

Show Us You Care!

I would like to dedicate
this thesis to my mother.

Thank you
for teaching
me how to care.

The Confessing Nation

Sharing is Caring

Rhetoric of Confession in Factual Television

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Identification

Pleasures

In this thesis, I will question the development of confessional discourse from the nineteenth century until now, using examples taken mainly from mass media and British factual television. I will write about what is spoken of, those who speak, the spaces that allow this speech and the institutions that incite confession and how they store/record, broadcast/diffuse what is being said. In other words, the global discourse of confession and its implementations. I have identified three categories where confessional discourse operates: in the nation, the state and the animal. I would like to stress that the politics of confessional discourse influence our relationship to the world regardless of our class, gender, age, race or political

views, in Westerns societies at least. This influence is nuanced but still inevitable, as confessional discourse regulates conscious and unconscious behaviours.

Show Us You Care is the result of my research about the underlying notion of confession in my film and print making practice. The honesty of my work has often been praised, but I have realised that the way it is being shaped makes it conditioned.

“You can tell a secret now Ayesha!
The camouflage is protecting you.”

What does anyone actually get from it? And why do I enjoy the process of sharing intimate information so much?

The Confessing Nation

Sharing is Caring

Michel Foucault gives several definitions of confession; In *Subjectivity and Truth*, a confession is “to declare aloud and intelligibly the truth of oneself”¹ and in *The History of Sexuality*:

1. Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, in *The Politics of Truth*, 1997, page 173.

A ritual of discourse where the subjects who speaks corresponds with the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual which unfolds in a relation of power, since one doesn't confess without the presence, at least the virtual presence, of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the agency that requires the confession, imposes it, weighs it, and intervenes to judge, punish, pardon, console, reconcile.²

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction Vol. 1*, 1978, pages 61–62.

I have based my understanding of confessional discourse on these definitions. *Show us you care!* was the headline in conservative newspaper *The Daily Express*³ accompanied by a photo of Queen Elizabeth II on September the 4th, 1997. On the 31st of August, Princess Diana known as the people's princess died in a car accident in Paris. The public had been captivated by the events involving Diana

3. *The Daily Express* is a right wing, daily national tabloid newspaper in the United Kingdom.

ever since she got engaged to Prince Charles. This incident was no exception. Her story had all the trappings of a fairy tale wedding. She was a beautiful and innocent looking nursery teacher who blossomed into a Princess. Needless to say, it didn't really take much for her to build up the respect and fascination of the public. She was an active member in charities such as AIDS, held people's hands without gloves and hugged suffering children. In addition to the charitable qualities of Princess Diana, she was also a fashion icon. She made the royal family attractive and modern.

In the late 1960's, media tycoon Rupert Murdoch bought failing newspaper The Sun and shifted the paper's content towards petty news and the fascination of the lives of the famous. Rupert Murdoch knowing that his poorly resourced paper would not beat its competitors on news, created a new market of readers: the television viewers. As people were watching more and more television, the newspaper focused on the lives of actors both on and off-screen. It created a demand for paparazzi shots. By the mid 80's, Diana was everywhere to be seen and the British could not get enough of her. Especially, when her marriage started to break down, the media became her weapon of choice. She introduced a realm of emotions within Buckingham Palace, interrupting its stiffness. She laughed, cried and swore in public. This behavior embodied a new national narrative that encouraged empathy, honesty and shamelessness. The more she shared publicly the more she was encouraged to share. A demand for her life was ever growing. The public supported Diana through the break up and identified

themselves in her confessional behavior and humility rather than in the mysticism and privilege of the royal family. After her death, the whole country seemed to claim a very strong emotional connection to a person they had never met.

Princess Diana also fascinated the German artist Christoph Schlingensiefel. In 2006, he showed *Kaprow City*, an installation/theatre play in 18 happenings and 6 parts.⁴

4. <http://www.schlingensiefel.com/backup/diana2/>

The installation represents Schlingensiefel fantasies

about her death. *Kaprow City* applies a panoptic structure; through its shape (See Figure 1) but also through its function. There is a control tower in the middle of the eighteen spaces that each host one happening. The authority of the tower is visible but unverifiable. The tower is screening live footage of each happening. The visitors are aware that they are being watched but continue participating in the addictive power-pleasure game. The installation becomes a “privileged place for experiments on men, and for analysing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained from them.”⁵ “It’s a

5. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, translation Alan Sheridan, page 195.

schizophrenic installation”

as Schlingensiefel writes in a press release. “Diana says, with her hand on the optics: Please do not film! But embraces the camera with her eyes. That’s Diana.”⁶

I believe that we function in a very similar way.

6. Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Kaprow City– Eine Installation Von Christoph Schlingensiefel*, press release of the Berlin Exhibition, Own translation, 2006.

Kaprow City was moved from the art fair Frieze in

London in 2006 to a smaller gallery due to a national revolt and censure. The public was offended. How could he desacralize the facts? Schlingensief disrupted and challenged the national grieving. He turned the power relations upside down and started to shed light on the perverse character of the human being and their relation to confessions.

The media and its followers had thrived from Diana's confessions. On one hand, Diana was an economic force, as she would help sell thousands of copies of newspapers and on the other the public had taken pleasure in the power that they had gained from their spectatorship and consumerism. Diana's life was so valuable (for economic and entertainment reasons) to the public sphere and vice versa. When she died though, this prosperity turned into guilt. Rumors say the paparazzi killed her and therefore readers rejected newspapers such as The News of the World for a while. The nation had to find someone to demonize, they needed a face, or at least a group of people to put the blame on. It was a hypocritical reaction and the millions of flowers placed in front of Buckingham Palace showed that deep down the national dependence and addiction had killed her.

Rhetoric of Confession in Factual Television

Coincidentally, during the 1990's, subjective, autobiographical and confessional modes of expression proliferated. When referring to these modes of expression in television the term factual television arises. It's an all-embracing genre of nonfiction television programming, which documents actual people and events. Tabloid journalism, documentary television and popular entertainment were more or less the pillars in the growth of factual television. It showcases the extraordinary moments of banality and uses confessional discourse as rhetoric. Confessional discourse goes hand in hand with factual television. Most of the time there is a confessional camera set up in an isolated area, where the participant can share their feelings and thoughts in an intimate setting directly to the viewer. It creates an individualistic mode of discourse. Confession is a prominent element of reality television and is commonly used as rhetoric to justify an idea that is relevant to a specific programme and audience.

In 2013, the United Kingdom discovered *Gogglebox*⁷, a reality television programme that shows families and friends over the United Kingdom reacting on British television shows in the comfort of their own homes. *Gogglebox* uses confession as

7. Gogglebox is a British reality show that has aired on Channel 4 since 7 March 2013.

rhetoric in an ambiguous way. First of all, the relation between the confessor and the agency requiring the confession is not obvious. In standard reality television programmes (or any form of confessional discourse), the agency of domination as Foucault's writes: "does not reside in the one who speaks (for he is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but the one who questions and is not supposed to know."⁸ The strange intimate setting of the television show makes it even more ambiguous. Seemingly comfortable

8. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1, 1978, page 62.

and relaxed settings are recognisably staged when one notices the polished and high quality scenography of these spaces. (See Figure 2.) This makes the confession go smoothly from one *Gogglebox* cast member to another and most importantly from the cast to the viewers. It is cozy and warm in the living room and we are in this space together, though at some point someone needs to be the authority extracting the confession. We cannot always blame it on the paparazzi.

On the 12th of May 2017,⁹ we watched the cast of *Gogglebox* watching their television sets while simultaneously listening to the voice of the narrator of *First Dates* (dating reality television programme) introducing us to a plausible couple.

9. *Gogglebox*, Season 9 Episode 12, 12/05/2017, Channel 4.

(Narrator) On Tuesday night, channel 4 was nothing but a love bubble.

(Gogglebox cast) What! My favourite show.

(Narrator) In the program, we met Eve, 22 years old from Wales and John. During dinner, Eve announces that she suffers from alopecia, a condition that causes hair loss.

The following comments are all from the Gogglebox cast.

- Aww, she looks absolutely stunning.
- She looks bloody beautiful.
- She should have come in without it.
- She looks amazing,
how's he going to take it?
- It must be awful for a woman
to have alopecia, because a woman.
- Your hair is your crown and glory.
- Yeah, and a young girl,
like 22 to have it.
- Take it off, babe. You look beautiful.
- I wouldn't put it back on.
- Aww, what a nice bloke.
- That's so sweet,
he's such a good lad.
- He likes her doesn't he.
- I hope they get together.
- Cupid fire your bow at them!
- I hope they do see each other again.
- Why are you crossing your fingers?
- Cause I like them.
- Go on! Go on!

- She's not going to say it, is she?
- Ahh, what?
- Jesus Christ.
- Why would she say that?
- When she thinks he's really nice and had such a lovely evening.
- Just say I'll go out with him again.
- See this is one of the most awkward ones I've ever seen.
- Well Lee, if it's not right it's not right is it.
- If you don't get that feeling, you don't get that feeling.
- But they look as though they did.
- That's a pretty big one.
- That shocked me; I didn't see that one coming.

Both the narrator and the cast are commenting. They believe that they are speaking to us through freedom. The authority (the agency of domination) has convinced the confessor that confession is beneficial for one's mental and physical health. They receive what Foucault calls the "speaker's benefit".¹⁰ The narrator is

10. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1, 1978, page 6.

describing a situation, giving some context to the events

that will follow on the screen. He sets a tone of interpretation, a semi-formal one. The cast is also describing a situation but the tone they use is informal. They express emotion-based reactions. They are projecting their lives or at least the way that they would react in a similar situation on to the candidates of *First Dates* (the show that they are watching). The level of language, the body language, the domestic setting and the sense of community are designed to promote viewer identification. As I have mentioned above, the rhetoric of this show does not follow the classic confessor and agency relationship. It seems here that there are two agencies, both the viewer and the cast/narrator.

Both are intervening in the judgment of the confessor, which in this case, are the candidates of *First Dates*. Can there be numerous agencies? Or only one that is divided in a hierarchical manner? Is the television viewer the agency requiring the confession and then privately intervening in the sanction of the confessor? Or is the cast in fact the agency, as the public sphere and the authority of the television show validate their intervention?

In this case, to understand how the rhetoric of confession functions we need to understand what is at stake. Farah Ramzan Golant, CEO of All3media and producer of *Gogglebox* claims, “Everyone loves watching TV and talking about TV. But the show isn’t really about TV. The show is about people’s lives, their relationships, their living rooms and the way children and parents talk about TV [...] It is asserting the indispensable role of TV in the fabric of people’s lives.”¹¹

11. Farah Ramzan Golant, interview by The Evening Standard, 18 December 2013.

Both the production company and the viewer are agencies, even though the viewer is also subject to confession while watching the show. If the purpose of the confession is the economic aspect of the television show, in the sense that asserting the show’s indispensable role in people’s lives also asserts its durability on air, then the confession of people commenting about other people is rhetoric. The informal, first person format, creates an emotional and pleasurable attachment to the programme. It gives an illusion of proximity to the cast and eventually an addiction to a show. Confession in the context of factual television at least has acquired a reputation of guarantor of truth and therefore adds to the aesthetic of reality that is trying to be represented.

The Production of Truth

During the Antiquity, philosophers such as Seneca introduced philosophical practices of recording and recounting one's acts and thoughts. A temporary master judged such inventories of acts autonomously or in the case of a pending emancipation. The criteria of this judgment were based on the ethical guidelines of the good life that were considered as truthful. The examination was part of a self-conscious process to understand one's behavior and possibly alter it in order to conform to a philosophical truth that was rationally accepted. Chloe Taylor writes:

Importantly, the emphasis on truth doesn't lie with the truth of one's declarations, nor with the truth of one's self, but with the truth of the ethical ideal at which those declarations aim and to which one compares them. Indeed, in contrast to today, there was no truth of the self, and this absence of truth was related to the fact that the self was free, autonomous, and could thus become other than what it was.¹²

12. Chloe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'*, 2009, page 14.

Therefore, if the self is restricted and dependent

how does one produce one's truth? Ways of truth production are unlimited. We could almost spend our whole lives trying to prove our truth. This fascinating social construct that forces us to engage with another in order to consider a behavior, feeling, taste, decision, as being in accord with reality. I have decided to recognize factual television, where reality apparently prevails, as a valuable platform

for the declaration of one's truth. Even though, most people consider factual television as low culture, I find a lot of richness in its claiming innocence and ability to tackle contemporary problems while hiding away in the arms of entertainment. My fascination comes from its method of turning everyday situations into empathetic and subjective experiences, something that I often strive for in my own work. And let's not forget but millions of people watch factual television and therefore I think the genre deserves a bit of attention.

In factual television, the truth operates on two levels: in the content and in the form. Firstly, the content hence the individual's subjective experience is a guarantor of knowledge. A truthful or untruthful knowledge is produced as one can confess something that one did not do, see or think about. Still, we have widely accepted the confession of individual subjective experiences as sources of truth. The claim becomes true through its performance and acquires an authoritative status of truth due to the legalistic functions of a verbal or written signature. Documentary realism and plausibly every form of realism in factual television, lies in what is called an epistemophilia, so to speak, an extensive striving for knowledge. An epistemophilia creates a distinctive form of social engagement as the viewer becomes preoccupied by this search and eventually obsessed. Bill Nichols argues "The engagement stems from the rhetorical force of an argument about the very world that we inhabit. We are

moved to confront a topic, issue, situation, an event that bears the mark of historically real.”¹³

13. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 2001, page 178.

Secondly, the aesthetics in other words the form is as important. The hushed whispering voice over, the incessant camera close ups, the shaking movements, the embodied intimacy of the technical process, appears to reproduce the experiences of subjectivity: the spontaneity of filming, the vulnerability of the filmmaker, and the irregularity of the camera. In 1998, the BBC issued new guidelines to factual producers in order to rewrite the grammar of film editing by insisting that shots and sequences should never be intercut to suggest that they were happening at the same time, if the resulting juxtaposition of the material leads to a distorted and misled impression of events. These guidelines were issued because factual television was confusing viewers after numerous cases of scripted, distorted and manipulated representations of reality.¹⁴

14. Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First person media and factual television*, 2000, page 7.

The editing is not the only manipulation though, as the content is also uncertain and unverifiable. For years, factual television has tried to be as actual as possible, as truthful as possible, it has changed in time to fit new criterion of truth and social phenomenon. The ongoing failure of synthesised reality seems to place factual television, as something of the past and confession in this context, is no longer credible.

The Confessional State

“Are prohibition, censorship, and denial truly the forms through which power is exercised in a general way?”¹⁵

Or does power operate as a mechanism of attraction;

15. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1 1978, page 10.

that draw in the peculiarities over which it keeps watch?

The Institutionalisation of Confession

In *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, Thomas N. Tentler writes: “ that the institutionalisation of confession did not occur as a response to a desire, compulsion, or need to confess on the part of the laity but was the invention of something new and difficult, and that confession was designed to instill anxiety as much as to cure it, to control and to discipline as much as to comfort.”¹⁶ Throughout the nineteenth

16. Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, 1977: xiii.

century, as the devotion for the church was declining,

confessional discourse still prevailed.

The interest in the private lives, actions and thoughts of individuals did not come from priests anymore but from politicians, doctors, economists, scientists, basically anyone who was interested in gathering a database in order

to solve contemporary problems. In Western countries, in the nineteenth century, an important concern was demographic growth and national prosperity. Foucault writes: “At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyse the birth-rates, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices [...]”¹⁷

17. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1 1978, page 25.

Society therefore affirmed that its future and fortune was not only dependent on the citizen’s integrity but also on how each individual made use of her sex. Sex became a powerful tool in the confessional discourse employed by institutions because of its role in the manipulation of the population. If sterile and non-reproductive forms of sexuality threatened a country, the institutions with the power to counter the threats had to take control. “The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm safeguarded the truth and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy.”¹⁸ Non-

18. *Ibid.*, 3

productive and illegitimate forms of social behavior were treated with a rational approach designed to trigger public concern rather than a theological one. So, through a coercive discourse, citizens were called to confess about their sexual habits. “Ours is, after all, the only civilization in which officials are paid to listen to all and sundry impart the secrets of their sex: as if the urge to talk about it, and the interest one hopes to arouse by doing so, have far

surpassed the possibilities of being heard, so that some individuals have even offered their ears for hire.”¹⁹

19. Ibid., 7

Sexuality became synonymous of identity. Non-productive or illegitimate forms of sexuality have been categorised by a representative of economic power and supported by the citizens who respect these categories, in order to medically diagnoses, criminally charge and/or publicly humiliate an individual for the sake of demographic growth and prosperity.

The initial compulsion to confess is an external one, a fabricated desire. Confessional discourse has a coercive power. Individuals do not present themselves to the authority first, but the authority asks the people under their care about their private lives, and develops techniques, or produces threats of divine punishment and risks to health to extract the confessions that do not come voluntarily. One has become convinced that confession is liberating and beneficial for one's spirituality, psychology and physical health.

Non-news

Il y'a eu plus de peur que de mal literally meaning there was more fear than harm is a common French expression used to reassure someone after an incident such as falling off a children's climbing frame or being assaulted on the street. In *Journal de Route*, Sylvain Venayre mentions that while his colleagues recount the aggression that occurred to them during their trip, one of them says without

hesitating that “there was more fear than harm”.²⁰ Yet

20. Sylvain Venayre, *Journal de Route in Histoires de frontières, une enquête sud-africaine*, 2017

when we hurt ourselves accidentally, we feel more harm than fear. Are we reassured by saying that there was more fear than harm? Is the sensation of fear more bearable than the sensation of harm? The expression is ambiguous as it all depends on the incident and therefore the severity of the aftermath. Still, it implements the overrated strength that the feeling of fear conveys. This expression is a misconception of these two feelings: I believe that pain is a stronger feeling than fear but fear as rhetoric is perhaps a stronger manipulative tool.

In the twenty-first century, how is confessional discourse used and to serve what purpose? Terrorism seems to be an urgent problematic. Fear has become terror. Since 9/11, this notion of terror has been so deeply installed in everyday life that a paranoid society has grown. Rhetorics of fear and confession have joined forces to install a confessional state or a confessional non-state: non-state because of the constant mutation of power and juridical paradox. In the air of urgency, there is also an installment of exceptional measures. Giorgio Agamben writes: “If the law employs the exception that is the suspension of law itself - as its original means of referring to and encompassing life, then a theory of the state of exception is the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and at the same time, abandons the living being to law.”²¹ If the state is exceptional, then the laws are exceptional.

21. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, 2003, page 12.

So, what is law if there is no guarantee of its intransigency?

One of the aims of terrorism is to create fear and anguish, which can, lead citizens to ask for authoritarian measures to be adopted and place the collective blame of an attack on a specific community. Still, if the authority is non-authority, the law non-law and the state non-state in other words with no representation of truth whatsoever from trusted sources how can we still ask for authoritarian measures and from whom? How can we ask the agency to impose, weigh, and intervene, to judge, punish, pardon, console, reconcile?

In Unesco, terrorism and media, Jean-Paul Marthoz writes: "It is important to remember that terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Many countries have suffered for decades from groups, both internal and external and including both State and non-State actors, wielding violence against civilians as political strategy."²² Perhaps, the aesthetics and representations of terror have increased, but not necessarily the threat. *In Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*, Henry Giroux writes: "a visual culture of shock and awe has emerged, made ubiquitous by the Internet and 24-hour cable news shows devoted to representations of the horrific violence associated with terrorism, ranging from aestheticized images of night time bombing."²³ Terror imagery is in high demand. As striking as some of the representations

22. Jean-Paul Marthoz, *Terrorism and the Media*, 2017, page 3.

23. Henry Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism, Global Uncertainty and the Challenge of the New Media*, 2006, page 38.

of terrorism may seem, I sometimes miss to see the point. Are these representations protests? Are they disclosing secrets that the government wants to keep hidden? Or has the appropriation of war imagery, images of suicide bombers, real or fictional just become a sort of hype. As if the actual impact and connotation of war has been detached from the aesthetics that are being uncritically mirrored. “[...] Only now the soup can has become a gun?”²⁴ Of course, all representations of terrorism are different, but in the case, it

24. Manon Slome, *The Aesthetics of Terror* in 'oncurating.org' issue 22, 2014, page 83.

seems like the media are portraying an aestheticised experience of terrorism: a mishmash of nonsensical facts, an overload of information, just a minute of a person shooting another person and a dead child on the floor. By adding one thing on top of another, one terrible story on top of another, each new story makes us forget the previous one. The media has managed to create non-news. During attacks, the media very often go live, a practice that satisfies an urgent need for information, but that also contributes to the inherent dramatisation of the coverage of exceptional events, especially in audiovisual media. In most media, specialisation is far from the rule. Journalists skip from one subject to another and only furtively touch upon features of a rare complexity.

Forensics Architecture, an independent research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London have challenged the form of non-information. On their website

they state: “We also undertake historical and theoretical examinations of the history and present status of forensic practices in articulating notions of public truth.”²⁵ Their

25. <http://www.forensic-architecture.org/>

evidence is presented in political and legal forums, truth commissions, courts and human rights reports and Art galleries. Their research called *The Gaza platform* is an interactive map of the Israeli attacks during the 2014 Gaza conflict. “Produced through a year-long collaboration between Forensics Architecture and Amnesty International, the *Gaza Platform* is a new gateway to this precious, first-hand information: it not only gives access to a large quantity of otherwise dispersed data, but helps make sense of it”.²⁶

26. <http://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/the-gaza-platform/>

An interdisciplinary team of investigators conducts the research. They reorganise found footage and data in order to visualise terrorist attacks in a spatial manner. I do praise their attempt to represent a truth of terrorism but I find the classification of terrorist events in the *Gaza platform* interactive map alarming. On the *Gaza platform*, you can search for events by target type such as medical, commercial, religious. Of course, for activist reasons it is relevant to know that residential areas were the most targeted in the 2014 conflict, but for private use the tool feels more like a game than activism: a personalized, individual, participatory investigation.

In the context of terrorism, the production of truth has been confused with the construction of individuality.

Forensics Architecture promotes this idea and encourages subjective approaches to foreign affairs. The more one engages with an event the more one feels like they can understand it. It gives a sense of uniqueness and affiliation. I do agree that the individual can only verify the validity of an event, but in the case of Forensics Architecture the choices and feelings are stored and analysed, therefore the subjectivity is not entirely accurate. With danger hovering over our heads we have easily accepted to give away our thoughts and information, especially to sources we trust. Terrorism has offered a perfect gateway for surveillance to subtly enter our lives.

Surveillance/ Self-Surveillance

The benefits of a state of hyper-surveillance have been implanted in contemporary society through ongoing fear. Our fear of the other has allowed surveillance technology to prosper. Big Brother Watch, a non-profit London Based organization claimed that there were 52,000 CCTV cameras accounted for in the United Kingdom in 2011. CCTV cameras are the first things that I think of when I hear the word surveillance. I have even romanticised them due to films such as *Red Road*²⁷

27. Red Road, Andrea Arnold, Scotland, 2006.

28. <http://www.evidencelocker.net/story.php>.

or the works of Sophie Calle and Jill Magid²⁸.

The other forms of surveillance though are less obvious. The un-protected, un-precautious data leakage is the most interesting. Most of the time, the data we give out is not necessarily perceived as confidential or intimate.

Even though, the data we share is not a secret it still does not legitimise its delivery to an authority in irrelevant situations. For example: when my dentist asks me about my gender, but not about my brand of toothpaste or my allergies? We have internalized surveillance to a point where we understand that it is not necessary to give out so much information, but because an authority justifies the intrusion we feel obliged to answer. Otherwise, our silence becomes suspicious. We are used to giving away data without questioning who is extracting it? Where it is stored? And for what purpose?

In court cases, false information or irregularities concerning times, spaces, and events can delegitimise a whole case. Jean Jacques Rousseau identifies a similar reaction from the readers concerning his writings.

In *Confessions*, he writes the following:

I must present my reader with an apology, or rather a justification, for the petty details I have just been entering into [...] Since I have undertaken to reveal myself absolutely to the public, nothing about me must remain hidden or obscure. I must remain incessantly beneath his gaze, so that he may follow me in all the extravagances of my heart and into every least corner of my life. Indeed, he must never lose sight of me for a single instant, for if he finds the slightest gap in my story [...] he may wonder what I was doing at that moment

[...] I am laying myself sufficiently open to human malice by telling my story, without rendering myself more vulnerable by any silence.²⁹

29. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, 1782, page 60.

In 1782, Rousseau as well as introducing a state of hyper surveillance where each individual is responsible for giving a truthful and complete justification of their acts, he also was interested in the attributes of the panoptic structure, designed by philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham around the same time. Like the prisoner in the Panopticon, Rousseau imagines himself under constant surveillance and feels chronically guilty. He needs to provide a truth that cannot be questioned, a credible and integral record of his life. The gaps and the silence are invitations to suspicion. We have entered a conscious and permanent state of visibility that assures the “continuous functioning” and “automatic mechanisms of power.”³⁰

30. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, page 222.

We have learnt to watch ourselves and to confess our actions and thoughts, but we have also learnt to watch others and act as the agency in order to apply our judgment over them. Surveillance has become self-surveillance.

Russian website insecam.org, is an online directory with over 73,000 live footage from security cameras around the world. It seems like there is nothing illegal about the website because the live footage showed on [insecam](http://insecam.org).

org is taken from unprotected cameras that have been left with their default password. The site administrator claims: “In order to avoid a situation when the camera which is not installed for public access becomes publicly available, the owner of each device should pay great attention to security settings and check the security password. It is desirable to select a difficult password. This problem can be solved only by mass media information.”³¹

31. Kathryn Cave, CCTV hack: Insight from the eerie, yet fully legal, world of live streaming, 2016.

I believe that informing citizens about the flaws of surveillance cameras could be done in a more efficient way because it seems that the users of *insecam.org* navigate recreationally on the website. On the 28th of November 2017, my friend Norig Dodier and I were browsing through *insecam.org*. We eventually found an interesting looking place, a laundrette. (See Figure 3) Its location was indicated on a map at the bottom of the screen, but a note next to it mentioned that the coordinates were very approximate. We could switch between two camera angles, allowing us to see the whole laundrette. We watched two young children. The older boy was helping his *sister* put on her coat and settling her into her pram. They seemed calm. Norig and I were quite entertained. Until, we wondered why two children would possibly be alone, in a laundrette, at 11P.M.? The situation became even more intriguing when the boy started to pull on the front door handle. We understood that they were trapped. Norig and I panicked,

and believed that we were responsible for these children. We wanted to call the police but what would we even say? Someone eventually came to the door of the launderette. We hoped that it would be the parents. The mother walked in. The children were saved.

It was a strange experience: a sort of interactive confession. It could have been staged for all we know, but we trusted the form, we trusted the security cameras to supply us with truthful images: raw footage with no traces of edit or distortion, nor traces of a human interfering with their declarations of truth. We believed that the children were providing us with truthful images and truthful behaviors. The content was credible and included all the aesthetics of reality: distress, intimacy, and emergency. An ordinary people's disaster that was so successful that we even got to physically participate while protecting ourselves from any danger.

The Confessing Animal³²

32. In the French version of The History of Sexuality it is written *bête d'aveu*. *Bête* meaning beast and also stupid. Beast would perhaps be a more adequate translation, as the beast is the animal that is uncontrollable and sometimes dangerous. Also, we say *bête de foire* and not *animal de foire* when we talk about a freakshow. The economical connotations of the *bête* are quite relevant in relation to the confession.

In Western societies, confession has become as valuable technique for producing the truth.

We confess everything

and when the confession is not spontaneous or imposed by an internal imperative, it is tracked down, extracted and uncovered.

Ancient Greek laws had coupled torture and confession, at least for slaves. The Romans had continued this practice.³³ Individuals

have become confessing animals. We have been

trained to constantly prove our innocence, in other words the *truth of oneself*. Though, this task is inaccessible. This unattainable truth hence our biggest secret is at high demand. We are led to believe that “the violence of power weighs on our secrets, and the only way of freeing ourselves is through a liberation”³⁴. *The truth of oneself*

33. Foucault, The History of sexuality: An introduction Vol. 1 (1978), page 59.

34. Ibid., 60

is embedded in a coercive discourse. As Foucault writes: “the production of truth is thoroughly imbued with relations of power.”³⁵ The confession is an example of this.

35. Ibid.

The truth is insignificant without the confirmation of its veracity by the

judge, in other words the agency that is the *master of truth*.

Identification

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, subjective, autobiographical and confessional modes of expression have increased over the last few decades. In an identity-obsessed society the development of these modes of expression is not a coincidence. First person experience of the author, maker, performer, etc. is synonymous with the first person identification of the viewer. This identification is crucial in numerous subject matters of modern society. In our constant search of the unreachable *truth of oneself*, the more one can identify to something or someone the better chances one has of proving their truth and therefore understanding themselves and their identity in an ultimate way.

In the context of factual television, it is quite blatant. The genre is based upon the incessant performance of identity, that happens through the voice of the first person speaking about feelings, sentiment and most powerfully, intimate relationships and unsuspecting, uncensored and liberating behavior. What was formerly considered irrelevant to a story, the behind the scenes aspect of a production, is now inseparable from the story itself. What was formerly private became public through a procedure of liberation. Intimately reserved individuals who were previously part of an economic force and community are

now an institution of individual identities. Factual television is not about contemporary problematics looked upon from an objective view. It's about relating to these problematics through our own subjectivity. Nick Broomfield, a pioneer in personal and subjective filmmaking states: "I don't think anybody believes in objectivity anyway, having that presence and sharing much less with the audience, they're much less able to evaluate what you're giving them."³⁶

36. Nick Broomfield, interview in *Late Show*, Cinéma vérité.

The importance of identification is also accounted for in Feminist Fieldwork methodologies. The relationship between the researcher and researched is imbued with identification from both parts in order to produce a truthful discourse. Liz Bondi, feminist geographer writes: "I describe identification in terms of unconscious processes of introjection and projection, which operate as dynamic exchanges within all interpersonal relationships."³⁷ These methodologies are prominently discussed around questions of positionality and reflexivity. They describe identification between the researchers and those they research as problematic. There is a confusion that lies between the self and the other in the context of these exchanges. For example, my use of the first-person singular throughout this text testifies my sense of belonging and my subjective position. At the end of this text, my name will appear, it will function as a signature and authentic proof. Once this text is approved by the institution defining is viability, it will be

37. Liz Bondi, *Empathy and Identification: Conceptual Resources for Feminist Fieldwork* in *ACME*, 2003, page 64.

available for you to read it. My thesis is also a confession; I am researcher but also researched. My point here is that readers will position themselves variously: included, excluded, elsewhere, affronted and so on. This positioning invokes processes of identification (identifying with) and dis-identification (identifying as other than or against). My position and the readers' positions will be constantly negotiated throughout the text.

In the article *Empathy and Identification*, Bondi, argues that the unconscious dimensions of identification are far more important than the conscious ones. This leads to the concept of empathy that can be thought of as an “oscillation between observation and participation which creates psychic space or room to manoeuvre.”³⁸

38. Ibid.

She argues: “that power laden differences, for example of race, class, age, sexuality, disablement, all have the potential to disrupt any possibility of identification.”³⁹

39. Liz Bondi, *Empathy and Identification: Conceptual Resources for Feminist Fieldwork*, page 66.

Empathy is a state of exception, of plasticity and uncertainty. If identification lies predominantly in the hands of the unconscious space necessary for empathy to occur, how does one make space for material to be transferred from one person to another? Do we have to let go of acquired forms of our identity in order to leave room for others to enter? In the text, I find intriguing the coupling of the terms unconscious and space. I have identified a similarity between the space of the unconscious and other spaces of secrecy.

I define the unconscious as a secret because of the human strive to understand its meaning, “tracing them (the secrets) back to their source, tracking them from their origins to their effects, searching out everything that might cause them or simply enable them to exist.” The other spaces of secrecy that Foucault’s writes about are medical and educational institutions; highly saturated spaces where non-conjugal, non-monogamous forms of sexuality and pleasure are drawn and established; through relationships of “parents and children, adults and adolescents, educator and students, doctors and patients, the psychiatrist with his hysteric and his perverts”.⁴⁰ There is a similar procedure happening in the space of unconscious hence the space where empathy operates.

40. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1, 1978, page 47.

I decided to re-watch the episode of *Gogglebox* with this idea in mind. In *Gogglebox* (see Chapter 1) we identify to the families that are being filmed, and they identify to the characters of the shows they are watching. So, it would be a misconception if I only watched the extract that I mentioned in chapter 1, because the viewer’s identification, hence, my identification lies in what is said before, during and after that extract.

Before: (*Gogglebox* cast):

- You know it's getting out of control when the kids at school are saying Sir you need a haircut. That's when I knew. So, I explained to them how I normally do my haircut. I wait for Mel to tell me I need a haircut, and then wait a week so I feel like I'm in control and then I get a haircut. But she never said anything this time.
- Maybe she's losing a bit of control!
- I don't think its control I think she's just stopped caring.
- Then the *Gogglebox* cast proceed with their empowering commenting and confessing.

During:

- Aww, she looks absolutely stunning.
- She looks bloody beautiful.
- She should have come in without it.
- She looks amazing,
how's he going to take it?
- It must be awful for a woman
to have alopecia, because a woman.
- Your hair is your crown and glory.
- Yeah, and a young girl,
like 22 to have it.
- Take it off, babe. You look beautiful.
- I wouldn't put it back on.
- Aww, what a nice bloke.
- That's so sweet,
he's such a good lad.
- He likes her doesn't he.
- I hope they get together.
- Cupid fire your bow at them!
- I hope they do see each other again.
- Why are you crossing your fingers?
- Cause I like them.

- Go on! Go on!
- She's not going to say it, is she?
- Ahh, what?
- Jesus Christ.
- Why would she say that?
- When she thinks he's really nice and had such a lovely evening.
- Just say I'll go out with him again.
- See this is one of the most awkward ones I've ever seen.
- Well Lee, if it's not right it's not right is it.
- If you don't get that feeling, you don't get that feeling.
- But they look as though they did.
- That's a pretty big one.
- That shocked me; I didn't see that one coming.

After:

- I don't think we have many bombshells to reveal on a first

- date. You can't let him know you're a psycho on the first date
- You can't unleash the psycho!
It's a gradual process.
 - I think my psycho is quite unleashed on Grant.
 - The last date I went on, the bombshell was that he had a girlfriend. That shocked me. I didn't see that one coming.

What is said before and after the extract is quite significant of what is of possible interest to a viewer, hence what could trigger identification. The theme of sexuality is constant. It is peripheral but underlying most thoughts. Foucault writes: "The persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals"⁴¹. In this case,

41. Foucault, *The History of sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1, 1978, page 44.

due to the high demand of identity in society (or in the television show), unconscious hence peripheral forms of sexualities are used to promote individuality, to name, categorize, distinguish, oppress, and shame. The sexuality of the *Gogglebox* cast remains a secret and by presenting sexuality as a secret, it gains the interest of the viewer that want to track their own secret and comprehend it.

Modern societies have not kept sex hidden but by making it so obscure and mysterious, we have conditioned ourselves to talk about it all the time. "Is it not with the aim of inciting people to speak of sex that it is made to mirror, at the outer limit of every actual discourse, something akin to a secret whose discover is imperative, a thing abusively reduced to silence, and at the same time difficult and necessary, dangerous and precious to divulge?"⁴²

42. Ibid., 35.

Pleasures

In a confession both actors/parties are experiencing pleasure; the pleasure of listening and the pleasure of confessing. Pleasure is a mental state that humans and animals experience during moments of happiness, ecstasy, euphoria and entertainment. The experience of pleasure is subjective and individuals will experience pleasure in different ways. It is commonly associated with the satisfaction of basic biological needs.

Producing the *truth of oneself* is not only obtained theoretically through identification; it can also be obtained in a physical way. This suggests the idea that producing the *truth of oneself* is affiliated with the *truth of sex*. Historically, there have been two great procedures for producing the *truth of sex*.⁴³ On one hand, societies such as China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo-Muslims endowed themselves with an *ars erotica*, in which pleasure; an independent practice acquires its own truth through

43. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An introduction* Vol. 1, 1978, page 57.

experience. In these societies, pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself.⁴⁴ It is worked on from the inside, in the body and the soul, in order to amplify its effects. The practice of pleasure is kept a secret, as “according to tradition, it would lose its effectiveness and its virtue by being divulged“

44. Ibid., 57.

On the other hand, our society, where the overrated dictatorship of pleasure prevails, is the only one that developed a laboratorial and analytical approach to pleasure and sex; which Foucault calls *scientia sexualis*. We execute our discovery of pleasure following rules and regulations, through medical advice, social norms and pressures, education, beliefs, etc. We are the only civilization to have developed over the centuries, procedures for telling the *truth of sex* which are geared to a form of knowledge-power.⁴⁵ The *master of truth* (parents, teachers, doctors, social groups) gathers information, analyses and diagnoses. The *master of truth* is the one with the answers. Our discovery of individual pleasure is a collective task and the identification of pleasure is only valid once evaluated and approved.

45. Ibid., 58.

Through the incorporation of procedures into our search of the truth we have developed an intimate relationship with power. We have learnt to confess our pleasure, compare it and fix it with the advice of others. Pleasure

and power have become affiliated. This particular form of power is rooted in peripheral spaces of pleasure. The more a space is sterile, disciplined, hidden, the more un-pleasurable a space the more it overflows with sex. In classrooms, prisons, hospitals, domestic spaces. "Western societies pleasure thrives on the forbidden." ⁴⁶

46. Ibid., 47.

The attractions, evasions and circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of power and pleasure. On one hand the pleasure of questioning, surveilling, digging, punishing, shaming and on the other the pleasure of escaping, running away, lying; and the power of showing, scandalizing and resisting, showing off, or resisting. The obligation of producing confessional discourse is so deeply incorporated in our behaviour that we no longer identify it as power. On the contrary, it seems that the truth is asking us to come out, if it does not manage to do so it is because of the violent power that is oppressing it and the only way of liberating ourselves is through confession.

This invasion of power into our search of the truth has perverted our social rituals. In post-recession British factual television, I have witnessed the rise of a new form of perversion: a sub-genre of reality television, which reproduces the classical aesthetics of reality, in its form and content. The subject is relevant to a contemporary problematic: benefit abuse. The sub-genre was named poverty porn by critics, a label that refers to the objectification and exploitation of the condition of the poor in text, photography and films to generate the reader's or viewer's sympathy and guarantee

their financial input. In this case, the label is applied to series (The Scheme, Benefits Britain, The Great British Budget Menu, Skint, On Benefits and Proud) where real life characters disclose (confess) their struggles and often self-destructive lifestyles. I find interesting the coupling of the notion of pornography (meaning printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.)⁴⁷ and poverty. The aesthetics of poverty have been linked with sexual arousal and

47. Oxford dictionary, 2018.

post-recession Britain has casually explored the peripheral sexuality of poverty. Grotesque, vulgar, shameless, filthy and greasy lifestyles have been identified, isolated and intensified to satisfy the strive for knowledge that already surrounds stereotypical poverty.

In 1785, the Marquis de Sade had described the sexual arousal that could be found in the vilest, foulest creatures that can possibly be met with. He describes how their practice of sexuality offers “completest abandon, the most monstrous intemperance and the most total abasement”, a form of pleasure that compared to sexual norms “has a way of lending a sharp spice”.⁴⁸ Perversions proliferate in contact with

48. Marquis de Sade, 120 Days of Sodom, translation Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse, 1785, page 6.

power. Foucault identifies power as the instrument and the effect of perversions, the agency and what it produces. In 120 Days of Sodom, four wealthy

male libertines are determined to experience ultimate sexual gratification through peripheral sexual rituals. They end up sexually exploiting the victims that they gathered for the specific occasion. The four men also hired four old brothel owners to narrate their life stories. Their stories have the purpose of inspiring the men in their debauch. In factual television there are also inside narrators, ones who are objects in the power-pleasure game but believe that they are subjects; because of this confusion they have a tendency of demonising the other. They are important witnesses of pleasure and especially obscure pleasures in the eyes of the authority. Their integrity with the victims (sexual or not) is hypocritical and their speech has the purpose of engaging with the peripheral sexuality in an auditory way. "The sensations communicated by the organs of hearing are the most flattering and those impressions are the liveliest".⁴⁹

49. Ibid., 23.

Through their confession they engage with the authority, while identifying themselves as with they reveal their secrets to an untrustworthy authority. These confessions are edited and distorted by the ones behind the footage and sadly result in a form of pornography. The degree of abuse of the victims of poverty porn is far from the same as Sade describes but nevertheless they are still objectified and exploited. The peripheral sexuality identified in poverty gives a surface of intervention for power and pleasure in order to ensure its economic interests.

Since the nineteenth century, confession has stepped out of the confessional and infiltrated Western social rituals. The agencies that require confessions are located theoretically in the nation, in the state

and through a suggested physicality. Confession has brought people together and united them as a community; it has built a bridge between the private sphere and the public sphere. Television producers and publishers have acknowledged the qualities of confession and exploited them as rhetoric of truth production. Since it left the church, confession has been a tool used to extract data from individuals. It operates at the service of institutions in order to solve contemporary problematics by instilling anxiety as much as curing, controlling, disciplining and comforting. The anxiety we feel in our society pushes us to survey others and ourselves in order to constantly prove our innocence. We must recount a complete and integral record of

our conscious and unconscious behaviour to the institutions for them to validate or not our actions and sanction or shame if necessary. The oppression felt by the individuals results in a close relationship of power and pleasure. The confession therefore sometimes appears as the only way of getting something out, as a protest and a liberation; but this confession can never be authentic with the listener/ receiver on the other hand who is economically, politically, socially and sexually thriving from the confession. I have come to terms with the fact that my so-called honest work has a scheming agenda and hopefully this research will allow me to redefine its ethics.

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Ayesha Ghaoul
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Graphic Design: Loup Lopez

