

I was recently amazed and relieved to hear the broad use of the visual word, 'oculus', by John Jennings, Professor of Media & Cultural Studies at University of California at Riverside, while he was reviewing the Nia DaCosta film, Candyman, on "The 1A Movie Club Sees 'Candyman', on the National Public Radio. In describing the multidimensional tonal quality of the film, Jennings stated the phrase:

(The film uses the) ..." white cube as an "oculus" to see through these different tensions."

After copious years of rejection by multiple jurors and panelists for utilizing this unique and creative term in my exhibition statements and grant proposals, often with or without feedback, randomly hearing the astute Jennings visual assertion came as a type of safety relief, release valve, innocence clearing, and liberating exoneration.

My first auditory examination of the word came during my MFA in Visual Studies program graduate critique at Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, VT in 1998. A mentor mentioned the term, in relation to my painting installation, as a means to express the multiple sociopolitical observations withing my narrative paintings and how they were displayed on multiple levels for exhibition. This comment, at the time, reflected upon Deleuze and Guattari's book, Thousand Plateaus, and how one is recommended to energetically read the vast work from any visual starting and stopping point within the text, rather than linearly front cover to back cover.

Oculus Ocular Oculi

Originates from Latin, meaning eye.

In architecture, a round or eye-like opening or design.

In botany, the beginnings of a leaf on a plant... (see idea).

Plural is Oculi. Can be singular or multiple. Both can be used as noun, as sign, symbol, trope, and metaphor.

Linguistical semiotics can extend the meaning and context of use. The word oculus or oculi's meaning can be used as **a visual or sensory system for viewing. Can be singular, multicellular, or all-encompassing in meaning.**

When you were confused by my use of the word "oculi" or "oculus" in my past writing, statements, or applications: Take for example how the word "oculus" is similar to the popular use of the word's "eye" or "lens" or "angle" or "optics" or "vantage point" in these simple phrases:

Looking "through the eye of..."

Looking "through the lens of..."

Looking "through the oculi of..."

Looking "through the oculus of..."

Looking "through the optics of..."

Looking "through the angle of..."

And "Let's look at it from the unique vantage point of..."

Thus, you can see from the simple examples above that the beautiful word, oculus, can be intentionally and accurately used for "**viewing**" and used as non-referencing to architecture. The examples are core to expanding the use and meaning of the word and phrase beyond the academic traditional, conservative parochial, and the homogenous conventional.

Thus, oculus, as a way of viewing:

Art can be looked at via the oculus of the viewer/observer/audience.

Artwork can be looked at via the oculus of the viewer/observer/audience.

A space can be looked at via the oculus of the viewer/observer/audience.

A gallery can be looked at via the oculus of the viewer/observer/audience.

A museum can be looked at via the oculus of the viewer/observer/audience.

A gallery in a museum can be looked at via the oculi of the viewer/observer/audience.

A regional gallery in a regional museum can be looked at via the regional oculi of the regional viewer/observer/audience.

And...

An idea can be looked at via the oculus/oculi of the artist and potential viewer/observer/audience, at the same or dissimilar times, and in the same and dissimilar spatialities.

This may confuse you as it is not the typical 'lens' or 'architectural' meaning of the word "oculus" as it has been used in traditional, conservative, and perfectionistic academic or artistic circles. You are perhaps, seemingly right, when you state, "the rectangular space does not have an architectural oculus." Or the "gallery does not have an oculus." Or the "white cube does not have an obvious oculi." But there is still another form of oculus and multiple oculi that exists within the rectangular site, space, gallery, or white cube, and their empowered spatialities. That is the oculus/oculi of the viewer, audience, and standard observer(s). When creating an installation, an artist imagines their work presented via the multiple oculi of the gallery site/space as seen through the oculi of the viewer/observer(s).

There are multiple oculi in any given space.

Yes, multiple oculi in a gallery. Multiple oculi in any idea. An empty gallery space, with no art objects, still has multiple oculi. A conservative academic juror or naïve layperson/panelist must be able to liberally view without bias (confirmation bias or other) a multimodal proposal via multiversal oculitation. If they cannot do so, they should not be a judge, juror, or panelist. An adjudicator needs to oculitate.

There are multiple oculi for a viewer to look through at any moment in any spatial site, with both focused and wide peripheral vision, and open and receptive mind. Similar to the use of a camera, aperture, or lens, the use of one's mind and eye to see, we look into or within a space, peer through a site, or visualize a purpose, thought and/or idea.

"Let's look at the idea of art through the multiple "lens" of a panelist."

"Let's look at the idea of art through the multiple "oculus" of panelists."

"Let's look at the idea of art through the multiple "oculi" of the gallery."

"Let's look at the idea of art through the multiple "oculi" of the gallery viewer."

"Let's look at the idea of art through the multiple "oculi" of the curatorial panel."

One can see from the simple examples above, the references to eye/lens/oculus in forms of viewership. Yet, the popular use of the word, "lens," is singular and monoculturally based...as in single lens camaras. But the oculus/oculi are multidimensional in their nature. In the case of the institutionally written application or the gallery exhibition project plan, it (oculus/oculi) refers to the viewer, visual observer, or audience to view the artwork via the multiple oculi of the gallery, site, or space(s).

In its multidimensionality, an oculus/oculi is also multi-volumous. One can view from multi-volumous, ever moving sites, spaces, and points of reference or nonreference within a given cube, gallery, museum, or space. (Not solely on the traditional 2D linear wall plane.) An example is when one moves around to observe or look at a painting—you observe through multiple oculi. This also considers biochromatic adaptation, human eye functions, peripheral vision, placement of observer, type of site/space, and many more variables.

Imagine stating, "...the sculpture/installation via the "oculi of the gallery."" This might be referencing an architectural gallery space, ...but it also may not be referencing an actual architectural oculus in the same space. It may be referencing the mind or eye of what the viewer sees or imagines. In essence, oculus and oculi are parts of a larger, ever changing/coevolving viewing ecosystem of continually shape-shifting oculi that views the gallery oculus/oculi ecosystem. And, since the architectural layouts of many gallery spaces have windows, multiple galleries, nooks and crannies, and many levels and floors, there imparts a **second-ordered observer** that looks through a secondary set of spatial oculi which in turn beholds more vantage points of the original oculi.

Imagine the artwork through the "lens of artist." Imagine the viewer within the largess "oculi of the gallery" site.

Oculus, as organ of site/space, for the viewer in the gallery.

Oculus as both symbol and metaphor.

Oculus as technology. Oculus as organ apparati.

Oculus as biology. Oculus as bodily organ.

Oculus as geography. Oculus as spatial organ.

Oculus as a philosophical organ. Oculus as a duration of time.

Oculus as nomadic and deterritorialized.

Oculus as a bunker. Oculus as open or closed.

Oculus as moving or still. Oculus as stable or unstable.

Oculus as roots. Oculus as rhizomic.

Oculus as living, breathing system.

Oculus as ecosystem.

The spatiality of the oculitical site offers a perceptual experience. The oculus/oculi can be perceived on multiple levels and give multiple insights to the viewer/audience/standard observer in any give site/space. Various takes, images, slants, readings, opinions, assessments, and experiences can be enjoyed, received, and cultivated by both individual and/or the collective when becoming discreetly aware of and acutely interpreting an oculus/oculi space. The readings and experiences of the oculus/oculi are nonlinear, nonsingular and nonstagnant. The spatial oculi experience is multiple, dynamic, active, and alive.

Note two famous architectural examples, both with infinite theoretical and philosophical study:

-**Pantheon.** Rome. Architecture. Circular. Central hole as eye. Singular, yet all seeing eye.

-**Panopticon.** Architecture. Jeremy Bentham. Central tower as eye. Singular/multiple all seeing eye. See Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish*, et. al.

-Poor example: World Trade Center Oculus—used for fiction-making and deceptive myth.

Synonyms: Eye, Optics, Visual, Seeing, Surveillance, Voyeur, Viewer, Beholder, Observer, etc.

Associations: Virtual imaging. Virtual caves. Portals. Holes. Spectacle. Theatricality. Panorama. Vistas. Overlook. Birds eye or worms eye view.

Related Books/Information References:

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer*.

Laruelle, Francois. *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*.

Livingstone, Margaret: *Vision and Art/Biology of Seeing?*

Maturana, Humberto: *The Multiversa*.

Second-Ordered Cybernetics

Varela, Francisco: *Embodiment*.

We hope this helps you understand and opens your mind when you create and cultivate your art and artistic process, read, or hear it in the context of future artist grant and exhibition proposals/statements, and within contexts of art historical and cultural conversation, whether as an artist, art critic, curator, collector, gallerist, museum director, exhibit juror, or grant panelist.

With Visual Oculitation.

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