

# **BLINK**

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## **Abstract**

“What happens in the blink of an eye?” *Blink* is a 14-minute experimental film that focuses on, and exposes brief, spontaneous, expressive, and communicative gestures that often pass us by unnoticed, unrecognized or unacknowledged.

*Blink* is made up of three parts that are categorized into family, childhood and self. Each section explores gestures by using formal techniques to highlight the movement of a particular body part. *Blink* emphasizes my interest in controlling and altering time within film, by demonstrating my ongoing exploration into the formal properties of accelerated speed, slow motion and/or repeated actions within cinema. It demonstrates my interest in portraiture and abstraction, and my continuous curiosity and attempt to capture and expose human gestures.

Music accentuates these gestures throughout *Blink*. The gesture of the gaze in *Blink* produces a deeper and more personal relationship between the subject and spectator, and evokes a deeper sense of connection between them.

## **Dedication**

To my grandparents Robert and Hanni Barton.

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## Filmmaker's Introductory Notes

With the acknowledgement that cinema in the 21st century has experienced, and will continue to experience, a profound transformation, with new cameras, delivery systems, forms of distribution, ways of working and means of consuming, my thesis project provides me with the opportunity to combine these emerging approaches with traditional styles and methods. As a filmmaker, I am interested in creative approaches that explore alternative forms of narrative, representation and expression. Inspired by the notion that film truly and simply is about light, time, space and rhythm, my goal is to explore and transform the formal elements within the image, such as its movement, texture, space, depth, tonality, and color. I am particularly interested in how we can portray and manipulate realistic and abstract imagery through film.

I have explored a variety of film genres, techniques, styles, histories and theories and have developed an awareness, enthusiasm and knowledge of the diversity and importance of cinema. One of my ambitions in this project was to utilize these options within the film medium and take a closer look at some of their characteristics. *Blink* highlights my interest in controlling and altering time within film, by demonstrating my ongoing exploration into the formal properties of accelerated speed, slow motion and/or repeated actions within cinema. It also illustrates my interest in portraiture and abstraction, and my continuous curiosity and attempt to capture and expose human gestures. My project strives to direct a viewer's attention to particular gestures within the film frame that may have otherwise been hidden, overlooked or disregarded. It comments on the development of self through age, experience, memory and time.

A number of artists, critics and art forms have inspired my approach to filmmaking and have been instrumental in developing my critical awareness. Experimental filmmakers such as Bruce Baillie, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, David Rimmer, Michael Snow, Stan Brakhage and Arthur Lipsett have a sensitive appreciation of film, in which they strive to achieve an element of purity through the medium of camera. These filmmakers have influenced and shaped distinctive formal aspects and styles within my work, such as my concepts, cinematography and montage.

Michael Snow's film *Standard Time* (1967) was one of the first experimental films I had seen. It is a short film entirely composed of various types of camera movement to investigate how they would be perceived on screen. It is one of Snow's early explorations into the infinite ways the camera can move. His obsession and exploration of the properties of cinema through a focused technique are reflected in his films, and in parts of *Blink*. In *Pas de Deux* (1968), Norman McLaren creates a sensuous, hypnotic-effect when he uses high-contrast film stock and optical printing to study the choreography of ballet. The minimalistic tone of this film directly influenced part two of *Blink*.

Rimmer's *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper* (1970) is a film of a seemingly endless loop of a single black and white stock footage shot, and is manipulated and transformed through optical printing techniques. Using repetition, Rimmer plays with our perceptions, and the ambiguity of the story enables the viewer to experience and interpret the film in a variety of ways. Rimmer's film, along with many others that use a singular formal technique, have influenced both the concept formation of my films and my approach to filmmaking.

Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966), *All My Life* (1966) and *Valentin De Las Sierra's* (1967) are beautiful experimental documentaries and serve as sensitive portraits of places or people that also combine elements of "lyrical fantasy and/or poetic constructs" (Everleth). The visual richness, delicacy and beauty of his films are insights that I depend and draw upon when I approach portraiture and cinematography in my films.

Arthur Lipsett's *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961) has been an extremely influential film. Many of Lipsett's works are constructed from different film scenes and pieces of sound that he found, collected, and recorded while working at the National Film Board of Canada. As part of my artistic process, I collect images over periods of time and then collage or piece different scenes or parts together in a particular aesthetic style. Lipsett's films tend to embrace contradictions and can be viewed as lightly humorous but also darkly ironic. They contain aspects of narrative, documentary, experimental collage, and visual essay, and these elements consciously exist in *Blink* and my previous works.

The flicker effect persistent in Paul Sharits's work, such as in *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G* (1968) or *N.O.T.H.I.N.G* (1968), has had a direct impact on my past films and is present in *Blink*. The flicker effect can be perceived as aggressive, especially in *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G* where there is a 'touch' of madness. Sharits has explained that through his flicker effect technique, where there are frames of varying solid colors and images, the film "invents" new colors, which Sharits calls "temporal colors" that do not exist in any single frame but collide together in the mind's eye (Totaro). A flicker effect is visible in the first part of *Blink*, with the rapid succession of single frames of family portraits.

It is hard to pin point exactly how Stan Brakhage has influenced my works and *Blink*, as his almost 400 films, ranging from nine seconds to four and a half hours long, have explored a vast array of subjects and properties relating to the medium of cinema (Camper). Fred Camper explains how:

“He [Brakhage] took light itself, in all its limitless varieties and unrestricted energies, as his greatest subject. He strived to personalize the medium, often expressing an individual’s emotions, ideas, dreams, fantasies, visions, eye-music, closed-eye seeing, and nightmares ...the sensual beauty of his films' shapes and colors and textures, his creation of a unique and complex kind of visual music (most of his films are silent because the music comes from the screen), his appeal to the viewer as individual rather than as a member of a crowd, the ecstatic unpredictability of his spaces and rhythms, all assure the monumental importance of his films, both individually and as a body of work (Camper).”

As noted above, Brakhage’s works explore the richness of vision and seeing, from the experimental documentary *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), to the collage film *Mothlight* (1963), to the serial films that make up *Dog Star Man* (1961-1964), to films such as *The Dante Quartet* (1987) in which he hand-paints over photographic imagery, to completely abstract hand-painted films, such as *Lovesong* (2001). Stan Brakhage is the godfather of experimental filmmaking, and his entire approach to filmmaking has been inspirational for me.

Brakhage's writings have also been important to my filmmaking process. One of his most famous passages from "Metaphors On Vision," in which he encourages us to question and "imagine an eye unrulled by man-made laws of perspective", directly stimulated my creativity (Brakhage and McPherson 12).

In addition to the above filmmakers, my mentors Philip Hoffman, Richard Kerr, François Miron, and Daichi Saïto have been fundamental in shaping and encouraging my artistic process by sharing their expertise in alternative filmmaking practices. These professors, who are amazing filmmakers in their own right, have significantly influenced my filmmaking process.

It was fortuitous that for my first filmmaking class at Concordia University, I had unknowingly chosen to be in a class taught by an experimental filmmaker, Daichi Saïto. He was very important to my post-secondary education and understanding that film is an artistic medium. The films of Saïto are "often characterized by rapid bursts of fleeting images" (Saïto et al. 59). They explore the relation between the perspectives of vision and the material nature of the cinematic medium, and combine a formal concentration of frame and juxtaposition with sensual and poetic expression (Saïto et al. 64). He mentored me during the beginnings of my exploration into experimental cinema, where his advice and knowledge impacted the direction of my film.

Other influential professors such as Richard Kerr encouraged me to pursue an "aesthetic wow", to practice and play with old and new filmmaking materials and to believe in my own cinema. Kerr also repeatedly spoke about the "Keep It Simple Stupid" (KISS) principle, which implies

that most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated, and therefore simplicity should be an important ambition in a film.

Likewise, Philip Hoffman, with his enthusiasm and passion towards Process Cinema, a type of cinema that explores creative practices in alternative filmmaking that is improvisational and interactive, has been significant in helping me recognize and welcome my filmmaking style.

Through working directly with Hoffman, especially throughout this project, I can reflect on the significant impact his mentorship has had on my growth as a filmmaker.

Music plays a particularly significant role for me, as it motivates me and helps me visualize the edit, tone and rhythm of my films. My father, Schaun Tozer, who is primarily a film and television composer, has been extremely influential not only in my musical upbringing, knowledge and openness, because we listened to a vast array of musical genres and styles in our home, but also in how I approach my creativity. He has always encouraged me to be the “Frank Zappa” that I can be, and this implies to me to be myself, to be inquisitive, push boundaries, and break expectations and conventions. My love of music helps me create the rhythms and patterning within my films.

Film Studies Professors John Locke and Peter Rist, have formed the basis of my critical awareness and ability to intellectually critique cinema. Conversations on film style, aesthetics, and genres, as well as formal techniques such as camera movement, montage and sound have been the basis for my development and understanding of cinema's artisanal history and the diverse potential of filmmaking practices.

Film theorist and historian David Bordwell has had a significant impact on my knowledge and appreciation of cinema. His writings, such as *Film Art: An Introduction* (1979) (2009), *Poetics of Cinema* (2008), and *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (1989), have become the foundation of film criticism and my introduction into film theory, narrative, and style. They have also increased my understanding of the formal and stylistic qualities that are intrinsic to the film medium.

Susan Sontag's article "Against Interpretation" (1966) serves as one of my references in critiquing the quality of a media arts piece by assessing its stylistic and artistic elements. Sontag is not necessarily "against interpretation" but more so the rules of interpretation: the use of a repeated analytical framework to infer meaning or decipher value of the art works (Totaro). These types of interpretations can be restrictive instead of descriptive (Totaro). Sontag believes that we should not critique and interpret a film on its content and narrative alone, but also consider its form, style and aesthetics. Content-only analysis negates differences between various distinctive art mediums (Totaro). Sontag believes that "the function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means" (Sontag 23). Thus we can criticize films (and perhaps mine) solely on its visual and formal components.

Furthermore, she notes that we have to be careful about how and what we examine and evaluate about a film. Several analytical essays have the tendency to evaluate whether a film is good or bad based on their own interpretations of how the form and style of a film have contributed to its narrative meaning. However, we can find a film to be amazing as a result of its artistic

composition or astonishing because of its formal elements.

When analyzing film, I evaluate stylistic qualities that the film embodies through close examination of its visual and formal techniques. I take the film's production and historical background into consideration, but tend to place greater significance on the images before me and on the visual and aural material on hand. By identifying the film's style, I try to determine the significance of the visual aesthetics and how these have contributed to the strength of the film's narrative or theme. In addition, if we are to base our criticism on interpretation, we should then base our interpretation on the film's style and form. In doing so, we are questioning the fundamental conventions and standards of film criticism.

## **Artistic Process**

My artistic process stems from my cinematic influences and my creative upbringing. As previously noted, my process tends to be more improvisational, organic and unplanned. Hoffman describes this process-driven methodology as a more expressive and spontaneous process, similar to that of a dancer or musician (Hoffman).

I often start filming with an unformed sense of what the finished project will be. I tend to capture the images because I like them; they spark my curiosity or interest, and I allow myself to become engrossed in the process and only figure out the structure of the film later. Once I have the footage, I choose what I like best, and decide how to highlight aspects of particular elements from within the image. Similar to my mentors, I tend to focus on elements that are either overlooked or disregarded in mainstream cinema, such as repetition, scratches on the film, over or under exposure, imprecise focus, or people looking directly at the camera. Through formal techniques, I use these “flaws” as a means of expression. I see myself as more of a collage artist - I collect images over time, treat them, reflect on them and then connect them at a later time. When I begin to edit and work with the footage, I become intensely focused on using formal techniques, in particular hand-processing and re-photography. These techniques create another layer, dimension and energy to the film and process. I also listen to many different types of music, which helps me find a particular rhythm to the edit.

I have always been interested in capturing friends and family in their most spontaneous and authentic moments. As it can sometimes be difficult for people to feel relaxed in front of the camera, I also encourage my subjects to film me. I believe that these partnered interactions help

create a more comfortable and trusting atmosphere. Once people feel more relaxed they tend to be more open, and both consciously and unconsciously, generate those gestures that are unique to them. As someone who initially tends to be reserved in new or uncomfortable situations, I found that by enabling my subjects to join in on the process, I could foster more openness, trust and vulnerability which, in turn, generated more genuine and impromptu expression.

## **Evolution of *Blink***

*Blink* has undergone a number of major changes since I began the MFA program in 2012.

Initially, the project was planned to be a total of five to seven short films, each ranging from two to seven minutes in duration. Each film was meant to explore one facet of human behavior within a unique stylistic and aesthetic approach. I was proposing to explore hereditary behavior traits; repeated movements in sports; the neurological makeup of human behavior; the digitalization of human behavior; habitual patterns of behavior between people, and human behavior in expressive urban street art. The seventh short film was still in development at that time. *Blink* incorporates many aspects of these elements, although more refined and focused. The films were intended to act as separate films that could be exhibited solely and stand on their own. That being said, the project as a whole, would thematically work together because they were a series of explorations and investigations into the different facets that make up the evolving nature and ambiguous aspects of human behavior.

Originally, part of my project was to explore the ways in which the transformation of communication is affecting our behaviors. I believe that communication is revolutionized by technology; it is becoming increasingly removed from face-to-face/one-on-one interpersonal communications, and evolving into indirect and impersonal technology-based interactions. We are either extremely public and visible, or completely detached and isolated. However, we are rarely exposing ourselves entirely – we can use a type of mesh or façade that prevents us from being completely seen and enables us to conceal certain aspects of ourselves. Certain factors affect individual behavior and add to our distinctive behavioral traits. These distinctive traits, in turn, make us communicate and express ourselves in unique ways.

This project intended to comment on our constantly changing world – the rapid transformation of technology resulting in our ongoing search for new ways to express ourselves and communicate with one another. I used and manipulated a mixture of digital and analogue film formats. I conducted a series of tests, where I experimented and played with new and traditional technical equipment to facilitate the abstraction of the images and portraits. This included the use of different cameras such as a Bolex or iPhone; the employment of unusual light sources; an obstruction to the camera's aperture and viewer; the use of filters and superimpositions; the interplay of movements between the subject and camera; and an exploration of different frame rates and capturing speeds.

The project changed further, after taking a hiatus from the MFA program in the Fall 2013, Winter 2014 and Fall 2014 terms, when I concentrated on my MBA program. During this time away, I was able to re-evaluate and reconfigure my project. I realized that instead of concentrating on how much technology affects human behavior, I was more interested in exploring human gestures and their uniqueness. I wanted my films to explore when and how these distinctive physical movements are developed, when are they exposed and visible, and when are they hidden. In preparation for the October 2014 symposium, I reflected on my previous works and concluded that I was more interested in exploring and capturing human gestures that display certain behaviors, rather than human behavior per se.

Gestures are considered to be more distinctive and expressive than other body movements, as they tend to have a far greater association with speech and language. Whilst the rest of the body

indicates a more general emotional state, gestures can have specific linguistic content (Straker). My interest in and focus on gestures is evident in my previous films, and I knew that I wanted to continue to explore these specific movements by using formal techniques to draw attention to them.

In my film *Exposed* (2010), I explore the brief moments of intimacy and spontaneity shared between a filmmaker and seven female subjects. I struggled to edit this film, and was only able to do so when Daichi Saito suggested I look carefully for similarities and differences between the movements of the women involved in the images. I used rapid edits, repetition, and a combination of still and moving images to emphasize their gestures. I challenged my audience to notice aspects within the image that may have otherwise been missed. The seven women in *Exposed*, all friends of mine, are getting ready in front of a mirror and we can see the similarities and differences between their gestures as the film evolves. It was really interesting to witness and capture their reactions to me filming them and to sense, through their spontaneous gestures, how comfortable or uncomfortable they were in front of the camera. As I believe that cameras are very powerful and can intimidate or unsettle people, *Exposed* challenged me, the filmmaker, to make my subjects, my friends, as relaxed as possible, in order to generate the most genuine gestures. The film demonstrates how I am encouraging them without words to trust me - the filmmaker, and this process was something I found really interesting and wanted to continue to explore. *Exposed* marked the beginning of my exploration into using film to capture and expose everyday moments and gestures between people.

My other films including *Connecting Through the Distance*, which I made in 2012 during my first year in the MFA program, continued to explore these expressive moments. By focusing on and transforming the formal properties of time within cinema, such as slow-motion and repetition, *Connecting Through the Distance* examines and emphasizes these subtle, often overlooked elements within the film frame.

I spent the summers of 2013 and 2014 filming and collecting footage. I conducted multiple tests where I experimented with new cameras, treatments to the film, and different cinematography and montage techniques. In preparation for our MFA Symposium in October 2014, I reviewed all my footage and identified those images that were most representative and pertinent to my project.

## **Evolution of Part One**

During the Winter Holiday break in December 2013, I found ten rolls of Standard 8mm Kodachrome film footage in my basement. My mother knew we had this footage, as my maternal grandfather Robert, in the mid/late 1950s and early 1960s, filmed it. My father knew we needed to get it digitally transferred before the film became too fragile to view, so I took it back to Toronto where I got it transferred into a digital format. The footage was amazing and seeing the images for the first time was very special and emotional. My sister and I never met my maternal grandparents as they had passed away before we were born. We had heard how wonderful and loving they were, and these images gave me a remarkable and touching glimpse into their lives.

Similar to many other home movies, my grandfather filmed moments of my grandmother, my aunt and my mother spending time together at home and on holiday through their childhood years. Some of the footage was captured just days and weeks after my mother was born, and others at different times up to when she was about five years old. What really captivated my interest in these images was how my mother's and aunt's gestures and actions were the same way then, as they are today. It sparked my curiosity and made me question when do we develop our gestures, how do they evolve over time, and are they shared between family members?

You have more than likely heard someone say to you “you look so much like your father,” or “like your mother.” You have also probably heard someone say, “that is something your father / mother / sister / brother / grandfather / grandmother / etc. would do.” I became interested in exploring gestures that are shared between family members in more depth. I also wanted to observe whether these traits begin in childhood and remain a lasting part of who we are throughout our lifetime. One of my initial questions was “does my mother smile the same way now, as she did when she was two years old?”

I went on a hunt to find more family home movies of my sister and I growing up. My aunt had many home movies from the 1990s to early 2000's. The footage showed family moments both of my first cousins when they were young, and also from when our two families would meet for regular family vacations together. The footage was filmed on an old videotape camera and it had significant additional qualities to the 8mm footage – it had sound and duration. Watching all this footage satisfied many of my questions regarding gestures. The video recorder changed how we as children interacted with the camera, and it also affected how my aunt used the camera. Much

of the time we used language more than actions to describe what was happening, and we spoke directly to the camera, whereas with the 8mm footage it was more a smile, a wave or a jump that communicated an emotion. The videotape camera also captured and documented much more, as it used a magnetic tape which had a longer recording capability than the standard 3-minute 8mm film roll. This allowed my aunt to film us for more extended periods of time before the tape or batteries would run out.

There were many humorous and several poignant moments in this footage. One funny example is where my sister explains to my aunt what a “wedgie” is and uses me as her model. A moving moment is at my cousin’s bar mitzvah, when a couple of speeches mentioned how my deceased grandparents would have so loved to have been there to celebrate with us all.

I had so much historical footage to work with, between the videotape footage and my grandfather’s Kodachrome film, but was lacking footage from the present day. In November 2014, there was a family reunion of all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in my great grandparents and grandmother’s hometown of Göttingen, Germany. Sixteen of us from Europe, the Middle East, South Africa and North America, met for a commemoration service in memory of my great grandparents, Max and Gertrud Hahn, who were persecuted by the Nazis and perished in a concentration camp between 1941 and 1942. I used this opportunity to both reflect on my family’s history, and film several family members.

This first film aimed to include and combine all these different types of footage collected over six decades. It intended to focus on gestures that are shared between family members, and explore their origin and lifetime evolution.

## **Evolution of Part Two**

With the discovery of all this family footage, I wanted to continue my exploration of the genesis and development of gestural behavioral. How and when do we begin to develop our own unique style of conscious and unconscious communication? How do these movements and/or expressions change over time?

I spent a good deal of time in Montreal during the summers of 2013 and 2014. My cousin's family and a close friend of mine live there, and I would visit for weeks at a time. In the spirit of my cinematic explorations, I always carried a camera on me to capture any spontaneous moments that sparked my interest. One beautiful summer's evening, as the sun was setting at my cousin's home, their five-year-old daughter Naomi and I were playing outside. Naomi wanted to show me something and I decided to film her on my iPhone. I had filmed Naomi in the past and was always struck by her authenticity and lack of inhibition. What followed was twenty-five minutes of her dancing and singing to a song from Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee's *Frozen* (2013). She became "Elsa and Anna" from that movie, and she was so entranced, expressive and present in that moment, that I knew I had captured something very special – her spontaneity. I planned to film her singing again. Would she present herself in the same way or what might have subtly changed with the passage of time?

It can be really rewarding to capture these beautiful unplanned moments on film. One of the first things I learned in film school was to keep the camera rolling if a scene is interrupted by something unplanned or unexpected, as these unique and spontaneous moments can bring an enriching and creative element to a story. Home movies have always had the ability to capture these moments, and now with cameras on almost every hand-held device, they can now be easily captured and distributed online or through social media.

### **Evolution of Part Three**

In late May 2014, I went to the International Film and Television School in San Antonio de Los Banos, Cuba, for two weeks with my supervisor Philip Hoffman and colleague Eva Kolcze, to assist in a ‘Process Cinema’ workshop. Throughout the workshop, we encouraged students to let go of the traditional, more static and styled process, and to embrace an alternative, more dynamic process-driven practice. I assisted students in this exercise and helped them make a film that followed this methodology.

I explored superimpositions in Cuba, a formal technique in which I would double expose high-contrast black and white film with a Bolex camera. My Bolex, however, had a broken spring, which in-turn resulted in my loss of complete control of the image results. I could not film the images automatically or consecutively by pressing on the release button. I had to manually hand crank the camera to move the film forward and expose the images, which enabled me to experiment with exposures during the middle of a shot. I had to wind the film forward at a steady 24fps rate, which is quite difficult to do, in order to create a standard or correct exposure. Alternatively, I set the camera at a medium exposure and played with the winding speeds -

speeding-up or slowing-down the footage – to over or under-expose the footage. The broken spring on the Bolex added to my own sense of vulnerability and lack of control. In this way, the camera too almost created its own “gesture and expression” within an unpredictable filming technique.

The results were interesting and quite successful. During the first pass of the stock, I filmed natural or abstract objects such as foliage and trees while walking or moving the camera, and in the second pass of the stock I filmed people’s faces and body movements. I concentrated on capturing people’s gestures not only because I continuously strive to explore these, but also because I needed movement to achieve abstraction. The results generated a creative patterning, which showed faces and body parts almost bleeding or breaking through the image.

It also became a participatory film where I filmed other “subjects” and asked them to film me back. This enabled me to experience a sense of emotional vulnerability that others including myself, can experience when in front of the camera. I believe that by using myself as one of the subjects, it encouraged a deeper sense of trust for all involved. This in turn generated more genuine gestures.

The results reminded me of old digital photographs that I took in 2010, when I had begun to be fascinated in impressionism, abstraction and street graffiti. I had always thought of making a cinematic version of these old photographs, and wanted to use movement, long shutter speeds, small apertures, mesh and color filters, to facilitate the abstraction of the portraits. The photographs were called *Luminous Existence* and were inspired by Brazilian street artists and

European impressionist painters. These led to my inspiration in Cuba to superimpose foliage and faces, and these results created a very unique, almost uncontrolled and organic image. This technique and the resulting images became the foundation of the third part of *Blink*.

Once we returned to Canada, Hoffman generously lent me his Bolex for the rest of the summer, and I continued to film people and their gestures using this superimposition technique.

Occasionally I also filmed people and foliage using my iPhone or DSLR. My idea was to re-photograph these digital images onto film, and create a similar effect using a contact or optical printer. I could also film the digital images off a screen using a computer, television or projected image, and superimpose them that way. For sections of part three, I used the Bolex and some high-con film stock to capture the digital images off a computer screen, then hand-processed the exposed footage and transferred it back to a digitalized format. In this way, the images attained more aesthetic characteristics associated with film rather than those of digital images. I then used blending tools in Final Cut Pro to regenerate a similar superimposed effect to the original version.

### **Evolution of Three Parts into One Film**

As noted, after the summers of 2013 and 2014, and almost a full academic year away from the MFA program to focus on my MBA, I was able to re-evaluate *Blink*. When I was preparing for the MFA program's October 2014 symposium, I reflected on all the footage I had collected, and felt that these three sections were aesthetically and conceptually the strongest. Though each part has a different visual aesthetic, the film comes together because it uses distinctive formal

techniques to highlight and emphasize gestures that may have otherwise been missed. The film takes us on a journey through time, where each part signifies a different chronological phase. The first part represents history both in family and cinema; the second suggests spontaneity in childhood and photography; and the third part reflects on the relationship of self and film. Each part of this film represents a different developmental point in my personal and creative growth.

I struggled to edit the first part as there was so much footage and I found myself losing my direction. It was only when Philip Hoffman and I discussed one of my test edits that he suggested I focus solely on the 8mm footage. I had been attempting to include too many aspects from too many generations in this first section, with footage that was too diverse in its texture and treatment. The advice I received was to focus on one generation only, using the 8mm footage, as not only is the footage beautiful but it also reflects a particular historical time period. The three parts when placed together in one film, explore and reflect on gestures of different family members and generations over six decades within diverse and evolving photographic eras.

## Structure and Non-Narrative Form

*Blink* is a film divided into three parts, and each explores a different type of cinematic non-narrative form. The film as a whole is arranged in a more categorical form, while the images within each part are organized in an abstract and associational form. Bordwell terms categorical form as “a type of filmic organization in which the parts treat distinct subsets of a topic” using the example of “a film about the United States might be organized into 50 parts, each devoted to a state” (Bordwell 476). He describes associational form as “a type of organization in which the films’ parts are juxtaposed to suggest similarities, contrasts, concepts, emotions and expressive qualities,” and abstract form as “a type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to one another through repetition and variation of such visual qualities as shape, color, rhythm, and direction of movement” (Bordwell 477). Categorical, associational, abstract and rhetoric forms are more closely linked to experimental cinema because they remain detached from the narrative form. Narrative form is “a type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to one another through a series of casually related events taking place in time and space”, and usually involves storytelling or plot elements that are characteristic of a Hollywood film (Bordwell 480). Although non-narrative film tends to avoid certain traits of the narrative film, it still retains a number of narrative characteristics.

Bordwell states that style is “the repeated and salient uses of film techniques characteristic of a single film or group of films” (Bordwell 481). Each section explores certain gestures in an abstract and/or associational structure by using formal techniques to highlight and focus on the movement or position of a body part such as a hand, arm, body, head, or face that is expressive of an idea, opinion, or emotion. The first part uses repetition of still and moving images or it

exposes the hidden and subtle moments of intimacy and spontaneity that occur within a family, in childhood, and in the self.

As noted, *Blink* is made up of three parts, which I have formally categorized into family, childhood and self. The film is organized in chronological order by photographic and generational history. I decided to structure the film in this particular order as it provided a more linear and logical structure to the work. Each section then explores certain gestures that are expressive of an idea, opinion, or emotion in an abstract and/or associational structure, by using formal techniques to highlight and focus on the movement or position of a body part such as a hand, arm, body, head, or face.

I was also aware and influenced by the structure of Japanese Haiku poetry, in which poems typically consist of three lines with the first and last having five syllables, and the second having seven. Haiku poems usually use sensory language to capture a feeling or image. They tend to be inspired by an element of nature, a moment of beauty, or another poignant experience. Philip Hoffman shared his experience with making visual Haiku's with his haiku-inspired film *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion* (1984). He encouraged us to create cinematic interpretations of the literary form of Haiku poetry. My film, *Exchange of the Beasts* (2012) is a short reflective film on Muhammad Ali and was inspired by a Tomislav Bilosnic Haiku Poem. The three parts in *Blink* alludes to my experience with creating visual Haiku's and structuring films in a Haiku form.

The first part, “family,” reflects on my mother, aunt and grandparents during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. I use a frame-by-frame flicker-type effect that at various points pauses momentarily to give a short succession of moving images. Through this, I create a rhythm that makes the audience focus on the gestures of my family members, some which are shared between them, and others that are unique to the individual person. My grandfather used a 8mm camera, which at that time, was one of the few movie-camera devices available for home use. These standard 8mm cameras were initially released during the early 1930’s, and made with the intention of filming home movies or creating amateur films. Their popularity increased after the post-war period, perhaps suggesting the importance of family time and the desire to preserve memory.

Presently, digital formats and especially smartphones are the most common photographic devices used to capture home video and everyday life footage. A smartphone has the capability of impromptu video filming and photography recording. This immediate digital format is represented in the second part, “childhood,” where I spontaneously use my smartphone to capture Naomi dancing freely. In order to draw the viewer’s attention to her expressive gestures, I use slow motion to the point where at times, the footage seems to stand still. The decelerated images become more mechanical because when significantly slowed down, they create a jerky, rough, almost machinelike movement, which contradicts Naomi’s naturally smooth movements. Perhaps this suggests a point in the young girl’s development, where her free flowing spirit is rubbing up against difficulties of entering the world of an adolescent.

The third part, the “self,” combines both analogue and digital formats. It uses 16mm footage, with smartphone and DSLR imagery, to reflect on past and present methods of filmmaking. It

explores how these formats and styles of filming have influenced our gestures, and plays with a future that will ideally contain both. It uses the self as a symbol to reflect on personal and creative growth at a time when technology has driven change. It uses superimpositions and layering of images to highlight how technology can hide, expose or manipulate individuality, creativity and other characteristics of personal identity - all of which affect relationships.

## Image

Each part of *Blink* incorporates a distinctive visual aesthetic in order to evoke different meaning, and uniquely highlight gestures. The first part is comprised of found footage that was originally photographed on Kodachrome film stock; the second part uses iPhone digital photography, and the third part uses a combination of 16mm black and white high-con film stock and digital cameras. The first part is the most colorful - embracing every color and shade in the spectrum. The second part contains more muted colors, comprising of dark and light reds, oranges, purples and blues, as well as shades of black, white and grey. The third part is high-contrast black and white imagery, with a lightly added hue of orange. I treated the images in divergent ways to emphasize the tone and ambiance associated with each part.

As previously noted, I had located the film for the first part of *Blink* in the basement of our family home, and it became evident that some of the rolls and cans of film had already begun to decay and change form with the passage of time. This included broken sprocket holes, molding frames and shrunken film stock. The footage received a full frame-by-frame film transfer to a digital format, which ensured the images would be preserved. When I first played-back the footage, I became quite emotional, not only because of the beautiful quality of the images, but also because the images had captured moments that were so pure, significant and sentimental. My mother, aunt and grandparents are seen on holiday in America, Europe and at their home near London, England. Situations or activities are frequently repeated, and many images featured my family near some form of water - swimming, boating or running into it. Even though the activities occur in different places and at different times, my family's gestures remain

remarkably similar in each situation. I found this fascinating and concentrated on displaying this in the edit of this part.

The exquisite quality of the Kodachrome images in their original state, even the decayed parts, justified leaving the image properties untouched. The imagery was strong and vivacious enough that it did not require much treatment. I slightly boosted the saturation and contrast levels in post-production to recover some of the image properties, such as its color and light density, which may have faded or diminished over the past 55-60 years.

Kodachrome is a color-reversal film stock that is renowned for its remarkable archival properties, natural dense color and ultra-fine rendering of details. In the majority of the footage, the blacks are black and the whites are white. The shades, along with the darkness and brightness of the imagery, help to ground the image. Visually, I think all the colors and shades are vibrant in their own right, with red being the most striking color and visible in several items in the footage. I consciously used reds, with darker and brighter frames, as a tool to repeatedly draw the viewer's attention to the image. Along with the flicker-effect edit, the reds, blacks and whites help to create a visual rhythm (in conjunction with the other colors) where the eye seems to be naturally drawn to its punctuation marks. Blues, greens, and yellows, though softer or gentler on the eye, are also key vibrant colors that become additional visual target points and help to create a pulsating effect. I recognize the strength of these aesthetical elements, and use their distinctive properties, as well as their size and shape to assist in emphasizing gestures within the frame.

The second part of *Blink* was filmed at dusk, using an iPhone camera. Naomi wanted to show me

her song and dance impressions of the characters Elsa and Anna from the Walt Disney movie *Frozen* (2013). The colors of the setting sun created a warm and serene ambiance. Since Naomi was between the sun and I, her figure was naturally backlit and silhouetted as she pranced around the garden and boardwalk. There was a strong wind, which created additional movement in the grass, water and leaves, as well as on her clothes and in her hair. My cousins live along the St Lawrence River in Montreal, and as the sun was setting, the light's reflection shimmered across the waves. Naomi frequently repeated her movements, and ran back and forth from the grass to the dock where she would jump, spin and/or pause. In her attempt to re-enact Elsa and Anna, she also displayed her own natural spontaneous gestures.

The iPhone footage is recorded into a highly compressed file, which then needs to be encoded into a more usable editing format. Though the file retains the images in a high quality codec, the quality of the images diminishes when applying post-production effects. Similar to parts of Norman McLaren's *Pas de Deux* (1968), I slowed down the images to accentuate Naomi's gestures. This causes the images to become rough, and bumpy, sometimes transforming her limbs into irregular or pixelated shapes. I also enhanced the original color hues of the sunset by applying color filters and compositing effects to the images. As a result, the images become darker, and more pixelated, artificially colored, and stylized. These aesthetics present the second part of the film in a more dream-like or memory-like tone. This is meaningful, as this part of the film focuses on spontaneous gestures that occur during childhood, and it is only as we mature that we tend to become more consciously aware of them.

As discussed, the third part consists of both analogue and digital formats, and was filmed at different times and places. The digital imagery was first filmed during the summer at my home in Vancouver, British Columbia, and features my mother, father, sister and I. Knowing I was going to intercut between them, I filmed my parents separately on the back deck, while I repeatedly moved in a semi-circle around them. My father then filmed me in the same semi-circle before I filmed him again. Large hedge trees line the deck, and at times, the sun would stream through the treetops. The automatic exposure on the camera would not react and compensate quickly enough, and the resulting image consisted of a flared sun streak. I filmed these images with an iPhone camera and once I had returned to Toronto, I re-photographed them off a computer screen onto 16mm high contrast black and white stock using a Bolex camera.

The analogue imagery was filmed in Vancouver, Cuba, Toronto and Montreal, and features my parents, my sister, a friend and myself. As stated in the Evolution of *Blink*, I explored superimpositions where I would double expose high-contrast black and white film with a Bolex camera that had a broken spring. The resulting exposures, though abnormal, created fluctuating image consistencies that occurred during a shot. I decided to film foliage during the first pass of the stock, and people's gestures and movements in the second pass. The results generated an abstract almost x-rayed patterning, which showed faces and body parts almost ripping through the image.

I hand-processed all the exposed high-contrast film, including the re-photographed images. This created an additional layer and texture to the film that evokes an artisanal aesthetical affect. Additional dirt, scratches or water droplets may appear on the image because of this hand-

processing technique. This practice accentuates the material qualities of film, and demonstrates how the photographic image can be easily manipulated using chemical or physical means.

I transferred the film to a high quality uncompressed digital format. The original analogue footage included in the third part, required very little color-corrective changes. I had boosted the blacks, whites and mid-tones, and increased the contrast. I also color corrected the formerly digital footage as it needed additional attention, not only because there were no superimpositions, but also because the texture was different from the analogue imagery. I ended up blending the images together, for example ones of foliage filmed in Cuba with ones of my parents and I in Vancouver. Even though the gestures and movements tend to blend more with the organic superimpositions than with the computerized ones, the results create a similar patterned visual aesthetic to those conducted in camera. They are quite inconspicuous and hidden, which plays with the notion of concealed or unnoticed gestures. To create a more visually synthesized and cohesive film with parts one and two, I tinted the brightest highlights in a yellowy orange hue that adds an additional visual texture to the image, and distantly echoes the Kodachrome reds of the home movies in part one.

## **Edit**

Bordwell discusses the importance of editing and how it significantly contributes to a film's organization and its effects on viewers. He describes how the role of editing, within an entire film's stylistic system, can alter and shape an audience's experience, even if they are not aware of it (Bordwell 249). He claims there are four dimensions of film editing: graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal relations. Graphic and rhythmic relationships are present in the edit of any film that cuts between two shots, whereas spatial and temporal relations may be irrelevant in the edit of formally abstract films. Graphic relations focus on the patterns of image properties, such as its shapes, movements, depths, volumes and darkness or brightness - independent of the shots' relationship to the time and space of the story (Bordwell 251). Rhythmic associations describe when the filmmaker controls the length of the shots in relation to each other, and these can change the potential rhythm of the film (Bordwell 257). Spatial associations enable the filmmaker to relate any two shots in space through development, similarities and/or differences (Bordwell 257). Bordwell uses crosscutting as an example of a spatial association between two shots. Temporal editing is when the relations between shots function to control time. This type of editing can cue the viewer to construct story time, through the ordering, frequency and duration of shots. They can create flashbacks or flash-forwards, follow or alter continuity (discontinuity), and shorten or extend time. Throughout *Blink*, I utilize these four editing dimensions and play with continuity as I embrace the abstract form.

The edit, for me, is the most difficult yet enjoyable part of the process. I tend to edit to no sound, and instead listen to music to help create a rhythm that I can visualize. *Blink* is a heavily edited

film, in which each part utilizes a distinctive formal technique to help create their own unique rhythm and draw attention to the subject's gestures.

The first part of *Blink* was the most challenging to edit. At first I had been trying to combine the Kodachrome with the videotape and digital footage, and include too many aspects from diverse footage. As noted, only when Phil and I discussed one of my test edits and he suggested that I focus solely on the 8mm footage, did the edit begin to take shape.

I had previously watched *Chimera* (1995), a 15-minute film that Philip Hoffman had filmed while travelling in Leningrad, London, Egypt, Helsinki, Sydney and Uluru between 1989-1992. The film is made up entirely of a series of succeeding shots where only a few frames are exposed at a time, while he zoomed in or moved the camera forward. The technique creates an extremely rhythmic film, one that demonstrates how a person may see or hear while travelling – and as Christopher Rohde wrote “represents the experience of simply being where [Hoffman] was at the given moment in space and time, in the fleeting moment of impression” (Rohde). *Chimera* became a huge inspiration for the edit of part one because Hoffman used a single aesthetic technique to construct a film, and incorporated images captured in many different places featuring diverse subjects. I borrowed this idea, in the editing, but made each of the three parts more distinct, each part having its own cinematic form.

I had also recently watched Richard Kerr's *Morning ... Came a Day Early* (2015), a film made entirely from 35mm archival found footage. The film opens on a series of images of trees in a flicker-type-effect technique, and proceeds onto sections of longer shots until the film ends.

One of my test edits opened with a flicker style effect, in which medium-sized still images of my mother, aunt or grandparents, either one or two frames in duration, would quickly and repetitively switch back and forth between them. I altered the ordering of the still images, and occasionally slightly adjusted which frame I used from the original footage, for example my aunt looking off-screen left, became her looking directly at the camera. The flicker-effect would then pause momentarily for a short succession of moving images to show a gesture being presented or completed. Hoffman had just returned from a retrospective of his work in Helsinki, where he spoke of the Seppo Ranvall's film *Vapautemme Hinta (The Price of our Liberty)* that was approximately 10-minutes in length, made up entirely of single frame images of Finnish people killed while fighting in World War One. We discussed how, over the course of the film, the soldiers faces began to meld together and look alike. This suggested that a flicker-type effect could potentially help display the gestural similarities (and differences) between my family members. I continued to use the flicker effect technique and eventually, this pattern repeated and ultimately became the editing configuration of part one.

The edit of this first part was very detailed and meticulous. It focuses heavily on the similarities and differences between the image properties including their colors, shades, shapes, movements and size of subjects within the frame. I would change the ordering of the still images, and consistently compare the image's dimensions to help create a flicker-effect, and display resemblances or variances between the gestures of family members. Through this, I created a rhythm that forces the audience to focus on the unique and shared gestures of my family members.

On some occasions the still images are intended to match each other, such as in size, color, or depiction, and at other times they are not. The flicker becomes more intense when the disparity between the images becomes greater, and the length of the frame is shortened to one frame. The flicker appears to be most extreme or powerful when the colors and brightness between two images differs. This can be seen when my aunt walks towards the camera with her arm sticking out wanting to show us something - the images before alternate from dark green, to mid browns, to bright yellow, and the flicker appears to strengthen. Conversely, the flicker effect weakens when the images are more alike and the duration of the frame is lengthened. In this first part, the flicker is quite muted when there are images of the trees along the water, to the boat and then to my grandmother swimming. The weakest flicker segment is when the images are about six-frames in duration and whitened from the mist of the waterfalls. This section acts almost as a visible break for audiences.

Sometimes the images were easier to perceive, while at other times they were more abrupt. This was dependent on the intensity of the flicker, which I would either intentionally increase or diminish. It became fascinating to observe how visual similarities and contrasts between the image properties can generate different optical effects, and how the eye seems to adjust to these rapid images.

I wanted to emphasize certain gestures and moments that I found particularly exquisite and unique. I loved the images of my family when they are happy or expressing childish behavior. Some of their most genuine expressions however are, for example, their minute movements

when they acknowledge the camera. The last shot of my grandmother holding my mother when she is just a few days old, is one of the most beautiful images I have ever seen. I never met my grandparents on my mother's side, and so this footage is especially significant to me.

Overall, the most frequent images and gestures, both still and moving, are when my grandparents, mother and/or aunt are looking directly at the camera; when they turn their head to the camera, and when they turn away from the camera. The gesture of gazing at, into, and away from the camera is highlighted in part one. It is as if my family was curious and inherently wanting to connect with the camera to create some sort of reaction, and then continue on with what they were previously doing. This type of interaction reoccurs in parts two and three.

The second part of *Blink* primarily utilizes the technique of slow motion to highlight Naomi's gestures, and largely contrasts the first part in its aesthetic style and approach. As noted, Norman McLaren's *Pas de Deux* (1968) was an inspiration for the tone of this part, especially how it incorporated a generally gentler pace. I also recognized that this would be the suitable way to edit and treat this type of imagery.

As Howard Suber describes, there is quality to "slow motion that creates a sense of intimacy by enabling us to see more clearly the relationship between time and space and between people or objects and as they move within them" (Bordwell 221). I wanted to slow down the footage to let audiences have enough time to truly feel the power and attentiveness of Naomi as she acted and danced out the scenes from *Frozen*. The additional time allows viewers to see all the elements within the film frame that may have otherwise been missed. This includes the movement of her

hair or dress, the rippling of the river's waves, the sun peaking over the hedges, and the pixilation of the images. With the footage slowed down, we can see all the aspects of the image as well as Naomi's expressive gestures.

Bordwell describes how "today, slow-motion footage often functions to suggest that the action takes place in a dream or fantasy, to express a lyrical quality, or to convey enormous power" (Bordwell 168). He uses the example of a martial-arts film, where normally the action would take place at a relatively fast pace. However, when the images are slowed down, audiences are able to see the precision of the martial artist's actions. This is similar to when Naomi was dancing. Her gestures and actions were so quick that it was only when the images were slowed down that I was I able to see her attentiveness and interpretations. Bordwell continues to say how "slow-motion is increasingly used for emphasis, becoming a way to dwell on a moment of spectacle or high drama. [It's used] to enhance expressive effects, [especially as] filmmakers can change the speed of motion during a shot. Often this change of speed helps to create special effects" (Bordwell 168). I changed the speeds of the slow motion several times during the edit of the second part, often several times in the same shot. This technique gives the impression of Naomi being suspended in space. Towards the end of this part, I let the footage run at its authentic speed to let viewers see the dynamics of her gestures in real time and help to emphasize a more climactic point.

Naomi looks at and gazes into the camera multiple times. She continuously engages with the camera, even when she is dancing or running around, the camera becomes a focal point and target for her gestures. Even though her face is almost blackened out by shadows, I slowed down

the footage at these moments to allow viewers to confront her as she gazes into the camera. I believe that this helps to bring the spectators into the image and into the space of representation.

I begin the second part with a fade-in from black to abstract colors that mimic the clouds of the sunset. This was an ideal transition from the first part to the second part as it emphasizes the end of a section and the soft beginning of the next. It then cuts to black and slowly fades-in, following a red dot as it slowly moves across the frame, to an image of Naomi standing on a dock where her arm slowly moves up her side, while her head turns to face the camera and then motions for us to come closer, before it cuts to black again. I knew I wanted this image to begin the second part because it is the first time we see her and I like how she gestures and invites us to participate in the section with her. I use blacks to separate the shots, as not only do they help create an overall rhythm and tone, they also suggest the passage and discontinuity of time – we really do not know how long Naomi was dancing for. They also imitate the idea of coming in and out of consciousness, as the whole tone of this second part evokes a memory or dream-like state.

The challenging part for me was the ordering of the images. I knew how I wanted to begin, yet I had not found a way for it to end. This was opposite to the first and third parts. With the edit of the first part I could visually feel the rhythm, and work with the images in a consecutive order until the last shot, which I knew would be on my grandmother and mother. For the third part, I knew I wanted to start and end, and had an idea for working up to a climactic part. However for the second part, there was no obvious climactic moment until Phil pointed out a sequence where Naomi runs around a bend and becomes almost fully visible. This is a section that I placed

towards the end, where Naomi is running away from the camera, and her orange silhouette is noticeable, she then turns around to face and look at the camera and her body becomes almost completely visible. We finish the second part where it began, with Naomi walking back out to the same point to when we first saw her.

The edit of the third part of *Blink* utilizes super-impositions to both hide and expose gestures. Bordwell describes how these superimpositions provide a way to convey dreams, visions or memories, and “typically these mental images are shown against a close view of a face” (Bordwell 174).

Philippe Leonard’s *Perceptual Subjectivity* (2009) really inspired the edit of this section. His film is an investigation of the structural formation of thoughts, where images fleet in and out of the frame as he switches between the positive and negative imagery of high-contrast black and white film.

It was the most organic of the three parts, meaning that I left larger sections of the footage untouched and intact because there was a natural beautiful texture and aesthetic that occurred during the filming. Many of the resulting images, such as the sight of a face outlined by a leaf, was created in-camera and not in post-production. There was also this rhythm to the original footage caused by my hand cranking of the Bolex that resulted in a jittery, and unstable camera movement that, even if I attempted to replicate (which would have taken forever), it still would not have created the same pulse or tempo.

The tone is quite different from the other two parts with its sporadic high-contrast black and white images and fragments of faces that oscillate between appearing and disappearing. This brings a sense of mystery, anxiety or tension, which differs from the preceding sections. It also plays with both the positive and negative imagery, and incorporates a great deal of repetition, suggesting a recurring event or gesture.

This was the section I began to edit first, as I had a clear idea of how I wanted to structure, order and present the footage. I wanted to start with images that disappear as quickly as they appear, to demonstrate how they almost crack or break through the black frame or theatre screen; they can not remain contained in the mind any longer. I then strived to convey the feeling of walking into our memory, psyche or ego; we have to push through the surface to get to the inner circle of intense pure energy and activity. Therefore, the images begin to get more intense and appear on the screen for longer. Along this journey, I believe we then encounter fragments of different memories, ideas or bits of knowledge that have impacted our behavior and essentially our actions and gestures. Thus, images of people and various faces begin to emerge. Finally, we reach the inner circle of our personality, psyche and ego, the part that can have the most impact on our gestures. I assume this would also show our most genuine behaviors. This is depicted towards the end of the section three, at the most climactic point where the imagery contains many faces and textures until it almost clears, and shows the portraits without any superimpositions overlapping them. After this, we leave this part of the psyche and retract back to the surface, passing through past memories.

## Music

My father, Schaun Tozer, composed the music for *Blink*. I sent him a fine cut edit of *Blink*, along with the synced sound from the original footage, which contained voices of my family and I, Naomi, and other background sound. I then described the objectives of the film and the kind of music I envisioned. Naturally, Tozer had his own ideas as he was inspired by the images, and we discussed the concepts before he started to work on the composition.

The music helps to emphasize and de-emphasize the gestures throughout *Blink*. Tozer played with several compositional techniques, such as manipulating densities, rhythms, tempos, instruments, sounds, voices and spatial relationships, to create a complex, multifaceted score. The film opens with a rapid clicking sound that references the sounds of an old film projector. This repeats rhythmically and sonically throughout the whole of the first part, punctuated by dynamic contrasts. This references the historical time period of the images in part one, when home movies were screened on portable projectors during the 1950's and 1960's. This same rhythmic projector sound returns in the third part of *Blink*, where the superimpositions create a heavily textured image. This recapitulation not only helps to unite *Blink* as a whole, it also references the return in use, manipulation and projection of the analogue image.

The concept behind the use of a Johann Sebastian Bach piano style piece appearing about halfway through part one, refers to the amateur musicians in my family. My grandfather, who is the primary cinematographer for the images in part one, was also an amateur cellist and played in a string quartet. His brother Stefan, my great Uncle, played the viola, and when he visited from Brazil, J.S. Bach was one of the classical composers that they would listen to, and play, together.

The piano piece is structured in the style of Bach and used to signify this tradition within my family.

Although we hear echoed phrases of the piano early on, we hear it more prominently when it comes in full force with the image of my mother pushing the cart. The piano is used to emphasize her gestures of acknowledgement and curiosity towards the camera. The piano also helps to highlight my family's gestures, and this can also be observed when my mother is on the dock and turns her head to smile; when my aunt is in the red water-tube and turns her head to look at the camera; or in the last shot when my grandmother's back is towards the camera, holding my mother as she turns around.

The piano, in conjunction with the rhythmic projector sound and the other layers of music, including the fluttering wind and rattling toys, sensitively compliment the edited images. The tempo of the music is often in sync with the visual rhythm created by the edit. Sometimes a beat or note produced by the piano or projector sound, matches the cut of the image, and at other times the music drifts away. This does not detract from the visual beat caused by the images; instead it takes it to another level.

Part one finishes with a loud punctuated sound. This was caused by chance procedures that Tozer was incorporating into the arrangement. He was using aleatoric techniques, or chance events, in which some elements of the composition are left to occur randomly. Once Tozer began to experiment with these techniques, he could see how these punctuated notes could help to accentuate a gesture or movement. Consequently, he edited some of the elements in part one to

work in-sync with the images, with people's movements, and in the concluding shot. Tozer continues to use aleatoric procedures throughout *Blink*, sometimes in-sync and sometimes intentionally out-of-sync.

Although we hear characteristics of the second part of the film in the first, the transitions between parts is completed when Naomi's voice says "um" at a pitch that is lower than her normal voice. The music in the second part primarily consists of long reverberations and echoes, made from various snippets of sound, music and voice. Tozer incorporated the notion of sound moving through space in order to strengthen the slowed down images of Naomi dancing. Sometimes we can hear what Naomi is saying, and at other times she is inaudible. This helps to create a dreamlike or memory-like ambience.

The accordion and guitar are prominently featured, where they morph in and out of frequency, which parallels the staggered, jerky and smooth movements in the images. This is a prime example of how Tozer applied Doppler effects as a feature in the mix process. The Doppler effect is the change in frequency and/or pitch. We hear a Doppler effect occur, for example, when a loud vehicle approaches in a tunnel, passes and drives away. The frequency is highest as the car approaches, maintains frequency when it passes by, and lowest when it drives away. We can hear different sounds, including Naomi's voice, audibly move from left to right, and right to left. The Doppler effect sometimes balances the imagery in *Blink*, and this can be observed when Naomi begins to move closer to the camera, pushing her arms up into the sky and back to her side. During these gestures, Naomi moves from the right side of the frame to the left side and back to the right. We can hear different sounds, including Naomi's voice, audibly move from left

to right, and right to left, matching her gesture. The Doppler effect also emphasizes the concept of Naomi and sound being suspended in space.

The beginning of the third part is a reprise of the start of the first part - the ticker tape (projector sound) rhythm - as the third part starts with a similar rapidly edited image. We hear intermittent low-pitched, scratchy bass sounds as the images begin to break through the black frame. As the image becomes more texturized, so does the music, with notes from instruments, voices from people, and sounds from objects becoming more intense. The sounds come and go just as quickly as the images and gestures of people.

The footage and edit of part three also presents the notion of moving from the outer surface of the ego through to its inner circle. With the music score, Tozer recreated the idea of moving through multiple memories, spaces and places. We hear snippets of dialogue, sound and music, sometimes audible and loud, and other times not. When Tozer watched this edit he remembered those times when my cousins, sister and I were playing together and there would be imperceptible words punctuated by an occasional very loud scream or yell. Tozer would glance over and gesture towards us, wondering if we were okay and then resume what he was previously doing. This is evident in the edit of part three, as the textures from the foliage make the faces and gestures almost undetectable. However, every so often a gesture will pierce through the foliage and become visible. At times, Tozer emphasized this with a loud voice or drumbeat sound. The gesture of my father looking towards the children and checking up on them is directly referenced in part three when my sister, my mother, my father or I look towards and into the camera and then back away.

Tozer also gave an example of moving through a large house party, which has several different rooms, with each room filled with people having conversations. When we arrive at the party, there is a general murmur heard. We begin to walk through the house, the sounds are moving sonically around us and we can sometimes hear different bits of conversations at different volumes, pitches, and tempos. This references part 3 and the idea of what we may hear if we were to move around our psyche. We may pass by different memories, knowledge and personality traits, which would be at various volumes and hums until we reach our inner self where our gestures are most present.

Robert Altman was a filmmaker who also strived to replicate natural conversational sounds in his films. During a film, he would hide multiple microphones on multiple actors and cast members, then record them talking over each other (Freer). This produced a denser and more realistic audio experience for audiences. Paul Thomas Anderson is another filmmaker who would record actors and extras talking over each other to create a dense soundtrack. We can hear this occur multiple times during his film *Boogie Nights* (1997). This type of textured, multidimensional composition, which features numerous sounds and voices at different volumes, pitches, frequencies and tempos, was part of the broader gesture that Tozer was interested in achieving in part three, and the entire composition of *Blink*.

## The Gesture of the Gaze

One of the most common gestures that occurs throughout *Blink* is the action of peoples heads turning to look at and gaze into the camera. The gaze helps to close the gap between the spectator and subject and it may alter how the audience perceives the image. This quick action occurs in part one when my grandparents, mother and/or aunt turn their head to the camera, look directly at the camera, and then turn away from the camera. In the second part, this can be seen when Naomi is dancing and moving through the space, she constantly glances at and gazes into the camera. This occurs in the third part, when the subjects are gazing into the camera, and continue to stare at it, following the lens as it moves. It is as if each person is curious and inherently wants to connect with the camera, to create some sort of reaction, and then continue on with what they were previously doing.

I have always been interested in this gaze because it goes against the conventions of traditional Hollywood cinema. In fiction filmmaking, we are taught to have the character look slightly left or right of the camera. When characters speak directly to the camera, it constitutes a “break to the fourth wall,” and can harm the illusion of the story by acknowledging this technology behind the cinema. The fourth wall is a theatrical term for an imaginary wall that exists between actors on stage and the audience (Bell 37). In cinema, this wall would be the camera, frame or screen. Many films and television series have broken this fourth wall convention, such as *Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), *Fight Club* (1999), *Psycho* (1960), *The 400 Blows* (1959), *Home Alone* (1990), *The Office* (2005-2013) and *House of Cards* (2013– ). These films and series are a prime example of how the direct address to the camera can intensify a spectator’s relationship to the story and film.

I like to challenge this fourth wall convention because this type of gaze can help filmmakers engage and connect with the audience in alternative and effective ways. At the end of *Psycho*, for example, when Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) is sitting in the detention center dressed-up as his deceased mother, protesting that the murders were Bates' fault, he looks up into the camera and says, "I hope they are watching... they'll see. They'll see and they'll know, and they'll say, she wouldn't even harm a fly." Here, Alfred Hitchcock uses the gaze to acknowledge the presence of the spectator, and to infuse additional terror, and distress because it feels as if Bates is looking at and asking the audience for support in his/her innocence.

The gesture of the gaze in *Blink* provides a richer and more direct connection between the subject and spectator, and evokes a deeper sense of knowing the subjects within each section.

## Conclusion

As the project comes to a conclusion, did *Blink* answer any of my questions regarding gestures? Although there is an abundance of evidence, the answers are not as clear-cut as I had initially anticipated. Yes, my mother's smile is similar to how she smiles today, and yes, there are similarities shared between family members. *Blink* demonstrates and reinforces how gestures are not set; they are free and expressive. They are influenced by our surroundings, our personality, our relationships, and our genetics. There is a continuity and longevity to gestures, even though some disappear, some remain unchanged and others transform. They are part of what makes us who we are, and they are crucial to the development of our unique self. *Blink* has helped me to discover my appreciation for people's gestures and for my own, and for their ability to radiate an individual's personality, spontaneity and personal characteristics.

The experience of making *Blink* has been invaluable to me. This project has created opportunities for me to grow and evolve as a filmmaker. It has enabled me to explore the complexities of cinema, not only its technical and aesthetical intricacies, but also its personal and communicative qualities. It has also made me reflect on the value and power of simplicity. Gestures are a language, and cinema is too; both are means to communicate ideas or opinions. The process of making *Blink*, similar (though more intense) than many of my other films, has been an extremely rewarding one, one that I am not sure if I am ready for it to end. Certainly, I have had moments when I felt as though the project would never finish, or it was moving too quickly, but these feelings are commonly recognized as being part of the process. It has been a lengthy process; a project that has lasted over three years, and a film that has transformed numerous times. *Blink* has become quite nostalgic for me because it reminds me of all the

experiences that I have had throughout its creation, and it is an acknowledgement of the incidents and people that have directly or indirectly impacted the final film. When I watch *Blink*, I see not only what is most obviously presented on the screen (which is already sentimental), but everything else that is not. I can see the ideas, conversations, moments and images that are not present, and the decisions that have affected and influenced the process of making *Blink*. This is what makes a film of this scope so personal, and this is what makes cinema so special to me.

To return to my original inquiry “what happens in the blink of an eye?” If something happens in the blink, it occurs so fast that it is almost impossible to notice. I recognize how quickly things can change, and I am someone who wants more time to reflect on them. *Blink* expresses this idea as it focuses on exposing gestures that often pass by so quickly that they are unnoticed. Perhaps my own individual cinema is a continuous exploration of these different fleeting moments, elements or actions. Therefore, this project is not necessarily coming to an end, but instead, transitioning and transforming into another inquiry, and becoming the basis of my own personal style of filmmaking.

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Bruce Baillie - *Castro Street* (1966)  
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Francois Miron – *What Ignites Me, Extinguishes Me* (1990)  
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Stan Brakhage - *Lovesong* (2001)  
Roy Cross – *Mirrored Homescapes* (1991)  
Stanley Kubrick - *2001 Space Odyssey* (1968) (Special effects sequence near the end)

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Quotations

“After all, art is experience. Art is emotion, the use of film as I see linked together, and making it have an effect on the audience, is the main function of film, what the art of film can do – it is emotional...It is not the pure manner of the content of film, the story, that matters, but what you do with it, not what but how, how you present the story.”

~ Alfred Hitchcock (Dir. Musilli, 1972)

“A film is – or should be – more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what’s behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later.”

~ Stanley Kubrick (Kagan, 231)