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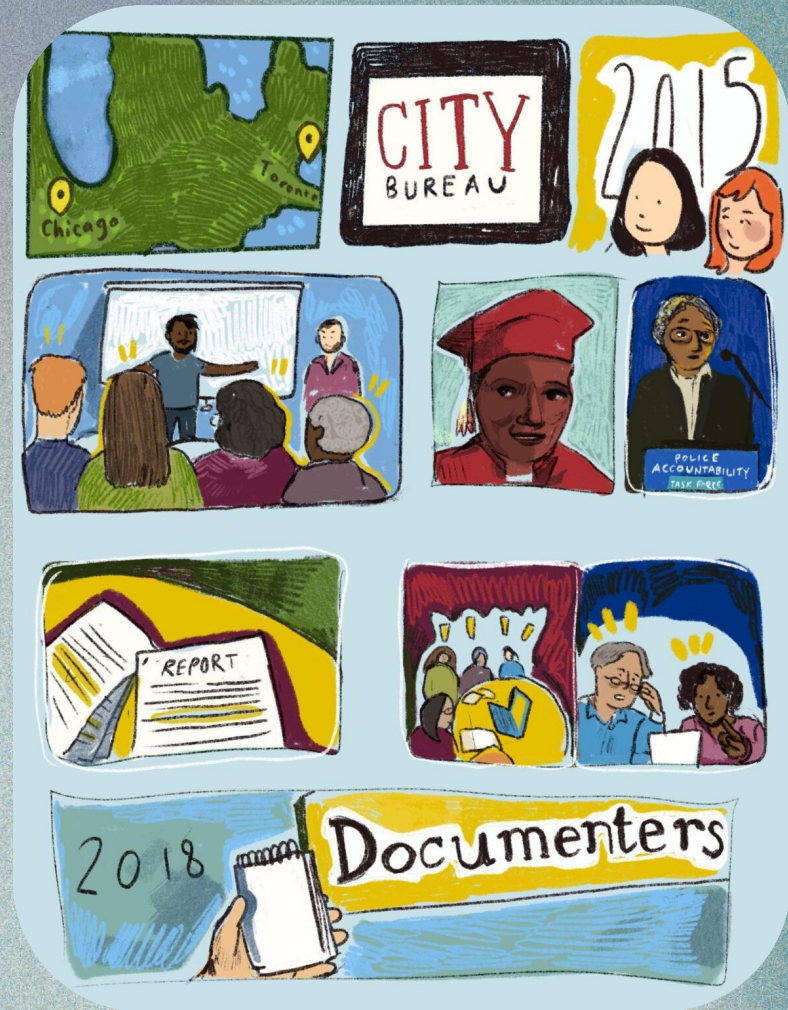
Montreal Documenters and Community-Centred Journalism: Exploring Journalistic Boundaries and Reflexive Practices

Clément Lechat

Presentation Plan

Argument: Bridging the gap between research and practice by including communities

- Introducing reflexivity, my journey, and why this matters
- My reflections on community-centred journalism in Montreal
- Food for thought and practical takeaways
- Questions for the audience



Data and Methods



Data:

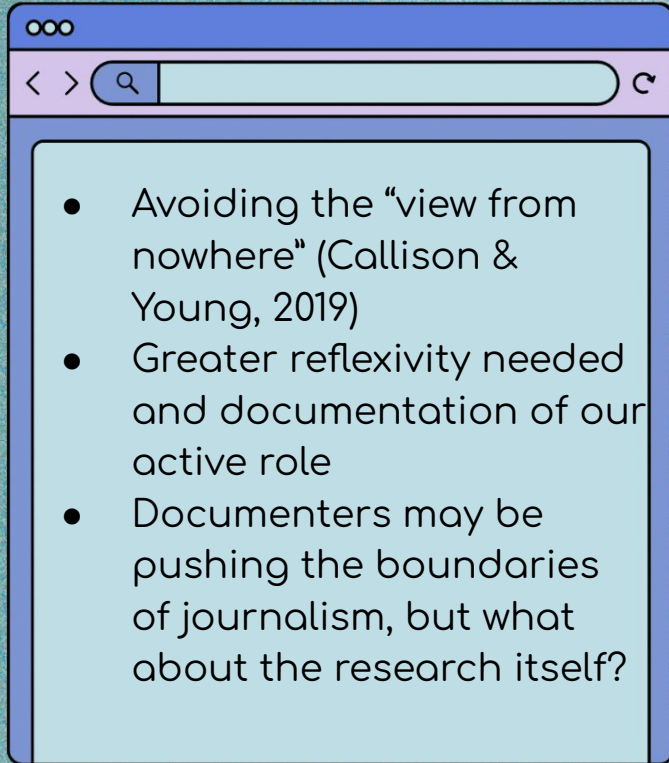
- Experience being involved in Montreal Documenters
- 10 memo notes August 2025-March 2026
- Conversations with friends and colleagues (intersubjectivity)

Reflexivity:

“The process and practice of a researcher critically reflecting on how their disciplinary, theoretical and personal assumptions and their design choices shape and delimit the knowledge they produce.”

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*.

Methodological Gap



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- Avoiding the “view from nowhere” (Callison & Young, 2019)
- Greater reflexivity needed and documentation of our active role
- Documenters may be pushing the boundaries of journalism, but what about the research itself?

Documenters: Journalism Practice-as-research?

“By arguing that experience is partially constructed from the researcher's own subjective position, reflexive practice and reflexive research into practice both offer a unique approach by providing an

insider's view of the systems model of editorial judgement and journalistic practice.”

Niblock, 2012

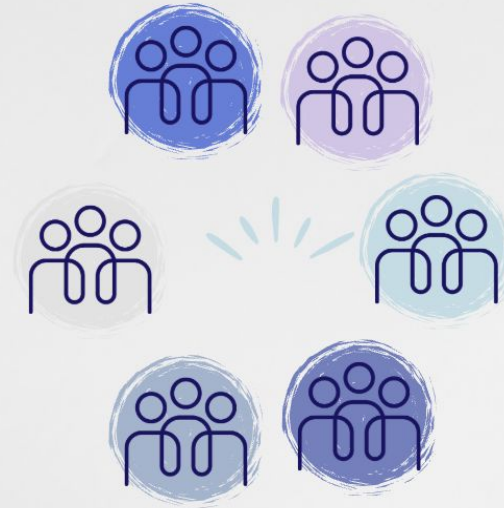


Documenters Canada

- Research funding is a particularity
- “Researching” while “implementing”
- Academic news partnership (Goff et al., 2025): Redirecting research resources to journalism
- Collaboration: academics, researchers, community organizers/members, etc.

Montreal Site

- Concordia University/Pivot Média
- Relationships with 3 main community organizations: precarity/housing/youth



Positionality & Reflexive Journey

September-December 2023:

- Concordia Masters' Student
- Research on 3 neighbourhoods
- Discovered community-centered journalism

January 2024-May 2026:

- Started and grew Documenters Canada
- Became Network-Lead
- Tasks: education, communications, logistics, research, production/journalism

Evolution:

- De-centered journalism
- Pivot to media entrepreneurship
- Influence of research mentor
- Internalized academia's rules, while getting closer to communities
- Conflicting habitus (Bourdieu, in Niblock, 2012)

Reflections on Community-Centred Journalism

(Wenzel, 2020)

- Principles: Listening, partnering, relationship-building
- A “portable intervention process”

“While there is no one-size-fits-all intervention project, there is value in following a process model that is participatory and focuses on building relationships that share power between journalists and community stakeholders.” (p. 19)



Adapted to Montreal?

- Integration into community information ecosystems
- Relationships with Community Gatekeepers (CMTQ)
- Recruitment and training with community groups
- Advisory board
- Member of Transition en Commun Network

Reflections on Community-Centred Journalism

Limitations:

- Top-down movement?
- Iterative relationship-building
- Funders “fund projects, not processes” (Wenzel, 2020)
- Continuum between newsroom and community-based projects (Wenzel, 2020)

Why Integrate Community-centred Journalism to Documenters?

- A guiding ideal
- Aspiration to democracy and power-sharing
- In reaction to the complicated history of community-journalism relationship (extractive, parachute)
- Need for infrastructure outside the newsroom
- Communities bring legitimacy?

Food for Thought and Takeaways

Autoethnography

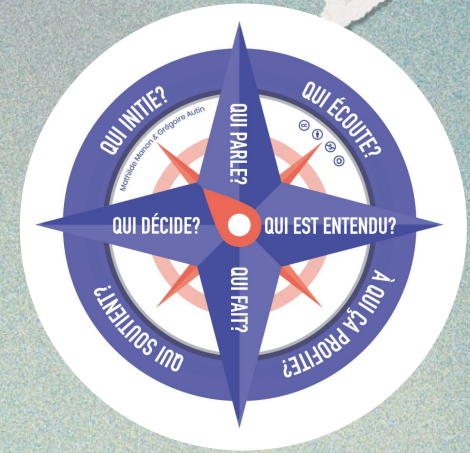
“The outcome of that research is often a first-person narrative, written in an evocative way, where the researcher is the object of the research.” (Niblock, 2012)

Epistemic Justice

- A compass (Manon & Autin, 2023)
- Questions: who decides / speaks / is listened to / makes / initiates / listens / benefits / supports?

Transformative Research Toolkit

- Lived experience
- Vision of social transformation
- Influence public policy & power dynamics



Sources:

Niblock, S. (2012). Envisioning Journalism Practice as Research, *Journalism Practice*, 6:4, 497-512

Manon, M., Autin, G. (2023). Boussole de la justice épistémique. Paroles d'excluEs, Montréal.

Othring & Belonging Institute, (2024). Transformative Research Toolkit

Opening Academia

- In Montreal: Centre for Research on Social Innovations (CRISES, UQAM)
- Participatory Approaches “seek to overturn the traditional participant-researcher relationship” with “social change goals” (Braun & Clarke, 2021)
- Ex: Co-construction, or community research, “involving community members as co-researchers who participate in research design, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis”



Conclusion

- How could communities be meaningfully involved in research? What opportunities or challenges might that create?
- Have tensions emerged as you simultaneously built, studied, and participated in Documenters?
- What type of knowledges become possible when journalists, researchers, and communities collaborate?





Thank
you!