

GRAPHICS INTERCHANGE FORMAT (GIFs) AS
MICRO MOVIES

A Master's Thesis

by

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September 2015

Dedicated to my family

GRAPHICS INTERCHANGE FORMAT (GIFs) AS
MICRO MOVIES

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN
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ANKARA

September 2015

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ersan Ocak Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

GRAPHICS INTERCHANGE FORMAT (GIFs) AS MICRO MOVIES

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September 2015

GIFs have become much more than they initially promised; they are much more than a format, and they are a mode of expression as well as a creative act as micro movies. Micro movies have been around since the capture of motion. Although they have gone through transformation, the principle characteristics have remained. This thesis attempts to demonstrate this through a brief media archeology with the aim to highlight what it represents today, as what they are commonly known as GIFs (Graphic Interchange format). The thesis also aims to highlight a significant role that micro movies have shouldered in daily life: a mode of expression in form of digital gesture. The project of the thesis is based on this idea and exhibits the common digital culture features, platforms, production and exhibition methods that we observe in GIFs which we see regularly on our daily online lives and attempts to do so with a local touch.

Keywords: Micro movies, Graphic Interchange Format, Media Archeology, Mode of expression, Digital Culture, Extended Cinema

ÖZET

MİKRO FİLM OLARAK GRAFİK DEĞİŞİM BİÇİMİ (GIF)

Erdem, Eda

Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Ersan Ocak

Temmuz, 2015

Grafik Değişim Biçimi (GIF'ler) ilk aşamada vadettiğinden çok daha fazlasını sundu; bugün sadece bir format değil bir ifade biçimi değil aynı zamanda mikro film olarak yaratıcı bir üründür. Mikro filmler, hareketin yakalanmasından bu yana varlığını sürdürmektedir. Zaman içerisinde dönüşüm geçirmesine karşın, ana özelliklerini korumuşlardır. Bu tez kısa bir medya arkeolojisi ile GIF (Grafik Değişim Biçimi) olarak bilinen mikro filmlerin bugün neyi temsil ettiğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tez aynı zamanda bugün günlük hayatta mikro filmlerin üstlendiği önemli role de yer vermektedir: dijital bir jest formatında gelen ifade şekli. Bu tezin projesi bu rolden ilham almıştır ve günlük çevrimiçi hayatımızda GIF'lerde gördüğümüz ortak dijital kültür özelliklerini, platformlarını, üretimlerini ve sergileme biçimlerini yerel bir dokunuşla sunacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mikro filmler, Grafik Değişim Biçimi, Medya Arkeolojisi, İfade Biçimi, Dijital Kültür, Genişlemiş Sinema

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The initial aim of this thesis is to define what in contextual sense we mean by micro movies or what we commonly refer as Graphics Interchange Format / GIFs. My aim is to look into this relatively recent but rather long-standing phenomenon and discover what it represents for its audience. This thesis hopes to conclude that GIFs as micro movies have become a mode of expression and a creative act through their particular use. The thesis also dwells on the obvious question of whether GIFs can be considered an art form. The project of this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate this idea with a local and traditional touch.

Graphics Interchange Format is actually a standard for encoding and decoding strings of 1s and 0s. Today what they represent is much more. GIFs today have their own particular attitude, spirit or philosophy. They are a utility and have their own set of aesthetics. We do not watch them in movie theaters or on our TV. They are generally on screens connected to the network. They are physically private but socially public

(Eppink, 2014: 301). We do not just watch them, we create, use, send, collect, copy and paste them. The owner or maker of the GIF is not known and is not emphasized. As Eppink states “It is shared casually as a form of identity-making, a cinema of affiliation.” (Eppink, 2014: 301)

The problem that strikes us and that grabs our attention can be the fact that GIFs are yet another digital image format (such as JPG or PNG). For this particular reason I believe that referring to these “shots of motions” (Pogue, 2013:34.) as GIFs leads to confusion. Throughout the thesis you might also sense this confusion. The reason lying behind this is that these micro movies can come in many formats, but it is true that they commonly appear as Graphic Interchange Format and even if they do not have this particular format they are still, strangely enough, referred as GIFs. The reasons for this will be explained in the following chapters how ever as an initial statement we can state that GIFs combine GIF images and create an animation, which we call, animated GIFs. Although animated, the format still remains to be the same, it becomes a sort of “digital flipbook” (LeFever, 2014). Just like image GIFs, it is easily shared digitally without any plug-ins or limitations regardless of which device or medium it is used at. Perhaps because of this reason the concept mostly referred to as GIFs instead of “micro movies”.

To understand this concept discovering where it came from and how it evolved over time can be beneficial. Unlike what many people think micro movies have been around for quite a long time. Best method to demonstrate this is to conduct a brief media archeology. As micro movies are an art of capturing motion, the sensible way to do so would be to look at how the capture of motion evolved overtime. When we look at the past it becomes clear that we have tried to take shots of motion for a very long time, in fact the first examples can be traced back to 19th century (Ceram, 1965). Discovering

how it evolved and what led to this big phenomenon is very important in terms of understanding it.

The art of motion intersects with the art of cinema as can be testified by its original names such as kinescope, cinematograph and moving pictures. In his renowned book *The Language of New Media* Lev Manovich also included a section titled *A Brief Archeology of Moving Pictures*. Manovich has stated that by looking at the history of visual culture and media in particular we can find many strategies and techniques relevant to new media design (Manovich, 2001). This is also the case for micro movies and we should also question if these shots of motion (or GIFs) can be defined as new media design or art. Perhaps it is better to go so far as to question if they can be actually considered art, a point that I will attempt to elaborate on in the following parts of this thesis.

This thesis' hypothesis is that Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) have become an important mode of expression in the digital world and they are an art form in terms of being considered as micro movies. The thesis elaborates on this idea with five main chapters: The second chapter is a brief media archeology which takes us back to the initial methods of capturing motion and how it progressed over time. It is an attempt for us to see how the initial examples of optical toys and GIFs have in common. It is an attempt to highlight these similarities while giving us a different perspective on limitations and how they shape products. It is the initial section where we observe the GIFs as micro movies.

The third chapter creates the main body of the thesis it aims to present different views in regards to GIFs. The first section of this chapter is an attempt to highlight GIFs as loops and what this loop means in terms of structure and a mode of expression. The

second section attempts to understand GIFs as a format. In this section without doubt historical background of GIFs as an image format and how they evolved overtime is also covered. The third section is where various utilization methods of GIFs so far are shown. There are examples as well as a short description for each. An additional sub section is the reasons behind the spread and popularity of GIFs this section also attempts to shed light on another type of resistance micro movies demonstrate today against high technology. The following section covers the question of how GIFs have become to be effective modes of expression today. For this purpose it looks at reaction GIFs and how they are used today. The final section of this chapter proposes different aspects as to why GIFs as art products. There are four sections that deliver different perspectives on this topic: GIFs as, GIFs as reproduced art, GIFs as products of digital culture and GIFs as a part of extended cinema.

The forth chapter is the chapter where the thesis project is uncovered. It is an effort to demonstrate what is written in the thesis. It is an attempt to demonstrate how GIFs as micro movies work as a mode of expression. It is an attempt to show their resistance to time. Perhaps above all, it is an attempt to show how effective they can be as a mode of expression.

The last chapter is the concluding chapter where the main ideas that this thesis is once again highlighted with the additional information that is provided in the text as well as the experience delivered through the project. It is therefore to state once again, the conclusion of this thesis will be that micro movies are indeed an effective mode of expression and an art form in terms of being micro movies.

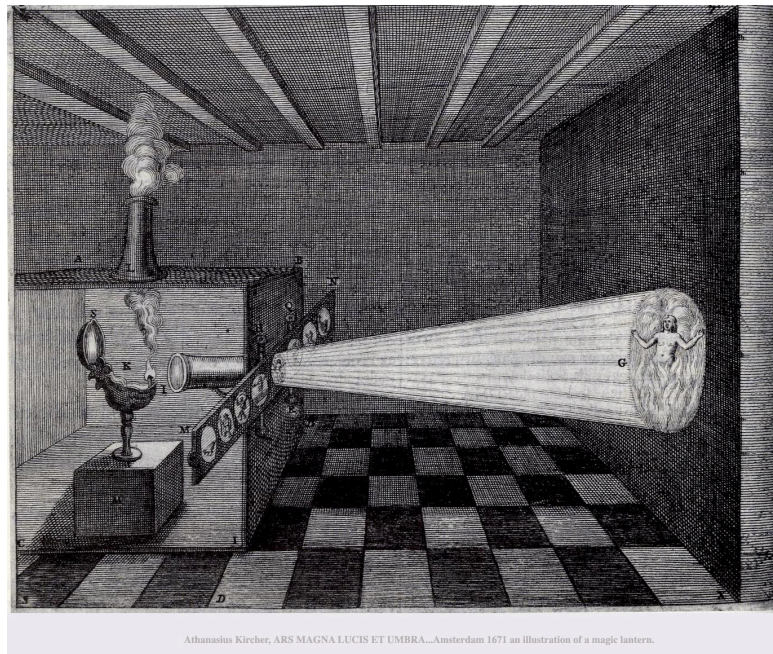
CHAPTER II

BRIEF MEDIA ARCHEOLOGY ON MICRO MOVIES

When we look at the early examples of art of motion we can easily observe that there are a lot of similarities with micro movies or what we today commonly refer as GIFs. These similarities may be better observed if we focus on the primary attempts in terms of capturing motion. We must not forget that art of motion is an accumulation of efforts over time. In this regard a deeper study of these efforts may assist us in understanding the similarities in a much more clearer sense since the initial capture of motion was mostly through these objects.

One must remember that even in the prehistoric era people were attempting to give a sense of movement to expression on the images with which they decorated their caverns. After them, the ancient Egyptians and Greeks sequenced images with movements in wall decorations, as well as many other kinds of utensils. (Musser, 1990: 62) With the invention of the magic lanterns the eagerness to capture motion

strengthened. Lantern exhibitors had their own methods for creating motion such as projecting the shadows of living things or moving multiple lanterns around. (Musser, 1907: 43). Also rack-and-pinion systems as well as pulley systems (Chromatropes) were used for slides for showing images in succession. Story lines such as a rat crawling into the mouth of a sleeping man or the head of a man replaced by a pig's head were used. These were mostly slip slides that created mystical or comical effects (Musser, 1907: 43). For the purposes of this thesis we shall be focusing on the more recent examples where motion is captured rather than examples where a sense of motion is reflected before doing so we should remind ourselves that, as Musser states, “photography with its realistic aesthetic and its scientific basis, seemed incompatible with methods of image movement. Instead the search for movement using photographic techniques was directed towards solutions based on the illusion of movement and persistence of vision.” (Musser, 1907: 43)



Athanasius Kircher, ARS MAGNA LUCIS ET UMBRA...Amsterdam 1671 an illustration of a magic lantern.

Figure 1 - An illustration of a magic lantern

Peter Mark Roget in 1824 discovered that “all movement could be broken down into a series of fixed images” this led to the principle of “the persistence of vision”. (Harley, 1993) Persistence of vision can be simply explained as the eye's ability to hold an image for approximately 1/20 of a second after the image is gone. In principle the theory states that because the eye can retain an image for a certain period of time, the following image would fill the gap between the two images. Thus, persistence of vision explains how objects or figures in a sequence of still photographs could appear to be moving or animated when that sequence is viewed at high speed. In the second half of the 19th century inventors dedicated themselves to creating artifacts that developed with this principle up until today.¹

In 1825 John Ayrton Paris invented the Taumatrope, which was among the first of these artifacts. It was a disc with a different image on each side; for example at one side, the image of a bird and the other, the image of a cage was illustrated. Another common example was a tree without leaves on the branches on one side, and another with its leaves on. The disc was suspended between two strings which were twisted in such a way that when they were pulled tight, they made the disc turn at high speed, creating the optical illusion that the bird was inside the cage or the tree was tree full of leaves. In the case of Taumatrope we continue to see the image on one side of the disc even if it disappears. As the Taumatrope spins the change of these images is taken as a single image by the eye. The invention of the Taumatrope has also been attributed to John Herschel and Charles Babbage, amongst others, but Paris was the first to distribute it commercially. (Harley, 1993)

¹ Film History Before 1920. (n.d.). Retrieved July 3, 2015.



Figure 2-An illustration of a Taumatrope

A year after, in 1832 the phenakistoscope was invented by Joseph Plateau. The phenakistoscope used a rotating disc connected vertically to a handle. Around the centre of the disc are a series of drawings forming an animation. Equally spaced radial slits were cut through the disc. The viewer would use a mirror to look at the images through the moving slits. (Harley, 1993) Also in 1832, Simon von Stampfer developed an optical disc similar to the phenakistoscope called the Stampfer Disc or Stroboscope. (Harley, 1993)

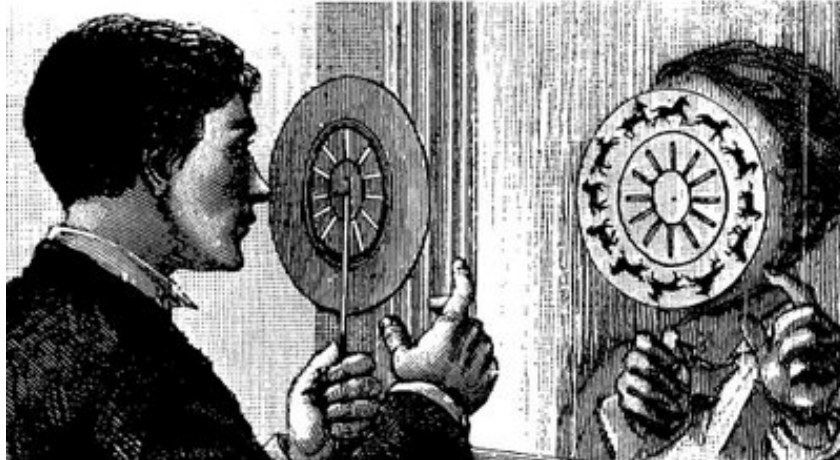


Figure 3 - An illustration of a Phenakistiscope

The modern zoetrope, perhaps the most known artifact, was invented in 1833 by William George Horner. It can be also referred as the “modern” zoetrope because around 100 BC Chinese inventor Ding Huan is known to have invented an artifact (called the Chao Hua Chih Kuan or the pipe which makes fantasies appear) that was quite similar to a zoetrope. (Needham, 1962: 124) The zoetrope is made out of a cylinder with narrow vertical openings in the sides. On the inner surface of the cylinder is a strip of images that form an animation. As the cylinder spins, the user looks through the moving slits at the animated images, producing the illusion of motion. (Harley, 1993) Since the device had a roll of paper with illustrations that was set within a spinning drum, that was pierced with slots, Horner called his invention the Daedalum (Wheel of the Devil) however it took 30 year for the instrument to become popular, when it was renamed the Zoetrope (Wheel of the Life), in the United States by William F. Lincoln. (Harley, 1993)

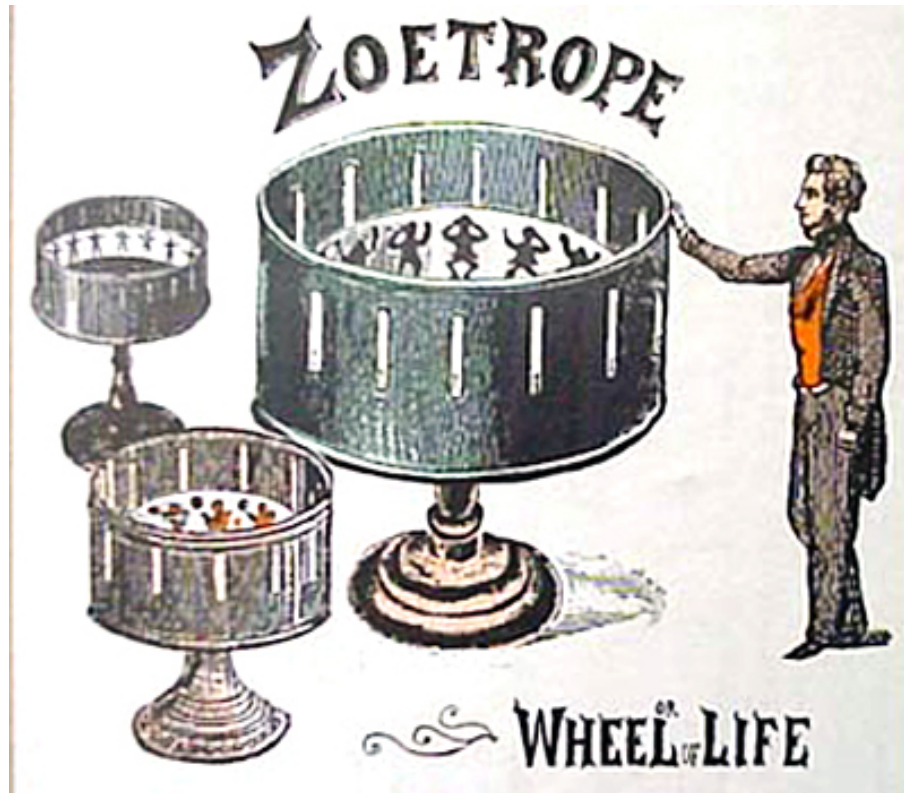


Figure 4 - An illustration of a Zoetrope

In 1877 the Praxinoscope, which works with similar principles to the zoetrope, was invented by Charles-Émile Reynaud. Its distinction is that it uses mirrors in the center for reflecting to the outer wall images. This allowed more people to watch the images at once. (Harley, 1993)

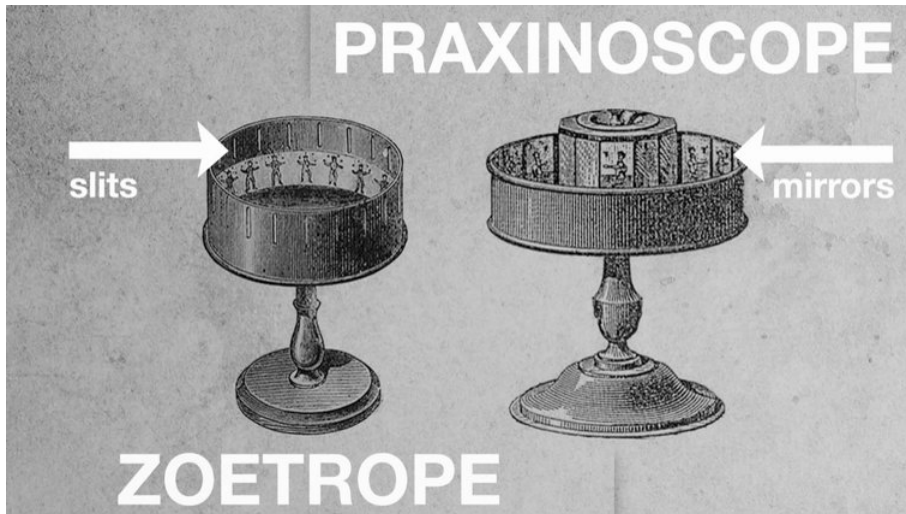
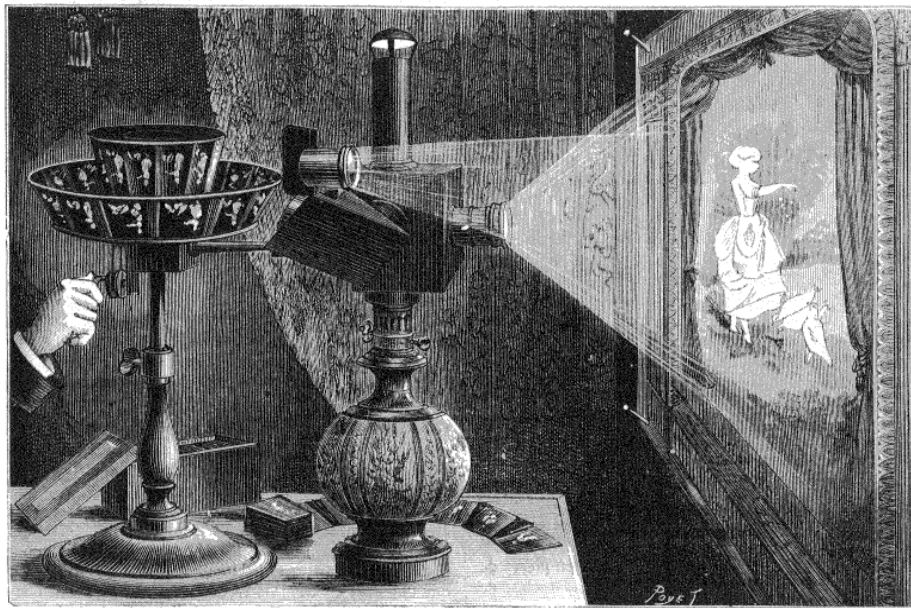


Figure 5 - An illustration that shows the difference between Praxinoscope and Zoetrope



Nouveau praxinoscope à projection de M. Reynaud.

Figure 6 - An illustration of Praxinoscope with projection

With inspiration of these inventions, which were referred as children's toy, in 1861 Seller's created the kinematoscope. Sellers figured that during the moment of vision images should be stable or line of vision and motion should be in the same direction. In the instruments he designed he used repetitive (looping) actions such as

sawing or rocking. These only needed three different photographs, two extreme positions and one in the middle. However kinematoscope was never commercially marketed since it was developed at the early stages of the civil war. (Musser, 1907: 45)

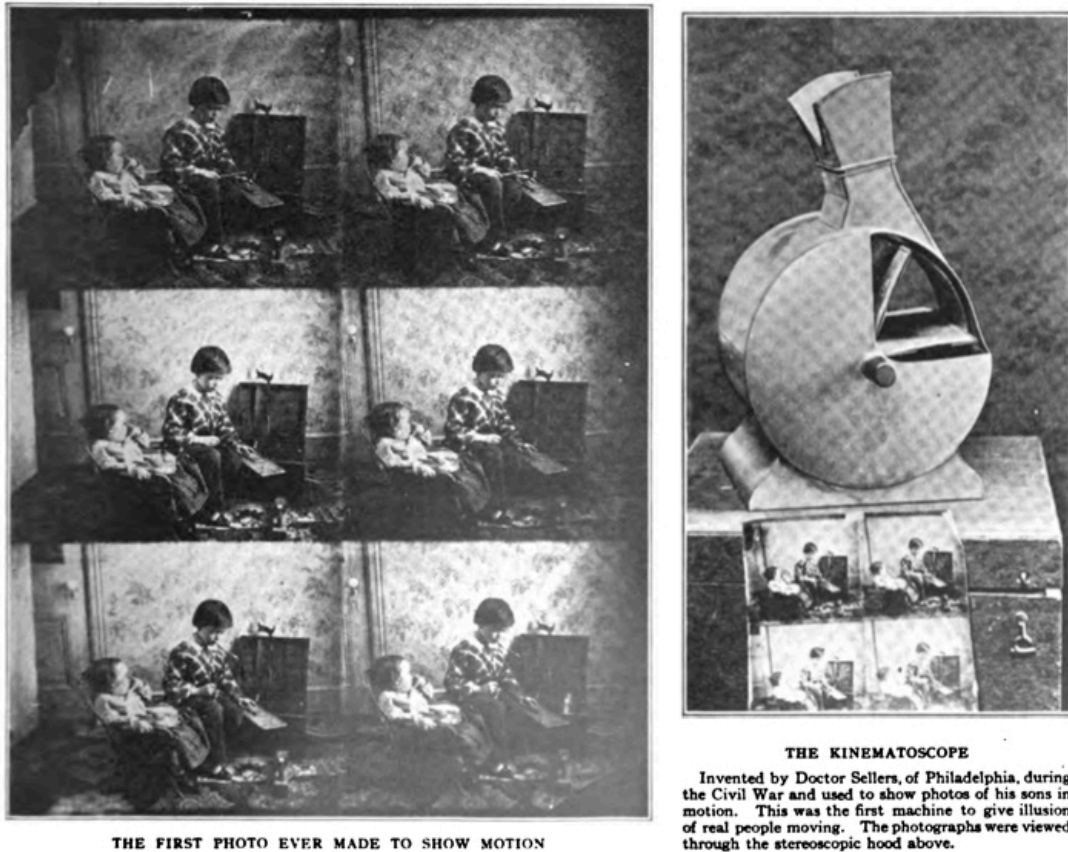


Figure 7 - A photograph of Kinematoscope

Henry Renno Heyl applied some of Sellers' principles in 1870. He named his improved magic lantern "phasmatrope". His wheel-like device included sixteen photographic slides that passed in front of the light source one after another. The projections repeated as many times as the exhibitor wanted. Heyl made at least three series for his phasmatrope. One was a popular Japanese acrobat another was a series of photographs of an actor. The photographs were taken when his lips were at different

positions and when projected it seemed as if he were speaking. There was also a series of waltzing couple, one being Heyl himself. In this series there were actually four different positions that were repeated (looped) to fill the sixteen slides. (Musser, 1907: 48)

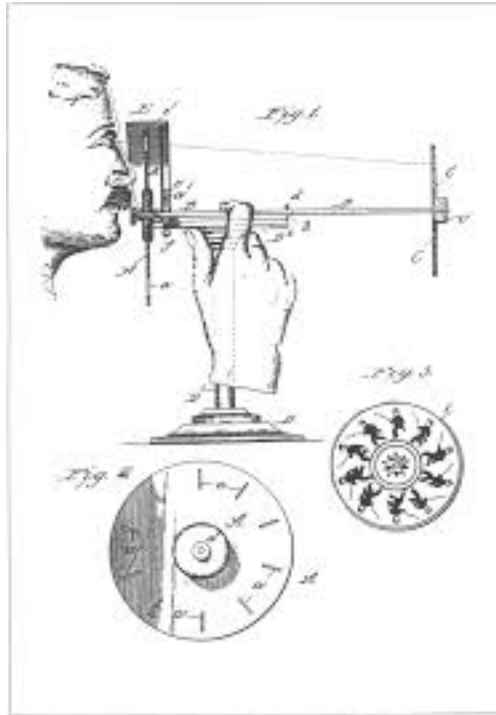


Figure 8 - An illustration of Phasmatope

However one of the most important moments for micro movies goes back to 1878 to Muybridge's ability to capture motion with stop motion photographs. As Musser indicates in all the examples that was indicated above, illustrations or photographs were shown in succession which actually created an illusion of movement even though the photographs that were taken as a part of continuous series. At the time there were no other alternatives of doing so, until Muybridge. (Musser, 1907: 48) Until Muybridge what we observed was mostly illustration of reality and basic motion capturing however with Muybridge representation of reality and capturing motion of life as a segment became possible. As a well-known photographic pioneer, Muybridge was fixated on the

utilization of photography to catch things that happen too quickly for the human eye to see. In 1878, Muybridge demonstrated what a horse looks like in full gallop by delivering a progression of timed pictures. At that point he put them on a zoetropic wheel, spun it around, and delivered a short looped video. (Harley, 1993)

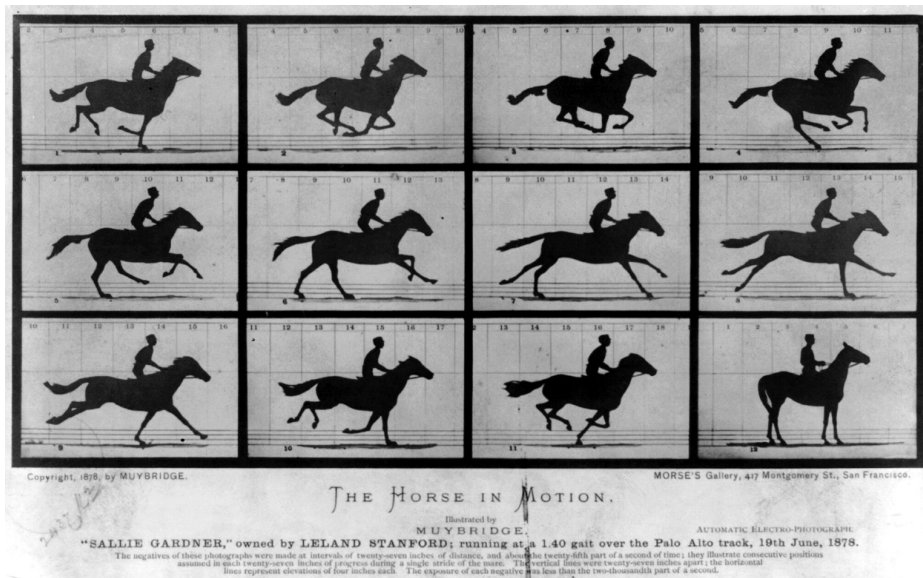


Figure 9 - The horse in motion, Muybridge

This “micro movie” was demonstrated throughout US and Europe. It was incredibly popular and its acclaim came up until today. (Harley, 1993) People were particularly captivated by how the zoopraxiscope let them consider a solitary motion again and again. “The rapid changing positions were most instructive” stated the Nottingham Express at the time. (Herbert 2000: 192) During 1878 and 1879 Muybridge focused on several different areas. He shot sequences of dogs, deer, oxen and other animals as well as leaping and wrestling athletes. We should also state that Muybridge invented the zoopraxiscope that projected images on a turning glass wheel while a disk with series of openings that turned the opposite direction served as a primitive shutter. Lacking the intermittent mechanism it was actually in this point less developed than

Heyl's phasmatrope. This device did not use actual photographs but colored elongated drawings that compensated for the moving shutter. Even though the real innovation and significance was in the images not the way it was projected, not many people were aware of prior devices such as Heyl's. Therefore actually when we consider the earlier devices and that of Muybridge's it is possible to say that he set back the technology of rapid projection of successive images. (Musser, 1907, 49)

The zoopraxiscope caught vanishing moments, replaying modest extracts of regular life so that people could see them in another way. Generally serial images of actions were shot from various different angles simultaneously. There were many taken for scientific purposes where human actions and activities were shot and the subjects were nude or had minimal clothing on, they had erotic content as well. The collection of this work which was nearly 20.000 figures of moving men, women, children, animals and birds were published in 1887 within *Animal Locomotion*. (Clegg, 2007)



Figure 10 - Picture of Zoopraxiscope

The nineteenth-century was particularly vivid with many different producers, inventors, exhibitors and ever changing methods of production and representation. Although the number of ways to present movement increased, what could be shown was very limited. During the end of the decade a solution to this problem was not found. Although this problem was to be solved with more sensitive photographic emulations and flexible celluloid film, it did not happen instantly. Like the previous inventions used for image making modern motion pictures were initially shown through peepholes and than projected into screens. The motion picture camera that reflected these and the peephole device was created at Edison's Laboratory (Musser, 1907: 54). Thomas Alva Edison was the prestigious American inventor who (taking as a base all those earlier inventions) created the Kinetoscope, the device that is considered to be the first cinema machine. It was essentially a box through which a roll of photos passed, at a rate of 46 images per second, and was lit by a bright lamp; through a peephole the spectator was able to see the show. It was already being used in the last decade of the 19th century and soon became popular at carnivals, parties, and funfairs. Around the same time also Kinetoscope halls in New York appeared, where Kinetoscopes were coin-operated. (Harley, 1993)

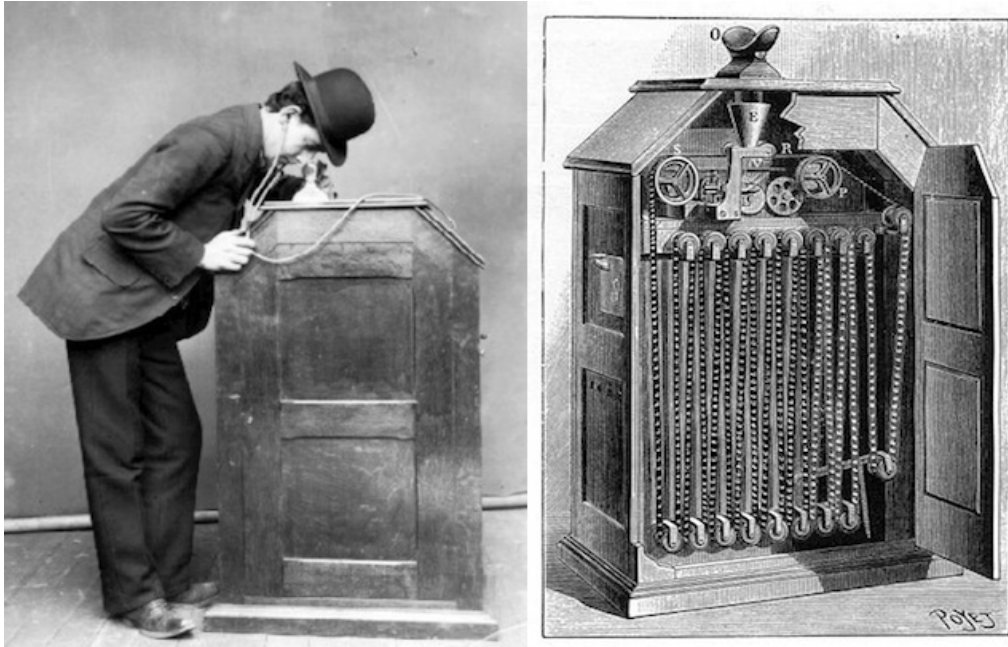


Figure 11 - Picture of Kinetoscope

EDISON

1901 MODEL

PROJECTING KINETOSCOPE

IS NOW READY. FULL DESCRIPTION IN CATALOGUE No. 104.

NEW FILMS NOW PREPARING.

NEW FILMS.

LAURA COMSTOCK'S BAG PUNCHING DOG(Code word, Ungainful)	100 ft.
Shows Laura Comstock's Wonderful Trick Dog, Mamma, punching the bag. Very clear and realistic. Full of action.	
We also furnish an excellent 50ft. strip. (Code word, Ungainly.)	
PIE, TRAMP AND BULL DOG(Code word, Ungallies.)	75 ft.
Tramp enters, sees bull dog in kennel. Retreats, re-enters on stilts. Starts eating pie from a shelf. Bull dog jumps from window, throws tramp and shakes him up.	
GORDON SISTERS BOXING(Code word, Ungallant)	100 ft.
Champion Female Boxers of the World.	
We also furnish an excellent 50 ft. strip.....(Code word, Ungartered)	
TRAMP'S DREAM(Code word, Ungangbar)	100 ft.
Tramp asleep on park bench. Dreams of getting pie without working for it. Also of an encounter with a bull dog. Wakes up, finds it only a dream. A cop has just soaked him on the bottom of his feet. Very Funny.	
HAPPY HOOLIGAN'S APRIL FOOL(Code word, Unellig)	50 ft.
HAPPY HOOLIGAN'S SURPRISE(Code word, Unesallig)	65 ft.
WHY BRIDGET STOPPED DRINKING(Code word, Unedilbor)	75 ft.
MONTREAL FIRE DEPARTMENT ON RUNNERS(Code word, Unedifying)	100 ft.
LOVE BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON(Unedonem)	65 ft.
A DONKEY PARTY(Uneducate)	60 ft.
The Greatest Mysterious Picture ever made is now ready.	
MYSTERIOUS BLACKBOARD(Code word, Ungarina)	100 ft.

Our Latest Films Are Being Exhibited Daily at the Following New York Theatres: Proctor's Four Houses, Tony Pastor's and Eden Museo, Which is a Strong Recommendation as to Their Merit. You Should Follow in Their Footsteps.

Send in your name and ask for our Special Advance Lists of the Latest New Films. These are All Winners. If you want to get subjects worth owning, send for our Latest Supplements and Advance Lists.

<p style="text-align: center;">CALL AT OUR NEW YORK OFFICE AND SEE THESE WONDERFUL FILMS</p>	<p>EDISON MFG. CO. MAIN OFFICE AND FACTORY, ORANGE, N. J., U. S. A. NEW YORK SALESROOM, 135 FIFTH AVE. THE PRICE OF FILMS IS \$15.00 PER 100 FEET. Shorter or Longer Lengths in Proportion.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WE HAVE ATTAINED A HIGH STANDARD OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PERFECTION and list nothing but PERFECT FILMS.</p>
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Figure 12 - Picture of Kinetoscope advertisement print

Since the very first day that motion was captured people were mesmerized by it. People were able to grasp moments and look at things from different perspectives over and over again. This is exact effect that animated GIFs or Micro Movies create today and perhaps this is the precise reason is why they are still popular today. In the time of YouTube and cell phones we are progressively becoming more involved moving pictures. With this in mind micro movies gives us the chance to stop and consider a moment in the stream, to acknowledge something that would pass unnoticed in a century where things just move too fast for us to recognize. Micro movies demonstrate what sharp viewers we are becoming to be. Videos used to be, as media critic Neil Postman expressed, “too slippery for analysis” (Thomson, 2013). However, now that we can loop a half second video with a simple tool and we have begun viewing it with insightful examination. With this perspective we can actually say that, in a way, after 132 years we are still living the time of Muybridge. (Thomson, 2013)

CHAPTER III

GRAPHICS INTERCHANGE FORMAT (GIFs) IN DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as a Loop

As Manovich states before cinema “The movement itself was limited in range and affected only a clearly defined figure rather than the whole image. Thus typical actions would include a bouncing ball, a raised hand or raised eyes, a butterfly moving back and forth over the heads of fascinated children – simple vectors charted across still fields”. (Manovich, 2001) This description that Manovich made for the initial examples of motion pictures is still applicable for micro movies today.

As Manovich states motion pictures most immediate predecessors share one significant thing in common and that is the loop. (Manovich, 2001) Micro movies and loop has a close relation since looping is actually one of the most prominent features of

GIFs today. As the 19th century obsession with capture of motion increased, devices that could animate more than just a few images became more and more popular (Musser, 1990). The Zootrope, Phonoscope, Tachyscope and Kinescope were all loop structures of pictures highlighting actions that can be played over and over. All through the 19th century loops prolonged. The Thaumatrope in which a disk with two unique pictures painted on every face was over and again pivoted by whirling strings connected to it, was, basically a loop in its most basic form which was two different images following one after another. In Zootrope (1867) and its various varieties, around a dozen pictures were set around the border of a circle. The Mutescope, prominent in America all through 1890's expanded the time span of the loop by installing more images on a pin. Even Edison's Kinescope (1882-1896) the first advanced machine to suggest film carried on to arrange pictures in a loop. (Ceram, 1965)

As the art of motion pictures started to develop, it pushed the loop to the low craftsmanship domains of instructional film. Film embraced a linear development through various interesting occasions. However film's introduction to the world from a loop structure was reenacted at any rate once amid its history. Early advanced motion pictures had the same constraints of capacity as nineteenth-century professional cinematic devices. The historical background of new media lets us know that hardware constraints never go away: they vanish in one area just to return in another.

Manovich actually foresaw the reemergence of loops in the 21st century and he stated: "We may expect that when digital videos appear on small displays on our cellular phones, personal devices such as Palm Pilot or other wireless communication devices they will once again be arranged in short loops because of bandwidth, storage or CPU

limitations” (Manovich, 2001: 318) However are technological limitations really the reason why loops (GIFs) became a phenomenon or was it that there was a certain necessity for it that other mediums could not satisfy? At this point Steven Neale describes, “What was lacking in photographs was the wind the very index of real, natural movement. Hence the obsessive contemporary fascination not just with movement, not just with scale but also with waves and sea spray, with smoke and spray” (Morra & Smith, 2006). This quote actually highlights that micro movies have a certain hybrid nature, it is neither a video nor a picture but performs the characteristics of both while not being satisfactory as a video or a picture by itself, it is a medium in-between.

Manovich also asks if the loop can be a new form appropriate for the computer age? (As it also gave birth to programming along with cinema) He claims that “the loop” (a continuous movement played over and over), is a narrative engine. He tells the reader that the loop gave birth not only to new cinema but also to computer programming and that it is used all throughout both old and new media. As he explains in his own words, the loop is “an engine that puts the narrative in motion” (Manovich, 2001: 318).

This looping structure of GIFs as indicated, is one of the main common futures it has with early examples of micro movies. The loop in it self delivers a narrative. It also provides different perspectives to the shot of motion in hand. With each loop a different aspect strikes us. It is a structure that is brought from the past and delivered to the present.

3.2 Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as a Format

Since the creation of films, video science has continued consistently in a solitary course: better. Better resolution. Higher frame rates. Richer audio. However something extremely intriguing is going on. What is mainstream today online are not videos that are big and sharp. It is tiny, low resolution and quite often silent. These small videos that we know of are mostly animated GIFs. It is a format that makes little, looping, silent videos with constrained hues. GIF was created in 1987, which was before Flash or many other popular video formats. Animated GIF was one of the first formats used to put features on the web. The dancing baby, waving American flag, under construction sign were probably the most prevalent GIFs that were seen essentially on about every early webpage.

It is also important to look at Graphic Interchange Format's individual history to understand how the format that is almost as old as the web itself has become strikingly popular over the last few years. Before the web CompuServe Information Service (CIS) was one of the biggest information network systems. It offered hourly subscription that gave access to email, forums, file transfers and also chat. Those who wanted to view images had to download them and use an additional application to view them. This would commonly be a shareware program like Compushow. CompuServe created GIF 87a in 1987 a standard defining color raster image information that emphasized interoperability between computer hardware platforms, which used to be a big problem during the time. With this format the received information was directly displayed and it could hold more than one image. This was not initially done for animation but rather to eliminate redundant data and therefore save memory. The specification was released as

an open format to encourage its widespread and to increase the service demand.²

In 1989 there was an update to the specifications and several new features were added to the format. Among these were transparency and frame delay that allowed the specification of duration of image display on screen. However this did not give the possibility for the animation to repeat. A GIF could only cycle once.³ Netscape Navigator 2.0b4 took advantage of this in 1995 and introduced Application Extension Block, which gave to possibility of looping GIF files. Even today most of the GIF files use netscape2.0.

GIFs persistent philosophy of open work or commons still survives at the time where the Internet has become overly commercial. Unlike many other image formats, GIF has been an open format therefore it became much more available and widespread. In the initial days of the Internet embedding, or “hot linking” as it was called at the time, was considered to be impolite since bandwidth was quite costly. People who wanted have animated GIFs on their websites used to save the copy on their server and host them. Soon there were sites that were type of GIF galleries that allowed people to download and use them as they wish, regardless of who created or owned the GIF. These GIFs were commonly anonymous but the attributions would be embedded in the file, however there were not any web browsers that rendered this information and there were not many GIF makers that made use of this.

Today a GIF is considered to be successful if it is shared and has shadowed its creator to become an important part of a common cultural conversation. As Eppink states this creates a “digital slang”, a “visual vocabulary” where numerous media

²Graphics Interchange Format (1987) Available at: www.w3.org/Graphics/GIF Retrieved July 3, 2015.

³ Graphics Interchange Format (1987) Available at: www.w3.org/Graphics/GIF/ Retrieved July 7, 2015.

artifacts are viewed without any barriers of authorship and is elaborated upon as a language rather than an art product. (Eppink,2014) Although it is processed individually it is the communities that make the GIFs.

3.2.1 Graphic Interchange Format Platforms

In the 2000's GIFs became much more popular and were frequently seen on websites such as 4chan⁴, b3ta⁵ along with many other new websites that hosted GIFs and also allowed you to generate GIFs from videos online. This opened a completely new page for animated GIFs. Shortly it became a new Internet phenomenon. At the same time a new trend that annoyed most people emerged: Watermarks. Many of these websites started to add their logo to the GIFs. (GIFSOUP, 4GIF and HilariousGIFs.com are some of these websites that add their watermark) This was disturbing because it was something that did not match with the GIF open and communal philosophy.

Tumblr, when created in 2007, offered its users to see endless “waterfall” content that was gathered from other users they follow. Today generally we encounter animated GIFs in this context, that is to say in algorithmically assembled, stream of images (Eppink, 2014: 300). Myspace was at its most popular era when Facebook and Twitter was launched. These new platforms resisted and still are resisting to support GIFs to separate themselves from the amateur appearance that Myspace had. However users could always upload GIFs (Upto 500KB in size at the beginning that reached to 1MB in 2012). Tumblr also had some limitations that lead users to create a distinct visual

⁴ 4chan. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

⁵ B3TA : WE LOVE THE WEB. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

aesthetic that was darker and desaturated because Tumblr processed the uploads in a certain manner that lead GIFs to be too saturated, particularly in magenta and cyan. We can see here once again the example of how limitations lead to a certain type of aesthetic. Most of the GIFs are micro scenes from films or TV shows, it is also possible to see several GIFs in grids. (Perez S, 2013) Tumblr also played an important role for creators of original work. These are usually works in unbroken loops that are geometric shapes, illustrations or collages-montages. Very recently with the pressure to compete with other platforms such as Giphy, Tumblr introduced its own GIF search engine that allows you to search the perfect loop that you are looking for. This also indicates a new age for GIF where you do not have to go “off platform” to find the GIF you hope to find.⁶

Launched by Alex Chung and Jace Cooke in a New York startup incubator in 2013 Giphy, is a GIF database and search engine. It is on its way to become one of the most popular websites.⁷ When you go on to the site you are able to search for any GIF related to anything you like. You may even search adjectives. Today there are millions of people who search for GIFs on Giphy and Giphy hosts more than 3 million new GIFs per month.⁸ Perhaps what made Giphy this popular was also the solution it provided for Facebook users to embed a GIF sourced from Giphy⁹. A few months later on November 2013 Giphy also integrated with Twitter Media Cards which allowed Giphy GIFs to be supported on Twitter¹⁰ However at this point we should also note that what we see on

⁶ Tumblr now lets you search for the perfect GIF. (2015, June 4). Retrieved July 1, 2015.

⁷ The Top 100 Websites of 2013. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

⁸ After An Approach From Facebook, Giphy Raises \$17M At An \$80M Valuation. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

⁹ Sorry, Facebook Does NOT Support Animated GIFs. (n.d.). Retrieved September 7, 2015.

¹⁰ Giphy Brings Its Animated GIFs to Twitter's Timeline. (2013, November 13). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

Twitter and Facebook as GIFs are not actual animated GIFs in format. Because micro movies today are almost synonymous with GIFs, people just assume they are or don't really care about the format. However when you have a closer look, by that I mean right clicks on the "GIF", most of the GIFs you see on Facebook are a Flash document¹¹ and for Twitter they are MP4 files. So when you want to share a GIF from Giphy on Twitter or Facebook a conversion of the files take place. This can also be seen in the way the GIFs are displayed. When you visit GIF featuring sites such as Tumblr you realize that the GIFs start running / looping when you arrive on the site unless they have been programmed otherwise. Hovering over the GIFs for them to run is another trend for example, but a play button seems somewhat alien and those with a play button are almost never a GIF in format.¹² Social platforms have not provided a clear explanation for the reasons behind this resistance to the format. At the initial stage there were aesthetic reasons as stated previously but that went wrong since users started to post links of GIFs that created a bigger aesthetic challenge. Later on the size of GIFs presented itself as a problem. For instance the MP4 files that Twitter uses can be up to 20% smaller than GIF files. This saves data and of course presents faster loading speeds. Speed is without doubt important for Twitter however interestingly it supports Vine files, which is quite similar to GIFs.¹³ Facebook does not give a clear answer as to why it will not support GIFs. Actually it would not be fair to say that Facebook does not support GIFs. It does not let you to upload or post animated GIFs. When you do upload them however, what you see is still images of those GIFs. An alternative to that is to share your

¹¹ Sorry, Facebook Does NOT Support Animated GIFs. (n.d.). July 7, 2015.

¹² Social networks, hear our cries! Why don't you all support animated GIFs? (2013, May 26). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

¹³ It's Official, You Can Finally View GIFs on Twitter. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2015.

GIF by posting a link. Facebook's spokesperson has indicated that they are working out a way to support the upload of GIFs as well. With the latest update if your "auto-play" setting is off the GIF does not start automatically instead you see a GIF sign in white circle and it starts looping when you click on it.¹⁴

Even though there are new developments every day, it is very interesting to observe this resistance from these social platforms in a time where GIFs are becoming more and more popular as a mode of expression. When a similar question was asked to Tumblr editorial director Christopher Price he answered: "Tumblr to me is really all about creativity. People are making things, creating things; what you can do with GIFs as an art form is just another tool in your palate...I'm not sure those other services are designed or geared to the creative."

While there is resistance to GIFs from certain platforms on one side, on the other there are constant novelties and developments. Giphy for instance just recently launched a new extension for Google chrome that allows the users to search and add a GIF to their Gmail¹⁵ and also it has created a application of its own, Giphy + Messenger that can directly integrate to your Facebook Messenger¹⁶ (Interestingly, another point that should be mentioned is that, Whatsapp, one of the most popular chat applications that has been recently acquired by Facebook, still does not directly support GIFs)¹⁷ Also internet is bursting with new GIF generator tools. For instance there are those that directly integrate with Youtube URLs. Youtube is undeniably a big source for GIFs. By

¹⁴ Chowdhry, A. (n.d.). Facebook Starts Supporting Animated GIFs. Retrieved August 7, 2015.

¹⁵ Crook, J. (n.d.). Giphy Makes Email Slightly Less Horrendous With Giphy For Gmail Extension. Retrieved July 7, 2015.

¹⁶ Crook, J. (2015, March 25). Giphy Messenger, Giphy's First Mobile App, Brings GIF Search To Facebook Messenger. Retrieved August 11, 2015.

¹⁷ Will WhatsApp Support GIF In The Future? - Boosh Articles. (2015, April 4). Retrieved June 7, 2015.

adding “GIF” in front of any Youtube URL you can create a GIF. Gifyoutube, makeagif and GIFsoup are some of the tools that work in a similar way. There are also other tools that create GIFs with videos you have on your computer. These are usually conversion tools such as Gifycat, Imgur or Gif Brewery. Other tools that you can download such as Licecap or Gifcam that gives you the possibility to capture anything on your screen and convert it to an animated GIF. Buzzfeed is another platform that has immensely contributed to the “animated GIF storytelling” (a notion that will further elaborate in following section) has worked with Starbucks to create a reaction cam where readers can create and submit their own reaction GIF to what they have read. Mobile phone applications have also started to work with smart phone cameras to create photographic GIFs with ease. It seems that the steady increase in the number of platforms and tools as well as the enhancing capabilities of browser speeds and the internet becoming more and more smarter shall lead to the further proliferation of GIFs/Micro movies over the internet.

3.3 Graphics Interchange Format in Daily Online Life

Over time different types of GIFs, different aesthetics and practices have been developed. It is fair to say that they all serve different purposes. We can see GIFs / micro movies just about everywhere over digital media with various purposes. It might be useful for the purposes of this study to categorize them so as to deliver a clearer portrait into understanding this phenomenon and why people make them.

3.3.1. Categorization of Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs)

3.3.1.1 Reaction GIFs

2011 onwards we observe the use of GIFs as a response instead of text. (Eppink, 2014: 299) Reaction GIFs are excerpts from films and TV (series, political, discussions, sports events etc.). They are often captured frames that might also include texts for dialogs since GIFs are mostly silent. They have become very popular because they are playful and also incredibly expressive. People can relate to them because they express common ideas and emotions. GIFs express some feelings that are nearly impossible to express with words. Reaction GIFs also come in to types: Actual and Hypothetical. (Eppink 2014: 299)

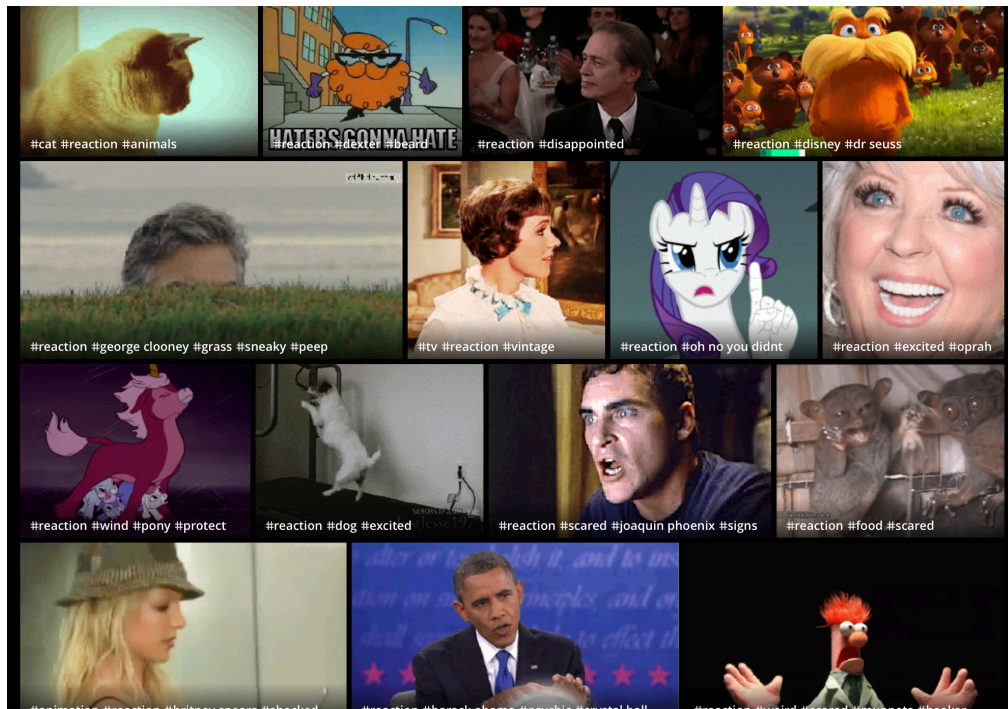


Figure 13 - Screen shot of various reaction GIFs

Actual reaction GIFs are those that are used as an answer in emails, chats, threads etc. It is a reactive response that we actually have, displayed with a GIF. Hypothetical GIFs on the other hand shares a reaction GIF to a Hypothetical situation that has been created. On platforms such as Tumblr they are referred as HIFW “How I Feel When” or MRW “My Reaction When”. (Eppink, 2014: 299) The primary purpose behind these GIFs is not aesthetic. They are used for delivering an expression. They are gestures to facilitate communication. Most of the users of these GIFs don’t even necessarily create them however their use establishes a form of authorship.

Reaction GIFs have become popular to such an extent that directors and producers are considering how a screen can become popular as a GIF and shoot accordingly. For example Dan Harmon, the executive producer of the popular television series Community, shared that he tried, many times a season to put star Alison Brie in a situation, that he knew was going to end up as a GIF.¹⁸

3.3.1.2 Animated GIFs

Without doubt there is an ongoing discussion on the question regarding if GIFs can be considered as art. This question shall be covered in the following sections of this thesis. In this section we are referring to GIFs that are considered to be a work of art for the purposes of classification. I shall admit that this classification might lead to confusion because this thesis promotes the idea that all GIFs are a product of art as micro movies. This classification is made through various sources that might not entirely be in line with my hypothesis.

¹⁸ <http://www.digitalspy.com/tv/interviews/a349824/community-dan-harmon-qa-our-fans-influence-the-show.html>

In the early days of the Internet, artist such as Olia Lialina, Jodi, and Vuk Ćosić were working with GIFs. They used GIFs mostly as elements for larger web-art work. GIFs started to emerge in exhibitions and art institutions such as the 2000 Whitney Biennial and SFMOMA's '010101: Art in Technological. Today it is possible to see many original GIFs on the net as well as art galleries. These can be micro animations as well as 2D or 3D graphic that seem to be in permanent motion. There are of course no limits to creativity. Recently, for example a street art project named GIF-ity was created by British street artist, it is considered to be worlds largest GIF. What may be done and what we will see in the future is nothing but intriguing.

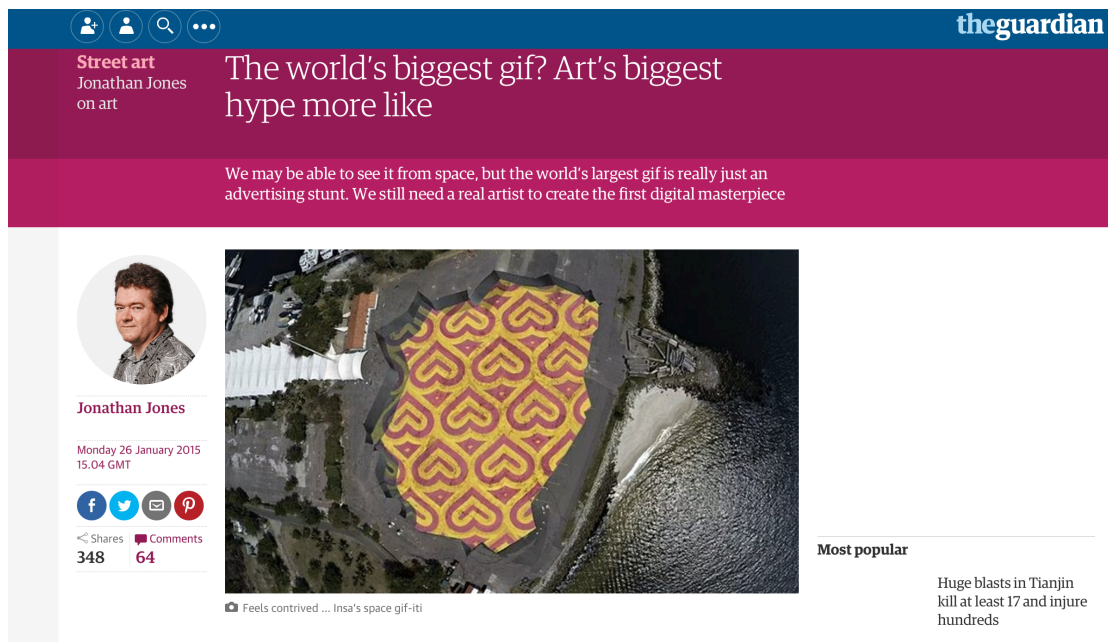


Figure 14 - Picture of a GIF art project news published on The Guardian

GIF by Dave Whyte

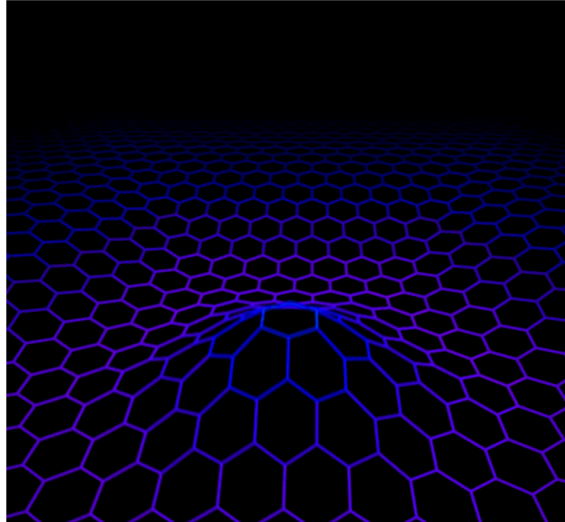


Figure 15 - Still of an illustration optical GIF artwork

3.3.1.3. Cinemagraphs

Cinemagraphs have become highly popular in the late years. The best way to describe them is probably stating that they are still photographs where there is a minor, seamless looping motion. It is a micro movie. It concentrates on a moment as if it freezes time and we can see that it is commonly used for consumer goods today. It was trademarked in 2011 by fashion photographer Jamie Beck and Designer Kevin Burg.¹⁹

¹⁹ <http://cinemagraphs.com>



Figure 16 - Still of Cinemagraph examples

3.3.1.4. Highlight GIFs

Since GIFs are perfect at capturing moments they are also great in highlighting them. Highlight GIFs are used to show funny moments of attempts that have gone wrong, which many Internet users refer to as “fails”. Highlight GIFs are also very popular in the sports world and many media agencies have realized this.

Yahoo updates Sports app to turn game highlights into GIFs

By Casey Newton on January 3, 2014 02:14 pm [Email](#) [@CaseyNewton](#)

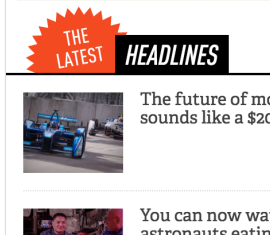
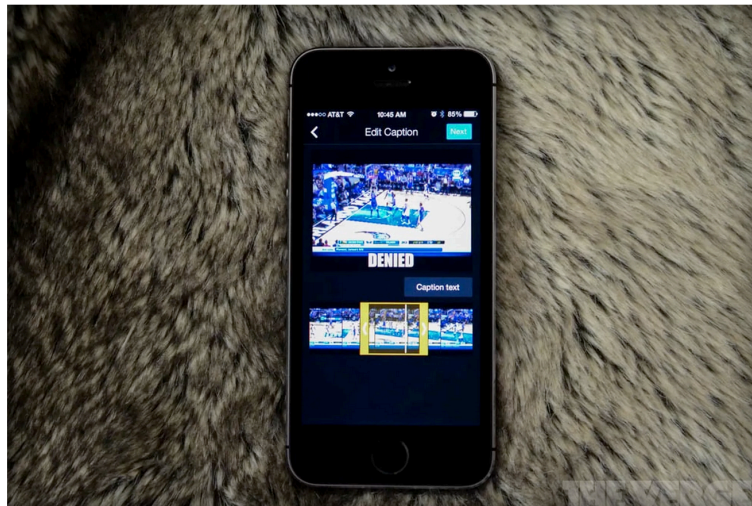


Figure 17-News article on how GIFs are used in sports news articles

3.3.1.5. Listicles

Listicles are another trend that has become highly popular on websites such as BuzzFeed and Cracked. It is a portmanteau word. It is a blend of the words “list” and “article”. They describe situations or share short stories to which unbelievably all of us can relate. As the wired magazine states they are becoming the “lingua franca of new-media journalism”.²⁰ These articles almost always are shared with a GIF that are mostly humorous and are used to serve as reactions, visual metaphors or illustrations. (Eppink, 2014, 299)

²⁰ Edidin, R. (2014, August 1). 5 Reasons Listicles Are Here to Stay, and Why That’s OK. Retrieved July 7, 2015.



Figure 18 - News article on how listicles are influencing journalism

3.3.1.6. Explanatory GIFs

Although GIFs are mostly used for entertainment purposes they can be very useful for educational purposes. Particularly things that need the description of an action or motion such as furniture assembly or a yoga pose for instance. These GIFs are also original material created for particular purposes and it is still an area that has not reached its full potential. (Lefever, 2014)

3 How a Trumpet Works



Figure 19 - Still of an explanatory GIF

3.3.1.7. GIFs and New Media Journalism

Journalism is becoming more visual every day and it is spread to more platforms. New York Times conducted a survey on preferred methods of information access in 2013 and the survey revealed that people preferred to read an article over watching a video when accessing news. Today we can see various websites, social platforms and applications that include text, image and video and many other different forms of media. They vary depending on the content that is going to be shared. Although images and videos are of great value they do require more time, attention and bandwidth which neither social networks nor mobile devices or browser tabs have. They are not that easy to share either, which is horrifying considering the fact that our age is all about online sharing. Thus new media journalists are forced to work with these limitations. Journalists have discovered that GIFs or micro movies are a great medium to overcome these limitations. As Niles states they are great in preserving the engagingness of video and the transmissibility of still images. GIFs have been widely used particularly during the 2012 Olympics and presidential elections in USA during the same year. Today there are great examples of how GIFs can be used in journalism. More and more prestigious publications such as The New York Times and The Boston Globe are on a quest to discover what they can do with these loops. The New York Times Pulitzer-prize winning feature “Snow Fall” starts with a windblown snow with is in fact a loop.²¹ Critics praised it because these loops gave “a subtle, atmospheric quality” to the article. Same year The Times did a story on summer places around New York which was also considered a

²¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall>

successful piece.²² Uses of GIFs are increasing each day in many online publications and it is not that surprising.²³²⁴ Nile states “A GIF might be created to reduce the time it takes to watch a key moment from a video, representing the moment immediately and repeatedly. Some GIFs may prolong a moment in time indefinitely, or through their looping sequence have a mesmerizing power over viewers.” Similarly on the matter Andrew Phelps writing for Neiman Lab says that this medium can be a strategic journalistic tool. It is perfectly answers the needs of our age since “A GIF is a moving story compressed to its most essential form.”

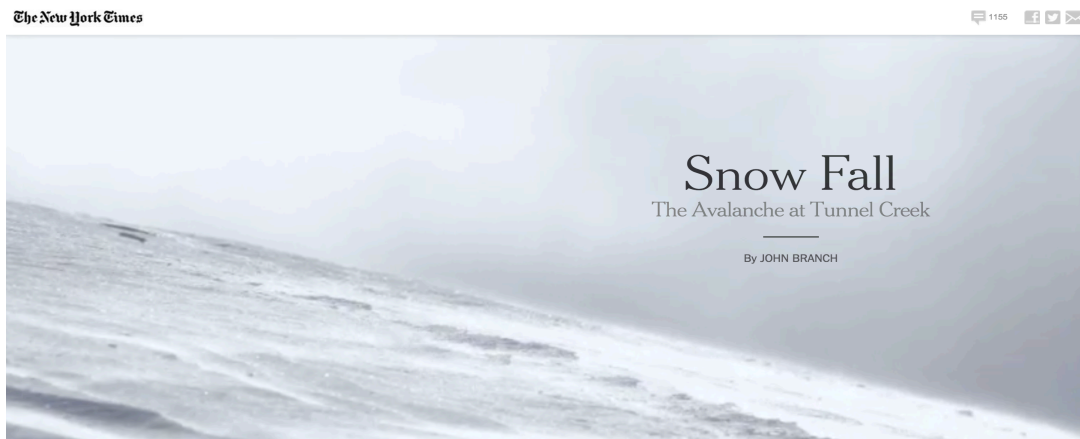


Figure 20 - Still of micro movie used in the opening of "Snow Fall" news piece

3.3.2 Increasing and Persistent Popularity of Graphics Interchange Format

After 28 years the popularity of animated GIFs is astonishing. Furthermore it is becoming more popular every single day. We have discovered that 19th century optical toys and have undeniable similarities, in a way it seems as if the history of motion

²² Miller, C. (2015, January 15). Technology Has Made Life Different, but Not Necessarily More Stressful. Retrieved July 7, 2015.

²³ Sontag, D., & Gebeloff, R. (2014, November 22). The Downside of the Boom. Retrieved June 7, 2015.

²⁴ Jennings, D. (2012, July 10). Scenes From the Meadowlandscape. Retrieved August 19, 2015.

pictures is looping. While we are in the age of incredible technology that never ceases to amaze us why are we stuck on this obsolete format? What led to this popularity? What happened to the evolution of videos? It is not possible to give one simple answer to these questions.

During the development of the Internet most people worked on improving GIFs without trying to understand the attributes that made it successful. The fact that Animated Graphic Interchange Format has no audio and playback control was always acknowledged as a shortcoming. It was not easy to see that this form that was silent and non-interactive did not demand the attention of a developed video player. Unlike most developed format GIFs can be directly embedded to a webpage and without any plugins or third-party players it loads immediately simply because of the fact that it is an open format. Because they are simple files they can be seen, processed and shared without any hassle thus as a result of this they are everywhere. These limitations seem to be the reason behind GIFs lasting popularity for nearly two decades.

High-resolution videos take up a lot of bandwidth and because of this unless one can find Internet connection it costs you money. It also takes time to load and download them. On the other hand the short, low-resolution videos almost immediately load and download, it does not take much of one's Internet quota or time. Another limitation is linked to storage. Storing micro movies is much more convenient since it takes much less space. (Pogue, 2015) GIFs other advantage is that it is possible to post them just about everywhere. (Pogue, 2015) Even new and popular applications and social media tools such as Whatsapp, Facebook messenger and Instagram are forced to update themselves to become adaptable with GIFs. Even decades after GIFs play in every browser and on

nearly every gadget on the planet, which is not the case for modern formats such as Flash.

It is commonly said that limitation fosters creativity (Kaufman, 2012). If that is the case than these micro movies are an excellent catalyzer for creativity. (Pogue, 2015) Twitter is a standard example for this. Limits force you to become more concise and much more creative. People do not protest the 140-character limit of Twitter they embrace it. Similarly Vine's success is closely linked with compression. On first though it might seem much more easy to take a six second video but to tell a story in such a limited time necessitates thought and originality. This actually brings up the question of concept of time-based art, which is a very marginal area in art. When we talk about time based art we think of music or cinema that is actually within a certain timeframe, while paintings, photographs or sculptures etc. are not. This close relationship between time (duration) and micro movies can be further elaborated at this point. When we talk about GIFs / micro movies the time becomes an important factor to consider. Whether videos are a right comparison is also a topic of discussion. Micro-movies maybe are not videos but rather live action photographs. If we assume that photographs try to capture a single moment we can say that that these looping, micro videos are attempting to do the same in a much more variable way for motions or even stories. Maybe as suggested we can think of these micro movies as improvements of pictures rather than downgrades of videos. As Pogue states these micro movies are neither photographs nor videos. They are something in between with their own artistic merits. It could be a new form of expression that took us 26 years to recognize. (Pogue, 2013: 34)

When we talk about GIFs today frequently we refer to the ones produced from

existing videos. Today, the Internet or even our smart phone galleries are full of videos. There is unlimited access to many tools. This also creates endless possibilities and provides endless materials. In addition to the vast materials as the popularity of GIFs increase also many GIF generator tools appeared. In relation to this Nigel Hurst, CEO of the Saatchi Gallery says “motion photographs or GIFs haven’t been used by artists much because until now it required special tools or know-how to make them.” These tools made it possible for any computer literate to convert a regular video into a GIF. In addition to being easy to use, they are also commonly free of charge. Considering all that is stated it is not that surprising to observe the increasing and persistent popularity of GIFs.

3.4 Graphic Interchange Format (GIFs) as a Mode of Expression

“Language is the highest application of the mimetic faculty: a medium into which the earlier perceptive capabilities for recognizing the similar had entered without residue, so that it is now language which represents the medium in which objects meet and enter into relationship with each other...”

Walter Benjamin

One of the most important things that need to be considered in relation to GIFs, is the human factor. Today the primary use of micro movies is to express emotion or a reaction to a situation, comment, and picture or otherwise previously uploaded

statement. One could express emotions through words or emoticons, but GIFs allow for a more profound message. GIFs are actually perfect in terms of highlighting a point; they are also very quick in delivering it too. It is probably much more convenient for our new lifestyle since it does not allow long video formats and there are no pre-roll or post-roll advertisements.

Words fall short. Its good for describing regular objects or actions but GIFs are much better for explaining feelings or situations. Since language emerged many millennia ago human communication was mostly on face-to-face bases. (Tomasello, 2010) Only after the printing press and the developments thereafter has text come to gain such a significant importance in our lives. In the last few decades our synchronous and near-synchronous communication has been dominated by text and with the emergence of the most recent mediums most of our interaction has been from afar with mediums such as email, text messaging and instant messaging. (Messaris & Humphreys, 2006) While communication is carried out on a face-to-face platform we have many non-verbal cues such as rhythm, intonation, volume, gesture however when communication is carried out through the suggested mediums what we have at our disposal to deliver our emotions become horrifically limited. There should be no major debate about the fact that speech is indeed related to text and some of the non-verbal cues that have been mentioned can be found in the use of punctuation and perhaps also fonts, capital letters and even typography nevertheless we can not help but question the obvious lack of gestures. (Eppink,, 2014: 300)

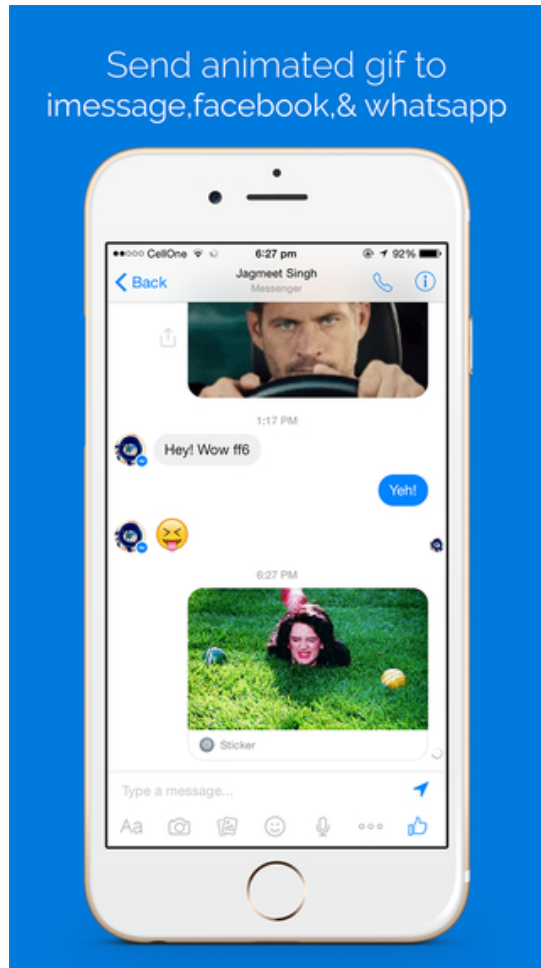


Figure 21 - Still of reaction GIFs used in messaging as a mode of expression through an application

Would it be possible to state that communication is becoming more limited and impoverished, as we are more prone to use text? It is true that it is a consumer society where time is money and in line with this statement everything moves rapidly and is disposed of easily. It is thus not surprising that communication in modern daily life adapts to this lifestyle. People without doubt have realized that with this text dependent communication style some of what they hoped to get across did not reach the target therefore new creative ways have emerged such as the use of emoji. Lately the use of what I shall refer as “reaction GIFs” became excessively popular. A reaction GIF, as

expressed in the previous chapter, can be defined as an animated GIF, typically a shot of motion from a film or television show, that is used online and more recently in texting as a response. There are two main different forms of reaction GIFs which can be stated as “actual” and “hypothetical”. These are also referred as HIFW (how I feel when) and MRW (My reaction when). What is interesting about these GIFs are that we can see the same ones appear over and over again in various platforms such as Reddit, 9gag and Tumblr.

Evidently GIFs have become a good way to tell stories and they seem to fill a gap that exists in our language: gestures. Therefore I ask whether the primary purpose of reaction GIFs is gesture, is it a mode of expression that allows the user to perform a gesture in a context that is mainly text-based. In his article titled “The Doctrine of the Similar - GIF GIF GIF” Daniel Rourke says “An ocean of viral videos turned into a self-serving visual language, looping back on itself ad-indefinitum.” He states that we deconstruct and separate whole media and from what is remained “a new lexicon of associations and meanings” emerges. He states that “The creation and collision of GIFs offers a potentially different implication for the looping horizon: the possibility of communication.” Rourke was inspired by Benjamin’s *The Doctrine of the Similar* where he states “So speed, the swiftness in reading or writing which can scarcely be separated from this process, would then become... the effort or gift of letting the mind participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things only in order to become immediately engulfed again.” With this in mind GIFs fill up a space between convenience and abundance “where an apparent breakdown in communication can stimulate new modes of expressing non-sensuous similarities in the internet world.” (Rourke, 2011) Thus through many platforms that are referred to in the

previous chapters GIFs have the ability to reach out to the world instantly. GIFs can even act as archives that have become viral over the Internet overtime. With this in mind as Rourke and Benjamin states sensitivity to similarity is required to create sense in the semiotic.

3.5 Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) in Different Art Discussions

Previous chapter attempted to highlight what GIFs or micro movies are and what they represent for people today. Knowing that it represents such an important part of our lives the subsequent question that comes up is can we refer to it as art. This is not an easy topic to cover. Most theorist have been struggling to craft a theory for avant-garde artwork in the 20th century, the new mass art forms can as Fisher states be their following occupation.

There are many different perspectives in regards to what art is. One thing that can be agreed on is that it has changed drastically overtime, particularly with the advancements in technology this has become much more evident. Paul Valéry foresaw this a long time ago. In his work *The Conquest of Ubiquity, Pièces sur L'Art*, dated 1931 Valéry states: “We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.” Valéry claims that the work of art of the past is much different that what we see today therefore our appreciation and behavior towards it must be altered, developed in relation to the modern environment and contemporary techniques. This point should be remembered when we are assessing

micro movies and their relevance to art. That being said we should also consider a new way of interpreting GIFs as an artwork. As Hurst states, by creating a new form of moving image, GIFs are changing our understanding of visual arts; “GIFs may be used to tell simple visual stories in ways that are different from still photographs or film.” (Hurst, 2013) With this idea, on this particular topic there are a few perspectives that need to be covered on the topic of Graphics Interchange Format as an art format.

3.5.1. Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as Low art

First issue that needs to be discussed is the distinction between high art and low art. To start with it should be highlighted that even though the adjectives “high” and “low” suggest quality of work it should not lead to a new discussion of *bad* and *good* since that can also be depending on context classified separately within high and low art. In addition to this certain theorists (such as Kaplan) prefer to use the “popular” art instead of “low” art because it is less pejorative. (Fisher, 2001) Also as can be concluded by Herbert Gans’ work the discussion of high/low art is much narrower than of high/low culture however Gans states that distinction of taste consists the bases of the distinction of high/low art. Cohen, on the other hand, in his article dated 1999 states that there are high and low audiences but this does not refer to high art as being more important or that it can not be enjoyed by both high and low audiences. (Although there has always been a tendency to divide or rank art forms as higher or lower.) (Cohen,1999) High art, as Fisher points out in his article titled High Art Versus Low Art, refers to the paradigms of art. Because of this it leads to burdening questions. He states that high art defines

what art is and also what isn't therefore the distinction of high art and low art naturally gives birth to art and non-art discussion which is the reason why this chapter is written.

The distinction lies in media or forms of art. As stated by Valéry in a different way, since the 18th century new media has emerged for a mass society. This is a point that we will see in more detail in the following parts of this chapter with Benjamin. What needs to be highlighted at this point is that high/low art has a distinction in form as Fisher states “ Certain traditional forms, those associated with modern system, are thought of as high art, whereas the new forms tend to be thought of as low.” (Fisher, 2001) Kaplan states that low art requires “familiar forms, a tendency towards easiness and emotional indulgence”. (Kaplan 1972) He says that there is a time and place for low art. Unlike Cohen he believes that there is hierarchy between high/low art and compares the to champagne and beer. Novitz (1992) believes that there is no fundamental aesthetic difference between high/low arts. Novitz states that the difference lays in the political function. He states that high art is acceptable art since it avoids issues related to political, moral and economic nature and does not constitute a threat for the dominate class. (Novitz, 1992)

Within this discussion of high art and low art the position that is attributed to GIFs is clear. They are not a part of traditional arts that can be considered as “high arts”. As a form that is created by the masses to reach out to the masses and as a form that has clear use of tools belonging to the low art end of the spectrum they can be referred as low art. This being said, as indicated above this does not state anything in regards to the quality of the work. There are in fact many similarities with many other products of art movements that have a similar resisting stand, such as the Fluxus. There resisting, open and embracing character is what defines GIFs as an artwork.

3.5.2. Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as Reproduced Art

The second point that I would like to dwell on is the reproducible nature of micro movies. Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction” states, “In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men”. A big majority of the micro movies are actually scenes from popular (commonly American) films or series. Few seconds from these scenes are usually looped and they acquire a different form. This new form has a new purpose, new message and transforms into a new piece of art. It is in a way a reproduced art.

The concept of art in age of reproduction has been covered by Walter Benjamin in his essay titled “The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in 1936, later it was also covered by John Berger in a four part television program called “ways of seeing” in 1972, which was later on adapted into a book with the same title. Benjamin covers change in perception and its consequences in the rise of film and photography at the 20th century. In his essay Benjamin tries to enlighten something particular about the modern age, specifically about the effects of modernity on art. Film and photography has a big effect on this. Walter Benjamin refers to a loss of “aura” with the emergence of mechanical reproduction of art. For Benjamin “aura” is the originality or authenticity of an artwork, which is not reproduced. Since a photograph is an image of an image according to him while a painting has an aura a photograph does not. Benjamin states very rightfully in my opinion “To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no

sense.” This is also the case for many digital works that we see on the Internet. Today art and its reproduction have gone so far as to wipe the name off the artist. It has become a public property of some kind. For micro movies for instance we might know the original source but we may never track down the “artist”. In the case of micro movies the question is we might be asking is in fact the possibility of double reproduction. (The reproduction of a reproduced work of art.) Well at this point there may still be question in our mind about the “art” quality of micro movies. This should at this stage be expected since as Benjamin states “Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question – whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art – was not raised. Soon the film theoreticians asked the same ill-considered question with regard to the film.” I believe the same applies for micro movies. We should perhaps consider the same question Benjamin asks for micro movies: perhaps the very invention of micro movies transformed the entire nature of art.

The point that really needs to be highlighted and which was partly covered above was “reproduction of art can be used by anybody for his or her own purposes. Images can be used like words we can talk with them”. This represents what micro movies stand for today. They are used like words and people do talk with them. They have become a tool for self-expression and delivery of emotion. As Berger has stated again “reproduction should make it easier for us to connect our experience of art directly with other experiences”.

3.5.3. Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as Product of Digital Culture

GIFs success and proliferation has been highly linked to it being an open format. Without a watermark it is almost impossible to track down the source of GIFs. Finger, editor to Tumblr states (2014), “If I happen to know the source offhand, I’ll definitely cite it. If I don’t know the source, I don’t. Attempts to find the creator are generally futile.” He also adds “Unattributed sharing doesn’t irritate me at all. I think part of the unspoken agreement you have when uploading a GIF anywhere on the Internet is that it’s no longer yours — it’s part of the great big community pool we all visit when wanting to express how we’re feeling in the way nature intended: on a loop.”

As stated in the previous sections of the thesis, GIFs acquire meaning so long as they are shared, which can also be restated as, as long as they are a part of the digital community. In Deuze’s article titled “Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture” (2006) Deuze refers to a digital culture that is conceptualized by participation, remediation and bricolage. These components could also be considered a part of the GIF culture as well. These components can be observed historically. As Lessing states, “In the next ten years we will see an explosion of digital technologies. These technologies will enable almost anyone to capture and share content. Capturing and sharing content, of course, is what humans have done since the dawn of man. It is how we learn and communicate. But capturing and sharing through digital technology is different.” (2004 :184) Today we can refer to a participatory and open production method. This is a digital trend that is increasing in media systems during the last century (Deuze, 2006). This participation component also stems from the do-it-yourself (DIY) culture. (Deuze, 2006) In terms of GIFs and their

creation this is crucial since it directly reflects the GIF culture where creators wish to be heard. Participation particularly comes into the picture after the GIFs are created since they gain meaning as the participating users online attribute meaning to it. As it is shared, reposted it becomes a part of the digital community. This is what is expected from a GIF as a part of the digital world and culture as Deuze states “it seems clear that people not only have come to expect participation from the media, they increasingly have found ways to enact this participation in the multiple ways they use and make media.” GIFs are yet another example of how this happens. On a similar matter in her article titled *In Defence of the Poor Image*, Hito Steyerl states that “GIFs enables the user’s active participation in the creation and distribution of content, it also drafts them into production. Users become editors, critics, translators, and (co)authors of poor images.” In relation to this Bianconi argues that the reason behind the non-authorship might be linked to quality and size. As they are used within contexts as reactions or expression they do not need any attribution.

Another component of digital culture is remediation. In reference to the chapter on media archeology and the common features of micro movies and GIFs, remediation as a component of digital culture and therefore GIFs are important to state. “Every new medium diverges from yet also reproduces older media, whereas old media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) By remediation we refer to the remix of old video forms and new ones as well as the other way around. The existing popularity of GIFs and their persistent use can be seen as remediation. Also other formats that followed GIFs can be considered as examples as well. On the topic Bolter and Grusin state that “all mediation is remediation” (1999) They argue that the existing media act as remediators and that remediation enables us to

interpret previous media. This might be perceived historical progression but we can not speak of linear history. Newer media does remediate older predecessors, particularly digital media but also remediation of newer media by the older can be referred, as in the case of GIFs.

The third component is Bricolage, which is explained by Hartley as “the creation of objects with materials to hand, re-using existing artefacts and incorporating bits and pieces.” (2002 : 22) According to Hartley borrowing, mixture, hybridity and plagiarism are notions and practices that incorporated in bricolage. We refer to reconstruction and restructuring of different images, ideas, actions etc. for the creation of the new. On the matter Jussi Parikka states the following “Endless recycling and quoting of past media content, artistic styles and forms became the new “international style” and the new cultural logic of modern society. Rather than assembling more media recordings or reality, culture is now busy reworking, recombining and analyzing already accumulated media material.” (Parikka, 2008) GIFs work in a similar way. Scenes are collected only to be re-used with a new purpose. Here we can talk about endless freedom and creativity where the created product is the product of competence and experience of the creator in selecting and using appropriate materials as well as deciding if it is suitable to the purpose. In this view the question of originality and quality also comes up. On this issue Deuze states “quality, is thrown out the window in favor of an attitude that prefers an assemblage and tweaking of multiple good copies over a single bad original.” (Deuze, 2006)

Here if a question might be if GIF makers even have the liberty to actually make GIFs with material owned by third party. Harvard University Berkman Center for

Internet and Society fellow Andy Sellars states that this is still a question that needs to be answered. Sellars states that it is not quite clear what would happen if the original owner of a video would file a case. Courts decide upon fair use when it is transformative and it creates a new context. With this in mind there would not be a copyright problem for GIFs. He also states that a law case for a GIF might even seem absurd since probably the creator of the GIF will not be found. Seller also reminds that courts recognize that “courts recognize that appropriation art is in the cultural zeitgeist nowadays” and upon thought that is how most of the reaction GIFs are created.

There are discussions in relation to the authorship of GIFs. Giampaolo Bianconi, art critic, states that frame capture GIFs (reaction GIFs) as stated above have indeed “abstracted authorship...and are deployed in variable contexts, as reactions, illustrations, or expressions.” And then there are the art GIFs which “are circulated to be admired... authorship is also more consistently policed, as their authors demand credit for their work.”

There are reactions to Bianconi’s article as his typology between Art GIFs and reaction GIFs opens the debate of high culture and low culture. He is accused of not understanding the GIF culture. As Pierre Bourdieu states, “A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.” (Bourdieu, 1984) When you are in the GIF community you know that if you want to get accredited your GIFs will not reach far on the Internet. For many GIF creators attribution is not as important as the spread of your work. “Resonation is more important than attribution” states in a blog post as an answer to

Bianconi's article.²⁵ The post also adds "Good GIF creators have to be highly skilled in packaging emotions into visuals, identifying what emotions & visuals will resonate within a community, and how their GIF contributes to the community's culture. Artistic validation is in the spread of their GIF beyond the creator's network." (Bianconi, 2013). With the same regard curator, of the Digital Programme at The Photographers' Gallery, London states "Frequently authorless and contextless, the gif image works on a different economy in which its value is based not on its uniqueness and scarcity (as in certain forms of art) but its circulation and proliferation." If there is one thing that can be clearly observed in terms of Internet culture that is GIFs have created their own set of aesthetics within its own community where outsiders or Bourdieu's words those who do not have the cultural competence do not and cannot appreciate it.

3.5.4. Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) as Extended Cinema

In the previous section attempted to cover micro movies as a product of the digital culture. With the emergence of digital culture we must also refer to the need or desire to expand the borders of advanced study of cinema. (Gaudreault, 2014 :281). In his article titled "Teaching 'cinema': for how much longer?" Gaudreault examines the effects of the change that this digital wave has brought on cinema. He states "Since the emergence of digital culture, our media world has been going through an unprecedented degree of turbulence. Borderlines are moving, boundaries are constantly shifting, and the classical media (books, newspapers, films, television, record albums) have to a great extent lost their bearings." (2014:82) It is stated that the context of cinema and its

²⁵ Hi tricia wang! (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2015.

definition of what it is has never been this confusing or imprecise and digital culture is to blame. Gaudreault speaks of a “ cinematic identity crisis” (Gaudreault, 2014 :280). In academia there is an apparent shift from the study of film to the study of moving images as the first appears to be too limiting in the framework of the digital culture that we observe today. On the matter also G Lipovetsky and J Serroy states the following “In less than a half a century we have gone from the entertainment screen to the communication screen, from one screen to all screen. For a long time the movie screen was unique and incomparable; today it is merging into a galaxy of infinite dimensions: we have entered the era of the global screen. . . . the new century is the century of the omnipresent and many-sided screen, the planetary and multimedia screen.” (2007:10) It is clear that a digital revolution has taken place and there is no means to deny it as it can be observed just about everywhere in our lives. (Tessé, 2011) At this point people have started to find variations to the long standing question of Bazin ‘what is cinema?’ This question today is posed in various forms such as ‘where is cinema headed?’, ‘when is it cinema?’, ‘is it cinema?’ etc. (Gaudreault, 2014 :285). On the topic we can speak of two opposing answers. On one hand there are those who claim the death of cinema and others who believe that cinema has never been in a better place and has a bright future ahead. The former group is referred by Gaudreault and Marion as those who are “victims of the dead cinema syndrome” and the later supported by Dubois, Monvoisin, and Biserna support the concept of extended cinema. (Gaudreault, 2014 :286). They support their idea by stating “Cinema is not in the process of declining, of disappearing, or sinking into oblivion, but rather, in the infinite variety of its forms and practices, it is more alive than ever, more multiple, more intense, more omnipresent than it ever has been” (2010, Backcover) Within the framework of GIFs, this thesis supports the idea of

extended cinema. Further more the thesis proposes that GIFs as micro movies are a part of extended cinema. With the previous chapters on media archeology on micro movies we have seen that “cinema” has always been on a transforming track thus perhaps the fact that the question of “is cinema dying” is not asked today for the first time is not that surprising. In the evolution for example from silent to sound film in the late 1920 – early 1930 the death of cinema was discussed or in 1950’s with the spread of television the same question was posed yet again. However a cinematic funeral did not occur in the 30’s nor the 50’s and it does not seem as if it will die in the 2020’s. (Gaudreault, 2014 :287). Péron states the same idea he states that it is unlikely that cinema will die since “its fabric is so elastic that it can always regain its shape after being stretched one way or another.” (2011:10). Cinema adapts to the new technology and creates new relations. As Gérard Lefort states “Today anyone equipped with a pocket camcorder is, potentially, a filmmaker” (2011:2) This is the point where GIFs come into the picture. They too are an adapted, extended version of cinema. They are micro movies that just about anyone with basic equipment can make. This is the point that this thesis highlights. As micro movies GIFs are an art product that has been crafted by the digital culture. GIFs as micro movies show the extend to which cinema can reach or the potential it has. When you consider the predecessors (see chapter on media archeology) we can see that they existed in another form in the time of Lumière films. Considering GIFs as micro movies can perhaps be hope for those who fear the death of cinema. At the end as Gaudreault states “The fact that we can also do all that with our telephone, as ‘smart’ as people say it is, is another achievement of civilization whose effects have not yet been fully felt.” (Gaudreault, 2014 :288).

CHAPTER IV

THESIS PROJECT

This thesis attempted to shed a light on Graphic Interchange Format (GIF) historically and in terms of what it represents today. The thesis attempted to highlight the idea that GIFs have become a mode of expression in the digital platforms. This idea in it self is an observation that I have made through my personal experiences while I receive and send reaction GIFs for commuting purposes on a daily bases. While they have their play / humor element they also fill in for a clear gap being gestures.

4.1. Why Turkish Cinema

As mentioned in the thesis the GIFs that are most commonly from American films, series and TV shows. In my digital daily life as expected I communicate in my mother tongue, Turkish, as do many others in my social entourage. Observation has revealed that non-English speakers from a deferent cultural background make GIFs from

the products of the “popular culture”. The reasons and effects of this phenomenon may be another research topic. This thesis adopts a different angle and as to not diverge from the topic, it has not covered this issue in abundance. A brief research on the Internet can reveal that there are a few GIFs made of “highlight” moments from the Turkish TV as well as recent Turkish TV series. Personal experience has not demonstrated any cases where these examples have been used to replace gestures in digital communication. The use of GIFs from the products of the “popular culture” seems to be most popular tool however when it comes to delivery of emotion/ reaction, for me, Turkish Cinema has a special place. I also believe that Turkish Cinema has a special place for the Turkish community as a whole while for each generation it represents something different. For the generation before mine these films represented something much more serious, for us it is commonly a source of “humor”. Regardless there are also few local products that we as Turkish people from at least three generations can relate to although in a lot of aspects most of the scenes from these films are “unacceptable” in today’s society. What this project hopes to highlight is how well these GIFs reflect our reactions.

4.2. Production Method

The thesis covered a section on GIF generators and how these tools enabled just about everyone to create a GIF from any material they wish. As stated these generators has had an immense effect on the proliferation of GIFs. As many GIF artists state, GIFs acquire meaning as they become more wide spread. The more they are used the more valuable they become. Just like any digital culture product. Although many generators add that grotesque watermark there are some that truly understand GIFs and avoid it.

Since this project is attempting to provide a look into GIFs as we see them in their natural environment, being the Internet, it shall also use the generators for the production of GIFs in order to highlight its open work and low art character. It should also be stated that as GIFs are becoming increasingly popular, many tutorials to create GIFs on programs such as Photoshop with a higher esthetic value have emerged. These can be interpreted in many different ways but for the sake of the GIF culture and what this thesis and project attempts to demonstrate the use of generators seem to fit the whole of the jig saw puzzle.

4.3. Project Exhibition

Exhibiting digital art / net art is a complicated issue. The solutions are not that variable. A screen must be involved in the exhibition of digital art, since the screen is the canvas of this type of art.

Art institutions started give place to GIFs around 2000's. Among these institutions were 2000 Whitney Biennial and SFMOMA's '010101: Art in Technological Times'. For the first time GIFs were highlighted as a growing art form in Rhizome's 2006 'The Gif Show' exhibition. (Eppink, 2014: 301) Other early examples of GIF exhibitions are Laurel Ptak's exhibition "Graphics Interchange Format" launched in August 2008, "Save for Web," a GIF exhibition that opened in August 2009, "Graphics Interchange Format" exhibition curated by Paddy Johnson in 2011. (Johnson, 2014)

We can see that the number of exhibitions and the variety of them have increased overtime. Among these and many more we can also list, The Wrong, New

Digital Art Biennale, which had an extensive size and scope that also hosted GIFs. In 2014 Jason Eppink curated *The Reaction GIF: Moving Image as Gesture*, which exhibited a set of GIFs he identified in consultation and contribution of more than one hundred Reddit users, again same year a similar exhibition titled "GIF Free for All," was curated by A. Bill Miller. While there are exhibitions that use GIFs directly from the Internet, such as the one that Eppink curated there are also others such as the exhibition curated by Katrina Sluis. This exhibition welcomed GIFs created for the gallery specifically, however the exhibition embraced the open-submission spirit of the Internet.

The exhibitions of GIFs are launched online and offline. Online, meaning that a web page or a platform that supports GIFs are used and offline means that the GIFs will be shown as projections or on screens or walls. Monitors have also become a popular solution lately (Johnson, 2014) For instance during the "The wrong, New Digital Art Biennale" the digital pieces were exhibited on "pavilions" which were in essence individual websites that were linked to the main biennale website. On the other hand offline exhibitions were hosted by "embassies" which were galleries such as the Paradise Hills in Melbourne and Transfer Gallery in Brookline. There were around 13 locations physically and during the 3 months of the Biennale more than 300 artists participated. (Johnson, 2014)

Quick Response (QR) codes that directs to the platform that the GIF is on has lately become a popular tool. With this method the connection with network is not interrupted. Therefore it can be considered as an online exhibition method. "Everything At Once, An IRL, GIF Exhibition" is one of the exhibitions that used this method.

As for offline exhibiting, Sluis stated that they “were conscious not to use digital projection as it would locate the project within traditions of cinema and exhibit GIFs as video art” and “they wanted the screens to respond to the reception and distribution of images within wider visual culture.” (Sluis, 2012) It is also worth mentioning that recently galleries dedicated only to GIFs or which have regular GIF shows have emerged.²⁶

The question of why GIFs should be exhibited is a question that could be raised and also if the sell of GIFs is possible. Although the idea seems somewhat strange Rhizome sold a selection of animated GIFs at the Armory Art Show in 2011. A year later Klausgallery.net put a GIF by Nicolas Sassoon on sale. Very recently Transfer has opened a store that sells, limited edition lenticular prints of GIFs made by artists, which also shows that creativity at the sells end of arts also has no limits. (Johnson, 2014) It is noted that appreciating GIFs as art over browsers is a very distracting experience but GIFs on the other have never been fully appreciated by art establishments. (Johnson, 2014) Another question that could be posed is if GIF- makers benefit from this acknowledgement from art institutions. Most who do not have an art degree do not pursue it and Johnson states “GIF-makers who have professional arts degrees, the desire to evaluate the art GIF in art terms can create tension.”

Exhibiting GIFs in my opinion and also in the general context of this thesis is peculiar. If GIFs are considered to be a product of low art, if they are, as this thesis proposes, an act of resistance their exhibition, particularly offline exhibition, is unnatural. It is, as can be understood from the provided examples some how forced, forced to gain some sort of benefit out of a product which was created with an open,

²⁶ 15folds founded in 2012 is one of these galleries

communal understanding. Online exhibitions are much more in harmony with the GIF culture; at least it is still connected to those who give meaning to them, being the community. The project of this thesis promotes the above-mentioned idea and the exhibition method contemplated in accordance to this, is explained in detail in the following chapter.



Figure 22 - Example of a GIF exhibition with the use of QR codes



Figure 23 - Example of a GIF exhibition with the use of QR codes



Figure 24 - Example of a GIF exhibition in a digital art museum

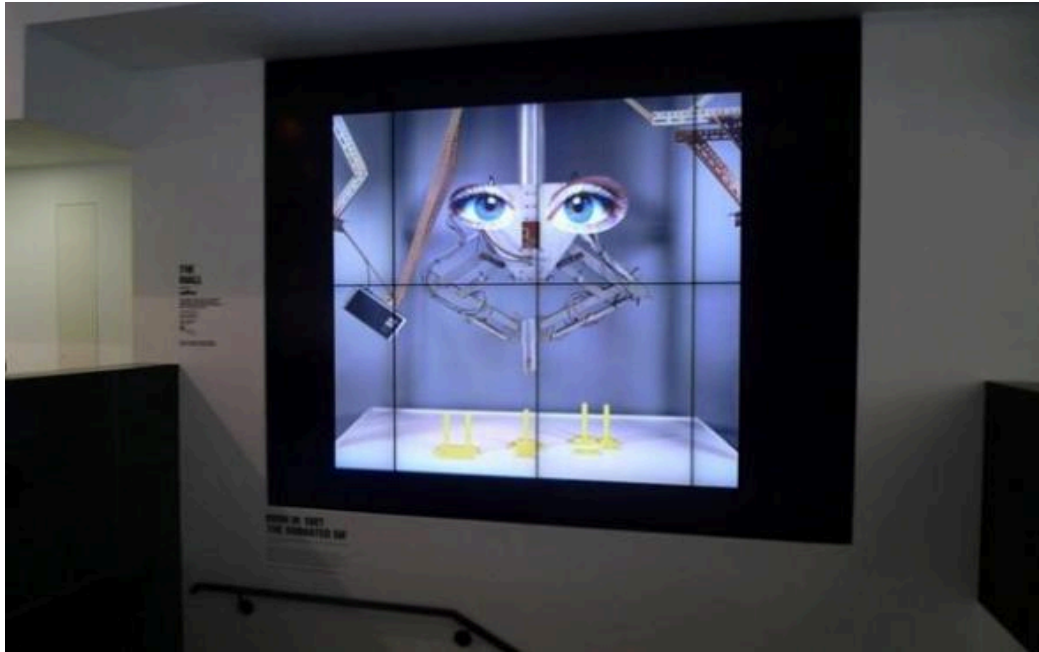


Figure 25 - Example of a GIF exhibition in digital art museum

GIFs are native to the Internet. The simplicity and humbleness of the format is the main reason behind the strong survival of the format in an age where technology is developing at a pace that is hard to keep up with. To exhibit GIFs on a platform other than the Internet would be odd. As stated by Bourdieu GIFs make sense when there is a community that actually makes sense out of it. Reaching out to this community is only possible through a connection to a network.

When we look at the previous examples of GIF exhibitions we can see that commonly straightforward methods have been used, being computer monitors, television screens, projectors etc. and now we see that there is tendency to keep them online. Another point that needs to be considered is that when GIFs are exhibited offline there is the possibility of a change in format (into AVI or mp4 for instance), using GIFs as a format might have significant importance.

GIFs should be exhibited online and on platforms that support them. Cutting its connection would be blocking the way that leads to its proliferation and that is against the whole idea of GIF art. It should be open and its openness comes from its connection to the network. With this in mind the exhibition of this project shall be on Tumblr, a platform that supports GIFs. It is also in line with the openness of GIFs. Tumblr also provides flexibility that gives the “artists” more space for customization. Over the years it has become a platform where people like to exhibit their work (not only GIFs but also other art work such as illustrations, videos, logos etc.). The existence of such a platform fosters open art that reaches out to many people. This is very much in line with GIF culture and also reflects the political and critical stand most GIF makers, including myself, have towards many popular platforms, which do not support or directly support GIFs for aesthetic reasons.

Although the exhibition will be online, through an open platform, a projector can be used for the exhibition to facilitate the discussion of the work. If used, this projection system shall only be used because of academic purposes and procedures. Being on a Tumblr page the possibility of reaching out to people and providing the possibility for the visitors to “take what they like” and sharing it in other platforms or just keeping it for other purposes is possible. I must also add that although it might seem to contradict with the original reasons lying behind an online exhibition it reminds one of the optical toys that is referred to in the initial sections and also creates a loop within itself.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

GIFs have undeniably become a more than they initially promised; they are much more than a format, and they are a mode of expression as well as a creative act in form of micro movies. Upon initial research on Graphics Interchange Format, the first opinion was that there was so much potential in the subject matter. As one plunges deeper into the subject it is seen that there is so much more than what meets the eye. GIFs initially catch attention as a strong mode of expression that is very frequently used today. When asked if there might be something more, it did not disappoint. It was mesmerizing to see how hypnotic the loop can be and how it can be used as an artistic tool.

When Graphics Interchange Format first came into scene it was a matter of “what can be done” with the existing technology, it was not a matter of chose. Later this changed as technology developed and much more sophisticated and advanced formats

emerged and this was when it became interesting because people preferred to use this format as a preference. This in itself is a creative act as well as a mode of expression. It is a mode of expression because the features of the GIFs allow one to deliver instant digital reactions in a participative manner. The loop, in itself, can also deliver a message by its hypnotic, repetitive nature. It can highlight an interval or segment of motion and allow us to see something that we did not notice or it could give us the possibility to look at the same thing with a different perspective. They are commonly silent though this is seen as a limitation; this silence is also expressive feature can also be a preference. It can deliver feelings or reactions that are almost impossible to express with words, images and even videos. GIFs are a medium that is truly “in-between” in this sense. They are probably one of the most effective tools as a mode of expression and they are used more and more each day. This is why we “necessitate” them and that is one of the strong reasons behind their resistance to time. It has become a gesture in the digital world with a global cultural context. It is a product of digital culture with the participatory nature. It is an example of remediation that has delivered many features of the past media to our day. It is a product of bicolage by giving new meaning to exciting work.

This thesis attempted to cover Graphics Interchange Format in different perspectives. It also touched upon how GIFs are an act of resistance. Although I am indirectly referring to Deleuze and his description of a creative act, I am in essence referring to the physical resistance that micro movies have shown. The resistance of micro movies is inspiring in many ways. It is a resistance against “high art”. It clearly demonstrates that art does not have to be confined in a room, accessible to a limited amount of people who can “afford” to see it. It is on many different platforms and can be searched, found and used just about anywhere. It is a creative act that nearly everyone can perform and it

increases in value as it is shared more and more, which is uncommon in many other art forms. It is demonstrating the real amateur spirit, which is of passion to the act. The authors are commonly anonymous. This is also a resistance where “self” is just about everywhere. It is a resistance against what the development of technology urges us to do. In a time where the quality of sound and image have increased, GIFs still keep on silently looping with their sloppy low resolutions and unoriginal content. They resist to time; they have been around for longer than most of the people in my generation. Perhaps most importantly it resists time in a sense that they capture a section in a stream, which does not allow time to fly by but allows us to capture intervals that would otherwise been swallowed by time and with their looping format they are resisting the linear trend that we have grown accustomed to.

However GIFs true creative act stems from it being a micro movie. Although the thesis covers discussions in regards to GIFs and their classification as low art and reproduced art the thesis highlights the idea that these discussions should be in a way overlooked because GIFs can be considered as micro movies thus a part of extended cinema. We observe micro movies in the history of cinema in many different forms; today they present themselves as GIFs. This thesis supports the idea that they are an example of how cinema evolves and adapts to the developing technology and digital culture. The similarities with initial examples of cinema can also be put forward as a proof for this.

The function of GIFs as a mode of expression and as a micro movie is without doubt in rise. Although faced with various restrictions due mainly to aesthetic reasons, we can see that GIFs are determined to be an important mode of expression with a

cultural context of their own on a wide range of different digital platforms. Their resistance to time and variety in terms of utilization has shown that they have become much more than a format. When we consider how these GIFs are created we realize what makes them inspiring and unique is how they are created and how they are available to masses. GIF makers have never attempted to agree on aims or methods, they came together to publish and share their work with something that is hard to name. Maybe this common thing was the belief that the borders of art (cinema) are much wider than what they initially were thought to be or maybe that art (cinema) and its bounds that were established long ago no longer served any purpose. In fact they might have never existed. GIFs as micro movies prove how these bounds can be flexed and how cinema will never die but simply extend.

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