

One-eyed filmmaker conceals camera in prosthetic

March 11 2009, By HOLLY FOX , Associated Press Writer



Canadian filmmaker Rob Spence shows his prosthetic eye during an interview with the Associated Press in Brussels, Wednesday March 4, 2009. The one-eyed documentary filmmaker is preparing to shoot from a camera position never used before, one lodged in his spare eye-socket. He hopes it will yield the intimacy only eye contact can achieve. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

(AP) -- A one-eyed documentary filmmaker is preparing to work with a video camera concealed inside a prosthetic eye, hoping to secretly record people for a project commenting on the global spread of surveillance cameras.

Canadian Rob Spence's eye was damaged in a childhood shooting accident and it was removed three years ago. Now, he is in the final stages of developing a [camera](#) to turn the handicap into an advantage.

A fan of the 1970s television series "The Six Million Dollar Man," Spence said he had an epiphany when looking at his [cell phone camera](#) and realizing something that small could fit into his empty eye socket.

With the camera tucked inside a [prosthetic eye](#), he hopes to be able to record the same things he sees with his working eye, his muscles moving the [camera eye](#) just like his real one.

Spence said he plans to become a "human surveillance machine" to explore privacy issues and whether people are "sleepwalking into an Orwellian society."

He said his subjects won't know he's filming until afterward but he will have to receive permission from them before including them in his film.

His special equipment will consist of a camera, originally designed for colonoscopies, a battery and a [wireless transmitter](#). It's a challenge to get everything to fit inside the prosthetic eye, but Spence has had help from top engineers, including Steve Mann, who co-founded the wearable computers research group at [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The camera was provided by Santa Clara, California-based OmniVision Inc., a company that specializes in the [miniature cameras](#) found in cell phones, laptops and [endoscopes](#).

Zafer Zamboglu, staff technical product manager at OmniVision, said he thinks that success with the eye camera will accelerate research into using the technology to restore vision to blind people.

"We believe there's a good future in the prosthetic eye," he said.

The team expects to get the camera to work in the next month. Spence, who jokingly calls himself "Eyeborg," told reporters at a media conference in Brussels that the camera hidden in a prosthetic eye - the same pale hazel color as his real one - would also let him capture more natural conversations than he would with a bulky regular camera.

"As a documentary maker, you're trying to make a connection with a person," he says, "and the best way to make a connection is through eye contact."

But Spence also acknowledged privacy concerns.

"The closer I get to putting this camera eye in, the more freaked out people are about me," he said, adding people aren't sure they want to hang around someone who might be filming them at any time."

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