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The Culturator: Film Noir Meets Bike Culture

Daniel Dean

Marshall University, daniel.dean@marshall.edu

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l'étoile

THURSDAY, JUNE 7TH

The Curator: Film Noir Meets Bike Culture

by Juleana Enright

If you've ever wanted to experience the thrills of a real life mystery scenario, put away that Clue game and hop on your bike, because this weekend's Mobile Experiential Cinema event will have you traversing the city in search of enigmatic adventure, and you won't even run the risk of being offed by Mrs. Peacock in the library with a candlestick.

Part of this weekend's *nuit blanche* Northern Spark festival, project Mobile Experiential Cinema invites goers to embark on a rambling, bicycle-mounted, multi-location cinematic experience that blends bike culture with locally-bred film. Created by artists Daniel Dean and Ben Moren, the project launched alongside the inaugural Northern Spark fest last year as an interactive projected film-focused group ride featuring live performance elements and urban exploration embodying all plot twists and theatrical curve balls we've come to expect from the mystery genre.



Mobile Experiential Cinema at Northern Spark '11

We caught up with Mobile Experiential Cinema collaborators Dean and Moren to chat about the project's creation, its noir influences and how they plan to epitomize the classic cinematic experience via an non-traditional platform:

***l'étoile:* How did you team up with the Northern Spark festival?**

Moren: Last year we were working with MAW (themaw.org). They put on a number of projects with the collective's gear for Northern Spark. Both Daniel and myself are members of the MAW collective, so we continue to work with that group. But this year we submitted a proposal directly to the festival, and the rest is history...

l'étoile: Daniel, The Mobile Experiential Cinema experience is a collaboration between you and Ben. Can you explain what the project is and how the idea came about?

Dean: This project came out of interests that Ben and I share and the opportunity to create an immersive experience for Northern Spark festival goers. Among other things, we both have an interest in how people move through urban spaces, how that space is controlled or delineated and how the materiality of space can play a part in the creation of recalling of memories, much like a particular smell can bring up a particular experience in your mind. Mobility is an important part of that idea and biking was a natural step in bringing together performance, video and audience to create a total experience that requires a short but serious commitment by an audience that travels to the story.

l'étoile: What sparked your interest in film and filmmaking and what is your creative background?

Moren: I've always been interested with filmmaking. It all started with making skateboard videos and short home movies when I was really young. It just progressed from there. I went to MCAD for my undergrad where I studied Web + Multimedia Environments (basically, an open media arts degree). There I was able to take filmmaking and screenwriting classes. This project continues to push that interest in new directions. My favorite part about MEC is that it allows us to combine filmmaking, biking, and technology. I'm currently working on my MFA at the UofM in Experimental and Media Arts.

Dean: I was introduced to experimental video in undergrad while supplementing a major in photography. I expanded my studies to include sculpture, net art and social practices. All of these modes of making have contributed to my broad interests in urban studies, phenomenological experiences and public space. I'm currently teaching and taking classes while pursuing an MFA in Experimental & Media Art at the University of Minnesota.

l'étoile: The film parts of the Mobile Experiential Cinema project have a very noir feel, almost reminiscent of Woody Allen's paradoxical Shadow and Fog. What were some of your influences?

Moren: Recently I watched *The Road* directed by John Hillcoat, but I've mainly been watching a lot of video artists. Both older work from people like Paul McCarthy and newer things like "Versions" from Oliver Laric. Part of the "noir" feel is a reflection of the underground spaces we inhabit, and part of it is technical. Projecting black and white is much easier to get a clear picture for many to see. It allows us much more leniency in our location selection.

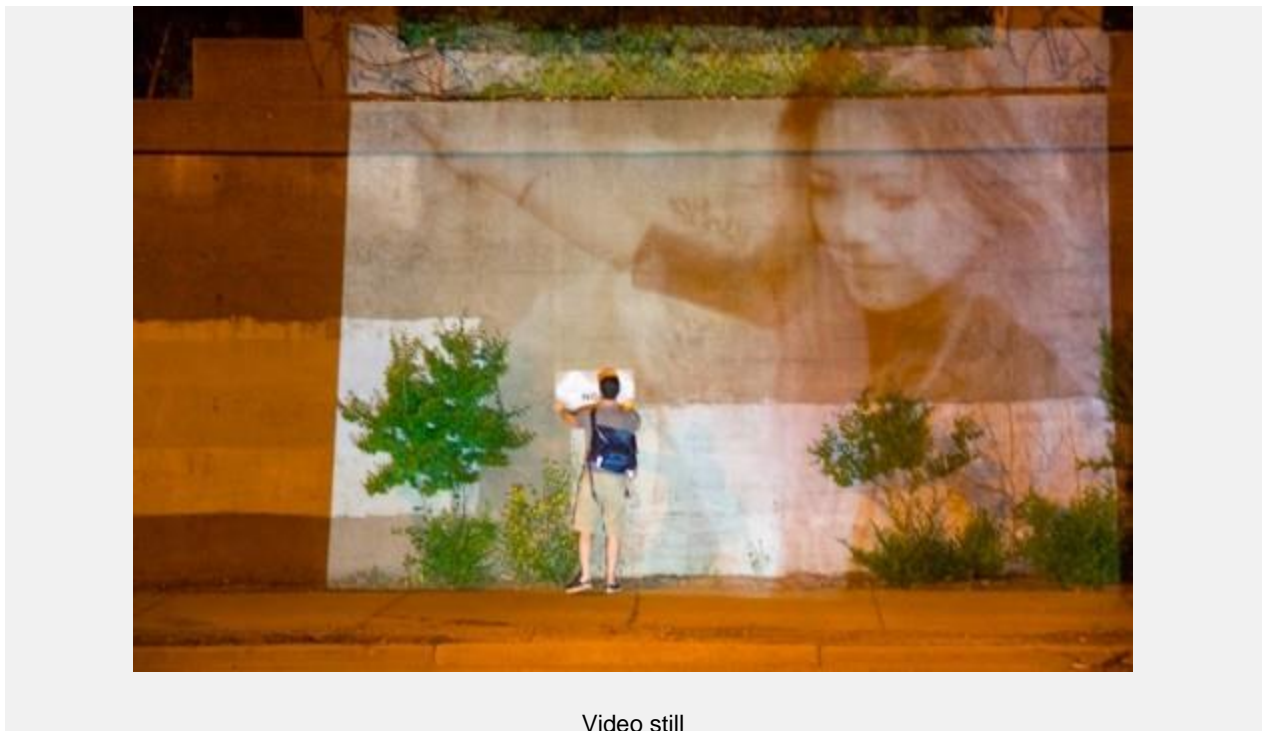


Mobile noir

l'étoile: During last year's Northern Spark, you premiered Second Bridge is Wider, But Not Wide Enough, a short film broken up to five sections screened at five different locations. For Northern Spark 2012, you're back with a new iteration and a new storyline titled The Parade. How was the first film and adventure bike ride received? Can you tell us a little more about this year's film and its director?

Moren: Last year was a great success with a strong attendance. The bike mounted audience was big enough that we were shutting down roads! People seemed to be very excited about the combination of a film with live action elements that they can be fully immersed in while biking around the city. There are so many small details that make the ride magic. Just biking with the sound system while listening to the "soundtrack" between stopping points offers a totally new biking experience.

This year Daniel and I have directed, shot, and edited the entire thing. Don't get me wrong, we have had a lot of help. There are somewhere around 25 people who have contributed both directly and indirectly to *The Parade*. With MEC projects, we usually like to bring in a third person to help us conceptualize the script and story for the film segments. Last year, we had Timmer O' Phelan from the Jeffery Company write and direct with us. This year, writer Keanan Faruq came aboard to work with us on the script.



Video still

l'étoile: Can you give us any hints on the live action elements?

Dean: This is a hard question as the success of the experience for the audience hinges on it being presented as a wholly new experience. Let's just say that the collective heart of the audience will beat quite a bit faster as they become "actors" in the film as witnesses. Content-wise, if the MPAA had a say it might be rated PG-13... just kidding, sorta.

l'étoile: The films are being projected onto the original sites they were filmed via a bicycle mount. What is the set up like? How do you think this DIY mobile aspect aides in producing a cinematic experience for the audience members?

Dean: This aspect of mobility is a central piece of this form, or medium, we're working to expand with this project. Hence the name for this form we have devised – Mobile Experiential Cinema. We outfitted a tricycle with a powerful battery that powers a projector, PA speaker and an iPhone. This year we're adding cellphone interactivity as well. Each iteration of our ongoing projects is widely different, though the basics are the same – urban mobility, film

projection and the conflation of the real and imagined in actual space. Essentially, the audience gets to be in a real place that supports the story instead of simply seeing the filmed set of a film.



Mobile bike projector



l'étoile: The project doubles as a urban dissection of the city. Through abandoned streets and clandestine passageways, bikers will unmask a perhaps hermetical underground side of Minneapolis. Was the point to exaggerate the project's mystery theme?

Moren: We have always been interested in discovering parts of the city most people might never explore on their own. Part of this comes from how we select the locations for the project. After we have a framework for the project's content we go biking on a Situationist Dérive through the city to find locations that seem unique. We come back to our studio, map everything out and plan a route from those locations. I think some of the hermetical underground side also arises because you need a certain type of place to project. Large, light colored walls that are dark are actually not the easiest thing to find. There are way too many lights in this city.

l'étoile: What advice do you have for this weekend's newbie adventure riders?

Dean: Don't forget to bring your cellphone! Stay focused on the experience – this may be a bit challenging when we're all used to being in a quiet, darkened theater. Instead, we offer the streets and alleys of Minneapolis as settings and these can be a bit uncontrollable at times with pedestrians, traffic speeding by – all things that are part of your typical bike ride. Also, we will be giving out 75 bike lights to the first people to arrive at our 10pm showing so get there early. And we start promptly; there are no previews!

For more info, check out the Facebook invite [here](#) and peep videos of last year's ride on the Mobile Experiential Cinema blog.

Photos are from last year's Northern Spark festival by Eric Schleicher and Ben Moren

- Ben Moren
- Daniel Dean
- film noir
- local film
- Mobile Experiential Cinema
- MPLS bike culture
- Northern Spark



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