The 9th McGill International Cellphilm Festival

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For further information about the McGill International Cellphilm Festival please contact Claudia Mitchell Distinguished James McGill Professor, Director of the Institute for Human Development and Well-being at claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca.

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INTRODUCTION

Now in its ninth year, the McGill International Cellphilm Festival was led by a committed group of doctoral students and researchers who organize the ‘call’ each year and arrange for judging and prizes; each festival has a different theme:
- 9th (2021): Transformation
- 8th (2020): Well-being in the Time of Social Distancing
- 7th (2019): Picturing Change
- 6th (2018): Making community; Action, Activism, Advocacy, Art
- 5th (2017): Resisting & Speaking Back
- 4th (2016): Exploring Consent: Bodies, Lands, & Media
- 3rd (2015): What’s a Cellphilm? DIY in the Digital Media Age
- 2nd (2014): Our Spaces, Our Selves.
- 1st (2013): Bridging Communities

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about sudden shifts in the lives of individuals as well as rapid and monumental social change globally. One year after the start of the pandemic, we can see that the sudden alterations in people’s lives have become more normalized. Drastic global and personal changes caused many to rethink their values, ambitions, and social lives. In an attempt to capture these thought-processes and changes, the organizers of the festival invited people to submit short cellphilms on the theme Transformations.

This year’s festival theme of transformation has been a pivotal force shaping human experience throughout history as our world undergoes unique and influential changes across the fields of education, health, art, technology, and beyond. Around the globe, we have learned to adapt individually and collectively to our circumstances, as well as pilot transformations of our own, bringing new perspectives and ways of living to our loved ones and wider communities. As we proposed in the call for submissions, the 9th McGill International Cellphilm Festival focused on: “Transformation: What does it mean to you and in your circumstances? How does it manifest in your school, community, environment or everyday life? Here is your opportunity to share your original transformation story with others!”

This year was the second occasion in which the Cellphilm Festival had to be conducted as an entirely virtual event, and it was also the first year we held a cellphilm symposium titled, “Why Participatory Video/Cellphilming and Why Now?”. Building on the success of 2020, where the online format allowed us to make wider connections to people from around the world, organizers of the Cellphilm Festival were prepared to run the festival on June 10th, 2021 in a similar fashion as last year.
The 9th McGill International Cellphilm Festival began with an introduction from Dr. Claudia Mitchell, speaking about this year’s theme of “transformation” and how it has shown its relevance, not only in the context of the pandemic, but also in its ability to relate to each person’s own unique experiences. This was followed by a few words from Scott Walter, executive director of CODE, a partner with the Participatory Cultures Lab and the Institute for Human Development and Well-Being, who spoke about the organization’s work and mission. After this, each filmmaker presented their cellphilm and said a few words about what inspired them to make their own connection to the theme of “transformations”.

This year’s panel of judges featured Brett Pardy and Heloísa Modesto. Brett Pardy is a DISE PhD candidate, and a sessional instructor in Media and Communication Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley (in Abbotsford, BC). His research focuses on the emotional impact of media on learning and the unlearning of conceptions such as racism, masculinity, community, and mental health. He is also the Associate Editor of the film site, Seventh Row, which focuses on under-the-radar films by emerging filmmakers.

Heloísa Modesto recently began working with Women and Gender Equality Canada as a Program Officer. Before that, she spent five years in the role of Senior Program Manager and Gender Specialist at Canadian NGO CODE. She led the design and management of a federally funded, bilateral project in Mozambique – a project with a particular focus on gender equality in teacher training. She has worked with Mozambican civil society organizations, and the Ministry of Education in Mozambique, for the past 20 years implementing Canadian-funded development projects. She has also managed international development projects in Malawi, Tanzania and Ghana. Throughout her career, Heloísa has focused on issues related to gender equality, sustainable development, craft and globalisation, social justice, and agriculture in Latin America. Heloísa has a degree in Agricultural Engineering from the Universidade Federal de Lavras in Brazil, and a Master’s in Human Ecology from the University of Alberta with a focus on gender and development in Latin America.
Dr. Sarah Switzer was this year’s keynote speaker with her presentation titled, “Transforming How we Gather: Reflections on Community-Engagement in COVID-19.” Sarah Switzer is a post-doctoral fellow and lecturer at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and women and gender studies institute, University of Toronto. Her research focuses on the methodological, theoretical, and pedagogical dimensions of participation and community engagement, as inspired by over a decade of working and teaching at the intersections of participatory visual methods, peer programming, and HIV and Harm Reduction. More recently, she has turned her attention to how community-engaged practitioners are adapting their participatory work with communities to online and remote settings. For more, see: www.beyondthetoolkit.com. In her presentation she discussed what it means to facilitate and participate in community-engagement projects online in the context of the pandemic and in the spirit of the festival’s theme, transformation.

SUBMISSIONS

In total, the festival received 53 submissions from 75 international participants hailing from four continents and a total of eight countries including New Zealand, Iran, Panama, Liberia, Mozambique, Brazil and South Africa, as well as from across Canada. Given the difficult year and a half we have all experienced, this year’s cellphilms were created within the unique context of lockdowns, social distancing, and a world that has just begun to reopen.

The filmmakers interpreted the theme in a variety of ways and the submissions included cellphilms about transformations in regard to issues of mental health, body image, violence towards Indigenous women, COVID-19, and systemic racism. For example, Andraya Daniels made a powerful video about the discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children from Kamloops who never made it home.

The age of the filmmakers ranged from under 14 with 8 submissions, 15-17 with 11 submissions, 18-24 with 17 submissions, 25-34 with 3 submissions, 35-44 with 7 submissions, 45-54 with 5 submissions, and 55+ with 2 submissions.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION:
COVERING MY EARS - BY ANDRAYA DANIELS
WINNERS

The festival offered prizes in 5 categories:

Creative Content Award

This year’s winner of the Creative Content Award was Laya Najwa Zoukari, with the cellphilm “The Labyrinth of Depression”. The Creative Content award honors the cellphilm that displays excellent critical and creative thinking skills and effectively harnesses narrative tools through highlighting cellphilming as a medium for social change. Laya used repetition by showing a young girl repeating her daily routine with the same camera angles and backgrounds while her moods drastically changed. This drove home some profound considerations towards the transformative nature of mental health. Brett Pardy enjoyed the rhythm of the editing and how it sped up towards the end. He also thought the camera position was creative; both of the judges praised Laya’s acting and explained how her conveyance of emotion made the message impactful.

As Laya explains, “I really enjoyed this project and I’ve always loved creating small, short montages of my life. I wanted to send out a strong message, and this year’s theme was nice, it allowed a lot of space for creativity and it forced me to think outside the box. The first thing that came to mind was how dealing with depression is a transformation in itself. In projects like this it is best to go with something that is personal to you and you have already experienced. The favourite part was choosing the music, as I associates feelings with music. Every period of my life is associated with a group of songs or artists. I chose genesis as the first one because I related it to how I felt in my depressive episodes. “It Feels Like We Only Go Backwards” by Tame Impala is how it feels healing at the end”.

CREATIVE CONTENT AWARD:
THE LABYRINTH OF DEPRESSION - LAYA NAJWA ZOUKARI

2021 | JULY
The winner of the Best Production Award was given to Yasha Shodjaee-Zrudlo, Mona Ghadirian and their youth team with the cellphilm, "Breaking the Mold." This award honors the cellphilm that displays a high level of technical production skills and demonstrates effective visual and auditory choices throughout which best highlights cellphilming as a medium for social change. This work gives the viewer a look into life during the pandemic, including the social turmoil, gun violence, and systemic racism. The film explores transformation by showing how such turmoil can inspire those to get involved and transform their communities.

Heloisa Modesto chose this film because it was incredibly relevant to what happened during the pandemic and how we can take the time to reflect on our reality: systemic racism and the hardships that are faced. She also said that the amount of elements in a short period of time was amazing as well. The filmmakers, Mona and Yasha, told the symposium that they and their group of recent high school graduates meet on a regular basis and discuss numerous topics. Yasha explained further that bringing meaning and awareness to certain aspects of life and education is something they discussed for a while and so when the cellphilm festival came up they felt as though this was the perfect opportunity. The idea was completely forged by the youth and Mona. Clara and Yasha helped them mediate how to express their idea.
Best Group Award

The award winner for Best Group Award was Déborah Maia de Lima and Juliana Ponguta for their cellphilm, “After Tomorrow,” which used bodily movement to portray the theme of transformation. This award honors the best submission from a group of two or more filmmakers who work collectively to produce a single cellphilm. Words like observe, breath, and release inspired their approach in showcasing how transformation occurs and to raise questions on what transformation means and how it manifests. One of the judges reported that the clear connection to the theme of transformation while emphasizing the purpose of cellphilming through connecting people from around the world made this film stick out to her.

The filmmakers, Déborah Maia de Lima and Juliana Ponguta, explained how they wanted to show that transformation is foundational to everyone’s life no matter where you live, and it was for this reason they sought to display a global connection between people in order to relay the essentiality of transformation.
Young Film-makers Award

The winners of the Young Filmmakers Award were Melody McKay, Harmony McKay, Kelly Kalum, and Kalan Kakum-McKay for their cellphilm titled, “Explaining Our Paranoia Walking Alone as Indigenous Girls in Treaty 6.” This Award honors the best submission from filmmaker(s) who are 14 years or younger. The cellphilm highlighted the experience of Indigenous girls and the transformations they undertake regarding their own behavior in order to avoid violence or harassment.

The creators describe how this is not paranoia, it is their reality. This film stuck out to Brett Pardy due to the use of the cat-calling man in the car, who was not actually there, which presented paranoia in a creative and clear way. One of the judges found the message very powerful and commended the young girls for putting themselves out there in order to raise awareness towards this pertinent issue.

Young Film-makers Award
MELODY MCKAY, HARMONY MCKAY, KELLY KAKUM, KALAN KAKUM-MCKAY
People's Choice Award

The People’s Choice Award went to Alma Sadati for the cellphilm “Kitties Transform Alma’s Life” which showcased how two kittens have transformed her life. The film shows how Alma goes from sleeping in and using screens a lot to the arrival of her kittens, which helped transform her life so that she was on screens less, getting out of bed earlier, and becoming more responsible and mature caring for these two kittens.
Social Media Campaign

The 9th International Cellphilm Festival was largely advertised via the International Cellphilm Festival’s social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Nesa Bandarchian Rashti, in collaboration with Aron Rosenberg, Leann Brown, Tatianna Sitounis, Theo Chiara, and Darshan Daryanani provided graphic design and communications support throughout the weeks prior to the festival streaming on June 10th. The communications strategy included dissemination of instructional cellphilm videos made by Université de Montréal, as well as informational infographics, festival details, calls for submissions, and post-festival announcements produced by Nesa Bandarchian Rashti, Darshan Daryanani, and Leann Brown. Theo and Tatianna collaborated on identifying target groups to invite to submit cellphilms, and target groups on Instagram to include in the organization and execution of future cellphilm festivals.
“WHY PARTICIPATORY VIDEO/CELLPHILMING AND WHY NOW?” SYMPOSIUM

For the first time since the beginning of the McGill International Cellphilm Festival, we included a one-day symposium. It has been over a decade since a group of creative researchers began exploring the potential of cellphilming. This symposium brought together an assemblage of ideas and people, facilitating a meeting point for sharing experiences and insights between some of the pioneering researchers in this field and other academics and educators who share an interest in supporting communities through participatory video or cellphilming. The symposium was held on June 10th from 10:30 to 16:00 with four panels composed of international researchers, scholars, and educators working on issues of social justice from gender-based violence to cultural preservation.

The first panel of the day, “The Birth of Cellphilm is in Africa,” chaired by Dr. Claudia Mitchell and consisting of speakers Keyan Tomaselli, Naydene de Lange, Relebohile Moletsane, and Alcina Sitoe, discussed the origins of cellphilm, its growth as an important tool in the classroom, and how the panelists themselves use cellphilms to engage with students. One strength of cellphilming is its power in representation. One teacher explained how she used cellphilms with students to share part of their family’s culture in the classroom, coupling visual art with cultural exploration and representation.

The second panel, “Participatory Video & Cellphilming Roundtable: Why Now?” explored the field experience of using cellphilm as a tool for various social justice initiatives. Chaired by Steven Schnoor, panelists Juan Carlos Sandoval Rivera, Katie MacEntee, Casey Burkholder, Josh Schwab-Cartas, and Ramson Karmushu, each discussed their unique experiences in using cellphilm for their work, which includes projects like Rivera’s work in documenting traditional fishing practices, MacEntee’s participatory methods in researching sex work, and others. Evodia Silva closed out this panel by summarizing the important ways in which cellphilm creates and incites change as it is a dynamic way of sharing and learning.

“Not Just a Toolkit,” the third panel of the day, centered on how cellphilming transitions from toolkit instructions into their use in the real world and the ethical and pragmatic issues that may arise. Chaired by Nesa Bandarchian Rashti, panelists Jen Thompson, Lisa Starr, Nicole D’Souza, Michaela Field, Darshan Daryanani, Chloe Garcia, Maria Ezcurra, and Mindy Carter all shared their insights on their experience in using cellphilm in the field, challenges they have faced, and how to go about resolving these challenges. Key points included accessibility concerns surrounding harnessing technology for communities who do not have these resources, how one positions themself in creating safe spaces for participants, and how to continue support for communities within the COVID-19 pandemic.
The fourth panel, “Cellphilm for Social/Environmental Change,” chaired by Aron Rosenberg and featuring speakers Vanessa Gold, Salima Punjani, Mitchell McLarnon, Francisco Reyes Pegeuro, and Jayne Malenfant discussed how cellphilm can be used as a mode of data collection by being a visual methodology that can portray a reality of the topic being researched. Jayne Malenfant spoke about how visual methodologies value lived experiences, which is crucial to research because it creates an inclusive space that is welcoming of artistic expression and allows researchers to understand the perspectives of their research-subject more deeply.

NEXT STEPS

Overall, the organizing committee was very pleased with the festival. This was our second virtual edition of the International Cellphilm Festival. We were able to learn from the 2020 Cellphilm Festival and based on the success of these two virtual events, we are likely to continue using a virtual platform as it allows more of the filmmakers from around the world to actually attend the event. Coming out of the festival we have embarked upon a number of initiatives:

1) A key feature going forward is to continue to support an emerging cellphilm producer community. This included sending certificates of participation to all those who submitted cellphilms to the 2021 ICF, developing a plan to follow up with them and to create a strategy for promotion over the whole year.

2) Thanks to the assistance of Tatianna Sitounis, we have assembled the archive of cellphilms over the past 9 years. This ‘bank’ will be an invaluable resource for tracking themes and genres, and generally feeding into cellphilm development.

3) A sub-group of the Organizing Committee has embarked upon plans for a Cellphilm Festival Think Tank focusing on the future of cellphilming as a participatory visual methodology.

4) We will be revisiting the idea of a Symposium both in relation to learning from this year’s symposium and the possibility of one or more publications, and planning a follow up event.
9TH EDITION
MCGILL INTERNATIONAL CELLPHILM FESTIVAL

“WHY PARTICIPATORY VIDEO/CPELLPHILM AND WHY NOW?”
SYMPOSIUM

THURSDAY, JUNE 10TH, 2021

It has been over a decade since a group of creative researchers began exploring the potential of cellphilming. This symposium brings together an assemblage of ideas and people, facilitating a meeting point for sharing experiences and insights between some of the pioneering researchers in this field and other academics and educators who share an interest in supporting communities through participatory video or cellphilm.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
https://internationalcellphilmfestival.com
Appendix B

The following schedule shows the approximate times and that were discussed during the Festival:

16:15 [Duration 15 minutes]
Nesa Bandarchian, Ramy Gorgis, Aron Rosenberg
· Log onto Zoom and give access to co-hosts and panelists
· Co-hosts change their username to (ICF Support)
· Check screen sharing with the panelists and answer their questions / communicate order to judges
· Share welcome slide

16:30 [Duration 3 minutes]
Nesa Bandarchian, Ramy Gorgis, Aron Rosenberg
· Admit participants and answer their questions
· Start recording
· Check ICF email address for any questions/issues
· Write a welcome message in the chat box and let the participants know they can use chat for questions

16:33 [Duration 15 minutes]
Colette Anton, Claudia Mitchell, Darshan Daryanani, Scott Walter
· Welcome to the festival
· Land acknowledgement / moment of silence
· Introduce facilitators and roles
· CODE partnership intro
· Start the session
· Start taking notes

16:45 [Duration 30 minutes]
Sarah Switzer, Brett Pardy and Heloisa Modesto
· Keynote Speaker –
· Award showcase & presentations
· Sharing winners’ videos, admitting winners to speak about their films

17:15 [Duration 15 minutes]
Colette Anton, Claudia Mitchell
Q & A?
Closing remarks / conclusion