"We Couldn't Do This Without You": Filmmaker Labor in Collaborating and Co-Creating with Audiences

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Participatory culture, enabled through various online tools and platforms, has created media audiences that want to engage and connect with their media products on a deep level. Audiences want to communicate with creators and contribute their own elements and creative perspectives to projects (Jenkins *Convergence Culture*, 3; Rose xx). Filmmakers are discovering that through these new technologies their audiences are talking back, and some filmmakers are learning that they can use these new technologies to create participatory films in collaboration with their audiences. Direct communication with audiences might be a way forward for independent filmmakers to overcome declining traditional funding, but this new audience has expectations of contributing. Collaborative filmmakers need to understand these audience expectations, while carefully balancing and negotiating their own needs for creative control and authorship. Building audience relationships and using online platforms that enable collaboration require additional time and new skillsets. Collaborative filmmaking changes the traditional filmmaking process by creating new forms of labor not previously associated with filmmaking.

As a part-time independent filmmaker myself,[1] building an audience and establishing a resilient career are very important to me. My filmmaking partners and I have experienced the barriers of traditional funding gatekeepers. However, we also knew it would be no easy task to crowdfund the required funds for our

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[1] The use of first-person voice is a way of identifying the researcher's own participation and is an important characteristic of autoethnography (Bochner and Ellis 65).

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project *The Woodsmen*. In my own reflections, I discuss my apprehension around attempting to use a crowdfunding platform to finance our project:

> Crowdfunding is not a guarantee. In fact, the success rates for first time filmmakers are low. After many discussions, I finally agreed that this might be our shot at making the film, and we'd never know until we tried.

I placed emphasis on my own experience for this research, using it as a framework to understand my other filmmaker participants. Researchers need to accept their own subjectivity and still work to produce scientific data that has meaning. Autoethnographic researchers "place value on being able to analyze self, their innermost thoughts, and personal information, topics that usually lie beyond the reach of other research methods" (Chang et al. 18). I used this type of narrative research, "writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al.), to interpret my own experiences. As a method, autoethnography recognizes me, the author, as part of the subject group being studied. This is significant because it helps place my motives and potential for subjectivity right up front, as I identify myself as part of the community of practice on which this research focuses.

However, autoethnographic research alone would only have examined my own experience of filmmaker-audience collaboration and would not necessarily have helped me understand the bigger societal impact that collaboration has on filmmakers, audiences, and the films themselves. This research blends autoethnographic and traditional narrative research to better understand the experience of audience collaboration. I interviewed three other collaborative filmmakers. These filmmakers created projects through collaboration and some of the related elements of participation: crowdfunding, crowdsourcing, and open licensing. I captured each participant's narrative through an in-depth interview process, including an interview of myself. Each participant had at least one previous film credit, where their work had been screened by audiences.

The Filmmakers

Narrative research focuses on stories told by the participants to the researcher. This creates the "strong *collaborative* feature of narrative research as the story emerges through the interaction or dialogue of the researcher and the participant(s)" (Creswell 71, emphasis in original). Using a collaborative approach to blend the case studies of each filmmaker provided a more comprehensive perspective of

filmmaker collaboration, using my own experiences as a framework for reference. For this study, each case consisted of one film project for each filmmaker, where a specific level of participation or collaboration could be identified.

Lucas Burnie's collaborative film project *Were-Wool: The Indie Creature Feature* is a feature horror film, successfully funded on Kickstarter. This project was collaborative in its incorporation of many of his audience members into the filmmaking process as cast and extras. Lucas reflected on his own audience engagement, and while he felt he did not set out to create a space for collaboration, he did identify that he wanted his audience to feel directly involved in his process:

> I definitely think I would call it collaboration. I didn't set out to create a space for collaboration, but in my preparation before launching the Kickstarter campaign I was aware of the importance of building an audience and engaging them in a way that would make them feel directly involved, rather than just a dollar value and a prize. I think most successful projects have that in common.

Curt Jaimungal's project *Better Left Unsaid* is an open source documentary on political bias, where his audience would have access to his unedited material to create their own films. Curt's project was successfully funded using multiple crowdfunding platforms. Curt felt that he had set out deliberately to collaborate with his audience:

> I'd say I'm an artist at heart, and then I'm an entrepreneur by training. The entrepreneur in me knows that you can't just make a film and hope it gets seen. I created the opportunity for collaboration deliberately because I want to innovate on the film form with each film I create.

Trevor Hanley[2] has run two successful crowdfunding campaigns and has built an audience on social media. He had decided not to use crowdfunding for his third short true history production but continued to collaborate with his audience by crowdsourcing elements for his film (like actors, locations, music, etc.). When discussing how he engages his audience, Trevor identified some of the labor required to capture his audience's attention: "We post BTS [Behind the Scenes] like crazy. Photos and video. Some behind the scenes on set Livestreams had 3-6k viewers." The fourth project studied was a short horror film that I co-wrote and co-directed.

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[2] Participant requested that their name, project titles, and production company name not be used; Trevor Hanley is a pseudonym.

My autoethnographic work started by writing about my experience at each stage of creating *The Woodsmen*. Using autoethnographic journaling methods, I recalled vivid details for each aspect of my experience. I struggled with feeling vulnerable as I recounted my thoughts, actions, and activities:

> I was not excited about the idea of crowdfunding at first. What I didn't say out loud to anyone, and why I was reluctant to consider this plan, was that I wasn't sure that I could handle our project not being successful. What would it mean to fail so publicly? I'm really afraid of failure. To the point of inaction. It's stupid, but sometimes I'd rather just not do something altogether so that it doesn't get the opportunity to fail.

It was important to be honest to understand my experience, because autoethnographic research provides tools for exploring and understanding periods of personal transformation (Romo 108), the idea of being in some way changed by a specific experience. The process of collaborating with my audience has changed my idea of how the creative process works. I no longer view filmmaking as a closed process involving specialized practitioners but rather as one where an audience can be associated with the final product because they have helped make the film better.

The Active Audience and Collaborative Filmmaking

For this study, the requirements for what constitutes a participatory project come from Antoni Roig Telo, who defines "participatory creation as opening some decision-making processes to a loose collective of participants who gain recognition as practitioners through their engagement in a creative practice" (2314). This framework for identifying collaborative projects outlines conditions such as the allocation of space for audience decision making, transparency, and mutual recognition (Telo 2329). The traditional Hollywood production model is fairly closed to audience members; they are not typically invited to participate in the process or to decide which films get greenlit. Before the rise of new digital technologies, it was easier and cheaper to cater to the mainstream tastes, rather than trying to create different products to accommodate multiple individual tastes. This creates an imbalance of power, because there are more people with niche tastes than there are people with mainstream tastes (Anderson). According to Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Itō, and danah boyd, when a cultural product "is produced according to a one-size-fits-all model, it imperfectly fits the needs of any given audience" (26). New technologies are disrupting this traditional model of filmmaking and creating

ways for niche audiences to have a say in the films and television shows that they want to see (Jenkins et al. *Spreadable Media*, 246-7).

Crowdfunding is one of the ways that audiences can choose to directly fund a project that they may not have otherwise had the opportunity to see and support. New technologies, like crowdfunding platforms and social media channels, provide the access collaborative filmmakers need to connect with niche audiences to find a place for their content. Participatory audiences want to help create content that they cannot access anywhere else, and they want to be involved in the process.

Much has been said about the rise of active, participatory audiences that have emerged with the connectivity of the online environment. Their transition from passive observers to active contributors and co-creators of media products has led them to being called "produsers" (Bruns 276), which acknowledges their combined role of media producer and user. The new participatory audience has many roles, being "a media consumer, perhaps even a media fan […] also a media producer, distributor, publicist, and critic" (Jenkins "Interactive Audiences?"). Much of their involvement is about the "extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement" (Bruns 276), completed through remixing, opensource collaboration, and sharing of content. Sharing and distributing existing media within their networks has created the much coveted and often abused "audience-as-pusher" (Reinhard 12) and publicity partner role. Collaborative filmmakers need to respect these various audience definitions and roles if they want to engage with their audience.

My participants recognized that audience engagement needed to be about more than securing a financial transaction: "The main thing with that I think especially when we were crowdfunding was to give this sense that now they're a part of something bigger than just a donation" (Lucas, filmmaker participant). Collaborative filmmakers need to have a "DIWO, or Do It With Others" (Trigonis 99) mentality that expands beyond merely raising funds to making a film together, recognizing the props, locations, and talents that audience members can bring to the production. Collaborative filmmakers acknowledge the value of their audiences and find ways to share a sense of ownership of their films.

Inviting the audience to participate in the filmmaking process creates expectations that the filmmaker will incorporate audience ideas and suggestions. In an interview discussing the *Veronica Mars* crowdfunding campaign, filmmaker Rob Thomas suggested that he felt he owed his donors a specific film: "Let's not piss people off who all donated. Let's give them the stuff that I think that they want

in the movie" (Sepinwall). This caused Thomas to make specific artistic decisions based on what he thought the audience wanted. In collaborative film projects like mine and those of my participants, the lines of creative authorship can become blurred as the audience provides feedback and influences the final film. It is important for each filmmaker to answer questions regarding what they owe their audience, in terms of both collaboration and executing the original premise of the film proposed. These questions are especially important when "donations are not investments" (Gehring and Wittkower 65) and will not result in any capital shares. David Gehring and Dylan Wittkower suggest that for audiences, "perhaps the primary appeal in donating to these [crowdfunded] projects lies not in the promise of any particular material return for their donation, but the feeling of participation in the creative process" (65). Collaborative filmmakers need to look at the various stages in the creative process, to decide how and where to allocate areas of audience participation and engagement.

The creation of space for collaboration requires extra time and labor for filmmakers, something many of the filmmakers discussed:

> I think the thing that a lot of people don't realize, there's a huge time commitment to developing a well thought out Kickstarter page, you know? There is a lot of time and effort that goes into organizing things, and you want to have graphics, you want to have images, you wanna have your pitch video. I'm not sure I'd be able to do it all by myself again, because that was pretty taxing. (Lucas, filmmaker participant)

Looking at impacts of participatory audiences on my participant filmmakers, this research suggests that collaborative filmmaking requires skills in communication, relationship building, self-promotion, technology, entrepreneurship, and public relations that were not previously required for filmmaking.

Transforming the Filmmaking Skillset

While this research project is limited to the experience of four filmmakers, their narratives were consistent when discussing the new skillsets that they needed to develop for collaborative filmmaking. As Lucas explained, he wore many "hats" on his project as the writer, director, editor, production designer, member of the sound team, and one of the producers. Lucas explained these new skills were not yet something that he felt entirely comfortable with:

> I do think there are some extra things that I had to learn how to do for this project. You understand why there's a marketing department for a Hollywood film, you know? They devote half their budget to marketing because it is a lot of work. I think what I've basically become is like a Jack-of-All-Trades, master of none type thing.

It is not unusual for independent filmmakers to keep costs down by using their filmmaking skillsets to their maximum capacity by working on many aspects of a project. However, collaborative filmmakers need to become proficient in wearing some "hats" not usually connected to film production, including marketing and promotion, which are traditionally managed by large teams of people.

For filmmakers who want to collaborate with their audiences, the ability to clearly communicate about their work in all stages of development is important. This kind of open, transparent communication is what will attract audiences to participate and help them feel like they are a part of the process. For these filmmaker participants, the ability to clearly communicate to their audience was especially important, and many did this by talking to their audience directly through personal video. Curt encourages other filmmakers to see themselves as a start-up company and find positives in the fact that they may not have everything that comes with a full Hollywood studio production: "It's interesting because these large companies are trying their best to humanize themselves. And then these independent filmmakers, or these small start-ups, are trying their best to look like they're large." When an organization is very large, it can quickly become impersonal. An independent filmmaker or small filmmaking team has a better chance to develop a relationship with their audiences if they communicate in a personal way. It is easier to adopt a one-on-one communication style when posts are created and read directly by filmmakers and audience members, without any intermediary or corporate hierarchy between them. Collaborative filmmakers should embrace this and create communication that sounds like it is coming from them personally, rather than trying to mimic corporate communication practices.

Equally important is the ability to talk about creative projects while they are in progress. Filmmakers need to be aware of the jargon that may be useful in day-to-day conversations with their crew but does not always translate as easily to their audience. Sometimes using terminology can be a fun way to let audiences feel like they are part of an exclusive club, and other times it can lead to misunderstandings, unmet expectations, and broken relationships. It is important to know which is which and make sure that transparent explanations are provided when needed.

Communication is a skill that requires practice and some training. Therefore, filmmakers may be tempted to hire professionals to take over the communication with their audience. As tempting as this is, Lucas suggests audiences may expect communication to be coming directly from the lead creative vision for the project: "I just think it comes off weird to not want to directly associate with them [the audience], you know? Like, I feel like that would be off-putting in a way." Audiences may forgive filmmakers for communication that is a little less professional, provided it is authentic. Communication builds trust and fosters personal relationships that can lead to feelings of loyalty and commitment (Bruning and Galloway 316), therefore it is important for this relationship to be with the filmmaker themselves. This way, loyalty that lasts longer than one project can develop in a way that may enable the filmmaker to sustain their creative career.

Hearing the Audience's Collective Voice in their Heads

These collaborative filmmakers found it important to always keep the audience in mind, especially when making decisions during the creative process. Participation means that extra time is needed, and processes must be created to allow for the audience to influence a project. Designing collaborative space starts with the ability to imagine an audience, and each participant's narrative highlighted how they anticipated their audience's needs: "It is just closing my eyes and thinking "what does my audience want?" (Curt, filmmaker participant). Ongoing communication with the audience allows the filmmaker to appreciate the variety of perspectives and internalize them to an extent.

Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that all media has a dialogic component between author and audience, even media that may be thought of as traditionally passive, like a novel (257). An author imagines and predicts the response from their readers, "every literary work faces outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself" (Bakhtin 257). Authors are having a conversation with the audience where "the words themselves are, in a sense, 'half someone else's'" (Jackson et al. 11). If an author writes both sides of these audience conversations, then after a while anticipating the audience's response is no longer fully separable from the author's response. This may also be true for collaborative filmmakers, who internalize their audience's voice: "It was just like they were always in the back of my mind" (Lucas, filmmaker participant).

For my filmmaker participants, imagined and anticipated conversations were intermixed with real audience discourse. For my own project, I experienced this with every decision I made. I reflected on how it would impact the audience and what their response would be, based on how they had responded in the past. Imagining the audience as smiling or laughing at a particular post would encourage me to write about the event in a specific way for them, framing my own memories through their lens. I then experienced their feedback as positive if they reacted the way I had predicted they would. Considering the audience's response became second nature during the process of collaborating.

If every filmmaker, like every author, starts out with an imaginary audience in mind, then for the collaborative filmmaker, this dialogue is enhanced through ongoing feedback from real audience members. Most filmmakers need to wait until their films are completed before they start to receive feedback and determine if their imagined audience responses were correct. However, the process of audience collaboration and ongoing communication means that filmmakers can receive feedback while their projects are still incomplete:

> I was watching it, experiencing it, looking at the reactions, and then going back and making fine tuning tweaks to the edit, to the sound, to the presentation, to the way that we open the show, everything. I was hearing from the audience, and seeing what they were experiencing, and finding ways to improve it. (Trevor, filmmaker participant)

These filmmaker participants were able to use their knowledge of their actual audience to bridge the gap between actual and imagined audience and make real-time changes to their films to improve the final reception.

Audiences: The Non-Renewable Resource

The participatory filmmakers in this research did not take their audience for granted. These filmmakers had all tried other avenues for funding and had successfully raised a project budget through crowdfunding. They felt a responsibility towards their audience and wanted to ensure that their audience felt their investment was well spent. Trevor explains how he did not want his audience to feel like their contributions were taken for granted:

> I think that it's a bit like the week before Christmas and everywhere you go it seems like somebody's asking for money, right? I just didn't want to take advantage of people or them to feel like we were taking advantage of them.

Collaborative filmmaking gives audiences "symbolic power," one of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "diverse forms of capital which are not reducible to economic capital" (*Field of Cultural Production* 7). Filmmakers who crowdfund and collaborate with their audiences do not offer shares or economic stake in return, and yet there is an expectation from both the filmmakers and their audiences that there will be a sense of shared "symbolic" ownership.

Participatory audiences, who are willing to contribute on crowdfunding platforms, are valuable for filmmakers. However, collaborative filmmakers need to consider crowdfunding audiences as a scarce and even non-renewable resource. After taking the time to carefully build a personal relationship with their audience, these collaborative filmmakers were concerned with preserving the relationship. Having a solid audience base can sustain a filmmaker and allow them to move away from crowdfunding. This was evident in Trevor's case. After two successful crowdfunding campaigns, he was able to connect with his audiences in different ways and was able to forgo crowdfunding for his next two projects.

As more filmmakers turn to crowdfunding, collaborative filmmakers will need to set themselves apart by showing their concern for and appreciation of their audience. This will also require staying on top of trends and opportunities to shift away from crowdfunding as an element of collaboration as well as opportunities to grow and refresh an audience base.

The New Labor of Collaborative Filmmakers

Through conversations with my filmmaker participants, I discovered that collaborative filmmakers could be considered both filmmakers and public relations professionals. Each filmmaker created dialogue to foster relationships with their audiences and acted as a kind of public relations manager. For this reason, many public relations theories were useful in understanding their audience communication practices.

Most Hollywood films would never share preliminary creative thoughts with their audience before the final film was completed. This is because at that stage ideas can be very fluid and can change quite drastically from initial conception to the final iteration. Discussing ideas that are not fully formed is only normal practice with crew members, because there is an understanding that preliminary sketches and concepts may not translate directly to the final film. Only after the film's release might a traditional filmmaker include some of their pre-production concepts in their

special features to increase their audience's sense of connection to the film. My collaborative filmmaker participants shared their raw creative thoughts with both their crew and their audience. Through personal reflection, I learned that managing expectations in these discussions was key to attracting an audience to a project and having them feel satisfied with the final film.

After *The Woodsmen* was released, we frequently had to explain to our audience the discrepancies between our original trailer and the final piece. A proof-of-concept trailer is a well-known tool in the filmmaking industry. It is understood that the actors, scenes, and dialogue in a proof-of-concept trailer are meant to allude to the overall feeling of the final piece without actually being direct excerpts, as would be the case with a normal film trailer. This disconnect between a standard industry tool and audience expectations was not something we had fully considered when we originally posted the trailer. To better manage our audience expectations, we needed to fully describe what a proof-of-concept trailer provides and how it connects to the film.

The ideas of relationship building and relationship management are foundational to public relations theory, which posits that effective public relations strategies will foster positive relationships with an intended audience (Centre and Jackson 2). Relationships can be measured on a scale of communal to exploitive, with key positive relational characteristics being trust and mutual benefit for both sides of the relationship (Ledingham 188). Elements of mutual gain are reflected in both the filmmaker's need for sustained, successful careers and the audience's need for active, meaningful participation.

The strategies that emerged from the filmmakers' narratives demonstrate how the principles of public relations are useful in understanding their practices. Each participant filmmaker needed to learn to engage their audience, incorporate audience opinions, tolerate criticism, and develop personal relationships to foster audience loyalty to the filmmaker and their projects. This required communications, public relations, and relational labor outside of traditional filmmaking labor. These types of labor and how they are specific to collaborative filmmaking will be considered here.

Communication Labor. To engage in collaboration, each filmmaker encouraged their audience to participate in an open dialogue. They discussed how they achieved this through the use of collaborative language to foster a personal connection with the audience:

> Whenever I post an update on our Kickstarter page, I'm always sure to remind our backers that this is as much their movie as it is mine. For the simple reason I wouldn't have gotten this far on my own. I think that notion of ownership [for the audience] can foster a greater sense of collaboration and participation. (Lucas, filmmaker participant)

Bourdieu states that "the propensity to speak […] is strictly proportionate to the sense of having the right to speak" (*Distinction* 412). My filmmaker participants used communication to extend this invitation of participation to their audiences by reminding them that it was their project as well.

Researchers Talia Leibovitz, Antoni Roig Telo, and Jordi Sánchez Navarro describe how the creator's real-life personal networks, such as friends and family, are the main foundations of support in crowdfunding projects. Research also shows that audience members as financial backers are more likely to give to projects where they have a personal connection to the creator (Leibovitz et al. 28; Trigonis 149-52). By fostering intimacy through dialogue and an invitation to participate, these collaborative filmmakers extended a sense of personal connection to people who were outside of their personal networks in order to be successful in funding, and ultimately in creating, their films.

Public Relations Labor. Each filmmaker participant wanted their audience to feel a sense of ownership over the film. They wanted their projects to be mutually beneficial for them as a filmmaker and for their audiences. Even though they were unable to provide ownership in the form of financial capital or profit shares, they hoped that another kind of capital might be attained. Bourdieu defines one of the three forms of cultural capital as a kind of "knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips a social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts" (*Field of Cultural Production* 7). Through constant online updates that provided insider information of the production process and behind the scenes of how the film came together, the audience members were able to build empathy with these filmmakers and appreciate the final product on a new level, something I experienced at our community screening:

> There was so much excitement for the audience and whole community when we had our screening here locally. You could really feel, like, this collective sense of pride in the final film and how it all came together. There were so many scenes that felt like little inside jokes or something, knowing which scene had the local karate dojo mats or whose car was used for what. Except

everyone was in on the joke and felt like they were in the know because they had seen it all come together. (Jodi, researcher and filmmaker participant)

Another form of capital relevant to cultural production is symbolic capital, "accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honor and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge […] and recognition" (Bourdieu *Field of Cultural Production*, 7). The insider knowledge of each project led to audience bragging rights and recognition as members of an exclusive group. The participants hoped that these bragging rights would lead to a natural sharing of the final film: "Once the film is done, then it's sort of like "Ok you guys, this is your movie now, so let's communicate that to the world. It's your bragging rights, you know? Let's show it off" (Lucas, filmmaker participant). Fostering the audience's sense of ownership and encouraging their bragging rights over the production is unique to collaborative filmmaking. To create cultural capital for their audience, each participant filmmaker needed to leave room for negotiation in both their processes and in their own sense of ownership over the final film.

Telo states that "just making people feel part of the project is not a sufficient condition [to participatory production] in itself" (2316). However, these participant filmmakers put a lot of time and effort into making people "feel" like they were part of a project. When audiences feel that they are part of a production, then there is a participatory element that cannot be disregarded so easily. If, as Bourdieu suggests, the audience interprets themselves as "having the right to speak" (*Distinction* 412), then these feelings can be considered mental and emotional participation. Dialogue is not created by what is being said by the filmmaker alone, but also by how the audience understands it: "Each listener, each reader, each viewer brings a similar sort of complexity to the reception of communication, brings a range of contexts in which the 'word' is received and made part of the receiver's world" (Newcomb 40). If the audience member understands a filmmaker as inviting them to participate in the filmmaking process and, either actively or passively, receives this invitation, then the final context for the film to be viewed in is altered because they will feel more connected. My filmmaker participants worked hard to invite their audiences into a participatory relationship to create value for their audiences. This also created mutual benefit for each filmmaker, as each described how they were making a better film through this process.

Relational Labor. Filmmakers who collaborate with their audiences create art with their audiences. Mark Deuze suggests that all kinds of storytellers need to figure out a way to collaborate with audiences and work towards co-creation:

> A radical reworking is necessary. I would like to argue that a future professional identity of media work could only be maintained if it includes a participatory component—such as a notion of storytelling as a collaborative experience. In other words […] to think about the stories they tell as co-created with those they once identified (and thus effectively excluded) as audiences, users, consumers or citizens. (Deuze)

For my filmmaker participants, part of their desire to collaborate with their audience came from the eagerness to hear and incorporate their audience's feedback into their final films. This co-creation generated a sense of responsibility to the audience, which in some cases may encourage a filmmaker to create the "'give the people what they want' version" (Sepinwall). However, collaborative filmmakers need to spark their audience's imagination with their film proposals. The audience wants to be a part of a project based on a filmmaker's ability to share their creative vision. Through collaboration, a filmmaker can enrich their concept. However, it would be a disservice to both the filmmaker and the audience member to stray too far from the heart of their original concept. My filmmaker participants needed to carefully manage their audience relationships and maintain their own creative vision for their projects.

My participants often used their own creative vision as a filter through which to view audience feedback. It is okay to incorporate a variety of perspectives for both artistic and capitalist reasons, as long as the final sieve is the filmmaker's artistic vision. Curt described the various sieves that a collaborative filmmaker needs:

> I plan to incorporate audience feedback on my initial interview footage, into the further interviews and how I'm going to edit the film. At the same time that sounds like it's selling out, and it would be if that's all it was. It always has to be filtered. There's what your audience wants, then there's what you want, and then there's what makes money. So, you have to have those three. As long as one of the sieves that you're using is "what do I feel is artistically credible?" then cool. (Curt, filmmaker participant)

The filmmaker's creative vision acts as a way to recognize the worth of an audience suggestion or critique. Bourdieu describes the practices of challenging someone's honor as being like a gift given to the challenged that recognizes he/she is worthy

of challenge (*Outline of a Theory* 10-5). This way of thinking of a challenge as a gift could be applied to the challenges offered by audience members in the form of feedback. A filmmaker cannot accept each challenge; they cannot incorporate every suggestion from every single audience member. This would not bestow honor on any and would instead make all suggestions worthless. The final film would lack the cohesion of the original pitch and would not match the expectations of what audience members had been excited to see in the first place. Often, audience suggestions contradict one another, so each filmmaker needed to "possess the capital of authority necessary to impose a definition of the situation, especially in the moments of crisis when the collective judgement faulters" (Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory*, 40). Each filmmaker needed to acknowledge their own authority to make decisions based on the context of their film and their vision. The audience believed in and bought into the filmmaker's vision, sometimes literally, by spending money on a crowdfunding campaign. Both the audience and the filmmaker needed to respect the filmmaker's ultimate decision-making power in these collaborative projects.

Conclusions and Broader Cultural Implications

Collaborating with our audience changed the way I think about filmmaking. The experience was no longer a small inner circle of people working on the creative outcomes for a project, but something that we all felt responsible for together with our audience. This shared responsibility changed my perspective on how to involve the audience in the filmmaking process, beyond just inviting them to the final screening. I learned that audience members could and should be involved from the very beginning, with ongoing two-way communication, to create opportunities for collaboration. This new understanding of how films could be made led to a richer creative experience, it produced a better final film, and it left me feeling connected to a community of collaborators with whom I otherwise would not have had an opportunity to interact.

Filmmaking is a time-consuming process. Film data researcher Steven Follows outlines that for the Hollywood model, "the average production was announced 871 days before it was eventually in cinemas" (Follows). In traditional productions there is not a lot of communication during the period between first announcement and the marketing just before the film is released. During the years of silence, "Hollywood" filmmakers are focusing on the practices and processes of

filmmaking itself. Similar to the Hollywood model, with most indie films, communication is sparse prior to the final release marketing as well. For collaborative filmmakers, however, communication is continuous from the moment they decide to make their films. They must learn to balance their communications, public relations, and relational labor practices with their filmmaking practices to create both a final film and a collaborative audience relationship simultaneously.

If films provide social value, by reflecting society and providing a way to look at things from a different perspective, then getting the audience involved in the creative process can be very rewarding due to the addition of multiple perspectives. As these perspectives "challenge" (Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory*, 10-5) the filmmaker and get filtered through their creative vision, they are leaving an imprint that will influence how the filmmaker makes subsequent decisions. The final product is a film that is much richer and more diverse.

My hope is that this research allows for the addition of the collaborative filmmaker's voice in discussions of participatory culture and crowdfunded filmmaking. I also hope it will provide some direction for filmmakers, allowing them to learn and benefit from the experiences and actions of others. As collaborative filmmakers, we discovered that when we told our audiences "We couldn't do this without you" (Cooper et al.), we meant it from both a financial and a creative perspective. Every incorporated audience suggestion, character that they played, or location they helped find added to the final experience of the film for both the audience members and the filmmakers.

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