services" 180). It is perhaps ironic that on such a platform as Netflix – built as it is upon the principles of speed and instantaneous connectivity – one consistently finds content that seems to "ask for confidence and to take [its] time to be credible" (Köhler et al). Throughout each of the examples discussed

above, there is a predisposition to high production values, and a true sense of polish to the finished product. These are programs, films, that are supposed to be an event, what Lotz calls "prized" content. This is content that is made to be chosen, to be consumed as an event, outside the "flow" of network programming. When their products are removed from flow, producers are afforded the time to make deliberate choices about their visuals and sound, and this is manifest in an unhurried, considered style – even in the "chaos" of *Shot in the Dark*.

The final credo of the Slow Manifesto offers that "Slow Media are discursive and dialogic." I have observed certain trends in Netflix-produced documentaries that comprise what I contend is a "house style." This style, with its sense of polish and patient editing style, fits the documentary remit well. But certain elements of the style can be found not just across Netflix Original documentaries, but its Original dramas, series, and the various acquisitions that it brings into its catalogue. It stands to reason that in the quest to retain subscribers, Netflix will commission or acquire content that stands out, to be chosen by the viewer from the curated selection on offer. How strange, then, that slow nonfiction seems to be the order of the day.

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About the author

Daniel Binns is a screenwriter, producer, and teacher of film and media studies. His creative practice is primarily short-form drama, observational essay films and smartphone filmmaking, and his theoretical bent is film genre and media philosophy. Daniel has produced documentary and lifestyle television across multiple continents and for several networks including Fox Sports and National Geographic. He is the author of *The Hollywood War Film* (Intellect, 2017) and has also published on drone cinematography, the affordances of the vlog, and the changing nature of editing in film.