

The I in Optics

by

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Abstract

This thesis involves a film-based installation that explores the notion of authorship in cinema. Participants are invited to access and combine short video clips through an interactive device that facilitates the creation of individualized films. Combining elements of expanded cinema, customized editing software, and crowdsourced video, *The I in Optics* challenges the conventional hierarchy and compartmentalization of film production, along with the presumed passivity of the audience. My exhibition empowers spectators to take on the role of filmic experimentation regardless of their training or knowledge; the result will be an archive of films that demonstrates the agency and creativity of individuals who can become filmmakers if provided the opportunity. In recruiting a wide variety of participants to engage with my customized software, what will ultimately be gleaned from this exhibition is the different ways users cull their creativity from the same set of tools and clips.

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Introduction

Cinema has come to represent one of the most versatile means by which one can convey that most basic element of communication -- the documentation and study of expression. The dexterous nature of film comes from its adaptability; there is a unique quality to the medium. It offers a means of visualizing and literalizing thought without ever having to rely on verbiage or the written word. When filmed entertainments were initially shared with the public, it was as sideshow attractions -- shorts whose entire purpose was to shock and astound audiences with a new means of experience and expression.



Figure 1: *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Shorts -- such as those made by Lumiere Brothers and Buster Keaton -- were showcases for daring, larger-than-life experiences. Film historian Siegfried Kracauer, upon observing the initial reactions and effects of cinema on its audience, mused that "Silent or not, film -- cinematic film, that is -- can be expected to influence the spectator in a manner denied to other media" (1960:157). It has been documented that audiences initially found the new invention frightening. In her novel *The Lumiere Affair: A Novel of Cannes*, Sara Voorhees notes that "Among their (the Lumiere Brothers) short films was a

50-second shot of a train pulling into a station but the audience had never seen anything like it, and many people ran from the room in fear as the train came barreling toward them” (2007: 283). In not being able to accurately differentiate between what was happening in the physical space they occupied in the viewing gallery, and what was being projected and shown to them (despite the glaring obviousness that the footage lacked colour), audiences showed through their behaviour the unprecedented effectiveness of the medium¹.



Figure 2: Buster Keaton in *The General* (1926) Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The infusion of narratives to these stunning tableaux was the next stage in cinema's evolution. With the advent of sound and controlled sets, the tone and respectability of the format changed considerably; whereas before works such as those by the Lumiere Brothers could be viewed as distractions, short windows of brief exhilaration, now film stood to tell more detailed and nuanced stories. Filmmaking became a very profitable form of storytelling -- ultimately giving birth to the modern Hollywood studio system. Within the makeup of the studio system came the hierarchical structure of film

¹ Accounts of early interactions with the form are documented at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/did-a-silent-film-about-a-train-really-cause-audiences-to-stampede>.

production, from set painters, carpenters, and craft services, to the writer, producer, and director.²

While there is no shortchanging the essential nature of these individuals, the director, producer, and writer have generally been the centralized trio (the emergence of auteur theory allowed for a singular voice to distinguish itself as the primary, if not sole visionary behind a work). It is these figures who most fundamentally shape the look, feel, and meaning of a given film. On the other side of this production mode is the audience who are at the effect of the film's power: Kracauer believed that audiences who engage willingly with the medium of film innately give their agency as individual spectators over to the work and its creators, "With the moviegoer, the self as the mainspring of thoughts and decisions relinquishes its power of control" (1960: 159). However, despite being completely removed from the processes entailed in film production, the spectator contradictorily acts as both the consumer of these works but also as the driving force behind the popularity of certain types of films in so much as that they act the aggregators of what is and is not considered popular, worthwhile, and in demand. As much as some filmmakers may feel their works are deserving of an audience, the nature of the film business is such that unless there is a proven audience for something, the likelihood of a project's completion and release lessens.

Audiences have, for the most part, been witness to the stories chosen and championed by those in a position to finance, create, and distribute filmic works. They have also typically been witnesses to films whose meaning(s) have largely been singular, at least on the part of its creators. As Siegfried Kracauer posits, "Films, then, tend to weaken the spectator's consciousness" (1960: 159). By engaging with works that may not

² More on the Hollywood Studio system can be located at http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605567?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

directly speak to a spectator's experiences or their understanding of the world, film-going can lead to audience alienation. What makes *The I in Optics* noteworthy is that it takes the tools of authorship away from those who would usually be placed in charge of such an undertaking, and puts them in the hands of the spectator. For as much as it allows for escapism and fun, if one continuously recognizes a lack of narratives that speak to who they are, it is undoubtedly noted in the mind of the viewer.

Freed from many of the confines of someone else's narrative choices and subject matter, *The I in Optics* allows for users to interact with an interface that provides the ability to look through a collection of film clips pulled from Hollywood motion pictures, as well as crowdsourced home videos and amateur footage shot on cell phones, camcorders, etc., and assemble them into a short work. By asking for the anonymous contribution of homemade footage with a diversity of contexts, audio and visual qualities, and intentions, I have been able to pull together a variety of brief clips, each running for seven seconds (the calculated average length of a Hollywood film edit/shot duration). When seven clips are chosen and arranged in an order and manner that the participant finds satisfactory, their short film is saved, added to a queue along with the works of the other participants, and shown in succession as a user-generated film festival, if you will. The reasoning behind the number of clips to be selected is that they would total the runtime of the average teaser trailer shown in theatres and online (about 50 seconds). With seven clips being chosen from a selection of fifty, this allows for a grand total of 780,250,000,000 possible outcomes.

With newfound accessibility to its modes of production (a recent development with the domestication of its various apparatuses), filmmaking has become a dominant form of not only polished, high profile commercial works, but also intensely intimate

windows into the minutiae of daily life. As mobile devices and apps quicken the proliferation of individuals with access to personalized filmmaking tools, the sheer number of people with the means to initiate themselves into the filmmaking process (on whatever level) has increased exponentially. My recent artworks (i.e., *Prunes*, *Multiple Views*) have attempted to map and distill these new modes of production into documents studying not only the modes by which people are now choosing to chronicle their own lives, but the ways in which technology can help individuals to apply their own tastes as filmmakers and spectators. Everyone is motivated by different factors, and we are each of us stimulated by a variety of subjects -- but what is the most effective means by which to bridge these elements into something digestible, sharable, and worthy of their time and efforts?

Now that general audiences have had filmmaking tools integrated into so many aspects of their daily lives, it has become easier than ever to put together something quickly with a polished quality. As people become more accustomed to having these types of tools at their disposal, it is my intention to leverage that into an experience that asks participants to apply those same sensibilities to a project that examines the ways in which separate spectators interpret and activate the same visuals.

For *The I in Optics*, the main objective is to enable the creation of short filmworks by participants. By bringing together a variety of participants through a grassroots marketing campaign (flyers, posters, online advertisements) calling for anyone who has an active interest in putting together a short film (running approximately 50 seconds in length) compiled from an assemblage of 25 crowd-sourced and 25 commercial film clips. Ideally, there would have been one hundred clips; however, the computers available for this work did not have the processing power and speed to accommodate that number,

forcing me to reduce the total to 50. Each short selection will be identifiable only by a small representational image that leaves the content of the clip itself more or less a mystery until it has been selected for usage. Once a total of seven selections have been chosen by the participant, they will then arrange and stylize the grouping into a short work that will then be archived and made available for viewing. Participants will then be able to see how their film differs from previous creators.

Interpretation is one of the foundational cruxes of art but it is also what supplies it (and its audience) with so much of their agency. Instead of putting together a work that attempts to ascribe a single meaning to something that cannot possibly be interpreted one way, I am facilitating this filmmaking procedure from the editing stage on. In providing the means by which to complete these short films, I am also not involving myself from the actual act of film assembly and production, allowing for others give their artistic voices a chance to be heard. My role in this process is in the randomized selection of the clips, and in the naming of said excerpts. File names were assigned specifically as a way of cataloguing the material as it was cultivated and stored on a laptop.

Aside from these tasks, I was involved in *The I in Optics* primarily as a facilitator. In doing this, I enabled others to construct stories without impeding on their works with my own input. In making my focus the handing over of filmic tools and a levelling of the playing field, so to speak, *The I in Optics* operates in the arena of an artist's project, not as a social-science experiment concerned with hypotheses and findings. What I seek to facilitate is a space in which there is no hierarchy to filmmaking; *The I in Optics* is an exhibition through which individuals who are often marginalized or disempowered can attempt storytelling. The questions informing this thesis project are threefold:

1) Who is ultimately cinema's creator? Is it the filmmakers who put forward a specific vision through their work? Or is it the audience, who engages the film and prescribes value to it based on their own subjective tastes and experiences?

2) How can one operate within the nexus of new cinematic languages, audience engagements, and the personalizations of the filmic experience? What works will emerge from this intersectionality?

3) How can cinema be expanded beyond the consumptive model?

Throughout the course of my methodology and theory sections, I will elaborate on authors whose texts paved the way for the examination and expansion of cinema and its various modes. A history of previous works of my own will also help to show the genesis of this work from its earliest iterations and focuses. Finally, this thesis provides a comprehensive listing and exploration of artists who helped shape this undertaking by providing trailblazing ideas and works of their own, as well as a documentation of my findings based on focus groups who were allowed to test run the interface and editing technology before the exhibition in order to ensure a successful showing.

Body of Work

Contained within this section is a listing and detailing of several art works of my own. Each of these past works was a stepping stone in the journey to *The I in Optics*. Whether through experimentation with different technologies and apparatuses, these previous

works were crucial in mapping out where my final thesis work. As one will be able to see in following descriptions, *The I in Optics* is a work several years in the making.

Prunes (2012-2014)

Initially envisioned as an exercise in formal and stylistic control, *Prunes* instead became the first undertaking I took on the road to *The I in Optics*. It was a short film exercise that acted as the impetus for this thesis. It was here that the concepts of authorial anonymity and removed creative control were tested. The results were encouraging enough that further research and study into the field of expanded cinema seemed warranted. The initial idea was simply to write and direct a short film with no real theoretical underpinnings or larger thematic relevance. During the filmmaking process – which is, first and foremost, a collaborative undertaking – the idea of literalizing the departmental nature of filmic post-production came to fruition. After examining old film production texts and the lengthy, analogue processes through which films were ultimately constructed, I decided that the singular contributions of the creative departments during post-production assemblage was a strong foundational structure onto which new concepts or permutations of the standard collaborative hierarchy could be rejected and formatted to ultimately coalesce into a new mode of film production.



Figure 3: Still from *Prunes* (2012-14) Photo by: Mel Worku

It can be argued that films can and/or are formed in the editing suite; when a project reaches the end of principal photography (and, sometimes, reshoots as well) and is sent off to be spliced and edited together, it is often this specific process that can save a film that may otherwise seem tonally inconsistent, structurally compromised, or saddled with a lousy performance. The same argument can be made in relation to the various departments that eventually take a crack at elevating and mastering the disparate parts of a motion picture into a well-constructed whole. Each level of technical engagement brings with it a specific expertise and understanding of cinematic language. This was the genesis point for this thesis work and final exhibition.

By giving the newly shot *Prunes* over to an editor (which is standard practice in the film industry), but with the explicit instruction to follow their own artistic instincts, and not anything mandated by the director, writer, cinematographer, etc., I was able to deconstruct and examine the journey a film takes from rehearsals and shooting to editing and scoring. The idea was to essentially deliver a semi-completed cipher to each collaborator with the only goal being that they add their own desired flourishes to the

film without any preconceptions about the work's meaning, desired audience, or storytelling. To that effect, the project was a success; the various team players who joined the project each took a crack at bringing their individual affectations and technical/structural influences into the fray. Through this initial undertaking, the earliest hints of my thesis project began to form a coherent and exciting idea.

***Multiple Views* (2016)**

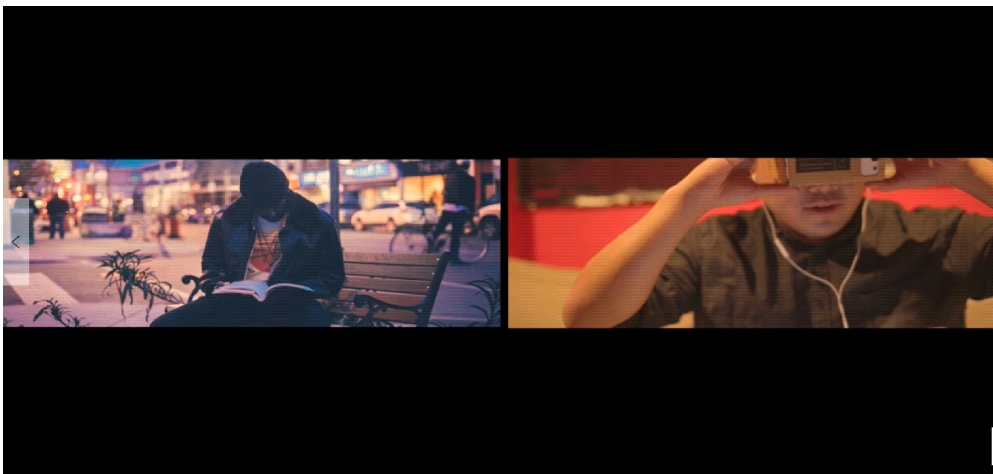


Figure 4: Still from *Multiple Views* (2016) Photo by: Mark Tym

Multiple Views was a prolonged set of self-recorded reactions to visual stimuli and filmic moments meant to elicit visceral responses in the viewer. The apparatus in *Multiple Views* was turned on audience members in their own homes as they watched assigned clips from various films in a plethora of genres. Participants filmed themselves on various devices as they engaged said predetermined filmic works at home. A laugh track was superimposed onto the images of these viewers and their unchanging faces. Additionally, a laugh track was added over the participants' submitted videos of themselves (ultimately, the purpose of this exercise was to examine the nature of expectation and practiced apathy in casual spectatorships). This was a natural extension of *Prunes*, the

short film whose collaborative post-production processes started this gradual movement towards personalized filmmaking experiences.

It seemed crucial after the work done on *Prunes* that a deeper study into the machinations of filmic engagement be put into use. In so much as this new mode of collaborative filmmaking proved to ignite an especially welcome reaction from participants, it ultimately left one integral demographic out of the process – the audience. For as much as a film coming together through the imaginations and skill sets of its various contributors is vital to the work's completion, so too is its delivery and consumption by its would-be spectators. Only once a film has been consumed (for lack of a better term) can it be properly digested, and eventually given unique, individual interpretation and meaning. As much as one of these projects may hold special meaning to its creators, so too does it form special meaning in the minds of those audience members whose experiences and subjectivities can align entirely new meanings with the film.

Multiple Views effectively sought to turn the gaze on the audience. In essence, the experiment was an examination of this sometimes unearned sense of predetermination that tends to run through so many films. Audiences are expected to react in specific ways to specific stimuli; comedies are supposed to make one laugh, dramas can reduce one to tears, and action spectacles can leave one feeling exhilarated. However, none of these emotional cues on the part of the spectator should ever be assumed or seen as being mandated or guaranteed. Often times it is expectation that undercuts reality – a film is expected to adequately convey certain emotions, affectations, etc. When this kind of engagement is assumed without the film having done any of the requisite legwork, it renders the work inert.

What was ultimately gleaned from this project was the confirmation that no amount of preparation can imbue a work with a specific emotional resonance in every viewer. It is always, at the end of things, in the hands of the viewer to find justification in the construction of a given work, and to have that impact them directly. In discovering this, it became apparent that whatever form my final thesis project took, it would need to directly address and engage the role of the spectator as much as anyone else involved in the development of a film.

VR/Screening Boxes (2016)



Figure 5: *VR/Screening Boxes* (2016) Photo by: Miriam Magsi

In searching for a means by which to effectively facilitate the engagement of the apparatus, as well as a test run for using a rudimentary interface to engage audience members, I came across a trend that was emerging in Japan. A popular form of DIY home entertainment, cardboard theatres are small constructed spaces where individuals

can replicate the sensation of being in a movie theatre whilst keeping their heads inside cardboard boxes. A hole is cut into the roof of the boxes, a phone or iPad placed in the hole and something is subsequently queued up for their viewing pleasure.³ Microphones were added as well so that participants could simultaneously watch and provide personalized narrations. After doing this, the various short films were saved and sent to the participants.

Intended to stir spectator creativity and provide only the scarcest of narrative constructions with which to implement their own storytelling ideas, and structure – ultimately the results of this project were somewhat mixed (creative engagement should not be taken for granted as off-the-cuff storytelling ability is a somewhat specialized skillset). This was coupled with an update on the popularized Japanese traditional of creating small viewing spaces out of recyclable and discarded materials such as cardboard, fiberglass, and headphones. In crafting these viewing spaces, what became apparent was that size is always an immense mitigating factor (as some participants found the viewing space to be of questionable size and appeal). Perhaps the most useful piece of information, or understanding as it were, to come from this undertaking was the realization that less can be more. There is a thin line that separates general accessibility and niche alienation.

Continuing the crystallization of the central ideas that would underline *The I in Optics*, the next logical step to take was to find the technology and proper environment in which to showcase the work and engage the audience. In looking for a mode of spectatorial engagement, one factor that tended to belie the work was accessibility. As

³ In-depth exploration of theatre box culture is available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/16/national/thinking-inside-box-cardboard-entertainment-privacy-cubicles-find-place-small-japanese-homes/>.

exciting as the prospect of direct-to-audience apparatus appeared to be, it also necessitated the inclusion of technology that would not stifle and/or overcomplicate the desired processes. One avenue that seemed to offer promise was virtual reality. Online instructions for making cardboard virtual reality headsets were easily found and utilized.⁴

While these devices provided a small, transportable means of engaging with visual works, it also required the user to stand stationary with the strapless seeing devices propped up against their faces. In order to test the feasibility of these goggles, preloaded, narration-less sequences of images were loaded onto the headsets. Participants were asked to create individualized narratives based on the succession of images playing out in front of them. These tests were filmed and subsequently screened in an attempt to explore the variations on story that were being created (all participants engaged with the same sequence of images).

It was here that the first fluctuation was encountered. Several participants deferred to simply describing the images in front of them instead of creating a unique, personalized narrative from them. Creativity had been taken for granted by myself. The first outcome to take away from this was that realization that some user-created products may lack the imagination to really invent something worthwhile. The second outcome was the obvious need for a more all-encompassing and comfortable mode of presentation and execution. This is where cardboard viewing theatres came into play.

Although the apparatuses proved fun and engaging, they also proved alienating. Some would-be participants found the boxes too small, constricting, or generally uncomfortable to use. What this allowed one to understand was that such a specific mode of engagement, while novel, was also rather off-putting to those who found the

⁴ A step-by-step guide to creating VR goggles can be found at <https://vr.google.com/cardboard/>.

experience too awkward and unwieldy. Ultimately, what was taken from this experiment was the confirmation that whatever the final project's mode of exhibition is to be, it had to allow for maximum engagement and comfort. It had been taken for granted that theatres (both large-scale and homebound) were designed for ease of access and total comfort. Whatever the ideal form for a viewing box is, it needs to be inclusively designed, above all else.

What should be clear now is how *The I in Optics* was a project that came about in various stages of other works. As each previous work suggested things about the nature of impromptu creativity, to the requirements of various users when engaging with the tools and apparatuses utilized in each undertaking. With certain areas showing more promise than others, what was ultimately done was a paring down of what seemed to be the most interesting or engaging elements of each past work. What remains is the sum total of several years' work and study.

Methodology

Cinema is an art form primarily structured around the theme of depiction. Through a traditionalized patterning of dramatic and stylistic principles, representation in film now follows a practiced and normalized application of narrative devices and structural conventions to tell its many stories. Film production has concurrently fostered a hierarchical structure wherein there is a solidified organizing principle whereby designated roles are provided to everyone working within the production umbrella, as well as those who would engage these works (in a theatre, at home, etc.).

My work is focused on issues of authorship and spectatorship, the growing accessibility and commodification of filmic apparatuses and tools, the behavioural

patterns/vocabulary of audience, and the privatization of the spectacle. Also of interest is the new model of vertical integration that has risen out of the current user-generated age of online entertainment in which we now find ourselves. Another important element in my work is the fracturing or removal of an authorial voice in relation to a given work. Despite the fervent uptick in consumer-based output via various platforms (YouTube, Vimeo, Kickstarter, and Indiegogo⁵), the same pervasive method of hierarchical and privileged filmmaking remains. It is here where the initial fissures must be introduced into this well-worn model of filmmaking.

In an effort to upend the studio-to-spectator systemic mode of production, what I instituted was the application of crowdsourcing as methodology in order to provide an experience that challenges and contrasts the stylistic and narrative tendencies of those with practiced, applicable filmmaking skills against those whose storytelling abilities are fueled by their personal experiences and circumstances (be it social, economic, political, ideological, or cultural), and who have received no formal training and whose backgrounds are in different fields of study and expertise. By examining the results of their creative freedoms in relation to the clips, what I aimed to find is the stylistic and narrative divergences that would help to identify the markers and trappings of those who have a background in filmmaking and film studies, and those who do not.

Film scholar Heather MacIntosh, writing in *Contemporary Documentary*, hypothesizes that the more involved a participant becomes in the art/work with which they are interacting, the more it instills them with a sense of creative purpose and will only help to vastly expand the possibilities inherent within such experimentation: “The participation of a subject in a [...] production represents an ideal for the form’s

⁵ Continued reading on crowdsourcing as a methodology can be found at http://www.copafs.org/UserFiles/file/fesm/H1_Keating_2013FCSM.pdf.

democratic and advocacy intentions, as this participation suggests a greater agency unavailable to subjects through representational strategies alone” (2015: 57). Akin to Walter Benjamin’s argument in *The Author as Producer* (1970), so much of what is needed to give validity to modes of distributed information and storytelling is the ability to put the tools of creation in the hands of those who experience these moments firsthand, or whose position in the globalized community affords them a kinship to a given story (whether this be a historical, cultural, or personal connection). It is this essence of relational understanding that gives the most poignant works their emotional power.

The application of filmic control by those in a position of removed privilege imbues filmic works with a kind of unaffected removal and misguided insincerity (one only need watch Steven Spielberg’s *Amistad* (1997) in comparison to Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave* (2013) to see evidence of this). “That’s why the crowd becomes more influential as it becomes bigger: every additional person is proof that something important is happening” (Surowiecki, 43). Once the tools of production are given to those whose perspective has never been utilized or fully understood, the audience is given a window into the perspective of someone whose understanding of a theme or subject is decidedly different than their own.

This methodology was applied to my thesis project as follows: a call for video submissions was posted online. This call specified that any digital footage submitted be provided with consent and approved as raw material for my exhibition. In the end, some fifty or so clips were chosen by me, along with approximately the same number of clips taken from commercial films. Finally, the various bits of footage were assembled and loaded onto a software program that ultimately allows participants in the exhibition to create their own short films.

Heather MacIntosh furthers her earlier idea by adding that “These inclusions allow subjects to assume greater roles in the production process, thereby turning them into participants” (2015: 58). My thesis project provides agency to participants to build on what they are doing and familiarizes them with filmic tools, technologies, and modes of storytelling that are at their disposal. By making a filmic experience one that comes to include participation on the part of its audience, then it begins to also act as a tutorial of sorts – expanding understanding and elevating ideas to the point that the participants walk away with a new set of skills applicable to something previously viewed and considered at arm’s length.

Crucial to the research entailed in this project was a tangible disparity, or contrast that should arise in these shorts. In order to ensure that this came to fruition (and to highlight the point touched upon earlier), a call for participants was issued. No formal or prerequisite training in filmmaking was required; they simply needed to demonstrate a willingness to participate, and an openness to sharing whatever work was produced therein. In showing no preference in regards to those who participate, it furthers the idea that the means of production have been transferred without the slightest attention being paid to whom. No person or persons were privileged above others. To do so would be to fundamentally undermine *The I in Optics*.

By crowdsourcing a significant portion of the available footage, what is being allotted is the chance for experimentation to be directed at clips that present us with realities that exist largely on the peripheries of conventional filmic depiction and representation. What may be dismissed as unremarkable, everyday, or lacking in spectacle is what lies at the heart of every great story: humanity. Giving control over to those who would engage with crowdsourcing as a means of distributing and sharing their

collective experiences is the most direct means of seeing their storytelling capabilities and the kinds of stories they feel deserve telling.

Asking others (whether they ultimately act as participants or simply providers of materials) to help generate useable footage for the exhibition allows for a collection that moves beyond any conscious or unconscious prejudices that I, as the artist, may show towards certain selections (the submitted footage remains totally unaltered). By posting ads asking for non-specific bits of filmed experience or creativity, what is being introduced into the mix is an unvarnished, destabilized element. Spontaneity and indifference (towards the materials) is what gives the work over to the user; there is no sense of ownership, entitlement, or the need for recognition. Without this kind of context, images are freed from a predetermined or interpreted lineage. They become completely unattached to any one person or meaning -- and it is here, at this intersection of anonymity and creative curiosity, the new dialogues and modes of interactive engagement may be incubated and bloom.

In selecting the clips for usage in *The I in Optics* exhibition, what was paid the most attention to was variety. Looking through dozens of submitted segments, what became immediately evident is that the unrestricted nature of the online call for submissions allowed for a truly wide-ranging gathering of clips to come together. Distinguishable by their content, visuals, video format, image quality, and sound levels, the submissions found no trouble standing apart in their uniqueness, yet also coalescing to create a healthy sampling pool from which others could effectively draw inspiration and creation. Again, the method by which these distinct clips were chosen was random, with only a basic, somewhat abstract title assigned to each of them, strictly for the purposes of file storage in the interim between file selection and use in the exhibition.

The submitted footage was admittedly a point of contention: the issue of what unsuspecting participants may encounter whilst putting together their short films could be upsetting. Sensibilities are always a variant from person to person, and one always runs the risk of inciting accusations of provocation and bad taste should someone else find themselves offended by what they are seeing. However, it is precisely this spontaneity and cavalier spirit that enlivens and emboldens *The I in Optics* and its participants to think outside the box, so to speak, and see what lies beyond the familiarity of good taste or acceptable subject matter. Without the variable provided by the unaltered clips, much of what gives this project its impact is lost.

The inclusion of Hollywood, or commercial film clips, was a way of addressing the (historical) prevalence of major studio output in the minds and lives of most filmic audiences. As much as there are a plethora of online content creators, the means by which access to their work is allowable is somewhat niche. In order to find new and innovative channels or networks with which to experience and engage with new forms of filmic and video output, one must have the luxury of knowing about and having access to the means/technologies that grants one access to these things. As much as it may seem as though everyone is aware of and in dialogue with new modes and forms of filmed content, it is actually somewhat naive to assume that this is a given with audiences from different parts of the world and from differing economic and social backgrounds. Ergo, the commercial film clips were included to contrast the changes within the filmed content circles, but to also show the dominance and persistence of corporate studio productions.

In having the results of *The I in Optics* incorporated into the exhibition, it allows for the research entailed in this project to lead to the creation of results that further the investigative aspects of the thesis work itself. In order to gain the proper insights into

how separate individuals process the same images and story elements, it was not enough to merely inquire or have participants discuss what they took away from their interaction with film and filmic tools. What was needed was observable results, and there was no better delivery system for these results than in using *The I in Optics* as a venue with which to witness the differences inherent in the works of the various user-participants. As much as theory and textual argumentation provided some illumination into the expanse of research provided towards the study of film and its relationship to the public, using the research to drive the final distillation of *The I in Optics* and to have the work culminate in completed shorts that can then be used to further the research and questions being asked was always the best means of assuring distinguishable outcomes. The evidence is there in the works themselves; in spite of any initial uncertainty, the creations provided by participants are the research in action.

The installation itself ultimately came to be comprised of two computer stations, a projector set-up, and a seating gallery where people could view their creations. *The I in Optics* was set up with two terminals, each with a computer or laptop, ready with the fifty preloaded film clips. Upon entering the space, participants could work at these stations on their films: collecting their clips from a sidebar of options represented as jpeg images. By dragging and dropping their selections into a single line, participants mixed and edited the clips together in whatever way they chose. Once their work was completed, it was synced up to a third computer stationed by the projector and seats at the other end of the space. Using iCloud to transfer the finished shorts from the computers to the one stationed farther away, they were then connected to the projector and used to form a queue. As each short was uploaded and added, participants came and went as their films played and finished. In seeing the works played successively like that, it allowed for a

first-person examination of the ways in which creative outcomes, when even made from the same materials, differed.

Historically speaking, filmmaking has been carried out by a very small pool of producers, directors, and writers. Legal red tape in the form of intellectual property law, copyright and trademark infringement have largely relegated the use of others' story elements as ways of enhancing their own, to within the studio system. The great majority of those who actually engage with and drive the film industry are left with mostly their own independent techniques and stories to depict. In removing myself from the actual process of shooting any of the footage and relegating my role to that of facilitator, as well as not providing instructions as to the kinds of stories that should be told, what is left is a means of filmmaking that attempts to reposition and examine the nature of the stories provided by those whose stories are left largely unconsidered.

Literature Review

Whilst exploring the various avenues that this experiment drew inspiration from, what was absolutely necessary was an understanding of each respective field, its history, its future prospects, and its direct impact upon *The I in Optics*. What follows is a run-down of the elements that coalesced to form this final thesis work.

Alternative Cinema

The gateway that led to the final body of work presented in *The I in Optics* was Gene Youngblood's 1970 text *Expanded Cinema*. This book lays out Youngblood's belief that the form can be used to move cinema into arenas and through innovations never considered previously. By pushing outward into fields such as computer science, and

videotronics, rapidly advancing fields at the time, and now pillars of tech-industry, film could be made to reach audiences and artists situated outside of cinemas. Across film history, cinema has largely split into two avenues: major studio releases; large-budgeted films with expensive talent and promotional campaigns that come in advance of a picture's release. The other, is the independent film circuit, the decidedly more experimental of the two options. Encompassing the avant-garde, low budgeted exploitation and genre pictures, art house, and documentaries, independent film provided an alternative to large scale, corporately-sponsored releases.

What expanded cinema brought to the table was a means of seeing cinema outside of the theatre. In *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (2008) media scholars Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord argue that issues such as vertical integration, site-specificity, and means of production lost sight of their boundaries and were untethered from their classically institutionalized foundations and will only continue to face new frontiers as newer and older technologies allow for an oscillation between what is and has been and what will be available to those willing to push its limits:

Using the experiments of the expanded cinema artists of the 1960s and 1970s as a pivotal point in the archaeology of digital media culture, we would be remiss not to mention Walter Benjamin's and Siegfried Kracauer's early engagements with cinema as sensorium, as architecture, as street, and a concretion of the flow of everyday life. (2008: 13)

If one need not occupy themselves with concerns such as venue and access to the proper equipment, then film production could adopt a freewheeling and ever-evolving nature.

Cinema had become truly mobilized and stood to gain new ground, both in terms of output and audience growth.

Expanded cinema offered a chance for film to seep into elements of life previously thought incongruous to the medium. If a group of diners could sit inside a dining hall while their consumption is projected on the edifice of the very building they are inside of, or a pedestrian could be incorporated into a video performance happening live on the street, then film will have finally transcended both its initial and classical modes of production and exhibition. Coupled with the ever-quickenening rate with which technological leaps were being made both in fields of globalization and the domestication of electronic appliances and applications, this marks a decidedly historic shift in cinema.

In coming across this in his 1970 text, I was able to finally apply appropriate terminology to what it was I had been working towards with past artworks like *Prunes* and *Viewing Boxes*. Expanded cinema gave new life and meaning to what I was doing with those older projects: an attempt to find a middle ground between established norms of filmmaking and consumption, and new, domesticated forms of creation and engagement. Marchessault and Lord make a point of looking to a cultural mixing, were this to be successful on a larger scale, “expanded cinema, that is, an explosion of the frame outward towards immersive, interactive, and interconnected forms of culture” (2008: 9). As technology continues to fuse itself to aspects of our everyday existence, it becomes imperative that we introduce a complexity to these mechanisms, enabling them to become tools of expression and a means of artistic and cultural expansion.

Authorship

Notions of authorship can become muddled in film production. With so many people contributing to a single unified work, it invariably becomes difficult to separate where one collaborator's influence and input ends, and another's begins. Within the realm of what is done in *The I in Optics*, authorship is perhaps the one element I have most distanced the project from. By removing all signs of whom may have contributed what or in what measure, the experiences represented by the various participants' short films will allow for a separation of art from artist.

It was in studying texts such as Walter Benjamin's *The Author as Producer* (1934) -- where he advocated that tools of production be given to those whose means may exclude them from such expression, but whose experiences paint truer pictures than those of the privileged few whose ease of access made them the de facto authors of social inequality and upheaval -- the notion of authorship seemed more and more like something that could act detrimentally towards the perception of a given artwork. If there is indeed truth in experience, then those with the most experience, not the most resources, should be given a fair shake when assessing who it is that ultimately gets to tell a/their story.

Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord also make reference to Benjamin's contributions in *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*. His early writings were invaluable to the evolution and definition of expanded cinema, which Youngblood gives as such in his titular 1970 text:

When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness.

Expanded cinema does not mean computer films, video phosphors, atomic light,

or spherical projections. Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes. One no longer can specialize in a single discipline and hope truthfully to express a clear picture of its relationships in the environment. This is especially true in the case of the intermedia network of cinema and television, which now functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind. (1970: iv)

Youngblood makes a wise and prophetic proclamation. To truly grasp the possibilities contained within this new field means shedding preconceived notions about the nature of film production and exhibition. In moving film outside the theatre, what was required was an unabashed embracing of areas of expertise previously thought unconnected or inapplicable to film specifically. This dislodging of apparatus and site of interaction is one of the core foundations of *The I in Optics*.

Literary critic Roland Barthes and his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author" were extremely helpful in helping to understand the nature of authorship and its relationship to its audience. Barthes believed that in order to truly open up and make a work available, one had to separate the work from its author. By attributing a work to single (in some cases) writer was to strip it of its transcendent capabilities:

To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing hence it is scarcely surprising not only that, historically, the reign of the Author should also have been that of the

Critic, but that criticism should be overthrown along with the author. (Barthes 1967: 5)

To remove the author from a work is to distance the work from a singular voice and history. This separation enables those who interact with the work to see in it whatever they wish, instead of the specific ideas and narrative of a single individual who essentially makes the work their own by putting their name on it. This was another crucial element of *The I in Optics*, and one whose specific intention it was to bring in participants.

Building off of what Barthes brought to the table with "The Death of the Author," Michel Foucault, in his 1969 text "What is an Author?" distinguishes that a name, like a genre or body of work, can work against a text. A name is a designation that aligns a work with an author, ostensibly making the author and the work fundamentally interlinked. Unlike Barthes, Foucault does believe in recognizing the author in relation to their work, but also emphasizes that writing (as was his subject) should be a form that allows one to disappear into the spaces and discourses created by a given work.⁶ Whereas authorship was central to something like fiction, which utilizes the author's name to categorize the work and increase sales, when it comes to writing about things like the arts and sciences, anonymity can be seen preferable as it allows for a communication and digestion of facts that are separate from a singular individual and their ideas on the subject. "The author's name is a proper name, and therefore it raises the problems common to all proper names. Obviously, one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions: more than an indication, a

⁶ For more on Eco's understanding of authorship, see https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/e/Eco_91.pdf.

gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description” (Foucault 1969: 209). To attach a name to work is to immediately ascribe a certain set of descriptors based on the author's identity, writing style, subject matter, etc. It loads a work before it has even been experienced. While authorship may be important in some cases, it can also act as a means of categorization that ultimately can work to stifle something from its prospective audiences.

Audience

In *Ambient Television* (2001), media scholar Anna McCarthy posits that the proliferation of televisions into the public and private spheres of modern life disables notions of the boundaries between what was private and what was not. Because of this blurring, the stories delivered to audiences via these objects cause the spectator to welcome a greater expanse of stories to enter their immediate environments. A principle emerges through this thinking: the participant (x) interacts with the apparatus, here represented by television (y), and is subsequently exposed to a broader criteria of programmes, films, and news (z). As the information contained within ‘z’ becomes more and more accepted by ‘x’, so too then do the possibilities, story-wise, of what they will bear witness to with a minimal amount of resistance or hesitation. In "Networked Screens," Haidee Wasson picks up on this notion and says that these devices will evolve and become cultural touchstones: “By setting aside questions of medium specificity, this [...] suggests its formative role in transforming celluloid, electronic, and digital images into differentiated social and material sites of cultural engagement” (2007: 77). For Wasson, it is only a matter of time before those objects and apparatuses with which we spend so much time

become an inseparable extension of our self-expression and means of communication and understanding.⁷

Coupled with what is presented in both *Expanded Cinema* (1970) and *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (2008), as well as *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Uroskie 2014), McCarthy's summations inspire an incredible amount of excitement. What she adds to the writings of Youngblood and company is the notion that expanded cinema's reach has, in actuality, transcended even Youngblood's expectations and utilized something as ubiquitous as television to reengineer the expectations and affectations of its audience. If what cinemas and theatres did was categorize audiences based on tastes and preferences, television (at least before the introduction of streaming services and satellite providers) made it so that whatever was being shown on it was what its audience would have to acclimate themselves to. Through this particular mixture of programming and accessibility, expanded cinema was able to inculcate untold masses into the idea that stories could be viewed anywhere, anytime, so long as a screen was present. More than that, if audiences could reconcile their environments with those willing to tell or share stories, then there would never be a shortage of experiences and insights to share through the medium.

Siegfried Kracauer put forward the idea that theatres provided its goers with a kind of opulent visual connection between their experiences inside the theatre and the decor with which it was adorned: "For an idea to be sold it must captivate not only the intellect but the senses as well" (1960: 160). In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud provides the following definition of art as a relational activity: "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure

⁷ Haidee Wasson elaborates on screen technologies at https://www.jstor.org/stable/41341040?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (1998: 113). It seems overly obvious to state here, but there is clearly importance in presentation when it comes to how an audience will engage with and understand what they seeing in connection to where they are when they engage it.

Witnessing a breaking news story as it broadcasts three hundred feet above the sidewalk in Times Square is very different from seeing the same news flash on your mobile device. How then to reconcile the disparity between size and importance? The answer to disrupt the historically traditionalised modes of presentation.

Theoretical Framework

Contained within this section is a step-by-step outline and dive into the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that encompass the entirety of *The I in Optics*. Moving along the gamut of both classical and contemporary film theory, criticism, as well as expanded cinema and relational aesthetics, what will be brought forward are excerpts and insights provided by theorists Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, as well as authors and artists Gene Youngblood, Anna McCarthy, and essayist Haidee Wasson. What each of these individuals brings to the discussion is a different facet of filmic exploration, experimentation, and expansion. By first deconstructing the very nature of filmic engagement (Kracauer) and moving onto the privileges and responsibility held by those with the means to create and produce (Benjamin), one can gain a more nuanced understanding of the general public's relation to film. From there, a shift over to the realms of expanded cinema (Youngblood) and emerging technologies (McCarthy and Wasson) will aide in finally moving the discussion of film and its new potentials into the future.

Relational Aesthetics and the Role of the Author/Producer

Whilst attempting to understand the relationship between audiences and the stagy showhouses where they would consume and enjoy filmed entertainment, Kracauer postulated the existence of a “homogenous cosmopolitan audience” (1997: 93). Such is the result of spectators accustomed to engaging with the medium inside of ornate, spectacularly expensive theatres. In addition to conditioning audiences to a certain type of heightened aesthetic, it also came to distinguish cinema as a form necessary of its decorative trappings. If, as Kracauer believed, that the housing of filmic works directly impacts and affects the tastes of its audiences, then the inversion of this presumed necessity of this aesthetic correlation can be initiated by first distinguishing the audience’s control over the content. What I attempted was to show that this connection is not hard-wired into the minds of most viewers, and that by showing the transient nature of cinematic exhibition, that there is a new limitless arena in which to engage with film.

It is at this point that Walter Benjamin’s text "The Author as Producer" avails itself. Benjamin put forward the idea that the tools of production should be given over and utilized by those experiencing the stories, instead of having them fictionalized or adapted by well-off, well-educated members of the upper middle class (1934: 87). Benjamin saw the lower class, lower income masses as having a much more immediate, authentic, and relatable authorial voice. There is always a risk run by artists (of privilege) that their depictions of others, or otherness, can fundamentally alienate not only their audience, but the subject(s) of their work. As well-intentioned and studied as an artist’s research and exploration of a given subject may be, it nonetheless can ever make up for,

or account for, the personalized experiences of those who have no choice but to live through the hardships of their (given) circumstances. This turns the audience into a producer, taking in what they are seeing and deconstructing/assigning meaning as the images play in front of them. In spite of what some may attempt, there is no interjecting in this function. The internal mechanics of the spectator allows them to stay fixed in their position as producer, as there simply is no way of stopping the machinations of subjective interpretation. The more an audience member can relate to something or see some truth in it, the more power the spectator gives the work they are interacting with. They also fashion their own understanding of the events depicted into their own narrative and descriptor of said narrative, they in turn become the producer.

Expanded Cinema

Now Benjamin's ideas coupled with Kracauer's paint a picture of audiences conditioned to aligning themselves with the surroundings and stories they felt reflected their status and class. As much as it may uplift individuals to see themselves as deserving of more high-minded entertainment, it retroactively delineates their understanding and stomach for stories considered low-brow, taboo, or beneath them. Enter Gene Youngblood and his seminal text *Expanded Cinema*. Bringing to light a new (circa 1970) form of filmic experimentation that essentially led to the destabilization of site specificity in relation to cinema. Until Youngblood's text, there was no separating of arena from content.

What Youngblood and *Expanded Cinema* helped artists and audiences realize is that:

Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in

front of his eyes. One no longer can specialize in a single discipline and hope truthfully to express a clear picture of its relationships in the environment. This is especially true in the case of the intermedia network of cinema and television, which now functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind.

(1970:41)

The ever-evolving nature of cinema and television demands nothing short of an ever-evolving audience and group of artists from which to continue its globalized networking. By first discarding the very structures that have continually housed filmed works, it literally opens up the arena of cinema to the outside world. In spite of the general accessibility to the masses in major and smaller-sized cities, standard theatres are still something of a privilege. In ridding cinema of the necessity of large screens and projectors, what becomes necessary are new, radicalized apparatuses. With only so much, and so many, available via television and film screens, bold new ideas are ultimately what will galvanize and keep cinema moving towards an exciting new future. Using computer technology as a window into expanded cinema is a good choice to make. Because of the ever-shifting line that separates computers from our needs of them, computers have never been more tapped into so much of what we do on a daily basis and how we are able to function. Pairing this with the notion that site-specificity (in relation to film) is no longer a constant when it comes to considering means and venues for exhibition, what is apparent is that the integration of computers into expanded cinema and *The I in Optics* is that it trains participants to look at seemingly random objects and materials as a means of experimenting with and creating new forms of expanded cinema. Almost anything (technological) can now be used to create a filmic work, and with

computers making up so much of our surroundings and interfaces, it allows for a field of exploration the likes of which have not yet been seen.

New Possibilities

Theorist and author Haidee Wasson, in her essay "The Networked Screen", makes a strong case of our continued study of new technologies as means of globalized communication and as a natural expansion of cinematic language: "By setting aside questions of medium specificity this [...] suggests its formative role in transforming celluloid, electronic, and digital images into differentiated social and material sites of cultural engagement" (2007: 76-77). As evidenced in the preceding excerpt, cultural engagement and integration are not things that can be accomplished by adhering to classical forms of engagement, specifically because these antiquated means of reaching others is partially responsible for the fractured and disassociated nature of international filmmaking communities that exist outside of mainstream cinema. "With the moviegoer, the self as the mainspring of thoughts and decisions relinquishes its power of control" (1997: 159). Even in its earliest stages of deconstruction and examination, it was empirically evident that the means of engagement were more useful as means of conditioning audiences to give up personalized aspects of themselves in favour of works that told them what their places were.

Expanded cinema provides the most effective means of uniting and mobilizing the global filmmaking community. In showing that there is so much more to be experienced and interacted with within the medium, the potential stories and modes of storytelling become unparalleled. A cinema that finds disinterest in tradition and transcendence

through a rebuilding and restructuring of filmmaker's very tenets. Anna McCarthy encapsulates this idea nicely: "Objects tell stories, shape social relationships, delineate boundaries between self and other, public and private, the absent and the enduring" (2001: 118). What she ultimately synthesizes into this statement is the understanding that cinema (can) free itself from, or no longer needs, identifiable parameters due to the pervasive nature of storytelling and experience. "Any object flat or not can be turned into a screen" (2007: 78). With the tether binding cinema to its historical trappings being somewhat forcefully slashed, we may not go out and venture to create experiences and works never before conceived can finally begin to make their way towards an unsuspecting, yet ever-ready public.

Artist Review

There were quite a few inspirations for my thesis project, artists whose own output may not necessarily fix itself on expanded or experimental cinema. Primary amongst these individuals is British filmmaker Steve McQueen, whose transition from experimental short to feature length director has turned him into something of a more traditionalist filmmaker. It was a work entitled *Bear* (1993)⁸ that McQueen released as a multi-screen projection that was the initiator of this genesis. A short film chronicling the interactions between two wordless individuals presented the notion that dialogue is something illusory in cinema -- the need to express oneself in verbiage dissolves as the moving image learns to signify and convey meaning all on its own.

⁸ An introductory write-up on McQueen and his experimental short is available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mcqueen-bear-t07073>.



Figure 6: Still from Steve McQueen's *Bear* (1993) Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The projection method for this piece was also somewhat revelatory in that it showed a work on five competing surfaces, all whilst examining the intimacy shared (whether consensually or not) between two imposing figures, each examining the other with unassignable looks of assessment. Giving so much agency to a spectator was something new and exciting to me, a bold and risky venture in which my ability and willingness to comprehend abstraction was equitable with my ability to gain insight into someone else's vision.

Speaking in the larger context, the inspiration for this project came through artists whose work is largely commercial filmmaking. Rather than finding the foundations of *The I in Optics* in works designated as expanded cinema or avant-garde, they were discovered in personalized readings of films whose writers and directors had always acted as exemplary. Aside from McQueen, Nicolas Winding Refn (*Valhalla Rising* (2009), *Only God Forgives* (2013)); David Lynch (*Wild at Heart* (1990), *Inland Empire* (2006)); Olivier Assayas (*Carlos* (2010), *Personal Shopper* (2016)); Michele Haneke

(*Cache* (2005), *Das Weisse Band* (2009)); and Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner* (1982), *Life in a Day* (2011)) all contributed hugely to what has ultimately come together.

With each film that pushed aside narrative objectivity or pandered to happy endings and other storytelling devices, my own interactions with film began to change; the relative importance of dialogue or narrative conclusiveness dimmed. What grew exponentially was the ability to read into a film and extract as many impressions and readings from it as possible. Films like *Only God Forgives* and Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) move along at languid paces, with endings so far removed from being conclusive as to give the audience no choice but to concoct their own, and from there completely change the make-up of the film itself.⁹

Artists engaged in the field of expanded cinema also had much to offer. The work of Canadian artist Stan Douglas was key in my developments regarding functionality, venue, and display. His works *Channeling Miles Davis* (2017) and *Luanda-Kinshasa* (2013), as well as his recreational photography which restages moments of historical ugliness as a means of documenting the stagnation of civil rights as the world around these incidents changes physically, were vibrant, exhaustive attempts to show that there is no changing the experiences of a group (be it social, economic, or cultural), even as time wears on. Douglas' works act as vivid reminders of the stagnation of certain cultural and societal concerns. Be it racial, religious, or based in issues of gender, there is always a current that underlies an individual's approach to certain subjects and issues.

⁹ On David Lynch's thoughts on audience and intention, see https://books.google.ca/books?id=x4egzIIAgJQC&pg=PA231&lpg=PA231&dq=david+lynch+detective+perverts&source=bl&ots=EJXkc-nzGO&sig=fo5T9ddCcg_6zxqNzVi937Y7yIY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjPg_XL7ofZAhVs04MKHaKeBJwQ6AEIWzAL#v=onepage&q=david%20lynch%20detective%20perverts&f=false.

It was this assertion that made so much of *The I in Optics* come together. Getting people to participate in an experiment comprised of modern technological appliances and recycled footage is one (very important) thing; getting these same individuals to imbue their work with deeper meaning requires a stimulation of the very things spectators can identify with. What Douglas proposes through his work is that these deeper understandings are based in our growing senses of self and community as we age and become more aware of our own histories. Touching again upon what McCarthy theorized in *Ambient Television*, it appears that the repetitious nature of our current immersion with televisual forms of entertainment and consumption when taken with our broader social/economic/cultural/historical backgrounds fuse together to influence us, the types of stories we connect to, and on what level/from what angle this happens from.

What these artists have shown me is that any scale of filmmaking can be used to produce a work that by its very nature is contradictory or aggressively unsympathetic to classical modes of storytelling or screenwriting. McQueen is of special note here, as his shift from small-scale art house shorts to big budget studio filmmaking has in no way hindered his instinctual desire to push his audience's practiced apathy into an agent of deconstructionist verisimilitude.

Films like 2011's *Shame* and 2008's *Hunger* (both McQueen's) tend to linger in my mind. Through the gradual ascension or integration of action movie tropes (rapid fire editing, heavy reliance on computer-generated effects, stock dialogue, and irrefutable resolution), intriguing and thought-provoking aspects of filmmaking have found themselves sorely lacking for exposure. McQueen's films champion long, unflinching camera takes. His modus operandi is to leave the audience hanging on an image (typically something as taboo as male genitalia, a body ravaged by starvation, or a bloody

tableau) for such a (seemingly) long period of time that the confrontational nature of the filmmaking causes the viewer to not only accept, but integrate what they are seeing into their own viewing vocabulary, either/or making them aware of their own hang-ups as a viewer, emboldening them to embrace whatever may come across the screen. It is with these artistic voices that I found my footing. In embracing abstraction, I was able to find a concrete idea that would not only allow for the maturing of oneself as an artist, but one's own prospective audience as well.

Conclusion

In utilizing video editing software in *The I in Optics*, an emergent concern that requires immediate attention is the relative ease with which participants will be able to interact with said software. Popular editing programs such as Adobe Premiere, Final Cut, and iMovie all require their users to have a practiced familiarity with their respective platforms. iMovie is the most straightforward, with a layout and set of tools and controls that aren't as intricate as Premiere and Final Cut; regardless, it is a software that takes time to adjust to - especially considering that is designed to be used exclusively with Apple computers - much the same as the others. The other two programs are far more complex and elaborate, with several channels appearing upon opening (each channel is designated an audio or visual file that can then be further dissected and reengineered).

Only adding further confusion to this is the breadth of abilities both the Adobe and Final Cut softwares are capable of. While said abilities, which are largely present to enable extremely detailed and layered edits to a given project, are impressive and indeed necessary in some cases, for the purposes of *The I in Optics* it is imperative that software used therein be as no frills as possible. To elaborate the editing software would be to

distract from the task at hand, and may prove to resign prospective participants as their involvement would only seem a hindrance or too pressured given the complex appearance and nature of the technology.

When approaching these various softwares as potential qualifiers for usage in *The I in Optics*, the first thing to look for was simplicity, which none of the individual programs possess. As mentioned earlier, iMovie is by far the simplest, but it still remains a software that demands a dedicated period of study and experimentation in order to truly become familiar with, or considered easy to use. What this led me to is a WeVideo, a video application and purchasable software that can be customized to fit almost any user's technical know-how. Partnering with a colleague who specialises in software development, I was able to get them to streamline the software so that what appears to the user is as straightforward and easy to understand as possible.

What this entailed was a removal of several sidebars and tabs that only add a sense of superfluousness to the layout and functions of the software. After the necessary adjustments are made, what is left is the barest bones version of WeVideo's platform. Pared down to a channel to which desired clips may be dropped onto for arrangement, a section above this channel where the selected clips are viewable, and viewfinder to the right of this, from which the video playback and alterations may be viewed by the participants. Sitting atop these windows are tab options which are limited to small, easy edits (transitions, title cards, colour changes, etc.). On top of all this, all work is automatically saved by the program as the work progresses; there is no danger of anyone losing their work and having to redo or become practiced in the intricacies of *The I in Optics*' processes. Ultimately, what now exists as the editing platform for use in *The I in*

Optics is the most roundabout way to level the playing field for all potential users and participants.

In addition to this editing software, participants will have the option of filling out a questionnaire designed to reflect their experiences using the software and creating their own short films. The participants will also have the ability to put their reflections up on the walls of the gallery space. Due to the randomized nature of the clips made available to users, their shorts (some, not necessarily all) will appear disjunctive and potentially obtuse. Much like Sergei Eisenstein's experimentation with montage, the shorts created within *The I in Optics* will require their audience (and creators) to exercise their ability to see and internalize meaning via the string of clips they see projected onto the wall. In producing an environment where potentially non-linear montages double as tool by which the participants can further their ability to grasp narratives that are not beholden to conventional storytelling measures, the more open and receptive they may become to filmic endeavours and works that would have previously seemed strange and unappealing.

Given the nature of *The I in Optics*, these results will prove most encouraging as they will promote the auteur nature of the productions. Each creator and their audience will be asked to utilize the spectatorial skills they have consciously or unconsciously honed as they have engaged with more and more works and avenues of user-based sharing and distribution. Having already held workshops to test the editing software's usability, what became almost immediately apparent was the works to be produced herein were by no means guaranteed to be linear, transparent, or polished. What is sure to emerge, as was proven in these trials, are strange, abstract, disruptive works. Again

though, this is a most encouraging outcome as it directly challenges the practiced conventions of narrative structure, pacing, thematic application, and dramaturgy.

Throughout the various projects that acted as stepping stones to my final work (*Prunes, Multiple Views, VR/Screening Boxes*), the input, both literal and figurative, of the participants and volunteers used to test the relative effectiveness of the works, has always played a crucial role in developing the foundations of this experiment. In spite of the numerous ways the projects would distinguish themselves from one another, the results of the integration are often similar.

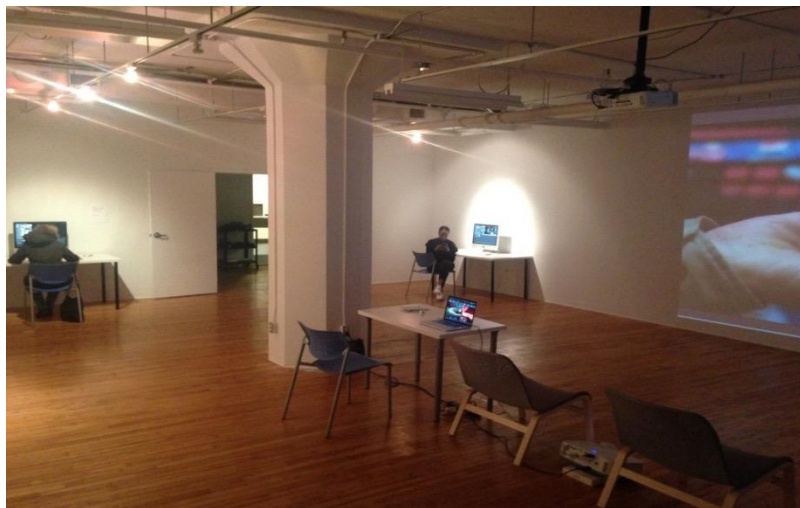


Figure 7: the layout and technologies used to bring *The I in Optics* to life

This remains true here, where trial tests of the interface and technology used to assemble the film clips and show the works themselves have been occurring sporadically throughout the production of the materials. Even as the minutiae of the editing software (its layout, design, and ease of use) changed in lieu of software crashes and incompatibility with interface devices (touch screen pads, laptops), the participants' films were exploratory.

It was only after working through the software and looking more closely at the short segments available to them that participants started to become more confident and experimental in their interactions with the software. As perhaps with any new technological gadget or device, there is an initial phase of unfamiliarity with the apparatus that causes a formality in the interactions between user and device that slowly erodes as the user becomes more and more accustomed to the object and grows curious about what else they may be able to do with this.



Figure 8: Participants viewing their respective works during a showing

As the final exhibition for *The I in Optics* approached, final tests were conducted in order to insure the software is as easy and user-friendly as possible. If future exhibitions' results show that what is needed in order for participants to engage with the apparatuses in any kind of meaningful way is to spend a protracted amount of time getting to know the software more intimately, then this will prove ultimately effective. This reinforces the basic notions of expanded cinema in that the white cube and black box venues typically associated with this type of creative output are no longer tethered to

the new avenues provided by mobile and domestic devices such as televisions, cellular phones, tablets, etc. As such, these results point in an encouraging direction for future expansion of this work; it has truly managed to transcend the historical trappings and site-specificity related to the cinema and the audience's engagement with its spectacle.

Even with applicable data, it must be stated once more that *The I in Optics* is not a social science experiment. What is being buoyed by this exhibition and the works to be created therein are geared towards the idea that users and participants will have the chance to exercise their creative agency and reflect upon their own experiences as both members of society and as audience members. The results of the participants' shorts are not the end game, it is the very process and ability to utilize and share one's creativity and to demonstrate that having never made a film or filmic work need not preclude someone from attempting to and creating a story they feel is worth telling, and/or is indicative of their life outside the theatre or gallery space.

In holding trials for the software and exhibition in advance of the initial showing, the results of participant's experimentation were both intriguing and arresting to behold. Much like Eisenstein's work with montage, the randomness of the clips led to some truly abstract, narratively-obtuse creations. This is not to say that these results were discouraging, quite the contrary, in fact. In seeing users embrace montage, spontaneity, and randomness to tell their stories demonstrated that audiences are not beyond using their own internal logic to find meaning in what they are viewing, and in this case, constructing films. In seeing these results in real time, it only acted to strengthen the foundations of *The I in Optics*, its very title a reference to the ways in which we see ourselves represented in the objects we watch and consume.

Through its various stages of development and refinement, the central crux of *The I in Optics* -- identifying and examining the nexus of cinematic language, audience engagement, and the personalization of the filmic experience -- remains fixed, and will continue to be adjusted and tweaked until a larger, more expansive version of the exhibition exists. Once the technology utilized for *The I in Optics* has been modified to handle a larger repertoire of film clips (both professional and amateur) for perusal and experimentation, the possibilities, both numerical and figurative, of what can be created and effectively used to better understand the variances in perceptions and perspectives amongst participants, grow exponentially.

Results culled from trial runs of the software, coupled with the cultural latitude *The I in Optics*, have shown that with continued exposure and with the addition of more filmic excerpts, there is limitless potential for the project. As long as there is a medium (film and television -- viewable through various platforms) through which so much of our information is gathered and storytelling traditions are deployed, and an apparatus (digital cameras, 16mm film, webcams, laptops, etc.) through which these stories can be accessed, then there will always be an audience from which to draw new narratives and stylistic variety. Despite the technology and format of *The I in Optics* needing a bit more familiarity with its audiences, there have been nothing but encouraging outcomes to draw these findings from.

For audiences truly are cinema's creators. Their desire is to be entertained, and to find out entertainment that will provide release whilst simultaneously weaving connections to their own life and experiences. As much as audiences are granted these moments via a filmmaker or filmmaking team, audiences too are ones whose creations are based on their own studying of and experiences with cinema. Filmmakers cannot

come into being randomly, they are students and fans of film whose imaginations provide them with a wellspring of ideas. It is a circular community.

As cinema changes and the means of interaction and consumption grow and expand, the best means by which to traverse and understand immerse oneself in the culture. Whether it be experimenting with a webcam at home or strapping a GoPro or old camcorder to the front end of something that will provide an interesting point-of-view, film's evolution beyond its traditional structures and modes of exhibition is rooted in both technological and narrative experimentation and connection. The criteria by which a film may be labelled good or bad are so subjective that allowing for such things to deter one from trying to engage with and create filmic works is a disservice not only to these potential creators, but also the medium. Cinema need not exist purely to be consumed, but can act as a springboard for innovation and experimentation, all whilst encouraging a healthy curiosity in its prospective audience.

Technologically speaking, it is the apparatus provided via *The I in Optics* that presents the last real remaining challenge. Even within that admission, it is not so much that the technology needs to improve, although an upping of the number of available clips somewhere closer to one hundred is assured and necessary, but rather the integration of the software with a public so unaccustomed to its newness and unique means of operation. As (future) participants become acclimated to the software, the point of total immersion and acceptance will rapidly come to pass; like all new forms of user-based/user-friendly software, an initial period of trial and repetition is essential.

The potential for *The I in Optics*, given the implications and potential for furthered insights into the machinations and interpretive powers of spectators, are far-reaching. As stated previously, as long as the apparatuses and medium continue to defy

the boundaries of nation states and differing political and cultural ideologies, then the audience of this work will always be there. With the potential provided by a growing consortium of users and initiated participants, the kinds of stories and storytelling devices, tropes, and styles that emerge will be exemplary of the potential held and instilled in spectators and audience members.

Filmography

- *12 Years a Slave*, 2013 [film]. Directed by Steve McQueen. USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures
- *Amistad*, 1997 [film]. Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA: DreamWorks Pictures
- *Bear*, 1993. Directed by Steve McQueen. Britain: Tate Museum
- *Cache*, 2005. Directed by Michael Haneke. France: Les Films du Losange
- *Carlos*, 2010. Directed by Olivier Assayas. France: MK2
- *Channeling Miles Davis*, 2017. Directed by Stan Douglas. Canada: Art21
- *Das Weisse Band*, 2009. Directed by Michael Haneke. Austria: Filmladen
- *Hunger*, 2008. Directed by Steve McQueen. Ireland: Northern Ireland Screen Broadcasting Commission of Ireland
- *Inland Empire*, 2006. Directed by David Lynch. USA: Absurda
- *L'arrivee d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, 1895 [film]. Directed by Auguste and Louis Lumiere. France: Societe Lumiere
- *Lost Highway*, 1997. Directed by David Lynch. USA: October Films
- *Luanda-Kinshasa*, 2013. Directed by Stan Douglas. USA: David Zwirner Gallery
- *Only God Forgives*, 2013. Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn. Denmark: Space Rocket Nation
- *Personal Shopper*, 2016. Directed by Olivier Assayas. France: Les Films du Losange
- *Shame*, 2011. Directed by Steve McQueen. Britain: Film4 Productions
- *The General*, 1926 [film]. Directed by Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton. USA: United Artists
- *Valhalla Rising*, 2009. Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn. Denmark: Scanbox Entertainment
- *Wild At Heart*, 1990. Directed by David Lynch. USA: The Samuel Goldwyn Company

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