



The McGill International Cellphilm Festival

A Brief History

Website: <https://internationalcellphilmfestival.com/>

Facebook: International Cellphilm Festival

Instagram: @cellphilmfest

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August 2023

The First Decade



The McGill International Cellphilm Festival is a project of the Institute for Human Development and Well-being and the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL), a Canada Foundation Innovation-funded unit led by Claudia Mitchell in the Faculty of Education, McGill University. The establishment of the Cellphilm Festival in 2013 comes out of the growing use of cellphones around the world, the burgeoning work in the area of participatory visual methodologies (PVM) in community-based research, and the role of cellphilm methodology within PVM.

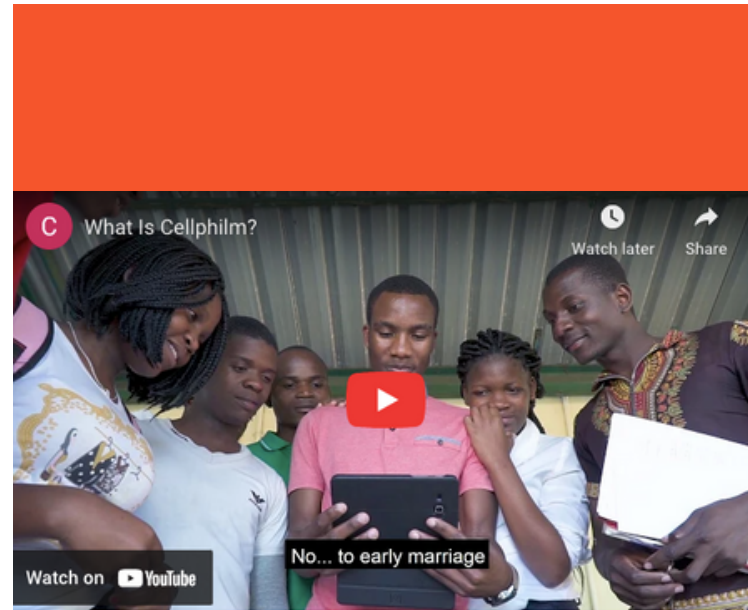
Cellphilm is a burgeoning artistic method of expression that emerged from years of experience of social science educators engaged in activism. The technique uses cellphones, tablets, and other hand-held devices to create a short video where community-engaged participants represent their ways of looking at particular critical issues in their lives. It emerges from a rich history of Participatory Visual Research Methodology to counterbalance the unequal power relations and break down the formalism between researchers and their collaborators.

Inspired by the work of South African researchers, Jonathan Dockney and Keyan Tomaselli, who coined the term 'cellphilm'(cellphone+film), the PCL research team embarked upon its first use of cellphilms in 2011 in work with rural teachers in South Africa. Since that time, numerous doctoral and masters students attached to the PCL have incorporated cellphilm into their research around the world and through their publications and presentations have inspired many others, including International NGOs, to include cellphilm in their programs. Three of the original Cellphilm Festival team, Dr. Katie MacEntee, Dr. Casey Burkholder and Dr. Josh Schwab-Cartas published their ground-breaking book in 2016 [What's a Cellphilm? Integrating mobile phone technology into participatory arts-based research and activism.](#)

The Second Decade

Now in its second decade, the International Cellphilm Festival has undergone numerous changes and expansions since its beginning.

- From 2020 onward, it has become an online event, ensuring that cellphilm producers around the world can participate.
- From 2022 onward it has included an 'under 8' Children's Cellphilm Festival led by Dr. Josh Schwab-Cartas (NSCAD) and Dr. Prudence Caldairou-Besette (UQO)
- The festival is not just about the cellphils that are submitted, but regularly includes a knowledge mobilization component, with speakers and panelists talking about their work. In 2021 the Why Participatory Video/Cellphilm and Why Now? 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 are supporting communities through participatory video or cellphilm. "How can visual interventions be used to educate community groups and point to ways to empower and reform institutional practices?" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 12). As MacEntee, Burkholder and Schwab-Cartas described in their 2016 volume that helped define the methodological approaches we are exploring today, cellphilm can support participants as they "identify challenges and explore potential solutions. The cellphils themselves are then used to promote community dialogue and engage decision-makers



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in pursuing actionable change with the community's perspectives and experiences in mind" (MacEntee, Burkholder, & Schwab-Cartas, p. 7). This approach can provide students or participants with meaningful opportunities to understand and affect the reflexively organized and unfolding relations organizing their everyday experiences. In 2022, the Re-Visioning Cellphilm Methodologies Virtual Symposium aimed to advance critical dialogue and re-imagine the co-production of knowledge through cellphilm. Key re-imaginings included the ways we can decolonize cellphilm methodology to support participatory work in new ways (especially in relation to Covid-19 and beyond) and with underrepresented groups (youth with disabilities, refugee youth, and older adults) for whom finding new ways for engagement is key. The presentations and roundtable discussions strengthened ties between the body of interdisciplinary researchers, practitioners, collectives and NGOs interested in participatory visual methods in social research. The symposium informed the production of a publication entitled 'Re-visioning Cellphilm', co-edited by Mitchell, Sadati, Starr & Roy to be published by Springer.

- Sponsorship: From 2021, the ICF has benefited from the generous financial support of CODE.
- The McGill International Cellphilm Festival continues to be led by a committed group of doctoral students attached to the Participatory Cultures Lab directed by Dr. Claudia Mitchell, undergraduate interns attached to the Faculty of Arts, and researchers who organize the 'call' each year, and arrange for judging and prizes.

Annual Cellphilm Festival Themes

- 11th (2023): If you had one minute to change the world, what would you say?
- 10th (2022): Re-imagining
- 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